



university of  
groningen

faculty of religion, culture  
and society

# Religious Studies

Bachelor's degree



open academic community – since 1614

# Practical information



## Application deadline

1 May for both EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA



## Duration

3 years



## Location

Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society  
Oude Boteringestraat 38, Groningen



**Entry requirements** A Dutch VWO diploma, a German Abitur, an International Baccalaureate diploma, an European Baccalaureate or another diploma that grants entry to a Dutch university.



## Tuition fees

EU/EEA: € 2.601

Non-EU/EEA: € 13.500



## 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.



# Why study religion?

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. What is radicalization and what is the connection between religion and radicalization? Why does it seem to appeal particularly to young people? Is the government allowed to interfere in ritual slaughter or circumcision practices? 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  
'What is religion'



## How do we study religion?

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 an interdisciplinary focus and experience in anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy and ethics.







## 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.



In this magazine, students tell more about their experiences in Rotterdam.



## Why choose Groningen?

- Regularly **Top Rated Programme** (Keuzegids Universiteiten), 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**.

A photograph of two young women walking through a hallway. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and has long brown hair. The woman on the right is wearing a light green quilted jacket over a white shirt and black pants, and has blonde hair. They are both smiling. The hallway has a dark carpet, white walls, and a clock on the wall. There are yellow pendant lights hanging from the ceiling. In the background, other people are visible sitting at a table.

## The degree programme

### Year 1

- Concepts and Methods 1: Study of Religion
- Judaism
- Anthropology of Religion
- Religion in South-Asia
- Christianity
- Psychology and Sociology of Religion
- Philosophy of Religion and Spirituality
- Islam



A photograph of two women wearing hijabs, smiling and serving food. The woman on the right is wearing a white hijab with a colorful floral pattern and is gesturing towards a tiered stand filled with various colorful pastries. The woman on the left is wearing a light pink hijab and is also smiling. The background is a plain white wall with some framed pictures.

## Islam: History, Sources and Practices

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.

Growing up in an international environment gave me a deeper interest in different cultures and ways of living. The BA in Religious studies offers a look into, and an explanation of these different habits and cultures worldwide. The wide variety of different subjects, and the welcoming atmosphere of the faculty during the open day made me apply for the programme.

I expected to deepen my knowledge and understanding of different religions and cultures, and to become more open-minded towards different cultures by understanding them better, and this has been the case! I thought I would have more difficulties with studying in English, but the students and the teachers in the programme have been very welcoming, and as an international, I have felt very included in both the Dutch and international students. My advice to international students is to have an open mindset, to challenge yourself to learn new things, and work hard, but also join the student life and have fun next to the studies. Try out all the opportunities the university and the city has to offer!

So far, all of the courses have been very interesting, especially when the teachers themselves are enthusiastic about the subjects and bring their own experiences into the lectures. My favorite first-year course unit is the one on Judaism. In addition to interesting lectures, we toured Groningen for important locations and traveled to Amsterdam to visit Jewish synagogues and museums to learn more.

At the moment my plans for the future are quite open, there are many options for master's programmes. I do know I want to continue studying religion and culture. After graduating, I hope to work in an educational institute, or in spiritual care. I would like to work with people and have a positive impact on people's lives.

**“Become more open-minded towards different cultures”**

**Julia Pitkänen (Finland)**  
Student BA Religious Studies





# The degree programme

## Year 2

- Concepts and Methods 2: Researching Religion
- Rituals in Theory and Practice
- The Text Awakens
- The Sacred Image
- Religion, Media and Popular Culture
- Religion and Politics
- Ethics, Religion and Care
- Religion, Diversity and Identity







## Religion and Politics

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.





**Joram Tarusarisa (Zimbabwe)**  
Assistant Professor of Religion, Conflict  
and Peacebuilding

**“I encourage my  
students to study and  
to conduct research  
that has a practical  
impact in the public  
domain”**

‘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.’



[Watch the video  
Mythbusting Religion  
and Conflict](#)

For a very long time, I did not know what I wanted to study, because my interests are very diverse. I have always been very interested in history, sociology, culture, religion and anthropology, only all these studies in themselves I thought were not broad enough and did not suit me. In the end, I just started flicking through the RUG brochure and came across Religious Studies, so that's where I went to look at the open day.

At the open day, it turned out that actually all my interests came together in this study and that's why I started studying Religious Studies.

