



Georgia State

University

Department of Religious Studies

Graduate Student Handbook

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Introduction	3
Admissions and Funding	4
Admissions	4
Funding	4
Employment as a Graduate Assistant	6
Enrollment: Full-time status	7
Degree Requirements for the Master of Arts in Religious Studies	8
Thesis Track	8
The M.A. with Distinction	10
Coursework Intensive track	9
Distribution Area Requirements	10
Restrictions	10
Foreign Language Competencies	10
M.A. with a Concentration in Nonprofit Management	11
M.A. with a Concentration in Religion and Aging	13
Dual Degree B.A./M.A. (4+1)	15
Thesis Research and Writing	16
Finding a topic	16
Forming a committee	16
Writing the prospectus	16
Presenting the prospectus	16
Researching and writing the thesis	17
Timelines for thesis projects	17
Thesis defense, submission, and embargoing	17
Sample theses	17
Grades and Grade Point Average	18
Minimum grade point average requirements	18
Letter grades	18
Satisfactory and unsatisfactory grades	19
Changes in grades	20
Department, College, and University Policies and Procedures	20
Directed Readings	20
Academic Honesty	20
Scholastic Termination Dismissal Procedures	20
Department Level Appeal Procedures	21
College Level Dismissal and Appeals Procedures	21
Other University and College Policies and Procedures	22
Locker use	23
University and College Policies and Procedures	24
Appendix A: Thesis Prospectus Guidelines	25
Appendix B: Guidelines for Degree Completion	31

Introduction

“It’s impossible to understand much of the news without knowing something about religion.”

– CNN Belief Blog

Research and coursework in religious studies opens students’ eyes to the role that religion plays in politics, public policy, media, business, education, the arts, and nonprofit activity. The Department of Religious Studies at Georgia State University is committed to highlighting this role and equipping our students to contribute constructively to the full spectrum of public life with an informed, critical stance. At Georgia State University, we train our M.A. in Religious Studies students to consider these issues, and to go on to careers in education, the nonprofit sector and the business world.

Our program offers three unusual opportunities for students. First, our Combined Master of Arts in Religious Studies and Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise – offered in conjunction with the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies – prepares our students for careers making a difference in society. We also offer a concentration in Religion and Aging as part of our applied religious studies initiative. Our distinctive graduate teaching program has prepared many graduates for careers in community colleges and private schools.

We have also placed M.A. graduates in Ph.D. programs at prestigious universities including Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, the University of California Santa Barbara, Columbia, Emory and Duke. Still others have pursued successful careers in law, business, journalism and medicine.

Our alumni’s successes reflect not only the quality of the program, but also the opportunities we provide students to research and work in the myriad religious communities of Atlanta, a city that contains 1,000 places of worship. In fact, students can earn course credit for interning at nonprofits and other relevant organizations.

Admissions and Funding

Admissions

The College of Arts and Sciences admissions information may be found online in the Graduate Catalog.

The Department of Religious Studies typically admits in the spring term for fall admission. The priority deadline for consideration in the first round of funding decisions is February 1 and the deadline for all applicants interested in funding is March 15. Prospective students who wish to apply after March 15 or at another time in the year should contact the Director of Graduate Studies to inquire about an application deadline waiver.

The Department requires that applicants fill out the online application and submit a personal statement of research interests, writing sample, official transcripts, and three letters of recommendation. The Department of Religious Studies does not require students to submit GRE scores.

Funding

At the time of admission, the Department of Religious Studies offers a few two-year funding packages to students who have demonstrated exceptional promise and may offer support for one or more semesters to applicants with particular potential.

Eligibility for Funding

To be eligible for funding, graduate students must:

- 1) Maintain a 3.0 GPA in the first semester and 3.2 in subsequent semesters;
- 2) Enroll in 18 graduate level credit hours;
- 3) Receive a S in any S/U courses;
- 4) Have no more than one incomplete at the beginning of a semester; and
- 5) Make appropriate progress in graduate level coursework depending upon the student's chosen track.

Ongoing Funding: Two-year packages

In the first year of ongoing funding, the Department offers funded students a position as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). (The College and University sometimes refer to GRAs as GRAs, Graduate Lab/Research Assistants; these are the same positions.) GRAs assist one or more faculty members with research activities. GRAs receive a tuition waiver and modest stipend. In the spring of their first year, funded students must enroll in the first teaching practicum (RELS 8970). Following the successful completion of that course (a B or better), the Department typically hires these students as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) in the fall semester of the second year. If the student performs well as a GTA and maintains a 3.2 GPA, the Department typically extends another position as GTA to the student in the spring term. Students who accept two-year funding packages commit to working for the Department in the fall and spring terms of their first two years in the program. Ongoing funding may be revoked if the student becomes ineligible for funding (see above).

Ad hoc funding

Students who do not receive ongoing funding may be offered temporary or ad hoc funding as a GRA, or they may secure funding through other employment in the College or University. Examples of other employment opportunities at Georgia State may include working as a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) consultant or a position with Information Technology. Occasionally students find positions as GRAs or GTAs in other departments or programs.

Other University employment

Students are responsible for reporting all University employment to the Director of Graduate Studies and to the Department's Business Manager. Some types of employment require specific codes in the payroll system; without entering all of the codes in the appropriate order, students may not receive paychecks.

University employment, start dates, stipend amounts & fee bundling

All students employed by the University receive a tuition waiver and stipend. Stipend amounts vary depending on the type of employment and hours of work. Typically, stipends for GRAs in the Department of Religious Studies during the fall and spring terms vary between \$2,500 and \$3,000 depending upon budgetary constraints. Summer session (Maymester and June-July) GRAs receive a minimum stipend of \$1500.

Graduate Assistants are paid on the last day of the month according to the following schedule:

Fall: September, October, November, and December

Spring: January, February, March, and April

Summer: May, June, July, and August*

*Summer GAs may be appointed for the Maymester and/or the June-July summer session, and typically their pay schedules align with their appointments.

The University sets a maximum monthly stipend graduate students may receive. Graduate students are responsible for reporting all University System of Georgia employment to the Director of Graduate Studies and to the Department's Business Manager in writing before the start of each instructional session. The University's Graduate Assistant Policy may be found here.

