Religious Studies
Bachelor's degree
**Cyber Buddhism**

Meet Xian’er, the zen Buddha-bot. This cute 60 cm robot was developed by Master Xianfan, a monk at the Buddhist Longquan temple in Beijing. Xian’er chants mantras, chats about the Buddhist way of life, and responds to voice commands. The temple developed the robot to promote the wisdom of Buddhism in a modern way. This is one of the many examples of how religious movements use modern media, as you will learn in the course unit Religion, Media, and Popular Culture.

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<td>1 May for both EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA</td>
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<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
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<td>3 years</td>
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<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
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<td>City centre campus</td>
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<td><strong>Entry requirements</strong></td>
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<td>A Dutch VWO diploma, a German Abitur, an International Baccalaureate diploma, a European Baccalaureate or another diploma that grants entry to a Dutch university.</td>
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<td><strong>Tuition fees</strong></td>
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<td>EU/EEA: € 2,168</td>
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Why study the religion factor?

Religion is an important factor in many national and international social themes. Sometimes this is obvious, especially when we read news about religious radicalization. Other times, it is much less obvious and we are not as aware of the influence religion has in social phenomena, such as in cases of sexual health or climate change.

Worldwide, there are many conflicts, sensitivities and political discussions in which religion plays a role. Religious Studies is thus a very topical social degree programme that touches on difficult issues, relevant to policymakers, education, healthcare, the arts and the media. Is the government allowed to interfere in ritual slaughter or circumcision practices? How can we prevent young people from becoming radicalized and joining organizations that promote violence? Should religious organizations be allowed to become involved in the legislative process regarding euthanasia? What is the relationship between freedom of speech and freedom of religion? How do you deal with someone who refuses to shake the hand of a woman because of his religion? Religious Studies experts are needed in a world in which religion is a permanent part of everyday life.

Watch the video ‘Open Your Eyes’
Within the Religious Studies programme, you will examine how we live and the prominent role religion plays in our lives. You will look at the past and present and study people’s behavior, thinking, and learning. In class, you will not debate to what extent religion is ‘true’, but rather, how religion affects people’s lives and what people do with it.

Because there are so many important factors in studying religion in relation to people and society, you will be trained as a social scientist, with experience in anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy and ethics.
Why choose Groningen?

- **Top Rated Programme** (Keuzegids Universiteiten, 2020) taught at Top 100 University.
- The programme offers a diversified approach to *religion, culture, and society*, combining disciplines from the humanities and social sciences.
- The course relates latest research and theories to *current developments*.
- **Personal approach.** Our education programmes emphasize discussion and engagement, with multiple opportunities for questions and discussions. Our lecturers are dedicated educators who prioritize the needs and interests of our students.
- **International environment.** Our lecturers come from all over the world, all international experts in their field of research. The degree programme has English and Dutch variants, which means that you will follow English taught lectures together with Dutch students.
- Taught at a **public, non-denominational** university.

Ethnographic fieldwork in the ‘super-diverse’ city

During the course unit on Religion, Diversity and Identity, you will focus on how religious pluralism features in the ‘super-diverse’ city. You will put theories about pluralism and diversity in the study of religion into practice by conducting anthropological and sociological fieldwork in Rotterdam. During this week of fieldwork, you will roam two super-diverse neighbourhoods. In small groups you will explore topics like inclusion, politics, language barriers, and neighbourhood organizations.
The degree programme

