Welcome to the GDRS!

Welcome to the Graduate Division of Religious Studies (GDRS), a program within Boston University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The GDRS is a multidisciplinary graduate program, bringing together faculty from the Department of Religion, the School of Theology, and other related departments and programs across the university. The GDRS was formerly known as the Division of Religious and Theological Studies (GDRS). This name change was approved in December of 2013 and was effective as of January 1, 2014. The change was adopted in order to more accurately describe the emphasis of our program, which is to train scholars of religion who will distinguish themselves through research, teaching, and service to universities, colleges, and the world at large. The core faculty members have not changed and we remain committed to providing a framework for students to engage in the advanced study of religious traditions and phenomena, and to acquire skills in cognate academic disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

We are excited you have chosen to become a part of our dynamic academic community! This Handbook is designed as a complement to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Bulletin and will help to guide you as you complete the steps toward your graduate degree. Outlined below are the basic requirements for your MA degree. As you progress in your degree program, the faculty and staff of the GDRS will be here to support you and answer any questions you may have.

All students are encouraged to work actively with your Advisor in the shaping of your program, and to identify the best resources for meeting your goals and helping to ensure that your work is done in a timely and efficient manner. You may also wish to consult with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), who is charged with overseeing student progress from entry to graduation. It is your responsibility to meet the requirements of your degree program and to accurately report your progress to your Advisor, and to the GDRS staff.

Questions concerning financial matters should be directed to GDRS Administrator Karen Nardella. General questions concerning program requirements can be directed to the Program Coordinator Claire Sadar Lake. Either Karen or Claire will also be happy to assist you with the administrative requirements of the GRS. And of course, you should feel free to contact the Director of the GDRS, Prof. Jonathan Klawans.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDRS Administrative Directory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of Acronyms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDRS Programs: The Track System</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Requirements</td>
<td>7-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframes for Completion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Extension, Withdrawal or Leave of Absence Guidelines</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The administrative offices of the GDRS are located in rooms 301 and 302 in the Department of Religion building at 145 Bay State Road (BSR). The offices of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GRS) are in room 112 of the College of Arts and Sciences building (CAS) at 705 Commonwealth Avenue.

**Jonathan Klawans**  
Director, GDRS  
147 Bay State Rd, Room 409  
(617) 353-4432  
jklawans@bu.edu

**John Berthrong**  
Deputy Director, GDRS  
745 Commonwealth Ave, Room 307  
(617) 353-6136  
jhb@bu.edu

**Frank Korom**  
Director of Graduate Studies (Spring 2014), GDRS  
145 Bay State Road, Room 506  
(617) 358-0185  
korom@bu.edu

**Karen Nardella**  
Administrator, Department of Religion and GDRS  
145 Bay State Rd, Room 302  
(617) 353-2636  
kcn@bu.edu

**Claire Sadar Lake**  
Program Coordinator, GDRS  
145 Bay State Road, Room 301  
(617) 358-4215  
ceslake@bu.edu
# Glossary of Acronyms

In the Boston University community, school, program, and building names are often abbreviated in both written communication and conversation. For the sake of brevity this Handbook employs many of these acronyms. This glossary is provided as a reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTI</td>
<td>Boston Theological Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSR</td>
<td>Bay State Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGS</td>
<td>Director of Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Committee on Academic Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>College of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDRS</td>
<td>Division of Religious &amp; Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRS</td>
<td>Graduate School of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLCL</td>
<td>Modern Languages &amp; Comparative Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Romance Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STH</td>
<td>School of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSU</td>
<td>George Sherman Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GDRS Program Structure: The Track System

When applying for admission to the master’s degree program, most students will choose an area of specialization within one of four Tracks. The curriculum for each track is meant to ensure that students are well prepared to produce high quality academic work in their chosen areas of specialization while also gaining a broad understanding of the field of religious studies. Each track is guided by a group of faculty that includes members of the Religion Department, the School of Theology and faculty members from other Schools and departments related to the focus of the Track. The diversity of faculty members involved in each of the tracks provides a meaningfully collaborative and collegial educational environment which is designed to foster excellence in religious studies.