All graduate students are responsible for paying their own fees.

The Bundled Student Fee Package policy allows students taking only off-campus courses to be exempted from mandatory fees, except the technology and University System of Georgia Institution fees. Because students receiving this package are not assessed the additional mandatory fees, they will only have access to the associated services when they opt in through payment for specific services. GTAs must register for a teaching practicum each semester they are employed, and because the practicums and their courses meet on campus, GTAs are not eligible for the fee bundle. Students who take advantage of the bundle may pay separately to access some campus services:

- Students wishing to access the sporting events or the Student Recreation Center must opt in by paying the costs on a per use basis.

- For access to the Student Health Center, students must pay the semester fee at the Health Center. This flat rate provides students receiving the fee waiver with the same services as students who pay all fees.
- The Counseling and Testing Center is not covered through student fees so one need only be enrolled as a student to receive services from this office.

Questions about this policy can be directed to grad@gsu.edu.

Employment as a Graduate Assistant

Graduate Research and Instructional/Lab Assistant Responsibilities

Graduate Research Assistants support faculty research programs, and Graduate Instructional/Lab Assistants (GRAs) support faculty teaching. Most Graduate Assistants in our Department are hybrid: GRAs. GRA responsibilities may include locating and retrieving journal articles, book chapters and books; doing preliminary research (i.e., creating annotated bibliographies); proofreading presentations or papers; creating and maintaining websites; and indexing manuscripts. GRA responsibilities may include assistance with recordkeeping, planning, and research related to instruction.

Religious Studies GRAs work a maximum of ten (10) hours per week per appointment. A GRA may work with more than one faculty member by sharing time; typically GRAs assigned to two faculty members are asked to work five (5) hours with each professor. If a GRA receives more than one appointment, their stipend will increase in measure with the number of hours he is working.

Graduate Research Assistant assignments

Graduate Research Assistant assignments are made at the discretion of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The DGS assigns GRAs to faculty prior to the start of each semester. Depending upon several factors, such as faculty returning from leaves and changes in students' funding or employment status, GRA assignments may shift over the winter break. When assignment changes occur between semesters, the DGS notifies both the students and the affected faculty members by email.

Prior to classes beginning, the DGS emails GRAs with contact information for the faculty member(s) with whom they will be working. GRAs are responsible for contacting the faculty member(s) to arrange a first meeting.

Graduate Teaching Assistant assignments

In the spring of their first year, graduate students may enroll in the first teaching practicum (RELS 8970). Following the successful completion of that course (a B or better) and depending on demand for RELS 2001, "Introduction to World Religions," the Department makes Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) offers to students for the fall semester of the second year. If the student performs well as a GTA and maintains a 3.2 GPA, the Department may extend another position as GTA to her in the spring term.

GTAs progress through a three-course teaching practicum sequence. Beginning in their second semester, they take RELS 8970 in preparation to teach. First-time GTAs take RELS 8980 in the fall. RELS 8980 begins a week early so that GTAs can meet to review material and prepare to teach well in advance of each session. In subsequent semesters, GTAs

enroll in RELS 8985, the advanced teaching practicum. GTAs must enroll in a teaching practicum every semester of employment.

After successfully completing RELS 8970 and accepting an employment offer, GTAs are responsible for teaching as instructors of record in RELS 2001, "Introduction to World Religions." GTAs are closely monitored by the faculty advisor instructing the practicum in weekly meetings of the practicum and through individual teaching observations. In consultation with the Department Chairperson, the practicum instructor may remove a GTA who violates University policies or whose teaching or performance in the practicum falls below the Department's standards.

Enrollment: Full-time status

Only full-time students are eligible for funding and employment in the Department. Full-time status for funded students requires that a student be enrolled in a minimum of 18 hours during the fall or spring term and 9 hours in the Maymester and summer session combined.

Degree Requirements for the Master of Arts in Religious Studies

The Masters of Religious Studies offers two tracks: a thesis track and a course work intensive track. Students declare which track they intend to pursue after they have completed 24 hours of course work, usually at the end of the first year of study. Current degree requirements for the graduate degrees offered by the Department of Religious Studies may be found in the Georgia State University Graduate Catalog. The requirements are as follows:

Thesis Track

In order to receive the Masters of Religious Studies, a student must complete 30 hours of course work. These courses must include:

1. Twenty-four hours of non-thesis course work. As part of these twenty-four hours, a student successfully must complete:
 - a. One course in theory and methods in the study of religion (3):
 - i. RELS 8200 Pro-Seminar in Advanced Theory and Method (3)
 - b. At least one course from each of the following areas (6):
 - i. History of Religions (Abrahamic Traditions): RELS 6150, RELS 6450, RELS 6460, RELS 6470, RELS 6480, RELS 6483, RELS 6490, RELS 6570
 - ii. History of Religions (non-Abrahamic Traditions): RELS 6080, RELS6610, RELS 6612, RELS 6615, RELS 6620, RELS 6622, RELS 6625, RELS 6628
 - c. One course in comparative / thematic approaches to religions (3):
 - i. RELS 6080 Religious Dimensions in Human Experience (3)
 - ii. RELS 6200 Religion in America (3)
 - iii. RELS 6225 Psychology and Religion (3)
 - iv. RELS 6240 Death and the Afterlife (3)
 - v. RELS 6250 African-American Religion (3)
 - vi. RELS 6255 Religion, Race, and Nation (3)
 - vii. RELS 6465 Religion in the American South (3)
 - viii. RELS 6270 Women and Religion (3)
 - ix. RELS 6290 Pilgrimage (3)
 - x. RELS 6630 Comparative Study of Mysticism (3)
 - xi. RELS 6645 Religion and Sex in Pop Culture (3)
 - d. One course in religion and ethics / politics (3):
 - i. RELS 6030 Introduction to Human Rights (3)
 - ii. RELS 6150 Religion, Nation, and Law (3)
 - iii. RELS 6500 Ethics of Violence (3)
 - iv. RELS 6650 Religion and Ethics (3)
 - v. RELS 6670 Church and State (3)
 - vi. RELS 6680 War, Peace, and Religion (3)
 - e. Additional electives (9 graduate level hours) from either Religious Studies or affiliated courses (see below) to bring the total to twenty-four hours. Because the interests and goals of each student are distinct, students are highly encouraged to consult their academic adviser when selecting courses to complete the program of study.
2. Six hours of RELS 8999 Thesis Research
3. A thesis

