Indiana University
Department of Religious Studies

Guide for Graduate Students
in the Department of Religious Studies

(2014-15 edition)

The information in this Guide is meant to help graduate students (and the faculty who advise them) in navigating the requirements for the MA and PhD in the Department of Religious Studies. The information supplements and does not replace the Graduate School Bulletin (http://www.iu.edu/~bulletin/iu/gradschool/), which is the ultimate authority in all requirements and regulations. In addition to the section of the Bulletin on the Department, be sure to consult the sections on “Academic Regulations” and “General Requirements for Advanced Degrees” which contain rules that govern all degree programs. If anything in this Guide seems to contradict the Bulletin, you should follow the Bulletin.

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I. General Advice for All Students

The faculty of the Department is strongly committed to the training and mentoring of graduate students, who embody the future of the academic study of religion. Every faculty member is available to offer you advice and to talk with you about your interests and concerns, but the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) should be your first stop for information about requirements, financial aid, and the like. The DGS is assisted by the Department’s Graduate Secretary, Debra Melsheimer, a staff member who handles much of the essential paperwork and other practical matters. The DGS chairs the Graduate
Studies Committee, which decides on graduate admissions, discusses policy issues, and makes final determinations on exceptions to requirements, prize competitions, and the like.

The person primarily responsible for getting you through your graduate program in an efficient and successful manner, however, is you. Because the faculty member who serves as the DGS changes regularly and other faculty go on leaves, you are the element of continuity during your time at IU. It behooves you to familiarize yourself with the requirements of your degree program and to take the initiative in formulating a good plan to meet those requirements. The information in this Guide is designed to help you do that.

II. Getting the MA

The MA degree is designed to be both broad, exposing you to the wider study of religion, and deep, enabling you to focus on an issue or tradition of interest to you. MA students have diverse goals: many hope to enter a doctoral program in religious studies, while others plan to teach at the secondary level or to bring perspectives on religion to their work in other fields (e.g., medicine, law, journalism). Some may simply be pursuing their intellectual interests beyond the BA. Your own goals should determine how you meet the MA requirements.

A. The Basic Requirements

To earn the MA degree you must do the following within five consecutive years:

1. Complete a total of 30 credit hours, including R665 and at least two other 600- or 700-level seminars in the Department of Religious Studies. No credit hours older than five years can count.

2. Maintain a 3.0 GPA with a grade of B or better in every course you offer for the degree.

3. Demonstrate reading proficiency in one of the two modern languages of scholarship required for the Ph.D. (French or German). Another modern language may be substituted with the approval of the director of graduate studies and the student’s advisors. Proficiency may be demonstrated by any of the methods normally sanctioned by the University Graduate School.

4. Complete an approved revision of a research paper, between 20-30 pages in length (not counting endnotes). The paper will normally develop out of one of your 600-level (or 700-level) seminars but may grow out of another research project. The revised paper is to be of professional quality, modeled on a submission to a refereed journal in your area of interest, and it should follow that journal’s requirements for length and documentation (e.g., Turabian, MLA, SBL Handbook of Style, Chicago Manual of Style). This revised research paper must be approved for your file by a member of the faculty. There is a form for this purpose in the office. The approved research paper
may not be a language translation, a bibliographic essay, a text edition, or a set of field notes. Annotated translations may be accepted with the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee. For details, consult the DGS.

B. Meeting Course and Language Requirements

1. Credit Hours
   You must earn 30 hours of graduate credit. Up to 8 hours can be transferred from another institution upon the recommendation of the DGS to the Graduate School. Transfer credits must have grades of B or better and must have been earned at accredited institutions. The five-year rule applies to these credits.
   
   Note that the courses for graduate students in Reading French, German, or Spanish do not accumulate hours toward the degree. You have to pay for these hours, but they do not count.
   
