



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2019

This handbook is intended to supplement the more general Graduate Catalog, which can be found online and which is the document of record. Please refer to the [general catalog](#) or the [Graduate School website](#) for subjects that are not covered in this handbook, such as residency requirements and degree deadlines. We recommend that you read this handbook in its entirety as you begin your graduate career and keep it handy for future reference. The handbook may also provide you with relevant information if you are considering applying to the program.

Special thanks to Will Sherman and Barbara Thiede for their work in producing this handbook.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Department of Religious Studies provides undergraduate and graduate instruction in the academic study of religion in multicultural and global contexts; conducts and publishes research related to religions and cultures; and provides service that enhances public understanding of issues related to religion. [We](#) also contribute to the institutional work of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the University. Our mission is to foster critical understanding of the significance of religion in human societies and cultures.

With over 14 faculty members exploring the vast array of various religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, we thrive on our interdisciplinary approach to the ways religion shapes and interacts with culture. We strongly encourage students to tackle difficult questions about the world while broadening their theoretical and methodological knowledge and skills, both broadly and within their chosen field of study.

Our M.A. program aims to advance students in their research and career interests within the field of Religious Studies and beyond. The program in Religious Studies at UNC Charlotte is designed for students who want to pursue advanced studies in the academic study of religion while working closely with a distinguished faculty of scholars and teachers. The program is designed to meet the needs of different kinds of students, such as those seeking to prepare for doctoral education in Religious Studies or other fields, those seeking post-baccalaureate skills for employment in a wide range of occupations in our increasingly inter-cultural and international world, and those drawn to the intellectual rewards of a liberal arts education at the graduate level. A variety of research areas are represented among the Religious Studies faculty, with particular strengths in theory and method, Christianity, American religious traditions, and global religious traditions.

The program is designed to accommodate both full-time and part-time graduate students, with classes typically held in the afternoons and evenings to serve students who are currently employed. Religious Studies degrees have prepared students for careers in education, government, program planning and evaluation, healthcare, media, the non-profit sector, and business.

HOW GRADUATE WORK DIFFERS FROM UNDERGRADUATE WORK

If you were a good student as an undergraduate, you have established the base for being a successful graduate student. However, graduate courses and programs differ in several important ways from undergraduate courses and programs. Graduate school is not appropriate for everyone, including many students who were successful as undergraduates. Before you apply to a graduate program, you should carefully evaluate your skills, goals, and ability to devote time and energy. You should also carefully consider the particular character of each graduate program you are interested in as all graduate programs have particular strengths and limitations.

Most importantly, graduate students must take primary responsibility for their education. While each regular graduate course has a syllabus in which the professor outlines assignments and expectations, you must actively participate in the course to expand your intellectual activities and boundaries. *All* graduate courses require extensive writing and revising of writing, oral presentation, intensive reading of scholarly material, active discussion of readings, and collaborative work. Many graduate courses will also require completion of hands-on activities that focus on research skills. In a small program such as ours, you will find yourself in several classes with many of the same people. You should be willing to learn to debate and collaborate with people of different personalities and points of view. All graduate courses are intensely participatory so you must be prepared to discuss, debate, argue, write, and collaborate for every class.

A full-time load for a graduate student is nine credit hours. To those who took twelve or fifteen credit hours per semester during their undergraduate education, this sounds easy. But graduate students must expect significantly larger reading assignments than undergraduates, as well as much more intensive requirements for discussion and writing. (And please bear this in mind if you have more work or family responsibilities than a typical undergraduate.) It is typical of graduate programs at UNC Charlotte and elsewhere that students must earn grades of A or B in all or almost all courses in order to earn a degree. At UNC Charlotte, you may earn up to two grades of C in your M.A. program; if you earn more than two Cs or any Ds or Fs, you will be suspended from the program. Without a doubt, effective time management is essential to success in a graduate program.

Graduate courses are often focused on theoretical or methodological concepts and debates (although this will vary from course to course). Therefore, you will be expected to read abstract material very closely to pick out key points, to evaluate the quality of presented arguments, and to express opinions that are supported by evidence and/or logic. It thus follows that your attendance at and careful preparation for *every* class is essential.

