

Graduate Student Handbook

**Department of Religious Studies
University of Colorado Boulder**

2025 – 2026

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Introduction

The Graduate Student Handbook has been prepared to provide an easy reference for rules, policies, and procedures governing graduate study in the Department of Religious Studies. The Handbook includes a brief summary of the **rules of the Graduate School** (which should be consulted in full on the Graduate School website). The Handbook also includes specific policies adopted by the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies. (Note: Throughout this Handbook, “the department” refers to the Department of Religious Studies.)

Though every effort has been made to accurately present the rules, policies, and procedures which govern graduate study, any statements or information in this Handbook that do not comply fully with the rules, policies, and procedures of the Graduate School either through misrepresentation or change in Graduate School policy are not binding.

Graduate students in Religious Studies must carefully read both this Handbook and the Graduate School Rules: It is the responsibility of the student to know and comply with all current rules, deadlines, policies, and procedures. In case of questions or uncertainties, please consult with the department’s Associate Chair for Graduate Studies (ACGS).

Graduate School Rules:

https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/sites/default/files/attached-files/graduate_school_rules_update_2023_final.pdf

DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS

Admission with Remedial Requirements

A student who has not completed at least twelve (12) semester hours, or the equivalent, of undergraduate academic course work directly related to the study of religion will be required to do remedial work to make up this deficit before beginning graduate study or, with the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies’ permission, after graduate study begins. This can be done by attaining a grade of B or better in an appropriate 2000 or 3000 level course taken within the first year. Remedial courses will not be counted toward the degree.

Provisional Admission

Some students may be granted provisional admission to the graduate program if the undergraduate GPA was below 2.75. In the case of provisional admission, the conditions of provision are specified by the faculty on the Admission Application for Provisional Degree Student form. These conditions may include remedial course work or a departmental reevaluation at a specified time. The department’s decision and reasons are clearly communicated to the applicant by the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. At the end of the specified probationary period, such students are either admitted to regular degree

status by submitting a change of status request to the Graduate School or will be dismissed from the program.

Transfer Credit

The maximum number of semester hours that may be transferred from another accredited institution and applied toward a Master of Arts degree is nine (9). This includes course work taken at the University of Colorado as an undergraduate or as a non-degree seeking student. Only graduate level courses may be presented for transfer credit.

Requests for transfer of credit may be submitted to the Graduate School after the student has a satisfactory record of at least one semester in residence. Transfer credits are accepted by CU Boulder only after approval from the department chair/program director, and under special conditions outlined on the Request for Transfer of Credit form. An official transcript of credit must accompany the request. Grades of courses accepted for transfer are not calculated in the GPA. Credits that have been applied towards another degree are not eligible for transfer, per Graduate School regulations.

Independent Studies

An Independent Study is the equivalent of a graduate seminar conducted under the guidance of an individual member of the Graduate Faculty. It should involve a workload commensurate with a conventional seminar. It will not be approved if a course on the same or a similar topic is being offered, or if the proposed syllabus seems inadequate to graduate-level study or to the amount of credit proposed for the course. You may take no more than six (6) credits of Independent Study. Internships or work as an instructor or grader may not be used for Independent Study credit.

If you plan to take an Independent Study, please see the Graduate Program Assistant for an Independent Study contract. It must be filled out completely and in detail and will be signed by you, your advisor, and the Graduate Chair. Please note that you cannot register directly for Independent Study credits. The Graduate Program Assistant will register you for the Independent Study after the Independent Study agreement has been completed and signed.

Residency Requirement

Apart from international students, all students who have out-of-state residency status are required by the department to have their status changed to in-state following their first year of study in the M.A. program. For information on the petition process, deadlines and requirements for in-state residence classification, contact information, and downloadable forms, see: <http://www.colorado.edu/registrar/state-tuition>.

Important: Exceptions will be made only for international students who are not United States citizens or permanent residents, and who are thus not eligible for Colorado residency.

Failure to apply for Colorado residency for your second year of study will make you ineligible to hold a GA or TA appointment.

Dual MA Program

The Department of Religious Studies offers a Dual M.A. degree with either the Department of History (HIST) or the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations (ALC). Such a degree serves the scholarly needs of students who seek a truly interdisciplinary experience among intellectually affiliated departments.

The dual M.A. program enables students to receive two distinct M.A. degrees upon the completion of a minimum of 42 credit hours of coursework taken between RLST and either HIST or ALC. Typically, 21 stand alone credits are taken in the department awarding the degree and 9 additional credits from the second program may be counted twice, once towards each degree.

Requirements:

- 42 credits minimum
- A “methods” course in each department
- Residency requirements are the same as for a traditional M.A.