Year 1

Concepts and Methods 1
Judaism
Anthropology of Religion
Hinduism and Buddhism
Christianity
Psychology and Sociology of Religion
Religion and Philosophy
Islam
This course unit provides an overview of the history of Islamic thought and practice from ca. 600 until the present day. It has a particular focus on contemporary practices and challenges for Muslims in different societies. One example you will discuss is Muslim Youth Culture. What is this and how do you study this? You will learn that simply looking at religious texts and rituals will not explain this phenomenon. You will need to combine psychological, sociological and anthropological skills and theories to understand how subcultures emerge, why teenagers wish to create their own groups with specific social codes and how it can be attractive for some troubled youth to join extremist organizations like IS.
I am an anthropologist and teach the course unit on Islam. This course unit is extremely socially relevant: political Islam is playing a major role in contemporary national and international relations and world order. The public debate sometimes reveals a very static view of Islam – people often think that it is a religion that has not changed since the seventh century and that that is what still determines all the thoughts and actions of Muslims. You will learn that people are not passive ‘carriers’ of a religion or culture. They are active actors who make use of different sources, which include religion, to define their own lives and to try to exert influence on their environment. If we produce one-sided explanations of the conflicts in which certain categories of Muslims are currently involved as being the result of Islam as a static, life-dominating religion, then you do not gain a proper view of the complexity of social, economic and political factors that contribute to people feeling hard done-by, insecure or who want to acquire power.

I will teach you to look past the clichés and to ask analytical questions in order to adequately research social phenomena.’
‘Having travelled and always been interested in meeting new people and discovering new cultures, I wanted to study the influence religion has on people’s lives, which led me from Germany to Groningen! The course here is special because we have so much interaction with our lecturers, but a good balance of independent reading and work, too. So far we have looked at research methods in religion and I’m really looking forward to learning about the psychological and sociological aspects of religion in the next block. The lectures have been very helpful and lead into the final exam or assignments well. Groningen is a very student-focused city and there’s loads of opportunities for shopping, sports and nightlife, as well as Student Associations for nearly everything!’

Lisa Förster
(Germany)
First-year student of Religious Studies

So much interaction with our lecturers
The degree programme

Year 2

Concepts and Methods 2
Rituals in Theory and Practice
The Text Awakens
The Sacred Image
Religion, Media and Popular Culture
Religion and Politics
Ethics and Secularity
Religion, Diversity and Identity
In this course unit you will discuss key themes related to religion and politics, ranging from democracy and secularism to conflict and peacebuilding. A topical question relates to the role of religion, and its counterpart secularism, in peace and conflict between and within different groups. You cannot answer this question without considering the historical, social, political, cultural and economic backdrop. What is more, transnational networks even play a role in seemingly local conflicts. For instance, you will only be able to understand the relationship of religion with conflicts in the Middle East if you consider the colonial past and the economic and geopolitical interests associated with oil production. In this course unit, you will learn that politics is about power.
‘It’s very important for me to conduct research that has a practical influence in the public sphere. A specific example of the practical application of my studies and research into reconciliation and transitional justice is my work as a consultant for various civic organizations in Zimbabwe. I’ve given workshops on peace, recovery and reconciliation, following two decades of political conflict, and have developed policy documents on these themes.

At the moment, I am researching the link between climate change and conflict in order to develop indigenously-founded peace and reconciliation strategies which are sustainable. Pairing scientific and technical perspectives with moral, religious and spiritual logics in dealing with climate conflicts, will help stop climate conflicts from becoming “wicked conflicts”, that is conflicts that seem unsolvable and recur over and over again.’

My teaching, as for instance in the course unit on Religion and Politics, is research driven, so students benefit from my past, present and on-going work. I encourage my students to study and to conduct research that has a practical impact in the public domain.’
‘I chose to follow Religious Studies because I want to get to know and understand people and other cultures better. The interdisciplinary nature of the degree programme really appealed to me. I think it’s very challenging that your own world view is constantly questioned and that you are stimulated to look beyond the minimal examination material.

I visited the UN Peace Summit for Emerging Leaders in my second year because I believe that it’s important to learn from others. World peace may be a bit too ambitious, but every step in the right direction is a good one. I highly value the (religious) dialogue very much in this process. I noticed that the word ‘religion’ in combination with peacemaking was a slight taboo. This observation is one of the things that I take into account during my studies, in which I try to find an informed answer as to why this is the case.