Some students will write an M.A. thesis, while others will take comprehensive exams. More information on this distinction can be found at religiousstudies.uncc.edu/graduate-studies/program-overview and below. If you expect to write a thesis you should talk to the graduate advisor regularly about a research project. It is your responsibility to figure out a focused and feasible research project that can be accomplished with the resources available at UNC Charlotte.

It is also your responsibility as a student in this program to be aware of the policies and procedures described in this handbook; to be aware of the applicable program, college and university deadlines; and to maintain effective communication with program faculty. In addition, you are ultimately responsible for the proper completion of your academic program, for familiarity with the current UNC Charlotte Graduate Catalog, for maintaining the grade average required, and for meeting all other degree requirements. The faculty you work with will advise you, but the final responsibility for the steps of degree completion remains with you. A particularly useful tool for tracking your progress is DegreeWorks, found at my.uncc.edu

DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM

Admission to our program is based on past performance and future promise. Elements considered in the admissions process include

- a bachelor's degree, most often in Religious Studies or a related field such as Global/International Studies, History, English, Women's and Gender Studies, or Sociology. Although we do not require an undergraduate major in Religious Studies, we recommend that applicants have completed some undergraduate coursework in Religious Studies;
- a GPA of at least 3.0 in the overall undergraduate degree;
- an acceptable score on the GRE;
- a personal statement that describes (a) the candidate's goals relevant to the graduate program; (b) the candidate's relevant experiences and skills that will contribute to success in the program; and
- three letters of recommendation, at least two of which are from academic sources.

CREDIT TRANSFER

With departmental approval, students may transfer up to six (6) hours of graduate work for which the applicant received a grade of B or better from another institution or related UNC Charlotte program. This includes post-baccalaureate credit (courses taken after a student has finished the undergraduate degree but before acceptance to the graduate program).

POST-BACCALAUREATE WORK

A student who did not study Religious Studies as an undergraduate may be very interested in pursuing Religious Studies at the M.A. level but may feel unprepared by their undergraduate work. Most students do benefit from having some related background (a major or minor or a set of several courses). If you have not taken Religious Studies as an undergraduate, you should consider doing one or two semesters of post- baccalaureate work, which are undergraduate courses taken after a student has finished the undergraduate degree. Many students use post-bac work to prepare to switch fields for graduate school. More information is available at: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/future-students/admissions/types-admissionn/post-bac-non-degree/>.

FINANCIAL AID AND WORK DURING GRADUATE STUDY

IN-STATE RESIDENCY AND OTHER FUNDING

The state of North Carolina establishes the criteria that must be met for a student to be considered an in-state student and receive in-state tuition. Please consult the Office of Residency Determination for this information: <http://resdetermination.uncc.edu/>. This can be a complex subject, so we advise that potential graduate students inquire about residency early in their application process.

FELLOWSHIPS AND ASSISTANTSHIPS OUTSIDE THE DEPARTMENT

The Graduate School offers a small number of competitive fellowships, including for students who are the first in their family to attend graduate school. In addition to the positions described below, other units on campus (for example, University College and the Library) also offer assistantships. Students apply directly to these opportunities as they present themselves. For more information on this and other financial aid, see: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/funding>. The Graduate School can help you find sources outside the university that provide some funding for graduate students in the humanities.

TEACHING/RESEARCH ASSISTANCESHIPS

The Department of Religious Studies sponsors several assistantships to support graduate students and the undergraduate program. These positions, which are generally funded by the academic year and require twenty (20) hours of work per week, match graduate assistants with one or more faculty members to support teaching or research efforts. Both in-state and out-of-state students are eligible to apply for these assistantships. They are competitive, and we regret that we cannot provide support for all students. The assistantships do *not* come with a tuition remission. There is a process by which we can apply for out-of-state tuition remission for especially talented students; if successful, those students would pay in-state tuition rates. The state of North Carolina has provided the university with limited numbers of complete tuition waivers which, at the time of publication, UNC Charlotte has chosen to use for doctoral students.