   You must finish your degree within five years of starting course work. That is, after five years, a course “expires” and can no longer apply to your degree. In that case, you must take new courses to make up the expired hours or go through a laborious process to “revalidate” the expired courses. Avoid this by finishing in a timely manner. It is expected and typical for MA students to finish their programs in two years of full time work.

2. 600/700-Level Seminars
   Take R665 in your first semester and take two 600-level (or 700-level) seminars as soon as possible. The other two 600/700-level seminars must be in the Department of Religious Studies.

3. Language Work
   If you wish to use a language other than French or German, you must secure the approval of the DGS before taking courses or otherwise preparing to certify in it.
   
   If you choose French, German, or Spanish, you may fulfill the requirement by passing the certifying test that is offered at the beginning of the academic year or by passing the second semester of the two-semester sequence in the reading knowledge of these languages offered to graduate students (e.g., F491-F492). Note that these courses do not contribute credit hours to the degree.
   
   If you choose another language, you can certify in one of two ways. You can pass courses in the language through the intermediate level (normally the fourth semester); in most cases, such courses do carry graduate credit (although sometimes fewer numbers of hours than for undergraduates). Or if you have already studied the language, you can pass an examination administered by a faculty member in the Department. Consult with the DGS and a faculty member in your area of interest about the best plan for you.

4. Graduating
   To receive your MA degree, you must apply for the degree at the Graduate School website, under the “forms” submenu, via a link to the relevant page on OneStart. The electronic form will be routed to the Department, which must verify that you have completed all the requirements, including the revision of a research paper. If you will complete the degree during the summer and want to participate in Commencement in the preceding May, you should apply for your degree in the spring (although you won’t
really get it until later). Information about Commencement, including rental of gowns and the like, is always posted on the IUB web site early in the spring semester.

C. Advice and Counsel

1. Advising
   When you are an MA student, your official advisor is the DGS. You should consult with the DGS every semester before registering for classes and at other times as needed. You will also want to seek advice from faculty members in your area of interest.

2. Strategy
   If you are to complete your MA efficiently, you need to set about fulfilling the requirements immediately. In your first meeting with the DGS, before your first semester, you should plan how you will fulfill the language requirement. In your first semester, take R665, and make sure that your other courses fulfill other requirements (600/700-level seminar).
   Students are encouraged to select a research paper by the end of the second semester of coursework to revise and have approved for partial fulfillment of degree requirements. This allows ample time (e.g., during the first summer) to revise the paper and to submit it to a faculty member for approval, well ahead of graduation.
   Students who decide to fulfill the language proficiency requirement through coursework typically do so during the summer; this allows them to focus intensively on language acquisition.
   If you are not planning to pursue a PhD, then you may not want to fulfill the language requirement by learning to read French or German; instead, you may benefit more from gaining some acquaintance with the language of the religion that most interests you (e.g., Arabic in the case of Islam).
   If you plan to pursue doctoral study, you should consider gaining reading knowledge of French or German if you have not done so already. If you are interested in a field that requires the knowledge of source languages, you should begin or continue study of those languages. If you think you might want to enter the PhD program in this Department, then you may want to look toward fulfilling the requirements for that degree by, for example, taking thematic/methodological/cross-cultural seminars when ones of interest are offered, taking a seminar at the 700-level, or taking a course in a department that might serve as a minor. In any case, you will want to establish a strong record of study with at least one faculty member (e.g., by taking more than one course from him or her) so that you might ask the professor to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf when you apply to doctoral programs (usually in your third semester).
III. Moving from the MA to the PhD

Admission to our PhD program from our MA program is not automatic. Even if you were originally admitted to both the MA and PhD and/or received a multi-year financial aid package that extends beyond the MA, your continuation in the program and renewal of your financial aid depends on your making satisfactory academic progress, and the transition to the PhD provides a particularly important opportunity for the assessment of that progress.

If you are a current MA student who wishes to enter the doctoral program, you apply to do so with a streamlined application, but on the same schedule as outside applicants. You need to submit your application by December 15 and you will hear from the Graduate Committee by early March.

