

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Brown University

Graduate Student Handbook

2025-2026

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* Draft version, awaiting final faculty approval

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General Information

Program Overview

The Graduate Program in Religious Studies at Brown is administered by a faculty sub-committee, the Graduate Committee, which ordinarily consists of no fewer than three faculty members appointed by the department Chair, one of whom is the departmental Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), who chairs the Committee.

Degree Programs

Graduate study in Religious Studies at Brown is designed primarily to train students for careers in teaching and research in colleges, universities, and related institutions. A full description of the graduate areas currently offered is found below. Ordinarily, graduate students are admitted only to do doctoral work. Students already accepted into the Ph.D. program who do not have a M.A. in religion from another institution may obtain the M.A. degree from Brown by petitioning the Graduate School after eight successfully completed graduate-level courses plus any additional departmental requirements.

Master of Arts

In 2012, the faculty voted not to institute a formal M.A. program, so presently, the Department of Religious Studies does not invite applicants who wish to receive a terminal M.A. As in the past, however, the department reserves the right under very unusual circumstances, to grant a terminal M.A.

The Department does, however, welcome applications for master's degrees from qualified Brown doctoral students in other departments, under the Open Graduate Education program. For information on how to apply, see the Graduate School website, and consult the appropriate Directors of Graduate Study.

The terminal M.A. in religious studies (should one be granted) requires the completion of an approved program of eight semester courses and a thesis. The candidate must take either RELS 2000A or 2000B or an equivalent course, and must pass a language examination in either French or German, as well as demonstrate competence in other languages necessary for the particular program of study. Since this degree provides a more general overview within the field of religious studies than the Ph.D., the specific content depends on the student's interests and the faculty available in any given area.

The M.A. may be completed in one academic year, in one academic year plus the summer, or in two academic years. A master's thesis is not a dissertation and is normally less than 100 pages long. It may be based on a course paper, or on separate research under the guidance of a faculty member.

Doctor of Philosophy Components

Brown University maintains general requirements for the Ph.D. discussed in more detail below, including residence/coursework, teaching, qualifying exams and languages, advancement to Ph.D. candidacy, and the dissertation. Advancement to candidacy occurs upon the recommendation of the department after students have completed all required coursework, including RELS 2000A and 2000B, and language examinations, qualifying requirements, and preliminary exams.

General Ph.D. Requirements

Introduction

Regardless of the specific areas of study focus, all Ph.D. work in Religious Studies at Brown has the same general structure: 1. Residence (coursework); 2. Satisfaction of qualifying requirements (languages, subject-specific competences, theory and method); 3. Teaching preparation; 4. Preliminary examinations; 5. Professionalization seminar; 6. Dissertation (prospectus and defense, actual dissertation; final public oral examination).

Residence (Coursework)

Ordinarily, students are required to complete the equivalent of three years (six semesters) of full-time study beyond the baccalaureate degree (i.e., twenty-four tuition units). Up to one full year of graduate work done in residence at other institutions and not used in fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. elsewhere may, on the recommendation of the department faculty (normally the DGS) and with the approval of the registrar, be counted in fulfillment of this requirement. Occasionally, students entering the program without an MA may be allowed, pending advisor approval, to forego a third year of coursework, though this is an exceptional circumstance. We encourage students to work and develop professional relationships with faculty outside the department who focus in cognate areas. Students who have completed their formal coursework often continue to attend doctoral seminars until they have passed their preliminary examinations and begun work on the dissertation. In addition, all RS graduate students must demonstrate competence in theory and method in Religious Studies, ordinarily through successful completion of RELS 2000A and 2000B. Students are also encouraged to cross-register for any relevant specialized courses at universities who participate in a consortium with Brown, as appropriate.

After coursework, students spend their remaining years doing preliminary examinations and then researching and writing the Ph.D. dissertation. Students should seek to design a six-semester curriculum of course-work that should lead to a successful performance on the necessary language exams and the preliminary exams and lay a good foundation

for a program of original research that will mature into a significant contribution to scholarship as a Ph.D. dissertation.

Courses should be selected each semester in consultation with the student's pre-dissertation committee (see below).

Professionalization Seminar

Professionalization is an essential aspect of graduate education. The primary tasks of the scholar are research, teaching, and service. Professionalization, formal and informal, is the process of learning to do these tasks well and to be a good colleague and a good citizen of the academy, university, and department. Professionalization is a broad and somewhat nebulous term that concerns navigating all the oftentimes unspoken and oftentimes disputed norms of academic life: relating to colleagues and mentors; preparing materials for academic jobs and interviews; publishing; and supporting and sustaining multi-cultural, diverse, and inclusive academic communities. These efforts happen in various ways, but one principal site in Religious Studies is the professionalization seminar, a required seminar for all fourth-year students.

Pre-dissertation Advising

Each student will be assigned a two-person pre-dissertation advisory committee. These faculty will help students as they navigate coursework, language requirements, and formulate areas of research in which they wish to pursue preliminary exams. Once a student begins writing a dissertation prospectus, the composition of what will become their dissertation committee may differ from this pre-dissertation committee, and can include other faculty inside or outside the department as well.

Annual Advising Plan

Each year, students will complete an annual advisory plan in which they give a brief overview of their scholarly activities in the past year. This includes: courses taken; courses for which students served as a TA; preliminary exams worked on or completed; conferences or workshops attended; conference or workshop presentations; language study; prospectus worked on or completed; dissertation chapters worked on or completed; Sheridan Center programs; field work; fellowship or grant applications submitted or accepted; journal article essays worked on, submitted, or accepted; committees or other service work; other professional activities; any other relevant scholarly or professional activities. This form will also include sections on plans and goals for the summer and the next academic year, and their long and short-term goals.

Before constituting a dissertation committee, the student will submit this advisory plan to their pre-dissertation advisors. After they have designated a dissertation committee, the annual form will be submitted to their primary dissertation advisor.

