

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Guide for Graduate Students in the Department of Religious Studies

The information in this Guide is meant to help graduate students (and the faculty who advise them) in navigating the requirements for the MA in the Department of Religious Studies. It exists in printed form as the Graduate Student Guide, which contains information on the PhD program as well. The information supplements and does not replace the [Graduate School Bulletin](http://www.indiana.edu/~bulletin/iu/grad/2009-2010/) (<http://www.indiana.edu/~bulletin/iu/grad/2009-2010/>), which is the ultimate authority in all requirements and regulations. In addition to the section of the [Bulletin](#) on the Department, be sure to consult the sections on “Academic Regulations” and “General Requirements for Advanced Degrees” which contain rules that govern all degree programs. If anything in this Guide seems to contradict the [Bulletin](#), you should follow the [Bulletin](#).

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I. General Advice for All Students

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

The person primarily responsible for getting you through your graduate program in an efficient and profitable manner, however, is yourself. Because the

faculty member who is the DGS changes regularly and other faculty go on leaves, you are the element of continuity during your time at IU. It behooves you to familiarize yourself with the requirements of your degree program and to take the initiative in formulating a plan to meet those requirements. The information in this Guide is designed to help you to do that.

II. Getting the MA

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

A. The Basic Requirements

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

- (1) Earn at least 30 credit hours. You must maintain a 3.0 GPA with a grade of B or better in every course you offer for the degree. No credit hours older than five years can count.
- (2) Take R665 and at least two more seminars at the 600-level or higher.
- (3) Take at least one course in each of the Department's three curricular divisions: Religious Traditions of the West, Religious Traditions of the East, and Critical Issues in Religious Studies.
- (4) Demonstrate reading proficiency in a language relevant to your interests. It may be one of the following: Arabic, Classical Chinese, French, German, Classical Greek, Hebrew (Biblical, Medieval, or Modern), Hindi, Japanese, Latin, Sanskrit, Spanish, or Classical Tibetan. Another language may be chosen with the approval of the DGS.
- (5) Complete a thesis or language project, or pass a comprehensive examination.

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.

If you choose to finish your degree with a thesis or language project, you may earn up to 6 credit hours for that by registering for R698 (language project) or R699 (thesis). That would mean 24 hours of course work. If you choose to take the comprehensive examination, you must earn all 30 hours in course work.

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

You must finish your degree within five years of starting course work. That is, after five years, a course “expires” and can no longer apply to your degree. In that case, you must take new courses to make up the expired hours or go through a process to “revalidate” the expired courses. Avoid this by finishing in a timely manner.

2. 600-Level Seminars

Take R665 in your first semester and take two 600-level (or 700-level) seminars as soon as possible. The other two 600-level seminars need not be in the Department.

3. Distribution Requirements

You must take at least one course in each of the Department’s three curricular divisions: Religious Traditions of the West, Religious Traditions of the East, and Critical Issues in Religious Studies. You must meet this requirement with courses within the Department or cross-listed in it. The Bulletin lists each course under its appropriate division. If there is any ambiguity about to which division a course belongs, consult the DGS before you take the course.

Please note that a 600- or 700-level seminar can also fulfill a distribution requirement if it is taken in the Department.

4. Language Work

You may consider any of the languages listed above as pre-approved for the language requirement. If you want to use another language, you must secure the approval of the DGS before taking courses or otherwise preparing to certify in it.

If you choose French, German, or Spanish, you may fulfill the requirement by passing the certifying test that is offered at the beginning of the academic year or by passing the second semester of the two-semester sequence in the reading knowledge of these languages offered to graduate students (e.g., F491-F492). Note that these courses do not contribute credit hours to the degree.

If you choose another language, you can certify in one of two ways. You can pass courses in the language through the intermediate level (normally the fourth semester): in most cases, such courses do carry graduate credit (although sometimes fewer numbers of hours than for undergraduates). Or if you have already studied the language, you can pass an examination administered by a faculty member in the Department. Consult with the DGS and a faculty member in your area of interest about the best plan for you.

C. The Completion: Thesis, Language Project, or Comprehensive Examination

You may choose to finish your MA in any of these three ways. Which one you choose depends on your personal goals in getting the MA.

1. Thesis

An MA thesis is a scholarly exploration and exposition that demonstrates the candidate’s ability to define an issue, investigate it thoroughly, and arrive at a well-written, carefully argued conclusion about it. It is a relatively short work (about 60-90 pages) which shows research and writing ability.

The thesis committee consists of three faculty members: a director and two readers. Usually the members of the committee are selected from the Department’s faculty (including adjunct members), but faculty members from other departments

may act as readers or directors. You select your thesis director in consultation with the DGS, usually at the end of your second semester or the beginning of your third.

Before writing the thesis, you must write a Thesis Proposal and have it formally approved by all three members of the committee. The Guidelines for MA Thesis Proposals are available in the office.

The Graduate School has specific directions regarding the writing and presentation of the thesis (title page, etc.) in its "Guide for Preparing Theses and Dissertations," which is available on the Graduate School's web site. The completed thesis requires the approval of all three committee members. There is usually not a formal meeting or defense.

You may receive and apply to your degree up to 6 credit hours for working on your thesis by registering for R699.