1. **Texts and Traditions**: This program emphasizes skills in historical, cultural, and textual analysis, as well as relevant linguistic proficiency, which will allow students to illuminate texts, traditions, artifacts, phenomena, or events of particular significance for the understanding of religion. Students in this program will typically develop mastery in the history, literature and language(s) of a specific religious tradition, or a particularly significant body of religious writing. Current areas of strength within this track include Ancient Christianity and Christian Origins, Greco-Roman Religions, Hebrew Bible, History of Christianity, Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, Religions of China, Religions of India, and Religions of Japan.

2. **Religious Thought**: This program emphasizes skills in analytic thought in addition to expertise in one of the following disciplines: philosophy of religion, systematic theology, comparative religious thought, and religious ethics. Students may choose to focus their research in one of the following three areas: (i) historical study of religious thought in one of these disciplines, (ii) constructive development of interpretations of religious subject matters within the domain of religious ideas, and (iii) interdisciplinary study of religious thought in relation to cognate fields in the humanities, literary studies, fine arts, and social sciences.

3. **Religion and Society**: Students in this Track study the relationship between religion and society in modern or traditional cultures. Students develop generalized skills in the social sciences and specialized expertise in sociology, anthropology, social ethics or social history. These skills prepare students to examine religion(s) of one or more particular geographic area(s) or historic period(s) from a social science perspective.

4. **Religion and Science**: This interdisciplinary program examines religious and theological studies in relation to the physical, biological, and psychological sciences. Students develop skills in relevant scientific methods as well as study the history and philosophy of science. In consultation with his or her advisor, the student will develop an area of research that involves (i) studying issues at the intersection of religion and science; or (ii) making religion the object of study by means of the physical, biological, and psychological sciences.
Students who do not wish or expect to pursue the PhD at Boston University may develop an individualized program to suit their needs irrespective of the curricular requirements of the particular tracks, provided the general rules described below are followed. When it is beneficial to their academic program, students in any of the Tracks may take courses in other Boston University Graduate Schools and departments, including but not limited to the following: Anthropology, Art History, Classics, English, History, Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Romance Studies, Sociology, and the School of Theology. Core and affiliated faculty of the GDRS may serve as advisors as well as assist in the design of programs of study and in the evaluation of qualifying examinations, theses, and dissertations.

Degree Requirements

This section of the Handbook provides a summary of the main rules and requirements that must be followed and fulfilled by students pursuing a Master's in the GDRS.

The GDRS follows the guidelines set forth in the Admissions and Policies sections of the GRS Bulletin. Students should familiarize themselves with these guidelines. The Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Bulletin is only available online.

The administrators and the DGS monitor student records to ensure that all requirements and timeframes outlined in this Handbook and in the GRS Bulletin are met. However, the student is ultimately responsible for meeting all degree requirements and deadlines. Depending on their number of years in the program, students will be required to submit a Progress Report or Petition for Extension in the spring semester before they will be allowed to register for the following fall. Students who are not able to meet one or more of the timeframes outlined below are encouraged to contact the Administrator and DGS for assistance.

Please note: All timeframes are recorded in semesters rather than years. For purposes of meeting GDRS requirements, these semesters are understood to include the fall and spring, but not the summer.
Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree

Prerequisites
All entering students should show transcript evidence of having studied at least one religious tradition at the advanced Bachelor’s level. Students should also show transcript evidence of having studied at least one other religious tradition at the introductory level. If this prerequisite has not been met before admission, it may be met during the course of study by taking courses approved by the student’s advisor and the GDRS Director.

Advising
Before a student begins his or her first semester in the GDRS, he or she will be assigned an Advisor who, in many cases, will be the Coordinator of the Track to which the student has been admitted. This Advisor will assist the student in selecting courses and satisfying degree requirements. Upon admission, students are welcome to request a specific faculty advisor. Students may also consult the Track coordinator and/or Director to request changes in assigned advisors. Students are permitted to have two formal advisors of record at any given time.