Example Degree Programs:

Dual MA RLST and HIST

RLST Degree	HIST Degree
RLST 5300*	RLST 5300*
RLST 5030*	RLST 5030*
RLST 5045*	RLST 5045*
RLST 5280	HIST 5000
RLST 5180	HIST 5106
RLST 5820	HIST 6950
RLST 6830	HIST 6950
HIST 6546*	HIST 6546*
HIST 6317*	HIST 6317*
HIST 6326*	HIST 6326*

*HIST 6546, HIST 6317, HIST 6326, RLST 5300, RLST 5030, RLST 5045 are each counted twice, once in each department

Dual MA RLST and ALC

RLST Degree	CHIN Degree
RLST 5300*	RLST 5300*
RLST 5820*	RLST 5820*
RLST 5250*	RLST 5250*

RLST 5180	CHIN 5010
RLST 6830	CHIN 5020
RLST 6950	CHIN 5280
RLST 5030	CHIN 5260
CHIN 5410*	CHIN 5410*
CHIN 4850*	CHIN 4850*
CHIN5430*	CHIN5430*

*CHIN 5410, CHIN 4850, CHIN 5430, RLST 5300, RLST 5820, RLST 5250 are each counted twice, once in each department.

Dual MA students will have an Ad Hoc Committee that will consist of an advisor from their primary program, an advisor from their secondary program, and a third faculty member from either department that specializes in an area appropriate to the student's interest. The sequence of courses for both programs will be individually structured by the student's Ad Hoc Graduate Committee, and the committee will meet toward the end of each academic year, assessing the student's progress and making a determination on the student's continuation in the program.

Dual MA programs may combine an MA thesis and an MA Portfolio or students may opt for non-thesis tracks in both departments. However, students may not write two theses; rather they are encouraged to select an interdisciplinary thesis topic if they opt for the thesis track. Thesis hours may be credited toward either degree, but not towards both.

Admission to the Dual M.A. program may be accomplished in one of two ways:

- Students can either be first admitted to one of the participating departments as a normal M.A. student, and upon consultation with a primary advisor about whether dual degrees are appropriate and feasible, decide to make formal application to a second M.A. program.
- It is also possible to apply to both programs from the outset by making a separate application to each department and listing one as your primary department. Students considering the Dual MA should consult with their advisor as early as possible in order to complete the dual degree requirements efficiently.

Bachelor's – Accelerated Master's Program

The Bachelor's – Accelerated Master's Program (BAM) offers currently enrolled CU Boulder undergraduate students the opportunity to receive both bachelor's and master's degrees in a shorter period of time. Students receive the bachelor's degree first, but begin taking their graduate coursework as undergraduates. If you are interested in applying for the BAM program, please see the graduate program assistant. More information on the program may be found here: <https://www.colorado.edu/registrar/students/degree-planning/bam-program>.

STANDARDS FOR SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Record of Progress

The Graduate Program Assistant will work with the student and faculty advisor to track each student's progress toward the MA degree via a student Progress Report, which is to be completed by the advisor each semester prior to the lifting of the advising hold allowing a student to register for classes. The Graduate Program Assistant will review this form and, with the permission of the advisor, release the advising hold each semester. The purpose of the form is for the faculty and staff to be aware of all student progress toward completion of requirements in the MA program.

GPA

A graduate student must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 on all coursework taken regardless of the level of coursework or the reason it was taken. Students whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 at any time during their graduate career will be placed on academic warning and will need to create an Academic Recovery Plan with their advisor. The student may be dismissed from the program if they fail to meet the terms of their Academic Recovery Plan or are unable to raise the cumulative GPA to 3.00 or above within two semesters. In addition, any student with a GPA below 3.0 will not be guaranteed an appointment as a TA/GA in the department.

Grades

Any course being applied toward the degree must be taken for a letter grade. Grades earned in transfer courses or courses taken as a non-degree student are not calculated into the graduate GPA.

A student cannot be admitted to candidacy or graduate with a cumulative GPA below 3.0. For policies concerning academic standards, warnings, and probation, refer to the graduate school rules online: <https://catalog.colorado.edu/graduate/academic-standards-advising/>.

A student is required to maintain a "B" (3.0) average in all work attempted while enrolled in the program. This is considered good academic standing. Courses with grades below "B-" (i.e. C+ or lower) are not accepted for credit towards the Master's degree. If a graduate student earns a C+ or lower in a class, they may retake it for grade replacement, so long as the low grade is not due to an Honor Code violation. To retake a course for grade replacement, the student must simply register for the class again.

More information on the grade replacement policy can be found with the registrar: <https://www.colorado.edu/registrar/faculty-staff/class-enrollment/grade-replacement>.

Incompletes

Students are discouraged from beginning a new semester without completing all assignments for Incompletes in a previous semester. A student should inform their advisor of any existing or anticipated Incompletes before registering each semester.

