

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Division of

Religious Studies

**PhD Degree
Student
Handbook**

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 PhD 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.

Associate Director of Graduate Study Prof. Diana Lobel is responsible for training and overseeing the work of Teaching Assistants and Fellows. 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.

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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 PhD 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.

Financial Aid and Fellowships

All PhD students who are offered admission to the GDRS will be fully funded (have their tuition covered and receive a stipend) for five years. Students who need more than five years to complete and defend their dissertation are guaranteed to have their tuition covered (but will not receive a stipend) for an additional two years.

External and Multiple Fellowships

PhD students receiving financial support from sources outside the University must inform GRS of this support. A PhD student may not hold multiple fellowships or other awards, whether from University sources or external to the University, if the total stipend exceeds that of a student at a comparable stage in the same program receiving a 12-month Boston University stipend. Students holding an external fellowship that carries a smaller stipend than the standard Boston University stipend, may have their stipends supplemented so that the student receives the same stipend as his or her peers. A one-semester teaching fellowship may be used for this purpose if allowed under the terms of the external fellowship.

Teaching

The majority PhD students who are admitted to the GDRS will be required to serve as a Teaching Fellow as part of the terms of their Fellowship. Most students should expect to serve as TFs for two years (four semesters) starting the Fall Semester of their second year in the program. TFs assist a faculty member with teaching a semester-long course 20 hours a week.

Additional Work

Domestic PhD students receiving a full stipend whether as a dean's fellow, teaching fellow or graduate research fellow, may be hired for minor additional tasks provided that:

1. the tasks provide the student with an opportunity for professional growth in research, teaching or associated administration (such as running a conference or department administration);
2. the total additional payment does not exceed \$1000 per semester;
3. the work involved does not exceed 5 hours/week averaged over the semester; and
4. the payment is set up as a weekly salary. Hourly payment is not permitted. All additional payments must be submitted to GRS Financial Aid by submitting the standard student employment authorization forms.

International students cannot be employed more than 20 hours/week under immigration rules.

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 PhD 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. **Students who are not able to meet one or more of the timeframes outlined below must contact the Program Coordinator 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.

Advising

PhD students entering the GDRS will be assigned an Advisor. This Advisor will assist the student in selecting courses and satisfying degree requirements according to the Timeframes for Completion established by the GDRS (see page 17 of this *Handbook*). Upon admission, students are welcome to request certain faculty advisors. Students can also consult the Track coordinator and/or Director to request changes in assigned advisors. It is often the case that as a student develops the focus that will constitute his or her dissertation, a faculty member other than the initial Advisor becomes the First Reader. All advising changes must be registered with the Program Coordinator.

Course and Credit Requirements

PhD candidates must complete 64 credit hours (16 courses) **including** two *Approaches* courses. (see Required Courses, page 8 below). These are minimum requirements; additional courses may be required at the discretion of a student's Advisor and the GDRS Director. Students who enter with previous graduate training in the study of Religion may petition for advanced credit for up to 32 credit hours. Please see [the GRS website](#) for complete information on receiving advanced credit.

Courses Required for all GDRS Students

Students who have not already done so as part of a GDRS MA degree 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). Students are encouraged, but not required, to take more than two. Students with a particularly strong background in one of these areas will not normally be exempted from corresponding course, but may be encouraged to take two of the other courses. Students should plan to take their *Approaches* courses at the earliest time the appropriate courses are offered.

Track Specific Requirements

Track 1: Texts and Traditions Students are required to take *Humanities Approaches to Religion* (RN 795) as one of their two GDRS methods courses. Students may be required to take further coursework in cognate disciplinary methods or approaches (e.g., History or Classical Studies).

Track 2: Religious Thought Students are required to take *Philosophical and Theological Approaches to Religion* (RN 797) and *Core Texts and Motifs of World Religions* (RN 723 and 724) or suitable alternatives in order to demonstrate broad religious literacy.

Track 3: Religion and Society Students are required to take *Social Science Approaches to Religion* (RN 796).

