“Death is a menace that approaches me as a mystery; its secrecy determines it — it approaches without being able to be assumed, such that the time that separates me from my death dwindles and dwindles without end, involves a sort of last interval which my consciousness cannot traverse, and where a leap will somehow be produced from death to me. The last part of the route will be crossed without me; the time of death flows upstream.”
— Levinas, Totality and Infinity

Death casts a long shadow. Its significance is not merely qua biological event, but as something that compels a response from us throughout our lives. Our responses have varied wildly, according to what death is taken to be and which deaths (e.g., animal, environmental, that of others, one’s own) are taken to be relevant. Mourning rites, martyrdom, and philosophical consolation: the centrality of these and other such responses within religious forms of life attests to the power and productivity of death as a feature of being mortal.

The Department of Religious Studies at Brown invites graduate students across disciplines to participate in a conference exploring the significance of death and dying for the study of religion—i.e., its social organization, rituals, doctrines, practices, and experiences—and vice versa. We welcome contributions informed by an array of methodologies and religious, theological, philosophical, ethical, or political tradition(s). We also welcome proposals from perspectives outside the usual bounds of the academic study of religion, such as those from psychoanalysis, theater studies, literature, critical theory, and the medical and social scientific fields, etc. We especially encourage proposals that examine death as it pertains to the following:

- The sacred
- Ritual practices
- Time and (in)finitude
- Memorialization, monuments, and built environment
- Liminality, transitions, and limits
- War, torture, suicide, and violence
- Climate crisis, extinction, and apocalyptic
- Race, social death, and the afterlives of slavery
- The death of God and/or the god(s)
- Economies of death
- Mourning, grief, memory, and hauntings
- Popular culture and artistic representation
- Law, the state, and punishment
- Biopolitics and necropolitics
- Care for the dying
- The gendered/sexed/racialized body
- Colonialisms and imperialisms

Details: Conference participants will have 20 minutes to present. Each panel will include a faculty respondent followed by open Q&A with other participants.

Guidelines for Submission: All graduate students are welcome to apply. Please submit a one-page, double-spaced abstract in either Word or pdf format to brownrsconference@gmail.com by December 15, 2019. Abstracts should include your full name, institutional affiliation (university department or research center), and contact information. Participants will be notified of their acceptance by January 3, 2020. Final drafts of conference presentations will be due February 21, 2020, so as to ensure that respondents have enough time to offer substantial feedback.