Students supported by assistantships must be enrolled for at least six hours per semester and must be full-time students in good standing in their programs (that is, with a GPA of at least 3.5). Students supported by assistantships are expected to work no more than 20 hours on assistantship duties per week total.

Our teaching assistantships (GTAs) generally serve larger courses as well as the gateway undergraduate course, RELS 2600.

SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

The Graduate Committee assigns assistantships by either of the following mechanisms:

1. Rarely, selection at the time of acceptance into the program on the basis of the quality of the application for admission. Early-entry students in receipt of their B.A. who are proceeding to full-time graduate work will be considered alongside entering students, but their work in the program thus far will also be considered.
2. Selection from among existing graduate student applicants on the basis of the student's academic work, any prior work and teaching experience, and recommendation from faculty.

The DGS will announce all positions open to current students, so that eligible students may apply for the job. Decisions on GTA appointments are final.

Students in the early-entry program about to begin full time enrollment in the graduate program are eligible for GTA positions as if they were new students.

DUTIES, EXPECTATIONS, AND EVALUATION

Full-time GTAs work an average of twenty (20) hours per week during the academic year, with a total of no more than 20 hours each week averaged over each semester. Part-time GTAs will receive a prorated stipend (i.e., a student in a 10-hour GTA position will receive half the normal stipend for a full position). A student in a full GTA position may not have other employment at the same time, as the 20 hours of employment is the maximum allowable for full-time graduate students.

Expectations are set by the supervising faculty in conjunction with the specific needs of the course or project the assistantship is assigned to. Common expectations include having mastery of the course material; taking course attendance; preparing lectures; maintaining on-line learning resources; holding office hours and review sessions; advising students on their coursework; grading quizzes, papers and exams; and doing other tasks at the discretion of the faculty member to whom they are assigned.

GTAs must meet all expectations of part-time faculty members in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and they must also attend a Graduate School orientation before they begin work. GTAs are normally expected both to be visible in the completion of their duties and to perform these duties on campus.

All graduate assistants must attend program events at the direction of the DGS and other program faculty (see Professionalism, below). Failure to do so could result in a negative performance evaluation and termination of the position.

Each GTA will receive a written evaluation of their work by the final day of the semester. The writing of this evaluation is the responsibility of the supervising faculty member.

REAPPOINTMENT AND TERMINATION

GTA awards are made for one academic year or the balance of an academic year (in case of an unexpected resignation or termination). Occasionally, there are GTA positions for only one semester.

For students who were offered an assistantship upon entry into the program, the general expectation is that the award will be for two years, pending satisfactory performance in both their coursework and the graduate assistantship. Continuation from year to year is contingent on positive evaluation of performance by the supervising faculty member and/or DGS and maintaining a minimum GPA of 3.5. No student can hold an assistantship for more than two years.

In unusual circumstances, employment as a GA may be terminated prior to the end of the agreed-upon tenure. The Graduate Committee makes the final decision on non-reappointment. In case of non-reappointment, the DGS will inform the GA in writing no later than October 1 (for appointments expiring in December) or April 1 (for appointments expiring in May), except in unusual circumstances. The decision to terminate may be appealed to the RELS Graduate Committee in writing. In case of an appeal, the Graduate Committee makes the final decision.

Reasons for termination include, but are not limited to:

- a) being placed on university academic probation
- b) receiving a GPA under 3.5 in graduate coursework
- c) poor performance evaluations in their GTA position. Such poor performance must be documented in writing by the GTA's supervisor on at least a monthly basis during the semester in question, and the supervisor will need to demonstrate that the GTA has failed to respond adequately to at least two written warnings

ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The management of a student's graduate program is a collaborative endeavor, involving the active participation of the student, his/her advisor, and the Graduate Director. The Graduate Director initially serves as the student's advisor, but it then becomes the student's responsibility to seek out a member of the faculty to serve as mentor, advisor, and thesis committee chair. This should be done by the beginning of the second semester. This advisor then works individually and closely with the student in program planning, committee member selection, selection of research topics, and planning of work.

The Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for overseeing advising in the program, including course selection, advice on the course of study, Graduate School paperwork, graduation clearance, as well as financial and graduate assistantship matters.

In “My UNC Charlotte,” students will use the DegreeWorks checklist to keep track of courses they have taken and requirements that are still outstanding. This checklist is the record of the course of Study. Students should inform the DGS if it is not up to date or if any of the information is erroneous.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

All students are required to complete a minimum of thirty (30) semester hours of coursework. (See the end of this document for courses currently in the catalog.)

REQUIRED OF ALL STUDENTS

All students enrolled in the M.A. in Religious Studies are required to take two core courses (six hours). These courses (a) require that students learn the integrative cross-disciplinary approach that is distinct to the field; (b) require that students incorporate both theory and methodology in their training; (c) help students form a cohort as they move through the program; and (d) train students in pedagogical theory and practice.

Each student must also take at least 15 credit hours at the 6000-level. See below for other general requirements.

- RELS 6101: Approaches to the Study of Religion (3 hours)
- RELS 6102: Teaching in Religious Studies and the Humanities (3 hours)

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

You may also take up to **three (3)** elective credit hours (usually one course) in RELS 6800 Directed Readings/Research (see below). This limit can be waived with special permission from the Director of Graduate Studies. No more than fifteen (15) semester hours may be taken at the 5000 level.

You may take up to two 5000-, 6000- or 8000-level courses in other departments (subject to approval by the Graduate Director), and you are encouraged to do so where their areas of interest overlap with other programs (i.e., biology, psychology, education, organizational science, public policy, history, geography). Courses taught in other programs (e.g., Women’s and Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, Masters in Liberal Studies) by Religious Studies faculty do not count as coursework outside of the department.

No more than six hours evaluated as C may be counted toward the minimum hours required for the M.A. degree. None of these may be from core Religious Studies courses (6101 and 6102). Receiving more than two Cs from courses taken inside or outside of the Department, or any Ds or Fs, will result in suspension from the program. Students wishing to re-enter the program must re-apply; re-admission is not guaranteed. The new application must address any causes of poor performance and an amelioration plan. Re-admitted students must re-take any classes in which

they earned a C. A readmitted student who earns two additional Cs or lower will be permanently expelled from the program.

As a student in the Religious Studies M.A. program, you will be asked to submit a mid-program self-evaluation prior to a brief meeting with the Graduate Committee for advising on your path to the degree. The schedule for this will be determined by you and the DGS. The goal of this meeting is to review prior work and ensure all students have a viable strategy going forward.

You must always follow the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and responsible conduct of research. Program faculty will enforce all aspects of the UNC Charlotte Code of Academic Integrity. For more information, please refer to the following websites: Code of Academic Integrity: <http://legal.uncc.edu/policies/up-407> and Graduate School-specific information: <https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/academic-integrity>

Study abroad can be a worthwhile resource for students active in the program. With the assistance of the Director of Graduate Studies, students must carefully weigh the benefits of study abroad with regard to their plan of study and completion of the degree. If you are interested in studying abroad, you and the DGS should generate a written agreement outlining how academic credits obtained abroad will translate to the student's Course of Study. This agreement will not be necessary for UNC Charlotte credit earned abroad via an approved UNC Charlotte Study Abroad program. Study abroad credits apply to the student's GPA at UNC Charlotte.

If you think you have a serious and justified grievance of any sort with a faculty member in the program, you should first discuss the problem with the DGS, who will work with the faculty member to find a solution and communicate that solution to the student. If the grievance is not resolved with this informal intervention, you may file a formal written grievance with the Graduate Committee, who will consider this grievance in consultation with the student and the faculty member and will decide on a course of action. If you remain unsatisfied with this intervention, you may file a grievance with the UNC Charlotte Graduate School. Formal grievance procedures can be found here: <http://legal.uncc.edu/policies/up-411>.

