



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

22 January 2024

Dear Chancellor Gilliam and Provost Storrs:

It has come to our attention that you are considering eliminating the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We are writing to express our dismay and grave concern, and we urge you to reconsider your plan. Religious Studies is crucial to successful higher education. It contributes essential elements to educating well-informed citizens and critical thinkers who are prepared to respond to the many complex challenges we face in our current and future worlds. Your religion department includes internationally recognized scholars and has been productive and successful. Eliminating Religious Studies would seriously damage the educational mission of your higher education institution, and we sincerely hope that UNCG will not make that mistake.

The American Academy of Religion, the premier professional association dedicated to advancing the academic study of religion and fostering the public understanding of religion, has upheld the importance of the rigorous academic study of religion for many decades. We have reminded the public of the relevance and significant contributions religious studies makes to higher education in our [public statement issued in 2020](#). We now repeat this reminder and urge you to reconsider UNCG's recently announced plan to eliminate the Religious Studies Department.

UNCG is one of the most diverse universities in the state of North Carolina, especially recognized for its unique first generation programming. UNCG seeks to "emerge as one of the state's strongest, most productive institutions, and meet the needs of students and communities for years to come." UNCG's mission statement advertises "a learner-centered, accessible, and inclusive community fostering intellectual inquiry to prepare students for meaningful lives and engaged citizenship." UNCG's stated goal is to be "a global university integrating intercultural and international experiences and perspectives into learning, discovery, and service." UNCG cannot fulfill that mission or credibly maintain a commitment to intercultural and international competence if it eliminates the Religious Studies Department, as the current plan proposes.

As part of the public university system of North Carolina, UNCG has obligations beyond providing basic career preparation. It is responsible for helping to educate a thoughtful, engaged, and critical citizenry that can tackle the challenges facing society today and in the future. Eliminating the program that has at its center intercultural literacy and critical consciousness of world religious traditions does not serve UNCG or its local community, much less the State of North Carolina.

Given all that Religious Studies offers to your institution, your students, and your community, we urge you to reconsider this short-sighted plan.

Sincerely,

Jin Y. Park, President of the American Academy of Religion
Leela Prasad, President-Elect of the AAR
Laurel Schneider, Vice President of the AAR
Dena Pence, Treasurer of the AAR
Kathleen Sands, Secretary of the AAR