

## **Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success**

Department of Religious Studies, University of Iowa

### **Standard Benchmarks**

- **Prior to the start of classes or during the first week of the first semester of the academic year:**

Meet with your advisor; plan the year ahead; plan on enrolling in one of the department's four required graduate courses, one of which is generally offered each semester; choose a possible graduate seminar; review with your advisor the Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success and the department's Mutual Expectations document. Begin to familiarize yourself with the M.A. Program Book.

- **During the first semester of your program:**

If you plan to write an M.A. Thesis, begin thinking about it and planning it right away; start a bibliography of works to be read for the thesis; read these items as you pursue your coursework.

- **By the end of midterm week in each semester of your program:**

Discuss your proposed courses for the following semester with your adviser (and with the rest of your M.A. Committee, once it is formed); complete a Planned Course Schedule and ask your advisor to sign it; place a copy of the document in the department secretary's mailbox.

- **During the second semester of your program:**

Work with your advisor to form an M.A. Committee, which includes your adviser and two other tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the UI, at least one of whom must be in the Department of Religious Studies. The members of this committee must be named by the end of midterm week.

- **During the third semester of your program:**

By February 1, complete an Annual Progress Report; send a copy to your advisor for approval; after receiving approval, send copies to the other members of your M.A. Committee; send a copy also to the department's Administrative Assistant. Your report is reviewed by the faculty as a whole, and a hard copy of it is placed in your student folder.

If you are taking a written exam, begin working with your advisor and other committee members to identify the areas on which you will be examined.

If you are writing a thesis, begin writing by early this semester and plan to complete a draft of the thesis by the beginning of your fourth semester.

- **During the fourth semester of your program (usually the final semester):**

Work with the Administrative Assistant and your advisor to schedule the Final Examination (either the written exam, for the Non-Thesis Track, or the M.A. Thesis Defense, for the Thesis Track). Exams must be scheduled during the academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

- For the M.A. with Thesis Track, notify the Religious Studies office when the title of the thesis and the date and time of the thesis defense have been determined.
- At least three weeks prior to the Final Examination, provide the Administrative Assistant with the information needed to complete the **Nondoctoral Plan of Study Summary Form** and the **Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree** (Graduate College documents).

Also submit to the Office of the Registrar an **Application for Degree**, available in the Registrar's office and on line at <http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/forms/students.aspx> The deadline for the application is posted on the Registrar's website each semester.

- If you are writing a thesis, make sure copies of the penultimate text of the thesis are in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the M.A. Thesis defense.

### **Steady Progress toward Degree**

- **Language study:**

Clarify with your advisor and the rest of your Core Advisory Committee, early on in your studies, which language training program, if any, you will follow to acquire the ability to read original materials in the languages that are relevant to your degree and career objectives.

- **Timely completion of coursework and incompletes:**

As a department, we discourage M.A. students from taking course grades of Incomplete ("I"). However, we understand that there are sometimes extenuating circumstances that necessitate a student taking an Incomplete. If you do take an incomplete, with the instructor's permission, you are expected to turn in any and all remaining assignments within 30 days of the last day of the course. Failure to do so may compromise your standing in the graduate program.

- **Cumulative GPA of 3.2:**

Your GPA should never drop below this level. Your GPA does not include language courses other than those approved for content by your M.A. Committee.

- **Failure to Progress:**

M.A. students who fail to meet the standard benchmarks for success, as listed above, and who do not show adequate progress toward their degree, as judged by the departmental faculty as a whole, are subject to dismissal from the program.

### **Guidelines to M.A. and Post-M.A. Success**

- **Initiate and maintain regular communication with your advisor:**

Think of your advisor as your mentor who is committed to your success. Keep in mind that you may one day ask your advisor and other faculty members to write letters of recommendation for you. Cultivating these relationships is important.

- **Adhere to (or exceed) the standard benchmarks for success:**

- **Participate actively in departmental events:**

Students and faculty are part of a dynamic learning community in Religious Studies. Participating in department-sponsored events is an important component in your education. It helps you to build collegial relationships that could prove important to the rest of your career. The Religious Studies faculty strongly encourages your participation in colloquia, lectures, social gatherings, and the like. We value your input and believe that it will contribute to faculty members' own intellectual growth.

- **Be proactive and keep an open mind about your future:**

Take advantage of department-sponsored, CLAS-sponsored, and university-sponsored events that focus on preparing for post-graduate success in the ever-changing marketplace of higher education.

We as a department are actively involved in helping to prepare our M.A. students for a range of career possibilities. Depending on their areas of interest, M.A. students might find "Versatile Ph.D." initiatives here at the University of Iowa to be useful.