Track 4: Religion and Science Students are required to take *Core Texts and Motifs of World Religions* (RN 723 and 724) or suitable alternatives in order to demonstrate broad religious literacy. Students are also required to satisfy a science literacy requirement (normally the two semesters of STH TT871 and STH TT872 “Science Literacy and Scientific Boundary Questions”) and are encouraged to take one or more of the following, depending on their backgrounds and in consultation with their Advisor, as preparation for comprehensive examinations: (i) a philosophy of science course (e.g., CAS PH643 Philosophy of Mind, CAS PH665 Philosophy of Cognitive Science, CAS PH670 Philosophy of Physics, CAS PH677 Philosophy of the Social Sciences); (ii) a history of science course (e.g., GRS HI868 Science and American Culture, GRS HI869 Science and Christianity in Europe and North America Since 1500); and (iii) a philosophy or history of religion or theology course (e.g., GRS RN750 Philosophy of Religion, STH TT923 Philosophical Cosmology).

Course Options

GDRS 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 or use the [Course Description Search](#) engine to explore course options by topic. More detailed information on the graduate-level courses currently being offered by the Department of Religion 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 on the [BTI Web site](#). In many cases, these resources can helpfully supplement the wide range of learning available within Boston University. Registration for BTI courses is handled through the STH Registrar's Office, located at 745 Commonwealth Avenue, room 108.

Timeframes for completion of Coursework Requirements:

4 semesters (ideal); 5 semesters (maximum). Students with previous graduate study in Religion should petition for advanced credit during their first semester in the program. Ideal and maximum timeframes will then be set accordingly.

Taking an Incomplete

Students who are unable to finish the work required for a course before the designated deadline may, upon the instructor's approval, take a temporary incomplete for the course. The student and the instructor must agree on a deadline for the work to be completed, normally within one to two months. By GRS policy, an Incomplete becomes a permanent "I" (unsatisfactory grade) unless the coursework is completed within a period of one year from the end of the semester in which the original grade is recorded. A [GDRS Incomplete form](#) must be completed by the student and faculty member and submitted to the Program Coordinator. Both the student and the instructor must sign the form and both parties should keep a copy as a reminder of the revised deadlines.

Modern Language Requirements

PhD candidates are required to demonstrate a reading knowledge of two modern foreign languages, one of which will usually be French or German. The second language, if not French or German, should be a modern foreign language clearly related to the dissertation research. This requirement may be satisfied by Division examination, or by passing one of the 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 language reading courses offered by the Departments of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature (MLCL) and Romance Studies (RS). 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 Pass/Fail courses and are designed for students with little or no prior knowledge of the language. The results of the final language course exam should be reported with a [Report of Exam](#) form.

Students who register for any language class should remember 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 consists of a passage of 250 to 500 words selected by a student's Advisor to 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. The grader's 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 also work with their advisors to develop appropriate exams. Examinations in ancient languages, when required, do not fulfill the requirement to demonstrate expertise in at least 2 modern foreign languages.

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

Track Specific Language Requirements

Tracks 1 and 2: Texts and Traditions and Religious Thought: Students who are working with primary written sources in foreign language(s) will need to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary in these language(s) at a level of expertise appropriate to the particular area of specialization. Normally, this expertise will be evaluated directly by Division faculty, during the stage of Qualifying Examinations (see page 11 below).

Track 3: Religion and Society students may be permitted, with the approval of their advisor, to substitute for a second modern foreign language a demonstration of competence in a relevant research methodology (such as statistics, ethnographic fieldwork methods, or other types of qualitative or quantitative research skills).

Track 4: Religion and Science students, in lieu of a second modern foreign language, are required to pass an exam or graduate level course in a science skill (such as cognitive and neural modeling, ecological modeling, mathematics, computer programming, or statistics for empirical research) depending on the direction of research. Students in this track will also complete a 200-hour practicum in a relevant physical, biological, or psychological science setting to gain experience as (i) contributors to research, aiming at a publication, and (ii) interpreters and evaluators of research procedures in light of knowledge gained about philosophy and history of science.