Students with an Incomplete may NOT be eligible to hold a TA/GA appointment.

Academic Probation and Dismissal from the University

If your cumulative GPA falls below 3.0, you will be placed on academic probation. You have two semesters in which to raise the cumulative GPA to 3.0 or above. If you have not done so after two semesters, you will be dismissed from the University, unless the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies deems you have extenuating circumstances, in which case he or she will petition the Graduate School for you to be allowed to continue. If your GPA is at or below 2.5 at any point in your career, you may be dismissed immediately from the University, unless the ACGS deems you have extenuating circumstances, in which case she or he will petition the Graduate School for you to be allowed to continue.

A student on academic probation may NOT hold a teaching appointment.

Thesis Prospectus Defense

A graduate student pursuing Track 1 (the MA thesis) must successfully complete their prospectus defense by the end of their first semester of RLST 6950; for the purposes of this policy, “end of the first semester of RLST 6950” means January 1 (if a student begins RLST 6950 in the fall semester) or August 1 (if a student begins RLST 6950 in the spring semester). Failure to do so constitutes unsatisfactory academic progress and will negatively impact the student’s eligibility to hold a GA/TA appointment in subsequent semesters. A student may petition the department for an exception to this rule. Possible grounds for an exception might include non-standard research associated with a thesis, deadlines related to graduate school or job applications, or other factors identified by a student in conjunction with their advisor; please note, however, that petitions on these grounds must still undergo a departmental review and approval process.

Time Limit for Completion of Degree

The MA program in Religious Studies is designed to be completed in 2-3 years. MA students must complete all degree requirements within **four (4) years from the semester** in which they are admitted and begin coursework in the MA program. To continue beyond four years, the student must file a petition for an extension of the time limit with the Dean of the Graduate School. The ACGS must endorse such petitions. Extensions may be granted for up to one year. For additional time, you must file another petition for extension.

Leave of Absence (LOA)

The Leave of Absence (LOA) Program lets students take a leave from the university for a semester or a year without losing their place in your degree program. Students must be in good academic standing and have the approval of the ACGS and of the Graduate School. Taking a LOA does NOT extend your allowable time to degree (see above). More information is available from the Office of the Registrar's website: <https://www.colorado.edu/registrar/students/withdraw/leave-of-absence>.

Discontinuation

A student who fails to register for any fall or spring semester between entrance to and completion of the program, and who is not on the LOA, will automatically be listed as "Discontinued" by the University. If the student wishes to re-enter the M.A. program at a later date, this will require a renewed application of admission.

If you are an international student and plan to participate in a LOA or withdraw from school, please see an advisor at International Student & Scholar Services: <https://iss.colorado.edu>.

Advisors

Upon admission to the program each student will be assigned a faculty advisor based upon the expressed field of interest of the student and the availability of faculty. The advisor is responsible for coordinating the student's program, ensuring that the program provides both breadth and depth, monitoring the student's progress, and overseeing the portfolio/thesis process.

- I. Consulting with one's advisor: students should confer regularly with their advisor (once a semester at a minimum) to gain evaluation of their progress in the MA program.
- II. Changing advisors: a student is free to change advisors at any time. A student who wishes to change advisors must inform the current advisor and consult the department's ACGS for approval.

Petition Procedure

When a graduate student believes it appropriate and justifiable, given his or her particular needs and circumstances, that an individual exception should be made in graduation requirements, the following procedure should be followed:

- I. The student should consult both the academic advisor and the ACGS regarding the situation. The student should discuss why s/he believes the exception is appropriate and justifiable. Often the desired goal can be met without an actual change in rules and

these advisors may be able to determine ways of accomplishing, under existing rules, the desired goal.

- II. Should the student continue to believe that an exception is appropriate, a letter identified as a “Petition for Exception to Graduate Requirements” should be submitted to the ACGS for departmental consideration.
- III. The department faculty will maintain a history file of such petitions with a statement attached to each describing the faculty’s deliberations and decision. Each petition request will be considered by the faculty as a whole, using the petition history file to assure consistency, impartiality, and fairness in the petitioning process.
- IV. The student will be informed in writing of the faculty’s decision.

Honor Code

The department places highest priority on academic integrity as outlined in the CU Honor Code: <https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/students/honor-code-and-student-code-conduct>. Failing to attribute a quote, a paraphrased statement, or an idea to its original source is never acceptable. Any time you write something that contains another person’s paraphrased statement, direct quotation, or original idea, you must use quotation marks or provide a reference that indicates that the idea does not come from you. Otherwise, *you are representing another person’s work as your own*. That is plagiarism and a serious violation of the CU Honor Code.

