

Department of Religious Studies

Graduate Student Handbook 2026-2027

Entering Ph.D. Class of Fall 2026

Northwestern University

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Introduction

Welcome to the Graduate Program in the Department of Religious Studies!

Congratulations on beginning your scholarly career at Northwestern! We are committed to supporting you as you advance toward your intellectual and vocational goals. You will find in our Department scholars with diverse training: history, textual studies, ethnography, philology, and more. We are united by our common dedication to the field of Religious Studies, both as teachers and researchers. Please feel welcome to call on any of the faculty with any questions that you might have. We are a scholarly community, and you, as our newest members, are a central part of that community.

In addition to the guidance provided in this handbook, you can also avail yourself of the advice and support of your graduate peers, your advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies for 2025-26, Professor Brannon Ingram, and the Graduate Program Administrator (GPA), Melissa Ferguson. We are all here to help you succeed.

We are pleased that you have made the decision to join us, and we look forward to working with you over the next several years.

Sincerely,

The Graduate Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies

Non-discrimination

Northwestern University prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, caste, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, height, weight, or any other class of individuals protected from discrimination under federal, state, or local law, regulation, or ordinance or any other classification protected by law in the matters of admissions, employment, housing or services or in the educational programs or activities it operates, as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended in 2008; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; and any other federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation.

The University has designated the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance to coordinate the University's compliance with federal and state civil rights laws regarding protected characteristics, including Title IX and those other laws and regulations references above:

Emily Babb

Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance | Title IX Coordinator
Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance
1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500
Evanston, IL 60201
(847) 467-6165
OCR@northwestern.edu

Tiffany Little

Senior Director. Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance | Deputy Title IX Coordinator
Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance
1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500
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The University complies with all federal and state laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability or perceived disability status. As such, reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are available to individuals with disabilities when such modifications and services are necessary to access the institution's programs and services. The University's ADA/504 Coordinator is:

Laura Conway
Director, ADA Compliance | ADA Coordinator
Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance
1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500
Evanston, IL 60201
(847) 467-6165
Accommodations@northwestern.edu

Sam Milgrom
Deputy ADA Coordinator
Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance
1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500
Evanston, IL 60201
(847) 467-6165
Accommodations@northwestern.edu

Inquiries about Title IX or the University's prohibitions against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation can be directed to the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, the ADA/504 Coordinator (for disability-related questions) or to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at the contact information listed below:

Complaints and inquiries regarding discrimination, harassment, and retaliation involving federal laws may be directed to:

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
John C. Kluczynski Federal Building
230 S. Dearborn St., 37th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 730-1560
OCR.Chicago@ed.gov

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
John C. Kluczynski Federal Building
230 S. Dearborn St., Suite 1866
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 872-9777

Any person who believes that the University as a federal contractor has violated nondiscrimination or equal opportunity obligations may contact the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) at

OFCCP
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20210
www.dol.gov
(800) 397-6251

How to Use this Handbook:

This handbook provides the policies, guidelines, and recommendations of the Department of Religious Studies. It will also refer you to relevant policies of Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences (WCAS) and The Graduate School (TGS). In case of conflict, WCAS and TGS policies take precedence over Religious Studies policies. Please consult the TGS website for their requirements and deadlines.

The Basics

The Department of Religious Studies

The Department of Religious Studies at Northwestern University is dedicated to preparing doctoral students to be scholars, teachers, and leaders in the various fields of Religious Studies.

The primary mission of the program is to foster an academic and research environment that trains graduate students to conduct original research in their subfields that is deeply informed by Religious Studies' theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Our goal is to help students graduate with well-crafted and well-written dissertations, and with the ability to engage broader audiences in the humanities and social sciences in both scholarship and teaching. This approach positions them to be competitive on the job market as area specialists who can engage in the methodological and theoretical conversations belonging to the interdisciplinary field of Religious Studies.

Questions about schedule, exams, and general course of study should be directed toward students' faculty advisors and the core faculty in their programs. Students engaged with a second Department should also consult their mentors from that Department. The DGS is available for general consultation. Graduate School (TGS) advisors solve registration problems.

For All Students

All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Departmental policies in this handbook as well as the policies of Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences (WCAS), The Graduate School (TGS), and the University.

Students retain the right to make their own choices within the program, whether it accords with faculty advice or not. Students may also appeal any decision made by the Department by contacting the DGS. Please see the separate appeals processes for WCAS and TGS.

Areas of Study

The Department of Religious Studies trains students in the following fields. (Faculty and supporting faculty are listed alphabetically.):

American Religions: James S. Bielo, Robert Orsi, Sarah Taylor

Supporting Faculty: KB Dennis Meade, J. Michelle Molina, Barry Wimpfheimer

Buddhist Studies: Kevin Buckelew, Sarah Jacoby

Supporting Faculty: Mark McClish, Robert Linrothe

Classical Judaism: Shira Schwartz, Barry Wimpfheimer

Supporting Faculty: David Shyovitz

Hinduism: Mark McClish

Supporting Faculty: Kevin Buckelew

Latin American Religions: KB Dennis Meade, Michelle Molina

Supporting Faculty: Paul Ramírez

Islam: Usman Hamid, Brannon Ingram

Supporting Faculty: Sean Hanretta, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Rajeev Kinra, Robert Launay, Henri Lauziere, Daniel Majchrowicz, Zekeria Ahmed Salem

Religion, Law & Politics: Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Brannon Ingram, Mark McClish

Supporting Faculty: Kevin Buckelew, Barry Wimpfheimer

Advising & Working with Faculty

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will provisionally assign to all students entering the program an advisor from among Department faculty with whom the student has shared research interests. If they wish, a student may change advisors after the first-year review (discussed below).

We adhere to a collaborative mentoring model in student-faculty relationships and believe that faculty resources are here for students' benefit. All students are encouraged to work with several faculty members over their time at Northwestern. We particularly urge students to consider including on their examination and dissertation committees Religious Studies faculty members who are outside of their immediate field, but who share more general theoretical interests. We also encourage students to include faculty members from other Departments on their committees.

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is a fundamental aspect of our program. Beyond courses taken in the Department (including core requirements, as discussed below), all students take courses in other Departments and programs that help them develop their research and methodological interests. Such decisions are made in consultation with the student's advisor. Students in American religious history, for example, will be encouraged to take courses in American history, Black Studies, and Latin American Religions. The Department of Religious Studies enjoys productive relationships with faculty across the University.

Most students follow one of two basic models, although flexibility is the rule:

- Courses primarily in Religious Studies with a concentration of 4-6 courses in a second Department or Interdisciplinary Cluster as well as further courses other Departments, as interest and time allows. *Please note that this does not constitute a formal "minor" on the transcript.*
- Courses evenly distributed between Religious Studies and a second Department, such as Anthropology, History or English. Students who pursue this option will develop a relationship with a co-advisor in the other Department, and one of the student's qualifying examinations will be the (primary) Departmental exam of the second Department. In principle, a student who follows this model should be eligible for employment either in Religious Studies or in the affiliated field. *Please note that no degree, certificate, or minor is conferred by the affiliated Department.*

Change of Area

Our program's flexibility and interdisciplinarity affords students ample opportunity to extend and develop interests beyond their primary area of study. For instance, an Americanist may decide to emphasize Contemporary Religion, or a student who studies texts may extend her inquiry into ethnography. The cultivation of such further interests is easily accommodated by either model presented above as well as by taking field examinations in these areas.

In rare cases, however, a student's interests may change sufficiently that they wish to change their area of study altogether. If such a change would require the student to take field examinations in entirely new areas, then the student must reapply to the program in the new area. Examples might include a student who wishes to change from Islam to Classical Judaism or from Buddhist Studies to American Religions.

The reapplication process consists of the following. The student must submit a new statement of purpose, writing sample, CV (including a statement of language facility), and two letters of recommendation from Northwestern faculty members (including one from the proposed advisor)

to the DGS, usually by the winter application deadline. No formal application is filed with TGS, and no application fee is due. If the student is accepted on the basis of this Departmental application, they may begin work in the new area immediately upon acceptance (normally Spring Quarter).

If the student is in good standing, reapplication does not jeopardize the student's current program or funding. If a student is not accepted to the new area, they may remain in the program in the area in which they were originally accepted. In addition, a student in good standing who is not accepted in the new area will not lose their existing funding if they continue in the old area. A student who is accepted in the new area will continue on his or her original funding schedule.

Students wishing to change areas at other times of year should contact the DGS. Students are strongly discouraged from beginning work in a new area of study later than the beginning of the second year.