4. An oral thesis defense

Coursework Intensive track

In order to receive the Masters of Religious Studies, a student must complete 36 hours of course work. These courses must include:

1. Thirty-six hours of intensive coursework. As part of these thirty-six hours, a student successfully must complete:
 - a. One course in theory and methods in the study of religion (3):
 - i. RELS 8200 Pro-Seminar in Advanced Theory and Method (3)
 - b. At least one course from each of the following areas (6):
 - i. History of Religions (Abrahamic Traditions): RELS 6150, RELS 6450, RELS 6460, RELS 6470, RELS 6480, RELS 6483, RELS 6490, RELS 6570
 - ii. History of Religions (non-Abrahamic Traditions): RELS 6080, RELS 6610, RELS 6612, RELS 6615, RELS 6620, RELS 6622, RELS 6625, RELS 6628
 - c. One course in comparative / thematic approaches to religions (3):
 - i. RELS 6080 Religious Dimensions in Human Experience (3)
 - ii. RELS 6200 Religion in America (3)
 - iii. RELS 6225 Psychology and Religion (3)
 - iv. RELS 6240 Death and the Afterlife (3)
 - v. RELS 6250 African-American Religion (3)
 - vi. RELS 6255 Religion, Race, and Nation (3)
 - vii. RELS 6465 Religion in the American South (3)
 - viii. RELS 6270 Women and Religion (3)
 - ix. RELS 6290 Pilgrimage (3)
 - x. RELS 6630 Comparative Study of Mysticism (3)
 - xi. RELS 6645 Religion and Sex in Pop Culture (3)
 - d. One course in religion and ethics / politics (3):
 - i. RELS 6030 Introduction to Human Rights (3)
 - ii. RELS 6150 Religion, Nation, and Law (3)
 - iii. RELS 6500 Ethics of Violence (3)
 - iv. RELS 6650 Religion and Ethics (3)
 - v. RELS 6670 Church and State (3)
 - vi. RELS 6680 War, Peace, and Religion (3)
 - e. Additional electives (21 graduate level hours) from either Religious Studies or affiliated courses (see below) to bring the total to thirty-six hours. Because the interests and goals of each student are distinct, students are highly encouraged to consult their academic adviser when selecting courses to complete the program of study.
 - f. Research competence must be demonstrated on the basis of a research paper. A committee of at least three members of the faculty will pass on the acceptability of the paper or project. Two-thirds of the committee must indicate approval. This approval must be submitted in writing to the Office of Graduate Services by the appropriate deadline announced on their webpage or via email.

Distribution Area Requirements

Faculty members determine which distribution areas their courses meet. Students may find a list of courses and the distribution areas they satisfy through the Department's "Resources" webpage.

Restrictions

1. Only six hours of credit transferred from another institution may be applied towards the Georgia State M.A.
2. Of the hours taken at Georgia State and applied toward the M.A, no more than six hours may be from outside the Department of Religious Studies.

Foreign Language Competencies

Depending upon their area(s) of concentration, students who wish to go on to pursue a Ph.D. in Religious Studies may need to initiate or complete studies in a particular language or languages before beginning doctoral studies. Students are urged to consult with their advisers for direction concerning language competencies.

The M.A. with Distinction

Students who meet all of the following requirements shall be awarded the M.A. with distinction:

1. A graduate Georgia State GPA of 3.50 or higher in courses applicable to the Religious Studies M.A.
2. A thesis that, upon vote of the committee grading the thesis, is judged to merit distinction.
3. A determination by the Director of Graduate Studies that the student's graduate record at Georgia State University is one of distinction.

M.A. with a Concentration in Nonprofit Management

Admissions

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of Master's degree-seeking students in terms of test scores, transcripts, the application fee, forms, and goals statement. Admission may occur in one of two ways. 1) A candidate may initially apply and be admitted to the M.A. in Religious Studies program (COAS). Then during the first year in that program, that student may apply to the Certificate Program in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. 2) Alternatively, a candidate may apply to both the AYSPS Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise Certificate program and the Masters Program in Religious Studies (COAS) simultaneously. Admission to the concentration is dependent on admission to both programs.

Once admitted, students will complete the Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise requirements as outlined below in the second year of coursework for the M.A. in Religious Studies (course-intensive track). The requirements for the Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise Certificate would also be accepted as electives toward the M.A. in Religious Studies. At the end of two years, a student will graduate with an M.A. in Religious Studies and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise from the AYSPS.

Supervision: The M.A. is housed in the Department of Religious Studies, and the Director of Graduate Studies supervises students' progress through the concentration.

The Concentration in Nonprofit Management has the following requirements:

Thirty-six hours of intensive coursework. As part of these thirty-six hours, a student successfully must complete:

Year 1 (18 hours):

1. RELS 8200 Pro-Seminar in Advanced Theory and Method (3)
2. At least one course from each of the following areas (6):
 - a. History of Religions (Abrahamic Traditions)
 - b. History of Religions (non-Abrahamic Traditions)
3. One course in comparative/thematic approaches to religions (3)
4. Two courses in religion and ethics/politics (6)

*Exceptions to this course plan can be made at the discretion of the Religious Studies Graduate Director.

Year 2 (18 hours):

5. One additional seminar in Religious Studies (3 credit hours)
6. Nonprofit electives coursework in the AYSPS: 12 graduate level hours)
 - a. AYSPS Certificate Required Course (3 hours):
PMAP 8210 Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector
 - b. AYSPS Certificate Approved Elective Courses (6 hours – choose two):
PMAP 8213 Nonprofit Financial Resources
PMAP 8261 Nonprofit Financial Management
PMAP 8223 Nonprofit Human Resources
 - c. Electives (3 hours – choose one):
Rels 6650, Religion and Ethics

Rels 6140 Religion and Law
Rels 6485 Ethics & Morality in Islam
Rels 6645 Religion and Sexuality in Popular Culture
OR an alternate 6000- or 8000- level course approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.

7. One semester internship (3 graduate level hours) offered through the Department of Religious Studies.

This course schedule brings the total credit hours for the program to thirty-six hours. Because the interests and goals of each student are distinct, students are highly encouraged to consult the Director of Graduate Studies (RELS) when selecting courses to complete the program of study.

8. Submit one paper representative of high quality graduate level research and writing. This paper will normally be written as the final paper for the elective taken to fulfill requirement "6.c" above.

This paper will be received and reviewed by the Faculty Advisor for the Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise as well as a faculty member in the Department of Religious Studies. This paper must articulate the relevance of the graduate-level Religious Studies course to the management of nonprofit organizations. This provides assurance that the student is integrating the knowledge gained in Religious Studies with the training in nonprofit management and vice versa.

9. NPM students submit the final paper to the Department and College in order to satisfy the non-thesis requirement. A copy of the paper and the completed non-thesis coversheet are due to the Director of Graduate Studies no later than week ten in the semester the student plans to graduate. The paper is approved by the Curriculum Committee, signed by the Graduate Director, and returned to the student, who then submits it to Graduate Services.

Concentration in Religion and Aging

Program Description

The M.A. of Religious Studies with a Concentration in Religion and Aging is designed to prepare students for work in professions related to health and human resources. A collaboration with the College of Arts and Sciences Gerontology Institute, this program provides training in religious literacy and cultural competency while students acquire the professional skills necessary for work related to human development.

Students who successfully complete the M.A. of Religious Studies with a Concentration in Religion and Aging will be able to employ the theories and methods acquired in their study of religions and aging to craft a final research project in which they:

- Identify relationships between the study of religions and aging significant to their own research interests and career objectives; and
- Articulate those relationships in a graduate-level research project that fulfills the M.A. with a Concentration in Religion and Aging degree requirement.

Administration and Curriculum

Admissions: Applicants must meet the admission requirements of Master's degree-seeking students in terms of test scores, transcripts, the application fee, forms, and goals statement. Students may earn the M.A. and Concentration without applying to the Gerontology Institute's certificate program, but students wishing to earn both the M.A. and certificate should apply to each separately either at the time of application to the M.A. program or after enrolling. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in Religious Studies advises students in the concentrations and deviations to the course plans outlined below should be directed to the DGS.

In order to receive the M.A. of Religious Studies with a Concentration in Religion and Aging, a student must complete:

1. Thirty-six hours of non-thesis course work.
2. Distribution requirements:
 - Theory and methods requirement: RELS 8200 Pro-Seminar in Advanced Theory and Method
 - History of Religions requirement (6 hours). At least one course in Abrahamic traditions and at least one course in non-Abrahamic traditions. See the list below for courses in these areas.
 - Comparative/thematic approaches to religions requirement (6 hours). See the list below for courses in this area.
 - Religion and ethics/politics requirement (3 hours). See the list below for courses in this area.
 - One additional 8000- or 6000-level course in Religious Studies (3 hours).

- Gerontology Certificate requirements, two of the following courses:
 - GERO 7110 Aging Policy and Services (3)
 - GERO 7200 Health and the Older Adult (3)
 - GERO 7260 Aging Practice, Policy, and Research (3)
 - GERO 8116 Sociology of Aging (3)
 - GERO 8320 Psychology of Aging (3)
 - Gerontology approved electives, one of the following courses:
 - GERO 6475 Communication and Aging (3)
 - GERO 8000 Seminar in Gerontology (3)
 - GERO 8124 Diversity and Aging (3)
 - GERO 8200 Aging Program Administration (3)
 - GERO 8330 Mental Health and Aging (3)
 - Or an alternate 7000 or 8000-level course approved by the Director of Graduate Studies in Religious Studies
 - Required elective, choose one of the following approved courses:
 - RELS 6240 Death and the Afterlife (3)
 - RELS 6225 Psychology and Religion (3)
 - RELS 6080 Religious Dimensions of Human Experience (3)
 - Or an alternate 6000- or 8000- level course approved by the Director of Graduate Studies
3. One semester internship: RELS 6400. In the internship placement agreement, the student and advisors must articulate the placement's relevance to the Concentration in Religion and Aging.
 4. Submit one paper/project representative of high-quality graduate level research and writing. This paper will be received and reviewed by a faculty member in Gerontology, as well as a faculty member in the Department of Religious Studies. Faculty will assess the learning outcomes outlined above when they review the final projects. The final project review is a formal process involving faculty advisors from both units and final approval by the Religious Studies Curriculum Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. The faculty advisors review the paper and record substantive feedback regarding the quality of its representation of the student's graduate level work in the M.A. and Concentration for the Curriculum Committee. The Committee's members review the comments and paper, and they make a final recommendation to the Director of Graduate Studies. If the Committee approves the project, the Director of Graduate Studies signs the cover sheet that the student submits to Graduate Services.

Dual Degree B.A./M.A. (4+1)

The department offers a dual Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Religious Studies. The dual degree opportunity enables qualified students to enroll in graduate courses late in their undergraduate program and apply the coursework toward both the bachelor's and master's programs.

Students must be formally accepted into the dual degree program by the department and College of Arts and Sciences to be able to take graduate courses as an undergraduate. Additionally, acceptance into the dual program does not constitute admission to the master's program. Students must fulfill regular graduate admissions requirements and apply for the master's program following college processes.

Information about the dual degree program, including application instructions and program requirements, can be found online.

Thesis Research and Writing

Finding a topic

Few students enter the program knowing exactly what their thesis topic will be. Most thesis track students develop a project through course work, and some of the best theses written by students in our program have started out as papers written in courses. As you select paper topics in your classes, think about how they might develop into longer projects.

Once a student has a sense of their topic, she should draft a tentative abstract and meet with any faculty she would like to invite to join their committee. An abstract is a brief statement (typically 150-200 words) of the project or paper's thesis and scope. Before meeting with individual faculty members, a student should consider why they would like each person to be on her committee (e.g., research expertise, methodological experience, etc.). Be ready to explain the project concisely and help the faculty member understand what he might contribute to your thesis committee.

Forming a committee

Thesis committees consist of a Director and at least two additional committee members. Directors and one committee member must be tenured or tenure-track faculty in the Department of Religious Studies. The third committee member may be graduate faculty from another GSU department or another university. Committees may include more than three members. Students wishing to assemble committees of more than three faculty members should first consult with their Thesis Director and the Director of Graduate Studies.

The frequency with which the student meets with his committee and/or Director is at the discretion of the student, Director, and committee members.

Writing the prospectus

Any graduate student who elects to write a M.A. thesis may enroll in RELS 8998, "Prospectus Research and Writing," with her Thesis Director after submitting the electronic registration form through the Director of Graduate Studies. A prospectus is a plan for research and writing that includes specific elements, such as an abstract, description of methodology, annotated bibliography, and explanation of the project's significance. Students present their prospectus to the faculty and any committee members from outside the Department in August, November, or April. Final drafts of the prospectus along with the committee's signature page are due via email to the Director of Graduate Studies by week ten of the fall or spring term or by August 1 for August presentations. Consult Appendix A for Prospectus Writing Guidelines.

Presenting the prospectus

Students present their prospectuses to the faculty in August, November, or April. The entire faculty reads and provides feedback to the student in writing or in person at the presentation. A prospectus presentation typically lasts ~30 minutes. The faculty confers briefly before the student enters the room. The student begins the presentation with a short statement (~2 minutes) of the project and then takes questions from

faculty not on the committee, committee members, and, time permitting, the Director (~25 minutes). During the presentation, the Thesis Director takes notes for the student. Following the presentation, the faculty confers to determine whether the student may enroll in RELS 8999 and if the student needs to make any revisions to the prospectus (~5 minutes).

After all of the scheduled prospectus presentations take place, the Directors inform their respective student(s) of the presentation's outcome.

Researching and writing the thesis

After a student successfully presents the prospectus to the faculty, he may enroll in RELS 8999, "Thesis Research and Writing," with his Director by submitting the electronic Thesis Research and Writing Registration form. Instructions for how to circulate the form appear on the document. Thesis track students must complete at least 6 hours of 8999, and they may be taken in a single semester or over two or more semesters. The latter is typical and recommended.

Timelines for thesis projects

These timelines outline normative thesis-writing schedules.

Thesis defense, submission, and embargoing

Prior to graduating, thesis students submit drafts of their work to their committee members for feedback and to Graduate Services for formatting review. Each semester Graduate Services sets deadlines for thesis format reviews and for defenses. Thesis writers should consult Graduate Services' schedule (available online) so that they present in time to revise and submit the final thesis to the College.

Writers schedule their own defenses at the convenience of their committee and in order to meet the College's deadlines. Students typically defend their theses to their committee in an hour-long conversation. Other faculty may attend the defense, but questions typically come from committee members. Students may invite friends or family to attend the defense if they wish.

Sample theses

Sample theses are available on the Department's webpage, or Georgia State affiliates may search the University Library's thesis database. A selection of M.A. theses:

**You may need to be on campus or sign in via proxy to access these through the University Library.

Edward Van Herik, "Moral Injury on the Home Front: Can a New Approach Provide Fresh Insight into Spirituality and Alcoholism?," 2015 (Dr. Moultrie, Director)

Karli Robinson-Myers, "Sankofa Healing: A Womanist Analysis of the Retrieval and Transformation of African Ritual Dance," 2015 (Dr. Moultrie, Director)

Natalie Barber, "The Way They Never Were: Nationalism, Landscape, and Myth in Irish Identity Construction," 2014 (Dr. Bassett, Director)

Suzanne Degnats, "Dispositional Religiosity: Religion in the Context of Life Narratives," 2013 (Dr. McClymond, Director)

Kelly O'Riley, "Hagiography, Teratology, and the 'History' of Michael Jackson," 2011 (Dr. Lloyd, Director)

Grades and Grade Point Average

Minimum grade point average requirements

Students must earn a 3.0 GPA at the end of their first terms and a 3.2 GPA in subsequent semesters. If a student's GPA falls below the minimum requirement, the Director of Graduate Studies will initiate Academic Termination (see below).

Letter grades

In accordance with department policy, Religious Studies instructors use a +/- scale: A+ 97-100; A 93-96; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D 60-69; F 0-59. An explanation of the College of Arts and Sciences graduate grading system may be found in the Course Catalog (§1328).

Satisfactory and unsatisfactory grades

S: Satisfactory

This symbol indicates that credit has been given for completion of degree requirements other than academic course work. The use of this symbol is approved for dissertation and thesis hours, student teaching, clinical practicum, internship, and proficiency requirements in graduate programs.

U: Unsatisfactory

This symbol indicates unsatisfactory performance in an attempt to complete degree requirements other than academic course work. No credit will be given. The use of this symbol is approved for dissertation and thesis hours, student teaching, clinical practicum, internship, and proficiency requirements in graduate programs.

RELS 8960: Research in Religious Studies

Students working as Graduate Assistants (GAs, GRAs, GLRAs, and GTAs) enroll in RELS 8960 to receive credit for the work they do as assistants. At the conclusion of each semester, the instructor of record, typically the Director of Graduate Studies, assigns a S/U grade for the student's work based on the recommendation of the faculty member with whom she worked.

RELS 8999: Thesis Research and Writing

Students receive an In Progress (IP) "grade" in RELS 8999 each semester they enroll until the defense. After a successful defense, the instructor of record, typically the Thesis Director, assigns a S or U.

Changes in grades

A course grade that has been reported by the instructor to the Office of the Registrar and recorded cannot be changed except in the following circumstances:

1. Error in grade – If a student believes that there is an error in a grade, the student should discuss the situation with the instructor. A request for a change of grade assigned by an instructor who has left the University should be addressed to the chair of the department.
2. Removal of an Incomplete – A student receiving a grade of I (incomplete) is expected to consult with the instructor within the prescribed time limit and to

complete all necessary work. The period of time given to a student to remove a grade of I is established by the instructor, subject only to the maximum time limit set by the university. The university requires that a grade of I be removed not later than the end of the second academic term after the grade of I was assigned (whether or not the student was enrolled during these two terms). The Office of the Registrar will automatically assign a grade of F at the end of the second academic term unless the Office of the Registrar receives an approved grade adjustment request from the instructor. (If the student enrolled for S/U grading, a U will be assigned.). Using the grade adjustment form, instructors may or may not change this F/U to an authorized academic grade (i.e., A, B, C, D, S or WF) but may not change it back to an I. Instructors may not change an I to a W unless an Emergency Withdrawal is awarded. In exceptional cases, departments may authorize students to have an I grade for more than two semesters. Such authorizations must be approved by the department chair. The authorization to extend the I beyond two semesters must be renewed each semester. Students need not be enrolled to complete assignments for a course in which a grade of I has been assigned. Auditing or retaking the same course will not remove a grade of I. No student may graduate with an incomplete grade for that particular degree program.

Department, College, and University Policies and Procedures

Directed Readings

As with all classes offered by the Department, the Chair is responsible for scheduling RELS 8950 (Directed Readings). By agreement of the faculty, the Department does not currently offer Directed Readings courses. Students wishing seeking an exception to this policy should contact the Chair directly.

Academic Honesty

See the Graduate College's policy on Academic Honesty.

Scholastic Termination Dismissal Procedures

The Department of Religious Studies is committed to supporting students in their progress through the program in every way consistent with the maintenance of acceptable academic and professional standards. There are, however, occasions when the standards of the College of Arts and Sciences or the Department of Religious Studies are not met and dismissal (called "scholastic termination" by the College of Arts and Sciences) must be considered.

The College of Arts and Sciences ultimately assumes responsibility for both the admission of students and, in rare cases, their dismissal. Nonetheless, a Religious Studies student is subject to both Department and College standards. The procedure for dismissal and appeal differs somewhat when a Department standard (e.g., progress guidelines) or a College standard (e.g., cumulative GPA) is violated.

When a departmental standard is violated, the Director of Graduate Studies will initiate the dismissal action.

Reasons for initiating dismissal at the departmental level include a student's:

1. failure to maintain a Religious Studies GPA of 3.0 in the first semester and 3.2 in subsequent semesters;
2. failure to present an acceptable individualized plan to the Graduate Director and Curriculum Committee within the semester the student's progress met the criterion for dismissal;
3. failure to follow the timeline and guidelines set by the faculty and/or thesis committee following requests for the revision and resubmission of a prospectus; and
4. failure to pass a thesis defense or complete the hours necessary for the coursework intensive track within one academic term after a failed defense.

In the first step of the dismissal process, the student will receive written notice from the Director of Graduate Studies of the reason that dismissal is being considered and the steps that may be taken to prevent dismissal. The student must acknowledge receipt of this notice in writing. In the event that the student fails to address or correct the deficiency during the specified probationary period, dismissal or academic termination will be finalized.

Department Level Appeal Procedures

The student may appeal academic dismissal, in writing, to the Director of Graduate Studies, although such an appeal must be received no later than 15 business days after notice was given. The appeal will be considered by the Curriculum Committee. At the meeting called for this purpose, the student has the opportunity to present evidence, including any written or verbal testimony from faculty with whom he or she has worked, that he or she is capable of successful completion of the graduate program and that the conditions leading to the dismissal action represent atypical behavior or the presence of temporary, mitigating circumstances. The committee will inform the student of their decision within 20 business days of receiving the appeal.

Actions of the Curriculum Committee may include, but are not limited to:

- (a) letting the dismissal action stand, in which case the student may not continue in the program; or
- (b) placing the student on probation and specify remedial actions which must be taken before the student may continue in the program. Such actions are at the discretion of the Graduate Director and Curriculum Committee as informed by faculty who are familiar with the student's work. Retaking courses with low grades is one possible action. A deadline for completing such remedial action must be specified by the Graduate Director in consultation with the Curriculum Committee.

If an appeal is granted and the student is placed on probation, the Director of Graduate Studies will monitor whether the student has met the specified requirements by the specified deadline. If the student has not done so, the Director of Graduate Studies will proceed with the dismissal action.

If the student believes that a decision by the Graduate Director and Curriculum Committee has been arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory, he or she may appeal the decision in writing to the chair of the Department. This action must be taken within 10 business days of the date of the Graduate Program Committee's decision.

If the student does not appeal the decision or if the appeal is denied at the departmental level, the Director of Graduate Studies will forward the recommendation for dismissal to the Associate Dean for the Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences. The Associate Dean will notify the student that this has occurred. The student may then appeal the decision through normal channels within the College of Arts and Sciences.

College Level Dismissal and Appeals Procedures

When a College standard is violated, the dismissal action is taken by the Associate Dean for the Humanities. As is true at the departmental level, dismissal occurs only after the student has failed to correct the deficiency during any specified probationary period.

Reasons for initiating dismissal at the College level include:

- 1) failure to achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.0 after the probationary period of 18 semester-hours;
- 2) failure to maintain the level of academic performance and progress required by the major Department; and
- 3) a second failure on the general examination (or its equivalent) in the graduate degree program.

In such cases, the Graduate Director and Curriculum Committee are not empowered to consider an appeal. The student may, however, request support from the Curriculum Committee for an appeal to the appropriate College committee. The student should refer to the College Graduate Bulletin for instructions on appeal procedures at this level.

[Other University and College Policies and Procedures](#)

Consult the Graduate College Handbook for University Academic Regulations.

Locker use

- Lockers are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. See the Administrative Coordinator to sign up for a locker.
- There are no day-use lockers. Students may use only the locker assigned to them.
- You must provide your own lock.
- Locker assignments are for the semester. At the end of each semester, you must clear out all contents of your locker. Failure to do so will result in cutting your lock and discarding of the locker's contents.
- No food/beverages, hazardous, or illegal materials may be stored in the lockers.
- Do not use any adhesive (tape, hooks, stickers, etc.) in or on the lockers.
- Lockers should be used to store school/teaching supplies and personal items necessary for use at the university.
- You are solely responsible for the contents of the locker. The Department assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of any item(s) in a locker, locked or unlocked.
- You must keep your locker in good condition.
- There is a fee for damaged lockers. The fee is the cost to repair the lockers plus \$25. If you notice damage at the time your locker is assigned, please report it to the Administrative Coordinator immediately.
- Failure to comply with the usage guidelines may result in loss of privileges.
- All lockers are the property of GSU. Although the Department respects the privacy of locker occupants, the Department reserves the right to cut the occupant's lock at any time. The Department also reserves the right to alter the policies governing the use of lockers.

University and College Policies and Procedures

University and College policies and procedures, including registration for courses, application for graduation, residency requirements, continuous enrollment, inactive status, transfer credit limits, and time limits on coursework presented for degrees may be found online in the Graduate Course Catalog.

Frequently Asked Questions

To quickly find answers to general or common questions, such as subscribing to RELGRAD, please visit the FAQs webpage.

First Year Graduate Students

- Subscribe to RELGRAD.
- Apply for graduation early in the student's second semester
- Etiquette
 - Graduates students are professionals in training. Professionalism should be reflected in emails and all other interactions with colleagues and professors.
- Nonprofit Management Concentration
 - Students with the Nonprofit Management concentration should apply to the Certificate Program in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies by the appropriate deadline. Check the AYSPS webpage for their fall and spring application deadlines.
- Thesis Track
 - Students who have chosen the thesis track should use the first year to develop a thesis idea and thesis committee. It is advised, but not required, to present the thesis prospectus before the onset of the student's second year in the program.

Appendix A: Thesis Prospectus Guidelines

Title

FirstName LastName

Master's Thesis Prospectus

Date

Abstract

Your abstract should introduce briefly your topic and thesis (150 word maximum). A topic is a general research area; a thesis is your interpretation or main argument about your research area. Keep in mind that successful theses are narrowly focused. You should not try to take on more than you would in a seminar paper or journal article. A good thesis will carefully circumscribe your topic and then examine it in depth. Faculty members will be happy to help you craft a suitably narrowed topic and thesis.

Methodology

In your methodology section (1-2 double-spaced pages) you should discuss how you will conduct your research. What kinds of materials will you study and how will you study them? If you are going to read closely a set of primary texts, how will you do so? What key ideas or theories are going to help you? If you are going to study a religious community, how and when will you do it? How will you get access to this community? What theoretical materials will help you understand it?

Assembling a methodology section involves understanding 1) what your primary source materials are (which texts, philosophical arguments, ritual behaviors, etc. you will study); 2) how you are going to study these materials; and 3) what theoretical or scholarly ideas or models you will use to help you interpret these primary materials. All of this information should be included in the methodology section.

Annotated Bibliography

In this section (1-2 double-spaced pages) you will list the key sources (primary and secondary) that you will use in your thesis. For each book or article in your bibliography you will need to include one or two sentences about the source and how it supports your argument and/or develops your thesis. Your annotated bibliography should include 10 to 15 sources.

Significance

In this section (1 double-spaced page) you have an opportunity to contextualize your research within the present literature, to explain its contribution to relevant academic conversation(s).

Committee Signatures**

** In this section you will need to list your three committee members. You will need to discuss your project with each committee member and have them sign by their name before you turn in your thesis prospectus.

Dr. Kermit T. Frog, Director

Dr. Rowlf T. Dog, Committee Member

Dr. Pepe T. Prawn, Committee Member

Appendix B: Guidelines for Degree Completion

Masters of Religious Studies – Guidelines for Degree Completion

Students in Georgia State's M.A. in Religious Studies begin two years of full time study with a year of coursework. In the spring or summer of their first year, students prepare a thesis prospectus under the direction of a thesis chairperson and committee, and they spend the majority of their second year focused on research and writing. This document is a guide for navigating the coursework and thesis process necessary for completing GSU's M.A. in Religious Studies.

Preparing the Thesis: Generating Ideas

Some students enter the M.A. program with a clear sense of their course of study and thesis project; others take some time to come to a topic. Many students find that coursework helps them think through and refine thesis topics. Consider taking a variety of courses to encounter new ideas and approaches, as well as meet faculty members.

Preparing the Thesis: Your Prospectus & Committee

A thesis prospectus details your project's scope and aim, methodology and significance. The prospectus also includes an annotated bibliography. (For more information on the prospectus, see the Thesis Information link under Graduate Programs on the Department's webpage.)

A student writes his/her thesis prospectus in consultation with a thesis committee of his/her choosing. The committee must include at least three faculty, two of whom are affiliated with Religious Studies. The Department encourages students to include committee members from outside Religious Studies. Of the three (or more) committee members, the student works most closely with the thesis chairperson (also known as the thesis advisor or director).

Presenting the Prospectus

Students must submit the written prospectus to the Department at one of three annual deadlines: the fall or spring semester's midpoint (see the Registrar's calendar) or the summer deadline (August 1). By the appropriate deadline, deliver a physical copy of the prospectus with the signatures of each committee member in ink to Claire Kooy, and submit an electronic copy to both Claire and the Graduate Director.

Approximately two to three weeks after a student submits his/her written prospectus, she presents it in person to the faculty. The thesis presentation provides the student with an opportunity to hear feedback from faculty members not on the thesis committee. Think of the presentation as a time when much of the faculty will be focused on each student's project, able to think through questions with the student and recommend resources.

Writing the Thesis

After receiving the department's approval and the Graduate Director's signature on the prospectus form, the student may begin researching and writing the thesis under the direction of his/her thesis chairperson and committee. Beginning the semester following the prospectus's approval, students enroll in RELS 8999 each semester by filling out a form found on the website (linked to RELS 8999 as a pdf) and turning it in to Claire Kooy.

Completing the Thesis

Upon completion of the thesis, the student defends his/her work before the thesis committee, whose approval of the final document is required for graduation. The thesis committee may recommend the student for graduation with distinction.

The following timelines represent two paths to degree completion within normative time, that is to say two years of full time coursework. These timelines are general guidelines; each student should work with his/her thesis chairperson to coordinate an appropriate prospectus preparation, research and writing schedule. Timeline A reflects the progress of a student who enters the program with a thesis topic; Timeline B represents that of a student who takes more time to develop a topic. As you read through these guidelines, please keep in mind that students all enter the program on the thesis track, but some (especially those who are not going to pursue a Ph.D.) may switch to the non-thesis track during the program.

