

Guidelines for Religious Studies Theses

The thesis represents a challenging and culminating academic experience in a Religious Studies major's scholarly career at Bates. Each student develops a thesis topic in the first semester of the senior year in consultation with one or more members of Religious Studies departmental faculty. The following guidelines are designed to support students as they begin the thesis process.

1. Students develop a scholarly question that engages significant issues or dynamics in one or more religious tradition(s). This question may explore theological issues, the dynamics of religious practice in a society or societies (past or present), or a set of issues tied together as part of a multidisciplinary study. Research subject matter might include text(s), place(s), person(s), material object(s), music, art, ritual(s), and the like.

2. After reading widely in their chosen subject area (and, when appropriate, conducting field research), students compose a thesis statement that represents an original formulation or synthesis of their research.

3. At the same time, students determine what method or methods will best serve to frame their research and its presentation.

4. Most theses follow the traditional genre of a multi-chapter presentation of evidence and original analysis to support a well-formulated thesis statement. Evidence is drawn from both primary and secondary sources. If students wish to consider alternative genres or formats for their thesis, they must do so in close consultation with their Religious Studies thesis advisor and receive approval for the chosen format before proceeding.

A senior thesis in Religious Studies should:

- a. be well written, with arguments constructed in thoughtful, compelling, and critically informed ways.
- b. demonstrate the ability to understand and interpret evidence.
- c. demonstrate investigative skills such as the ability to find, comprehend, and critically evaluate sources and to discriminate between valid and invalid claims.
- d. demonstrate facility with and awareness of diverse methods and methodological choices.
- e. demonstrate the ability to contextualize religious phenomena, and to describe their malleability and significance within and/or across cultures.
- f. be the product of independent work in close collaboration with and responsiveness to the faculty advisor.
- g. be an opportunity to explore and develop individual voice and insights.
- h. be a satisfying, empowering, and even pleasurable endeavor (yes, really!).