Course and Credit Requirements
32 credit hours (normally eight 4-hour semester courses) are required as a minimum for the Master of Arts degree. Additional courses may be required at the discretion of the student’s Advisor and the Director. Proficiency in one modern foreign language is also required.

As stated earlier, students who do not wish or expect to pursue the PhD at Boston University may develop an individualized program to suit their needs irrespective of the curricular requirements of the particular tracks, provided the general rules described in this section are followed. Students who do hope to pursue the PhD at Boston University should carefully attend to the curricular requirements of the relevant doctoral tracks. (Please see GDRS Student Handbook for PhD Students.)

Course Options
MA students may take graduate level courses (500 level or above) in any School or College of Boston University. Students can view the upcoming semester’s University Course Schedule online on their StudentLink page. More detailed information on the graduate-level courses currently being offered by Department of Religion courses is available on the GDRS website.

Students may also take courses at all member institutions of the Boston Theological Institute (BTI). A full listing of member institutions is available at the BTI Web site. Students are encouraged to take advantage of this resource, which extends and enhances the
educational experience at Boston University. Registration for BTI courses is handled through the STH Registrar’s Office, located at 745 Commonwealth Avenue, room 108.

Required Courses
In addition to any prerequisites required upon admission, all students in the Division must successfully complete two 4-credit courses in Approaches to Religious Studies. These courses will be selected from the following: Humanities Approaches to Religion (RN 795); Social Science Approaches to Religion (RN 796); Philosophical and Theological Approaches to Religion (RN 797); and Scientific Approaches to Religion (RN 798). These courses count toward the required credits for the MA degree. Students should plan to take their “Approaches” courses at the earliest time the appropriate courses are offered.

Taking an Incomplete
If you are unable to finish the work required for a course before the designated deadline, and the instructor of the course gives his or her approval, you may take a temporary incomplete for the course. You and the instructor must agree on a deadline for the work to be completed, normally within a month or two, but it must be within one year from the official end date of the course, or it will be considered a “F.” If you are taking a course being taught by a GDRS core faculty member, please fill out the GDRS Incomplete form. The form should be signed by both you and the instructor and both parties should keep copies as evidence of the revised deadline and your agreement to complete the required coursework.

Modern Language Requirements
Passing a translation exam in French, German, or another relevant modern foreign language is required of all MA candidates. This requirement may be satisfied by Division examination, or by passing one of the free (0-credit) modern language reading courses for graduate students, discussed below. Additional languages may be required at the discretion of the Advisor, in consultation with the Director. Please note that international students may not use English to satisfy the language requirement.

Language Courses
Students are strongly encouraged to take the free language courses offered by the Modern Languages and Comparative Literature and Romance Studies Departments. These courses are GRS LG 621 (German), GRS LF 621 (French), GRS LI 621 (Italian) and GRS LS 621 (Spanish). They are set up as a Pass/Fail course and are designed for students with little or no prior knowledge of the language. If you have difficulty learning foreign languages and have no prior experience with the language, you may consider auditing, rather than officially enrolling in the course. Please see one of the administrators for further information on this option. Those students who audit a language-reading course are
permitted to take the final exam with the rest of the class. However, for those who choose to enroll for the class as an audit, the results of the final language course exam must be reported with a Report of Exam form that is completed and signed by the instructor since no grade for the class will be recorded.

Students who register for any language class, and especially those who register to take the class for a grade, are advised that attendance at the weekly class sessions is required. Students who stop attending the class without withdrawing from the course will be assigned a grade of F.

**Language Exams**

Students who are already proficient in a modern foreign language may make special arrangements to take the exam without taking the class. Those who wish to do so should contact the Program Coordinator.

The exam should consist of a passage of 250-300 words selected by their Advisor and reflect the student’s program of study. The student has two hours to translate the passage(s) and is permitted the use of a dictionary, although not a grammar text or electronic dictionary. The completed exam will be graded by a GDRS faculty member who is fluent in the language, and the evaluation will be based on the evidence of reading comprehension, and accuracy of the translation(s). Please note that the nature of the test is finally determined by the faculty member who designs it. Students who are required to take tests in ancient languages will work with their advisors to develop appropriate exams. Examinations in ancient languages, when required, do not fulfill the requirement to demonstrate expertise in a modern foreign language.

