

Ph.D. Degree Program Book

Department of Religious Studies, University of Iowa

This document sets forth the requirements and procedures for completing the Ph.D. degree in Religious Studies.

The Religious Studies graduate program operates under the rules of the University of Iowa Graduate College as set forth in ***Manual of Rules and Regulations*** (<http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/graduate-college-manual>, hereafter *Manual*). Students should read the *Manual* carefully and refer to it as needed during their academic program. The Graduate College posts its deadlines for meeting various requirements at <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/deadlines>.

All degree-granting departments and programs must adhere to the requirements of the Graduate College, although they may have requirements that are more (but not less) stringent than the general requirements of the Graduate College. *Students are responsible for reading and adhering to the rules and regulations of the Graduate College* as well as the department.

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Director of Graduate Studies

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1.0 Areas of Study.

1.1 The Ph.D. program in Religious Studies is flexible. It can prepare a person to become a professor or to bring a nuanced, critical understanding of religion and its influences to careers in such fields as medicine, nursing, law, ministry, social advocacy, government, journalism, counselling, and informatics. The Ph.D. program can accommodate individual students' interests within the limits of existing faculty expertise.

1.2 Programs are often developed in relation to one of the following traditional areas of concentration:

- Religions of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean
Religion, law, and politics in the Islamic world; the history of interpretation of the texts and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Greco-Roman and Egyptian religion and culture; digital humanities
- Religions of East Asia
Religious traditions of China and the political, social, and economic factors that have shaped them; modern religion and culture in Korea, most notably Christianity; religion and gender in transnational perspective; religion and empire
- Religions of the United States and the Atlantic World
History and ethnography of religion in the US; African American religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, and African diaspora religions); West African religions; religion, media, and the negotiation of technological change; Latina/o/x Christianity
- Religion, Ethics, and Society
Religion and morality; religion, emotion, and affect; human rights; religions' relationships to gender, race, ethnicity, and social justice; ethics of medicine and biotechnology; religion and health

1.3 Programs can be developed also by theme. Common themes include:

- Religious Diversity in Public Life
- Religion and Gender
- Religion and Race
- Religion and Media
- Religion, Health, and Healing

2.0 **Student Advising.**

2.1 Students work closely with an assigned academic advisor (hereafter **advisor**) or dissertation director to develop a program of study that best meets their personal and career objectives. Regarding the departmental expectations for all parties to an advising relationship, see [Mutual Expectations](#).

2.2 Students are required to develop an [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#) by the end of their first year, in consultation with their advisor. IDP's are student-driven, working documents that help to clarify goals, strategies, and timelines, and enhance communication.

2.3 Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week of each semester of their program, including semesters of dissertation writing. A main function of this meeting is to discuss and agree on the students' best registration choices for the upcoming semester. Priority of registration should be given in the first two years to the four-course sequence and to at least two of the three required graduate seminars. Language training may also be a priority for some students. The usual load for Ph.D. students is 9 semester hours (s.h.) per semester.

2.4 Students form a three-member **advisory committee** consisting of their advisor from within the department (who chairs the committee) and two other tenured or tenure-track members of the faculty, at least one of whom must also have an appointment in Religious Studies. The members of this

committee must be named by the end of midterm week during the second semester of a student's program, which is usually after completing 9 s.h. of graduate coursework.

- 2.5 Students meet with their advisory committee regularly, at least once per semester, to discuss their progress and the direction of their studies. Students are encouraged to request meetings whenever a need for consultation arises.
- 2.6 Students whose interests or circumstances shift over the course of their studies may request of their advisor a change in the membership of their committee, to be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies (hereafter **DGS**).

3.0 **Course Requirements.**

- 3.1 72 s.h. are required to complete the Ph.D. degree.
- 3.2 The following four-course sequence is required of all Ph.D. and M.A. students. Each course is offered on a two-year cycle.
- Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion (RELS:5400) (3 s.h.)
 - Genealogies of Religion (RELS:5300) (3 s.h.)
 - Encountering Religions of Asia (RELS:5200) (3 s.h.)
 - Teaching & Public Engagement on Topics of Religion (RELS:5100) (1 s.h.)