Required Forms

Once a student has passed a language exam either independently or as part free reading language courses a [Report of Exam](#) form must be completed in order for the satisfaction of language requirements to appear on academic transcripts. Once a student has independently passed a language exam, a [GDRS Modern Language Exam](#) form must also be completed. 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.

Timeframes for completion of Language Examinations

- 4 semesters (ideal); 5 semesters (maximum)
- Students with at least 16 hours of advanced standing credit: 3 semesters (ideal); 4 semesters (maximum)

Continuing Student Status

Once they have completed their coursework and language requirements, students must continue to register each semester until all other degree requirements, including the dissertation defense, have been met. **In order to graduate, a student must be registered with the University in the semester that he or she defends the dissertation, as well as the preceding semester.**

All continuing students will register using the GRS [Full and Part Time](#) Continuing Student form.

Annual Reports

Each spring all PhD candidates are required to submit a [Graduate Student Annual Report](#) to the Program Coordinator. Students who are beyond the maximum time frame for the degree must also file a [Petition for Extension](#) with the Graduate School. Both of these forms require students to detail their progress during the previous year and outline progress to be made the following year. Reports and petitions must be signed by the student and his or her Advisor, and will be reviewed by the GDRS Director. **Students will not be permitted to register for the fall semester until these forms have been submitted and approved.**

Qualifying Exams

General Guidelines for Exams

Prior to beginning the dissertation, students are required to pass three to five separate qualifying examinations. When a student is ready to proceed to examinations, he or she must submit a [Petition to Proceed to Exams](#) form to the GDRS Program Coordinator along with an unofficial transcript (a print out of a “transcript preview” from StudentLink suffices) and a brief explanation of the topics of each exam and their relationship to the student’s proposed research. The petition must include a description of the exam structure, as approved by the student’s advisor and First Reader. The GDRS Director or Program Coordinator will inform students of the outcome of their applications.

PhD candidates normally schedule qualifying examinations after successful completion of all coursework and language requirements. Students may, however, petition to proceed toward examinations earlier, with the approval of their advisor. The precise number and nature of the exams is determined by the student’s track and particular research focus, but will generally follow the guidelines indicated below for each track.

For students in all tracks, at least one exam must have an oral component and at least two exams must have a written component. Questions for all comprehensive examinations will be shared among faculty in the appropriate track. Qualifying examinations may not be extended beyond one year unless an extension of time is approved by the Director. At least two faculty members in the student’s area of research must be closely involved in the preparation and evaluation of each examination. The Advisor or First Reader will be responsible for reporting the results of all exams to the student and to the GDRS Program Coordinator.

Students should pass all exams within 3 semesters of the completion of course requirements. Students are permitted one retake of each exam. Repeated failure to pass qualifying exams may result in termination.

Track Specific Exam Guidelines

Track 1: Texts and Traditions: Students will normally take four comprehensive examinations. Students may take these four examinations in any order, though it is advised they are taken in the order listed here. The first examination consists of a written research paper in the student’s area of specialization that explicitly integrates into the analysis a careful selection of relevant theories or approaches to religious studies. This paper should include, but need not be restricted to, approaches covered in the divisional course, *Humanities Approaches to Religion* (RN 795). This paper may be produced within the context of required coursework. Once evaluated by the student’s advisor, a final version of the paper will be submitted to the Director or Track Coordinator to verify successful completion of this requirement. For most students, a second examination will test the student’s competence in the primary source language(s) most relevant for the chosen area of study, at the level of expertise appropriate for quality academic work in that field. In the case of students doing research on English language sources, the second exam should focus on a relevant method or approach (e.g., textual criticism or literary theory). A third examination will define the student’s specialization in a broad sense. For most students this will be a broad-based exam in a single religious tradition or a particularly significant body of religious literature. The fourth comprehensive examination will seek to establish that the student has a deep expertise in a particular area of focus. The focus will usually be

limited within a particular religious tradition by space and time but sometimes also incorporate other contemporary or otherwise related religious traditions and phenomena.

