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# BeMo

## Graduate School Statement of Purpose Example for Religious Studies (808 words)

*Not many students seek to spend their gap year surrounded by the choking aroma of sulfur, but I will readily admit to being just such a student. After 4 years spent in a blur of library lighting and research, I found myself in desperate need of immersion into both Soto zen Buddhism and Japanese culture more generally. So, after some careful planning, I spent 4 months last year working in an onsen in Fukui, spending my 1 day off each week wandering around the shrines interspersed between Echizen and Kyoto and generally trying to soak up every bit of soto history I could.*

*My real wish was granted near the end of my time in Fukui, when I was accepted for a 1-week sesshin at Eiheiji castle. This was the fulfillment of a desire I'd stoked throughout my BA work in Asian studies at X University. Throughout my research, I'd devoted considerable time to analyzing concepts of time in extended religious ritual, and at Eiheiji, I was able to not only observe this in action but to experience it directly as well. My personal relationship to zen was not especially developed prior to this point, but after just the first step through Eiheiji's main gate, I felt something shift in me, and knew that I wanted to dedicate my academic career to exploring not just zen but soto ontology specifically.*

*To this end, my dissertation with the religious studies department would seek to utilize ongoing scholarship by professor Farmington in discussions of temporal dilation and dissolution in religious ritual. At Eiheiji, and in sesshin settings specifically, there are numerous conceptualizations of time that are at odds with typical monastic linearity, and I believe incorporating a more careful analysis of temporal augmentation is key to unpacking the metaphysics of both sesshin and "intensive" events in other traditions as well. I may feel a personal connection to much of what I've studied and written about so far, but I feel an even stronger dedication to exegesis of religious ritual experience for the sake of furthering philosophical and theological discussion across traditions.*

*My abiding love for Soto zen is a key motivator in this project, but I come to this study earnestly and with academic rigor. Interfaith dialogue has been a constant part of my life outside of academia. Throughout high school I volunteered a great deal of time with both Saint Sophia Orthodox church and Bharatiya Hindu temple in [hometown]. This provided not only opportunities to engage in beneficial community projects, but also myriad opportunities to discuss theological and doctrinal matters with people outside my own religious practice. These activities, much like my enthralling experiences in Fukui, clarified and concentrated my desire to pursue high-level scholarship in religious studies.*

*Your program will allow me to pursue interdisciplinary studies that will touch upon more than just community interfaith dialogue. My early undergraduate years heavily focused on Western philosophy, and specifically German idealism. Dr. Huron's work in examining influxes of hermeticism and esotericism in general in this tradition is incredibly fascinating*

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*to me, and while my thesis doesn't directly touch on it, I am quite curious about potential intersections of Western esoteric ritual and Soto Zen ritual, specifically their descriptions of atemporal experience. Indiana university's overarching emphasis on collaborative work, and especially the religious studies department's similar commitment to intersectional and comparative analysis, is a massive draw for me. Although Northwestern's Asian studies department boasted a number of interdisciplinary and cross-specialty working groups, the offerings at IU are significantly more numerous and broader in scope, and I would be honored to participate in the East Asian epistemology working group especially. The paper I presented at last year's International Conference on Buddhist Philosophical Studies centered on epistemological contradiction in Yunmen's koans, and I think there's a great deal of room in my proposed project to explore theories of knowledge in relation to the discussions of ritual temporality and chronology.*

*While I certainly found aspects of my time working in an onsen exhausting, the difficulty of the work and communication therein was a challenge I greatly enjoyed. I would bring this newly enhanced sense of dedication and discipline to graduate studies at Indiana university, and, gratefully, be able to formalize an ongoing academic project that's deeply connected to the religious and cultural experiences I had during this time as well. I feel profoundly ready, in other words—ready for both advanced scholarship and the semi-monastic lifestyle that best supports this work. My week at Eiheiiji was transformative in a few ways, but perhaps the most unexpected of which was the way it showed me what I already knew about myself from a clarified or even purified perspective, and I know without a doubt that the zeal I felt bloom within me is inextricable from continuing along the path toward doctoral research and eventually teaching.*