TIMETABLE

The M.A. program is designed so that full-time students starting in the fall may finish in two years; students taking courses part-time or who start in the spring may take longer. Full-time coursework consists of nine hours a semester in both the fall and spring. This does not include classes taken during summer. The maximum course load for a graduate student is twelve hours per semester. In general, students in each new fall cohort will take RELS 6101 in the fall and RELS 6102 in the spring.

Taking longer to finish is fine, although you should keep a few things in mind when planning your program. First, the Graduate School requires that all coursework for an MA be completed within six years. Coursework from more than six years before graduation must either be retaken or revalidated (this means you need to show you still have some familiarity with the material, like retaking an exam). This includes courses taken as a post-

baccalaureate student at UNCC and courses transferred from elsewhere. Second, you must be registered in the semester in which you graduate.

ACADEMIC PETITIONS

To obtain any exception from a catalog, Graduate School, or University regulation, students must submit an Academic Petition. These petitions are filed online at <https://gpetition.uncc.edu/login>. Academic Petitions are used to request, for instance, late drops of a course or course substitutions. Because Academic Petitions will require the approval of the DGS and/or the instructor of the course in question, they should be filed only after consulting with the relevant faculty member(s). In the case of students already approved for the thesis or examination tracks, the DGS will consult with the student's Faculty Advisor before making a determination on some petitions.

INCOMPLETES

The grade of I is assigned at the discretion of the instructor when a student who is otherwise passing has not, due to circumstances beyond his/her control, completed all the work in the course. The missing work must be completed by the deadline specified by the instructor within a year of the initial grade. If the I is not removed during the specified time, a grade of U as appropriate is automatically assigned. Time extensions beyond one year cannot be approved except under extraordinary circumstances; such extensions require approval of an Academic Petition by the DGS and the Graduate School. The grade of I cannot be removed by enrolling again in the same course, and students should not re-enroll in a course in which they have been assigned the grade of I.

Students who have earned a grade of I (Incomplete) in any course must submit a written agreement approved by both the student and the instructor. The agreement, which may take the form of an email thread, outlines plans for completion of the missing work by an agreed-upon deadline. The DGS should include this documentation in the student's file.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

If you need to interrupt your program for good cause (health problems, etc.), you should apply for a leave of absence. Leaves of absence are generally granted for a period of up to one year. To request a leave of absence, use the [Graduate Petition link](#). If you do not apply for a leave of absence and you do not register for courses for twelve consecutive months (spring, summer, and fall semester), you will be required to reapply for admission to the program before you can register for classes again.

All requirements for the degree must be completed within six calendar years, beginning at the end of the semester that the student commences courses carrying graduate credit applicable to the degree program.

CONTINUOUS REGISTRATION

Once the thesis proposal has been defended and approved or the comprehensive exams have been set, students fall under the continuous registration policy of the University. This means that students are expected to be enrolled *every fall and spring semester* until they complete the thesis. They must be registered in the semester that they graduate (including 2nd Summer, if they plan to graduate in August).

Students who have taken the allotted six credit hours of Masters Thesis (RELS 6999) but are still working on the thesis/project, must enroll for at least three (3) credit hours to maintain continuous registration. If they have completed *all* requirements for the degree, but need to be registered for one more semester in order to graduate (for example, if you finished the thesis and the defense in late August, but not in time to graduate in August), then they can register for RELS 7999 (one credit) to maintain continuous registration.

Note: In this situation, a student will be required to demonstrate that he or she is covered by health insurance. If they do not have other health insurance, then they will have to purchase the university's student insurance, which is expensive. So please be careful about meeting deadlines and completing your work.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY AND APPLICATION FOR GRADUATION

Upon successful completion of a minimum of 18 semester hours of graduate work and in no case later than four weeks prior to the beginning of the semester in which you expect to complete all requirements for the degree, you are required to file for admission to candidacy using the form supplied by the Graduate School. Students apply for admission to candidacy through 49er Express: see <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms> (scroll down to Admission to Candidacy). This application is a check sheet approved by the student's advisor, department chairperson and college dean listing all course work to be offered for the degree (including transferred credit and courses in progress). The Registrar's office publishes a [schedule of deadlines](#) for application for candidacy.