Track 2: Religious Thought: Students will normally take four comprehensive examinations. The first examination will cover the field of religious thought, broadly speaking, including major themes in philosophy of religion, theology, and religious ethics. The second exam will treat core literature and methodological debates within the particular disciplinary tradition(s) in which each student is specializing. The third exam will treat the literature related to each student's research specialty, testing both competence in a specialized area of research and the ability to articulate the relevance of that specialized area to the broader horizons of religious thought and religious and theological studies. For some students a fourth exam will test the student's competence in the primary source language(s) most relevant for the chosen area of study. For other students the fourth exam may serve as supplement to the second, as described above.

Track 3: Religion and Society: Students will normally take three examinations. The first will test expertise in *Social Science Approaches to the Study of Religion*, and will be divided into two roughly equal sections. The first half of the examination, based on knowledge of approximately 25-30 core texts, will be administered to all students in the unit. The second half of the examination, of also approximately 25-30 core texts, will be more streamlined to specialties such as Anthropology, Sociology, Social Ethics, or Social History. The second exam will test the student's knowledge of a broad area of competence, including the ability to situate theoretical and methodological knowledge within a broad geographic and/or historical area. Comparative perspectives will be encouraged where relevant. The third exam will test the student's competence in the chosen specialized area of research, including the ability to articulate the topic's relevance to the broader study of religion.

Track 4: Religion and Science: Students will take five comprehensive examinations. The first covers *Philosophy and History of Science*, treating debates in philosophy of science and the history of science, with particular attention to the history of interactions between sciences and religions. The second covers *Philosophy of Religion*, treating major themes in the philosophical and theological study of religion; this exam can be customized to fit the specific focus of each student's program. The third exam depends on the track specialization, as follows. For the specializations (i) religion and science dialogue and (ii) history and philosophy of science and religion interactions, the third exam is on the core literature of the religion and science field. For the specialization (iii) scientific (bio-cultural, neurological, evolutionary) study of religion, the third exam is on the core literature of the bio-cultural study of religion. For the specialization (iv) spirituality, medicine, and health, the third exam is on the core literature of spirituality, medicine, and health. For the specialization (v) psychology of religion, the third exam is on the core literature of psychology of religion. The fourth exam, a multidisciplinary specialty exam, is an analysis and discussion of the literature surrounding the student's multidisciplinary research specialty. The exam focus and design must be approved in advance by the advisor and the entire Track 4 faculty by means of a one-page prospectus stating and justifying the topic, the readers, and the method of the examination. The fifth is a comprehensive oral exam focusing on the content of the previous four exams.

Required Forms

Upon completion of all required qualifying exams, a [*Report of Exam*](#) form must be submitted. The form should list the title of each exam taken and the date each exam was administered. This form can also be found outside of Room 302, in the Religion Department at 145 Bay State Road.

Requesting the MA

PhD students who have successfully completed at least two written qualifying exams may receive the MA degree “in course.” He or she must complete a [Report of Exam](#) form and file a [Diploma Application](#) with the GRS office.

MA Terminal Degrees

A student who chooses not to continue in the PhD program, who has otherwise fulfilled the course and language requirements for the Master of Arts, may apply for that degree. The required thesis or comprehensive examination for the degree will be determined by the student’s advisor, in consultation with related faculty, and with the approval of the Director of the GDRS.

Timeframes for Completion of Qualifying Examinations

6 semesters (ideal); 8 semesters (maximum).

*Students with advanced standing credit hours should adjust this timeframe accordingly

Dissertation Prospectus

The academic policies and procedures of the GRS require that students who have completed their language requirements, coursework, and qualifying examinations prepare a dissertation prospectus before the more extensive phase of dissertation research is undertaken. A prospectus must be approved by the student’s Readers as well as the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP). The information below outlines the formal requirements and academic standards of the GDRS regarding PhD prospectus and can also be found [online](#). For more detailed advice on writing the body of the prospectus, please see pages 19-21 of this handbook.