Satisfactory Progress and Evaluation

The Department of Religious Studies expects that all Ph.D. students will make satisfactory and timely progress through the graduate program, and all funding is contingent on such progress. Students whose work is ultimately deemed insufficient by the faculty may be terminated from the program, although such a determination is unusual and only reached after considerable consultation with faculty, the student, and the Graduate School. In some cases, students terminated from Ph.D. study may be eligible to receive a terminal M.A. Students whose work is otherwise acceptable but whose progress is not sufficiently timely may have their funding withdrawn, or may be terminated from the program.

As noted, graduate students are evaluated annually in writing; first-year students are also evaluated at the end of their first semester in residence. At the end of each academic year, the student completes their advisory plan, which will provide the common ground for the student's end of year meeting with their advisors. This meeting will encompass discussion about the student's accomplishments for the previous year and goals for the coming year. The advisor will then provide written feedback provided in a year-end letter, as required by the Graduate School (an annual evaluation letter).

The annual evaluation letter will be based both on the student's self-assessment of their goals and plans and their advisor's feedback on their progress. This letter will provide substantial feedback and indicate whether the student is in "Good standing," "Satisfactory standing," or "on Warning." The parameters for each status are set forth in the Graduate Handbook, available on the Graduate School website. These letters are intended to provide a formal feedback mechanism that conveys the expectations of the faculty for the coming year. Should a student fall behind or in another way not fulfill the faculty's expectations, the letter will specify precisely what the student needs to do, and within what time-frame, to maintain a status of "satisfactory progress" in the program. Students are encouraged to discuss any issues raised in these evaluations with the appropriate faculty, and if necessary, with the DGS as well.

The annual evaluation is sent to the student by e-mail and copies are kept in the student's departmental file and shared with the Graduate School. The letters of evaluation are not routinely shared outside the department, other than with the Graduate School administration. The student's standing is reported to the Graduate School each year (and at mid-year for first year students). Please also note that progress standings differ from those that appear on the student's transcript issued by the Registrar. Good Standing with the Registrar means only that the student has successfully completed a minimum number of courses: a student whose progress is Satisfactory or even on Warning may still be in Good Standing with the Registrar.

Teaching Training

All RS graduate students are expected to serve as Teaching Assistants for courses in their areas of specialization. In addition, most students will be asked to serve as TAs in other departmental courses or, occasionally, in courses outside the department, depending on Department or University needs. All RS graduate students should also participate in the teaching training programs run by the Sheridan Center, including their certification programs. (See below, “Guidelines for Teaching Assistantships.”)

Preliminary (Doctoral) Examinations

After completion of coursework, students will embark on a set of preliminary exams with (usually three, but occasionally two) faculty. Occasionally, a student wishes to gain expertise in an area with a faculty member whom they have gotten to know during coursework, either within or outside the department, and so the examiners may or may not coincide entirely with the two-member pre-dissertation advisory committee. See the section below on possible exam formats.

Ordinarily, all Ph.D. students sit for three preliminary examinations. The faculty conducting the exams are the exam committee. The exam committee consists of the relevant faculty with whom the student is working in their specific research areas. The content of the exams themselves is tailored to the student, and each exam requires students to be involved actively in developing their own reading lists (bibliographies that serve as the basis for each exam). Students are generally expected to complete all their exams by the end of the third year, with occasional exceptions. At the discretion of area faculty, students may be required to revise portions of their exams or given an opportunity to rewrite or retake an exam. If, in the end, the faculty determines that the student has not passed the preliminary exams, the student will be asked to leave the program. The area faculty will decide whether the student may be awarded a terminal M.A., contingent on the quality of the student’s coursework and examinations. For more details on exam format and scope see pages 17-18 of this handbook)

Preliminary Exam Formats:

In consultation with the faculty administering the exam, students will take exams in a number of potential formats including but not limited to: a one- week take-home exam; a 24-hour take home exam; a four-hour-sit-down exam; or an extended essay on proposed thematic topics.

The Dissertation

Written Prospectus

Upon completion of all preliminary exams and language requirements, the dissertation prospectus should be written under the auspices of a dissertation committee, which may

or may not coincide with the members of the exam committee. A dissertation committee is ordinarily comprised of the faculty member most connected to the student's dissertation research area (primary dissertation advisor), and at least two (and up to three) other faculty within or external to the department.

The dissertation prospectus must be presented to the Religious Studies faculty for their discussion and approval. The prospectus should present the proposed dissertation topic, explain its scholarly context and justification, describe the methodologies to be employed, put forth a tentative, annotated table of contents, outline a time line for completion, and provide a select bibliography. The ideal typical length of the prospectus is fifteen to twenty pages, plus a bibliography.

The student works closely with their primary dissertation advisor on the prospectus. Before a prospectus meeting can be scheduled, the student should circulate a draft of the prospectus to all probable members of the dissertation committee, sufficiently far in advance to allow the committee members time to comment on the draft, and to allow the student to make any necessary revisions. Graduate students should allow at least four weeks for this part of the process, if not longer, depending on the state of the initial draft, and the availability of the committee members.

When the committee members have had an opportunity to comment on the draft and the proposed dissertation director is satisfied that the prospectus is ready, the director notifies the DGS that the prospectus is ready and the Department Manager schedules the meeting. The DGS then announces the meeting to the department faculty and any appropriate outside faculty, and circulates the prospectus electronically. The faculty must be given notice of the meeting and receive the approved draft of the prospectus no less than two weeks in advance. To facilitate this, the DGS should receive the approved prospectus no less than fourteen days before the proposed meeting date.

Prospectus Presentation

The prospectus presentation ordinarily takes place two weeks after formal submission of the prospectus. Unlike the final oral defense of the dissertation, this is a closed (not open to the public) meeting (ordinarily 90 minutes) in which the prospective dissertation committee members and other RS faculty discuss the proposed dissertation with the student. This is a working session whose purpose is for the faculty to have constructive input early enough to avoid major problems later, and to assist in clarifying the dissertation process. Ordinarily, the primary dissertation advisor presides. After any appropriate preliminary consultation of the faculty, the student is invited into the room and offers a brief statement (10 minutes), describing the genesis of the project and how it relates to the work the student has done in the department. After appropriate faculty questioning and discussion, the student leaves the room briefly while faculty assess the dissertation, raise any further issues and clarify agreements about the dissertation committee. The student then returns and is informed of the faculty's decision regarding both the prospectus and the committee, and given any further points of clarification,

advice or procedure. If the faculty approves these, the student is now formally advanced to candidacy.

