

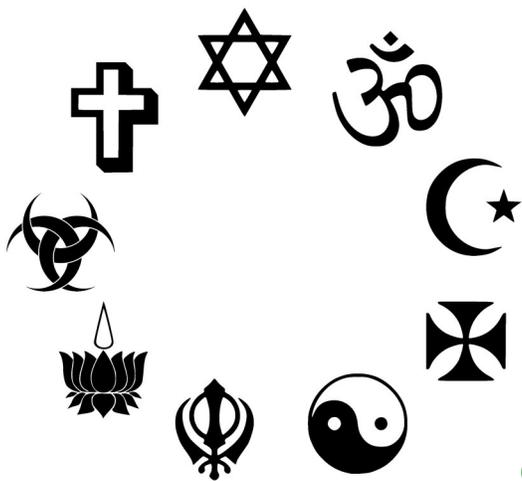
# STETSON UNIVERSITY

## Religious Studies

The Newsletter

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## What is Religious Studies?



While religious studies is greatly appreciated by scholars and students of the discipline, it is unfortunately still misunderstood by those outside of it. The field is often considered synonymous with biblical studies or theology, and for that reason most people think the only career it can prepare one for is the ministry or academia. What is generally overlooked is how religious studies trains students to think critically, broadly, and deeply about a fundamental aspect of human experience and expression. As an innately interdisciplinary field, religious studies incorporates history, anthropology, ethics, psychology, literary criticism, and other methods to understand how religious traditions constantly change and impact the world around us. To better illustrate the value of religious studies, this newsletter offers a brief sample of answers to the following questions: Current majors and minors were asked, “Why did you choose a religious studies major or minor?” The department faculty were asked, “What is religious studies?” And department alumni were asked, “How has your religious studies degree helped in your career or graduate studies?” It is hoped that the diverse answers to these questions will prove illuminating.

# Why did you choose a religious studies major or minor?

Responses from current majors or minors



Ysabel Flores – Minor

As an art major, my current experience with religious studies has deepened my passion for art and people. It's given me a greater perspective on how my art can better influence those who come from a different religious perspective than my own. I've always believed that religion and faith shape the messages we send out, especially the messages we send through our art. Through opening myself up to new ideas and religious concepts, I see more potential in my work to affect all kinds of people depending on how I understand and relate to their religious tradition and culture.

Porter Crapps – Major

I chose a religious studies major because I felt it was one of the best ways to prepare myself to serve a diverse community in my medical practice. I hope that by learning about their religion I can get a sense of their values and what they will want in terms of healing.



Katherine Kinnaird – Minor

I chose religious studies as my minor because I love learning about other people's religions, their traditions, and ways of thinking about the world. My minor enhances my major because it allows me to better write about people from another religion. As an English major, it contributes to my college experience because it has given me insight into why people wear a hijab or don't eat something unless it's prepared a certain way. I now know some of their reasoning behind their actions.

Zachary P. Ewing – Minor

I chose to be a religious studies minor because of its interdisciplinary concepts that deal with my history major. Furthermore, the minor helped develop my senior research by supplying a different perspective other than Western.



# What is Religious Studies?

Responses from faculty

## Dr. D. Gregory Sapp

Religious studies takes an academic approach to the study of religion and the religious. As beings who are self-aware and who have the capacity for imagination, humans ask questions of meaning regarding their existence and their place in the world. Organized religions seek to provide answers to questions of meaning and purpose as well as to provide an image of the ideal human condition whether that be during this life or a possible future life. Outside of organized religion, humans still deal with being finite and limited and seek meaning and purpose for their existence.

In religious studies, we work to understand the varieties of ways humans answer these questions of meaning and purpose whether as part of an organized religious tradition or individually.



## Dr. Phillip Lucas



Religious studies attempts to understand how religion both influences, and is influenced in turn by, politics, economics, science and nature, psychology, secular social institutions, the law, and other aspects of culture. In other words, it is an interdisciplinary field that employs the methods and theories of various academic disciplines (i.e., political science, history, sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, among others) to understand religion. In our courses we attempt to enter empathetically into the worldview of believers in the various traditions, to understand how a religious perspective influences their lives. Our approach is critical but non-hostile, analytical but respectful. Religious studies does not privilege one tradition over another but views each tradition as an authentic attempt to understand the mysteries of where we came from, how we should live today, and what lies beyond death.