Graduation takes place in May, August, and December. You must apply for graduation online by the deadline specified on the Registrar's calendar, linked above.

DIRECTED READINGS/RESEARCH (RELS 6800)

Directed Readings/Research is similar to a directed independent study in that a student elects to work closely with a faculty member to explore a given substantive area or develop research skills not typically available in regular courses. You may take up to three (3) hours of Directed Readings/Research credit (this limit may be increased with special permission from the Director of Graduate Studies).

To register for any independent studies course — directed reading, direct research, or an internship — students must first discuss their intentions with the DGS and then make arrangements with a supervising faculty member prior to submitting an Independent Studies and Projects Form (in appendix). This form identifies the subject and scope of the independent studies assignment and documents approval of the DGS and supervising faculty member. Upon approval, the DGS will grant the student an enrollment authorization. After completion of the project, the supervising faculty member will relay the final grade to the DGS. Independent Study is not permitted before a student has earned nine credit hours in the program.

The Directed Readings/Research should include regular meetings between student and faculty member (for example., weekly or in alternate weeks), and interim writing projects due during the semester. A Directed Readings/Research course should take the same investment of time and commitment as a standard course.

THE M.A. THESIS (RELS 6999)

A Master's Thesis is a demonstration of your ability to apply skills you have learned in graduate school to a pivotal question. Commonly, a thesis involves developing an argument, then supporting that argument with evidence. Typically, the evidence consists of appropriately gathered and analyzed data, either primary (that you collect) or secondary (collected by others and available for use). A guideline as to quality is that the thesis should have the potential to be published in an appropriate refereed journal.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THESIS OPTION

Students must declare that they are pursuing the thesis option prior to the beginning of their second year or after the completion of 18 hours. Students who pursue the thesis option will prepare and defend a thesis proposal before a committee composed of three faculty members, consisting of two graduate faculty members from the Department of Religious Studies and a third member selected from Religious Studies or another department. All students will defend their thesis proposal and their final thesis in a formal oral defense.

Note that thesis hours will be graded "IP" (for "in progress") until the thesis has been approved by your committee at defense and submitted to the Graduate School.

Completing a thesis involves a number of discrete steps and also requires submitting several forms in a timely fashion. It is your responsibility to make sure that this is done. All forms are available in the Religious Studies department office. Those required by the Graduate School are available: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms>

Choose a thesis committee chair. Your committee chair will act as your advisor and help you select courses and a research topic. *You are encouraged to select a committee chair after one full semester of coursework (9 hours).* You will want to weigh a number of factors in

deciding on a committee chair. Among them are the person's research expertise and publication record, the person's current areas of interest, and the ability of the person to facilitate your post-M.A. plans. You may find classroom experience, faculty publication records, faculty websites, direct meetings, and discussion with students and other faculty helpful in making this decision.

Meet with your committee chair several times to help identify a specific research area and to narrow your thesis topic. It often is a good idea to take a Directed Readings/Research as a readings course in the subject matter in which you are interested. This will familiarize you with the general field of study in which you will be able to find a narrower topic of interest for your thesis.

Formulate a thesis committee. You need a committee of three members. Two members of the committee must be from the department (including your committee chair), while the other may be from another department. You may have additional members from outside the University as long as they are members of the graduate faculty. The department will need to file an application with the Graduate School to have this person appointed to the graduate faculty (so, be sure to start the process with time to spare). The chair of your committee should help you in selecting the second and third members for your committee.

Prepare a Thesis Proposal. The thesis proposal should be completed no later than during your third full semester of coursework. This will be done in close coordination with your committee chair. While you will officially do this when you register for RELS 6999, it is strongly suggested that you start working on this during the summer between your first and second year. Some students may actually gather thesis data during the summer between the first and second year, for example archaeological field data.

Defend the proposal and revise your research plan as needed. To defend your proposal you should distribute copies to all committee members. Then set a date when you and the committee members can meet for about one hour. At the defense you will be asked to present a brief review of what you are proposing. The committee members will ask questions to help them understand what you are trying to do. They probably will ask you to make some changes to help you focus the research, add relevant literature, or improve the methods. The Graduate School requires that a form be filled out indicating completion of the proposal and to ensure that you have received [Institutional Review Board approval](#) for research involving human participants.