Steps for Creating a Successful Prospectus

1. Find Readers

The student is required to have a minimum of two Readers, but may have as many as three. Readers are selected at the prospectus stage; additional committee members (also called “examiners”) are normally added later, as the student prepares to defend a completed dissertation.

Once graduate students reach the prospectus-writing stage, they may, in consultation with their Advisor, choose a different faculty member from the GDRS to serve as the First Reader on their Dissertation Committee. Students who exercise this option must inform the GDRS Director and the Program Coordinator of this decision. The First Reader is responsible for ensuring that the prospectus and the dissertation conform to the standards of the GDRS.

Normally, GDRS faculty will serve as Readers for GDRS dissertations. Students may draw on full-time graduate faculty outside of the GDRS (but within BU) by permission of the Director to serve in the position of second or third Reader. In consultation with their advisor, students may also request to have a professor from outside of BU serve as a second Reader or third Reader by submitting a [Special Service Appointment form](#). Students requesting Readers from outside the GDRS (or outside

BU) should familiarize themselves with the [rules governing dissertation committees](#). In all cases, the majority of the full dissertation committee of five must be GDRS faculty.

2. Prepare the Prospectus

Students must successfully submit their prospectus and receive CAP approval within one year of qualifying exams. It is recommended that students start drafting it while preparing for the exams, in close consultation with their First and Second Readers. Readers commonly review the prospectus a number of times before declaring it ready for submission.

Students should review the [Content Requirements of a Prospectus](#) (which are outlined in Appendix 1 of this handbook) as well as examples of other students' successful prospectuses (available as hard copies outside 145 Bay State Road Room 302 or by request in electronic form from the Program Coordinator) before beginning the writing process.

3. Submit the Prospectus

Students must submit a Word Document of the prospectus and a signed [Acknowledgement of Prospectus Submission Form](#) to the GDRS Program Coordinator no later than 1pm on one of these submission dates:

* September 6 * October 17 * December 1 * January 30 * March 15 * May 1 *

Note: students hoping to apply for a Spring GRAF should submit a prospectus on or before Jan 30.

The Program Coordinator will then pass the student's prospectus on to the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) for their review and approval.

4. The Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) Prospectus Review and Approval

The Committee on Academic Programs (CAP) comprises the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), who chairs the committee, the Director of the Division, and representatives from each of the four tracks. The CAP meets multiple times each academic year to discuss and evaluate student prospectus submissions. Its purpose is to ensure that all dissertation proposals are appropriate to the field of religious studies and will make a contribution to a particular field of study. The CAP also ensures that the proposal is understandable to educated non-specialists.

Please note that the [Institutional Review Board](#) must also approve projects involving human subjects. Students must submit an IRB application as soon as the prospectus is approved by the CAP. For assistance in completing that application, the student may contact the IRB member currently assigned to the GDRS, [Shayne C. Deal](#).

Once the CAP has reviewed the prospectus, the DGS will communicate the Committee's decision to the student in writing within one week of the scheduled CAP meeting. The CAP can make one of three decisions: to accept the prospectus; to accept the prospectus with a request for revision(s); or to require the student to resubmit. In the latter two cases, the Committee will communicate suggestions for revisions directly to the student and the First Reader. The student and his or her First Reader are also encouraged to meet with the DGS to discuss the CAP's recommendations.

Repeated failure to produce a successful prospectus may be grounds for dismissal.

Final Prospectus Approval

Once the CAP approves the prospectus, and, if applicable, required revisions have been made, the student is required to submit two hard copies of the final prospectus and a completed GRS [Dissertation Prospectus Approval Page](#) to the Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator will obtain the Director's signature and submit the materials to the GRS office.

Timeframes for completion of approved prospectus:

6 semesters (ideal); 8 semesters (maximum).

*Students with advanced standing credit hours should adjust this timeframe accordingly.

Writing and Defending the Dissertation

There are multiple important [deadlines](#) during the course of the academic year that the student must meet in order to schedule the defense and, following a successful defense, to file the final dissertation and receive his or her degree. A student who is planning on graduating must meet all of these administrative deadlines in order to qualify to receive the degree on time.

