

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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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 geographic or thematic areas of concentration:

Geographic

- Religions of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean
- Religions of East Asia
- Religions of the United States and the Atlantic World

Thematic

- Religion, Ethics, and Society
- Religious Diversity in Public Life
- Religion and Gender
- Religion and Race
- Religion and Media
- Religion, Health, and Cycles of Life

2.0 Student Advising

- 2.1 The department assigns incoming students an academic advisor to help craft their program of study. Students may change their advisor to reflect their developing area of research with approval of the Director of Graduate Studies (hereafter DGS).
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 By the end of the first year, students are required to develop an [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#), student-driven, working documents that help to clarify goals, strategies, and timelines, and enhance communication, in consultation with their advisor.
- 2.4 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 All students are required to take:

RELS:5400 Colonial Knowledge Production and its Discontents: Religion and the Academy

- 3.3 For the PhD, the additional requirement of two graduate courses in teaching: GRAD:6217 and CLAS:5100 (1 s.h.).
- 3.4 Students are required to take 3 additional courses (4000 level or above) in the Department of Religious Studies in the first two years.
- 3.5 Students must take at least one course or graduate seminar in one or more departments *other than* Religious Studies.
- 3.6 A maximum of 12 s.h. of thesis credit may count toward the 72 s.h. requirement.
- 3.7 Students are expected to complete all coursework except their 12 s.h. of thesis credit by the end of their fourth year in the program.
- 3.8 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.

4.0 Annual Review of Graduate Students

- 4.1 The Religious Studies faculty conducts a review of all graduate students each spring to determine that students are adhering to the stated benchmarks for success (see the [Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success](#)).
- 4.2 Prior to this review, students are required to submit to their advisor, the DGS, and the graduate program administrator an [Annual Progress Report](#). A copy of the report is subsequently placed in the student's file.
- 4.3 Students whom the faculty do not consider to be meeting stated benchmarks will be notified in writing by the DGS following the faculty meeting.
- 4.4 Students who do not pass the Annual Review are able to appeal the decision at the next faculty meeting by submitting to the graduate administrator for dissemination to the faculty a one-page plan to address faculty concerns and meet benchmarks. Faculty will vote on the original progress report and supplemental plan.
- 4.5 Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to loss of funding and/or dismissal from the program.

5.0 Language Requirements

- 5.1 All Ph.D. students are required to demonstrate competency in English and at least one other language.

- 5.2 Students must demonstrate language competencies that are necessary for advanced research in their areas of expertise, as determined by their advisory committee.
- 5.3 The means for assessing language competencies are determined by a student's advisory committee.
- Students whose primary research focuses on English-language scholarship may demonstrate their competency in a language other than English by passing 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).
 - When necessary expertise is not available at the University of Iowa, a faculty member outside the department may be asked to assist in evaluating a student's language proficiency.
 - Letters from advisors that attest to language competencies are placed in students' files.
- 5.4 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.

6.0 Residency requirements

Residency requirements are set by the University and can be found here:

<https://registrar.uiowa.edu/residency>.

7.0 **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>.

8.0 **Advisory Committee**

- 8.1 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 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.

9.0 **Departmental Program of Study for the Ph.D.**

- 9.1 During their fourth semester, students are required to convene their advisory committee to review their Departmental Program of Study. At least two weeks in advance of that meeting, students must prepare a Department Program of Study by submitting their proposed transfer credits, courses completed, courses in progress, and proposed future courses through MyPlan in MyUI. Students will need to identify their committee members, the admin, and the DGS as the recipients in Workflow. In addition, students will need to submit three supplemental documents by email to their advisor and advisory committee members:
- At least two substantial papers

- A one-page document that identifies their research language(s), justification for each proposed language, and a plan for demonstrating the required level of proficiency

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

- Completion of the three required courses: RELS:5400, GRAD:6217, and CLAS:5100
- Completion of at least three graduate seminars in the Department of Religious Studies
- 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
- Evidence of the ability to write strong scholarly papers, as assessed by a students' advisory committee
- Evidence of the ability to attain appropriate proficiency in a relevant research language or languages
- 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](#)

9.3 The Departmental Program of Study must be approved by the student's advisor and advisory committee. Upon committee approval, this document is discussed by the Religious Studies faculty. 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.

9.4 Students who do not pass the Departmental Program of Study are able to appeal the decision. To do so, one week prior to the subsequent faculty meeting, students must submit to the graduate administrator for dissemination to the faculty a one-page plan to address faculty concerns and demonstrate how they will meet Departmental Program of Study benchmarks within the following semester. Faculty will vote at the subsequent meeting.

9.5 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).

10.0 The Comprehensive Exam Committee

10.1 Following an approved Program of Study, students work with their advisor to form a comprehensive exam committee. Led by the committee chair (the advisor), the comps committee is responsible for constructing the exam and evaluating its written and oral components.

10.2 The comprehensive exam committee consists of at minimum four faculty members, each of whom must be a member of the graduate faculty (hold a tenured or tenure-track position). At least two members of the committee 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.

10.3 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).

11.0 Comprehensive Exam Bibliography

11.1 In preparation for the comprehensive exam, students confer with the members of their comprehensive exam committee to compile a bibliography of works to be read.

