



'The Training of a Spartan' Prepares Alumna for the Future

Julia Johnson came to Michigan State University wanting to study Animal Science, but later discovered what she truly wanted to do within the College of Arts & Letters and Department of Religious Studies.

"I realized that studying the humanities is so important for the future of the world," said Johnson, who graduated in 2015 with a BA in Religious Studies. "I took Intro to Biblical Literature with Dr. Chris Frilingos. He motivated me to pursue the academic study of religion. Without guidance from him and the whole Department of Religious Studies, I wouldn't be where I am today."

And where Johnson is at is Yale Divinity School, working on her master's in Divinity. And, based on her exceptional academic achievement at Michigan State University and her demonstrated leadership ability, she was awarded the title of Marquand Scholar by Yale Divinity School, which comes with a merit-based, full-tuition scholarship as well as a living allowance to pursue her master's at Yale.

"I was often told that applying to an Ivy League school would be very difficult having a 'state school' education," Johnson said. "But, it hasn't been. I feel overly prepared, and I owe it all to MSU. I'm proud to say I attended Michigan State University for so many reasons. MSU made me feel like a leader both in and outside of the classroom. I immersed myself in all the opportunities the University had to offer, and I graduated knowing I left my mark."

Johnson was encouraged to apply to Yale by Gretel Van Wieren, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies.

"As my senior advisor, she helped me explore the intersection between religion and animals," said Johnson, who is now combining her two areas of interest, religion and animal science, by studying religious animal ethics, specifically surrounding farming, slaughtering, and domestication.

Johnson says her experience visiting MSU's agricultural farms and slaughterhouse inspired her to explore the relationship between food animals, death, consumption, and faith.

"I am interested in how religion shapes our worldviews, especially regarding the treatment and management of animals, the intimate connection between religion and food, and religious ethics regarding death and the afterlife," Johnson said.

After she graduates from Yale, Johnson plans to pursue doctoral work in religious ethics as well as training as an animal chaplain.

"I feel called to educate people on the relationship between humans and animals, and how faith plays a large factor influencing our worldviews," Johnson said. "I'm also in the process of creating an 'environmental series' for churches to draw attention to nonhuman creation in Scripture and sacred texts. I hope to generate more empathy for animals and the Earth, ultimately instilling a new Christian environmental ethic to effect compassion for all Earth's creatures."

Johnson is the 2015 recipient of the Religious Studies Engaged Scholar Award, which recognizes the Religious Studies undergraduate major at Michigan State University with the highest grade point average. She also received the Nick Rashford and Jake Folio Religious Studies Award, recognizing student excellence in engaged scholarship and community/nonprofit outreach combined with the academic study of religion.

"Michigan State afforded me confidence in my academic studies and within myself," Johnson said. "Because I know who I am, I can move forward in my professional career, knowing that I have the training of a Spartan to prepare me for anything that lies ahead."