GSP – Graduate Student Progress

GSP (Graduate Student Progress), gsp.northwestern.edu, is an online interface that allows programs to keep track of graduate student academic progress and view academic milestones and related academic activity in one place. All graduate students are asked to submit required Departmental and TGS forms through GSP. This includes providing information about the following in a timely manner:

- Advisor and dissertation committee (when selected)
- Plan of study, including coursework planned and completed
- Annual progress reports, including awards, publications, research progress, meetings attended, teaching, and research goals
- The achievement of all milestones (both Religious Studies and TGS milestones, as discussed below)

On GSP you can also find various important TGS forms that the Department will require as you pass through your milestones, such as forms pertaining to Master's degree completion, qualifying exams, prospectus defense, dissertation defense, application for degree, petition for absence, and program withdrawal forms.

Once you submit a form on GSP, the information is automatically sent to the Department for approval. If you have any questions, please contact the GPA.

Funding & Stipend

TGS Funding

Religious Studies students are admitted with 20 quarters of TGS funding: five full academic years and five summers. This is referred to by the program as regular funding. Each academic year is 3 quarters (Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters) and each summer is 1 quarter (Summer Quarter).

This funding is contingent upon satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D., as laid out in this handbook and Departmental policies, The Graduate School policy, and [Regulations Governing Recipients of University Assistance](#). Maintaining good standing in the program requires ongoing participation in the intellectual life of the Department, including attendance at Departmental events.

We discourage students from going unfunded at any time during this five-year period, including summers. In all quarters (Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer) students with funding must register to remain active.

The current stipend rate can be found on the [About Graduate Funding page](#), and current tuition rates can be found on the [Student Finance website](#). As a full-time registered funded graduate student at Northwestern, you will be eligible to receive a full health insurance subsidy for single coverage if enrolled in the [Northwestern Student Health plan](#). Students are enrolled in this plan on an annual basis beginning in the fall, and to be eligible for this subsidy and coverage, a student must be enrolled in the Fall Quarter. Funding is contingent upon satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D., according to the program's handbook and policies, The Graduate School policy, and Regulations Governing Recipients of University Assistance.

Two Types of Funding: University Fellowship (UF) and Graduate Assistantship (GA) Quarters

Your 20 quarters of TGS funding are divided into University Fellowship (UF) quarters and Graduate Assistantship (GA) quarters.

- In UF quarters, a student is not required to work for the Department.
- In GA quarters, a student will be asked to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA) or, less commonly, a Research Assistant (RA).

Note: The program requires at least six quarters of Teaching Assistant work (GA-ship), usually two each in the second, third, and fourth years. In other quarters, students are funded by a University Fellowship (UF). With the permission of the Department, it is also possible to serve as a Teaching Assistant once each in the fourth and fifth year.

The Department encourages students to use UF funding exclusively during years one and five. We feel that TAing in the first year is too much to ask of new students, and not TAing in year five allows for maximum focus on writing the dissertation. Students whose research requires extensive travel or residence elsewhere, however, may opt to use UF quarters in their fourth year and serve their final two quarters as Teaching Assistants in the fifth year.

Funding Beyond Year Five: Internal and External Fellowships

Funding beyond the fifth year is not guaranteed. Two sources, however, can extend a student's regular funding:

- [Internal fellowships and grants](#), which are administered by TGS
- [External fellowships and funding](#), which are administered by outside sources

The most common type of fellowship funding that our students receive are [Interdisciplinary Graduate Assistantships offered within NU](#). Interdisciplinary Graduate Assistantships offer the chance for Ph.D. students to obtain academic and professional development skills while exploring special interests in other areas. The Graduate School also has an online [professional development tool](#) to help students, postdocs, and faculty easily search the various opportunities available at Northwestern. If you receive additional funding of any type, you should notify the Department of the award and your acceptance as soon as possible. Please see TGS' [External Award Policy](#). More information on eligibility for fellowships and grants can be found at [Fellowships and Grants](#).

Students who receive external funding (either through outside Northwestern fellowships or qualifying Research Assistantships, Teaching Assistantships, or Graduate Assistantships with other Northwestern departments) during their first five years of study will receive the following support:

1. During the 20-quarter funding package a 1:1 match of up to four additional quarters of support (Student Banked Quarters) to be used through the summer of the sixth year of graduate study only
2. A stipend top-up to the TGS base stipend (if the external award stipend is lower) through the sixth year

While most external fellowships will qualify for this additional support, students should be aware that some RAs, GAs, and TAs with other Northwestern departments do not qualify for Student Banked Quarters. Students must consult their Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or Graduate Program Administrator (GPA) to determine whether their funding qualifies for Student Banked Quarters.

Students should also be aware that they may not accrue more than four (4) Student Banked Quarters for use in the sixth year, and student banked quarters are not eligible to be used beyond the sixth year.

Departmental Funding for Student Travel and Other Needs

All students are eligible for a career total of \$3000 in funding from the Department. These funds are intended to cover attendance at conferences at which students are presenting papers, interviewing for jobs, and/or representing the Department in a society's graduate organization. See the section on "Conference Travel" below.

For the 2026-27 academic year, there will be a **\$750 maximum allowance** for all conference travel, domestic or international.

All allocations are based on Departmental budget availability.

In exceptional circumstances where advanced students have unused funding, Departmental funding may be used for other student expenses, such as books and professional society memberships. Annual funding totals are limited, and all requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with priority given to conference travel in which students are presenting.

Other Sources of Funding at NU

- All students are eligible for **TGS Summer Language Grant** with a maximum award of \$2000. The Summer Language Grant (SLG) assists Ph.D. students with expenses related to language training necessary for their dissertation research. Grants are made to help defray expenses incurred pursuing language instruction not available at Northwestern or via the Traveling Scholar Programs. Applicants must exhaust efforts to address needs locally or through Northwestern course offerings, the Traveling Scholar Program or the Chicago Metropolitan Exchange Program. Guidelines and restrictions are [here](#). The deadline each year is early in Spring Quarter.
- The **Graduate Research Grant** (GRG) is intended to help Ph.D. and M.F.A. students in historically underfunded disciplines meet expenses related to scholarly research and creative endeavors. The maximum award amount for a student over the course of his or her graduate career at Northwestern is \$3,000. For more information, see [here](#).
- The **Career Development Grant Program for the Humanities and Social Scientists** is intended to facilitate students' next professional steps after graduate school, whether they are on the conventional academic path or not. The awards can be used to cover costs directly related to a job search, such as travel to conferences or other venues to interview,

or for items such as production costs for job market materials. Students can be granted up to \$400 over the course of their graduate career (either in one \$400 award or multiple awards not exceeding \$400). See [here](#) or contact gradfund@northwestern.edu

- The **Dependent Care Professional Development Grant** assists graduate students with dependents with supplementary funding for attending conferences and workshops or conducting research-related travel. Applications are accepted throughout the year on a rolling basis. Dependents include custody for one or more children under 18, a spouse/partner who is incapable of self-care, and/or a dependent who lives with you of any age who is incapable of self-care and whom you claim as a dependent on your tax return. The grant can cover care at home while you are away or onsite care at a conference, workshop, or research site. The grant provides up to \$750 per year. See [here](#) for more details.
- Students actively affiliated with the **Mellon clusters in the Humanities and Qualitative Social Sciences** are eligible for travel support to attend conferences and/or seminars and make presentations on behalf of Northwestern University. See [here](#) for details.

Reimbursements

Reimbursements for expenses related to funded travel and for Departmental business must be approved in advance. Upload a copy of the receipts with any meeting invitation, schedule or RSVP list, and copies of credit card statement (if applicable) to a [Departmental Expense Report](#) form for reimbursement.

Taxes and Tax Withholding

All students must file annual tax returns. Students must follow specific rules for reporting income and withholding taxes for fellowships, scholarships and assistantships.

As discussed above, the designation “GA” denotes quarters in which a student is serving as a Teaching, Graduate, or Research Assistantships, while “UF” designates quarters during which the student is on a University Fellowship (i.e., not serving as a TA, GA, or RA). Whether you are on GA or UF funding has tax implications.

- If you are on UF funding, the University **does not automatically withhold taxes**. The University will only withhold Federal or Illinois taxes from your fellowship stipend during such quarters if you request the Payroll Office to withhold a specific dollar amount each month.
- If you are on GA funding the University **automatically withholds taxes**, as required by law.

Teaching, Graduate, and Research Assistants will need to complete W-4 Federal and Illinois withholding forms. For more information: <https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/funding/taxes/>.

Conference Travel

The major conference in our field is the American Academy of Religion (AAR), where 10,000 scholars in our field gather, discuss their latest research, and read papers. In addition, each subfield has its own meeting(s). Once students have advanced to candidacy, conferences are wonderful opportunities for feedback on dissertation work and are an essential element of professional formation. Your advisor can help you to propose a session or give a paper at these meetings, which is an invaluable opportunity for you to find a cohort in your area of interest and to meet other scholars with an interest in your dissertation work.