This sequence is the heart of the graduate program. It provides all students, regardless of background, with a strong foundation in methods and theories, as well as insight into the history of the concept of religion and its academic study. The sequence prepares students to teach an introductory course in Religious Studies and to construct educational events for the public. In addition, the sequence provides students with a shared intellectual experience that spans their first two years in the Religious Studies program and lays a foundation for lasting collegial relationships.

3.3 Ph.D. students are also required to take a course offered by the Graduate College, by the end of their third year, which focuses on the advancement of essential teaching skills.

- Seminar on College Teaching (GRAD:6217)

Ideally, students take this seminar in their first year to ensure their ability to excel as Teaching Assistants (T.A.'s). Students who have taken a comparable graduate teaching seminar at another institution or have already acquired several years of teaching experience may request a waiver of this requirement. Waivers must be approved by faculty vote.

3.4 Three graduate seminars are required (in addition to the four-course sequence), at least two of which must be in Religious Studies. Also, students may have individualized requirements as determined in consultation with their advisory committee.

3.5 If a graduate seminar in Religious Studies is not offered in a semester when a student's program requires one, students may take a graduate seminar in another department. With the approval of their advisor, they may also request to take a course that a faculty member is teaching at or above the 3000 level, while doing additional readings and meeting regularly for more advanced discussion. Students register both for the course and for an Individual Study: Graduates (RELS:7900). To count as a graduate seminar substitute, a final research paper is required.

3.6 Students must take at least one course or graduate seminar in one or more departments *other than* Religious Studies.

3.7 Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or above (not including language courses, other than those approved for content by the students' advisory committee). Students who drop below this minimum are placed on academic probation and sent a letter from the DGS indicating that they must raise their GPA by a specified deadline or be dismissed from the program.

- 3.8 A maximum of 24 s.h. of relevant graduate work may be transferred from another accredited graduate school or professional program, as approved by the DGS. Transferred courses and credits must be listed on a student's [Departmental Program of Study](#) and, subsequently, on the [Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Form](#) (a Graduate College document).
- 3.9 A maximum of 12 s.h. of thesis credit may count toward the 72 s.h. requirement.
- 4.0 **Language Requirements.**
- 4.1 All Ph.D. students are required to demonstrate competency in English and at least one other language.
- 4.2 Students must demonstrate language competencies that are necessary for advanced research in their areas of expertise, as determined by their advisory committee. These languages may include, for example, Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Chinese, Japanese, French, German, Sanskrit, Hindi, Greek, Latin, or Spanish.
- 4.3 Students are encouraged to begin as soon as possible to acquire the language skills that are necessary for conducting their proposed research.
- 4.4 The means for assessing language competencies are determined by a student's advisory committee.
- Students whose primary research focuses on English-language scholarship are usually permitted to pass a final exam at the completion of a sufficiently advanced UI language course, earning the grade of B or better.
 - Entering students who already have competency in one or more of their research languages may demonstrate it by translating 1-2 pages of text chosen by their advisor (dictionary allowed).

- Students for whom additional or multiple language competencies are essential generally demonstrate their competency in working closely with their advisor. Otherwise, they too may show competency by translating 1-2 pages of text (dictionary allowed).
 - Letters from advisors that attest to language competencies are placed in students' files.
- 4.5 Credits earned in courses that focus on language skill-building do not count toward the department's 72 s.h. requirement. Credits earned in *content-oriented* foreign language courses (e.g., courses in which students read primary texts that are relevant to the study of religion) may count toward that total, as approved by the students' advisory committee.
- 5.0 **[Residency requirements.](#)**
- 6.0 **Registration Requirements.** The Graduate College *Manual* addresses registration requirements in Part 1, section XII, C. [http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/manual-part-1-section-xii-doctors-degrees#1.12.C.](http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/manual-part-1-section-xii-doctors-degrees#1.12.C)
- 7.0 **Annual Review of Graduate Students.**
- 7.1 The Religious Studies faculty conducts a review of all graduate students each spring. Prior to this review, students are required to submit to their advisor an [Annual Progress Report](#), a summary of which is presented by the advisor to the rest of the faculty. A copy of the report is subsequently placed in the students' file.
- 7.2 For a detailed description of departmental expectations of student progress see the [Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success](#). Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to loss of funding and/or dismissal from the program. Students must clearly and consistently demonstrate that they are able to produce high-

