

Brandeis University Program in Religious Studies Learning Goals

The contemporary field of religious studies is an important part of a liberal arts education, allowing for the study of religious thought, ritual, culture, history, and texts, often in a comparative context. The goal of the Program in Religious Studies (PRS) is to expose students to different scholarly and pedagogical approaches to a variety of religious teachings. For example, the study of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam will bring great depth to one's understanding of the historical development of individual traditions during a given epoch, as well as of the related art, literature, and politics of the societies practicing these religions. Similarly studies in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism will provide deeper appreciation not only of the relevant texts, but also of East-West cultural encounters and fundamental topics such as enlightenment and the possibility of rebirth.

In this program students survey the world's religions and a variety of approaches to religious studies, study specific religious traditions, and learn additional methods and contexts in which these traditions are situated.

Core Skills: As an interdisciplinary program, PRS helps its students to gain a broad understanding of religions, the peoples who practice them, and their modes of belief, particularly of those religions outside the student's usual experience. Students analyze texts, histories, and the ways in which human beings have understood their world as reflected in their beliefs, ethics, rituals, artifacts, and organizations of religions. Students also investigate the changing relationships between religion and elements of the wider culture, and learn the theories and methods used in the study of religion.

Knowledge: The exposure to a wide range of religions often opens whole new fields of inquiry to the student: some extend their studies into languages, literature, history, law, and even the sciences. The Program in Religious Studies, through its unique and

dynamic interdepartmental course work, strives to deliver a deep understanding of the multi-faceted nature of religion.

Some of the majors and minors with which our students have combined their studies in religion include: Biology, Neuroscience, Psychology, Film/Television/Interactive Media, Health Science, Society & Policy, Environmental Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, Music, Theater Arts, Art History, Classical Studies, Philosophy, History, Politics, Anthropology, Sociology, English, Comparative Literature, Medieval & Renaissance Studies, International & Global Studies, American Studies, East Asian Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Near Eastern & Judaic Studies, European Cultural Studies, Medieval & Renaissance Studies, Classical Architecture & Ancient History, Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies, and Interfaith Chaplaincy.

Social Justice: The PRS curriculum provides students with the knowledge and perspectives needed to participate as informed citizens in a global society. PRS emphasizes understanding of and critical engagement with various religious ways of conceptualizing the world and of how religious communities contest practices and beliefs.

Students who are familiar with the narratives and history of various religious traditions develop a deeper understanding of the artistic expression in the world and the need to preserve it. Students who engage the beliefs and practices of various religious traditions develop a greater understanding of the forces that motivate people and move them toward justice. Students will learn to think in a more sophisticated manner about religious freedom within civil society.

After Brandeis: A Brandeis student with a religious studies minor will be prepared to:

- pursue graduate study and a scholarly career in religious studies, a seminary, or another related field,

- use the knowledge and perspectives gained from the sustained study of religion to pursue professional training and a range of careers in any field dealing with people and religious-cultural diversity— including health care, politics, policy, education, and human rights work—in local and international settings,
- engage in a pluralistic world as an educated global citizen.