

**BOSTON UNIVERSITY**

Graduate Division of  
Religious Studies

**Masters Degree  
Student  
Handbook**

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2016-2017

# Welcome to the GDRS!

Welcome to the Graduate Division of Religious Studies (GDRS), a division of 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 (DRTS). 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 so pleased that 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 major 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 Study (DGS), Prof. Jennifer Knust, 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 on your progress to your Advisor and to the GDRS staff.

Questions concerning financial assistance should be directed to Karen Nardella. General questions concerning program requirements can be directed to the Program Coordinator Ryan P. Sullivan. Either Karen or Ryan 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.

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# GDRS Administrative Directory

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 Road, Room 409  
(617) 353-4432  
[jklawans@bu.edu](mailto:jklawans@bu.edu)

## **Jennifer Knust**

Director of Graduate Studies, GDRS  
745 Commonwealth Avenue, Room 306A  
(617) 358-4222  
[jknust@bu.edu](mailto:jknust@bu.edu)

## **Diana Lobel**

Associate Director of Graduate Studies, GDRS  
147 Bay State Road, Suite 507  
(617) 353-2863  
[dnlobel@bu.edu](mailto:dnlobel@bu.edu)

## **Karen Nardella**

Administrator, Department of Religion and  
GDRS  
145 Bay State Road, Room 302  
(617) 353-2636  
[kcn@bu.edu](mailto:kcn@bu.edu)

## **Ryan P. Sullivan**

Program Coordinator, GDRS  
145 Bay State Road, Rm 301  
(617) 358-4215  
[rysull@bu.edu](mailto:rysull@bu.edu)

## **Track Coordinators:**

**Track I: Prof. Jonathan Klawans**

[jklawans@bu.edu](mailto:jklawans@bu.edu)

**Track II: Prof. David Decosimo**

[decosimo@bu.edu](mailto:decosimo@bu.edu)

**Track III: Prof. Adam Seligman**

[seligman@bu.edu](mailto:seligman@bu.edu)

**Track IV: Prof. Wesley Wildman**

[wwildman@bu.edu](mailto:wwildman@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.

BTI	Boston Theological Institute
BSR	Bay State Road
DGS	Director of Graduate Studies
CAP	Committee on Academic Programs
CAS	College of Arts & Sciences
GDRS	Graduate Division of Religious Studies
GRS	Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MLCL	Modern Languages & Comparative Literature
RS	Romance Studies
STH	School of Theology
TF	Teaching Fellow

# GDRS Program Structure: The Track System

When applying for admission to the master's program, graduate students choose an area of specialization within one of four Tracks. The curriculum and exam guidelines for each track 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 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 designed to foster excellence in religious studies.

1. [Texts and Traditions](#): This program guides students to develop skills in historical, cultural, and textual analysis, combined with relevant linguistic proficiency, to illumine texts, traditions, artifacts, phenomena, or events of particular significance for the understanding of religion. The faculty members of this track are experts in specific religious traditions, with particular strengths in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Track faculty stress methodological rigor and theoretical engagement; many have particular interests in religious interactions and inter-religious boundaries. 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, and gain the ability to examine this material in a broader religious, material and cultural context. Current areas of strength within this track include: Ancient Mediterranean Religions (from ancient Israel through early Christianity), World Christianity, Jewish Studies, and Islamic Studies.
2. [Religious Thought](#): This program guides students to develop philosophical and analytical skills, knowledge of at least one religious tradition, and expertise in one or more of the following areas: philosophy of religion, religious ethics, historical and analytical approaches to theology, and comparative approaches to religious thought. Specialized research programs include: historical studies of religious thought in one of these areas; philosophical, ethical, or theoretical analysis of religious subject matters, especially within the domain of religious ideas; and interdisciplinary studies of religious thought in relation to cognate fields in the humanities, literary studies, fine arts, and social sciences. Current strengths include: German idealism; modern Jewish thought; political theology; comparative philosophy of religion; comparative religious ethics; trauma studies; pragmatism; philosophy of religions; theory and method; religion and political philosophy; and religion and popular culture.
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 pursues religious and theological studies in relation to the physical, biological, medical, and psychological sciences. Students will develop skills in relevant scientific methods and gain knowledge in the history and philosophy of science and the philosophy of religion. They will also engage the core literature of one of several specializations: (i) religion and science dialogue; (ii) history and philosophy of science and religion interactions; (iii) scientific (bio-cultural, neurological, evolutionary) study of religion; (iv) spirituality, medicine, and health; or (v) psychology of religion.

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. A core member of the GDRS faculty will serve as the student's primary advisor. While the student's advisor and first reader will normally be a member of the Core Faculty, affiliated [faculty of the GDRS](#) may serve as dissertation readers and assist in the design of programs of study and in the evaluation of qualifying examinations.

## 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 to 500 words selected by their Advisor and reflect the student's program of study. The student has one hour for every 250 words 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, Master's 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. If language exam is taken independently of class, a [GDRS Modern Language Exam](#) form must be completed. **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

If you decide to write a thesis, please work closely with your advisor to set up deadlines. For further information, consult the [Graduation Calendar](#), the [Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations](#) .

## 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.

	<b>Ideal Timeframes</b>	<b>Maximum Timeframes</b>
<b>Language Exam</b>	2 semesters	3 semesters
<b>Approaches to Religion</b>	3 semesters	4 semesters
<b>Coursework</b>	3 semesters	4 semesters
<b>Exit Requirement</b>	4 semesters	6 semesters

***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](#) .