11.2 At least six months prior to taking the exam, students confer again with their committee to finalize an approved draft of their bibliographies.

12.0 Timing of the Comprehensive Exam

12.1 The comprehensive exam takes place during students' third or fourth year in the program and must be completed by the end of their eighth semester.

12.2 Students who are unable to meet this expectation by the end of the fourth year may apply for an extension by sending a narrative explanation of the need for additional time and a timeline to complete the comprehensive exam. Extension applications must be endorsed by the advisor and committee members and is determined by departmental vote.

12.3 Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

12.4 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the comprehensive exam, students must confer with the departmental admin to complete two Graduate College documents: the Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet and Exam Request, which are submitted by the admin.

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

13.0 The Comprehensive Exam

13.1 The comprehensive exam includes both written and oral exams. At least two members of the comps committee contribute questions to the written exam.

13.2 The written exam has three parts. All three parts, distributed sequentially, must be answered within a five-week period that begins with receipt of the first question. The format of each part of the exam is decided by the Comprehensive Exam Committee and the student from the following two options (all three parts need not follow the same format):

- A. Sit-down exam: The sit-down exam is a three-hour exam. Students are allowed an additional 30 minutes to think and plan their answers before writing. A room with a computer for word-processing is provided. Students are encouraged to prepare and consult précis while writing the exam. Students are permitted one précis per text on their bibliography, and each précis can be up to two pages, formatted with 12-point font and one-inch margins.

- B. Take-home exam: Students have seven days per question and may complete the exam at the location and time of their choosing. Students may complete the written exam more quickly if they desire. The exam answers themselves should be no more than 15 double-spaced pages, excluding notes and references. The exam should be formatted with 12-point font and one-inch margins. Students may consult their notes and relevant texts as they prepare their exam. Students should fully cite appropriate and relevant sources and include a reference list, endnotes, and/or a bibliography.

13.3 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, that matters to but is distinct from the specific dissertation topic
- The student's area of additional specialization or dissertation topic

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

13.4 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 submitted electronically by the committee and recorded in the student record .

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

13.6 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.

13.7 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.

13.8 After successfully defending their comprehensive exam, students 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:7950:0IND.

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 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.
- 14.3 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.
- 14.4 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 The Dissertation

- 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](#).

16.0 Timing of the Dissertation and Graduation

- 16.1 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.
- 16.2 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.

17.0 Dissertation Defense

- 17.1 Students must consult with their advisor and the admin to arrange the date and time of the final examination or dissertation defense, which normally falls within the same semester in which the student is planning to graduate.
- 17.2 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.
- 17.3 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 thesis title, committee

members, date, time, and location of the defense. The admin submits the request through workflow for approvals.

- 17.4 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.
- 17.5 The dissertation defense is evaluated as either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory and recorded by the committee on the workflow form initiated from the Graduate College.
- 17.6 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.
- 17.7 The dissertation deposit of the successfully defended dissertation must be made to the Graduate College by the posted deadline in the students' graduation semester. The dissertation 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.

18.0 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.

Appendix

This appendix is intended to help graduate students successfully engage the graduate program by providing guidance, outlining best practices, and describing departmental norms beyond the formal rules and procedures of the Program Book.

Advising and Committees

Students are assigned an academic advisor upon entering the program; they work closely with the advisor to develop a program of study that best meets their personal and career objectives. Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week of each semester of their program, in part to plan for coursework. Priority of registration should be given in the first two years to required courses. 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.

Students form an advisory committee during their second semester of study. Students then meet with their advisory committee regularly, usually 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.

Regarding the departmental expectations for all parties to an advising relationship, see [Mutual Expectations](#).

Coursework

The required RS course 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. In addition, the course provides students with a shared intellectual experience and lays a foundation for lasting collegial relationships.

Students may have individualized requirements as determined in consultation with their advisory committee.

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.

Re the GRAD 6217 teaching seminar, ideally students take this 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 apply for a waiver of this requirement. Waivers must be approved by faculty vote.

Language requirement

Students are encouraged to begin as soon as possible to acquire the language skills that are necessary for conducting their proposed research.

The Comprehensive Exam

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.

Students are encouraged to begin compiling their bibliographies early. There are no standard bibliographies for all Ph.D. students because programs are tailored to individual goals.

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.

After a student has passed their comprehensive exam, members of the comps committee ordinarily continue as members of the student’s dissertation committee. In most cases, both of these committees include the members of the student’s advisory committee.

Prospectus

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.

Professionalization

Conferences

Students are strongly encouraged to attend conferences to gain familiarity with current research and to develop strong scholarly networks with other graduate students and faculty.

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to submit a paper to a conference. The department will sponsor workshops that help students to revise a seminar paper into a conference paper. The department also provides conference funding; see the Director of Graduate Studies for more information.

External Grants

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to apply for an external grant. The department will arrange workshops that assist students in locating and applying for grants.

Publications

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to submit a paper for publication to a journal.

Placement

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.

The Department encourages students to review online job postings in The Chronicle of Higher Education and Openings On-Line (American Academy of Religion).

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.