

**DATE:** November 16, 2016

**SUBJECT:** New Academic Program  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Religious Studies, BA/BS

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Approval

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The proposed baccalaureate program in Religious Studies at Middle Tennessee State University seeks to expand the Religious Studies minor that has been in existence for over 30 years. MTSU identified Religious Studies as an institutional priority with the hiring of two tenure-track faculty members in 2012-13. These faculty members were awarded a year-long 2015 fellowship at the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Recently, they were awarded a \$30,000 collaborative grant (in conjunction with University of North Florida and Clemson University) from the Wabash Center. This grant is awarded primarily to institutions to develop or expand Religious Studies programs to assist with curriculum development and assessment.

The proposed Religious Studies program seeks to prepare students to become well-informed, independent, and creative thinkers equipped with the methods and theories necessary to study religious phenomena in a systematic way, to synthesize findings, and to analyze critically what one finds. Religious Studies offers students an invaluable foundation for a wide range of careers in which reading, writing, understanding, and analysis are essential.

**PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE:** Fall 2017

**1.1.20A MISSION:** The proposed Religious Studies program supports Middle Tennessee State University's mission of "preparing students to thrive in their chosen professions and a changing global society. Given the distinctive role religion has played and continues to play in global culture, the major in Religious Studies will provide students with a cultural literacy that is invaluable in our increasingly diverse and multicultural society.

**1.1.20B CURRICULUM:** The proposed program will prepare students to become well-informed, independent, and creative thinkers equipped with the methods and theories necessary to study religious phenomena in a systematic way, to synthesize findings, and to analyze critically what one finds. The curriculum is designed around a major field course and a selection of electives within three broad competency categories: description, analysis, and critique.

The curriculum is based on methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of religion and society, both locally and globally, historically and today. The program will require completion of 120 credit hours and the electives and foreign language requirement will vary based on the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree option.

	<b>Bachelor of Arts</b>	<b>Bachelor of Science</b>
General Education	41	41
Major Field Core	18	18
Guided Electives	12	12
General Electives	19 – 22	31 – 34
Minor	15 – 18	15 – 18
Foreign Language	12	--

**1.1.20C ACADEMIC STANDARDS:** The admission, readmission, retention, and graduation requirements are the same as those described in the MTSU *Undergraduate Catalog*.

### **Projected Program Enrollment and Productivity**

Enrollment projections were developed based on student interest surveys and students who had declared a Religious Studies minor.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>Graduates</b>
<b>2017</b>	11	--
<b>2018</b>	19	--
<b>2019</b>	31	4
<b>2020</b>	43	7
<b>2021</b>	52	10

**1.1.20D FACULTY:** The instructional workload for this program will be continued by the two full-time, tenure-track faculty. For early program implementation, adjunct faculty members will be hired. One additional faculty member will be hired in year three to broaden the focus of the program to include a more Eastern (Asian) views of religion as a complement to the existing faculty expertise.

**1.1.20E LIBRARY RESOURCES:** The University has significant library holdings for the proposed Religious Studies program. The Walker Library has a robust collection of monographs and databases on the subject of religion. Additionally, the instructional services provided by the library include a liaison that has an extensive background in South Asian religious culture and history.

**1.1.20F ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION:** No new organizational unit will be required. The proposed Religious Studies BA/BS program will be housed in the Department of Philosophy within the College of Liberal Arts.

**1.1.20G SUPPORT RESOURCES:** The proposed Religious Studies BA/BS program will utilize faculty and the college-wide advising coordinators to advise students on curricular and career issues.

**1.1.20H FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT:** Instructional facilities and equipment are adequate to support the proposed program.

**1.1.20I NEED AND DEMAND:** Like other liberal arts programs, the proposed Religious Studies program offers students an invaluable foundation for a wide range of careers in which reading, writing, communication, critical thinking, and team-work are essential. According to the 2014-15 national survey conducted by the American Academy of Religion, recent graduates were employed by religious organizations, higher education, non-profit organizations, and business. The report also found that a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies prepares students exceptionally well for graduate studies which would be necessary for many of the varied career options.

The proposed Religious Studies BA/BS program is structured to provide graduates with the essential tools (description, analysis and critique) in learning about the world's religions. This unique approach provides a practical utility of the degree while engaging students in the academic study of religion.

**1.1.20J NO UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION:** Program duplication among traditional liberal arts majors is common in higher education. In Tennessee, most Religious Studies programs are offered at private institutions (Vanderbilt University, Rhodes College and Sewanee: The University of the South). The University of Tennessee, Knoxville is the only public institution that offers a Religious Studies program.

**1.1.20K COOPERATING INSTITUTIONS:** None at this time.

**1.1.20L DIVERSITY AND ACCESS:** Middle Tennessee State University embraces diversity as a core value and the proposed Religious Studies BA/BS program is consistent with the institution's Diversity Statement with a focus on student success, faculty recruitment, curricular content, and co-curriculum programmatic events and activities. Religious Studies as a discipline is committed to fostering an appreciation for and greater understanding of diversity.

**1.1.20M ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION:** The Religious Studies program will be evaluated on student success indicators such as their senior seminar, other courses and faculty evaluations. Additionally, the program will be evaluated externally every seven years in accordance with the Quality Assurance Funding Program. Assessment results from both internal and external evaluations will be used for program improvements.

**1.1.20O EXTERNAL JUDGEMENT:** External review of the proposed program was conducted during an institution site visit on May 5, 2016. Dr. Stephen Berkwitz, Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies at Missouri State University served as the external reviewer. He recommended approval of the proposed Religious Studies program. He stated that "additional resources required to initiate the BA/BS major are minimal, and the benefits to the university and its students are significant. The two faculty in charge of this program are tremendous assets to the university and they are committed to the work of starting and maintaining the major program. All of the required pieces are in place to establish a distinctive and productive program in Religious Studies."

**1.1.20P COST/BENEFIT:** The proposed Religious Studies program will be funded through additional tuition revenues generated by the program and no institutional reallocation of funds is necessary for program implementation.

**1.1.30 POST APPROVAL MONITORING:** An annual performance review of the proposed program will be conducted for the first five years following program approval. The review will be based on benchmarks established in the approved proposal. At the end of this period, the campus, governing board, and Commission staff will perform a summative evaluation. The benchmarks include, but are not limited to, enrollment and graduation, program cost, progress toward accreditation, and other metrics set by the institution and agreed upon by governing board and Commission staff. If benchmarks are not met during the monitoring period, the Commission may recommend that the institutional governing board terminate the program. If additional time is needed and requested by the institutional governing board, the Commission may choose to extend the monitoring period.