Religious Studies

Religious Studies seeks to understand and interpret religions in various historical, cultural, and social contexts. It fosters scholarly skills such as close reading (of texts and other social and material data), excellence in writing and verbal expression, interpretation of the past from written and physical evidence, and interpretation of contemporary society. By exploring the public and private concerns that religions engage—for example, the nature of community and solitude, suffering and death, good and evil—students discover new ways of interpreting the complex world in which they live. As students venture into the religions of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and Europe, they learn about the formation and transmission of beliefs, behaviors, values, rituals, texts, institutions, and forms of community. Students also learn about conflict and accord within and between religions, as well as between religious and non-religious perspectives.

Concentration in religious studies includes course work in RELS 1000 (junior seminar in methods in the study of religion) and eight other courses conforming to the following requirements.

Each student in consultation with appropriate faculty members devises a concentration program. The student presents (for approval by the concentration advisor) a written statement of the objectives of his or her concentration program and a list of the component courses. The program is expected to encompass the study of at least one religious tradition from each of the following groups. Ordinarily, this requirement is satisfied by two or more courses in each of these areas:

1. Traditions that emerge from West Asia and the Mediterranean world
2. Traditions that emerge from South and East Asia

The plan of study must take account of more than one approach to the study of religion, e.g., philosophical and historical; contain at least two intermediate-level courses (0200-0999), RELS 1000, and two additional advanced-level courses (above 1000). This means that no more than four courses (out of nine) can be at the introductory level. Courses listed in other departments but taught by religious studies faculty count toward the program. Up to three courses that are outside the department and not taught by religious studies faculty can count toward the program.

No later than the end of spring registration in the junior year, the concentrator will determine whether he or she will write an honors thesis or complete a capstone project for the concentration. A capstone course will be selected in consultation with the concentration advisor and other faculty as appropriate. Within the frame of this capstone course, the concentrator will address the theoretical and interpretive issues of his or her particular focus in the religious studies concentration.

Honors:

A religious studies concentration with Honors requires, in addition to RELS 1000 and eight other courses, an Honors thesis (RELS 1999, during both semesters of the senior year). A thesis is an opportunity for students to conduct extended independent research under the guidance of faculty. To be eligible to write a thesis, a student must have earned a grade point average of greater than 3.5 (A=4, B=3, C=2) on courses that count toward the concentration. Additionally, to be eligible for honors, concentrators can elect to take no more than two of the concentration courses with the "S/NC" option, after declaring a Religious Studies concentration. (If a student is philosophically committed to taking the majority of her or his courses at Brown as "S/NC," that student may petition the Department to waive the "S/NC" limit). Writing the thesis is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for receiving Honors. The thesis must earn an A from its readers for the student to receive Honors, and the student must have earned a grade point average of greater than 3.5 in the concentration (as well as satisfy all the other concentration requirements). Students who study abroad, or who petition to include Brown courses not cross-listed with Religious Studies, must still complete at least five courses in Religious Studies.

Nancy Khalek, Director of Undergraduate Studies
Tina Creamer, Departmental Administrator