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 (0200-0999) 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)

- RELS 0011: Faith and Violence
- RELS 0015: Sacred Stories
- RELS 0022: Introduction to the New Testament
- RELS 0025: Wealth; Religious Approaches
- RELS 0050: Love: The Concept and Practice
- RELS 0055: Modern Problems of Belief
- RELS 0056: Spiritual But Not Religious: Making Spirituality in America
- RELS 0060B: Foreigners, Refugees, and the Ethics of Minority (JUDS 0061)
- RELS 0065: On Being Human: Religious and Philosophical Conceptions of Self
- RELS 0068: Religion and Torture
- RELS 0087: Religion in America
- RELS 0088: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- RELS 0090E: Faith and Violence
- RELS 0090F: Friendship in the Ancient World
- RELS 0090I: Radical Romantics: Politics, Ecology, and Religion
- RELS 0090J: Death and Afterlife in the Biblical Tradition
- RELS 0090K: Christmas in America
- RELS 0090M: Islam, Violence and Media
- RELS 0095A: Islam from the Ground Up
- RELS 0096: The Imaginary Lives of Muslims
- RELS 0105: Judaism
- RELS 0110: Christians
- RELS 0150: Islam Unveiled
- RELS 0195: Gender in Early Jewish and Christian Narratives
- RELS 0200A: Christianity and Economic Inequality
- RELS 0240: Judaism and Christianity in Conflict
- RELS 0260: Religion Gone Wild: Spirituality and the Environment
- RELS 0290D: Islamic Sexualities
- RELS 0290H: Defense Against the Dark Arts in the Ancient World
- RELS 0320: Israeliite Religion
- RELS 0323: Great Jewish Books
- RELS 0325: How the Bible Became Holy
- RELS 0410: Christianity in Late Antiquity
- RELS 0420: Sacred Bodies
- RELS 0430: Sacred Stories
- RELS 0600A: Islam Today: Religion and Culture in the Modern Middle East and Beyond
- RELS 0600B: Islam in America
- RELS 0600C: Radical Islam (?)
- RELS 0600D: Black & Brown Islam in the US
- RELS 0640: Dying To Be With God: Jihad, Past and Present
- RELS 0700B: The Bible as Literature (JUDS 0830)
- RELS 0810: Conservatives vs. Liberals: Religion and Identity in America
- RELS 0820: African American Religious Strategies: Martin and Malcolm
- RELS 0825: Foundational Texts in African American Theology
- RELS 0830: Religion, Reason, and Ethics from Kant to Nietzsche
- RELS 0835: Black and Brown Religion in America
- RELS 0840: Religion and Politics
- RELS 0845: Religious Freedom in America
- RELS 0850: Liberation Theology in the Americas
- RELS 1050A: Problems in Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism (JUDS 1625)
- RELS 1050C: Prophets and Priests in Exile: Biblical Literature of the 6th Century BCE (JUDS 1690)
- RELS 1050D: Jewish Magic (JUDS 1801)
- RELS 1130: Philo
- RELS 1144: Adam and Eve in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation
- RELS 1150: Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls
- RELS 1300: Ancient Christianity and the Sensing Body
- RELS 1325A: Educating Bodies in Ancient Christianity
B. Traditions that emerge from South and East Asia (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism)

REL 1510 From Moses to Muhammad: Prophets of the Ancient World
REL 1511 Islam in South Asia
REL 1520 Pilgrimage and Sacred Travel in the Lands of Islam
REL 1530A Methods and Problems in Islamic Studies: Narratives
REL 1530B Heresy and Orthodoxy in Islamic Thought
REL 1530D Medieval Islamic Sectarianism
REL 1530F The History of Emotions and Medieval Islamic Tradition
REL 1540 Monks, Mystics and Martyrs: Abrahamic Traditions Compared
REL 1560 Sacred Sites: Law, Politics, Religion
REL 1580 Disability in Antiquity
REL 1650 Gospel Music from the Church to the Streets
REL 1760 Religion and Suspicion
REL 1830A Pragmatism, Religion, and Politics
REL 1880A The Gift in Antiquity
REL 1999 Individual Study Project

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.

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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.