This process should be completed by the end of your third semester of coursework.

Develop and execute a research plan and time line. You should map out when you will accomplish each of the tasks set out in your research proposal. This will help to keep you on track and keep your work organized. The latest you should start on this is in your fourth semester. You may start earlier once you successfully defend your proposal.

Write your first draft. The final thesis should be between 30 and 40 pages long, and should follow the format of a journal article in your particular substantive area. Consult

with your committee chair for examples. We use the style established by the Chicago Manual of Style: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. We strongly encourage all students to use bibliographical software, such as Endnote, to help organize and format bibliographical information.

You will need to have a formal formatting review, as described [here](#). This is not optional. Plan to do so early in the writing process.

Your thesis will go through several revisions. Your committee chair will review your thesis and make comments and suggestions first. You will revise the thesis based on his/her feedback, perhaps going through several iterations of comments and revisions. You will then submit the thesis to your other committee members. As a rule of thumb, expect committee members to take two or three weeks to review drafts before your official defense. It may be necessary to call a second committee meeting if you find that comments are contradictory or confusing. Frequent contact with committee members is the best way to ensure timely progression and completion of the thesis. Revisions should be completed and your thesis defended in the last three months of the program.

Arrange a time for the thesis defense with your committee members and the Director of Graduate Studies. *The Graduate School stipulates that committee members must receive a final draft of the thesis at least three weeks before the defense.* The department may refuse to schedule a thesis defense if the committee members do not receive a final draft at least three weeks before the desired date, even if this means you cannot meet a deadline for graduation. It is your responsibility to make sure the final draft is available at the appropriate time.

You are also responsible for filling out the Report of Thesis Defense required by the Graduate School. At the conclusion of a successful defense your committee will sign the forms you bring to the meeting. The Report of Thesis Defense must be filed with the Graduate School and your submitted thesis must comply with all formatting regulations. In order to graduate at the end of a particular semester, the student must submit the thesis and Report of Thesis Defense by a date specified by the Graduate School. See <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/sites/graduateschool.uncc.edu/files/media/examandthesidefenser eport 0.pdf>.

Plan of action	Fall semester	Spring semester
Submit thesis committee form	September 1	January 20
Successfully defend thesis proposal	October 1	February 20
Submit final copy	To advisor one month before defense and to committee members three weeks before defense	

REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

The examination option helps students gain broad expertise rather than concentrate on a specific subject in the way a thesis project requires. If you are interested in non-profit or government work or plan on becoming high school or community college teacher, for example, you may find that exams better suit your career goals. This choice may also simply be a matter of personal preference. Students completing the comprehensive exams show that they have mastered some key approaches and content knowledge in the field.

Students opting for the examination track will register for three hours of exam prep as a Directed Reading course in their final semester. They will also enroll in one additional elective to accumulate the 30 hours needed to graduate.

In developing comprehensive exam reading lists, you should work first with the instructor who taught you in RELS 6101. You will also work with two other faculty members on reading lists and, in some cases, exam questions devised in advance. Reading lists for each exam should include approximately 20 books (or the equivalent in articles ~ 5 articles/book). All exams must be taken within the same week, as determined by the DGS within the first week of the semester in which the exams are to be taken.

RESEARCH INVOLVING ANIMAL SUBJECTS AND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

All research involving animal subjects *must* first be approved by the UNC Charlotte Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC); all research involving human participants *must* be approved first by the UNC Charlotte Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Graduate School also requires completion of a form indicating that the research proposal has been accepted by the student's committee and that the research has received approval from the IACUC/IRB. For more information about requirements and appropriate forms and templates see "Research Compliance & Ethics" at the Office of Research Services website: <http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics>. You should also consult with your committee chair.

COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

COMMUNICATION

In addition to the RELS graduate website and this handbook, the Director of Graduate Studies and the Religious Studies faculty rely on email to communicate essential information to students. As a rule, we send messages to your UNC Charlotte email account (@uncc.edu). The Graduate School also sends messages to this account. Therefore, you **MUST** make sure to check your UNC Charlotte email frequently.