## Dr. Sam Houston

Religious studies endeavors to instill religious literacy, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding through the analysis of religious traditions. In doing so, it cultivates the ability to empathetically and critically engage religious traditions as communities whose discourses and practices shape how adherents imagine and act in the world. With this comes the recognition that religions are diverse, evolve over time, and are embedded in all dimensions of culture. By developing the skill sets and knowledge base required to accomplish the above, religious studies equips students with the resources not only to pursue a range of professional careers, but also to be community-minded and civically-engaged citizens in our religiously and culturally pluralistic society.



# How has your religious studies degree helped in your career or graduate studies?

Responses from Alumni

## Andrew Rawls

The studies at Stetson helped me develop as a religious person because the courses broadened my understanding of people of my faith and different faiths. In the professional religious communications organization of which I have been a member for 28 years, I have beloved colleagues from Episcopalian to Hare Krishna. As religion communicators and people of faith, the Stetson background and subsequent experience taught me we have more that unites us than divides us. I worked for Southern Seminary in technology for 32 years and my Stetson studies laid the foundation for understanding and coping with the changing denominational life after 1979. I'm grateful for my time at Stetson. There is one more very important blessing of my religious studies degree at Stetson: I met Malinda, a Stetson music major, at the BSU and we have now been married for 48 years.



As a double major that graduated with a degree in religious studies and psychology, my entrance into the counseling masters program was accelerated. I have drawn on my religious studies degree often when counseling individuals that have felt discriminated against or oppressed. While not all counseling situations require this knowledge, many healing aspects can be found within religious practices and beliefs. Simply believing in a power greater than the human self provides some with comfort. Other eastern religious practices have been found to be quite beneficial, such as meditation. Individuals that meditate have been found to develop resilience to stress. As most deal with stress daily, simply adding this practice can effect positive change.

## Sabrina Thomas



Since graduating from Stetson University in 2014, I have pursued and received a master of theological studies at Emory University. Simultaneously, I received a master of public health. I was originally a religious studies major because I saw myself pursuing a juris doctor. I wanted to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, but also learn how others think and orient themselves to members in their community. My degree was so versatile that it gave me the skills to make the transition to another discipline. Even with this transition, my religious studies degree gave me the ability to think in an interdisciplinary fashion in my master's classes and to make more of my graduate experience in a dual degree program. My religious studies path has also helped me develop the aptitude to build relationships. Today I work in public health with the Centers for Disease Control in the National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases conducting workforce evaluations for the office of the director. Most of this work requires me to be able to build meaningful relationships and connections inter- and intra-departmentally to truly understand the nature of the relationships of the staff to the larger organization and governing bodies. My religious studies degree has helped me to do so.

## Elizabeth Scovil

My religious studies degree has helped me tremendously in running my business. By 2019 millennials are expected to be the largest living adult generation, surpassing the baby boomers. These consumers are soon to be the majority of our leaders and will make all the decisions. While many millennials do not consider themselves 'religious,' they still very much care deeply about social issues, values, social justice, and staying connected in their communities. Having my religious studies degree has educated me further in my deep belief system,



which drives my company vision and purpose. It helps me to touch upon all those issues that the millennials care so deeply about and in turn helps me to reach this consumer base.

# Alumni News



The following professional and personal news from our alumni also illustrates the diverse achievements and goals that a religious study degree can encourage.

**2010s Nathan Bodger '19** married Caylyn Gunby on October 28, 2017, and is pursuing a career in international environmental law. He will either go directly into law school or begin work as a litigation assistant and start law school in 2021. — **Porter Crapps '19** will be