2. Language Project

The language project demonstrates scholarly proficiency in a specific primary-source language usually by producing a translation of a previously untranslated text, along with a critical introduction that places the work in its historical, theoretical, and/or literary context. It is of the same length as a thesis (60-90 pages), and the finished project follows the same guidelines as a thesis (see the Graduate School's "Guide to Preparing Theses and Dissertations"). You follow the same procedure of forming a three-person committee, making a proposal, and so forth.

There is one additional step, however. You must first demonstrate your ability to undertake the project by passing either an advanced course in the language or an examination administered by your director. Consult with your director about the better plan for you.

You may receive and apply to your degree up to 6 credit hours for working on your project by registering for R698.

3. Comprehensive Examination

The MA Comprehensive Examination has two parts: (1) the general field of religious studies; (2) a special area of inquiry. Each part is a 3-hour written examination, and the two parts must be completed in a two-day period. After the committee has evaluated the written exams, it may decide to schedule an oral examination, but an oral exam is not required.

To prepare for the exam, you must form a faculty committee of at least two members appointed in consultation with the DGS. Each part of the examination must be read by at least two faculty members if there are more than two members of the committee. You work with the committee in choosing a specialized area of inquiry and in compiling bibliographies.

The Department's guidelines for the MA Comprehensive Examination are available in the office. Since no lasting document is produced in this case, no guide for style is necessary.

4. Graduating

To receive your MA degree, you must apply for the degree at the Graduate School office. The Graduate School then sends a form to the Department, which must verify that you have completed all the requirements, including the thesis, language project, or comprehensive examination. If you will complete the degree during the summer and want to participate in Commencement in the preceding May, you should apply for your degree in the spring (although you won't really get it until later).

Information about Commencement, including rental of gowns and the like, is always posted on the IUB web site early in the spring semester.

D. Advice and Counsel

1. Advising

When you are an MA student, your official advisor is the DGS. You should consult with the DGS every semester before registering for classes and at other times as needed. You will also want to seek advice from faculty members in your area of interest. When you form a committee for your final project (thesis, language project, or exam), the director will become your primary advisor.

2. The Ideal Pattern

It is possible to complete the MA in four semesters. If you choose to do a thesis or language project, you should be able to complete all or nearly all of your other 24 hours of coursework in three semesters, leaving the fourth semester to write your thesis, which is the equivalent of about three graduate seminar papers in length, and perhaps to finish the last semester of your language. If you choose to take the comprehensive examination, you must wait until you have completed 30 hours of coursework: you should be able to take it immediately after the end of your fourth semester, if not earlier.

In fact, however, most students choose to write a thesis or language project, and they usually complete that sometime during the summer after their fourth semester. Some students, for reasons having to do with their financial aid, wait until that summer to complete the two-semester sequence in reading French, German, or Spanish as well.

3. Advice

If you are to complete your MA efficiently, you need to set about fulfilling the requirements immediately. In your first meeting with the DGS, before your first semester, you should plan how you will fulfill the language requirement and consider which method of completing the degree you might choose. In your first semester, take R665, and make sure that your other courses fulfill other requirements (e.g., distribution, 600-level seminar). Note that the distribution requirements (western, eastern, critical issue) can be fulfilled by a 600-level seminar, which also fulfills that requirement.

At the beginning of your second year (or third semester), you should decide how you will complete the degree and begin to form your committee. Ideally, you want to have your thesis or language project proposal approved or your comprehensive examination bibliographies set by the end of the third semester. (Indeed, you must do so if you want to enter our doctoral program the following year: see Part III below.)

If you are not planning to pursue a PhD, then you may not want to fulfill the language requirement by learning to read French or German; instead, you may benefit more from gaining some acquaintance with the language of the religion that most interests you (e.g., Arabic in the case of Islam). The Comprehensive Examination is also an efficient way for you to complete the degree and to show a wide range of knowledge as well as mastery of a specific area.

If you hope to go on to doctoral study, you should consider gaining reading knowledge of French or German if you have not done so already. If you are

interested in a field that requires the knowledge of source languages, you should begin or continue study of those languages. If you think you might want to enter the PhD program in this Department, then you may want to look toward fulfilling the requirements for that degree by, for example, taking thematic/methodological/cross-cultural seminars when ones of interest are offered, taking a seminar at the 700-level, or taking a course in a department that might serve as a minor. In any case, you will want to establish a good enough relationship with at least one faculty member (e.g., by taking more than one course from him or her) that you can ask him or her to write you a letter of recommendation when you apply to doctoral programs (usually in your third semester).

III. Moving from the MA to the PhD

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

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

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

- (1) an updated statement of purpose, plotting your doctoral program within the framework of the fields of study and identifying primary faculty mentors
- (2) a letter of recommendation from at least one faculty member in the Department
- (3) a copy of your approved thesis proposal, language project proposal, or comprehensive examination bibliographies
- (4) a writing sample
- (5) a statement as to your situation regarding the French and German language requirement

If you are admitted to the PhD program and receive financial aid and you are finishing your MA with a thesis or language project, you must submit a draft of your thesis or project to your director by August 1 before the fall semester of beginning PhD work in order to receive your funding for that semester. Your director must inform of you of any necessary revisions by August 15. The thesis or project must be formally accepted by the entire committee before the end of the first (fall) semester of PhD work; if it is not, the student may not take courses in the spring semester and must reapply for admission to the PhD program. This policy applies to students who are finishing theses at other institutions as well as students coming from our own PhD program.