Academic integrity is such a core principle of the profession. As employees of the university and as members of the profession, all faculty members and graduate students are bound by our institutional and professional codes of ethics, and it is our responsibility not only to abide by those standards in our own research and writing, but also to enforce them in our courses. All of our courses have statements about plagiarism in our course syllabi that link directly to the CU Honor Code, and all students are expected to know and understand the Honor Code and what constitutes plagiarism.

Faculty and TA/GAs are required by the university to report any instances of Honor Code violation to the Honor Code office for adjudication by the Honor Code board. A single instance of plagiarism in a course here at CU Boulder can (and does) result in penalties for undergraduate and graduate students ranging from an F or a 0 on a particular assignment to an F in the entire course. In addition to academic penalty at the sole discretion of the Instructor, the Honor Code board, upon reviewing the case, may impose non-academic sanctions and require additional training or service on the part of the student.

TEACHING APPOINTMENTS

Student Appointments

- I. The appointments referred to in this section include Teaching Assistantship (TA) and Graduate Assistantship (GA) appointments. TA-ships and GA-ships carry a salary, tuition waiver, and a contribution to student health insurance towards the University of Colorado Boulder Student Gold Insurance Plan. All full-time graduate students in good academic standing are eligible for these awards, regardless of financial need, commensurate with the percentage appointment.
- II. Basic qualification factors (Graduate School requirements):
 - A. A student admitted as a provisional degree student, a student on academic probation, a part-time student, or a special student is not permitted to hold an appointment. Concurrent (BA/MA) students are also not eligible to hold a graduate student appointment until they are considered to be at graduate student status as defined by the Graduate School.
 - B. A student on appointment must demonstrate continued adequate progress toward the degree. Adequate progress requires a cumulative GPA of 3.0 as well as the completion of five (5) hours of graduate work or eight (8) hours of mixed graduate and undergraduate work per semester and a cumulative GPA of 3.0; or any number of directed readings/portfolio preparation portfolio or master's thesis hours, master's portfolio hours, or master's candidate for degree hours. Master's thesis hours cannot be taken until the semester before and/or during which the thesis is expected to be completed and in which all other course work is completed. A student who has not either successfully completed their thesis prospectus defense by the end of their first semester of RLST 6950, or successfully petitioned the department for an exception to this rule, will be deemed not to be making adequate progress.
 - C. No student with an Incomplete from a previous semester may hold an appointment as of a week before the semester (at the latest) or preferably by August 1st for a Fall appointment and January 1st for a Spring appointment.
- III. Additional Departmental criteria for selection:

Awarding of TA/GA appointments in the Department of Religious Studies will be based upon an evaluation of the individual graduate student's academic strengths as well as the number of TA positions previously held. Appointments will be made available primarily on the basis of merit evaluation. Standard academic indicators will be used in this process of evaluation. For new students, evaluation will be based

upon the strength of their application materials including, but not limited to, GPA, GRE's, letters of recommendation, and the student's statement of purpose. For continuing students, evaluations will be based upon original application materials in addition to adequate progress, advisor recommendation, and previous performance in appointments if applicable. Additional factors that will be considered include the applicant's general background and preparedness for classroom performance in Religious Studies courses and, in particular, the relevance of the student's preparedness to the needs of the department in a given semester. Limited funds for TA/GA positions means that, in any given year, the department may or may not be able to offer TA/GA positions beyond what is promised in the student's offer letter.

Workload Limits

Graduate students are eligible to work up to a 50% (20 hours per week) appointment at the university during the academic year. They may work up to 100% (40 hours per week) during the summer. This eligibility includes all university employment, including teaching appointments and hourly positions (e.g., working in the library, writing center, or elsewhere on campus). Students who seek university employment totaling more than 50% must apply for a special exemption through the Graduate School, and must have the endorsement of the department's Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. Working more than 50% is discouraged in the interest of students' academic progress and will not be approved, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Lead Graduate TA

Each year, one graduate student will serve as the Lead Graduate TA for the department. Requirements for this position as set forth by the Graduate Teacher Program (GTP) include: serving as a liaison between the GTP and the department, meeting with the lead coordinators, negotiating and writing a plan that is acceptable to the GTP and to the department, presenting on opportunities available in the Graduate Teacher Program to graduate students and faculty, consulting with department TAs and GAs during office hours and in videotape consultations, developing and presenting at least one discipline-specific workshop, working on a cross-disciplinary team, and turning in a final report. The Lead Graduate TA is available to consult with all graduate students on ways to improve their teaching. Application and more information can be found at: <http://www.colorado.edu/gtp/>. The department will issue a call for Lead TA applications, along with detailed instructions, in the spring semester.

There are a number of other leadership positions for graduate students in the department, including editors for the journal *NEXT*, co-organizer for SOSR (Student Organization for the Study of Religion), and Department Liaison. Any and all students are welcome to apply. More information can be found below under Graduate Student Organizations.