working at the Recovery Café in San Jose, CA as a full-time volunteer through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. After that, he plans to attend medical school. — **Zachary Ewing '19** will be teaching English in China for the Peace Corps. — **Stephanie Mondelo '19** is pursuing a master's degree in marketing. — **Georgia Reed '19** is pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling. — **Kaitlyn McEvoy '18** is currently working at Yadkin Path Montessori Preschool in Salisbury, NC. — **Aurora Sullivan '18** is pursuing a master of public health at Bethune-Cookman University. — **Clayton Williams '18** is pursuing a master's in religious studies— **Nichole Cheslow '17** is working as a personal assistant in Chapel Hill, NC.—**Chelsea Probus '17** received her master's degree in religious studies at Duke University, December 2018, and is currently working at The Jewish Community Project (JCP Downtown), New York, NY.—**Douglas Reddick '17** is attending law school at Florida State University. — **Alexandra Sullivan '17** received her master's degree in cultural anthropology at New York University, New York City, NY. — **Lynn Walsh '17** is a 9th and 10th grade Honors English teacher at Ponte Vedra High School. — **Christina Canalizo '16** married Christian Decker '15 on August 4, 2018. — **Steven Cassell '16** received his master of science in physical education at Eastern Kentucky University. — **Michael Cartridge '15** is pursuing a PhD in religious studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. — **Elizabeth Fuller '15** is a library assistant with the Loudoun county government, Leesburg, VA —**Robert Pruette '15** is teaching STEM at Northridge School Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico. —**Ian Campbell '14** received a master of divinity degree at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, May 2018, and is pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church and Highland United Methodist Church in Lakeland, FL.— **Natalie Faria-Campbell '14** received a master of divinity degree at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, May 2018. — **Nerissa Fay '14** married Nate Charland on November 3, 2018, and received her master's degree in biology, 2019.— **Kiara John '14** received a doctoral degree in clinical psychology, May 2019. — **Christopher Dell '13** married Shannon Sanborn on June 24, 2018. Chris was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacons at Christ Episcopal Church, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL on May 30, 2019. — **Anne Moore Sutherland '12** is program manager of the Youth Pilot Program in the Mental Health and Homelessness Issues Division, Orange County Government.— **Claire "Stubblefield" Helton '11** is co-pastor at Northminister Church, Monroe, LA. — **Elizabeth (Lovejoy) Maury '10** is supervisory librarian/entrepreneurial services librarian at the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.— **Janie (Stewart) Osborne '10** and Matt Osborne welcomed their new daughter, Olivia Jane Osborne on November 3, 2018. **2000s Daniel Puchalla '05** is interim rector at the Annunciation of Our Lady Episcopal Church in Gurnee, IL, and married Raff Donelson in May 2018.— **Charles T. Myers '03** married Monique Sanchez on January 20, 2019, and is rector at the Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist, Orlando, FL. **1990s Ryan Wright '99** married Joe Wright on February 2, 2019.

The Department of Religious Studies offers multiple international and study abroad opportunities to our students.  
**What adventure awaits you!**

## LONDON/PARIS

During spring break of even-numbered years, Dr. Reddish takes students on a ten-day travel course to London and Paris. This trip is designed to expose students to the variety of archaeological artifacts in major museums that provide valuable insights for understanding the Bible, its history, and its cultures. Clay tablets, palace wall reliefs, stone inscriptions, ancient manuscripts, statues, and architectural remains are examples of archaeological objects that shed light on the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds that influenced the literature of the Bible. In addition to studying archaeological artifacts, the course also includes an examination of art works on display in world museums that depict scenes from the Bible. Places visited include the British Museum, the British Library, and the National Gallery in London, and the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Participants are given plenty of free time, as well, to see other sights in the cities. Friends or family members of students, as well as other interested persons, are also eligible to participate in the trip.



We traveled the Camino de Santiago, an ancient pilgrimage route across Northern Spain to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where, according to legend, St. James the Apostle is buried. The students had a fully engaged international experience that included tours of churches, monasteries, archaeological sites, and museums. They also walked over 110 kilometers in five days. This gave them the opportunity to interact closely with pilgrims from all over the world, many of whom had been walking over 800 kilometers! They

## SANTIAGO SPAIN

participated in pilgrim rites like having their pilgrim's passport stamped in each town, attending pilgrim's religious services, eating together at small cafes along the way, and hugging the statue of St. James at Santiago Cathedral.