Religious sciences is unique because it combines different disciplines, such as sociology, history and anthropology. As a result, you learn to look at a particular issue through different lenses, which can be very valuable when analysing or solving certain issues. In addition, Religious Studies is the only bachelor's in Groningen that offers so many anthropological courses! Furthermore, I really like the small and personal faculty; everyone knows each other and it is very approachable to talk to a professor, lecturer or fellow student.

While writing my thesis, I found out that I find the combination of law and religion very interesting. I hope to end up in an administrative law position later on, and then mainly deal with social issues in our society.

**“So many  
anthropological  
subjects!”**



**Zita van Boetzelaer (The Netherlands)**  
Student BA Religious Studies





## Religion, Space and Place

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

Multiple options and compulsory courses:

- Quranic Arabic
- Climate Change, End Times and Sustainable Futures
- Religion, Space and Place
- Study abroad or at another Faculty
- Placement
- Specialisation:
  - Origins of Religion
  - Lived Religion
  - Cultural and Political Impact of Religion
- Science Communication
- Thesis



**Andrew Irving (New Zealand)**  
Assistant Professor of Religion and Heritage



## **“How do we engage, preserve and communicate the remains of our religious past?”**

We humans are constantly making use of the past to say something about who we are in the present: sometimes unconsciously, sometimes very deliberately. Where it gets particularly interesting is when for instance formerly cherished sites, landscapes, practices, and objects are neglected, forgotten or threatened with destruction.

The war in Ukraine, climate activist vandalism, social polarization, and the burden of mass tourism draw urgent attention to what are in fact on-going critical questions: who benefits from the use of the past and how? But what has this to do with religion? A great deal of both material and immaterial heritage around the world is religious in nature (from sacred rivers, to carnival parades). On top of this, heritage practices themselves (such as walking the Camino, or keeping a local dance tradition alive) are ways of preserving “the chain of memory” in community - they are, in other words, perhaps another way of “doing” religion.

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. This has 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.

I had a lot of interests in high school and did not want to choose any one aspect so the BA in Religious Studies was extremely appealing in terms of how multidisciplinary it is. I was also attracted to the small class sizes and how excited both the professors and students I spoke with at the open day were about the programme. On top of that, I have a lot of space to explore my individual interests as they relate to the study matter! Groningen is also a beautiful city, slightly isolated, however there is more than enough here to keep it very entertaining while still being easy to get around and have a very safe and comfortable feeling. It's an amazing community in the faculty and the city of Groningen is one of the nicest places I have ever been!

I am planning to do my masters in Heritage and Religion, hopefully with a focus on heritage tourism. This programme, coordinated by Professor Andrew Irving, combines theories and practical knowledge for working in the field of heritage and religious heritage. My goal is to end up working in a heritage organization, using my degree and specializations, but also using the organizational skills I have developed during my bachelors through my extracurriculars with our study association Gerardus van der Leeuw. There, I have served as a board member, as well as being a member of the activities committee and chairing the travel committee for the past three years. These positions have also complimented positions in the faculty including being a mentor, a member of the programme committee, and the vice-chair of the faculty council, all of which have given me a space to work towards a better faculty as well as work on my organizational and political skills.

**“A lot of space to  
explore my individual  
interests”**

**Austin Brewin (USA)**  
Student BA Religious Studies





# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

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MON

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 Faculty library.

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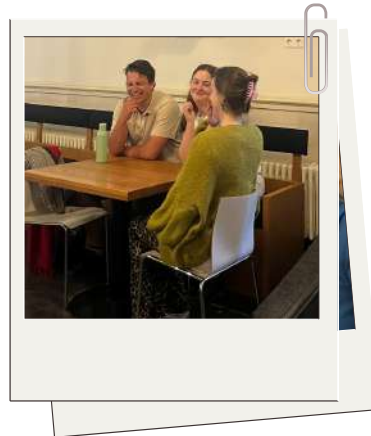
TUE

The day starts with a lecture on Religion in South Asia from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and continues right after with the course unit on Psychology and Sociology 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!

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WED

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 Religion in South Asia 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.



# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

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THU

Another day of lectures, starting with Religion in South Asia 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!

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FRI

Our lecture on Psychology and Sociology 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.



