

# Rice Researchers Receive Grant for Cross-National Study of Religion Among Scientists

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Tension rises on a global scale as scholars argue that religion hinders the progress and acceptance of science in the United States, Europe, and parts of Asia. Yet no research to date has examined how scientists view religion and how religion influences scientists in different national contexts. A \$2,057,000 grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation will fund the first-ever such study, titled "Religion and Spirituality Among Scientists in International Context" and headed by a team of Rice University researchers.



RPLP director, Elaine Howard Ecklund, an associate professor of sociology and Rice Scholar at the Baker Institute for Public Policy is PI on the study. Kirstin Matthews, a fellow in science and technology policy at the Baker Institute and a lecturer in the department of sociology and the Wiess School of Natural Sciences at Rice, and Steven Lewis, C.V. Starr Transnational China Fellow at the Baker Institute and associate director of the Rice's Chao Center for Asian Studies will be co-PIs. "With seemingly constant developments in the areas of science and religion, these two subjects have taken an important role on the global stage," Ecklund said. "Our team can think of no better way to discover how the international science community negotiates religion than to go straight to the source and study scientists themselves."

The study will begin with a survey of 10,000 biologists and physicists at different points in their careers at top universities and research institutes in the United States, United Kingdom, Turkey, Italy, France, and China—nations that have very different approaches to the relationship between religious and state institutions, different levels of religiosity and different levels of scientific infrastructure. The researchers will then conduct follow-up qualitative interviews with 600 of these scientists. Through these two methods, the study will determine how scientists in different national contexts understand the relationship of science and religion (and, where relevant, spirituality), and how religion and spirituality influence their research agendas, daily interactions with students, and ethical decisions and discussions.

Specific questions will include: What are the boundaries and/or conflicts that scientists perceive between science and religion? How do scientists address religious views within their work as scientists, as educators, as ethical decision-makers? What do they perceive the role of science within society to be, and what do they think it ought to be? Are scientists religiously more similar to other scientists within their specific discipline than they are to the populace of their specific nations?

Through its dataset, articles, and books, the project intends to reshape the secularization debate, create new measures of religion and spirituality (by testing their salience in different national contexts among members of the same professional group), and initiate a new research agenda within the social sciences. Additionally, a book produced for a general audience will aim to advance this conversation beyond the academic community. Ecklund also hopes that the project will improve public policy efforts to increase productive dialogue between scientists and religious communities by uncovering similarities and differences in how they perceive the relationship between science, religion, and spirituality.