Funding Conference Travel

Conference funding comes from three sources:

- Departmental funding for each student (discussed above and below)
- Students are eligible to receive up to two **TGS conference travel grants** for *confirmed conference presentations* during their time in the program. The limit per student for our program is \$1600 (\$800 per grant, two grants allowed per student). These two grants may be used for the same conference, but the student must fill out two separate applications to comply with the rules in TGS system. It is wise to use these grants for more expensive, distant conferences. TGS grant applications must be made within 90 days prior to the conference. If a student meets TGS qualifications, they will be approved for a grant. You can apply [here](#).
- Advanced students who have exhausted their TGS conference funding may still receive up to \$400 in TGS Professional Development Funds to attend a conference for job interviews, for example. More information [here](#).

Students are encouraged to seek additional conference travel funding from professional societies, clusters, and other granting organizations. These awards will not count against the funds available from Religious Studies or TGS.

Applying for Departmental Travel Funds

Religious Studies students may apply for conference funding from the Department starting their second year. Students in their first year may ask for an exception to attend a workshop or conference *with their advisor*, who must provide an explanation as to why this event is crucial for the first-year student's career.

We ask that you inform us of any travel plans by October 1 for early year conferences or March 1 for conferences in Spring and Summer. We will, however, also consider requests on a rolling basis throughout the year. Requests are made through the [Departmental Travel Request](#) form. In addition, a student's advisors must submit an email explaining in specific terms the value of the particular conference for the student, as well as the relative importance of each conference if the student has requested funding for more than one.

The amount of money provided by the Department depends on the number and dollar amounts of requests the Department receives in total.

Recommendations for using your conference funds wisely:

- Always register as early as possible
- Buy travel tickets early. The best rates can typically be found 3-6 months prior to an event.
- You are required to share a room with someone else. You can stretch your money even further by getting a quad or staying with a friend in the area.
- Take food along, and take advantage of receptions (the Departmental food expense limit is \$50 per day, but you can often spend much less if you plan)

If an important conference opportunity arises that cannot be accommodated by a student's remaining conference funds, and no other support is available, the student and advisor should contact the Chair.

Residency

According to TGS: A student pursuing a doctoral degree must complete eight quarters of residency consecutively over two years, including summers (see the [Ph.D. Timeline Completion](#)). [Leave of absence](#) may alter the residency timeline. Students must successfully complete all the course units for which they are registered to receive full credit towards residency.

It is Departmental policy that all students in coursework and all students who are receiving GA funding maintain residency for the duration of that funding.

Grievances

If there is a conflict with a faculty member, the issue should be taken up directly with that faculty member. If the matter is not resolved, consultation can be made with the DGS, followed (if no resolution has been made) by the Chair.

Leaves of Absence and Withdrawal from the Program

In our Department, we understand that one's academic progress may be interrupted by important commitments to family, by mental or physical illness, or by other pressing emergencies. We do not attach a stigma to such leaves of absence. We urge you to contact your advisor and the DGS to discuss any issues that may require leave as soon as practical. Before requesting an official leave from TGS, the student should gain the written approval of the advisor and the DGS. The approval should include the student's reason for a leave, explicit plans for the leave, and a date and conditions for return to the program. Under no circumstances should a student request an academic leave from TGS without having had a serious conversation with his or her advisor. We can first offer the support of the Department and assist in supporting your petition for a leave to TGS.

Students do not need the permission of the Department for family leave or childbirth accommodation, but they should inform their advisors, the GPA, and the DGS and make plans for completing or postponing work. A voluntary [medical leave of absence](#) is processed outside of TGS through the Dean of Students Office.

Here is where you can find TGS policy on [leaves of absence](#).

Should you choose to discontinue your participation in the program, here is where you can find information on [withdrawal](#).

Exclusion (Dismissal) From the Program and Appeals Process

When conditions arise prompting the exclusion of a student from the program, whether through the annual review process (outlined below) or because of exceptional circumstances, a committee will be convened consisting of the student's advisor, the DGS, and a member of the Graduate Faculty from Religious Studies who has not been involved in advising the student. In a case in which the advisor is the DGS, a third Religious Studies Graduate Faculty member who has advised the student will be included. The DGS will request a written evaluation from the member(s) of the committee who is (are) not the DGS or the student's advisor. Committee decisions to dismiss a student must be ratified by majority vote of the faculty. The only exception to this is failed exams, which can trigger the automatic exclusion of the student from the program (see below). In such cases, the committee outlined above is not convened, but instead the exam committee notifies the DGS and Chair, who begin the process of dismissal.

Any appeals will be referred to the same committee, which will review the appeal and again review the written evaluation made in consideration of the exclusion. The decision of the committee on the appeal is final.

Course of Study

A student's path through the program can be divided into two parts: pre-candidacy and candidacy. In the first part, a student completes coursework in fulfillment of the Department's curricular requirements and passes their qualifying (and language) exams. After these exams have been passed, the student is admitted to candidacy. As a candidate they must write and defend a prospectus of their dissertation. After the prospectus defense, a student devotes themselves to writing their dissertation. Ultimately each student will defend their dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Religious Studies.

What follows provides an overview of the course of study, including general requirements, registration, milestones, progress to degree, coursework, and exams.

General Requirements for All Students

Good Citizenship

Good citizenship (conscientious attendance and engagement in Departmental activities) will be a factor in determining the selection of finalists for Department-sponsored grants and the opportunity to teach stand-alone courses. We may not always agree, and there is certainly a time to resist and push back, but we all strive for respectful engagement that enhances the dignity of all of those around us. Attendance at all Departmental events is required.

Mandatory Departmental Events

- **Departmental Conferences and Lectures:** The Department frequently sponsors lectures, job talks, and conferences of broad interest to our students. Barring illness or direct conflicts with courses or teaching responsibilities, all graduate students in residence are expected to attend and participate in these events. The Department tries to schedule such events between 12:30 and 2:00 on Tuesdays, so nothing should be scheduled for that time. When an event is scheduled at a time other than Tuesday at lunch, the Department will provide as much advance notice as possible. The Department's annual Perry Lecture is often held in the afternoon or early evening.
- **Faculty-Graduate Colloquium:** All graduate students in residence and all faculty attend the faculty-graduate colloquium. They are the center of our intellectual community and meet approximately 4-6 times yearly on Tuesdays from 12:30-2:00 p.m. Discussions will be of two types:
 - Discussions of advanced students' work-in-progress (draft dissertation chapters, articles, or job talks) read in advance. The student will spend a short time highlighting methodological issues implicated in the work before open discussion

among students and faculty. These colloquia are not meant as job talks and should not be delayed until the dissertation is essentially finished, but should present some of the students' work while it is in process. This enhances the usefulness of these sessions.

- Outside speakers or our own faculty. Works-in-progress will be provided and read in advance.

The Program by Year

All students take different intellectual paths, but there are a standard set of milestones that all must pass satisfactorily. Here is an overview of a typical path:

- **Prior to Matriculation**
 - meet with advisor to discuss first quarter classes
- **Year 1:** (UF year, typically: no TA or GA duties)
 - meeting with advisor and DGS in Fall to discuss year 1 classes and language study
 - first half of required coursework
 - end of year review meeting (end of Spring Quarter): required
 - summer: language study and/or preparation for second-year paper
- **Year 2:** (GA year, typically: TA or RA duties during 2 quarters)
 - second half of required coursework
 - second-year paper
 - end of year review meeting (end of Spring Quarter): required
 - summer: language study and/or preparation for exams
- **Year 3:** (GA year, typically: TA or RA duties during 2 quarters)
 - qualifying exam in Theory and Method in Religious Studies (end of Fall)
 - qualifying field exam 1 (usually end of Winter)
 - qualifying field exam 2 (usually end of Spring)
 - end of year review meeting (end of Spring): required
 - language exam (usually during Summer)
 - summer: preparation for prospectus defense
- **Year 4:** (GA year, typically: TA or RA duties during 2 quarters)
 - dissertation prospectus defense (usually early Fall)
 - application for external funding (usually Fall)
 - end of year review meeting: optional
- **Year 5+:**
 - early dissertation research colloquium (unless student is in the field)
 - dissertation defense
 - graduation
 - end of year review meetings: optional

There are a few things to note:

- Each spring, all students must submit a self-evaluation through the Graduate Student Progress system (GSP)
- Students are passed on to their next year when, in their end of year review at the end of Spring quarter (see below), they are determined by the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) to have successfully and satisfactorily achieved their respective milestones
 - Pre-candidates must have their end of year with the GSC in person
 - Candidates are encouraged, but not required, to meet with the GSC
- The language exam may be taken at any time prior to the prospectus defense
- The Theory and Method exam is only offered in the Fall Quarter. Students who, due to a leave of absence or other circumstance, find themselves “off-cycle” with respect to exams (see below), may have to take their exams out of the sequence outlined above
- A student may not defend their prospectus before being admitted to candidacy
- Any of these milestones may be extended if a leave of absence has been granted by TGS
- Time to completion may be abbreviated if credit is awarded for Ph.D. level study in another program

JD/PhD Combined Degree Program Students

Students enrolled in the JD/PhD combined Degree Program follow a different course of study than that outlined above. They follow the general Religious Studies PhD course of study for the first three years and complete all milestones except the dissertation, then they transition to the Law School to complete the JD for three years, and finally they return to Religious Studies to complete their dissertation.