Students who elect to take a language exam rather than a language class, may retake each language test twice if necessary. Once a language exam is passed, any prior failure(s) will not be included in the permanent record. Repeated failure to pass language exams constitutes failure to make good progress toward the degree, and is therefore grounds for dismissal.

**Timeframe for Completion**

Although in some cases, Masters degree students wait until their second year to satisfy the language requirement, it is strongly recommended that they satisfy this requirement during their first year. **Please note:** Once a student has passed the exam in the free reading language courses, or by special arrangement, a Report of Exam form must be processed in order for the satisfaction of language requirements to appear on the student’s transcripts. These forms only need to be signed by the Director of the GDRS. Completed forms should be turned in to the Program Coordinator who will then obtain the signature of the Director and file the form with the GRS.
Continuing Student Status

Students who have completed all coursework must continue to register each semester until all degree requirements have been met. This includes the semester in which he or she takes exams or defends a thesis or comprehensive exam, as well as in the preceding semester. Normally, this does not include summer terms. However, if a student plans to defend his or her thesis or comprehensive exam during the summer, he or she needs to register as a continuing student for the summer term. Please consult the Program Coordinator for guidelines regarding summer registration.

Students who have petitioned for, and been granted, an extension of time to complete degree requirements will be charged the continuing student fees assigned by the GRS (see Timeframe for Completion of Program below).

Master’s Exit Requirement

After fulfilling course requirements, a MA candidate must write and defend a thesis or pass a comprehensive examination in the student’s area of specialization. The contours of the exam or thesis will be determined by the student’s advisor, in consultation with related faculty, and with the approval of the Director of the GDRS. All MA students who intend to graduate must meet the deadlines specified on the GRS calendar.

Comprehensive Exam

The comprehensive exam consists of the submission and oral defense of two or three of the student’s best academic papers to a committee of two or three faculty members.

Thesis

The student must submit a Thesis Title Approval Card to the GRS on November 1st of the academic year in which he or she plans to graduate. For further information, consult the Graduation Calendar, the Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations and the MA Timeline for Thesis.
Timeframes for Completion

The following table provides a summary of the ideal and maximum timeframes within which students are can hope (ideal) and are expected (maximum) to complete the various steps toward the completion of their degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ideal Timeframes</th>
<th>Maximum Timeframes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Exam</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
<td>3 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Religion</td>
<td>3 semesters</td>
<td>4 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>3 semesters</td>
<td>4 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Requirement</td>
<td>4 semesters</td>
<td>6 semesters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These Timeframes may only be extended with the approval of the GDRS Director. The Dean’s approval is required for any extensions beyond 6 semesters.*
Extensions

If a student reaches these time limits and has not finished his or her program, he or she will need to successfully petition the Associate Dean of the GRS for an extension. If the Dean grants extension the student will continue in the program, but will be charged the GRS rate for continuing student fees.

Withdrawal or Leave of Absence

Students who find themselves temporarily unable to make progress toward their degree should consider taking a Leave of Absence (LOA). Reasons to take a LOA include, but are not restricted to, family emergencies, illness, maternity/paternity leave, or reserve duty. Please note that you are automatically allowed up to two semesters of LOA. Students who find themselves unable to make progress toward the degree for an extended period of time (longer than one year) may petition for an extended LOA or may consider withdrawing from the program. For more specific information please consult the GRS Bulletin and the official University Policy pages regarding withdrawals and LOAs.

If you should need to take a leave of absence or withdraw from your program you must complete and submit a Withdrawal/Leave of Absence form directly to the GRS. Your withdrawal or LOA goes into effect the day the signed request is received in the GRS office.

If you file for a leave of absence before classes start, you are eligible to receive full credit for tuition and fees. Should you need to file for a leave of absence after classes have already begun, you will have your tuition and fees cancelled in accordance with the University Registrar’s refund schedule.