To ensure timely and thorough review of the dissertation, students should submit a **complete draft** of the dissertation to a minimum of 2 Readers on or before the following deadlines

January 2017 Graduation	October 9, 2016
May 2017 Graduation	February 5, 2017

To ensure that all requirements and paperwork filing dates are met, the student must schedule an appointment with both the [Program Coordinator](#) and the [GRS Records Officer](#) early in the semester in which he or she intends to graduate.

The deadlines to schedule these appointments for the 2016-2017 school year are:

January 2017 Graduation	October 14, 2016
May 2017 Graduation	February 10, 2017

After the Readers have approved the dissertation for defense, the student must schedule an oral defense in consultation with the First Reader and the Program Coordinator.

The student must defend the dissertation before a committee of 5 professors. The committee includes the student's 2-3 Readers, the Defense Chair (who is not a Reader) and 1-2 additional Committee members (known as Examiners). The combination of Readers, the Chair and additional Committee Members must add up to 5, a majority of whom must be members of the GDRS Core Faculty. Three weeks prior to the defense, a copy of the dissertation should be provided to each member of the student's committee. Students should determine the preferred document format (hard copy, Word Document, etc.) of each committee member before circulating the dissertation. For further guidelines on the defense, please see the [GDRS website](#).

Dissertation Abstract

Before a student defends his or her dissertation, he or she must submit an abstract to the DGS, Director of the GDRS and the Dean of the GRS. The abstract must state the thesis, the methods of research, and the contribution of the research to the academic study of religion, the area of specialization, and scholarship on the topic.

The student should submit a properly formatted abstract of no more than 350 words to his/her First Reader at least **four weeks** before the scheduled defense. **After** the abstract has been edited and approved by the First Reader, it should be emailed to the [Program Coordinator](#), the [DGS](#) and the [GDRS Director](#) along with a [Dissertation Defense Abstract form](#) signed by the First Reader. Once the student's First Reader, the GDRS Director and the GDRS DGS approve the abstract, the Program Coordinator will submit the abstract and form to the GRS Dean.

For formatting guidelines, please consult the [GRS Research Guide for Writers of Theses and Dissertations](#).

GRS Timeframe for Completion of all PhD Programs

10 semesters (ideal); 14 semesters (maximum)

Timeframes for PhD Programs

Requirement	Ideal Timeframes	Maximum Timeframes
Coursework	4 semesters	5 semesters
Approaches to Religion	4 semesters	5 semesters
Modern Language Exams (2)	4 semesters	5 semesters
Qualifying Examinations	6 semesters	8 semesters
Prospectus Approval	6-7 semesters	8 semesters
Dissertation Defense and Completion of Program	10-12 semesters	14 semesters

Note that students who receive advanced standing course credits should adjust these timeframes accordingly. Please [see the GDRS website](#) for the timeframes that apply to students who matriculated prior to Fall 2015.

The maximum timeframes may only be extended with the approval of the GDRS Director and the GRS Dean. Students who do not make reasonable progress toward completion of the degree may be terminated from the degree program. Students who find themselves in situations that prevent their making progress on the degree should consider taking a Leave of Absence.

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 students are automatically allowed up to two semesters of leave of absence. 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 a student should need to take a leave of absence or withdraw from his or her program, the student must complete a [Withdrawal/Leave of Absence form](#) and submit it directly to the **GRS office (CAS**

112). The student's withdrawal or LOA goes into effect the day the signed request is received in the GRS office.

Appendix 1: Prospectus Guidelines

General Advice Regarding the Prospectus

The prospectus is a major step toward composing the dissertation and is a key step in the preparation of students for entry into the field of Religious Studies. A successful prospectus describes the dissertation project succinctly, persuasively, and in a manner that an educated non-specialist can understand. As such, the prospectus offers practice at writing for a broad audience of interested readers, a valuable skill when applying for grants, submitting manuscripts to publishers, applying for positions at academic institutions, and so on. The prospectus also offers an opportunity to receive detailed feedback from senior scholars across the discipline.

