

DRTS to DRS Position Paper

Approved Unanimously by DRTS Faculty, 10/2/2013

We, the faculty of the Division of Religious and Theological Studies, propose to change the name of our Division, and the name of the degrees we grant, from “Religious and Theological Studies” to “Religious Studies.” We envision that, in the future, the Division of Religious Studies (DRS), as a re-named unit of GRS, will bestow upon its graduates MA and PhD degrees in Religious Studies.

We, the membership of the Division, remain committed to our core mission, to train scholars in the academic study of Religion. We remain committed to maintaining a broad interdisciplinary approach to our field. We will continue to include, within our purview, historical study of theological literature, philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, and the social impact of religious beliefs. We remain equally committed to maintaining our broad-based membership, which includes, primarily, members of the CAS Department of Religion, and BU’s School of Theology, as well as faculty committed to religious studies from across the university as a whole. The faculty membership in the DR[T]S will remain unchanged. Certain areas of study (e.g., constructive theology, mission studies) will from here on find a more suitable place within the growing PhD programs being developed by the School of Theology.

We believe that our current name has caused unnecessary confusion on a number of levels. Some erroneously compare our program to the Joint PhD Program in Religious and Theological Studies shared by the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology (<http://www.du.edu/duiliffjoint/index.html#>). But while their program is jointly administered by a Seminary and a University that are otherwise independent of one another, our program is fully based in the Graduate School, albeit with the cooperation of many faculty whose primary appointment is in BU’s School of Theology. Each year, some applicants to our program speak in their personal statements as if they are applying not to a graduate school, but to a seminary—a reasonable confusion, considering our current name. And both applicants and colleagues justifiably wonder whether church-oriented theological doctoral studies are carried out within BU’s DRTS. As the School of Theology continues to develop PhD programs of its own, such confusions are likely to increase. However, the change we are proposing will help clarify to our applicants what will be taking place in each of these programs.

Our move will bring the Division, and the degrees we grant, in line with the best of the programs in Religious Studies that are like ours, in that they incorporate contributions from a Department of Religion and a seminary. For instance, at Emory University, the Graduate Division of Religion is “a unit of the Laney Graduate School, drawing on the resources of the Department of Religion in Emory College and Candler School of Theology” (<http://www.gdr.emory.edu/>). On paper, the arrangement at Duke University is similar (<https://web.duke.edu/gradreligion/>). Both of these programs, like many others, bestow PhD’s in Religion (or Religious Studies)—not “Religious and Theological Studies.” Emory’s program represents the best model for us to emulate. Like BU’s DRTS, Emory offers a highly-rated program in Religious Studies involving cooperation and collegiality among a Department of Religion, a seminary, and faculty across the university. This is what the DRTS has been, and this is what the DRS will remain.