

To: Senior Religion Majors
From: John Barbour, Distinction Project Coordinator
Re: Departmental Distinction
Date: September 2007

I invite each of you to consider applying for departmental distinction in religion for 2007-08. Why should you seek distinction, particularly when the college and the department have other ways of recognizing high achievement? What sets the distinction award apart is that it gives you the opportunity to develop your strengths by completing a polished scholarly paper. Your paper can be a completely new project; more typically, a student will revise an essay written for another religion course. It is an excellent way for you to round out your study of religion.

Below you will find a fuller description of the distinction award. The steps to be taken toward distinction are listed, and an application form is attached. Please return the application form to me in Boe Chapel by **Friday, November 9th, 2007**. If you would like to discuss your project or have any other questions about the program, I'll be happy to talk with you.

Religion Department Distinction

Departmental distinction is awarded to students with a major in religion who have demonstrated their solid foundation in the study of religion and who have demonstrated further their ability to produce independently work of the highest scholarly or artistic standard. Achievement of the minimum grade points of 3.0 overall and normally of 3.5 in religion is taken as evidence that students have completed the first component of departmental distinction. The second component of distinction consists of a major, substantive project or paper prepared with the direction of a faculty member in the department of religion. It should either confirm or improve the student's record in course work by demonstrating the quality of the student's skill as a researcher, as an interpreter of the ideas of others, and as a thinker.

A project or paper prepared for class or IR must be revised prior to submission as part of an application for distinction. If a paper is submitted it should be of significant length; 7,500 to 10,000 words in length. The paper should be presented in a uniform format according to a standard such as Turabian's Manual for Writers. Length and format of other sorts of projects should be discussed in the fall with both the advisor and the Distinction Project Coordinator.

Evaluation of applications for distinction concentrates on the paper or project with the assumption that the minimum grade point demonstrates a solid foundation. The readers committee for evaluation of the project is selected by the Distinction Project Coordinator in consultation with the Department Chair. Normally the readers committee consists of three persons: the student's advisor for the project, a faculty member who has some knowledge of the topic, and a third faculty member whose major field is different from that of the project. In addition, as soon as the readers have been appointed copies of the paper are made available to interested members of the department.

Each of three readers evaluates the paper. If the project or paper receives the vote of at least two readers, the Religion Department recommends that the student receive distinction; if the paper or projects receives the vote of less than two readers, the Religion Department recommends that the student not receive distinction.

Procedures and deadlines.

- A. The preliminary application for departmental distinction must be submitted by Friday, November 9th, 2007. Candidates should register their intention to apply for distinction with the Religion Department distinction project coordinator, John Barbour. He will discuss with the candidate how she or he intends to complete the requirements of distinction and what faculty member(s) will oversee the project. A member of the Religion Department must be selected as advisor for the distinction project by Friday, November 9th, 2007.
- B. Candidates for distinction must have an overall GPA of 3.0, and normally a GPA in Religion of 3.5.
- C. Students should consult the “Advice for Students Considering Distinction” which is attached and on the department website.
- D. Distinction will be granted upon the completion and submission of a major, substantive paper/project (7,500 - 10,000 words in length) and upon approval of the Religion Department. The paper/project will be evaluated by two members of the department in addition to the advisor of the project. The paper/project may be one of the following:
 1. A major, IR or department seminar paper/project, appropriately revised under the guidance of the project advisor;
 2. A major paper/project done for a department course and appropriately revised under the guidance of the project advisor;
 3. An independent project or paper for which no formal Religion credit is given (e.g., a project done in an international program); such a project or paper must still be guided by an advisor from the department.
 4. Projects other than research papers are possible, with a contract specifying the work to be completed and the criteria of evaluation.
- E. Students must submit a complete draft of the whole project by March 1. A complete draft is a student’s best attempt to present a coherent and fully developed argument, although it may require further refinement and mechanical issues may still need to be addressed. The draft will be commented on by the advisor and two anonymous readers by March 15. In cases where the three evaluations differ substantially in their recommendations for revision, the student will consult with the advisor to determine how to proceed.
- F. Students submit final copy of the project to the Distinction Project Coordinator (Barbour) by the first Friday after spring break (April 4).
- G. Distinction will be granted only to papers/projects which are polished and of excellent quality. Either the readers or the candidate may request an oral presentation or defense of the paper/project.
- H. Each candidate will be informed in writing of the decision of the department.
- I. Students may see copies of papers by students who have received distinction by contacting Jennifer Schultz, Academic Administrative Assistant to the Religion Department.
- J. Students who are awarded distinction will be considered for the Junia Prize, a cash award usually made to the outstanding distinction project.

Advice for Students Considering Distinction in Religion

The distinction project offers an excellent way to round out one's study of religion, and can be one of the most enriching and rewarding experiences of an undergraduate career; it can also prove excellent preparation for those considering graduate studies. Undertaking a distinction project gives undergraduates the opportunity to further develop research and writing skills by completing a polished scholarly paper. Other kinds of project are also possible, with a contract specifying the work to be completed and the criteria of evaluation. There are a variety of ways in which students and faculty can work together to complete a successful distinction project. The department recommends that students consider the following advice:

- i) Good discernment and careful planning are often essential to well-accomplished research projects. The department recommends that students begin to consider possible distinction projects in their junior year. Though distinction projects more typically evolve out of papers students have completed for departmental seminars, this is not always the case. Papers completed in any departmental course can in fact form the basis of a distinction project, and an IR (independent research) can provide a particularly good foundation for a non-seminar based distinction project.
- ii) A faculty member with whom a student has worked in the past and with whom he or she has rapport makes a good choice for a distinction project advisor. Occasionally the student's research project may extend beyond the advisor's immediate areas of expertise. In such cases the department recommends that the advisor and student consider additional faculty in the department as resources for consultation about the distinction project at hand.
- iii) Distinction projects are evaluated according to the author's demonstrated facility as a researcher, as an interpreter of the ideas of others, and as a thinker, and according to standard writing and documentation procedures. It is recommended that early on in the distinction process students and their advisors discuss research methodology and documentation procedures, as well as taking a look at the distinction evaluation form, so that departmental standards with regard to the content and the final presentation of distinction papers are clear.
- iv) The department recommends that the advisor and student set up a specific and regular schedule for the completion and submission of work. This may involve weekly or bi-weekly meetings to read and discuss on-going work; contact by Email; or alternative mutually agreeable arrangements that make it possible for the advisor to provide constructive feedback to written work on a regular basis.
- v) Length guidelines for distinction papers are from 7, 500 to 10, 000 words. To ensure the advisor has time to read and respond to a first draft of the student's project in its entirety prior to the March 1 deadline, the department highly recommends that students submit a draft of the whole to the advisor by the end of Interim.

Preliminary application for Departmental Distinction in Religion

Name

Graduation date

GPA:

GPA in Religion courses:

Religion courses taken:

Briefly describe your proposed distinction project:

Signature of the faculty member supervising your project

Signature of distinction project coordinator

Return to: John Barbour, Department of Religion