The Law School requests that JD/PhD students consult with relevant Law School faculty on a major project before beginning the JD. Typically this consists of including one or more Law School faculty, in addition to the PhD advisor, on the student’s 2nd-year paper project. We recommend JD/PhD students get in touch with Law School faculty early, e.g. in Spring quarter of the first year, to ensure this can happen smoothly in the second year.

All JD/PhD students attend a mandatory orientation to the Law School, usually held for one week in December at the end of Fall quarter. JD/PhD students in Religious Studies should complete this orientation in their second year.

Satisfactory Progress to Degree

A student's progress to degree is monitored by the Department through annual end-of-year reviews and independently by TGS. Failure to make adequate progress to degree, as determined either by the Department or TGS, can result in academic probation.

Departmental End-of-Year Reviews

Satisfactory progress is assessed within the Department by the GSC at annual review at the end of Spring Quarter. Reviews will take place during Reading Week of Spring Quarter. In early May, all students will receive notice of the review. The GPA will send instructions to each student to fill out a required self-evaluation on the Graduate Student Progress system (GSP). Students are asked for updates on academic progress, teaching, plans for next year and professional development. The GPA also solicits evaluations from the students' professors that year, including those for whom the student has TAed.

The review committee consists of the Graduate Student Committee, as well as the student's primary advisor (or advisors if there is a co-chaired committee). All members of the review committee look over the self-evaluation, transcripts, instructor evaluations, any course evaluations and other relevant material.

All pre-candidates are required to meet with the review committee in-person, while candidates may elect to forego this meeting. The review interview itself usually lasts about a half hour. The committee queries the student on their performance and discusses upcoming milestones and projects.

Regardless of whether a student meets with the committee in person or not, the committee votes on each student's progress. There are two possible outcomes:

- The committee approves of the student's progress by majority vote, the student is passed on to the next year without restrictions.
- The committee, by majority vote, does not approve of the student's progress for one of the reasons listed below (or others), and they are passed conditionally or placed on probation (see below)

After the vote, a written evaluation is provided to the student and advisor and uploaded to GSP.

Inadequate Progress and Probation

The following are examples of the kinds of problems that will prompt the review committee to withhold approval:

- challenges with writing skills
- challenges with analytical skills
- inability to consistently meet deadlines
- inability to consistently make quality contributions in seminar
- incomplete grades remaining on the transcript by spring quarter
- B/B+ grades on the transcript
- problematic conduct and interpersonal demeanor
- failure to participate in Departmental activities

If a student exhibits any of these problems, the review committee will come to one of the two following conclusions, depending on the number of problems the student is experiencing:

- For a student experiencing **one or two** of these challenges: the committee will pass the student conditionally, which means that the student will undergo a more intensive annual review the following year to confirm that these areas of concern have been eliminated. At that subsequent annual review:
 - If the committee finds that all of the identified problems have been addressed, the student returns to good academic standing, perhaps with a modified milestone timeline.
 - If the committee finds that all of the identified problems have not been addressed, the student will be placed on a two-quarter Departmental academic probation. At the end of the second quarter, the student will meet again with the review committee. If, at that time, the review committee finds that all of the identified problems have been resolved, the student is returned to good academic standing. If not, the committee will begin the process of excluding the student, as outlined above.
- If a student is experiencing **three or more** of these challenges, they are placed on a two-quarter Departmental academic probation. The student has two quarters to re-establish good academic standing by addressing the identified challenges. At the end of the second quarter, there is another meeting of the review committee. If, at that time, the review committee finds that all of the identified problems have been resolved, the student is returned to good academic standing. If not, the committee will begin the process of excluding the student, as outlined above.

Students who successfully re-establish good academic standing are still required to have an annual review at the end of the academic year in which they are returned to good standing.

If a student fails a second-year review, a recommendation to award a terminal master's degree is brought before the Departmental faculty for discussion and final decision.

TGS Review of Milestones

While the Department reviews progress relative to TGS' requirements, TGS themselves monitor student grade point averages (must stay above 3.0), incomplete grades (no more than three X or Y grades), and four milestones:

- completion of coursework (with 3.0 GPA): by the end of the second year (8th quarter)
- candidacy (completion of all exams): by the end of the third year (12th quarter)
- prospectus defense: by the end of the fourth year (16th quarter)
- graduation: by the end of the ninth year (36th quarter) – but don't plan to be here that long!

Failure to make satisfactory progress according to these criteria will automatically trigger TGS probation. TGS probation lasts for 2 quarters (not including Summer Quarter), before the end of which a student must have addressed the underlying problem. If a student has not, they are dismissed from the University. A student may petition to have this probationary period extended one time. This decision to dismiss a student from the University may be appealed. All of this is covered in greater detail in TGS' [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#). TGS policy on coursework more generally can be found [here](#).

Don't Worry!

You are encouraged not to worry about all of these milestones at once, but to focus on what is particular to your year in the program and trust in the guidance of your advisor. Although they require a lot of work and energy, these milestones present no difficulty for most of our students and cases of probation have been uncommon. Be aware of where you are in the process, stay present to that, and keep your eye on the final milestone: the happy day of graduation.

Years One-Two (and Beyond): Coursework

Overview

All graduate students who receive a stipend are required to be registered full time, which is defined as no fewer than three and no more than four course units per quarter. More than that is an overload, which requires a [Course Overload Petition Form](#) and approval from a student's advisor and the DGS.

Religious Studies students are required to take a total of nine courses in their first year and nine in their second year, three in each quarter.

Grades

In general, classes at NU can be taken either for a "quality grade" (i.e., ABC/NC) or Pass/No Credit (P/N). In practice, however, Religious Studies Ph.D. students may take only up to 2 courses Pass/No Credit (excluding REL 490, for which students register when they are serving as TAs and are always taken P/N, as discussed below). Only one of these P/N courses can be a Religious Studies course, and only one can be a course in a secondary Department in which the student is taking a qualifying exam (see "Interdisciplinarity" above). In Religious Studies, students taking P/N courses are required to complete all requirements, including any final project.

Please familiarize yourself with TGS' [General Registration Policies](#), particularly policy on incomplete grades. Note that any student with more than three incomplete grades is automatically placed on TGS probation (see above), and that students cannot graduate with incomplete or unreported grades. Failure to redress incomplete grades can also result in a loss of good standing in the Department.

Required Coursework for Ph.D. Students

The following coursework is required by the Department:

- 18 total courses (9 each year), including:
 - The 3-quarter Theory and Method sequence
 - REL 481-1: *Classical Theories of Religion*
 - REL 481-2: *Contemporary Theories of Religion*
 - REL 482: *Themes in Comparative Religion*
 - 2 quarters of REL 490: *Teaching Assistantship/Research Assistantship* (See "Teaching," below)
 - 2 quarters of REL 570: *Religious Studies Research Paper* (See "Second Year Paper," below)
 - 11 other courses graded ABC/NC

There are few important things to bear in mind about coursework:

- the following courses **may not be taken P/N**:
 - in Religious Studies: REL 481-1, 481-2, 482, 570-1, 2, or 3
 - in the secondary Department: their general introductory course or sequence, equivalent to our REL 481-1, 481-2 and 482.
- **REL 481-1 and 481-2** are usually staggered, with each offered every other year. That means students in coursework must take either whenever they are offered.
- **REL 482** may be taken in either the first or second year and may be repeated for credit.
- Quarters in which a student serves as a TA or RA count toward the 18 total courses. Students register **REL 490** for each class they TA, and that class is taken P/N.
- The **two quarters of REL 570** spent writing the Second-year paper count toward the 18 total courses. Students must enroll for two quarters of REL 570, but they can be any two quarters of the second year (REL 570-1 is Fall, 570-2 is Winter, and 570-3 is Spring). REL 570-1, 2, and 3 are taken for ABC/NC grades. A grade of “K” is assigned for the first quarter, and then a final ABC/NC grade is entered for both quarters after the completion of the second quarter.
- Students are strongly encouraged to seek out **Independent Studies (REL 499)** in which they can develop research and writing skills appropriate to their specific subfields. All independent studies involve significant writing assignments.
- Only three advanced language courses (whether regular courses or Independent Studies with a mentor) may count toward the total of eighteen courses in the first year.
- A first-year graduate student may take no more than one-half of the total credits in any one quarter in REL 499 Independent Study or Projects.
- All coursework requirements for a doctoral program are expected to be completed by the end of the 8th quarter.

Regular Religious Studies Courses

You can find a list of courses offered by the Department [here](#). The courses offered in a given Quarter can be found [here](#). Please note that some courses, such as REL 482, may be repeated for credit.