quality research papers (as assessed by their advisory committee).

8.0 Departmental Program of Study for the Ph.D.

8.1 During their fourth semester of residency, in consultation with their advisor and advisory committee, students are required to prepare a [Departmental Program of Study](#), which shows the degree requirements they have met and the requirements they have yet to meet. After being approved by the students', advisor, this document is submitted electronically by students to the departmental administrator (hereafter **admin**) and then discussed by the Religious Studies faculty. The current admin is Maureen Walterhouse.

8.2 After reviewing the Departmental Program of Study and a student's overall progress, the Religious Studies faculty votes on whether to permit the student to continue in the Ph.D. program.

8.3 For approval of the Departmental Program of Study and permission to proceed, the following conditions must be met:

- Completion of three of the four required courses in the four-course sequence
- Completion of at least two graduate seminars
- Evidence of the ability to write strong scholarly papers, as assessed by a students' advisory committee (at least two substantial papers must be submitted to the committee for review)
- A cumulative University of Iowa GPA of at least 3.4 (excluding language courses that do not count towards the 72 s.h.)
- Satisfactory progress toward the language and other course requirements of the students' program, as agreed upon by the students' advisory committee
- Acceptable adherence to the department's [Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success](#)

- 8.4 Students who proceed through an approved departmental program of study are expected to write and orally defend their comprehensive exams (by the eighth semester), a dissertation prospectus (by the ninth semester), and a doctoral dissertation (by the 12th semester).
- 8.5 Students whose Departmental Programs of Study are not approved may be dismissed from the program or directed to complete the remaining requirements for a terminal M.A. degree (non-thesis track).
- 9.0 **Comprehensive Exam Committee.**
- 9.1 When the Departmental Program of Study is approved, students work with their advisor to form a comprehensive exam or comps committee. Led by the committee chair (the advisor), the comps committee is responsible for constructing the exam and evaluating its written and oral components.
- 9.2 After student comps are completed, members of the comps committee ordinarily continue as members of the students' dissertation committee.
- 9.3 The comps and dissertation committees both consist of at minimum four faculty members, each of whom must be a member of the graduate faculty (hold a tenured or tenure-track position). In most cases, both of these committees include the members of the student's advisory committee. At least two members of the comps and dissertation committees must be on the Religious Studies faculty. If the committee consists of more than four members, a majority must be on the Religious Studies faculty.
- 9.4 Students may be directed by their advisor, or may themselves request, to have up to two graduate faculty members of their comps and dissertation committees be from another department.

9.5 If there is scholarly coverage that the UI faculty cannot provide, the committee may request permission (with the endorsement of the DGS) from the Office of the Dean of the Graduate College to include a recognized scholar from another academic institution as a member of one or both committees (see *Manual*, Section XII, P).

10.0 **Comprehensive Exam Bibliography.**

10.1 In preparation for the comprehensive exam, students confer with the members of their comps committee to compile a bibliography of works to be read or a comps bibliography. Students are encouraged to begin compiling their bibliographies early in their programs. There are no standard bibliographies for all Ph.D. students because programs are tailored to individual goals.

10.2 At least six months prior to comps, students confer again with their committee to finalize their bibliographies.

11.0 **Comprehensive Exam.**

11.1 The comprehensive exam takes place during students' third or fourth year in the program and must be completed by the end of the fourth year. It is the expectation that students will have finished all required coursework by the end of the semester in which they take the exam (outside of a possible 12 thesis hours).