You must submit to the DGS the following materials, which will be added to your file from when you were admitted to the MA:

(1) an updated statement of purpose, plotting your doctoral program within the framework of the fields of study and identifying primary faculty mentors
(2) a letter of recommendation from at least one faculty member in the Department
(3) a copy of your approved revision of a research essay
(4) a writing sample (the revised essay might serve as this)
(5) a statement of your situation regarding the modern language requirement (e.g., French and German)
IV. Getting the PhD

The Ph.D. program is designed to prepare students to teach in colleges, universities, or seminaries and to carry out research in the field. Your goal is to become a professional in the field of religious studies, and you should seek to acquire the skills that you will need to become a successful and productive teacher and scholar in your area of interest.

A. Time Limits, Expectations, and Advising

1. Time Limits and Expectations

Until you complete all requirements but the dissertation (including the Qualifying Examination), you are known as a “doctoral student.” After you have passed your Qualifying Examination and completed all requirements except the dissertation, you become a “doctoral candidate.” Each of these two phases comes with a limit of seven years.

As a doctoral student, you must complete all the coursework that you offer for the degree within seven years before passing your Qualifying Examination. This includes courses that you use from your MA program and that you transfer from another institution. This rule, then, can cause complications for students who have taken time off between a masters program and entering the PhD program if they wish to use credits from their masters program for their PhD. Any course older than seven years has “expired,” and you must either take new courses to replace the expired hours or “revalidate” the expired course(s) by means of a laborious procedure that is described in the Bulletin. Avoid this complication by taking your Qualifying Examination in a timely manner.

Likewise, once you become a doctoral candidate, you have seven years to submit and defend a dissertation. The seven years are counted from the date of your Qualifying Examination (the oral exam). At the end of the seven years, your candidacy expires and you may no longer submit a dissertation. In this case, if the DGS and the members of your research committee approve, and you successfully appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School for reinstatement, you may renew your candidacy for another three years by fulfilling any requirements for the PhD that were added since you entered candidacy and by taking a new Qualifying Examination. Avoid this fate by completing your dissertation in a timely manner.

The expectation of the Graduate School and the Department is that you will become a candidate by completing coursework and language requirements and passing the Qualifying Examination by the end of the third post-masters year. Numerous policies, including those governing financial aid, are based on this expectation. It is expected that by the end of the third year you will have accumulated the required 90 credit hours and taken your Qualifying Examination so that you can register for the inexpensive G901. Therefore, your goal should be to complete required courses in your first two years and to use the third year to finish any remaining language requirements and to prepare for and take the Qualifying Examination.
2. Advising

The Graduate School requires that doctoral students be advised by an Advisory Committee, which is to be appointed by the end of the first year, and which supervises the Qualifying Examination. This appointment is an online process initiated by the student. The form may be found on the website of the College of Arts and Sciences under Current Graduate Students and then Record Changes.

Most faculty advisors for doctoral students come from faculty in the relevant fields of study. These fields currently consist of Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions; Chinese Thought; Comparative and Transnational Studies of the Muslim Tradition; Ethics, Philosophy, and Politics in the Study of Religion; History of Christianity; Jewish Thought and Culture; Religion in the Americas; and Religions of South Asia. Before you register for classes in your first semester, you will meet with the DGS, who will advise you on your fall schedule and can consult about faculty in your field(s).

The department also assigns one non-specialist faculty advisory committee member to each student, to encourage the student to articulate his/her interests and plans in ways that make sense across multiple subfields of religious studies. Once your advisory committee is constituted, generally by the spring semester of your first year, you should meet with your committee each semester, to discuss your intellectual plans as well as such matters as your language requirements, your minor department, etc. The Department keeps an electronic Advising Form to record the results of these conversations. You should be sure to meet with your advising group every April until you take the Qualifying Examination, to chart your progress and to make plans for the following year. Once again the electronic form should be used to record decisions and evaluations. At the meeting in April of your second year, you should schedule your Qualifying Examination and make any necessary changes to your Advisory Committee, which usually includes a representative from your outside minor. See below for more information on this process.

