



Science of Religion

Pursue scientific explanations for religious beliefs and behaviour

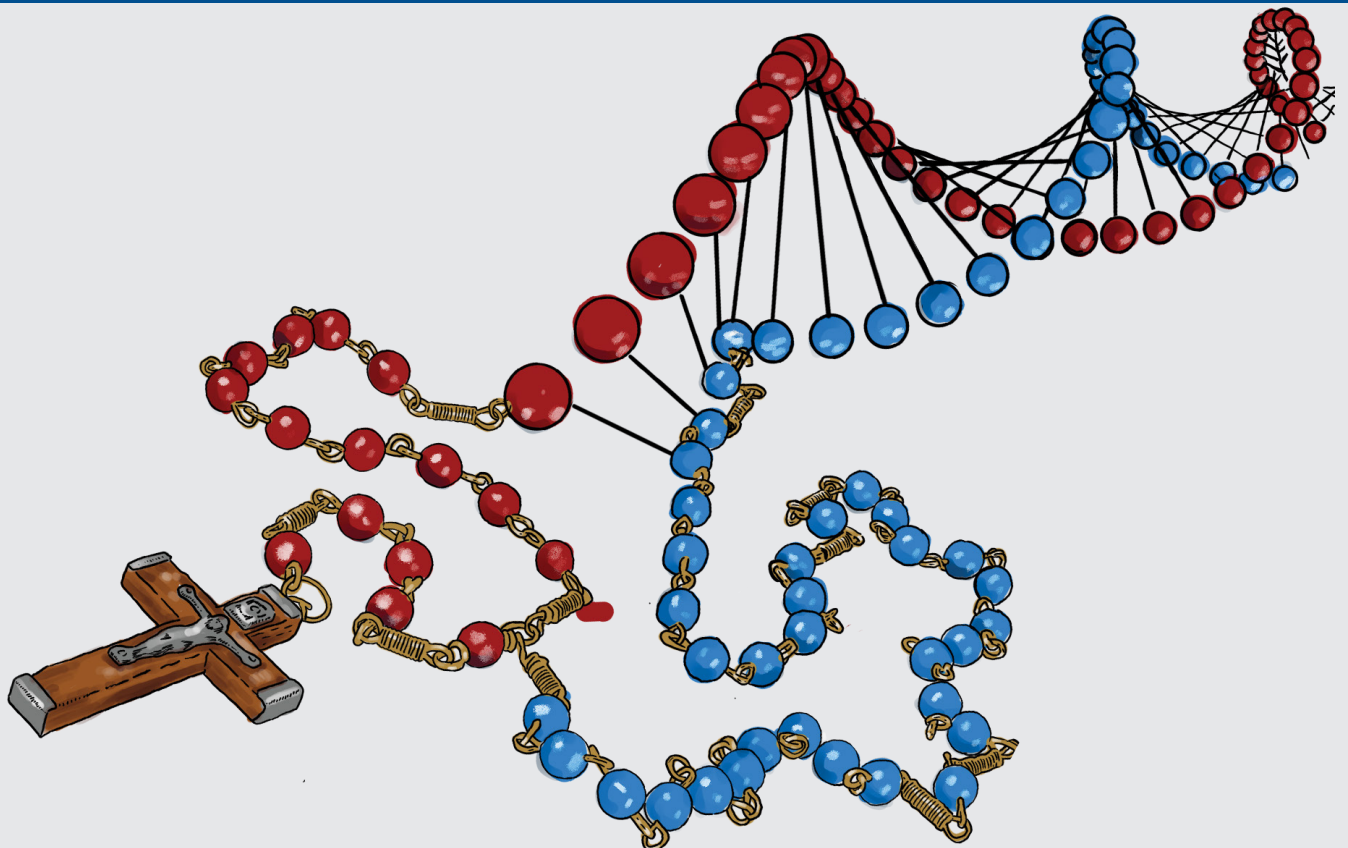
“The scientific study of religion provides a rigorous, impartial perspective on how and why religion plays such an important role in human life.”

Dr Joseph Watts
Lecturer, Religion Programme

Are you interested in how science can help us understand religion? Have you ever wondered why some people are religious, and others aren't? Or whether religion affects a person's mental and physical health?

The scientific study of religion examines topics that are important locally and globally. A minor in the Science of Religion will allow you to explore experimental, cross-cultural and survey-based research design and learn how scientific methodologies can help us understand religious beliefs and behaviour.

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Why study the Science of Religion?

Religion is a fundamental feature of human nature and exists in all human societies. Understanding religion will also be critically important in helping to solve many of the world's most pressing social issues. A scientific approach to the study of religion can increase our understanding of key aspects and concerns of human life.

The Science of Religion minor will give you a general ability to understand and appreciate scientific research. The papers in this minor introduce hypothesis testing through a range of experimental, comparative and survey-based research designs. You'll discover what cutting-edge psychology experiments reveal about religious belief. You'll learn about the place of religion on diverse scales, from the context of human evolution to contemporary New Zealand. And you'll examine the future of religious belief and unbelief.

This subject is a valuable addition to degrees across all university disciplines – Arts, Science, Health Sciences and Business.

Background required

There are no prerequisites for this minor. All students are welcome.

Teaching style

Students attend lectures and small-group tutorial sessions. For those who cannot study on campus, it is possible to take all Religion papers by distance study, regardless of where you live.

Required papers

100-level:

RELS 110 Introduction to the Scientific Study of Religion

An introduction to scientific methods and their application to the study of religion, focusing on scientific explanations for religious belief and behaviour.

Plus one of:

BIOA 101 Introduction to Biological Anthropology

PSYC 111 Brain and Behaviour

PSYC 112 Human Thought and Behaviour

SCOM 109 Communicating Science: An Introduction

STAT 110 Statistical Methods

Plus three papers above 100-level from an approved list:

otago.ac.nz/courses/subjects/srel.html

Career opportunities

A minor in the Science of Religion will prepare you for a variety of careers. Your knowledge of the scientific methods used in studying religion and the social sciences more generally will be attractive to employers. You will also gain experience with persuasive writing and evaluating evidence-based claims, which will put you in a good position for careers involving evidence-based social policy, such as those in government, NGOs, and education.

For questions about the
Science of Religion
otago.ac.nz/courses/subjects/srel.html



ENDORSEMENTS

Dr John Shaver

Associate Professor, Religion Programme

"The Science of Religion minor provides students with training in general scientific approaches, as well as with an understanding of how science can help us to explain many features of religions and their role in the world today. It's therefore great training for students interested in both the sciences and the humanities, as well as their intersection."

Dr Joseph Watts

Lecturer, Religion Programme

"Religion plays a central role in people's lives as well as major global events. The scientific study of religion provides a rigorous, impartial perspective on how and why religion plays such an important role in human life. The Science of Religion minor teaches students to rigorously and critically analyse complex human phenomena."