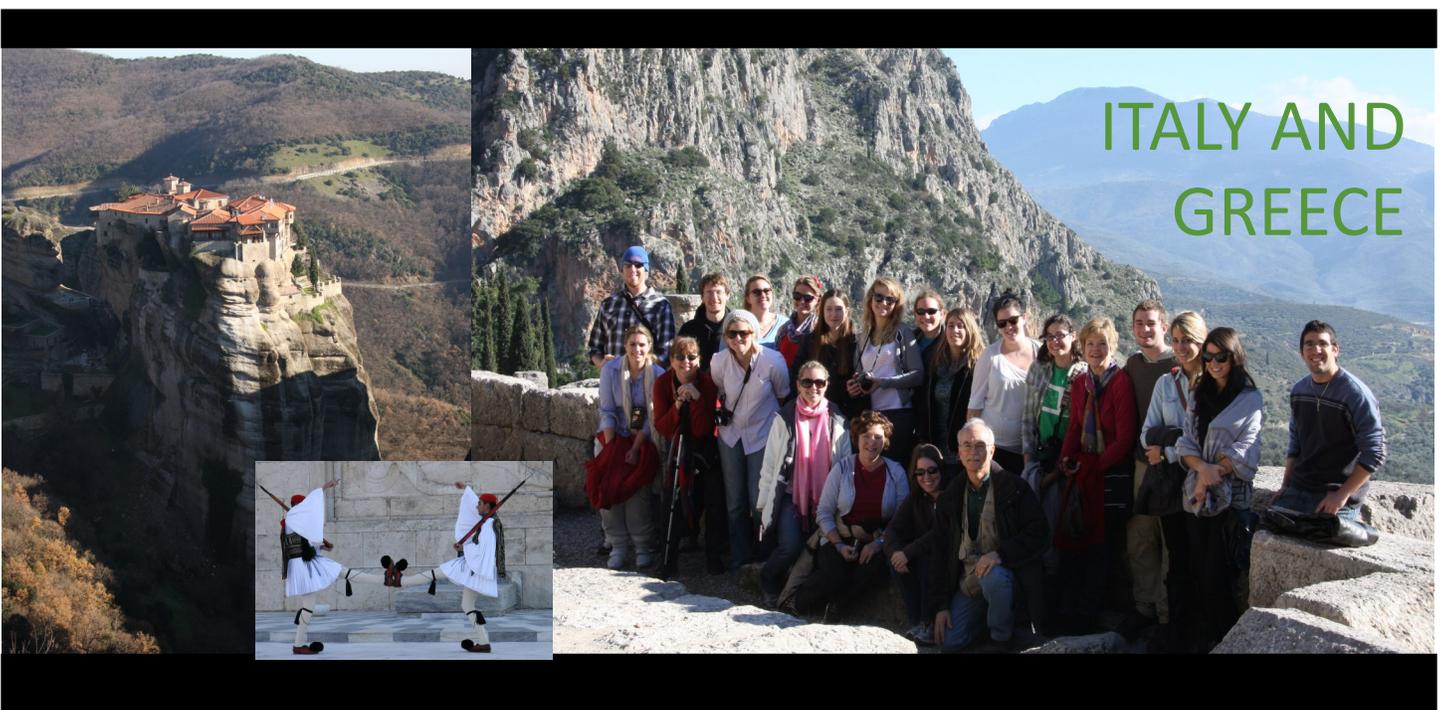


## EGYPT/JORDAN/ISRAEL

Dr. Kandy Queen-Sutherland and Dr. Mitchell Reddish offer a travel course between Christmas and the start of spring semester, usually during odd-numbered years (the next trip will be in January 2021). The specific course that is offered is rotated between two courses, The World of the Bible I: The Middle East and The World

of the Bible II: The Mediterranean. Both courses are study tours of major historical, archaeological, and religious sites, lasting approximately two and a half weeks. The focus of the courses is on archaeological sites and museums that have a connection to biblical history and events. The Middle East trip usually in-

cludes sites in Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, while the Mediterranean trip includes travel to some combination of Greece, Turkey, and Italy. Even though these are student trips for which academic credit is earned, non-students (including alumni) are always welcome to participate in the travel courses.



## ITALY AND GREECE

## Religious Studies Outstanding Juniors and Seniors

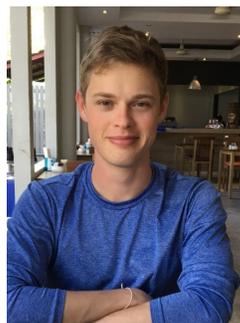
2017-2018



Seniors (left to right): Rebekah Anderson and Catherine Howell

Juniors: Porter Crapps, Olivia Daly, Kaitlyn McEvoy, and Victoria Toro

2018-2019



Seniors (left to right): Nathan Bodger and Porter Crapps

Junior: Abigail Crater

## Theta Alpha Kappa

2017-2018



The inductees and faculty are pictured above from left to right. Dr. Mitchell Reddish, Olivia Daly, Porter Crapps, Victoria Toro, and Dr. Dixon Sutherland.

Theta Alpha Kappa is a national honor society for professors and students in religious studies/theology. Three new members joined Stetson's Alpha Gamma Omicron Chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa on April 11, 2018; Olivia Daly, majoring in religious studies with a minor in philosophy; Porter Crapps, majoring in religious studies, and Victoria Toro, with a minor in English.

2018-2019



The inductees and faculty are pictured above from left to right. Dr. Mitchell Reddish, Abigail Crater, and Dr. Phillip Lucas. Not pictured Makeba Dorival.

Two new members joined Stetson's Alpha Gamma Omicron Chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa on April 10, 2019: Abigail Crater, majoring in religious studies and aquatic and marine biology, and Makeba Dorival, majoring in psychology with minors in religious studies and gender studies.