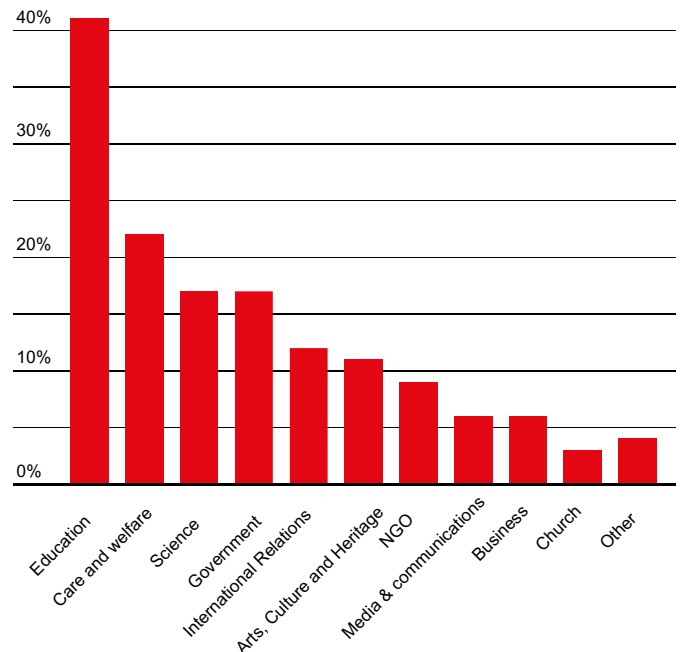


# After Graduating

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, culture, and society. But you also learn general skills that are useful in any profession: critical thinking, analyzing and solving problems, and extracting and putting into words the essence of a large amount of information. 90 percent of those who complete a Master's degree programme after their bachelor's find a job at bachelor's- level at the very least. Most graduates find work in one of the following sectors: education, health care, government policy, international relations, NGO's, science, culture & heritage, media & communications.

## Job examples

- Policy officer, for example in the field of development aid, prevention of radicalization, 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
- Spiritual Caregiver



# 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.



## Marieke Landman

is a policy officer for the prevention of radicalization and extremism at the Municipality of The Hague. During her internship she ended up at this department and after six months they offered her a job. Her main task is to set up projects that reduce the susceptibility to radicalization. To this end, the department focuses on, for example, guiding young people with their identity issues or their daytime activities, and guiding parents not to lose contact with their child. In addition, she provides information to professionals to recognize signs of radicalization in good time and provides tools for professionals to properly discuss this theme.

[Check our alumni page](#)  
[for more examples!](#)







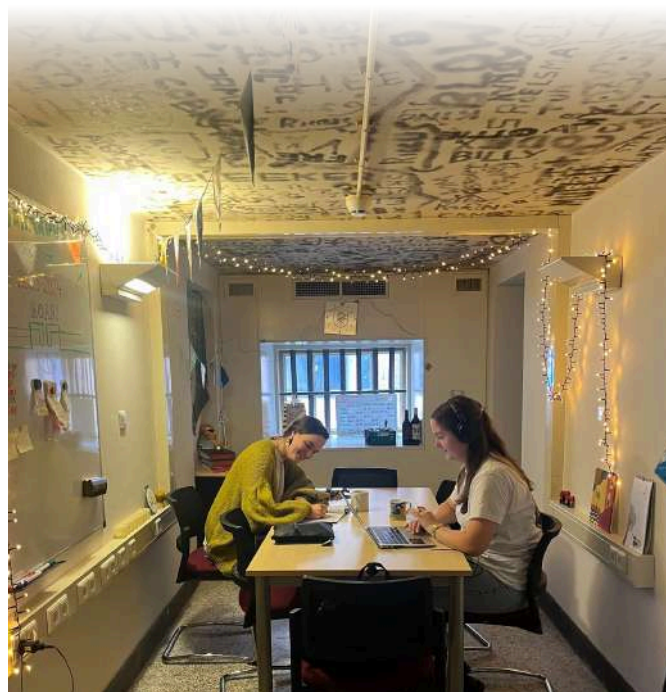
## Faculty Life

The Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society 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.

You quickly get to know your fellow students well, for example through the annual first-year camp on Schiermonnikoog (a small Dutch island, close to Groningen) before the start of the academic year (early September).

## Study association

You can choose to join 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!



# Contact

## Mail a student

Want to know more about this degree programme or studying in Groningen?

Go to [rug.nl/mailastudent](http://rug.nl/mailastudent), look for Religious Studies and our student ambassador will answer your questions.



[www.rug.nl/mailastudent](http://www.rug.nl/mailastudent)

**University of Groningen**

**Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society**

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## Study advisors

Our study advisors **Kees van den Ende** and **Nina van der Velden** can help you with your questions about your admission and enrolment, 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 study advisors:  
[studyadvice.rcs@rug.nl](mailto:studyadvice.rcs@rug.nl)







Watch the video 'Welcome to the Faculty'



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