Dissertation Topic, Scope, and Requirements

The dissertation requirement includes the following: the formulation of an acceptable dissertation topic; the preparation of a formal prospectus; a closed oral prospectus defense; the formation of a dissertation committee; the submission and acceptance of the dissertation; and a final public oral examination.

Dissertations regularly set one's scholarly program for years to come, and contribute substantially to one's professional identity, including one's perceived suitability for various teaching positions. Students should be thinking about possible dissertation topics from the beginning of their program, and should discuss these aspects of prospective thesis topics from the beginning of their program, and should discuss these aspects of prospective thesis topics early on with their advisors. Topics or areas for dissertation research often develop out of work in seminars and courses, so students should choose course papers with an eye to their suitability for further research. Once a student has identified a topic or promising area, the natural choice for the primary advisor will be the faculty member whose specializations most closely match that topic. The student should work with this person (and the other faculty members in the program) to develop a prospectus and to propose second and third readers for the dissertation.

Students ordinarily devote at least two years to the dissertation, including research and writing, although occasionally less.

Dissertation Advising

Different institutions (and departments) have different procedures for dissertation advising. In Religious Studies, it is often the case that only the advisor reads first drafts, and that second and third (and fourth, if applicable) readers only see and critique the project at a later stage. These practices, however, are flexible, and students are encouraged to devise a process with their advisors that provides the most constructive guidance to the student, and produces the strongest possible result. Students should keep in mind, though, that reading and critiquing dissertations is highly time-consuming for faculty. Being mindful of faculty schedules and workload makes it more likely that students will receive productive feedback and complete their dissertation in a timely manner. Students should always let faculty members know well in advance when to expect drafts, and should have reasonable expectations about faculty turn-around time.

Dissertation Defense/Oral Examination

The Department of Religious Studies requires that the dissertation, demonstrating original research and advanced scholarship, be defended in an oral examination before the faculty. This is a two-hour meeting, which brings the student together with the

readers and other pertinent faculty, and is usually open to the larger university community, including graduate students.

It is the responsibility of the dissertation advisor to determine, in consultation with the full dissertation committee, that a dissertation is acceptable and ready for defense. All committee members must thus have read the final version of the dissertation sufficiently to participate in this determination. When the advisor, having consulted with the whole committee, judges that a dissertation is ready for defense, they will, in consultation with the DGS, schedule a date, time and place for the defense. Defenses are not ordinarily scheduled during the winter break or during the summer months.

Notice of the defense must be provided to the full faculty no less than two weeks prior to the defense. An electronic copy of the dissertation and an abstract must also be circulated to the faculty no less than two weeks prior to the defense.

The format of the defense, which is an oral examination, is similar to that of the prospectus meeting. University procedures expect that the dissertation director will preside, but the DGS may also do so, often in concert with the dissertation director. Normally, the faculty hold a brief closed meeting (without the candidate or any guests) to discuss the format of the defense, and to consider any last minute issues that may have arisen. The candidate and any others attending then join the faculty. After the candidate provides an overview of the dissertation, faculty ask critical questions, normally for about an hour and a half. The faculty then meet in closed session to evaluate the student's work. When the faculty formally accept the dissertation, including approval of the defense, the student has successfully completed the doctoral degree.

Deposit of the Dissertation

Detailed instructions for the preparation and submission of the dissertation and abstract, as information on filing fees, microfilm publication and copyright, are available on the [Graduate School website](#). Students should familiarize themselves with these requirements very early on in the writing process. They must allow a minimum of several days beyond the defense before the formal submission, in order to incorporate any final changes or corrections from the defense before binding: several weeks are preferable.

Dissertation Deadlines

The Graduate School expects that all candidates will successfully submit and defend the dissertation within five years of achieving candidacy. Students who have not done so may petition the Graduate School for a one-year extension, in the form of an explanatory letter, with the consent of the DGS. A second one-year extension is also possible, but requires action by the Graduate Council. Such requests are not automatically granted, and students should make every possible effort to meet this deadline.

Receipt of the Degree

Ph.D. degrees are physically awarded only at spring commencement, regardless of when the actual defense takes place. To receive a Ph.D. degree at commencement students must submit the dissertation by the first business day in May, although an extension to May 15 is possible when a request is submitted to the Graduate School. Students who anticipate completing the dissertation within one month of the semester following that in which they are presently registered may request a one-month extension that allows them to complete their work without registering (and paying) for the following semester.

Sample Ph.D. Program Schedule

The following calendar represents the ideal sequence through the program for Ph.D. students in religious studies who enter with a relevant prior master's degree, as do most students. The exact number and timing of semesters when a student will work for the department or the university, as a Teaching Assistant, Teaching Fellow, Research Assistant or Proctor will depend on institutional needs, and on the student's program.

Year 1

Fall	4 courses
Spring	4 courses
Summer	Language work, archaeological or other field training, travel
Funding	First-year fellowship, summer funding
Notes	All students take RS 2000A or 2000B; students take field-specific language courses as necessary

Year 2

Fall	3 courses, departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship)
Spring	3 courses, departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship)
Summer	Language work (completed if possible), archaeological or other field training: completion of all qualifying requirements
Funding	Departmental assignment, summer funding
Notes	All students take RS 2000A or 2000B (whichever was not taken in year 1); students continue field specific language courses as necessary

Year 3

Fall	Students who entered without an MA: 1-2 courses; departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); begin preliminary exams; continue language work as needed.
Spring	Students who entered without an MA: 1 course; departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); complete preliminary exams; fulfill language requirements
Summer	Continue language work as needed; begin working on prospectus
Funding	Departmental assignment, summer funding

Year 4

Fall	Departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); defend prospectus
Spring	Departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); work on dissertation
Summer	Work on dissertation
Funding	Departmental assignment, summer funding
Notes	In exceptional cases, and with the support of the dissertation advisor and the DGS, students may petition the Graduate School to take their dissertation fellowship year in their fourth year. In that case, they will have departmental assignments in their fifth year (unless they obtain external funding).

Year 5

Fall	Dissertation and relevant fieldwork, begin job search
Spring	Dissertation and relevant fieldwork
Summer	Dissertation

Funding	Dissertation fellowship
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Year 6

Fall	Departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); completion of dissertation, job search
Spring	Departmental assignment (TA, TF, RA, proctorship); completion of dissertation, job search; dissertation defense

Funding	Departmental assignment, unless external funding obtained
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Research Areas in Religious Studies

Areas of Study

Art, Literature & Media: The study of artistic and literary works of relevance to religion from different periods, locations, and traditions. The study of the

aesthetic values in religious traditions. The study of media from philosophical, historical, and anthropological perspectives.

Culture, Ethics & Society in Modern South Asia: The study of religion in modern India from anthropological, historical, textual, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives.

Emotions and Affect: The study of emotional and affective aspects of religious practice, as well as the discourse about emotions and affects in religious text and speech.

Gender & Sexuality: The study of discourses, practices, and identities associated with gender and sexuality, as they intersect with religion, other markers of identity and social location.

Jewish Studies: The study of Jewish tradition throughout its history, including the Hebrew Bible in the ancient Mediterranean context, rabbinic literature, and modern Jewish history and thought.

Medieval Islamic History & Thought: The study of Islamic beliefs and practices within the cultural and historical context of the Middle East and South and Central Asia.

Religions of East Asia: The study of East Asian religions in their historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts, with a focus of pre- and early-modern eras.

Philosophy & Ethics: Philosophical and ethical studies related to religious traditions and practices.

Religion & Ecology: The study of ecological themes as they relate to religious practices, from historical, literary, and ethical perspectives.

Religion & Politics: The study of politics and its interconnections with religion, from historical, textual, and constructive perspectives

Religion in the Americas: The study of religion in North America from historical and anthropological perspectives.

Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean: The interdisciplinary study of religion throughout the ancient Mediterranean and Near-East.

Religious Experience & Mysticism: The historical, phenomenological, and critical study of religious experiences and mysticism in various traditions and contexts.

Race & Indigeneity: The study of race and indigeneity, as well as their intersections with other identities, discourses, and structures of power.

Languages

Depending on the area of study, those in pre-modern fields ordinarily need to demonstrate competency in a) two pre-modern research languages, and attain reading competence in b) two modern research-related languages other than English (ordinarily French and German, but this may be adjusted according to field of study). Native speakers of one research language in category a) will be asked to demonstrate mastery of a second as well as in two modern research-related languages other than English.

Graduate students are urged to take intensive language courses in the summer whenever possible, so as to complete their language requirements in a timely fashion. Some students refine their language skills abroad during summers or other limited periods during the course of their graduate studies. Enquiries about the possibility of financial assistance for language study should be made well in advance of the projected study program.

Pre-Modern Languages

Depending on the area of study, the ability to conduct research in Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Turkish, Classical Chinese, Japanese, Syriac, Aramaic, Sanskrit or other pre-modern languages should be attained as early as possible and students should be prepared to demonstrate competence in one of these languages by the end of the fourth semester and in the second no later than the end of the sixth semester.

Modern languages

Depending on the area of study, reading knowledge of German and French may need to be attained as early as possible (other modern languages, such as Persian, Turkish, Hindi, Modern Chinese, Japanese, or Spanish may be options as well). Students should be prepared to prove competence in these languages no later than the end of the fourth semester.

Competency in languages can be demonstrated in one of four ways:

- A grade of B or higher in an appropriate course, as determined by the advisory committee.
- A translation test, typically lasting three hours during which the student is asked to translate, with the aid (if desired) of lexical aids, a passage of scholarly prose; or
- A working exercise, administered by the faculty, in which typically a student reads a substantial scholarly article or book and submits a report on it.
- Completing one of the university-approved language for reading online courses (usually this applies to French and German)

Research Sources

Students are generally expected to conduct research using scholarly sources, whether critical editions, primary texts in archives and libraries, works of art in museums, interviews with subjects, or other materials. For research conducted abroad, ordinarily students will apply for fellowships in the fall of the year preceding the academic year in which they plan to live in the country of their choosing.

Teaching

Guidelines for Teaching Assistantships

Doctoral students serve as Teaching Assistants (TAs) for pedagogical reasons, to train in classroom instruction with the anticipation of their future placement as college and university faculty. Our commitment to the pedagogical concern is underscored by the fact that service as a Teaching Assistant for at least two semesters is a requirement of our doctoral programs, even for students who may have an outside fellowship that prohibits them from teaching (such students are funded by Brown, if necessary, during their teaching service). Graduate students begin serving as teaching assistants in their third semester and ordinarily complete six semesters of teaching at Brown. TAs have a serious professional responsibility to both their students and faculty supervisor. TAs are expected to be familiar with their responsibilities, professional obligations, and rights.

The Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning offers an array of services to orient new TAs to the processes and issues involved in teaching, as well as to assist others in the strengthening of their teaching skills. The SCTL is an excellent resource center, and we expect all TAs to utilize this facility. In particular, we require all new TAs to attend the New Teaching Assistant Orientation offered by SCTL at the beginning of each school year and to participate in the Sheridan Center Teaching Certificate 1, a series of lectures and workshops, that SCTL offers on a yearly basis to introduce TAs to pedagogical issues and to help them develop reflective teaching skills. Ideally students would take this in their first year so they would be prepared to TA in their second year. It is, however, acceptable for the student to take it in their second year as well. Many students avail themselves of further special teaching certification programs at the Center. These are encouraged but not required.

English for International Teaching Assistants

The English for International Teaching Assistants program evaluates the spoken English proficiency of international teaching assistants prior to their assuming teaching duties at Brown. It also provides English language courses for international graduate students who need to improve their spoken English before they begin teaching. International graduate students who have been awarded teaching assistant positions and whose native language is not English will be tested upon their arrival for English proficiency.

According to University policy, if a student's English language skills do not meet the minimum standards for certification, provisional approval of the teaching assistantship appointment may be made on the condition that the student enroll in an English-language course during the first semester of their appointment and be assigned to other duties that will prepare him or her for teaching. Students who have not been certified at the appropriate level for the classroom or laboratory will not be supported as teaching assistants past the first year. For instructions on scheduling an English proficiency evaluation, test dates, course descriptions, and related information see the website of the [English for International Teaching Assistants Program](#) (EINT).

The Apprenticeship Model

In the Department of Religious Studies, we understand the training of future teachers to be best undertaken through an apprenticeship model. For additional information on this model, please refer the [Guidelines for Teaching](#) Assistantships page of the Department website.

The Professor's Responsibilities

The professor has primary responsibility for the syllabus, for establishing course requirements and grading standards, for monitoring the quality of grading to ensure consistency of standards, for lectures, and for supervision of the TA(s). The professor

may seek input from the TA(s) on these matters, and may also invite the TA(s) to participate in the design of the course.

The TA's Responsibilities

According to the [Graduate School's website](#), TAs assist instructors "on all work related to instruction of a particular course." The precise duties of a TA depend upon the structure of the particular course. In Religious Studies, TAs are often responsible for running one or two discussion sections of a course and for grading the written assignments and examinations of the students in those sections. The departmental policy is that a TA shall have no more than two sections in their responsibility. In general, the maximum number of students per section should be fifteen. In exceptional situations (e.g., early in the semester while students are shopping classes or if one of a TA's section is larger and the other smaller but the average is fifteen or fewer students) sections may be larger, but in no case more than twenty students per section. To enable effective handling of these responsibilities, TAs normally attend all class lectures, hold regular office hours for their students, and meet regularly with the professor concerning the content and progress of the course as well as content of section meetings. In accordance with university policy, a TA-ship will normally require 15-18 hours per week (with a limit of an average of 20 hours per week). It is understood that the time requirements will vary throughout the semester: the heaviest periods will be when grading. A preliminary meeting between professors and TAs prior to the start of their courses, to go over the syllabus and check on assignment dates, should allow TAs sufficient notice for adjustments in their own academic schedules to accommodate the fluctuations in workload.

In addition, TAs may be asked to hold review sessions prior to examinations. In cases where more than one TA is assigned to a course, TAs often find it useful to prepare together for section meetings. In many courses, TAs present a lecture or two in order to gain experience before the class.

Teaching Assistants receive feedback on their teaching from the students through course evaluation and (as applicable) in conversation and writing from the faculty member who directs the course.

Faculty may ask TAs for some administrative assistance on matters directly related to the assigned course: e.g., preparing handouts, checking on reserve readings, posting notices regarding class meetings, maintaining course websites, monitoring attendance, etc.

TAs are not expected to assist faculty in work unrelated to the assigned course.

TAs who feel they have been asked to perform tasks unrelated to the course, or that are in some other way inappropriate, should discuss this first with the faculty member, if at all possible. Students may also seek the advice of the DGS in resolving such situations (or the Department Chair, if the DGS is the course faculty member).

For additional information on TA-ing, please refer the [Guidelines for Teaching Assistantships](#) page of the Department website.

TA Assignments

In the Student's Areas of Training

At present, TA assignments are made either because the enrollment of a course justifies TA support, or because training to teach the course is required as part of the student's program. When possible, TAs are assigned to courses that bear directly on their area of study. Graduate students will not only be most familiar with the material in these courses but should also find them useful for their own needs, for example in mastering material for their own examinations. Moreover, these courses will often be the sort that graduate students will themselves teach in their future employment. Close attention to matters of course design, perspective, pedagogical methods, and goals will help TAs learn how to prepare a syllabus and classroom strategies of their own.

Occasionally, students may be assigned to serve as TAs in related courses offered in other departments.

Outside a Student's Area

Graduate students may sometimes be asked to serve as TAs in courses outside their stated expertise, either because of department staffing needs, or because no appropriate placement is available within the department. Such assignments often afford students broader teaching experience that enhances their qualifications for future teaching positions, particularly in departments seeking faculty able to teach in a variety of areas.

When no placements are available within Religious Studies or closely related departments, assignments may then be made by the Graduate School in consultation with the Department. In all cases, the Department and the Graduate School try to find the best possible match, and consider previous student coursework, research or other relevant experience and training. Final decisions for TA assignment rest with the Director of Graduate Studies, the Department Chair, and ultimately the Graduate School, which currently authorizes all departmental assignments for graduate students.

Advance Planning

TA assignments are tentatively planned for the following year by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Department Chair in the late spring, and submitted to the Graduate School for authorization. Such plans are made taking into account the Department's announced course offerings, the number of graduate students eligible to serve as teaching assistants, spring pre-enrollment figures, and projected course enrollments based on previous patterns. However, enrollments can fluctuate

unexpectedly and so can staffing arrangements. Students for whom no appropriate assignment is foreseeable in late spring may be placed in the Graduate School's open pool, for later assignment. Assignments can only be finalized at the beginning of each semester, usually toward the end of the so-called shopping period. Graduate students, like faculty, must allow for a certain flexibility in this regard.

Additional Teaching Experience

Students interested in further pedagogical training and independent teaching experiences are encouraged to explore the following resources and programs:

- Sheridan Center workshops and certificate programs.
- Summer@Brown teaching opportunities in the School of Professional Studies.
- Deans' Faculty Fellows Program
- Brown/Wheaton Faculty Fellows Program
- Brown/Tougaloo Faculty Fellows Program
- Departmental opportunities for independent teaching.

Financial Matters (Funding & Fees)

University Funding Sources

Fellowships: Currently, all admitted Ph.D. students are promised six years of funding, provided they make satisfactory progress and otherwise remain in good standing. Students are strongly advised not to plan on additional support, and to be prepared to support themselves after the sixth year. Students who do not complete by the end of their 6th year may be eligible to apply for a status called "Dissertation Extension Plan" which includes tuition waiver and health insurance for one year. After that year, students who have not completed will be moved to ESRP status (Enrollment satisfied, requirement pending.) For full information, see the [Graduate School website](#) (Academics: Rules and Regulations: Student Status Issues: Advanced Student Status; see also Support: Tuition, Fees and Billing for current costs).

Summer Support: Students entering ordinarily receive five years of summer support, as specified in the offer of admission from the Graduate School.

Loans: Loans, both, short and long term, are offered through the Brown Office of Financial Aid. To apply for a loan, students must fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on-line, at www.fafsa.ed.gov, in order to determine financial need. Consult the [Graduate School website](#) (Support: Student Loans) as well as the [OFA website](#) for further details. Try not to do this at the last minute, since it takes some time for these data to be processed. Loan requests can be submitted throughout the year, although earlier is better: later in the year, there may or may not be funds remaining. All

questions about loans and other such aid should be directed to the Office of Financial Aid and/or the Graduate School.

Travel and Research Funds

Conference travel: In order to help defray the costs associated with travel to professional conferences, the Graduate School provides limited grants to students who are presenting papers at recognized professional conferences. For details, please see the [Graduate School web page](#) on this topic.

Students who need assistance to travel to an international conference to present a paper should also apply to the [Graduate School's International Travel Fund](#). To apply, visit the [Graduate School's Ufund site](#). See also the [Office of Global Engagement](#) for a list of grant opportunities.

The Department also has limited funds available to help with conferences, research, and language study. Check with the DGS and/or the Department Manager for more details.

In certain cases, the university also subsidizes graduate student research travel for students who already have other travel grants and require supplemental funding. For details, deadlines, and forms, see the [Graduate School web page](#).

External Funding

Some graduate students receive funding for one or more years from foundations and organizations external to Brown. Such funds allow students to defer their university funding and also entitle students to various incentives from the Graduate School. Consult the [Graduate School website](#) for details (Support: External Funding: Incentives Policy). In Religious Studies, outside fellowships are often for the dissertation year, but in recent years, students in the department have been awarded fellowships for course work and exam years as well. Students are strongly encouraged to seek outside funding at all levels. Consult the [Graduate School website](#) for information. Students who plan to apply for outside funding should be in contact with the appropriate deans at the Graduate School, as well as the DGS. The DGS will also circulate information that the Department receives on grants and fellowships relevant to Religious Studies, such as the Newcombe, Jacob Javits, and Ford fellowships.

External Employment

Brown's summer funding has decreased the need for students to work in unrelated areas over the summer, but some students may choose supplement their summer stipends with part-time summer positions, and are allowed to do so for up to 12 hours a week maximum. The Student Employment Office is a good place to begin a summer job search, but remember to start early since postings for summer jobs go up as early as spring break for some jobs. It is also possible for advanced graduate students to teach a course for Brown University's summer, pre-college, or Professional Studies programs,

and some graduate students have served as Resident Advisors as well. Keep in mind, though, Religious Studies summer courses may be cancelled at the last minute in the event of insufficient enrollments. Other graduate students are often a helpful source of information about local (and other) summer employment.

University Fees

Graduate students are generally responsible for various small fees. For details, consult both the [Graduate School website](#) (Support: Tuition, Fees, and Billing) and the Brown University Student Billing Guide, available on the [Bursar's website](#).

Student Activity and Health Insurance Fees

Students are required to pay a small “Student Activities Fee” each semester.

All graduate students on fellowship support receive health insurance and the health services fee through the University. All students, however, are responsible for the summer coverage fee if they plan to use University Health Services over the summer.

Registration fees: The Registrar's Office charges a fee for late registration. Please check their [website](#) for the most current information.

Student Status and Leaves

Study Elsewhere

Cross-registration with Harvard

Students may register for courses at Harvard without paying additional tuition. It is important to note, however, that students may not enroll in courses at Harvard Divinity School unless such courses are also cross-listed in the catalogue of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, or unless the instructor is a member of the faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Occasionally, special arrangements can be made to take a Divinity School course not taught by such an instructor: check with the DGS in advance.

Exchange Scholar Program

The graduate schools at Berkeley, Brown, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale have an Exchange Scholar Program which allows students at each of these universities to spend time studying at another school without paying additional tuition. Students in this program remain active students at their home

institutions. See the [Graduate School website](#) for details (Academics: Partnerships and Exchanges: Exchange Scholar Program).

Study and Research Abroad

Students who are studying abroad are strongly encouraged to register the trip with the Brown University Global Assistance Program. This program provides 24-hour worldwide medical, security, and travel assistance, including emergency evacuation. Please visit the website for more information and the access code to Brown's International SOS portal: <https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/safety/resources/international-sos>.

Leaves of Absence

Leaves of Absence are granted for a variety of professional, educational, medical (including psychological), and personal reasons (including parental leave and family care leave).

Obtaining a Leave

Students considering such leave should consult as early as possible with their advisors, the DGS, and the Graduate School, as appropriate. The procedures for obtaining such leaves are spelled out on the Graduate School website, where the necessary forms are also available (Academics: Rules and Regulations: Student Status Issues: Leaves of Absence). Leaves are granted for one semester or one year and may be extended to two years, if necessary.

When the department approves a leave, it ordinarily implies a willingness to re-admit the student, although such readmission may depend on the student satisfying various conditions, ordinarily laid out in writing at the time the leave is granted.

Re-Admission from Leave of Absence

Students returning from Leave of Absence do not ordinarily need to apply formally for re-admission, unless the Department requests such an application. However, students whose return is conditional must satisfy those conditions before being returned to active status. Students seeking re-admission after medical leave must have their physician write to the appropriate person in Health Services or Psychological Services and confirm the student's ability to resume their studies. Financial aid issues and remaining degree requirements are best discussed with the DGS. Students wishing to return from leave must ordinarily indicate their intention to return by May 1 for the following fall or November 1 for the following spring.

Part-Time Study

Graduate students are ordinarily expected to be enrolled full-time, and students are not admitted for part-time study. However, it is sometimes possible to study on a part-time status, with the approval of the DGS. Simply enrolling in fewer than four courses, however, does not automatically confer part-time status. The DGS must officially inform the Dean of the Graduate School of the student's intentions. Without such notice students will continue to be billed for four courses, even if they are formally enrolled in less than four. Students should also be aware of the financial consequences of adopting this status. They may lose some or all financial assistance and become liable for at least partial repayment of existing student loans. Students should check the fine print on any student loan agreements. Requests for changes in status must be submitted in writing to the Graduate School, but there is no official form.

Second Master's Degree

Doctoral students may earn a second Master's degree from Brown, in a related field, without an additional charge for tuition. No courses or theses, however, will count toward more than one degree. The form for obtaining a second Master's degree is available on the Graduate School home page, under Forms (Second Master's). RAM doctoral students may do an M.A. in Classics (and vice versa). In addition, doctoral students in one department may apply to do an M.A. in a second area at Brown under the Open Graduate Education program. Students admitted to OGE receive an additional year of fellowship support: for details, see the Graduate School OGE website, and consult with the DGS.

Integrative Studies Program

Students who determine, after one year of full-time study, that their work cannot be accommodated within existing departmental programs may petition the Graduate Council for approval and permission to enroll as a doctoral student in Integrative Studies. At least three members of the University Faculty must agree to sponsor the program, one in a supervisory capacity. For further information, consult the Graduate School website on Integrative Studies, and contact the DGS.

Professional Development

Professional Organizations

As students progress in their studies it is a good idea to become a member of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), or other

professional organizations, such as the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) or the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), depending on one's interests. These organizations publish newsletters and other publications of interest to scholars of religion. Currently, the AAR and SBL sponsor a concurrent annual meeting in November at which scholars from all fields in religious studies gather to share information and present papers. Each society has a website with various useful resources, including student membership information. Also, the department has a student liaison to the AAR who is responsible for providing students with information about joining the Academy and attending the annual meeting. Overall, annual meetings are a good place to get a sense of the larger field of religious studies and to meet people, both established scholars and graduate student peers, from other institutions. Many preliminary job interviews also take place at the annual meetings. Students are generally encouraged to attend the meetings by the time they begin work on their dissertations, if not before.

Giving Papers at Professional Meetings

Many graduate students also give their first professional papers at such meetings. For the AAR and SBL, a call for papers is sent out early each year (in January, usually). Students who wish to submit a proposal should first consult with a faculty advisor about its feasibility. If the faculty member thinks the proposed paper is advisable, students can then follow the instructions for the appropriate section of the organization.

Job Searches

When to Start a Search

Students who hope to be competitive for positions should, ideally, have substantially completed the dissertation when they begin applying for full-time teaching positions. Prospective employers of Ph.D. candidates now often expect applicants to have the degree in hand at the time of appointment, if not before, and/or to read a dissertation near enough to completion to convince them that it will be finished before the job begins. Not only is it difficult to complete a dissertation while teaching full time, there may be serious consequences to taking a full-time tenure-track position before the dissertation is completed.

People whose dissertations remain unfinished after they have accepted a job offer may find that they will be appointed at a lesser rank, and a lesser salary. In rare instances, students who have not completed the dissertation by the time of the appointment may even find the appointment itself in jeopardy. Students who obtain a tenure-track appointment before finishing may also find their tenure process affected if it takes more than a year to complete the dissertation.

Nevertheless, it will occasionally be desirable (or necessary) to apply for a teaching position before the dissertation is complete, in which case it is essential to have a significant portion of the dissertation in polished form, to offer as a writing sample.

The bottom line: make every effort to have a good portion of the dissertation completed by the time you begin applying for tenure-track positions, or even full-time non-tenure track positions.

How to Start a Search

Starting a job search has two components: identifying appropriate available positions and preparing one's application materials.

Job Listings

Both the AAR and the SBL currently list available positions on their websites. The AAR site seems to be more comprehensive. Other professional societies may also list appropriate position advertisements, for instance the AAS or MESA. Often schools indicate whether they will be interviewing at an annual meeting. Students may also find it helpful to consult publications as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or the Affirmative Action Register, which occasionally advertise positions before they appear on AAR and SBL websites (and may also advertise positions in other related areas that do not show up on these sites). Throughout the year, faculty in the department also receive announcements of job openings that they circulate, again sometimes before they are posted elsewhere.

Dossier Overview

It is a good idea to begin building a dossier early in the year one plans to apply for positions. The Career Development Center Office, 167 Angell Street, assists students in organizing dossiers, through a web-based service called Interfolio. The CDC offers many useful workshops, especially in the early fall, on dossier preparation, writing cover letters, interview skills, and related matters. Further information is available on the CDC website, which has a special section for Graduate Students. In addition, the RS Graduate Student Organization periodically runs workshops on applying for positions in Religious Studies.

In general, the dossier should contain a resume (curriculum vitae), letters of recommendation from professors, and other pertinent information such as sample syllabi and possibly letters from former students or from other people who can evaluate one's teaching or administrative abilities. Always remember to keep the dossier up to date, and make sure that outdated information or double recommendations from the same person have been removed as necessary. Verify that the dossier is complete before copies are sent out.

Letters of Recommendation

Well before you actually apply for particular positions, solicit letters of recommendation from your dissertation committee and other referees, as appropriate. Make sure that you give your recommenders ample time to write these letters: no less than a month, and ideally several months. Provide them with updated copies of your resume (see below), a draft of any job application letters you plan to send, and make sure they have the most recent drafts of your dissertation. Discuss with them well in advance what other materials they may wish to see (such as position advertisements, earlier seminar papers, teaching materials), as well as whether they are willing to write you letters for specific positions (as opposed to a single letter on file with Interfolio).

Resume (Curriculum Vitae)

The Resume (curriculum vitae) included in the dossier will generally provide details on one's educational background, including preliminary examinations, any grants or fellowships received, employment history, teaching experience, and administrative work, as well as papers presented or published and any other information relevant to one's academic and professional life, such as memberships in academic societies. Because one may meet potential employers outside of formal interviews, it is a good idea to keep the C.V. updated and take copies to professional meetings and events of various sorts.

