

The Department of Religious Studies The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

STRATEGIC PLAN Spring 2018

The Department of Religious Studies promotes the historical and critical academic study of religion as a crucial component of the study of world history, diverse global cultures, and contemporary politics. The Department offers an undergraduate major that emphasizes a multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural approach to the study of the world's religions. We offer both breadth and depth, with a balance between the study of the past and present, and between global and local religious phenomena. Our diversity provides students with method-, tradition-, region-, and issue-specific approaches to the academic analysis of religion. Some of our graduates go on to top graduate programs in religion and area studies; many others use their training to pursue careers in education, law, government, religious and social service, non-profits, business, and the media.

VALUES

The Department of Religious Studies is committed to the non-confessional academic study of religion, which promotes a commitment to critical intellectual inquiry, global awareness and engagement, respect for diversity and cultural variety, and civility and inclusion within and outside of the classroom.

VISION

The vision of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is to be recognized nationally as a faculty of research and teaching excellence, and as an outstanding undergraduate program for the critical, comparative, and cross-cultural study of religion.

MISSION

The mission of the Department of Religious Studies is:

- To provide a high-quality program for the academic and non-confessional study of religion(s) to a diverse student population;
- To attract some of UT's most talented students and equip them for graduate programs or professional careers that require a nuanced understanding of how religions relate to history and culture, both at home and abroad;
- To prepare students to be knowledgeable and critically engaged citizens of the diverse global community;
- To foster the development of critical thinking, reading, and writing skills;
- To support excellent faculty research, creative activity, and scholarship, as well as faculty instruction and professional activities;

- To participate in innovative and engaged research, scholarship, and teaching, both at the University of Tennessee and beyond;
- To be a University leader in promoting intercultural and international learning through research, teaching, and service, both on and off campus;
- To play an exemplary role in promoting the University's mission to promote diversity and inclusion, and to foster civic engagement;
- To sustain a working environment of intellectual freedom, equity, and inclusion for a diverse body of faculty, staff, and students.

GOALS and STRATEGIES

Goal I. Provide a diverse undergraduate student body with a quality program in the academic study of religion.

The Department of Religious Studies has long had a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. Our curriculum serves our majors and minors as well as the College and University. We offer a range of courses on specific religious traditions, geographic areas, and comparative topics. These courses expose students to a variety of religious histories, cultures, and societies. We also provide instruction in the core ideas as well as the latest developments in the critical, comparative, cross-cultural study of religion.

Strategies

1. Regularly review and update the Department's undergraduate program and the diversity of course offerings, including online courses.
2. Attract excellent undergraduate students through targeted outreach programs, especially to institutions with courses on world religions.
3. Provide excellent advising and mentoring for our majors and minors to help students build a course of study, identify career paths and goals, and facilitate a timely graduation.
4. Support undergraduate research and encourage students to share their research at conferences and through publications.
5. Encourage majors and minors to participate in experiential learning, service learning, and study-abroad opportunities.

Goal II. Support graduate education and interdisciplinary research.

Because of the multidisciplinary nature of Religious Studies, the Department is uniquely positioned to support education in a variety of fields. The Department's faculty members are committed to supporting both graduate education and interdisciplinary research. To this end, our faculty contribute to the graduate programs in other disciplines and the College Scholars

program by mentoring students, directing theses, and regularly serving on College Scholars' and graduate committees.

Strategies

1. Continue to serve on and direct M.A., Ph.D., and College Scholars committees.
2. When relevant, invite graduate students to share their research at our Departmental seminar.
3. Organize and contribute to multidisciplinary faculty research seminars that can provide opportunities for graduate and undergraduate student participation.
4. Teach cross-listed and graduate-level courses for graduate programs in other departments.
5. Mentor and advise graduate students in other departments to help prepare them for successful careers.

Goal III. Encourage, support, and promote faculty excellence in research, scholarship, creative activity, and engagement.

The Department encourages, supports, and promotes the research, scholarship, and creative activity of its faculty and supports UT's land-grant mission by fostering the critical, comparative, and cross-cultural study of religion in Tennessee. The Department of Religious Studies has built a strong national and international reputation in the academic study of religion over its more than 50-year history, through the research, publications, professional activities, and engagement of its faculty.

Strategies

1. Encourage and support the preparation of grant and fellowship proposals by faculty.
2. Encourage and support the faculty's presentation of their research and scholarship at prominent national and international meetings.
3. Encourage and support the presentation of research and scholarship at UTK Department and faculty research seminars.
4. Support engaged scholarship that carries out our land-grant mission by building relationships across campus and with the wider community.
5. Support and nominate faculty and their research, scholarship, creative activity, and engagement for local, national, and international awards and recognition.
6. Showcase the scholarly and creative research accomplishments of the faculty in local, national, and international venues.

Goal IV. Continue to build, support, and retain an outstanding faculty and staff in the Department of Religious Studies.

The Department of Religious Studies is a diverse community of outstanding scholars and teachers committed to the Department's mission and vision. The Department seeks to strengthen its mission and vision through the appointment of new tenure-line faculty, effective mentoring of faculty and staff, and by providing a collegial workplace that values diversity and supports continuous professional development.

Strategies

1. Maintain existing faculty lines in the face of retirements or other losses, and increase the number of tenure-line faculty in the Department, especially in the fields of Religion in the Americas and of Hindu Traditions, to fulfill our mission as a public land-grant university and to build a program that is comparable to the programs of our aspirational peers.
2. Recruit, mentor, retain and reward outstanding and diverse scholar-teachers.
3. Support the continuous professional development of faculty.
4. Promote participation of the Department's faculty in scholarship-enhancement opportunities, such as Faculty Development Leaves and Professional Development Awards.
5. Recruit, mentor, retain and reward staff who are dedicated to the highest levels of excellence.

Goal V. Increase the resource base and infrastructure that the Department of Religious Studies has available to accomplish its goals.

The Department continues to seek internal and external funds to support faculty lines, research, teaching, and service. This support will strengthen the Department's contribution to the University's goal to become one of the top 25 public research universities.

Strategies

1. Promote the importance of Religious Studies through outreach and advocacy.
2. Optimize efficient and effective use of resources.
3. Work closely with the College's Office of Development and the Department's Board of Visitors to strengthen development possibilities and to identify and engage current and prospective donors.

4. Optimize opportunities to increase revenue including through development opportunities, grant writing, and offering online summer courses.

Goal VI. Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The Department seeks to cultivate a climate that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in support of the College and Campus goals. To do this we seek to hire, retain, and promote a diverse faculty and staff, and to attract and retain a diverse population of students in our classes and our major.

Strategies

1. Strengthen faculty and staff mentoring to promote equity and inclusion.
2. Encourage faculty and staff to take advantage of training opportunities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
3. Encourage the faculty to make the curriculum relevant and accessible to a diverse student body.
4. Encourage faculty to model and encourage equity and inclusion in their classrooms.
5. Develop a clear system for welcoming and responding to feedback from students, faculty, and staff that could improve the climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion.