

April 2021

GRADUATE PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Department of Religious Studies

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

I. GRADUATE STUDY

A. Fields of Specialization

The graduate program in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers concentrated study in the following six fields of specialization:

- Ancient Mediterranean Religions
- Islamic Studies
- Medieval and Early Modern Studies
- Religion and Culture
- Religion in the Americas
- Religions of Asia

Each new student is admitted into one of these fields of specialization. Each field has specific degree requirements set out in Section IV that must be completed in addition to the general requirements for the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees.

At the time admissions decisions are made, each new student is formally admitted into the M.A. degree program or the Ph.D. degree program. All students are required to complete the degree requirements in these Policies and Procedures as they move through the program.

A student can transfer into a different field of specialization with the approval of the faculty in the new field and the Graduate Studies Committee. Students wishing to transfer into a new field of specialization must submit a petition to the GSC indicating their plans for fulfilling the requirements of the new field in a timely manner. This should be accompanied by a letter from the student's new faculty advisor recommending the move. Faculty advisors must be primary faculty in the field of specialization into which the student is transferring. Students who transfer to a different field from the one they were admitted into must have fulfilled all requirements of the new field of specialization in order to sit for doctoral exams in that field. For this reason, it is suggested that transfers take place no later than a student's third year in the program. All students must take doctoral exams in the field of specialization in which they graduate.

B. Graduate Studies Committee

The Department's graduate program is governed by the Department's faculty, with authority for certain decision-making delegated to the Graduate Studies Committee (the "GSC"). The GSC is chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies (the "DGS").

C. Graduate School Regulations

All graduate students in the Department of Religious Studies are governed by the rules and regulations of the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as specified in the Graduate School Handbook (available at <http://handbook.unc.edu/>). All students are advised to consult this document regularly.

II. THE M.A. DEGREE

A. The M.A. Degree Program

Students in the M.A. program are introduced to general problems and methods in the study of religion and pursue concentrated study in a specific field of specialization. The Department does not admit students seeking an M.A. as a terminal degree.

During the first year of study, the DGS serves as the academic advisor for each new M.A. student. By the end of the second semester of study, each student must designate a faculty advisor (or advisors), who will normally be a tenured member of the faculty. Faculty advisors must be formally associated with the field of specialization in which the student was admitted.

B. M.A. Degree Requirements

The following are the minimum general requirements for the M.A. degree:

1. *Coursework.* All M.A. students must complete thirty hours of course work (ten courses). At least half of the courses taken must be numbered 700 or above, and each student's coursework must include the required courses described in Section 2 below.

Students may take up to twelve of their thirty course hours outside of the Department of Religious Studies. Students generally take three semesters of three courses each and complete their theses in the fourth semester.

With the recommendation of the Department and approval of the Graduate School, a maximum of six graduate course hours may be transferred from another accredited institution and be accepted toward the fulfillment of the thirty-hour minimum. Students who have successfully completed graduate level courses in this University prior to formal admission into the Religious Studies graduate program may also be accredited with six credit hours.

Each semester students must have their prospective schedules approved by their faculty advisors and can make subsequent changes only with the consent of their advisors.

2. *Required and recommended courses.* To provide students with a thorough grounding in the history of Religious Studies and knowledge of some of its primary theoretical orientations, all M.A. students are required to take RELI 700 (Theory and Method in the Study of Religion). Students are additionally recommended to take a gateway course outside of their own field of specialization. (These courses are included in the thirty-hour minimum course requirement.)

a. RELI 700. Theory and Method in the Study of Religion, usually offered every fall semester, is a required course for all first-year graduate students. Its objectives and contents are standardized, but the course is structured with the objective of making all students aware of the course's relevance to their specific fields of specialization. Department faculty members share the responsibility for teaching the course.

At the conclusion of the course, a final examination is administered by the primary instructor of the course. This examination is graded by the instructor along with a second faculty member who has taught the course within the last three years (in case of any conflict in grading, the DGS provides a third vote). Any student failing the final examination in RELI 700 must take the course again when it is offered the following year (the credit hours for retaking the course will not count toward the student's course requirements). Any student failing the final examination in RELI 700 for a second time will be dismissed from the program immediately.

b. Gateway Courses. Different fields of specialization within the Department regularly offer graduate seminars designed especially to introduce important themes and methodologies relevant to the field. These seminars are designated by the GSC as "gateway courses." Courses with this designation include the following:

RELI 703, Critical Approaches to the Study of the Hebrew Bible and Its History of Interpretation (Ancient Mediterranean Religions)
 RELI 707, Early Christian History and Literature (Ancient Mediterranean Religions)
 RELI 720, Critical Lineages in Religion and Culture (Religion and Culture)
 RELI 740, Approaches to the Study of Religion in the Americas (Religion in the Americas)
 RELI 780, Methods in Islamic Studies (Islamic Studies)
 RELI 885, The Study of Asian Religions and the Construction of the Field (Religions of Asia)

c. Additional Required Courses. Faculty teaching in each field of specialization may also prescribe additional course requirements for students in the field. These additional requirements are set out in Section IV below.

3. *Language.* All M.A. students must demonstrate reading competency in one modern research language before beginning their M.A. thesis. This language is usually either French

or German, but in some circumstances, with the approval of the student's advisor and the faculty in the student's field of specialization, a student may substitute a different modern language as more relevant to the student's research interests.

4. *M. A. Field Examination.* Each M.A. student is required to take a comprehensive examination in the student's field of specialization (the "Field Examination"). The Field Examination is designed to test general knowledge of scholarship within the chosen field, as well as detailed knowledge of specific topics. In consultation with the student's faculty advisors, each student is expected to develop an individualized reading list of approximately thirty to forty significant works that provide an opportunity for the student to explore major themes, issues, and arguments within the field of specialization.

The Field Examination usually consists of one or more essay questions. It is three hours in length and closed-book. The Department provides a dedicated laptop computer for the Field Examination, along with an instruction sheet and a copy of the University's Honor Code, and no other electronic equipment (including computers, cell phones, and USB data storage devices) or written materials are allowed in the examination room. Students are not permitted to leave the building without prior approval from their advisors during the Field Examination.

The Field Examination is scheduled by the student and the student's faculty advisor, normally at the beginning of the third or fourth semester of study. In consultation with the student, the faculty advisor will establish a two-person faculty committee for the Field Examination. This committee will construct the questions, and each member will grade the candidate's work independently (assigning grades of "High Pass," "Pass," or "Fail"). After independent evaluations, the graders will discuss the examination and make a final evaluation. If irreconcilable differences emerge in the grading, the advisor will select a third faculty member in the Department to serve as an additional grader. The judgment of the third grader will be considered the deciding vote. If the student fails the examination, the graders will provide written assessments of the exam.

Students who fail the Field Examination must retake it the following semester. Any student failing the Field Examination for a second time will be dismissed from the program immediately. Following any failure, students may consult the graders' assessments or have oral consultations with the relevant faculty members.

Some fields may also schedule an oral consultation after the written Field Examination, but the grade recorded will be the grade achieved on the written examination.

5. *M.A. Thesis.* Each M.A. student must write and defend (by oral examination) a thesis in the student's field of specialization. The thesis is a limited research project designed to demonstrate scholarly potential in the field. Students may count a maximum of six credit hours of RELI 993 (Master's Thesis) towards the required total of thirty credit hours.

Students normally register for RELI 993 credit hours in the fourth semester of residency, but a student may not begin writing the thesis until passing the Field Examination. Students who

have not passed the Field Examination by the beginning of their fourth semester will be required to withdraw from RELI 993 and enroll in RELI 696 (Independent Study). Students may then use this course to prepare for the Field Examination at the end of their fourth semester.

The M.A. thesis demonstrates the ability of the student to research, organize, and write an extended essay. An acceptable thesis involves sustained research in a body of primary materials, interpretation of those materials in a methodologically self-conscious manner, and presentation of one's work in a clear, well-written essay. The M.A. thesis thus serves as an indicator of a student's promise for doctoral work. The M.A. thesis should be crafted as an extended essay, approximately thirty to fifty pages (9000-15000 words), including appropriate footnotes and bibliography.

In most cases, students should observe the following timeline for completing the thesis:

- The student should consult with his or her advisor about the thesis approximately one year before the student expects to complete it (usually in the spring of their first year in the program). Preliminary consultation should begin no later than the beginning of the second year in the program.
- Work on the thesis should begin the semester prior to its submission. Some advisors will expect a proposal draft before the end of the preceding term.
- Students writing a thesis will sign up for three or six credits with their advisor under RELI 993. The student and the advisor will then secure two additional readers in the months preceding the thesis' completion. The advisor and at least one of the secondary readers must be regular or adjunct members of the Department.
- As substantial work on the thesis begins, candidates will submit to their committee a proposal of three to five pages (typed, double-spaced) describing the problems, arguments, methods, and resources involved in the thesis project. The thesis committee will meet with the student to approve, disapprove, or suggest revisions in the proposed project.
- The final draft of the thesis must be submitted to the committee at least two weeks before the oral examination is scheduled. The oral examination, in turn, must be scheduled at least two weeks before the last day of classes of the semester. Students are urged to make arrangements for the final oral examination far in advance of the defense date.

The oral examination covers the contents of the M.A. thesis and any other matters deemed appropriate by the thesis committee members. The committee may approve the thesis, require revisions, or reject it. Approval requires the endorsement of at least two members of the committee, including the advisor. If all members of the committee pass the thesis, they have the option of recommending that the student be granted the M.A. degree with departmental honors. The advisor will inform the GSC in writing of the final disposition of the thesis and oral examination.

Candidates bear responsibility for meeting all University specifications regarding format and related matters for the final version of the thesis manuscript, as outlined in the Graduate School's "Theses and Dissertation Guide" (available at <http://gradschool.unc.edu/etdguide/>). The final version of the manuscript must be submitted to the University electronically (following the procedures at <http://gradschool.unc.edu/student/etd/index.html>).

6. *Additional Requirements.* The requirements specified above may not prove adequate for students whose previous training in Religious Studies is lacking in certain respects. In such cases the Department may require, through the student's advisor, an additional course of study.

C. Duration of Degree

Time limits for completion of the M.A. degree are specified by the Graduate School in the Graduate School Handbook. Most students are expected to complete the degree within two to three years.

D. Bypassing the M.A. Degree

At the end of one full year of coursework (eighteen credit hours) at the M.A. level and after completing the Field Examination and demonstrating reading competency in one modern research language, students initially admitted into the M.A. program who have already completed an advanced degree in the study of religion from another academic institution and who can demonstrate sufficient preparation in Religious Studies may petition the GSC to bypass the Department's M.A. degree. Petitions to enter the Ph.D. program must be submitted with the endorsement of the student's faculty advisor by no later than one month after completion of all the requirements to bypass the M.A. degree.

Bypassing the M.A. degree allows students to bypass up to twelve hours of coursework and the M.A. thesis requirement. All students initially admitted into the M.A. program are required to take RELI 700, to show competency in one modern research language, and to pass the Field Examination prior to admission into the Ph.D. program.

II. THE PH.D. DEGREE

A. The Ph.D. Degree Program

The Ph.D. program is designed to prepare students for careers in university and college teaching and for research in Religious Studies. All doctoral students are admitted into one of the Department's fields of specialization and must fulfill the specific requirements of that field set out in Section IV. Students in all fields are encouraged to select courses in other departments or

curricula and to pursue supporting studies in another department or another field within the Department of Religious Studies.

B. Admission to the Ph.D. Program

1. Applicants to the graduate program who have already completed an advanced degree in the study of religion from another academic institution and who can demonstrate sufficient preparation in Religious Studies may be admitted directly into the Department's Ph.D. program. At the time of admission, the Graduate Studies Committee will decide whether an applicant is admitted into the Ph.D. program or into the M.A. program. Students admitted directly into the Ph.D. program are required to demonstrate competency in at least one modern research language relevant to their field of specialization prior to matriculation. During the first semester of study, the DGS serves as the academic advisor for each new student admitted into the Ph.D. program in this fashion. By the end of the second semester of study, each student must designate a faculty advisor (or advisors), who will normally be a tenured member of the faculty. Faculty advisors must be formally associated with the field of specialization in which the student was admitted.
2. Students who successfully petition to bypass the M.A. degree (as specified in Section II (D) above) are admitted to the Ph.D. program at the beginning of the semester following the approval of their petition to the GSC.
3. Upon a student's successful completion of all M.A. requirements (as specified in Section II (B) above), the student's faculty advisor may recommend to the GSC that the student advance to the Ph.D. program. Upon receipt of this recommendation and a petition from the student that specifies the direction of his or her proposed doctoral research, the GSC will vote at its next regular meeting on the student's admission to the Ph.D. program. Recommendations received after May 1 will be considered at the first regular GSC meeting of the fall semester.

The completion of the requirements for the M.A. degree provides no guarantee that a student will be accepted into the Ph.D. program. In addition to these general guidelines for admission into Ph.D. program, there may be additional requirements specific to the various fields of specialization set out in Section VI below.

C. Ph.D. Degree Requirements

The following are the minimum general requirements for the Ph.D. degree:

1. *Coursework.* All students who have completed an M.A. degree in the Department or who have successfully petitioned the GSC to bypass the M.A. degree are required to take a minimum of eighteen additional hours of coursework (six courses) at the Ph.D. level. Up to six hours (two courses) previously taken at UNC in excess of the thirty-hour M.A. requirement may be counted toward the Ph.D. coursework requirement upon approval of the advisor and the GSC.

Students admitted directly into the Ph.D. program with an advanced degree from another institution are required to take a minimum of 36 hours of coursework (twelve courses) at the Ph.D. level. As part of this 36-hour requirement, these students are required to take RELI 700 and at least one gateway course outside of their own field of specialization. Students may also be required to take a gateway course offered by their own field of specialization, depending on the specific requirements of each field of specialization.

- a. RELI 700. Theory and Method in the Study of Religion, usually offered every fall semester, is a required course for all first-year graduate students. Its objectives and contents are standardized, but the course is structured with the objective of making all students aware of the course's relevance to their specific fields of specialization. Department faculty members share the responsibility for teaching the course.

At the conclusion of the course, a final examination is administered by the primary instructor of the course. This examination is graded by the instructor along with a second faculty member who has taught the course within the last three years (in case of any conflict in grading, the DGS provides a third vote). Any student failing the final examination in RELI 700 must take the course again when it is offered the following year (the credit hours for retaking the course will not count toward the student's course requirements). Any student failing the final examination in RELI 700 for a second time will be dismissed from the program immediately.

- b. Gateway Courses. Different fields of specialization within the Department regularly offer graduate seminars designed especially to introduce important themes and methodologies relevant to the field. These seminars are designated by the GSC as "gateway courses." These gateway courses are intended to cover at least two of three purposes:

- 1) Students learn the history of the development of the field
- 2) Students prepare to offer an introductory course in it
- 3) Students learn theories and/or methods they can apply in their own fields

Courses with this designation include the following:

RELI 703, Critical Approaches to the Study of the Hebrew Bible and Its History of Interpretation (Ancient Mediterranean Religions)
 RELI 707, Early Christian History and Literature (Ancient Mediterranean Religions)
 RELI 720, Critical Lineages in Religion and Culture (Religion and Culture)
 RELI 740, Approaches to the Study of Religion in the Americas (Religion in the Americas)
 RELI 780, Methods in Islamic Studies (Islamic Studies)
 RELI 885, The Study of Asian Religions and the Construction of the Field (Religions of Asia)

All students in all fields of specialization are encouraged to select courses in other departments or curricula and to pursue supporting studies in another department or in another field within the Department of Religious Studies.

2. *Languages.* All Ph.D. students must demonstrate reading competency in two modern research languages prior to beginning their Doctoral Examinations. The particular languages a student studies will be decided by faculty members in the student's field of specialization and the student's advisor. As detailed in Section IV, some fields also require students to demonstrate proficiency in additional languages necessary for the study of primary texts and other materials.

3. *Teaching.* All Ph.D. students are normally expected to complete at least two semesters of work as a Teaching Associate under the direction of a member of the Department's faculty.

4. *Doctoral Examinations.* All Ph.D. candidates are required to pass a set of doctoral examinations (the "Doctoral Examinations"). The Doctoral Examinations include at least four written exams and a concluding oral examination. All Doctoral Examinations must be completed before the student can proceed to begin formal work on a doctoral dissertation.

The Doctoral Examinations are intended to demonstrate the mastery of broad scholarly literature within the student's field of specialization as well as specific literature relevant to the student's dissertation and related areas of research. These examinations also signal the teaching competencies of the student. In consultation with the advisor, the student should aim both for breadth across the discipline of Religious Studies (and sometimes in allied fields in the humanities or social sciences) and for depth within a specific area of specialization. Reading lists for doctoral examinations are normally expected to comprise 35-40 books and/or articles per exam, recognizing there may be variation between lists within an exam set.

The Department provides a dedicated laptop computer for the Doctoral Examinations, along with an instruction sheet and a copy of the University's Honor Code. No other electronic equipment (including computers, cell phones, and USB data storage devices) or written materials are allowed in the examination room. Students are not permitted to leave the building without prior approval from their advisors during any of the Doctoral Examinations.

a. Composition of the Examining Committee

i. Each exam committee will consist of at least five faculty members, at least two (but normally three) of whom must be full-time faculty members of the Department of Religious Studies (including officially recognized adjuncts). Three members of the examining committee must be members of the graduate faculty. Although all committee members will read the written exams and participate in the oral examination, it is not expected that they will share equally in the work of drafting and evaluating the written exams.

ii. The committee is to be formed after consultation between the student and the student's advisor, who will ordinarily serve as the chair of the committee.

iii. In most cases, the student will make initial contact with potential members of the examination committee. It is the responsibility of the advisor to ensure the integrity and efficiency of the process of constituting the committee. As soon as the composition of the

committee is finalized, it should be forwarded to the Department registrar to ensure that external committee members meet University requirements for committee service.

iv. The chair of the examination committee will choose one committee member to serve as the primary examiner for each examination, and another to serve as the second reader. The chair may serve in either capacity. The same committee member may serve as the primary examiner for more than one exam. Each reader must have scholarly competence in the area covered by the relevant examination.

b. Functions of the Examination Committees

In general, the members of the examination committee will perform four tasks. The members will: (i) help the student construct, and then give final approval to, bibliographies for each of the areas of examination; (ii) write the examination questions; (iii) evaluate the student's written answers; and (iv) administer a final oral examination based on the written exams.

i. *The Construction of Bibliographies.* Separate bibliographies will be constructed for each of the written examinations. These bibliographies are to be developed through consultation between the student and the primary and secondary examiners for each of the examinations. Generally, the student will be asked to complete initial research on important bibliography for the examination area and will then be guided by the examiners through the process of accumulating an appropriate list of books and articles to be mastered for the exam. Students are encouraged to discuss focal issues and themes with their advisors and committee members at this stage as appropriate to help examiners understand students' interests and construct bibliographies that reflect these concerns.

ii. *Construction of the Exams.* The primary and secondary examiners will construct written questions that can be adequately answered in the time provided for the exam. The length of time provided for writing each Doctoral Examination is determined by faculty members in each field of specialization. Examiners are responsible for drafting the examination questions, which are not to be shared with the students before the exams.

iii. *Evaluation of the Exams.* Each member of the examination committee will independently evaluate the student's written examinations.

iv. *The Oral Examination.* The student's oral examination will be held before the entire examination committee, with the student's advisor chairing the meeting. The questions asked at the oral examination may relate either to the questions asked on the written exams or to other issues relevant to the area of examination.

c. Final Evaluation of the Ph.D. Examinations

- i. At the conclusion of the oral examination, the examination committee will render a judgment on the entire set of exams, written and oral. Possible judgments include (a) requiring the student to retake one or two of the written examinations; (b) pass; (c) pass with departmental honors; and (d) fail.
- ii. A student who fails one or two written examinations or the oral examination will be required to retake the failed exam(s) within six months of the initial examination, following the procedures specified for the original examinations. The same bibliography is to be used, but different (though related) questions are to be asked. The entire written examination committee must reconvene for a second oral examination on the retaken examination(s), and the committee must then vote either (a) to pass the retaken examination(s) or (b) to fail the student on the examinations and dismiss the student from the program.

5. *Doctoral Dissertation Proposal.* As the culmination of the Ph.D. program, each Ph.D. student must write and defend (by oral examination) a doctoral dissertation in the student's field of specialization. The doctoral dissertation is designed to be a substantial and innovative contribution to knowledge. The student should draft the dissertation in very close consultation with the faculty advisor, who will provide guidance on research, writing, and other practical matters involved in the dissertation process.

Each student must prepare a proposal for a doctoral dissertation under the guidance of the student's advisor, and the student must submit a complete draft of the proposal to the advisor at least 30 days prior to the end of the semester that follows completion of the Doctoral Examinations. The dissertation proposal is aimed to set forth a plan of study and to persuade others of the importance of the project. Toward that end, it is crucial that the student write for an audience of scholars that may know very little about the specifics of a given field of study. The proposal should avoid technical language (or, if necessary, explain it clearly) and actively describe the significant questions addressed in the research project.

The proposal should contain the following sections:

- a. a statement of the thesis of the project and its justification;
- b. a discussion of the significance of the project for its field and for the discipline of Religious Studies broadly construed;
- c. a description of significant previous research on the topic;
- d. an explanation of the sources to be consulted and the methods to be followed;
- e. a chapter outline;
- f. a list of committee members, with a brief explanation of what each member will contribute to the project; and
- g. a preliminary selected bibliography of primary and secondary sources available for completion of the project.

The text of the dissertation proposal should not exceed 4500 words, including footnotes and endnotes but not including the list of committee members and the bibliography.

After the student's advisor has approved the dissertation proposal, the advisor will provide each member of the GSC with a copy of the proposal at least one week before a regularly scheduled GSC meeting. The GSC will review the proposal in consultation with the student's advisor and approve or request reconsideration and revisions. The GSC may also approve or request modifications to the proposed dissertation committee. A student may make no more than two submissions of a dissertation proposal to the GSC, and a second rejection of a proposal by the GSC will result in a consultation between the GSC and the student's advisor concerning the student's continuation in the program. The dissertation proposal must be approved by the GSC within one year of the completion of the student's Doctoral Examinations.

6. *Dissertation Committee.* Following approval by the GSC, the dissertation proposal will be evaluated by a dissertation committee consisting of at least five faculty members. A majority of the members of the doctoral dissertation committee must be full time faculty members of the Department of Religious Studies (including officially recognized adjuncts). A majority of the members of the doctoral dissertation committee must also be regular members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate Faculty (see <https://gradschool.unc.edu/policies/faculty-staff/faculty/regular.html>). In cases in which the expertise requirements of the project demand an atypical committee composition, students may petition the GSC and the Graduate School for exceptions to these rules. The dissertation committee examines the prospectus, consults with the student throughout the progress of the research, and participates in the final oral examination. Each doctoral student is expected to consult with members of the dissertation committee at frequent intervals throughout the progress of research and will be required to submit a progress report to each member of the committee at least once a year.

After receiving GSC approval of the dissertation proposal and committee, the advisor is to schedule an oral defense of the proposal with the members of the student's dissertation committee. The committee will assemble for the candidate's defense, with the student's advisor serving as chair of the committee. The committee will decide (1) to accept the proposal, (2) to request minor modifications and leave final approval to the discretion of the student's advisor, or (3) to request further work to be followed by another submission to the GSC and oral defense.

7. *Doctoral Dissertation.* The student's faculty advisor is the principal director of the dissertation project. The student should work in close consultation with the faculty advisor and also consult regularly with all members of the dissertation committee concerning progress on the project. While engaged in research and writing on the dissertation, students commonly enroll in RELI 994 (Doctoral Dissertation).

As the dissertation nears completion, it is the responsibility of the primary advisor to schedule an oral defense of the dissertation. All members of the dissertation committee must participate in the oral defense of the dissertation, with the student's advisor chairing the meeting. If necessary, a member of the committee may participate in the defense by teleconference, but at least four of the members of the dissertation committee must be physically present for the defense. At the conclusion of the defense, the members of the committee will vote either to pass the dissertation, to fail it, or to require revisions. If major revisions are required, the full committee must meet again for another oral defense.

Candidates bear responsibility for meeting all University specifications regarding format and related matters for the final version of the dissertation manuscript, as outlined in the Graduate School's "Theses and Dissertation Guide" (available at <http://gradschool.unc.edu/etdguide/>). The final version of the doctoral dissertation must be submitted to the University electronically (following the procedures at <http://gradschool.unc.edu/student/etd/index.html>).

D. Duration of Degree

Time limits for completion of the Ph.D. degree are specified by the Graduate School in the Graduate School Handbook.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION

A. Ancient Mediterranean Religions

1. General Description. Ancient Mediterranean Religions focuses on ancient forms of religious expression, from Mesopotamia to Rome, encompassing the geographic regions and time periods out of which Judaism and Christianity first emerged. Faculty pursue a variety of critical approaches, including text criticism, linguistic and literary analysis, philosophy, history, and archaeology, in order to examine diversity, interaction, and development in the religious cultures of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean.

At the time of application, students should select one of the following subfields as their primary specialization:

- Ancient Near East
- Hebrew Bible
- Early Judaism
- Archaeology
- Greco-Roman Religions
- Early Christianity (including New Testament)
- Religions of Late Antiquity

2. Coursework. It is expected that the bulk of a student's classes will be in their subfield, with other course requirements being fulfilled in related areas in consultation with their advisor.

3. Languages. Students will be examined on two ancient languages, one (the primary research language) in a Doctoral Examination as specified in the following section and the other (the

secondary language) prior to taking the Doctoral Examinations. It is expected that most students will acquire at least a third ancient language (e.g., Latin, Coptic, Aramaic, Syriac) in the course of their program.

A solid competency in both French and German is required of all doctoral students in this field prior to their doctoral examinations

4. *Doctoral Examinations*. Doctoral candidates will normally be required to pass five written Doctoral Examinations subsequent to the completion of coursework. The examinations will typically cover the following areas:

- a. Language. A translation examination in the language of primary research (Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic).
- b. Religions and cultures of the ancient Mediterranean. An examination focusing either on the religions of the ancient Near East (including Ancient Israel) to Alexander or on the religions of the Greco-Roman world from Alexander to Constantine.
- c. History and literature of the primary field. An examination of the critical study and interpretation of selected texts in the student's area of special focus, some in the original languages and some in translation, and of the historical developments in the period of specialization.
- d. Outside area. An examination in an area outside of the student's specific area of research interest, whether within the field, within the Department, or within the University (e.g., a student focusing on early Judaism could choose, in consultation with the faculty advisor, to be examined in the Hebrew Bible, early Christianity, religion and culture, classics, etc.).
- e. Dissertation examination. An examination in the broad area of proposed dissertation research within the student's subfield (e.g., Pentateuchal studies, Palestinian archaeology, New Testament textual criticism, Gnosticism, early Christian apocrypha, etc.).

The precise formats of these examinations and the relevant bibliographies to be mastered in preparation for them will be determined in consultations between the student and the faculty advisor. In most instances the examinations will cover the broad range of issues relevant to the topic, with at least one question focusing on a subtopic of particular interest to the student, on which greater knowledge and in-depth preparation will be expected.

A student who has successfully completed the five written examinations will be given a final oral examination based on issues raised in the written exams and on matters that pertain to the area of dissertation research.

B. Islamic Studies

1. *General Description.* The field of Islamic Studies takes a global, interdisciplinary, and comparative approach to the study of Islamic religion and Muslim cultures. Utilizing literary, historical, sociological, anthropological, and other critical approaches, students explore a broad array of Islamic religious traditions, both elite and popular. Students also work closely with program faculty to develop their own particular sub-fields in Islamic Studies.
2. *Languages.* In addition to the requirement of two modern research languages, all students must develop proficiency in at least one Islamicate language (usually Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu) before taking the Doctoral Examinations. Additional languages may be required by the faculty in the field, and the student's advisor, depending on the research trajectory of the student.
3. *Doctoral Examinations.* All Ph.D. candidates will be expected to pass a set of four Doctoral Examinations. Program faculty members, in consultation with the student, will determine the topics of the examinations based upon the individual needs and interests of the student. In general, written exams will cover the following areas:
 - a. A formulation and interrogation of a problematic in Islamic studies, which both defines and critically examines a series of issues that connect major categories of Islamic thought and practice (e.g., Sufism and reformism, gender studies and the methodologies of Islamic law, Qur'an and literary theory, Shi'ism and performance theory).
 - b. Theory and methodology of Islamic studies, focusing on the general historiography of the field as well as the ways in which scholars in others disciplines (such as anthropology) and in previously marginalized sub-fields (such as Islam in America or Shi'ism) have sought to reconstruct its boundaries.
 - c. The religious history of one geographic region, usually the region in which the student expects to do field research (including, for example, the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, or North America). This exam is implicitly comparative in approach, since it requires dealing with non-Muslim religious traditions in the region of choice.
 - d. A thematic examination, focusing on a particular subfield of Islamic studies (such as Sufism, Islamic philosophical and political thought, Qur'anic studies, or Islamic rituals).

Upon completion of the written exams, the student will take an oral examination based primarily on issues raised in the written exams.

C. Medieval and Early Modern Studies

1. *General Description.* The program in Medieval and Early Modern Studies is designed to encourage broad understanding of the history of one or more of the major Eurasian religious traditions from their formative periods (in the first millennium C.E.) through the nineteenth century and mastery of a specific area of specialization within that range. The field's scholarly focus is the relationship between religious traditions and their cultural settings, the study of which is multidisciplinary and can only be undertaken responsibly in concert with colleagues and

students from other University departments (including Art and Architectural History, Anthropology, Asian Studies, English, Classics, History, Philosophy, Romance Languages, German, and Comparative Literature).

2. *Coursework*. Students are required to complete the gateway course in the field (a seminar in methods and topics in medieval and early modern religions) early in their time in the program.

3. *Languages*. Competence in two modern research languages and one classical language (e.g., Latin, Hebrew or literary Chinese) is required of all doctoral students in the field. The modern research languages are commonly French and German, though other research languages may be substituted with the approval of the faculty in the field and the student's advisor if appropriate for the student's specific area of research. Candidates for the degree may be required to acquire reading knowledge of other languages relevant to their doctoral research.

4. *Doctoral Examination*. Doctoral candidates will be required to pass four written examinations subsequent to the completion of course work.

a. The first two exams cover intellectual and institutional developments in one of three periods: (1) the formative through the early medieval period; (2) the medieval period; or (3) the early modern period. Candidates will be tested for comprehensive knowledge of the period most directly related to their areas of special interest and for their familiarity with primary sources and interpretive studies.

b. The third exam permits students to track their area, theme, or topic of special interest through other periods in the history of the religion(s) of primary research interest.

c. The fourth exam may supplement the third exam or enable the students to track their area, theme, or topic of special interest in the history of other Eurasian religions. The special interests of recent students include such topics as rituals of dedication, penance, ascetic discipline, authority and polity, religion and drama, and hagiography.

Upon completing the written examinations, candidates will be given a final oral examination on the results of their work and plans for dissertation research.

D. Religion and Culture

1. *General Description*. Religion and Culture focuses on the critical study of culture with specific attention to the position of religion within modernity. The field explores a variety of philosophical and cultural themes arising from modern discourses on religion, including academic discourses. The theoretical basis of Religion and Culture is informed not only by the Western philosophical tradition but also by a broader range of intellectual traditions, incorporating the perspectives of ethnography, critical theory, and contemporary cultural criticism.

All students in Religion and Culture are expected to become well-grounded in modern Western

intellectual and cultural history since the seventeenth century, including the major traditions of modern scholarly engagement with religion as well as the critical reactions to these traditions. Building on this foundation, each student designs and carries out focused study in a specific discursive tradition or a particular empirical moment of cultural practice. Students specialize in such areas as the ethnographic study of religion, religion in American law and politics, Jewish studies, religion and gender, and modern Western religious thought.

2. *Coursework*. RELI 720, Critical Lineages in Religion and Culture, is required of all Religion and Culture students. Additional coursework should be selected through close and regular consultation with the student's faculty advisor.

3. *Languages*. Each student is required to be competent in two modern research languages. These languages are commonly French and German, through other research languages can be substituted with the approval of the student's advisor if appropriate for the student's specific area of research.

4. *Doctoral Examinations*. At the doctoral level, the student's competency in the following areas will be examined through the Doctoral Examinations:

- a. Western intellectual and cultural history since 1600. This examination includes basic issues in the philosophy of religion, theory and method in the study of religion, and contemporary critical theory. The purpose of the exam is to situate the field of Religion and Culture in its historical and intellectual context.
- b. Area of specialization. This examination focuses on major scholarly literature specific to the student's specific field of study.
- c. Cultural theory. This examination focuses on methodological and theoretical issues in an area of cultural theory relevant to the student's scholarly work, such as literary theory, cultural studies, ethnographic theory, postcolonial studies, or gender theory.
- d. Dissertation examination. This exam covers historical and critical literature specific to the student's area of dissertation research.

E. Religion in the Americas

1. *General Description*. The field of Religion in the Americas emphasizes the multiplicity of religious traditions in the Americas and explores the links between religion and other aspects of American culture from the precolonial era to the present. Special features of the program at UNC include its close affiliations with related disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and the freedom it allows in the selection of sources and methods for the study of American religion.

2. *Coursework*. Students must take the following gateway: RELI 740, Approaches to the Study of Religion in the Americas. Students must also take one of the following: RELI 744, Religion in

Colonial Americas, *or* RELI 745, Religion in Postcolonial Americas.

3. *Languages*. Each student is required to be competent in two modern research languages. These languages are commonly French and German, through other research languages can be substituted with the approval of the faculty in the field and the student's advisor if appropriate for the student's specific area of research.

4. *Doctoral Examinations*. Following completion of coursework, students will take four written exams. These examinations focus on religion in the United States (or, in some instances, the United States and other parts of the Americas), as follows:

- a. Field. Outlines the state of the field, providing some historical genealogy and engaging relevant approaches to the study of Religion in the Americas.
- b. Location. Examines the specific historical period and/or regional context of study and situates the location of future work.
- c. Method. Develops the particular methods and practices to be used in the dissertation (e.g. historiography, ethnography, literary, visual, cultural studies, or mixed methods).
- d. Theory. Assembles the theoretical conversations that student's research will address and intellectual tools necessary for critical investigation.

Upon completion of the written exams, the student will take an oral examination based primarily on issues raised in the written exams.

F. Religions of Asia

1. *General Description*. Religions of Asia specializes in ethnographic and historical approaches to the study of the religions of Asia. Students in this field of specialization focus on Asian traditions in their social, cultural, and historical environments and contexts of exchange. Participants in this concentration use a variety of methodologies to explore specific questions and themes (including gender, diaspora, personhood and identity, place and pilgrimage, religion and the state, transnationalism/globalization, and the cultural and political dynamics of religious modernity) as these intersect, influence, and are influenced by past and present religious formations in Asia. Core faculty members have particular expertise in the contemporary religious worlds of Japan and Nepal.

2. *Coursework*. All students are required to complete RELI 885, the religions of Asia gateway. Other courses will be selected in consultations between the student and her or his advisor. Participants in this specialization are encouraged to collaborate with faculty in other graduate specializations (including Religion and Culture, Islamic Studies, and Religion in the Americas) and at Duke University.

3. *Languages*. In addition to languages necessary for the student's primary research, each student is required to be competent in two modern research languages. These languages are

commonly French and German, although other research languages can be substituted with the approval of the faculty in the field and the student's advisor if appropriate for the student's specific area of research.

4. *Doctoral Examinations.* All Ph.D. candidates are required to pass a set of four Doctoral Examinations. Faculty members, in consultation with the student, will determine the topics of the exams based upon the student's area of specialization.

Examination areas may include:

- a. Theory and method. This examination focuses on methodological and theoretical issues in an area relevant to the student's scholarly work, such as historiography, ethnography, or critical area studies.
- b. Basic themes and critical issues in one or more subfield or Asian religious tradition.
- c. History and culture of the student's sub-specialization (i.e., historical period and/or ethnographic area and religious tradition).
- d. For comparative purposes, students will also be required to demonstrate secondary mastery of one additional tradition or mode of religious practice. Secondary mastery is defined for these purposes as familiarity with the precepts, history, culture, scholarly traditions in regard to, and current critical issues within, scholarship related to that tradition.

V. GENERAL GUIDELINES

A. Course Lists and Credit

A list of available courses can be found in the Graduate School Record or on the Department of Religious Studies webpage (http://www.unc.edu/depts/rel_stud). Courses offered by other departments and programs at the University and other area academic institutions may also be appropriate, and students are encouraged to investigate those options.

All courses numbered 400 or above may be taken for graduate credit, although undergraduates also are eligible to enroll in courses numbered up to 699. Courses numbered 700 and above are open only to graduate students, and at least half of the courses taken for a graduate degree must be numbered at this level.

Graduate students may enroll in courses numbered below 400, but no credit for such courses is allowed toward the graduate degree. Foreign language courses numbered 601 and 602 carry no credit.

B. Demonstrating Foreign Language Capability

1. Modern Research Languages. There are three ways to satisfy the requirement for proficiency

in modern research languages:

- a. By completing the University's two-semester course sequence designed for graduate students seeking reading knowledge in the language (German 601 and 602, French 601 and 602, etc.).
- b. By passing the Foreign Language Proficiency Assessment ("FLPA") administered by the Graduate School on a regular basis. Information concerning the format and schedule of these exams is available from the Graduate School.
- c. By demonstrating that a comparable course (or language examination) has been passed in an accredited institution. To meet a language requirement in this fashion, the student must submit a formal transcript for the language course and petition the GSC for approval that the requirement has been met.

2. Other Languages. Competence in other languages specifically required within one or another field of specialization is usually demonstrated through both transcript and examination evidence. Students are advised to consult with faculty in the relevant fields of specialization concerning these requirements.

C. Grades

Courses taken for graduate credit are graded "H" (excellent), "P" (satisfactory), "L" (low passing), and "F" (fail). A graduate student who receives a grade of "F" is ineligible to continue study. Ineligibility will also result if a student receives nine or more semester hours of "L."

D. Cross-Institutional Registration

Students may take a maximum of two graduate-level courses through inter-institutional registration during a fall or spring term or a maximum of one graduate-level course during a summer term, provided that the student is also registered for the balance of his or her normal load (at least three credit hours) at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Students may take these courses at North Carolina State University, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina Central University, or Duke University.

No inter-institutional course may be taken pass/fail (satisfactory/unsatisfactory, etc.), and all courses must earn a specific grade. Please refer to the Graduate School Handbook for the policy concerning inter-institutional grading.

To register for an inter-institutional course, the student must complete an Inter-Institutional Approval Form and obtain the signature of the DGS.

E. Advancing through the Program

All graduate students are expected to comply with the requirements specified in this document and with the rules and regulations of the Graduate School for advancing through the Department's graduate program in a timely manner. Students unable to meet any of these requirements must consult immediately with the GSC and their advisor.

In the spring semester each year, the GSC will compile information about each first year graduate student's progress in the program in consultation with the student's advisor. At the end of the semester, the GSC will provide each first year student a written assessment of the student's progress together with any suggestions to assist the student in developing necessary professional skills. These assessments will then be discussed in a meeting between the student, the student's advisor and one or more members of the GSC.

F. Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence are governed by the Graduate School Handbook. Students seeking a leave should consult their advisor as well as the DGS to insure that they are following appropriate University guidelines. A petition for readmission is necessary in order to reenter the Department's graduate program.

Students on leave who anticipate returning to the program should also contact the DGS at the beginning of the spring term of the leave year in order to be considered for TA assignments on their return.

G. Guidelines for the Selection of Teaching Associates

The following guidelines are followed in the yearly selection of graduate student Teaching Associates:

1. The class schedule for the upcoming academic year will be finalized by the chair of the Department in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the DGS. Students should finalize their fellowship plans for the upcoming academic year early in the spring semester.
2. A form containing a listing of the upcoming years' undergraduate course offerings (fall and spring) will be sent to all graduate students during the spring semester. The DGS will request information concerning which of these courses students would like to serve as a teaching associate.
3. The DGS will also consult with faculty about any qualifications and requirements they seek in the TAs for their classes. If a faculty member requires a gateway course as preparation to serving as a TA, that course must have been taught within the two years prior to the relevant fellowship term.

4. In assigning TAs, the DGS will consider not only the areas of student interest and faculty need, but also the following criteria (especially when two or more students are under consideration for the same position):

- a. The number of years the student has been in the program;
- b. The number of opportunities the student has already had to serve as a TA;
- c. The student's experience in the field of study undertaken by the class and the quality of his or her coursework; and
- d. Where appropriate, the opportunity to serve as a TA outside of his or her own area of research.

H. Guidelines for the Selection of Teaching Fellows

The following guidelines are followed each year in the selection of graduate students Teaching Fellows:

1. The need for classes taught by graduate students will be determined by the chair of the Department in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the DGS.
2. A form will be sent to all advanced graduate students to indicate whether they would like to serve as a Teaching Fellow. Students will be asked to indicate which classes they are prepared to teach, to describe their qualifications for doing so, and to submit a curriculum vitae.
3. The DGS will confer with faculty advisors concerning the most appropriate graduate students to be awarded Teaching Fellowships and make recommendations to the chair of the Department for these positions. The chair makes final decisions concerning extending an offer of appointment.
4. In assigning Teaching Fellowships, the following criteria will be considered:
 - a. The qualifications of the student to teach the class (based on graduate preparation and previous teaching experience);
 - b. The standing of the student in the program (except in exceptional situations, only students who are completing their dissertations will be considered; students who have performed exceptionally well in their own seminars and in their previous TA positions will be given preference);
 - c. The number of opportunities the student has already had to serve as a Teaching Fellow; and

d. The student's financial need.

5. Letters will be sent to the graduate students with Teaching Fellow assignments. Students will be asked to sign the letters, and their signature will be taken as a binding commitment.

I. Guidelines for the Selection of Graduate Students for Summer School and Carolina Courses Online Teaching Assignments

The following guidelines are followed each year in the selection of graduate students for teaching assignments in Summer School and Carolina Courses Online (CCO):

1. The need for classes taught by graduate students will be determined by the chair of the Department in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the DGS. Faculty members have priority for these assignments, but graduate students are also regularly offered the opportunity to teach these courses.
2. An email message will be sent to all advanced graduate students asking them to indicate whether they are interested in teaching courses in Summer School or CCO. Students will be asked to specify which classes they are prepared to teach, to describe their qualifications for doing so, and to submit a curriculum vitae.
3. The DGS will confer with faculty advisors concerning the most appropriate graduate students to be awarded these positions and make recommendations to the chair of the Department (or other faculty member delegated by the chair) for these positions. In consultation with the appropriate officials at the Summer School and CCO offices, the chair will approve the final decisions concerning extending an offer of appointment.
4. In assigning teaching assignments for Summer School and CCO courses, the following criteria will be considered:
 - a. The qualifications of the student to teach the class (based on graduate preparation and previous teaching experience);
 - b. The standing of the student in the program (except in exceptional situations, only students who are completing their dissertations will be considered; students who have performed exceptionally well in their own seminars and in their previous TA and TF positions will be given preference);
 - c. The teaching opportunities the student has already been offered in the Department; and
 - d. The student's financial need.

5. Letters will be sent to the graduate students from the Summer School and CCO confirming these assignments. Students will be asked to sign the letters, and their signature will be taken as a binding commitment.

J. Guidelines for the Supervision and Evaluation of Teaching Associates

In the Department of Religious Studies, graduate students who serve as Teaching Associates are mentored by the faculty instructors. The following guidelines are to be followed each year in the supervision and evaluation of graduate student TAs.

1. Faculty members supervising Teaching Associates will be expected to meet with their TAs as a group at least once a week to discuss weekly reading and writing assignments, pedagogy for upcoming recitations, difficulties that have arisen among students in the class, and related matters.
2. At least once each semester (and preferably more often), the faculty member is to observe one recitation for each TA.
3. Following this visit, the faculty member is to schedule a consultation with the TA to discuss and evaluate the student's performance in the classroom.
4. All TAs will be expected to distribute and collect the Carolina Course Evaluation for each of their recitation sections.
5. Based on in-class observation, oral consultations, written evaluations, and general student feedback, the faculty member is to prepare a written evaluation of each TA at the end of the term. This evaluation will be placed in the student's permanent file.

K. Petitioning the Graduate Studies Committee

All student petitions to the Graduate Studies Committee under these Policies and Procedures should be delivered in writing to the DGS. It is the student's responsibility to provide any supporting materials relevant to the petition (including transcripts and other documents). Students should consult with the DGS if there are any questions concerning a petition.

L. Applications to the Graduate School for Degrees

The Graduate School Handbook specifies the procedures for students to follow to make formal application for degrees and graduation. Students should follow those procedures carefully to insure that degrees are conferred in a timely manner.