Research Dossier

If you choose to present a research dossier in addition to the Career service dossier, it will generally include an overall statement of your career plans for the coming five to ten years, as well as specific ideas for books, journal articles, and other research projects and publications. You might also wish to include writing samples in this dossier in order to demonstrate the ability to research and write in a scholarly fashion. Whether or not you have a formal research dossier in hand during an interview, you should nevertheless be prepared to offer this kind of information to potential employers. Often candidates will be asked during an interview what exactly they plan to accomplish on junior sabbatical leave and what books they intend to publish.

Teaching Dossier

A teaching dossier will often be composed of sample syllabi, letters from colleagues and former students, course evaluations, statements of pedagogical approach, and possibly student essays. Because of the size of such dossiers, candidates often compile a teaching dossier themselves, and send it out as appropriate, or have a set in hand during an interview. The purpose of a teaching dossier is not only to demonstrate your proven ability to teach, but also to emphasize your commitment to teaching. Since certain institutions may value this aspect of an overall portfolio more than others, you may choose to include these materials only with some applications.

Academic Support and Wellness

If an academic issue arises, students are encouraged to consult with their primary advisor, DGS, or Chair. The following are additional sources of personal and academic support provided by the Graduate School.

Student and [Employee Accessibility Services \(SEAS\)](#) coordinates and facilitates services for students with physical, psychological, and learning disabilities, and temporary injuries (20 Benevolent Street, 1st Floor).

Students should inform their instructor if they have a disability or other condition that might require accommodation or modification of any course procedures. They may speak with the instructor after class or during office hours. As part of this process, they should register with the Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS) and provide their instructor with an academic accommodation letter from SEAS. For more information, contact SEAS at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides free confidential counseling (J. Walter Wilson, Room 516, 401-863-3476). CAPS offers Saturday appointments for graduate students from 9am to 4pm during the academic year at Health Services, 13 Brown Street.

Students seeking more information about Medical Leave should contact Student Support Services (Graduate Center, 4th Floor). (See also below: "Leaves of Absence").

Recording a lived or chosen name change into University systems can be done through banner by logging on to Self-Service Banner, clicking Personal Information, and clicking the My Name tab. The chosen (or preferred) first name may only be changed and/or deleted once per semester if you are an actively enrolled degree-seeking student.

Maria Suarez, Associate Dean of Student Support in the Graduate School, is dedicated to serving master's and PhD students (Horace Mann 110, maria_suarez@brown.edu, 401-863-1802).

English Language Learning

The [Center of Language Studies](#) and the [Writing Center](#) at Brown offer a number of programs to improve English language skills, such as Language Partners and English Language Learners seminars on academic writing for graduate students whose first language is not English. (See also above, "Teaching: English for International Teaching Assistants").

University Grievance Procedure

(Taken from the Graduate School Regulations)

Our expectation is that you will have the best possible relationship with colleagues and faculty during the course of your graduate work at Brown. It is possible, however, that difficulties will arise. Should you have a grievance, it is important to know how it can best be handled. It is University policy that each and every graduate student is entitled to a fair and prompt hearing of grievances. It is also policy that all other avenues of resolution are to be exhausted before a formal grievance procedure can begin. According to Section 10 of the official Faculty Rules and Regulations, the student must attempt to resolve the issue directly with the person or persons involved.

In the event that the attempt is unsuccessful, the next step is to take the issue either to the departmental Director of Graduate Study (DGS) or to the Chair. It is the responsibility of the Chair or DGS to have an informal discussion with all involved parties, to the end of achieving resolution via mediation. It is also the Chair's or DGS's obligation to prepare a memorandum outlining the problem, steps taken, and the proposed solution; copies of this memorandum are given to all concerned parties.

If this step does not result in a mutually satisfactory outcome, the next step is to ask the DGS or Chair to determine whether or not the question at issue is departmental in nature. If it is, a written request for a review with the Chair of the department should be filed. If it is not determined to be a departmental issue, no further action can be taken at the departmental level. Instead, the issue must be taken to the Dean of the Graduate School, where the aggrieved can seek advice and direction in the matter. If there is disagreement with the determination of whether the issues are departmental in nature, an appeal concerning that decision may be made to the Dean of the Graduate School, whose decision is final.

If the issue at hand is indeed departmental in nature, a written appeal must be filed with the Chair of the department. This appeal must ask for review of the question and must specify the injury alleged, the reason for the student's belief that he or she is aggrieved, and the remedy sought. The Chair may either refer the appeal to a committee of review or to the departmental Faculty. For more on the difference between these two bodies and the procedures regarding disputes please refer to the Faculty Rules.

As expeditiously as possible the committee of review will hear the student, consider the evidence, confer with other persons concerned, and prepare a comprehensive report of findings and a response to the appeal. Committee decisions are made by a simple majority vote of the members. It is the Chair's duty to carry out the directions of the committee. Once a decision has been made, a memorandum of what was done is prepared and a copy is given to the student.

Appendix: Sample Advisory Plan Form

Please fill out this form and email it to your advisor(s) along with a pdf copy of your updated digital CV.

Student name:

Year in program:

If you are not yet ABD, Faculty Advisor(s):

If you are ABD, your Dissertation Committee Members (If not RS faculty, please specify department):

Please give a brief overview of your scholarly activities in this academic year. Depending on your stage in the program, include any of these that may apply:

- courses taken;
- courses for which you served as a TA;
- preliminary exams worked on or completed;
- conferences or workshops attended;
- conference or workshop presentations;
- language study;
- prospectus worked on or completed;
- dissertation chapters worked on or completed;
- Sheridan Center programs;
- field work;
- fellowship or grant applications submitted or accepted;
- journal article essays worked on, submitted, or accepted;
- committees or other service work;
- other professional activities;
- any other relevant activities.

Please give a brief overview of your plans and goals for the summer and the next academic year, in reference to the types of activities referred to in the above questions (e.g., courses you want to take, exams you intend to complete; dissertation chapters you plan to write).

In terms of your short- and long-term goals, what skills and support do you need?