Sample Timeline A

Semester 1

- * Theories and Methods (required)
- * Coursework (Graduate seminars, area studies, languages)
 - * Consider taking a variety of courses spanning areas of interest and exploration to get a sense of which faculty may be well suited for your committee and course of study
- * Initiate thesis conversations with faculty (October).
 - * Read thesis guidelines (online).
 - * Brainstorm thesis ideas.
 - * Begin thinking about a thesis committee chairperson.
 - * Look at example thesis prospectuses (available from Graduate Director and Claire Kooy).

Semester 2

- * Coursework
- * Construct thesis prospectus through conversations with your committee (January-February).
 - * In early January, let your committee know that you're planning to submit a thesis prospectus in March.
 - * Complete your prospectus in time for your committee to review it before the submission deadline (2-3 weeks).
- * Submit thesis prospectus at the semester's midpoint (early March).
- * Present thesis prospectus to faculty committee 2-3 weeks later (late March).
 - * Meet with your thesis chairperson to discuss the prospectus presentation and faculty feedback.
 - * Follow up on the faculty committee's feedback.

Summer

- * Begin thesis research & writing (course credit optional)

Semester 3

- * Coursework (limited)
- * Thesis research & writing (enroll in RELS 8999)
 - * Be in touch with your thesis chairperson; update him/her on your progress; and find out what his/her expectations are regarding meetings or reading drafts.
- * Check the Graduate Office's webpage for Thesis Preparation Guidelines.
- * Register for graduation; the Graduate Office asks that students register two semesters in advance.

Semester 4

- * Coursework (very limited)
- * Thesis writing & revising (enroll in RELS 8999)
 - * Contact your committee members as you finish your thesis draft.
 - * Give your committee plenty of time (4-5 weeks) to read the draft before your defense. You may need time to make revisions.
 - * Plan the date for your defense.
 - * Check the Graduate Office's recommended dates for thesis defenses and graduation activities on the "Graduation Requirements and Calendars" webpage.
 - * It is also the student's responsibility to coordinate the timing with his/her committee and to reserve a room for the defense; see Felicia Thomas to reserve a room.
 - * Send your committee a "defense draft" of your thesis that incorporates your committee's feedback one week before your defense.
- * After your successful defense:
 - * notify the Director of Graduate Studies;
 - * get all the committee signatures;
 - * give a copy of the signature page to each committee member;
 - * submit the original signature page to the Graduate Office;
 - * upload thesis to the Library's Electronic Theses and Dissertations Database.
- * Graduate at the end of the spring semester!

Sample Timeline B

Semester 1

- * Theories and Methods (required)
- * Coursework (Graduate seminars, area studies, languages)
 - * Consider taking a variety of courses spanning areas of interest and exploration to get a sense of which faculty may be well suited for your committee and course of study
- * Construct thesis prospectus through conversations with your committee (October).
 - * Read thesis guidelines (online).
 - * Brainstorm thesis ideas.
 - * Begin thinking about a thesis committee chairperson.
 - * Look at example thesis prospectuses (available from Graduate Director and Claire Kooy).

Semester 2

- * Coursework
- * Write thesis prospectus (March-May).
 - * Before the semester ends, let your committee know that you're planning to submit a thesis prospectus in August.
 - * Complete your prospectus in time for your committee to review it before the submission deadline (2-3 weeks). Keep in mind that faculty may be out of town during the summer.

Summer 1

- * Submit thesis prospectus by August 1. Students do not need to be enrolled in order to present a thesis prospectus at the end of the summer.
- * Present thesis prospectus to faculty committee (late August).
 - * Follow up on the faculty committee's feedback.

Semester 3

- * Coursework (limited)
- * Thesis research & writing (enroll in RELS 8999)
 - * Be in touch with your thesis chairperson; update him/her on your progress; and find out what his/her expectations are regarding occasional meetings or reading drafts.
- * Check the Graduate Office's webpage for Thesis Preparation Guidelines.
- * Register for graduation; the Graduate Office asks that students register two semesters in advance.

Semester 4

- * Coursework (very limited)
- * Thesis writing & revising (enroll in RELS 8999)
 - * Contact your committee members as you finish your thesis draft.
 - * Give your committee plenty of time (4-5 weeks) to read the draft before your defense. You may need time to make revisions.
 - * Plan the date for your defense.
 - * Check the Graduate Office's recommended dates for thesis defenses and graduation activities on the "Graduation Requirements and Calendars" webpage.
 - * It is also the student's responsibility to coordinate the timing with his/her committee and to reserve a room for the defense; see Felicia Thomas to reserve a room.
 - * Send your committee a "defense draft" of your thesis that incorporates your committee's feedback one week before your defense.
- * After your defense:
 - * notify the Director of Graduate Studies;
 - * get all the committee signatures;
 - * give a copy of the signature page to each committee member; and
 - * submit the original signature page to the Graduate Office.
 - * Upload thesis to the Library's Electronic Theses and Dissertations Database.
- * Graduate at the end of spring semester!

----- OR -----

Summer 2a

- * Thesis writing & revising (enroll in RELS 8999)
 - * Contact your committee members as you finish your thesis draft.
 - * Give your committee plenty of time (4-5 weeks) to read the draft before your defense. You may need time to make revisions.
 - * Plan the date for your defense.
 - * Check the Graduate Office's recommended dates for thesis defenses and graduation activities on the "Graduation Requirements and Calendars" webpage.
 - * It is also the student's responsibility to coordinate the timing with his/her committee and to reserve a room for the defense; see the 16th floor staff person to reserve a room.
 - * Send your committee a "defense draft" of your thesis that incorporates your committee's feedback one week before your defense.
- * After your defense:
 - * notify the Director of Graduate Studies;
 - * get all the committee signatures;
 - * give a copy of the signature page to each committee member; and
 - * submit the original signature page to the Graduate Office.
 - * Upload thesis to the Library's Electronic Theses and Dissertations Database.
- * Graduate at the end of summer!

----- OR -----

Summer 2b

A student may also defend his/her thesis by the last day of spring semester classes, upload the document before the start of the next semester and graduate in the summer. Following this model, the student avoids paying tuition and fees in the summer.