I am considering following the Master’s programme in Religion, Conflict and Globalization after I finish my Bachelor’s degree. I think I’ll be able to combine my fascination for politics, religion and culture very well in this Master’s programme. It would also mean that I can continue studying at this awesome Faculty and living in the best student city of the Netherlands!’
Religion happens not just in the head or heart, but somewhere: in buildings, on mountains, in suburban flats, in warzones, and even online. This course unit introduces you to the tools of contemporary spatial theory and how they may be applied to the study of religion across traditions and across history. You will study how religious spaces and the networks between them are defined, and challenged, imagined and transformed by religious people and their practices. You will analyse how these spaces in turn shape the people who make and use them. Limited only by your imagination and interests, you will apply theoretical approaches to a research project of your own choosing: from yoga tourism in the Caribbean to oil pipelines through Native Americans’ sacred land.
The degree programme

Year 3

Quranic Arabic
Spirituality and Secular Religion
Law and Religion
Climate Change, End Times and Sustainable Futures
Religion, Space and Place
Lived Religion
Cultural Impact of Religion
Study abroad or at other Faculty Placement
‘According to current estimates, over 300 million tourists visit religious sites every year. The vast cultural, political, religious, economic, and environmental impact of these visits - whatever their motivations may be - is attracting the attention of governmental bodies on all levels, of private foundations and museums, and of industry specialists in tourism and infrastructure. At the same time, pressures on religious, governmental, and private organizations concerning changing religious and cultural identities, and relating to the long-term sustainability of religious heritage management have leant urgency to the question: How do we engage, preserve and communicate the remains of our religious past?

I teach courses like Religion, Space and Place, that engage with material aspects of religion: visual arts, liturgical rites, books, music, and objects, material culture, architecture and archaeology. Studying material religious cultures helps us to think outside the box about the nature of lived religious belief itself. It is the careful and patient approach to sustained engagement with all material aspects of religion that I aim to bring to the classroom, fieldwork, and student-lead research.’
Jorrit Haarman  
(The Netherlands)  
Third year student Religious Studies

I am curious about how people give meaning to their lives

‘I chose Religious Studies because I am interested in various subjects such as anthropology, politics and philosophy, and because I am curious about how people give meaning to their lives. I became a Student Ambassador for the degree programme because I am really enthusiastic about it.

I am also Chair of the student mentor programme. Mentors help students get through their first year of studies as best they can. Being a mentor has taught me a lot about group dynamics, and how to get quieter groups to open up. As a member of the Board of the student society MATA, I’ve had a chance to improve my organizational and communication skills.

After I complete my Bachelor’s degree, I intend to do a combined Master’s programme in Spiritual Care and Education. That way, I will be able to apply the knowledge I have gained in a more social or personal setting. My current job at a hospital will surely be helpful in my degree programme in Spiritual Care, and vice versa: no doubt the subject matter of the degree programme will be relevant to my work. My experience as a mentor and Student Ambassador will dovetail nicely with the Master’s in Education.’
Monday

The week starts with a day off, but this does not mean that there is nothing to do. In the morning, I prepare the readings for tomorrow’s classes. Halfway through I take a break and use the free time to work out at the sports center here in Groningen. After that my head is empty again and I can go for another reading session in the Zernike Library. I like to study here from time to time, since it is not as crowded as the University Library in the city centre.

Tuesday

The day starts with a lecture on Buddhism from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and continues right after with the course unit on Psychology of Religion until 5 p.m. After class I meet with two of my fellow students to prepare our presentation for Friday. After that I go shopping and have dinner, before I get ready for the Faculty party in the Kiwi Club!

Wednesday

Today is another day without classes which gives me time to attend a lecture by the Indian Ambassador in the Academy Building. After that, I go to the Faculty Library to prepare my Hinduism class for tomorrow and to work on the assignment I have to hand in next week. The Faculty Library is a nice, quiet place to study and for lunch I can easily go to the canteen next door. In the evening, I hurry home to cook for some friends who are coming over for dinner.
Thursday

Another day of lectures, starting with Hinduism from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. I use the time between 1 and 3 to finish my homework for my Dutch course. At home again, I practise my part for the presentation for tomorrow and make some last adjustments. Tonight I go to bed early to be in good shape for the next day!