Once you have passed your Qualifying Examination and have become a doctoral candidate, your advisor becomes the faculty member who will direct your dissertation. Together with that faculty member you will organize your Research Committee for your dissertation, which need not be identical with your Advisory Committee for the Qualifying Examination. See below for more information on this process.

Throughout your entire career the DGS is available to you for consultation on any facet of your program. The DGS will also monitor your progress and intervene if things are not moving forward in a timely manner. Please be advised that satisfactory progress through the program is a requirement for continued enrollment.

B. Credit Hours and Course Requirements

1. Credit Hours

You must earn 90 hours of graduate credit. These can include the hours that you earned while an MA student at IU if you were one: thus, you must earn 60 hours beyond the 30 required for that degree. You may transfer up to 30 hours from another institution (e.g., if you earned your masters elsewhere) upon the recommendation of the DGS to the Graduate School. Transfer credits must have grades of B or better and must have been
You may earn up to 30 credit hours for writing your dissertation. Dissertation credits are earned under R799. Most students do not earn dissertation credits while they are actually writing the dissertation: instead, they accumulate them while doing course work. For example, if you are an Associate Instructor and receiving a tuition credit for 12 credit hours in a semester, you should register for the courses that you wish to take, and if the total of their credit hours is less than 12 you should register for the remaining credit hours that are paid for as R799.

Note that the courses for graduate students in Reading French, German, or Spanish (e.g., F491) do not accumulate hours toward the degree. You have to pay for these hours, but they do not count.

2. Required Course Work

You must take the following courses:

(1) R665 (4 hours)
(2) A second thematic, methodological, or cross-cultural seminar
   (identified as such by the DGS; generally these carry course numbers in the ranges of R661-664 and R761-764) (4 hours)
(3) 12 hours at the 700-level
(4) Teaching Practicum (R790) (1 hour)

If you took R665 as an MA student at IU, you do not need to take it again.

Thematic, methodological, or cross-cultural seminars are designed to introduce students to the history of and current research in a specific methodological orientation or thematic focus within Religious Studies. Some students may find it useful to take more than two (including R665) such seminars. You may, however, apply only one such seminar at the 700-level (4 hours) to the fulfillment of the 700-level requirement.

700-level courses are usually (but not always) linked to a 600-level seminar and are designed to prepare students for professional research and writing in the field. They presume the ability to use the appropriate languages of scholarship and to work in the original source languages. You may apply an independent research course (R791, R792, R793, R794) to the 700-level requirement, but no more than 4 hours of such.

The Teaching Practicum (R790) requires you to prepare the syllabus, bibliography, assignments, and exams for a course in your field under the supervision of a faculty member. Many students take this course in connection with one of their assignments as an Associate Instructor. Because it is only 1 credit hour, students sometimes put this requirement off, figuring that it is easy to do “later,” and then find that their failure to have done it becomes a snag when they are ready to apply for candidacy. Do not put this off.

3. Outside Minor

All doctoral students at IU must complete a minor outside their home department. While most doctoral minors are department-based (e.g. History, East Asian Languages and Cultures), others are inter-departmental programs or supervised by committees (e.g.,
Ancient Studies, Jewish Studies, Medieval Studies). The requirements for a doctoral minor vary and are controlled by the relevant department, program, or committee. Most require 12 credit hours.

You have a wide range of possibilities in choosing your outside minor. The outside minor intends to enhance the value of the degree and your scholarly skills by incorporating the methods and issues of a related discipline. You should discuss your outside minor with the DGS and your advising group and begin working toward it as soon as possible. With rare exceptions, a faculty member from the outside minor must be a member of the student’s Advisory Committee, that is, the committee that administers the Qualifying Examination. Thus, you should get acquainted with faculty in your outside minor as soon as possible.