All RELS graduate students are automatically subscribed to the graduate student listserv, the GHA-L. Religious Studies Department faculty and staff use this listserv to communicate with

students. You may also post messages to the list. In addition, the DGS will use bulk email to send communications specifically for RELS graduate students. *Please only use the list to send messages of a professional nature, such as announcing meetings, conferences, and the like. This is not a social forum.*

PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS

All graduate students are expected to take part in the professional life of the program. In particular, you should attend talks and colloquia relevant to Religious Studies, meetings held to welcome new students, and events held to recruit future students. The program can only thrive if both faculty and students take advantage of the resources that it offers, and professional lives are more successful when recommenders can speak to your commitment to the field more broadly. The DGS may require participation in some activities of the graduate assistants employed by the program but shall provide ample advance notice of such events.

THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

All graduate students in the RELS program are invited to become members of the Religious Studies Graduate Student Association. RELS graduate students are eligible to be RSGSA officers. There are no annual dues, as the department supports this effort. The student groups sponsors a number of professional development events throughout the year, including workshops, panel discussions, meetings with professionals, an annual conference, and social gatherings, with and without faculty members. Association membership will allow you to apply for conference travel funding from the [Graduate and Professional Student Government](#).

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONFERENCES

We encourage students to present papers at regional and national conferences, and we do what we can to support the expenses of travel. Professional conferences assemble panels based on promising proposals submitted in response to a call for papers. The most common venues for graduate student papers in our field are the [North Carolina Religious Studies Association](#) (NCRSA), whose call for papers usually has a June 30 deadline and is held in October or November; the [Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion](#) (SECSOR), which usually has an October 1st due date for proposals and is held in late February or early March; and the [American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting](#), which usually has an early March deadline and is held in mid-November.

GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

The Student Association's largest project each year is to organize a graduate student conference. The conference attracts student presenters from across the nation and even internationally. It is a mark of distinction for our students to run such a longstanding and well-regarded conference. At the conference, UNC Charlotte students join with their peers from other institutions to present their original research in a collegial and constructive atmosphere. UNC Charlotte faculty serve as panel discussants. The Forum usually takes place in March.

RESOURCES

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

- The UNCC Graduate School: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/>
- Official graduate catalog: <http://catalog.uncc.edu/graduate-catalogs>
- Apply to Graduate School at UNCC: <https://gradadmissions.uncc.edu>
- Financial aid for graduate students: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/funding>
- Office of Residency Determination: <http://resdetermination.uncc.edu/>
- Center for Graduate Life (CGL): <http://gradlife.uncc.edu/>
- Workshops at the CGL: <http://gradlife.uncc.edu/what-we-offer/workshops-seminars>
- Resources for teaching assistants: <http://gradlife.uncc.edu/teaching-assistants>
- The UNCC Department of Religious Studies: <http://ReligiousStudies.uncc.edu/>
- Resources for international students: <http://isso.uncc.edu/>
- The J. Murrey Atkins Library: <http://library.uncc.edu/>
 - Plagiarism tutorial: <https://library.uncc.edu/node/194>
 - Help with citations: <http://guides.library.uncc.edu/CitationGuides>
- Religious Studies databases in the library: [XXX](#)
- Support for research ethics and compliance at UNCC: <http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics>
- Writing Resource Center: <http://wrc.uncc.edu/>
- UNCC Center for Teaching and Learning: <http://teaching.uncc.edu/>
- Important forms for graduate students: <http://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms>
- Registrar's office: <http://registrar.uncc.edu/>
- Official university calendars: <http://registrar.uncc.edu/calendar>

USEFUL LINKS OUTSIDE OF THE UNIVERSITY (SEE OTHERS ON WEBSITE)

- American Academy of Religion: www.aarweb.org
- Society of Biblical Literature: www.sbl-site.org
- North Carolina Religious Studies Association: <http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/>
- Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion: <https://secor.org/>