Teaching Issues

If you are having problems with one of your students (e.g., plagiarism or disruptive classroom behavior), first consult with the faculty member teaching the course and the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies. The Associate Chair for Graduate Studies and the Lead Graduate TA are also happy to provide consultation on teaching matters.

MA DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

A graduate degree in Religious Studies represents the mastery of a significant body of knowledge and interpretation within the academic discipline. The student is expected to acquire both breadth and depth in religious studies. Listed below are the minimum formal requirements for the MA degree in Religious Studies.

- I. The student must successfully complete thirty (30) semester hours of academic work. At least 27 of these hours must be completed at the 5000 level or above.
- II. No more than six (6) semester hours at any level outside the department may be presented for the degree, including transfer credits, except for candidates for the Dual M.A. with another department, who may count nine (9). Other students may petition the department for exceptions to this rule for up to a maximum of nine (9) credit hours outside of the department.
- III. Independent study credit hours shall not exceed six (6) hours.
- IV. RLST 6830 Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion is a required course and is offered every Fall term. This course should be taken the first fall term the student enters the MA program.
- V. In each semester prior to the one(s) when a student enrolls in RLST 6950, 6945, or 6940, that student must enroll in at least one seminar offered by RLST. A student may petition the department for an exception to this rule.
- VI. In the second year of graduate study, students will select one of the following: (1) the MA thesis option, (2) the MA portfolio option, or (3) the MA comprehensive exam option. Those selecting Track 1, the MA thesis option will enroll in RLST 6950 Master's Thesis for 6 credit hours in their final two semesters: 3 credit hours in the penultimate semester and 3 credit hours in the final semester. Those selecting Track 2, the MA portfolio option will enroll in RLST 6945 Portfolio: Non-Thesis Option for 3 credit hours generally taken in their final semester in the program. Those selecting Track 3, the MA comprehensive exam option will enroll in RLST 6940: Masters Candidate for Degree for 3 credit hours in their final semester in the program.
- VII. An advising hold will be automatically put on the student's account before each

registration period begins.

- VIII. Courses for each term must be approved by the student's faculty advisor before students can enroll for the semester. This will be recorded on the student's "Record of Progress toward the M.A. Degree" form and must be in compliance with the requirements of the Graduate School where necessary. After the advisor and student meet, the advisor will notify the Graduate Program Assistant, and the hold will be lifted. No changes can be made in registration without the advisor's approval.
- IX. Certain courses – Independent Studies, Thesis hours, Portfolio hours, and Candidate for Degree hours – cannot be registered for independently. Students seeking to enroll in these courses must first obtain advisor approval and then be enrolled administratively by the Graduate Program Assistant.
- X. Incomplete policy: students needing to take an Incomplete in a course due to extenuating circumstances beyond their control must make arrangements with their Professor for the deadline of completion at least one week prior to the start of the next semester. Students must finish the incomplete at least one week prior to the start of the next semester in order to be eligible to hold a TA/GA appointment. Students will NOT be eligible for a TA/GA appointment in a semester where they have outstanding Incompletes. In addition, students must have no outstanding Incompletes before they can proceed to register for thesis, portfolio, or comprehensive exams.
- XI. All students must fulfill the residency requirement (see page 7 in the handbook). In general this can be fulfilled by either two (2) full-time semesters or four (4) part-time semesters of study. A full-time* program is defined as either five (5) hours of course work at the 5000 level or higher, eight (8) hours of total course work, or, if the student has completed all coursework, at least one (1) hour of thesis or candidate for degree.

* Financial Aid's full-time and part-time standards are different than those set by the Graduate School, and are established based partly on federal law. If you have any financial aid, you **MUST** make sure you are in compliance with the registration requirements of their office. You can look for information on their website: <http://www.colorado.edu/finaid/>.

* International students must be aware of Visa requirements regarding full-time enrollment in the program. More information can be found here:

<https://www.colorado.edu/isss/students/current-students/information-all-international-students/full-time-enrollment>

Any student planning to pursue a non-standard degree path—including a Dual MA, a Bachelor's–Accelerated Master's Degree program, concurrent graduate degrees in RLST and some other unit on campus, a RLST MA degree involving exceptions to regular degree requirements, a RLST MA degree involving transfer credits, and any other non-standard path—is required to submit a petition requesting approval from the student's faculty advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Chair; the Graduate Program Assistant should also be involved in the formulation and submission of the petition and receive a copy. Some petitions may require that approval be sought from the Graduate School. Additionally, any student planning to pursue a non-standard degree path is required to attend a meeting, at the beginning of every academic year, with the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students who are pursuing a standard degree path are also strongly encouraged to arrange a meeting, at the beginning of every academic year, separately with their faculty advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

MA students have three options for the culmination of the MA program: (1) the completion and defense of a MA Thesis, (2) the MA portfolio option, or (3) MA comprehensive exams.