When you have completed the requirements for your minor, you should ask the DGS or Graduate Secretary of the minor department to send a letter to that effect to the Department’s DGS for your file.

C. Language Requirements

1. Languages of Scholarship
   Doctoral students must demonstrate reading proficiency in at least two modern languages of scholarship: French and German. You may substitute another modern language for one of these with the approval of the DGS and your advising group. To make a substitution, you need to make a written request/justification to the DGS with the support of your advising group.

2. Primary Source Languages
   Many students must show proficiency in one or more primary source languages. See the descriptions of the fields of study below. Some advising groups (e.g., AMNER) have precisely formulated requirements. You will determine with your advising group which languages you need to learn and how you will demonstrate proficiency in them; these decisions should be recorded on the electronic advising form. Sometimes proficiency is demonstrated through an examination administered by faculty in the Department and/or with the cooperation of another department as appropriate, and sometimes through course work in the language.

D. Research Papers Requirements

You must produce two research papers of between 20-30 pages (not counting endnotes) prior to taking your Qualifying Examination. If you completed your MA at Indiana University, then it is expected one of these paper requirements will be fulfilled by the revised essay that is stipulated in the MA requirements (effective fall 2011). These papers will normally develop out of your 700-level seminars, but they may grow out of other research projects. These papers are to be at a professional level of quality, modeled on a submission to a refereed journal in your area of interest, and should follow that journal’s requirements for length and documentation (e.g., Turabian, MLA, SBL Handbook of Style, Chicago Manual of Style). These research papers must be approved for your file by a member of the faculty; the same professor cannot approve both papers. There is a
form for this purpose in the office. An approved research paper may not be a language translation, a bibliographic essay, a text edition, or a set of field notes. Annotated translations may be accepted with the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee. For details, consult the DGS.

E. The Qualifying Examination

As you finish your course work, you are reviewed for permission to take the Qualifying Examination. Permission to take the Qualifying Examination presupposes that in the semester you take the exam (or earlier) you will have completed all other requirements (including languages), you have no outstanding incompletes, and you are not on academic probation. In rare cases, the DGS may allow you to take your Qualifying Examination and to complete a requirement (e.g., a remaining language) shortly thereafter. You cannot, however, be nominated to candidacy and thus be allowed to register for G901 and to submit a dissertation proposal until you have completed all requirements and passed the Qualifying Examination. It is expected that you will take your Qualifying Examination no later than your sixth semester after the master’s degree.

The Qualifying Examination is supervised by a committee of faculty members, officially known as your Advisory Committee (as discussed above). The Graduate School requires that the Advisory Committee have at least three members: two must come from the Department (adjuncts qualify) and one must represent your outside minor. Note that some members of the Department can also represent an outside minor to which they belong (e.g., Jewish Studies), but then you have to have two more people from the Department.

You should organize your Advisory Committee in your second semester at the latest. These people will plan with you what each part of the Qualifying Examination will cover and help you to develop bibliographies. They compose the questions and evaluate your performance. Not all members of your Advisory Committee need be experts in your area of study: often a member of the committee represents a methodological or thematic angle and works with you on an exam because he or she taught a theoretical/methodological/thematic seminar when you took it.

The Qualifying Examination consists of written exams totaling 12 hours, divided into at least three parts, and an oral exam, all of which are to be completed within a three-week period. Each field of study has its own specifications as to the number and topics of exams. See the full descriptions of the fields published on the department’s website at the following URL: http://indiana.edu/~relstud/graduate/doctoral.

Although minor variations on the Department’s basic structure are permitted (e.g., taking a break between the first and second two hours of a single 4-hour exam), any significant variation on the basic exam structure (e.g., substitution of a major paper for an exam) requires your consent and the approval of the DGS. These days most students write their exams on a computer provided by the Department (often in a vacant faculty office).