11.2 Students who are unable to meet this expectation by the end of the fourth year may apply for an extension if the extension is endorsed by their advisor and other committee members.

11.3 Students work with their advisor and the admin to schedule a date and time for their written exam and for the subsequent oral defense. Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

- 11.4 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the comprehensive exam, students must confer with the departmental admin to complete an [Exam Request](#) (a Graduate College document), which is submitted by the admin.
- 11.5 A [Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet](#) (also a Graduate College document) must accompany the department's request of the Graduate College for permission to conduct the comprehensive exam. This plan indicates credits transferred from other institutions (if any), courses taken at the University of Iowa that apply toward the Ph.D. degree, and courses in progress or to be completed after the exam. The document is completed by the admin in consultation with students and their faculty advisors. It is submitted by the admin.

NOTE: Students who have outstanding incompletes in any of their courses are not permitted to take the comprehensive exam.

12.0 **The Comprehensive Exam.**

- 12.1 As stated by the Graduate College, "The comprehensive examination is not a deferred qualifying examination. It is intended to evaluate a candidate's mastery of the subject at or near the end of the candidate's formal preparation and prior to the completion of the dissertation." *Manual*, Section XII, K.
- 12.2 The comprehensive exam includes both written and oral exams. At least two members of the comps committee contribute questions to the written exam.
- 12.3 The written exam has three sections. Each section is scheduled for three hours. Students are allowed an additional 30 minutes per section to think and plan their answers before writing. The three sections of the exam are ordinarily taken within the span of a week. Students are not permitted to access written materials during the exam (electronic files,

internet, books, articles, or notes). A room with a computer for word-processing is provided.

12.4 The three-part written exam covers the following areas.

- The student's main field within religious studies (its history, influential figures, perennial debates, and/or theoretical approaches)
- A secondary area of focus chosen by the student, distinct from the dissertation topic
- The student's area of specialization or dissertation topic

For each part of the exam, students are ordinarily asked to choose from among possible questions.

12.5 Students are advised to select exam areas and titles in light of their career objectives, as these titles are likely to be included on the c.v.

12.6 Approximately two weeks after the last part of the written exam has been completed, students meet with their committee to defend their written answers at a two-hour oral exam. The results of the comprehensive exam are recorded on the [Report of the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination](#), which is filed by the admin.

12.7 If the comprehensive exam is assessed as Satisfactory, students proceed to the next step in their degree program.

12.8 If the comprehensive exam is assessed as Reservations (with more than one committee member noting reservations), the examining committee must stipulate the conditions for the removal of the reservations and the date by which the conditions must be met (see *Manual*, Section XII). Failure of a student to meet the deadline results in a failed exam.

12.9 If the comprehensive exam is assessed as Unsatisfactory (with more than one committee member voting to fail) the student may be dismissed from the program, or (at the student's

request), the comps committee may permit the student to be re-examined. Re-examination may occur no sooner than four months after the first examination. The comprehensive exam may be repeated only once.

- 13.0 **Post-Comprehensive Registration.** Students who are post-comp must continue to be enrolled in the Graduate College during each fall and spring semester, from the time of the comprehensive exam through the semester in which they complete all requirements for the degree. If all coursework has been completed, they may register for RELS:7950:OIND.
- 14.0 **Dissertation Prospectus and Defense.**
- 14.1 Within the first semester following the successful completion of the comprehensive exam, students must submit a draft of their dissertation prospectus to what is now their dissertation committee.
- 14.2 Students should consult departmental [Guidelines for the Dissertation Prospectus](#). They are encouraged to consult with all members of their dissertation committee prior to the defense of the prospectus.
- 14.3 Students work with their advisor and the admin to schedule a time for a meeting known as the prospectus defense, at which all members of the dissertation committee are present. The defense must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.
- 14.4 Students meet with their dissertation committee for a two-hour oral defense of their prospectus, at which time students receive guidance on how best to proceed with their dissertations. A prospectus must be approved by a majority vote before students are permitted to proceed with writing the dissertation.