Track 1 | The MA Thesis (RLST 6950, 6 credit hours)

Students select the thesis option with the goal to conduct independent research and produce an original MA thesis of approximately 50-125 pages, under the guidance of a primary faculty advisor, usually on the basis of a previous term paper or other research effort. The thesis process requires students to register for 6 total credit hours across two semesters, with the first semester (3 credit hours) resulting in a thesis prospectus defense, and the second semester (3 credit hours) resulting in the thesis defense itself. Note that this means students will have two *separate* defenses, one for the prospectus, completed in the first semester, and one for the thesis, completed in the final semester. Note also that failure to successfully complete a prospectus defense by the end of the first semester of RLST 6950 constitutes unsatisfactory academic progress and will negatively impact the student's eligibility to hold a GA/TA appointment in subsequent semesters. The thesis process culminates in an oral examination by a committee of at least three faculty members who must approve the thesis and must be accompanied by an intellectual biography.

Preparation for Thesis

Students who wish to write a thesis are encouraged to begin thinking about possibilities for their thesis project early on in the MA program and to speak with their faculty advisor about the process. It is also advisable to consider taking an independent study in the first year and a half of the program to conduct reading and research in a broad field of interest in order to come to know the literature. The MA thesis process takes place over a full year, with three credits dedicated to the prospectus and three credits to write and defend the thesis. Students must be at least in their second year and be in good academic standing, **including**

having no outstanding Incompletes, before embarking on MA thesis hours.

Thesis Committee

Thesis candidates are encouraged to assemble a thesis committee during the semester prior to submitting the prospectus. Committees are constituted by a minimum of three faculty members, one of whom is the student's advisor and one of whom may be from outside of the Department. The candidate must have had a class or independent study with each committee member. Exceptions will only be considered through student petition.

Prospectus Guidelines

The candidate is required to write, submit and defend a prospectus for the MA thesis in the semester before they wish to write and defend the thesis or, in exceptional cases, the beginning of the semester in which they are defending the thesis. Students should consult and agree on deadlines with their faculty advisor.

The prospectus is a formal statement about your chosen topic of research. It should contain an explanation of the larger concerns which make your topic worth doing. You will also be able to present questions that you will be asking of your sources, as well as to present a tentative thesis statement and conclusions.

The candidate should submit a first draft of the prospectus to their faculty advisor several weeks before this deadline. The prospectus should be 10-15 pages and should include the following:

- A clear statement of the thesis topic and argument. Describe your subject briefly, place it in an historical context, and state its significance to the larger issue(s)
- A definition of the "problem" that you are confronting, including a few questions that you will ask in an attempt to solve the problem
- A rationale as to why it constitutes original research
- A contextual framing of the project in terms of existing literature
- An account of the methodology and primary source material to be employed
- A contextualization of the theoretical issues to be engaged in the thesis
- A statement concerning its contribution to the discipline of religious studies
- A provisional chapter outline
- A detailed working bibliography (possibly annotated) composed of sources you intend to use in the thesis
- A timeline from proposal to completion. This should include the number of weeks or months you expect each stage of your labors to cover. As with most things, this usually takes longer than you expect!
- A one-paragraph abstract of the thesis
- A cover page with a proposed title and the names of your advisor and committee

members

Timeline to Completion

The candidate should prepare a timeline with their faculty advisor to establish deadlines for drafts of individual sections of the MA thesis as well as a firm deadline for the complete first draft. It is advised to have a complete first draft submitted to your advisor at least 4-6 weeks in advance of the anticipated thesis defense date.

Students are strongly advised to work together with their faculty advisor on several revisions of the MA thesis before it is shared with the rest of the thesis committee. MA candidates must have their advisor's approval to bring the thesis to defense before they arrange a defense date with other committee members. Once receiving advisor approval, the candidate should contact the Graduate Program Assistant to schedule the conference room and contact each member of the thesis committee to schedule the defense.

Submitting the Thesis

The penultimate version of the thesis must be submitted to the thesis committee no later than one week prior to the date of the scheduled thesis defense. It is a courtesy to check with individual members of the thesis committee to see if they need the thesis earlier for any reason. Anticipate holidays and breaks in the timing of this.

Thesis Defense

The thesis defense is usually scheduled for 1 ½ - 2 hours. The candidate should come prepared to give some introductory remarks about the thesis, its argument and contribution to the field of religious studies. At the conclusion of the defense, the thesis committee may ask for major or minor or revisions be made to the MA thesis. It is up to the committee to stipulate the revision review process and timeline. The most common process is for the faculty advisor to review and approve changes, though the committee may wish to be involved if the revisions are substantial.