Friday

Our lecture on Psychology of Religion starts at 10 a.m. but I meet my group half an hour earlier to set up the projector for the presentation. It all goes well and the lecturer seems happy with our contribution to the lesson. That is a good start to the weekend! The class ends at 1 p.m. which gives me just enough time to cycle home and pack my bag for the trip to Hamburg that I planned for this weekend.
After Graduating

Thanks to the broad training it offers, Religious Studies prepares students for many different careers. In terms of content, you become an expert in the field of religion and culture. But you also learn general skills that are useful in any profession: critical thinking, analysing and solving problems, and extracting and putting into words the essence of a large amount of information. It is therefore no surprise that our graduates find jobs quite easily: 95 percent of those who complete a Master’s degree programme after their bachelor’s find a job at University of Applied Sciences-level at the very least. Most graduates find work in one of the following six sectors: health care, government policy, education, science, culture, and media.

Job examples
• Spiritual counsellor
• Policy officer, for example in the field of development aid, international diplomacy or cultural heritage
• Religion and World-Views teacher
• Researcher at a university or social research institute
• Journalist
• Project officer with a civil society organization
Alumni stories

Carmen Fleurke
followed an internship at the Dutch embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel. Her job included following the news and writing reports and memoranda about developments in the region. Since then, she has held several jobs: Regional Coordinator for Day for Change, a Dutch organization that supports inclusive financing in developing countries; Instructor in English as a Second Language in Bogotá, Colombia; and currently in the United Arab Emirates as Country Manager for The Business Year, a global media group specializing in economics news, research on national economies, and business intelligence.

Peter Meister-Broekema
set out as a consultant in the area of innovation and grant acquisition. The company that he worked for mostly employed economists and business specialists, and wanted to hear from someone with a different perspective. After this, he held many different positions: project manager within the cultural sector, grant acquirer for the UG and then fundraiser at the London School of Economics. After years of project management and grant acquisition, he wanted to return to working with more of the ‘content’. He therefore now works both as a grant acquirer and researcher at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences.

Fardo Eringa
went straight to work for the University of Groningen Humanities Support Desk after graduating, where she helped organize educational projects for secondary schools. One of the projects she set up together with the Historical Groningen Churches Foundation focused on redesignation of church buildings that are no longer used as such. A year after graduating, she started as a PhD-student, further researching the subject of her master’s thesis, the fascinating phenomenon of ‘Michaeling’: fans following in Michael Jackson’s footsteps through a pilgrimage that brings them closer in spirit to their idol.

Check our alumni page for more examples!
Study association

You automatically become member of the Faculty study association Gerardus van der Leeuw. In the introduction week, you become acquainted with the study association and its activities. Ours is an active study association with several committees: the travel committee organizes excursions; the social events committee organizes get-togethers; the sustainability committee takes care of the vegetable garden; Geerfit organizes sporty activities to keep you fit; and the book committee arranges discounts on textbooks. There are also several debating societies within the Faculty which you can join. In short, there is plenty to do at our Faculty besides studying!

Faculty Life

The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies is the only independent public faculty in the Netherlands to offer a degree programme in Religious Studies. You will follow lectures in the beautiful medieval courthouse in Groningen’s historical centre. The Academy Building, the University Library and other Faculties are within walking distance. Thanks to its small scale, the programme leaves a lot of room for questions and discussions and you will receive a lot of individual attention from your lecturers. Each year, we start the academic year with a lunch of the first year students with their professors and a ceremonial opening of the academic year with a special guest.

Watch the video ‘Opening Academic Year’
Contact

Mail a student
Want to know more about this degree programme or studying in Groningen?
Go to rug.nl/mailastudent, look for Religious Studies and our student ambassador will answer your questions.

www.rug.nl/mailastudent

Student advisors
Our study advisors Thea de Boer and Kees van den Ende can help you with study planning, study delay and questions regarding examination regulations. You can contact them for information regarding electives and specializations, but also for a confidential talk about potential study and/or personal problems.

Contact student advisors:
studieadviseur.ggw@rug.nl

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