

Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success

Department of Religious Studies, University of Iowa, spring 2015

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 graduate seminar; review with your advisor the Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success and the department's Mutual Expectations of Graduate Students and Advisers document. Begin to familiarize yourself with the Ph.D. Program Book.

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

Create a file that will become your Comprehensive Exam Bibliography; add texts to it, with input from your advisor and other faculty members; distinguish on this document between works already read and works yet to be read.

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

Discuss your proposed courses for the following semester with your advisor (and with the rest of your Core Advisory 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 identify a Core Advisory Committee, which includes your advisor 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.

- **Every spring semester after the first 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 Core Advisory Committee, if the committee has been formed; 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.

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

Formulate an Early Program Plan with input from your advisor; convene your Core Advisory Committee to discuss and revise your plan. After the meeting, your committee chair submits a copy of the plan and a brief report of the meeting to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The DGS files this information electronically and sends it on to the Religious Studies office. The department secretary makes hard copies of the plan and the report, and places them in your student folder.

- **Early in the fourth semester of your program:**

Having completed three of the four required graduate courses and at least two graduate seminars, work with your advisor and the other members of your Core Advisory Committee to prepare a Departmental Program of Study. Submit an electronic copy of the completed form to the department's Administrative Assistant and also to the DGS. If everything is in order, the DGS brings the program forward for an all-faculty review. The Departmental Program of Study must be ready for faculty review by the end of the second week of March.

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

Form your Doctoral Committee with the help of your Core Advisory Committee. This committee consists of five faculty members, each of whom must hold a tenured or tenure-track position. Ordinarily, this committee includes the three members of the Core Advisory Committee, and the student's advisor serves as chair. At least three members of the committee must be part of the Religious Studies faculty. Students are required by the department to have at least one member of their committee be a member of the faculty of the University of Iowa from *outside* the department.

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

Meet with your Doctoral Committee to discuss a rough draft of your Comprehensive Exam (Comp) Bibliography; revise until your committee members think it is satisfactory.

At least six months prior to the Comprehensive Exam, confer with your committee to finalize your bibliography.

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

Work with your advisor and the Administrative Assistant to schedule a date and time for the written and oral parts of your Comprehensive Exam.

At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the exam, provide the Administrative Assistant with the information needed to complete the Request for/Report of the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination (a Graduate College document).

Work with the Administrative Assistant also to complete a Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet (a Graduate College document), which must accompany the request for permission to conduct the exam.

Take and successfully defend your Comprehensive Exam. Students who enter the Ph.D. program with a relevant MA degree are encouraged to take their comps by the end of their sixth semester.

- **By the end of the ninth semester of your program:**

Write a dissertation prospectus with your advisor's assistance; convene your Doctoral Committee for a Dissertation Prospectus Defense; obtain the approval of your committee members to proceed.

- **By the end of the twelfth semester of your program:**

Complete and successfully defend your dissertation.

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 programs you will follow to acquire the ability to read original materials in the languages that are most relevant to your degree and career objectives.

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

As a department, we strongly discourage Ph.D. 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 an 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, including your competitiveness for funding and awards.

- **Cumulative GPA of 3.4.**

Your GPA should never drop below this level. Your GPA does not include language courses other than those approved for content by the student's core advisory committee.

- **Failure to Progress.**

Ph.D. students who fail to meet the standard benchmarks for success, as listed above, and who do not show adequate progress toward their Ph.D. degree, as judged by the departmental faculty as a whole, are subject to dismissal from the program and/or loss of funding.

Guidelines to Ph.D. and Post-Ph.D. 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 will 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.**

- **Establish an excellent record as a TA and an employee of the department and Graduate College.**

Maintaining and demonstrating a record of teaching excellence and a reputation of reliability will help to secure your success in the graduate program and in your post-graduate career.

- **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 and professionalization. It helps you to build collegial relationships that will likely prove important to the rest of your career. The Religious Studies faculty strongly encourages your participation in colloquiums, lectures, social gatherings, and the like. We value your input and believe that it will contribute to our own growth as scholars, teachers, and professionals.

- **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-Ph.D. success in the ever-changing marketplace of higher education.

While the “traditional” Humanities Ph.D. student has gone on to a tenure-track teaching and research position at a college or university, these positions are becoming increasingly rare. “Alternatives to academic” jobs are becoming part of the new normal. We as a department are not only aware of the changing realities of the marketplace; we are actively involved in these conversations and in helping to prepare our Ph.D. students for a range of career possibilities. There are numerous “Versatile Ph.D.” initiatives at the University of Iowa, and Ph.D. students in Religious Studies are expected to take advantage of these opportunities to expand their CVs.