Instructions for Special Registration Courses

The list below provides guidance on courses with special registration numbers (i.e., not for named, regular courses) used above. Consult the GPA with questions.

- **REL 490:** TA / RA Assistantship: Students register for REL 490 as a placeholder for TA / RA work. Graded P/N. You will need a permission number to register for REL 490. Obtain permission number from GPA and register with professor teaching the course.
- **REL 499:** Independent Study: Students register for 499 with the professor who has agreed to teach the Independent Study. A first-year graduate student may take no more than one-half of the total credits in any one quarter in 499 Independent Study or 499 Projects. Please obtain permission number from GPA. Graded ABC/NC.
- **REL 570** (1, 2, or 3): Research Seminar: Second-year students register for two of the three quarters between fall and spring for the second-year paper. Please obtain a permission number from the GPA and register under the advisor's name. A single grade will be given to both quarters after completion of paper.
- **REL 590:** Research: Students who have not yet completed residency requirements use REL 590 as a placeholder for research outside their coursework. This generally is used for students in year one and two of the program. Can be taken for 1, 2 or 3 units. P/N.
- **TGS 500:** Advanced Doctoral Study: Available only for advanced students on funding who have completed the residency requirement of eight consecutive quarters. TGS 500 provides full-time status (all 3 units) without accumulation of credit or residency. TGS 500 does not require a permission number.
- **TGS 512:** Continuous Registration: Available for students who have used all TGS funding but are continuing unfunded. TGS 512 costs \$100/quarter and provides full time status. TGS 512 does not require a permission number but does require permission from the Department and advisor.
- **TGS 513:** Advanced Continuous Registration: Available for students past the 9-year cut off. TGS 513 is considered less than full-time. TGS 513 will not defer student loans or keep visas active. The cost of registering for TGS 513 is \$1,000 a quarter.

Enrolling in Classes after Year 2

Students may enroll in courses at any time while they are registered as Ph.D. students. While students may take some formal courses in the third year, however, it should be devoted as much as possible to independent studies in which the student prepares for qualifying examinations and drafts a dissertation prospectus. Third year students may take courses P/N, but all pre-candidacy students are advised to take courses essential to their fields and concentrations for “quality” ABC/NC grades, even if Religious Studies and any requirements from a secondary Department have been fulfilled. After candidacy students may take any courses P/N.

Registering for Courses

[Online registration takes place on CAESAR](#) 4 times per year for Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer Quarters, respectively. Check the [Academic Calendar](#) for important registration dates and deadlines. If a student receives an error message for having exceeded the unit load when registering, they can email the GPA or [TGS Student Services](#) to request an override.

A few notes:

- Students TAing or RAing should enroll in REL 490 TA/RA Assistantship under the Instructors name for the term they TA/RAing.
- If a student is assigned another type of GA-ship (such as teaching their own course) they should enroll in REL 490 but under the name of the DGS (Prof. Brannon Ingram), as there is no faculty instructor.
- Students who are funded and who register for less than three course and/or research units in any given quarter must also register for TGS 500-0: Funded Doctoral Study. This applies typically to students who have completed coursework.
- Students in quarters 13 and beyond may register for non-required coursework in addition to TGS 500-0 Funded Doctoral Study, if the courses are related to the student's area of study.

Summer Registration

First-year students often use Summer Quarter to study languages and carry out preparatory work on their Second-Year Paper. Second-year students often use Summer Quarter to study language, as well, in addition to preparing for exams. Third-year students may continue language study in Summer Quarter, but almost always use it to prepare for their prospectus defense as well.

Summer registration is **required** for the following students:

- Those who receive funding in the form of a tuition subsidy and stipend throughout summer quarter. This applies to all students on regular funding who wish to be paid through the summer. Students must be enrolled full time (3-4 units, TGS 500, or REL 590) during summer to receive their TGS funding. The number of units for TGS 500 cannot be adjusted, but this registration provides full time status nevertheless.
- International students, who require enrollment for visa status
- Those who plan to receive or defer student loans during summer and must, therefore, be registered full time

Students who do not fall into any of the categories above are not required to register over summer quarter unless they wish to fulfill academic requirements outlined by their program.

Any funded student who is enrolled in a language and/or other course, and is below three units, must supplement their registration with REL 590, TGS 500, or another registration to achieve full time status.

If you have any questions about your summer enrollment, please contact the GPA.

Students who are not receiving University funding but require registration for visa or loan purposes typically enroll in TGS 512, which costs \$100/quarter. Students in TGS 512 are not charged the TGS activity fee, nor are they eligible for the U-Pass.

Auditing

Students registered in The Graduate School may not audit courses, per TGS [policy](#).

Canvas

Northwestern makes use of the classroom software Canvas, about which you can learn more [here](#).

Travelling Scholar Program (CIC)

Another exciting opportunity is interdisciplinary study through the CIC [Traveling Scholar Program](#) (including courses at the University of Chicago) and the Chicago Metropolitan Exchange (courses only at the University of Illinois at Chicago). Please note that you cannot use the Chicago Metropolitan Exchange to take courses at the University of Chicago. Plan ahead; you should begin the registration process at least six weeks in advance.

The Traveling Scholar Program is limited to three quarters of work, but you do not need to complete the semesters or quarters consecutively and you may take as many or as few courses at the other institution as you like during each quarter of registration.

Year Two: Second-Year Paper

The most important feature of year two is the **Second Year Paper**. Early experience with intensive, directed scholarly research and with writing for publication in Religious Studies is crucial to graduate formation. The second-year paper allows students to pursue these ends free of the time constraints of 9-week quarters. The subject matter and topic of the paper are chosen in close consultation with the advisor and discussed at the first-year review. If a new advisor is to be chosen, this would be done with the second advisor. Its method and/or content should support the student's longer-term research interests. Students work on the paper throughout the second year but register for only two quarters of full-credit 570. The timing of the registrations depends on the timing of the student's GA/RA work and of important seminars. Students register for two quarters of 570 according to the term: 570-1 in the Fall, 570-2 in the Winter, and 570-3 in the Spring.

The first portion of the second-year paper is an independent study ideally taken with the advisor in the Fall of the second year (i.e., 570-1), but at any rate by Winter Quarter (i.e., 570-2). Under the close guidance of the advisor during weekly meetings, the student frames the research question and hypothesis, assembles a bibliography, acquires materials from other institutions if necessary, and begins to formulate an argument. The student will receive a K (continuing) grade for the first quarter of 570, which will be changed to a letter grade after completion of part two. Students must register for a second full-credit quarter in either Winter (570-2) or Spring (570-3). During the second full quarter of study, students meet occasionally with their advisors to discuss progress in framing the work, formulating arguments, and acquiring additional sources. **Regardless of their schedule of 570 registration, students must create a rough draft of the paper by the beginning of the spring quarter and complete it by the end of spring quarter. A single grade is given for both full-credit quarters of work.**

The second-year paper is an exercise in writing for publication. Whether or not it is published, its character and execution should aim at this goal.

- The paper should be conceived and written with a clear sense of the appropriate audience.
- The research should be thorough; the bibliography should reflect the depth of work in the sources and literature.
- The paper should make an original contribution to the field, perhaps by use of unpublished source material, and in any event by development of a thesis or argument that adds significantly to understanding of the material.
- There is no mandatory minimum or maximum length, but the typical paper length is 7,500-10,500 words.

Year Two: Eligibility for Master's Degree

The Department of Religious Studies does not admit students to a terminal M.A. program. However, Ph.D. students in good standing may request the M.A. after they have met the following criteria, which has usually happened by the end of the second year:

- 5 quarters of residency
- Successful completion of the two-quarter Religious Studies research paper (570-1, 2 or 3)
- 11 other courses graded ABC/NC

For students leaving the program with an M.A., no language or qualifying examinations are required. Please see TGS' requirements for the awarding of Master's Degrees.

Year Three: Exams

Overview

All students take qualifying examinations in their third year, although it is possible to take one or more in the second year in consultation with their advisor.

There are three qualifying exams and one language exam. All four are collectively known to TGS as the "Qualifying Exam." TGS requires all students to have completed their "Qualifying Exam" by the end of the third year (12th quarter). In this handbook, "qualifying exam" refers to each of the three comprehensive exams listed below. For Religious Studies students, then, meeting this TGS requirement means passing all three qualifying exams and the language exam by the end of the third year. Failure to do so will result in TGS probation. Students may not defend their prospectus until they have passed all four exams.

The aim of qualifying examinations is three-fold: to certify students in the study of religion broadly; to provide them ample background in theory, method, and content in an identifiable field; and to prepare them to launch a research career in a particular segment of the field. To those ends, the examinations begin with a foundation in theories and methods and progress to more specialized material in the field examinations, where the students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the history of their field and to make a strong argument about the material they have prepared.