This is also an opportunity to work collegially with your peers. Students are encouraged to seek advice and feedback from student colleagues and to set up a working group with other students drafting their prospectuses.

Students should expect to revise drafts, in consultation with their First and Second Readers, prior to submission. Please be attentive to proofreading prose, citations, and bibliographies. Students are also encouraged to consider making an appointment with the graduate writing tutors at the [Educational Resource Center \(ERC\)](#) for a final check.

Content Requirements of a Prospectus

A prospectus is a description and justification of research to be undertaken. A good dissertation prospectus is clear and concise, and accessible to all scholars engaged in the academic study of religion. Technical language not widely used in the larger field should be explained (or avoided). The prospectus should demonstrate the student's control of the issues to be investigated, make clear the boundaries of the inquiry, indicate the method(s) to be employed, and describe the significance of the research. A full bibliography must be included in order to display the thoroughness of the preliminary investigation of the problem, the location of the problem in a field of inquiry, and the present state of the research in the field. The prospectus is limited to 12 double-spaced typewritten pages, plus bibliography and appropriate appendices.

Outline of a Successful Prospectus

- **Statement of the Problem**

The prospectus begins with a concise statement of the problem addressed by the proposed dissertation. This section delimits the topic and provides a preliminary dissertation thesis or the central research question to be addressed.

- **Context and Significance of the Study**

This next section explains how the dissertation contributes to the advancement of scholarship and normally includes a literature review that surveys existing research on the topic, identifies an intellectual context, and demonstrates the significance of the proposed study within the established context. The research should be placed not only in a particular field but also within a wider understanding of religion in human history and experience. In short, the question, “So *what?*” should be cogently addressed.

- **Method(s) of Investigation**

Third, the methodology or theoretical framework of the proposed study is presented. This section explains the method(s) used; describes the legacy, in the specialization, of the method(s); and makes a case for the appropriateness of using the method(s) to carry out the proposed research. While it is not possible to know everything about a research project at the outset, the prospectus should demonstrate awareness of some of the difficulties facing the proposed project and describe the ways the project will overcome known challenges.

- **Structure of the Dissertation**

The final section describes the structure of the proposed dissertation and should include an anticipated chapter outline.

- **Working Bibliography**

The bibliography is a crucial part of a successful prospectus. It indicates how thoroughly the student has investigated the research on the topic, its location within a field of inquiry, and its relation to cognate fields in and beyond the academic study of religion. The bibliography should also include sources and literature published in all the research languages required by the student’s [Program of Study](#). Students should also list and comment, where appropriate, on original sources and secondary literature. The bibliography should be organized by category, and a rationale for the organization should be provided in an introductory paragraph. A good working bibliography at this stage of research is typically at least 15 pages long.

- **Appendices**

Any tests, questionnaires, or other such instruments to be used in the proposed investigation should be included as appendices.

Please also include a brief statement of the estimated timeline for completing the various stages of the research and writing, including planned graduation date.

- **Formatting**

The prospectus must include a title page with the title of the project, the name of the student, his or her track, the names of the first and other Readers, and the date of submission.

The body should not exceed 12 double-spaced typewritten pages and should use a clear, formal font, such as Times New Roman. Citations should be appropriate to the standards of the field of the student, either parenthetical in-text citations or endnotes. Margins should be 1" on all sides. Pages should be numbered.

Bibliography and citation formats should match the standards in the field of the student, most commonly the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition. A handy, shorter reference is Kate Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). *Note:* If the body uses an in-text parenthetical citation system, the student must include a separate bibliography listing only those sources cited in the body; a prospectus that uses endnotes will include all this information in the notes.

It is not necessary to follow the above list to the letter. That is, a particular prospectus need not begin with a section entitled "Statement of the Problem" followed by one on "Context and Significance of the Study," and so on. Instead, individual prospectuses should follow the contours of the proposed project and field. However, students should keep in mind that all of the issues discussed above must be addressed and within a clear, discernible structure.