At the conclusion of the oral part of the exam, the Advisory Committee determines the grade. The possibilities are the following:

Honors: exceptional performance
Pass: adequate to very good performance
Fail: one or more exams is/are inadequate and must be re-written

Each faculty member records an individual vote. The chair of the committee then tallies the votes and informs the student of the committee’s decision as the concluding rite of the Qualifying Examination. For the student to receive Honors, the vote must be unanimous. The Qualifying Examination may be retaken once, either whole or in part, and this will be determined by the committee before its verdict is announced.

If you pass the Qualifying Examination and you have completed all other requirements, the members of the Advisory Committee should sign your Nomination to Candidacy form and pass it on to the graduate secretary. You should prepare this form and have it ready for possible signing at the oral examination.

F. The Dissertation

Once you have passed the Qualifying Examination and your candidacy has been accepted by the Graduate School, you are eligible to submit a proposal for the dissertation. You are expected to successfully defend the dissertation proposal within six months of having completed qualifying exams. You now must organize a new committee: the Research Committee. Once again there are membership requirements. The chair of the Research Committee is the director of your dissertation. (If this faculty member is not yet tenured, you should check with the DGS to ensure that he or she is authorized to serve as director.) Two more members must come from the Department, and one member represents the minor area. In this case, however, if the dissertation research will not touch closely on the area of the minor, the DGS can ask the minor department to waive this requirement.

Your Research Committee meets formally twice: to approve your proposal and to examine you at the defense. The dissertation proposal is a document of approximately 10-15 pages, annotated and followed by a bibliography. The Department has a handout on preparing the proposal. You formulate the proposal with your director and circulate it to the other committee members for their comments and suggestions. The meeting to approve the proposal should not be a time of suspense over whether the proposal will be approved, but an opportunity for you and the committee to reflect thoughtfully on how you should go about your project. Please note that the online form relevant to the proposal approval meeting, the “Nomination of Research Committee for the PhD,” requires you to append a “one-two page summary of the proposed research.” This is not to be confused with the proposal itself. You fill out and initiate the chain of approvals for this electronic form (with appended summary), which can be found on the Graduate School website, under the “forms” submenu, via a link to the relevant page on OneStart. The electronic form will be routed to the Department, which must verify that you have completed all the requirements. It will also be forwarded for approval to the members of the RC, the DGS, and then the Chair, and then forwarded to the Graduate School.

You write the dissertation under the guidance of your director. The extent of involvement of committee members in the process of writing varies considerably, but often a committee member will read in early drafts those chapters having to do with his
or her area of expertise (if any at all), but will read the entire dissertation only when it is ready to be defended.

While you write the dissertation, you must be continuously enrolled at IU, at least part-time. As a doctoral candidate you may register for G901, which charges a nominal flat fee and carries six “dummy” credit hours that certify you as a full-time student (for financial aid, health insurance, and other purposes) but do not accumulate to any degree. You may register for G901 for a maximum of six semesters. If you are still not finished after that, you must register each fall and spring for at least one hour of R799 until you finish. This is considerably more expensive than G901. If you defend your dissertation in a summer semester, you must register for G901 or one hour of R799 in that semester as well. Until your candidacy expires, you are considered a full-time student even when you register for only one hour of R799.

The defense of a dissertation is a public event. You must give formal notice of the date, time, and place of your defense to the Graduate School thirty days prior to the defense; this formal notice is posted on the web. Other faculty and graduate students may attend the defense. Once the dissertation is approved, you must prepare the manuscript according to strict guidelines determined by the Graduate School. Check with the Graduate School about all facets of the defense and submission process.

If you want to participate in Commencement, you must submit an application for an advanced degree via the Graduate School website. Otherwise, the various sets of documentation surrounding the approval of the dissertation suffice for receiving your degree. Information about Commencement is always posted on the IUB web site early in the spring semester.

[Revised August 18, 2014.]