Flexibility, comprehensiveness, and breadth are the goals of qualifying examinations. The student's examination committee (which may be different for each examination, see below) determines the optimal content for each examination and writes the examination questions.

Timing

Normally the examinations are given during the reading weeks of Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters, respectively, to avoid interrupting either undergraduate teaching or undergraduate examinations and grading. During a quarter in which a student is not serving as a GA, however, the exam may be scheduled during the ninth week or during final examination week by mutual consent of student and committee. Students should never be asked to take qualifying examinations during a week when they are also required to teach class or grade exams.

Students and their advisors may petition the Department and (if necessary) TGS to either delay or advance the schedule of examinations, but this may not prevent a student from being placed on probation by TGS. In order to allow for processing time, candidacy documents should be filed two weeks in advance of this deadline.

First exam: Theory and Method Exam

All students take this exam at the end of Fall Quarter in their third year. The committee that gives this examination is the Graduate Studies Committee.

The Theory and Method exam consists of both written and oral components. The written component is a take-home exam that presents the student with three sets of two prompts. Students choose one of the two prompts in each set to answer. The three sets cover the following areas:

- 1) a problem or trend in the historical formation of the study of religion and of religion as a modern field of inquiry
- 2) the theoretical contributions characteristic of a particularly prominent theorist in this discipline
- 3) approaches to a particular theme (e.g., ritual, religion and the state, religion and political authority, hermeneutics, gender, colonialism, etc.) in the study of religion.

Answers to the prompts are to be based on a reading of list of approximately 35-40 works confirmed by the Graduate Student Committee and distributed to students who are scheduled to take the exam before the end of the previous spring quarter. The list is intended as a foundation and guide. Students may freely consult any books or notes while writing their exam and are encouraged to refer to additional pertinent readings in order to prepare fully thought-out essays. The answers to the first and third questions must involve substantive interaction with at least five of the works on the reading list, and none of those ten works can be the focus of the answer to the second question. Each essay is limited to 2000 words, excluding in-text references or brief footnotes.

Students have one week to complete the written portion of the exam, which is usually distributed at 5 p.m. on the Sunday prior to reading week and is due back at 5 p.m. on the following Friday. The exam may be posted and submitted on Canvas or sent out and received back by the DGS via email.

After reading the written exams, the committee holds an oral defense toward the end of examination week of not more than one hour with each student. The result of the exam will be delivered on the day of the oral exam.

A student who is deemed to have failed the exam must retake the exam with new questions in the Winter quarter. Rewriting deficient exams or parts of exams is not allowed. A student may not proceed to their two field exams before the second attempt at the Theories and Methods exam. If the student fails the second attempt, they are dismissed from the program. Students will not be asked to rewrite any portion of the examination.

Samples of past Theory and Method Examinations and the current list of required readings are posted on Department's website.

Second and Third Exams: The Field Exams

Normally, the first field exam is taking during reading week of Winter quarter and the Second during reading week of Spring quarter.

Typically, the student's advisor chairs the committees for these examinations. The committee for each examination must include at least two members of the Department, unless the examination is primarily in another field. In that case, the committee must include at least two members of the Northwestern faculty. External examiners are sometimes appropriate but may only be added in addition to the Northwestern members.

The first field exam is intended to be broader in scope, and the second more specialized. Typically, the broader exam takes the form of a two-hour oral examination, while the more narrow exam must be written. If the student's advisor approves, however, both may be written. The format of the written exam falls to the discretion of the committee and might be a paper, a take-home examination, or a seated and timed examination.

If a student wishes to emphasize a second discipline in their coursework, examinations, a research (see below), one of the two field examinations must be a basic qualifying examination in that second discipline administered by their co-advisor in the second Department. The student's Religious Studies co-advisor consults with the co-advisor in the second Department to ensure that this examination approximates a Religious Studies field examination as much as possible in its expectations and standards, if not in its format. If the affiliated Department has no basic qualifying

examination, the student's advisor, with assistance from the DGS, organizes and administers the external exam with assistance from the affiliated Department.

Results of oral examinations are announced the day of the examination. Results of written examinations must be communicated to the student, the DGS, and the GPA no more than one week after the examination.

The results of these exams are pass, conditional pass, or fail. A student who passes may move on to the next exam. A student who receives a conditional pass receives an additional task – usually a paper—with a scope, topic, and due date assigned by the examination committee. The results of the exam are reported to Department after the committee has graded the additional assignment. A conditional pass does not constitute a failure unless the student fails the additional task in the eyes of the committee. A student who fails the exam must retake the failed exam within one quarter after the failure. If the student also fails that exam, the student is excluded from the program.

In the event of a conditional pass or initial failure, the committee makes a recommendation to the DGS and the Department chair regarding the student's future in the Department.

Should disagreement about a student's exam performance arise, it is brought to the Departmental faculty as a whole.

Failed Qualifying Exams

The following rule pertains to failing any of the three qualifying exams.

- A student who fails one qualifying examination is placed on Departmental probation. The probationary period lasts two quarters, during which time the student must pass the failed exam on the next attempt. Upon passing, the probation is lifted. If the student fails the second time, they are automatically dismissed from the program.

Language Exam

Facility in scholarly and source languages is imperative for participation in global scholarly discourse. By the end of the 12th quarter, and before admission to candidacy, each student must demonstrate by examination the ability to comprehend and interpret scholarly works written in one contemporary research language (other than English) relevant to their fields, as well as any research or primary source languages their research requires. Decisions about which language and how many additional languages a student must study are worked out in conversation with advisors. A contemporary research language (e.g. French, Spanish, or German) may not replace proficiency in the primary source language(s) (e.g. Sanskrit, Tibetan, Hebrew, Urdu, Latin, etc.) deemed essential by a student's advisor. Students should meet with their advisor and the DGS during the summer before matriculation or early in their first quarter to decide the languages in which they must develop competency before candidacy. In certain cases when a student's research language is a non-English language of which the student is already a native speaker, the language examination requirement may be waived (for example, a native speaker of Spanish may not need to take the Spanish language examination), but this is decided by the advisor. Students may take their language exams as soon as they are ready to do so, from the first quarter forward. Note that students are required to pass their language exam before they advance to candidacy.

Language facility is determined in different ways, depending on the language:

- **Romance languages, German, Hebrew and Japanese:** students must pass the regularly scheduled language examination at University of Chicago. The Department will pay, and take care of registration for, one attempt by each student in each language to be passed. At the beginning of the fall quarter, inform the GPA which language exam you will be taking and in which quarter. Exams taken at other institutions, or proficiency demonstrated in other forms, will not be accepted in place of these exams. However, students who can demonstrate that they have passed the University of Chicago exams prior to matriculation at Northwestern University do not need to retake them. Here is a link to the [University of Chicago Academic Reading Comprehension Assessment](#).
- **Other languages:** facility in Tibetan, Arabic, Sanskrit, Urdu and other languages not mentioned above will be determined through successful completion of coursework (equivalent of 4 years); translation work; or other means to be chosen by the advisor and student in consultation with the DGS. Exams within the Asian languages follow a model similar to exams in French, German, and Spanish, although they focus more on language comprehension in reading and providing idiomatic English summaries of the passages through the use of comprehension questions.

Religious Studies students have found a number of programs useful for language acquisition (see below). Students who wish to take undergraduate language courses in WCAS are encouraged to register early, as they fill quickly.

Summer Language Grant Program

Students who have a need to study a particular language for research and/or degree progression may apply for funds to support such study in an immersion program domestically or in the target country. Students must have had some exposure to the target language in order to be awarded an SLG. Details about the Summer Language Grant can be found [here](#):

Summer Classes

PhD and MFA funded students may register for [summer intensive language programs](#) without accruing an additional tuition charge. Students can register for these courses by submitting a dual registration form (available at the Registrar's Office or The Graduate School (TGS) to a student services representative at TGS.

Courses via BTAA

[Big Ten Academic Alliance](#) program allows students to take language classes, at any Big 10 school, University of Chicago, and University of Illinois, Chicago.

Language Courses During the Academic Year

Students may take 100-, 200-, and 300-level language classes through the [Judd A. and Marjorie Weinberg college of Arts and Sciences](#) the during the academic year. Students must take these classes as their fourth class in a given term, if full-time status needed. Students beyond course work would take these language courses in addition to TGS 500 registration. All language courses must be taken for credit and a grade. Visit the registration page for information on how to register for language courses and other courses outside of TGS.

Failed Language Exam

A student who fails a language examination may retake it at his or her own expense the next time it is offered. If the student is approaching candidacy or graduation and the exam can be administered locally, the student may retake it as soon as the quarter following the failure.

Year Four: Prospectus

Students ordinarily spend the summer between the third and fourth years preparing the dissertation prospectus.

