Religious Studies

Religious Studies explores religious thought and practice in various historical, political, cultural, and social contexts in order to understand and interpret societies and cultures throughout the world. It fosters scholarly skills such as close reading (of texts, images, artifacts, and other social data), excellence in writing and verbal expression, interpretation of the past and present from multiple forms of evidence, and assessment of contemporary social issues. By exploring the public and private concerns that the study of religion highlights -- for example, the creation of community, the nature of the individual, suffering and death, notions of good and evil -- students discover new ways of engaging the complex world in which they live. As students examine religious activity in the Americas, South and East Asia, the Middle East and West Asia, Africa, and Europe, they not only learn about the formation and transmission of beliefs, behaviors, values, rituals, and identities but also come to understand how diverse peoples have expressed religious understandings of themselves and others through politics, institutions, conflicts, and spaces commonly recognized as secular.

1. Basic Requirement

A concentration in Religious Studies includes a minimum of nine semester-long courses. Those nine courses include RELS 1000 (a seminar in methods in the study of religion) and eight other courses, which must satisfy the concentration's distribution requirements. Students who transfer to Brown or study abroad must complete at least five courses in Religious Studies at Brown.

2. Distribution of Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced courses:

Among the eight concentration courses, no more than four courses (out of nine) can be at the introductory level (0001-0199). In addition to any introductory courses and RELS 1000, the plan of study must include at least two intermediate-level courses (2000-0999) and two advanced-level courses (above 1000).

3. Geographic and Methodological Distribution:

In order to ensure that students study a diversity of religious traditions and learn about multiple methods of study, the eight concentration courses (that is, the courses other than RELS 1000) must: 1) reflect more than one approach to the study of religion (e.g., philosophical, anthropological, historical); and 2) examine more than one religious tradition. To ensure that students examine multiple traditions, the plan of study ordinarily should include two or more courses in each of these areas: A) Traditions that emerge from the Mediterranean world and West Asia/Islamic World (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam); and B) Traditions that emerge from South and East Asia (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism).

A. Traditions that emerge from the Mediterranean world and West Asia/Islamic World (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam)

1. Sacred Stories
2. Introduction to the New Testament
3. Love: The Concept and Practice
5. Christianity and Culture
6. Religion and Torture
7. Blues People: Topics in African American Religion and Culture
8. Foreigners, Refugees, and the Ethics of Minority (JUDS 0061)
9. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
10. Christmas in America
11. Islamic Cosmologies

B. Traditions that emerge from South and East Asia (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism)

1. Introduction to Buddhism
2. Great Contemplative Traditions of Asia
3. Buddhism and Death
5. Pilgrimage and Quest
6. Introduction to Buddhism
7. Buddhist Classics
8. Classical Philosophy of India (CLAS 1140)
9. Buddhist Poetry

4. Courses in Other Departments

Courses listed in other departments but taught by Religious Studies faculty count toward the program of study. In addition to cross-listed courses taught by Religious Studies faculty, up to three courses taught by faculty in other departments can count toward the program (pending approval by the DUS). Students who transfer to Brown, study abroad, or otherwise petition to include Brown courses not cross-listed with Religious Studies must complete at least five courses in Religious Studies at Brown.

5. Capstone Project

No later than the end of spring registration in the junior year, the concentrator will determine how they will complete a senior capstone project for this requirement - either by selecting a capstone course, or by undertaking an honors thesis. A capstone course will be selected in consultation with the concentration advisor and other faculty as appropriate. Within the frame of this capstone course and through work completed for the course, the concentrator will address the theoretical and interpretive issues of their particular focus in the Religious Studies concentration.

Honors Thesis (Optional)

A thesis is an opportunity for students to conduct extended independent research under the guidance of faculty. If a student chooses to write an honors thesis, in addition to completing the typical eight concentration courses (in addition to RELS 1000) the student will enroll in RELS 1999 during both semesters of the senior year. Whether or not a student receives honors, RELS 1999 will serve as the student's capstone course. 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 may take no more than two of the concentration courses with the "S/NC" option, after declaring a Religious Studies concentration. (Note: 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 this "S/NC" limit.) Writing the thesis is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for receiving Honors. In order to receive Honors, the student's thesis must earn an A from its two readers, and the student must have earned a grade point average of greater than 3.5 in the concentration and satisfied all other concentration requirements.

Paul Nahme, Director of Undergraduate Studies
Tina Creamer, Departmental Administrator
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

Helvetica was used instead of Arial.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.