Final Deposit of the Thesis

The deadline for deposit of the thesis with the University comes before the end of the semester in which the student plans to graduate, and thus the thesis defense needs to be scheduled well in advance of those deadlines, leaving a minimum of two weeks between oral defense and deposit in case of required revisions, determined at the defense.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to find out (1) the University deadlines for defending a MA thesis in the chosen semester of their graduation and (2) the official procedures for submitting a final version to the University. Any questions regarding this should be directed

to the Graduate Program Assistant.

Submit the final, revised version of the thesis to the University electronically prior to the appropriate deadline.

Track 2 | The MA Portfolio (RLST 6945, 3 credit hours)

The MA Portfolio brings together a student's training in Religious Studies and prepares them for their on-going professional development. The portfolio process culminates in an oral examination by a committee of at least three faculty members, including the student's advisor, who must approve the portfolio. Committee members are normally faculty who have taught the student or otherwise participated in a student's professional development. Working with their advisor, students will assemble and prepare their portfolio materials during the semester. The portfolio defense, to be completed in accordance with the deadline set by the graduate school each semester, will involve all three committee members and will be overseen by the advisor and conducted as part of the work required for either RLST 6945 or RLST 6950.

The defense will typically involve the student presenting a brief overview of the contents of the portfolio, as well as opportunities for committee members to ask questions, raise issues, and offer feedback.

Students should prepare a Table of Contents by listing the elements of the portfolio with the titles of relevant submissions and submit as a single PDF or in a google folder shared with the committee.

The MA Portfolio will include the following three required elements:

1. INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY outlining your professional trajectory and research interests (2-3 pages)
2. COLLOQUIUM: one presentation at a department graduate colloquium or, alternatively, a conference paper (which can be one of the following items in the portfolio: research paper, original translation or critical edition)
3. RESEARCH PAPER: Research-based, article length paper that has been revised to the point that it might be ready for submission to a journal (20-25 pages in length)

In addition, students choose 4 out of 6 of the following in consultation with their faculty advisor:

4. LITERATURE REVIEW essay in your research concentration (10-15 pages)
5. ADDITIONAL research-based paper, digital project, or other project idea whose presence in the portfolio is approved by the student's advisor

- and explained in the intellectual biography
6. ORIGINAL TRANSLATION of primary source material or CRITICAL EDITION of archival document in your research language (in consultation with advisor). This should be a substantial (minimum 4-6 double-spaced English pages, i.e. 1500-3000 words) annotated translation of one of the following: (1) a classical or modern source, with a comparison of available editions, along with a scholarly introduction detailing available primary and secondary sources on the source, author, or relevant topic; (2) a contemporary literary or oral source, whether from a published or unpublished work, public speech, or ethnographic interviews, complemented by a detailed scholarly introduction; (3) a shorter edited and translated manuscript document with scholarly commentary. Translations should be of documents without previously published English editions (or should include a discussion of the scholarly contribution made by the student's translation, including a comparison to other translations); critical editions with translations should be of materials that have not previously been edited (or should include a discussion of the need for a new critical edition and the ways in which the student's edition addresses that need).
 7. Demonstration of FOREIGN LANGUAGE competence for those who need foreign language training to pursue research or professional goals (intermediate level; this should be demonstrated by completing an original translation or critical edition, using primary source materials in that language in one of the research papers or the thesis, or by advisor consent.)
 8. SYLLABUS of a survey course in your area of expertise, including course description, learning goals, assignments/assessments, and weekly readings (8-10 pages)
 9. Grant proposal/cover letter/statement of purpose, depending on your professional path (2-5 pages)

Track 3 | MA Comprehensive Exams (RLST 6940, 3 credit hours)

Students choosing the comprehensive exam option will prepare three (3) bibliographies on topics of research interest. They will work with their faculty advisor to create these bibliographies and the range of questions to be addressed by the student in their readings. A written exam consisting of three essays (from a selection of questions) will be completed that includes and synthesizes readings from each bibliography. The timing and duration of the exam writing period will be agreed on between the faculty advisor and student. Students should form a committee of three faculty (two within the department and one within or outside the department) for an oral exam based on their three essays, after which successful completion of the comprehensive exam will be decided.

Colloquium Requirement and Intellectual Biography (all tracks):

All students, regardless of track, should write an Intellectual Biography in 2-3 pages, outlining your professional trajectory and research interests including both undergraduate and graduate study. In addition, all MA students will be expected to attend at least three department graduate colloquia over the course of their careers and to present their own work at one of them. A conference presentation can take the place of a colloquium presentation and is encouraged.

GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

These Graduate School requirements for degree fulfillment are intended to be used as a supplement to information obtained from the Graduate School website, the Schedule of Courses, the major department, and as an aid to preparing degree plans for master students. The major department should be consulted about specific additional requirements.