Although the University deadline for prospectus approval is the end of the 16th quarter of registration (typically the last day of the fourth summer quarter), the University's requirement that all students apply for major fellowships by the end of the fourth year means that the dissertation proposal must normally be approved by the student's committee during the first two weeks of fall quarter of the fourth year, but preferably by early September. The student, with assistance from the advisor and the GPA, schedules the meeting at which the proposal is discussed and approved. The student sends the proposal to the advisor and other committee members two weeks before it is discussed for approval, but students are encouraged to present their prospectuses to their dissertation committees earlier to allow time for revision before approval.

The dissertation committee includes at least three faculty members: the Religious Studies advisor, the proposed second Department committee member (if applicable), and one or more additional committee members from Religious Studies. Any committee members who have been chosen from outside Northwestern University should also participate; however, often the need for additional members from inside or outside the university is determined in the prospectus defense itself, and in this case, they may be invited later. At least two Northwestern University committee members must be members of the Graduate Faculty. All Departmental and TGS requirements for candidacy must be completed before the final proposal can be considered.

The prospectus should be between 15 and 25 pages in length (not including the selected bibliography and tentative chapter outline). It should include a clear statement of the problem the student anticipates exploring, a literature review, and a statement of how the dissertation will contribute to knowledge in three areas: a particular subfield of the discipline, Religious Studies generally, and the humanities or social sciences broadly. The prospectus must signal the relevance of the student's proposed research to broader discourses in Religious Studies and even in the humanities and social sciences generally. Students must ask themselves questions like the following: what would a scholar of Latin American religion learn from reading my dissertation on Islam (or vice versa)? How would my analysis of ecclesiastical statements on the death penalty help a sociologist interpret opinion poll data?

The proposal defense normally lasts no longer than two hours. At this meeting, the proposal may be approved with or without conditions, or substantial revision may be requested. In the latter case, the committee may choose to reconvene to approve the new draft or may conduct its business by email.

The student must submit the Ph.D. prospectus form through TGS Forms in GSP. The program must approve this form online before The Graduate School enters the final approval. Students are notified via email by The Graduate School of approval of their prospectus form.

Year Four: ABD (All But Dissertation)

After students have defended their prospectus, they are considered ABD (and are thereby eligible to apply for many external Ph.D. grants (see below).

The time after the prospectus defense is used to focus on dissertation research and writing, although students may take particular courses of strong interest either for grades, for P/N, or as audits. Normally, ABD students will use the unused portions of their final GA-ship and University Fellowship years.

Year Four or Five: Application for External Funding:

The University expects graduate students to make a good faith effort to apply for external funding during their graduate studies. Typically, this happens in year four or five to assist with dissertation research and/or writing. Most fellowship deadlines are in the fall. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with their advisors and with [The Office of Fellowships](#) staff during the previous summer to identify appropriate funding sources.

Year Five: Graduate Student Early Dissertation Colloquium

All ABD students present a chapter, field report, or some aspect of their research at a Departmental graduate colloquium. The purpose of this colloquium is not to present a finished chapter of the dissertation nor to replicate a job or professional talk. Rather, it is an opportunity for the student to get input and feedback while they are in the process of formulating their dissertation. Ideally, students will schedule their Colloquium in Year 5, although students on a delayed timeline may present in Year 6. Students should discuss their colloquium with the DGS and GPA during the summer before the fifth year.

Unless the student has won an internal or external fellowship, the fifth year is the last year of guaranteed financial support.

Advanced Students: Teaching Independent Courses

Based on need and interest, the Department may offer advanced students the opportunity to design and teach their own course instead of serving as a TA or RA in fulfillment of GA duties. If you are interested in this possibility, please contact the DGS or Chair.

Advanced Students: Professionalization

The Department offers a number of services to help students with professionalization. A professionalization series may be offered on a regular basis, the Colloquium offers an opportunity to practice presenting work, and the Department will provide advanced students with the opportunity for a mock job talk and interview.

Students should also be in close consultation with the dissertation advisor about placement issues. They will need to contact Career Services (UCS) to compile a dossier and should be a member of the American Academy of Religion and possibly other relevant societies. At any time, students may direct questions to the DGS, who can help and advise them through this somewhat stressful process.

Your mentors will help you revise your CV, cover letter, teaching statement, and other supporting materials for job applications. For help with producing first drafts of all these items, as well as for information on setting up a credentials file, please see:

<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/services-support/professional-development/index.html>

This page is full of helpful links and basic information for academic job searches.

<https://www.northwestern.edu/careers/programs-opportunities/development-fund/index.html>

For a general overview of services available through UCS, including links to advice on applying for non-academic jobs, please see <https://www.northwestern.edu/careers/>

Students who wish to send cover letters on Departmental letterhead stationery may obtain it from the GPA, or send the files electronically to the GPA 24 hours before they are needed.

Advanced Students: Dissertation Defense

The dissertation defense—*also called the “final examination” in TGS policy*—takes place long enough before the University dissertation deadline to allow for final editing of the dissertation manuscript. Students arrange the meeting of all committee members with the assistance of the GPA, if needed. Students should submit the manuscript to the committee members at least two, and if possible more, weeks in advance of the meeting.

TGS’ rules for Ph.D. scheduling your defense and completing your degree (including paperwork and deadlines) can be found [here](#).

Teaching & Graduate Work

TAing

Teaching is an essential element of the education and training experience of Ph.D. students at the university and a central focus of our Department. All students must TA at least 6 times during the 20 quarters of their initial TGS funding. The Department reserves the right to ask students to TA up to 9 times in this period, as per TGS guidelines, although we strive to avoid it.

Funding beyond the fifth year is not guaranteed, but any further funding acquired by the Department for a student from TGS comes with the expectation that the student serve as a TA or RA (Research Assistant) for two quarters per year of funding (and must therefore be in residence).

Typical TA duties, discussed below, include attending all lectures, answering student questions, holding office hours, leading discussions sections (usually 3 of no more than 17 students each), grading, and maintaining fastidious communication with students, instructors, and other TAs. TAs may also be given the opportunity to present a lecture, or part of a lecture, to the whole class. Advanced students may also be offered the opportunity to teach stand-alone courses in fulfillment of their TA requirements (see above).

All graduate students are eligible to serve as a TA **for any course and any professor, and TA assignments are subject to change over the course of the year.** Assignments are typically shared during the Summer Quarter of the preceding academic year, and we will give a student as much notice as possible if assignments do change. The Department may, at its discretion, take faculty and student input into consideration when assigning TA-ships. To the extent the Department can accommodate specific assignment requests, preference will be given to senior TAs who can demonstrate a compelling reason to TA a specific course.

TA Training

The Department sometimes offers a year-long program on TA training for first- and second-year students. In addition, Northwestern's [Searle Center for Teaching Excellence](#) is an excellent resource for teaching advice. It runs a variety of valuable seminars and certification programs for graduate students. The Searle Center continues to provide consultations and can meet with an instructor to go over any videos students may have made of their classes. Searle Center also conducts observations and Small Group Analyses for instructors. Please see their [resources](#) page.

Your work as a TA should be a collaboration between you and the supervising faculty member. You should feel free to consult your supervisor for discussions of your teaching and request that they observe at least one of your discussion sections.

Issues dealing with the logistics of teaching (e.g., room assignments, copying, copyright permissions) should be directed toward the GPA or PA.

The TA-Professor Relationship

At its core, the TA-professor relationship is that of a subordinate university employee working for a superior employee. At its best, this relationship is also one of collegial collaboration, mentorship, and tutelage. The goal of both parties should be to make the course as successful as possible. Here are some expectations that pertain to their mutual engagement in the course.

- Vigorous communication between the professor and all teaching assistants is essential.
- A pre-course meeting should be scheduled before the course (plan early if traveling)
- Throughout the quarter, the TAs should meet collectively with the professor at least once per week. More frequent meetings may be necessary during examination and grading.

Basic Responsibilities of Each Teaching Assistant

Although the TA-professor relationship will vary from course to course, there are a clear set of obligations that both parties must meet. Each TA is thus expected to:

- For class lectures:
 - Attend each lecture.
 - Arrive punctually (as much as 20 minutes early), so that unforeseen problems can be addressed, and to allow for spontaneous exchange with students and with the professor.
 - Complete the course readings at least one week in advance of when they are assigned. This schedule gives TAs the flexibility to ad-lib with the professor if they skip ahead to new material during a given lecture.
 - Request individual meetings with the professor if they are having difficulty with any aspect of their TA assignment.
 - Carry out lecture-based duties as assigned by the professor, such as sitting in a specific section of the room, “floating” during in-class activities, or helping to stimulate conversation by asking questions during in-class discussion.