- 14.5 If the doctoral committee judges that a student does not yet have a viable plan for a dissertation, and the committee members wish to see a revised prospectus before permitting the student to proceed, the prospectus may be revised and the prospectus defense process repeated.
- 15.0 **Doctoral Dissertation and Preparation for Graduation.**
- 15.1 The doctoral dissertation is a work of original scholarship that demonstrates firm knowledge of, and makes important contributions to, a chosen field of study. It is generally about 180-200 pages long (double spaced). Students should consult the departmental [Guidelines for the Doctoral Dissertation](#).
- 15.2 According to Graduate College regulations (*Manual XII.O*), once students have passed the comprehensive exam, they have a maximum of five years to complete the research, writing, and defense of the dissertation. If, after consultation with the advisor, it is clear that this deadline cannot be met, a student may write to their advisor requesting an extension. If the advisor approves, the request is transmitted to the DGS, who presents it to the graduate faculty of Religious Studies with a recommendation. If the faculty approves the student's request, the DEO writes a letter to the Office of the Dean of the Graduate College requesting the extension. The extension, if granted, is ordinarily for one year. Requests for multiple extensions seriously inhibit projected career success.
- 15.3 During the semester in which students expect to graduate, they must submit to the Office of the Registrar an [Application for Degree](#). They must notify the departmental admin when they have done so.
- 15.4 **First Deposit** of the dissertation must be made, in the format required by the Graduate College at the time, by the first deposit deadline in the session in which the degree is to be conferred.

16.0 **Dissertation Defense.**

- 16.1 Students must consult with their advisor and the admin to arrange the date and time of the final examination or dissertation defense, which normally must fall within the semester in which the first deposit of the dissertation is made.
- 16.2 The dissertation defense is scheduled for two hours. The entire dissertation committee is present, either in person or through remote video link. Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence. Defenses are in principle open to the public.
- 16.3 At least three weeks prior to the dissertation defense, an [Exam Request](#) must be submitted to the Graduate College. Students provide the departmental admin with the information needed to complete the form. After the DGS approves the completed form, it is submitted by the admin.
- 16.4 Copies of the penultimate text of the dissertation (paper or electronic, as preferred by each committee member) must be in the hands of all committee members by two weeks prior to the defense. The admin must be notified of the title of the dissertation.
- 16.5 The dissertation defense is evaluated as either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. If the defense is judged Satisfactory, the dissertation committee members initial the [Report of Final Examination](#), sign a [Report of Thesis Approval](#), and complete the signature page of the dissertation, all of which are deposited with the admin.
- 16.6 Two negative votes make the final examination Unsatisfactory (no pass). In case of a report of Unsatisfactory, candidates may not present themselves for re-examination until the next session of the regular academic year, when most faculty members are in residence. The examination may be repeated only once.

- 16.7 The **final deposit** of the successfully defended dissertation must be made to the Graduate College by the posted deadline in the students' graduation semester. The final deposit must be made no later than the semester (summers excluded) following the session in which the final examination is passed or the dissertation is successfully defended. Failure to meet this deadline requires re-examination.
- 17.0 **Graduation.** Students are encouraged to celebrate their accomplishments at the Graduate College's graduation ceremony, at which many faculty members "hood" their graduating Ph.D.'s. Students who would like their advisors to accompany them should let their advisors know.
- 18.0 **Placement.**
- 18.1 Before and as they are writing their dissertations, students are encouraged to consult with the [Graduate Success Office](#) for support in preparing application materials and making applications.
- 18.2 The Department encourages students to review online job postings in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Openings On-Line* (American Academy of Religion).
- 18.3 Students should request letters of recommendation from the faculty members who know their scholarship and teaching the best and are committed to their success. When requesting letters, students should send their letter-writers their c.v. and their letter/s of application, as well as information about how their recommenders should expect to receive institutional requests for recommendation letters, as these requests are not standardized. Recommenders may request additional information as well.