

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Division of

Religious Studies

**PhD Degree
Student
Handbook**

2017-2018

Welcome to the GPR!

Welcome to the Graduate Program in Religion, a division of Boston University's Graduate School of Arts and 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 GPR 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 GPR 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 GPR, Prof. Adam Seligman.

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GPR Administrative Directory

The administrative offices of the GPR 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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Jewish Studies

[Michael Zank](#)

Religions in American Culture

[Stephen Prothero](#)

Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World

[David Frankfurter](#)

Religion in Philosophy, Politics, and Society

[Adam Seligman](#)

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
GPR	Graduate Program in Religion
GFR	Graduate Faculty in Religion
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

Financial Aid and Fellowships

All PhD students who are offered admission to the GPR 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 GPR 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 GPR.

The GPR 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 GPR requirements, these semesters are understood to include the fall and spring, but not the summer.

Advising

PhD students entering the GPR 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 GPR. Upon admission, students are welcome to request certain faculty advisors. Students can also consult the 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** the required theory courses: 'The Study of Religion I: Classic Approaches and Theories' and GRS RN79X: The Study of Religion II: Religion and Contemporary Theory and a Professional Development Seminar. These are minimum requirements; additional courses may be required at the discretion of a student's Advisor and/or GPR Director. Students who enter with previous graduate training in the study of Religion may petition for advanced credit for up to 24 credit hours. Please see [the GRS website](#) for complete information on receiving advanced credit.

Courses Required for all GPR Students

Students are required to take the two theory courses and the Professional Development Seminar.

Course Options

GPR 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 [GPR 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 [GPRS 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 GPR 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.

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. 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 GPR 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

Students of the GPR will take three types of examinations. Examinations will have both oral and written components, to be decided on by the specialization committee in consultation with the student's primary advisor/s.

Examinations reflect the corpus of knowledge the GPR expects the student to control before they can move to writing a dissertation prospectus.

I. Specializations draw on diverse bodies of knowledge, address different historical periods and geographical areas and demand discrete methodological skills. Consequently, each specialization will administer 1-2 examinations covering the historical periods, data, and historiography relevant to the specialization.

II. Students across the GPR are required to master the theoretical models, interpretive schemes, and modes of analysis unique to their specialization. Hence, all students will be required to take one examination that will demonstrate the theoretical and methodological acumen necessary for interpretation of the materials particular to their specialization.

III. In their dissertations, students will be making use of the requisite historical, theoretical, and methodological knowledge of their specializations to develop an original work of scholarly analysis. The final exam will consequently be aimed at demonstrating the student's skill at analyzing their own area of expertise and interest in terms of those accepted interpretive schemes and bodies of knowledge.

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 GPR.

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 consisting of the DGS, the Director of the GPR, and other relevant faculty from the Graduate Faculty in Religion (GFR). The information below outlines the formal requirements and academic standards of the GPR 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 GPR to serve as the First Reader on their Dissertation Committee. Students who exercise this option must inform the GPR 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 GPR.

GPR faculty will serve as Readers for dissertations. Students may draw on full-time graduate faculty outside of the GFR (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 GPR (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 members of the GFR.

2. Prepare the Prospectus

Students must successfully submit their prospectus and receive 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 GPR 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 Specialization Committee for their review and approval.

Final Prospectus Approval

Once the prospectus has been approved 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 2018 Graduation	October 9, 2017
May 2018 Graduation	February 5, 2018

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 2017-2018 school year are:

January 2017 Graduation	October 16, 2017
May 2017 Graduation	February 12, 2018

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. Students are responsible for any technology and communication needed for the defense.

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 GFR.. 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 [GPR website](#).

Dissertation Abstract

Before a student defends his or her dissertation, he or she must submit an abstract to the DGS, Director of the GPR 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 [GPR Director](#) along with a [Dissertation Defense Abstract form](#) signed by the First Reader. Once the student's First Reader, the GPR Director and the GPR 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 GPR 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 GPR 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 Absenc

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)** Room 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 specialization, 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.