- Weekly discussion sections
 - Lead weekly discussion sections, as assigned.
 - Create a weekly lesson plan and circulate these plans to the professor and other TAs to ensure some curricular continuity.
 - Prepare meticulously in advance of each week's sections, including communicating with the professor and other TAs about the content and activities for each week.
 - Record section attendance and assign participation grades (when applicable).
 - Proctor quizzes administered during discussion sections.
 - Provide feedback to the professor on how your students are doing with the course content.
- Grading
 - Adhere to the professor's grading rubric for each assignment. TAs should not begin to grade an assignment until they have received clear instructions from the professor on the grading process and rubric.
 - Circulate your grading trends to the other TAs. Communicate grade averages to the professor before returning the assignment to the students. Alert the professor if there are major discrepancies in the averages that each TA assigned.
 - Return graded work in a timely manner. Undergraduates cannot learn from their mistakes unless they have had time to digest feedback from the prior assignment before their next similar assignment is due.
 - Enter your grades into the grading record system that the professor has established (usually CANVAS, but possibly other formats).
- Office hours
 - All TAs should make themselves available for undergraduate questions and concerns for two hours each week.
 - The time and location of these office hours should be provided to the PA well before the quarter begins. It is appropriate to remind students of the opportunity to attend office hours throughout the quarter and to change your office hours schedule if attendance is poor.

- While TAs may host their office hours in the TA office, they are also encouraged to make use of other public meeting spaces on campus (Crowe Café, Norris Café, etc.) or off campus.
- Learn professionally from the experience.
 - Keep a journal on what you like best about the professor's teaching style. Note which activities work well for certain types of course material.
 - At the start of the quarter, ask the professor when you can offer a full or partial lecture to the entire class.
 - Remind the professor to visit your discussion section at least once, and request formal, written feedback that you can include in your teaching record.

The following duties are **not appropriate** to be required of a TA:

- Providing audio-visual support. If a TA has some facility and inclination, they may volunteer to help. AV issues should be referred to NUIT
- Creating lecture notes or presentations, unless being remunerated separately by the Department for those services
- Regularly copy, fetch, make PowerPoint presentations or carry out research for the class
- Performance of any personal services for professors
- Write quizzes, exams, essay prompts for the professor, unless undertaken in a collaborative and pedagogical manner. Even so, this should not represent a substantial burden on the TAs time
- Grading exams or significant assignments without detailed guidance from the professor
- Determining or entering final grades, although TAs may be asked to calculate final point grade totals
- Run an entire lecture period in the professor's absence

Expectations for Working With Your Professor

Having TAs presents an opportunity not only for assistance, but also for mentorship and collaboration. By working effectively with TAs, professors enrich both the undergraduate and graduate student learning environments. The most basic responsibilities of professors are:

- Meeting and communicating well and clearly with each TA
 - Scheduling a meeting with all TAs at least two weeks prior to the start of the course
 - Visiting each TAs discussion section at least once per quarter, and providing written, constructive feedback on the TAs teaching skills
 - Providing detailed guidance on materials as well as what should occur in each weekly discussion section
 - Answering undergraduate questions that the TAs cannot answer
- Grading
 - Providing detailed grading instructions
 - Separate instructions should be given to TAs for each graded assignment, (such as quizzes, exams, and participation). Professors' guidance of this process might include rubrics, explanations of grading expectations, and/or grading a sample of exams alongside Tas.
 - Ultimate decisions about grading are solely the professor's responsibility. The TA is not responsible for creating the course's grading policy, nor are TAs expected to resolve grading disputes.
- Teaching
 - Mentoring each TA in the craft of teaching, including opportunities for TAs to participate professionally in lecture
 - Each TA should have the opportunity to deliver a lecture (full or partial) at least once during the quarter.

Conflict Resolution

As stated above, communication between TAs and the professor ought to be regular and open, and all interactions should be carried out with the wellbeing and development of the TA in mind. Even with excellent communication, however, conflicts inevitably arise. In such cases, each party is expected to address their concerns in a timely manner. Please do not let a conflict fester. If there is a conflict that cannot be resolved between the TA and the professor, or if the TA feels uncomfortable approaching the professor about the problem, either party should address the issue with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), who will offer guidance and mediation. If the TA-professor relationship sours, both parties must strive to maintain a professional and collegial atmosphere in front of undergraduate students. This is a form of professionalization that will aid the TA as members of a faculty later on. Under no circumstances should a professor or TA undermine the other's authority in front of the undergraduates, nor make undergraduates party to the conflict.

Getting Help in Cases of Harassment, Discrimination, Abuse or Harmful Situations

Harassment, discrimination, and all other forms of abuse will absolutely not be tolerated. Violations of University policy or state or federal law should be reported directly to relevant University officials or to off-campus law enforcement. Please refer to the [Provost's policies and procedures page](#) for more detail. General help navigating difficult situations can be had at the [Office of the Ombudsperson](#), which can provide resources for conflict resolution and referrals to other services. If a TA is uncertain as to what to do, or if the offense does not seem to rise to this level, they should consult the DGS and, if necessary, the Chair.

Teaching Evaluations

Students are asked to submit evaluations for TAs as well as professors. It is possible, if the TA is interested, to add customized questions to the course evaluation. If you are interested in this, talk to the professor. Typically, only the TA and professor of the course can see these evaluations. CTEC Reports are made available through [CAESAR](#).

Graduate Student Work

Graduate Student Additional Work Policy

According to Weinberg College policy, graduate students funded through the Graduate School or the College (whether by fellowship or graduate assistantship) **must refrain from other remunerative work, unless an online permission to work (PTW) request is approved by TGS**. Any such request must provide the number of hours to be worked, the amount of compensation, the overall time-period, and the nature of the work. The PTW must be approved online by the student's advisor, DGS and the Departmental Chair **before any work begins**.

In general, requests will be approved only for additional remunerative work that amounts to 15 hours or less per week and that the student's advisor will certify as having no adverse effect on timely completion of the student's degree. Approved tasks often include assisting with conferences, performing light research assistant work, or serving as an assistant master in a residential college.

While there are requirements for RA/TAing as part of the program, students can voluntarily work for faculty members in the Department for short-term projects for payment outside of their stipend (i.e. translational work). The work cannot be for more than 20 hours per week (total across all assignments) and the Department must be notified before any work is started, including the nature of the work, anticipated period, compensation, and hours.

First-year students are normally not eligible for significant, sustained additional work but can usually receive permission for occasional work such as assisting with a conference, lecture, or reception. More information is [here](#).

Getting Paid

Students should contact the GPA with questions about pay. Payroll inquiries can be directed to HR [here](#).

General Policies and Resources

TGS and NU offers a number of services, including [family resources](#), [housing resources](#), and [mental health counseling](#). Please familiarize yourself with all of the student support services provided by [WCAS](#), [TGS](#) and [NU](#).

Transfer Policy

The Department's policy on transfers varies based on whether the student already has funding from TGS/WCAS:

- Transfers from other universities and internal transfers of students without TGS/WCAS funding must apply through regular TGS channels like other outside applicants.
- Internal transfers of NU Ph.D. students from other programs with TGS/WCAS funding may apply to transfer to Religious Studies at any time. We encourage only transfer students who find that changes in their foci or changes in staffing in their home Departments or in Religious Studies suggest that their academic needs would be met better in Religious Studies than through collaboration between Religious Studies and their home Departments.

The application process is given below but may require modification by or coordination with WCAS/TGS. Applicants must provide the following:

- Curriculum vitae
- Statement of purpose modeled on the usual applicant statement of purpose explaining the applicant's academic background both at NU and in previous programs, reason for wanting to transfer, and planned program of research.
- List of Religious Studies requirements already fulfilled, if any
- Proposed timeline for all course, language, and examination requirements as stipulated for all regular graduate students in the Religious Studies program
- Writing sample of approximately 20-25 pages

Applicants' Departments must provide two letters of support (ideally from a mentor and the DGS) speaking to the student's skills as a scholar and supporting the student's rationale for the transfer

In order for consideration of the transfer to proceed, there must be:

- Written confirmation from TGS that the student's funding will transfer
- Written confirmation of support from at least one Religious Studies faculty member who is eager and able to mentor the student

The acceptance of the proposed transfer will be decided at a Departmental meeting by vote of all present faculty by simple majority, with proxy votes accepted at the discretion of the Department chair. The application materials must be available for circulation to the Department at least one week prior to the meeting at which the student's application for transfer is to be considered.

Entering the Program with Advanced Standing

Following TGS policy, the Department of Religious Studies does not award formal transfer credit to students who enter the program with Master's degrees in the field and no other coursework.

Students who have significant Ph.D. level study beyond the Master's may request from the Department up to three quarters of advanced standing upon acceptance to the program or at the first-quarter planning meeting. Candidacy and other deadlines will be altered according to the number of quarters awarded. For example, a student with three quarters of advanced standing is expected to complete all three required courses and the second-year paper during the first year; to achieve candidacy in the second year; and to defend the dissertation proposal at the beginning of the third year. No student may receive more than three quarters of advanced standing, because no student is exempt from the TGS requirement of 8 consecutive quarters (two academic years and two summers) of full-time registration and 9 graded courses. Advanced standing does not alter a student's funding package. In all cases, admitted students are guaranteed five years of funding.