

INDIANA UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Guide for Graduate Students in the Department of
Religious Studies
(revised August 2023)

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. This guide supplements the Graduate School Bulletin, which is the final 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” in the Bulletin, which contain rules that govern all degree programs.

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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. Every faculty member is available to offer you advice and to talk with you about your interests and concerns. Your advisory committee should be your first stop; however, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) should be your first point of contact when it comes to technical questions about program requirements, financial aid, e-documents, and other administrative matters. The DGS is assisted by the Department’s Graduate Secretary, 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, etc.

The faculty member who serves as the DGS changes regularly and other faculty go on leaves; thus, the person primarily responsible for getting you through your graduate program in an efficient and successful manner is ultimately you. You should familiarize yourself with the requirements of your degree program and formulate a good plan to meet those requirements. The information in this Guide is designed to help with 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 which interests you. MA students have diverse goals: to enter a doctoral program in religious studies, to teach at the secondary-education 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 at the graduate level, including REL-R 665 “Interpretations of Religion” and at least two other 600- or 700-level seminars. 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 count toward 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. (see IV below, “Fulfilling Language Requirements”).
- (4) Complete an approved revision of a research paper, 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 that is not a requirement. 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 with the Graduate Secretary. 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 or German do **not** count toward the 30 credit hours required for the degree.

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 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 coursework.

2. 600/700-Level Seminars

Take R 665 in your first semester. Take two 600-level (or 700-level) seminars early in your coursework.

3. Language Work

If you choose French, German, or common alternatives to these such as Spanish*, you may fulfill the requirement by passing the certifying test that is offered at the beginning of the academic year, 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), or by completing a standard sequence of language courses (usually through year three). Note that these courses do not contribute credit hours to the degree.

* If you wish to use a language other than French or German, first speak to your advising committee and then get the approval of the DGS before taking courses or otherwise preparing to certify in it. For more details, see IV below.

4. Graduating

To receive your MA degree, you must apply for the degree at the Graduate School website under the “forms” submenu, or via One.IU (as of August 2016, this form is termed “Master’s Application for Advanced Degree”). 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 technically receive it until later). Information about Commencement, including rental of gowns, etc., is posted on the IU web site early in the spring semester.

C. Advice and Counsel

1. Advising

When you enter the program, you are assigned an advisory committee. You should consult with them each semester (usually in November and April) before registering for classes and at other times as needed. We also encourage you to consult with other faculty members in your area of interest.

Before you meet your Advisory Committee, you should pick up a Graduate Advisory Committee Form (also known as the “yellow sheet”) from the Graduate Secretary, fill it out as completely as you can, and bring it with you to your meeting. At the end of the meeting, a member of your committee will fill out the last section of this form, “Progress, Evaluation, and Professional Development.” After the meeting, please turn the form in to the Graduate Secretary who will

place it in your file. You will not be able to register for classes for the next semester until you turn in your Graduate Advisory Committee Form.

2. Strategy

If you are to complete your MA efficiently, you need to fulfill the requirements promptly. In your first meeting with your advisory committee, before your first semester, you should discuss how you will fulfill the language requirement. In your first semester, take R 665, and make sure that your other courses fulfill other requirements (e.g., a 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.

III. Getting the PhD

A. Time Limits, Expectations, and Advising

1. Time Limits and Expectations

Until you complete all requirements except 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, all your coursework must be completed within a period of seven years before the date you pass your Qualifying Examination. This includes courses that you transfer from another institution (or courses from an MA program within IU). 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 procedure that is described in the Bulletin.

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 you complete your Qualifying Examination. 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 dissertation 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.

The expectation of the Graduate School and the Department is that you will become a candidate by completing coursework and language requirements and by passing the Qualifying Examination no later than the end of the third post-master’s 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 G 901. Therefore, your goal should be to use your **first two years** to complete required courses and to use your **third year** to finish any remaining language requirements and to prepare for and take the Qualifying Examination, typically near the end of the third year or the beginning of the fourth.

2. Advising

The Graduate School requires that doctoral students be advised by an Advisory Committee, which will be assigned before your first semester starts.

The members of this initial Advisory Committee will be a mix of faculty members, including those in fields of your interest and those beyond. This diversity serves to encourage students to articulate their interests and plans in ways that make sense across multiple subfields of religious studies.

The Advisory Committee also supervises the Qualifying Examination; however, your initially

assigned Advisory Committee can be changed for the purposes of your Exams. Begin by meeting with potential examiners, and once they have confirmed, you will submit an online form found on the website of the College of Arts and Sciences (click on “Student Portal” near the top of the page, then look under “forms” in the tabs at the left).

PhD students should meet with their Advisory Committee at least once each semester to discuss their progress including course plans, language requirements, their minor department, and other program requirements. At the meeting in the spring semester 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.

Before you meet your Advisory Committee, you should fill out a Graduate Advisory Committee Form (also known as the “yellow sheet”) as completely as you can and bring it with you to your meeting. At the end of the meeting, a member of your committee will fill out the last section of this form, “Progress, Evaluation, and Professional Development.” After the meeting, please turn the form in to the Graduate Secretary who will place it in your file. You will not be able to register for classes for the next semester until you turn in your Graduate Advisory Committee Form.

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 dissertation committee (officially called your “Research Committee”). They can be the same faculty as your Advisory Committee for the Qualifying Examination, or you may choose new faculty members. See below for more information on this process.

Throughout your entire career, your committees and the DGS are 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. 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 up to 30 graduate-level hours earned previous to starting the PhD. You may transfer up to 30 hours 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. All of these credit hours are subject to the seven-year rule (see above regarding time limits).

You may earn up to 30 credit hours toward work on your dissertation. Dissertation credits are counted with the course number REL-R 799. Most students do not accumulate dissertation credits while they are actually writing the dissertation; instead, they accumulate them while

doing course work. This is because funding packages usually cover up to 12 credit hours per semester; and since courses often do not add up to 12 credits, the remainder is filled with R 799 credits. For example, if you register for R 665 (4 credits) and two 500-level courses (3 credits each), your semester total will be 10 credit hours. The remaining two credits should be R 799. This will allow for timely progress in the program. Note that there is no instructor associated with these credits, and you are not expected to demonstrate any work for these credits.

Also note that only graduate level courses count toward the 90 required credit hours. Language credits, even those geared toward graduate study (e.g., F491), often do not count toward the degree. These classes, however, do count among the 12 credit hour semester limit.

2. Required Course Work

You must take the following courses:

- (1) R 665 “Interpretations of Religion” (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) Three courses at the 700-level
- (4) Teaching Practicum (R 790) (2 hours)

If you took R 665 as an MA student at IU, you do not need to take it again.

Note that the teaching practicum (R 790) is generally offered as a year-long course *every other* year. You should take it during your first or second year.

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. The specific requirements for Minors are listed in the Graduate Bulletin, under the relevant department or program.

One 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. Because faculty members often have multiple appointments, some faculty within Religious Studies can also represent the minor-granting unit.

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 our Graduate Secretary that states you have completed their requirements.

C. Language Requirements

1. Languages of Scholarship

Doctoral students must demonstrate reading proficiency in at least two modern languages of scholarship. By default, these languages are French and German, but you may substitute another modern language for one of these with the approval of the DGS and your advising group. Discuss what will work best with your advisory committee, and then submit a written request to the DGS.

2. Primary Source Languages

Students must show proficiency in one or more primary source languages. You will determine with your advising committee which languages you need to learn and how you will demonstrate proficiency in them; these decisions should be recorded on the advising form.

For more details on how to meet your language requirements, see IV below.

D. Research Papers Requirements

You must produce two research papers between 20-30 pages (not counting endnotes) prior to taking your Qualifying Examination. We often call these “file papers.” 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. These papers will normally develop out of your 600- and 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. Note that the same professor cannot approve both papers. There is a form for this purpose on file with the Graduate Secretary. 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 on the recommendation of your Advisory Committee and with the approval of the DGS.

E. Qualifying Examinations

Once you finish your course work, the next step is to take your Qualifying Examination. By the semester in which you take your Qualifying Examination, you should have completed all other requirements (including languages), have no outstanding incompletes, and be making good progress through the program. In some cases, the DGS may allow you to take your Qualifying Examination and to complete a requirement (e.g., a remaining language) shortly thereafter. Keep in mind that in order to be nominated to candidacy you must have completed all requirements and passed your Qualifying Examination by the seventh year of entering the program.

The Qualifying Examination is supervised by a committee of faculty members. The Graduate School requires that this committee have at least three members: two must come from the Department (including those with adjunct appointments) 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 must have two other faculty from the Department.

These faculty 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 this 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 usually 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 track of Religious Studies may have its own specifications as to the number and topics of exams.

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.

At the conclusion of the oral part of the exam, the Advisory Committee determines the outcome. The possibilities recorded with the Graduate School are either Pass or Fail, where Fail is for 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. If a student does not pass, the Qualifying Examination may be retaken once, either whole or in part. 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, you will then fill out the "Nomination to Candidacy for the PhD Degree Application" eDoc. When you submit the form, it is routed to the faculty on your exam committee and DGS for approval before it is sent to the University Graduate School for final approval.

F. The Dissertation

Within six months of being accepted to candidacy by the Graduate School, you should defend your dissertation proposal in a meeting with the faculty who will eventually be the members of your Research Committee (aka the dissertation committee). Faculty have to go through an

additional process of becoming members of the Graduate School to be able to direct and serve on Research Committees. Thus, notifying faculty far ahead of time will give them a chance to verify their eligibility and join the Graduate School. Two more members of the Research Committee must come from the Department, and an additional member must represent the minor area. If the dissertation research will not touch closely on the area of the minor, however, the DGS can ask the minor department to waive this requirement. At least three IU faculty must serve on the Research Committee. Faculty from other institutions may also advise on the dissertation; however, from the Graduate School's perspective, these faculty are not official members of the Research Committee.

The dissertation proposal is usually a document of 10-15 pages, followed by a bibliography. You formulate the proposal in consultation with your director. Once you and your director feel it is ready, you circulate it to the other committee members for their comments and suggestions. When the members judge the proposal to be ready, you will schedule a meeting. 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, the "Nomination of Research Committee for the PhD," requires you to append a "one-two page summary of the proposed research." This is not the proposal itself; rather, it is a condensed form of the proposal that the Graduate School will keep for their records. 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, or via One.IU. The electronic form will be routed to the Department, which verifies that you have completed all the requirements. It will also be forwarded for approval to the members of the Research Committee, the DGS, and then the Chair (all of whom must approve the e-document) and then forwarded to the Graduate School.

While you write the dissertation, you must be continuously enrolled at IU, at least part-time. You may also register for G 901, which charges a nominal flat fee and certifies you as a full-time student (for visa, health insurance, and other purposes). You can register for G 901 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 R 799 until you finish (note that visa regulations for international students may require more than one hour). This is considerably more expensive than G 901. If you defend your dissertation in a summer semester, you must register for G 901 or one hour of R 799 in that semester as well. Until your candidacy expires, you are considered a continuing student as long as you have at least one hour of R 799.

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 at least thirty days prior to the defense; this formal notice may be posted on the web. The online form "PhD Defense Announcement" found under the One.IU Indiana University Graduate School submenu must be submitted and approved no later than 30 days before your scheduled defense date. Other faculty, graduate students, and community members may attend the defense. The Research Committee conducts the defense, announcing the conditions of approval at its conclusion. Once the dissertation is approved, you must prepare the manuscript according to guidelines determined by the

Graduate School. Check the Graduate Recorder's website for the specifics of the submission process.

If you want to participate in Commencement, you must submit the PhD Commencement Participation Application via the Graduate School website (also available via One.IU). Otherwise, the various sets of documentation surrounding the approval of the dissertation suffice for receiving your degree. Information about Commencement is always posted on IU's web site early in the spring semester.

IV. Fulfilling Language Requirements

These are parts of the Religious Studies section of the Bulletin that pertain to language requirements:

For the MA: "All M.A. students must demonstrate reading proficiency in one of the two modern languages of scholarship required for the Ph.D. (French or German). Another language may be substituted with the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies and the student's advisors. Students may demonstrate proficiency in French, German, or Spanish by any of the three methods normally sanctioned by the University Graduate School. They may demonstrate proficiency in other languages by successful completion of course work through the intermediate level or by departmental examination."

For the PhD: "All candidates will be required to show proficiency in two modern languages of scholarship (French and German) and any necessary primary source languages required by their field. Other modern languages may be substituted for French or German with the approval of the director of graduate studies and the student's advisors. Proficiency in primary source languages is demonstrated through methods determined by the faculty in the student's field."

This means that MA students must show reading proficiency in one modern language of scholarship and PhD students must show reading proficiency in two modern languages of scholarship. Those are met via the requirements spelled out below. In addition, PhD students may need to show proficiency in primary source languages, which is handled by the student's committee and faculty within the department.

The Bulletin States:

"Reading proficiency in a foreign language is normally established in one of three ways:

1. By achieving an appropriate score on an examination administered on the Bloomington campus by the respective language department; students should contact the language department for details.
2. By completing, with a grade of B (3.0) or better, the reading course 492 (e.g., F492 for French, G492 for German). Students may register for the first course in the sequence, 491 to prepare for 492; those who feel they have sufficient preparation may register for 492, though they should consult the language advisor first.
3. By receiving, in the cases of Catalan, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, or Spanish, a grade of B (3.0) or better in a literature or civilization course at Indiana University numbered 300 or higher (exclusive of individual readings and correspondence courses) in which the reading is done in the foreign language. Courses in Russian offered to meet this requirement must be approved by the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures.

In certain departments, reading proficiency may be demonstrated by presenting an original translation for approval by a faculty examiner designated by the appropriate language department. For details, consult with the respective language departments.”

V. Overview of eDocs

For MA students and for students without an MA who are on the PhD track:

In order to receive your MA, you will need to fill out the *Master's Application for Advanced Degree* eDoc. If you entered the PhD program without an MA, it's a good idea to apply for the MA degree along the way (i.e., at the end of your second year).

For timelines and other requirements for graduation, consult the Graduate School's website.

For PhD students:

- 1) Once you pass your qualifying exams, you will need to fill out and submit the *Nomination to Candidacy for the PhD Degree* eDoc. Once that is approved, you will be a Doctoral Candidate.
- 2) After you defend your dissertation proposal, which should happen within six months of passing your qualifying exams, you will need to fill out the *Nomination of Research Committee* eDoc. Once that is approved, you will have an official dissertation committee.
- 3) At least 30 days before your dissertation defense date that you will arrange with your committee, you will need to submit the *PhD Defense Announcement* eDoc.
- 4) After your defense, you will need to submit the *Defense Signature Collection* eDoc and your committee members will verify that you have successfully defended your dissertation.

For timelines and other requirements for graduation, see the Graduate School's website.