In brief, to graduate you must:

- Be admitted into candidacy
- Apply to graduate online for the current semester of graduation
- Request approval of final exam committee
- Successfully pass your defense of the MA thesis, portfolio, or comprehensive exam.
- Be registered on the Boulder campus the semester you pass your defense.
International students in F-1 or J-1 status should ask an advisor in International Student and Scholar Services* about immigration requirements.
- If doing a thesis, have successfully completed 6 thesis hours. If you are doing a portfolio or comprehensive exams, have successfully completed 3 non-thesis hours
- Submit your thesis electronically along with a Thesis Approval Form by the submission deadline. Please see the Graduate School website for more information: <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/academic-resources/thesis-dissertation-submission>
- Have your faculty advisor submit a final grade for thesis or portfolio hours
- Earn a letter grade of at least B- on all classes applying toward your degree. In addition, your cumulative GPA must be at least 3.0
- Have no outstanding Incomplete course work
- Stay within the 4 year time limit to complete your degree
- Have at least 2 semesters of full-time registration
- Meet department requirements
- Meet all deadlines

Minimum Course Requirement

Regardless of track—Track 1 MA Thesis (RLST 6950 for 6 credit hours), Track 2 MA Portfolio (RLST 6945 for 3 credit hours), or Track 3 MA Comprehensive Exams (RLST 6940 for 3 credit

hours)—the minimum number of credit hours to complete the MA program is 30. If a student switches from Track 1 to Track 2 or 3, thesis hours must be dropped and the Graduate School contacted.

Candidacy and Graduation Application Details

Application for Admission to Candidacy

The Application for Admission to Candidacy is an important step in the student's progress to degree. At the beginning of the student's final semester of coursework, the student must submit a Candidacy Application for Advanced Degree. This form verifies that the student has met or will meet the course requirements for graduation in their degree program. The form may be found on the Graduate School website: <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/academics/forms-current-students>.

Please consult the Graduate Program Assistant for deadlines and more information. The application is considered a legal document and must be signed by the student and have appropriate departmental signatures. This is considered your degree plan and will be verified against your records to approve your degree. Students will receive written notification from the Graduate School when the application for candidacy is approved.

Admission to the graduate program does not automatically imply admission to candidacy for a degree. After all formal course work is completed, a student who wishes to become a candidate for the MA degree must file an application for admission to candidacy in the Graduate School. The following rules and procedures govern applications for candidacy:

1. The form "Application for Admission to Candidacy for an Advanced Degree" (provided by the department's Administrative Assistant or the Graduate School) must be completed by the student. An online version can be found here: http://www.colorado.edu/GraduateSchool/academics/_docs/candap.pdf
2. The "Application for Admission to Candidacy for an Advanced Degree" must be submitted to the Graduate School the semester the comprehensive/final examination is to be taken, no later than each semester's posted deadline. The Graduate School website will have updated academic year deadlines posted to their website: http://www.colorado.edu/GraduateSchool/academics/master_graduation_packet_thesis.html
3. The "Application for Admission to Candidacy for an Advanced Degree" form must be approved and signed by the Chair of the thesis committee and the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies before being submitted to the Graduate School for final approval.
4. The student is responsible for informing the Graduate School of any changes made in

the degree plan after the application has been submitted to the Graduate School.

5. Admission to candidacy is not approved by the Graduate School unless requirements related to academic quality of work and graduate level course work are met in the degree plan.

Online Graduation Application

Students must apply online to graduate through their Buff Portal. This notifies the Graduate School and your department that you intend to graduate and it provides necessary information to the Commencement Office for ordering and shipping diplomas. If you do not complete requirements in time for the graduation date you indicate on the online application, you must apply online to graduate for the new graduation date. You must apply to graduate online whether or not you plan to attend the ceremony.

At least two weeks before your scheduled defense date, the graduate program assistant will submit a preliminary Master's Final Exam Form (aka Master's Examination Report) to the Graduate School for approval. Therefore, you must inform the graduate program assistant of your defense date no later than two weeks prior.

Final Thesis Guidelines

Each thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master's degree must be an independent investigation of a topic related to the major field. The thesis should represent the equivalent of six semester hours of work.

- A. Length: A thesis demonstrates a student's ability to engage in sustained research and writing and therefore it is expected to be longer than an article-length research paper. Expectations are that the thesis will be between 50 and 125 pages, depending on topic, advisor, and goals.
- B. Process: The thesis will engage a research, review, and writing process supervised by the research committee. Submit a prospectus to your thesis committee using the guidelines above during the first semester you are registered for RLST 6950. The prospectus must be presented to and approved by the committee as soon as possible after course work is completed and no later than the semester prior to submitting the thesis.

Research, argument, and writing should be of the highest quality. Given the quality requirements, students should expect to do **several drafts under the direction of the thesis advisor who serves as the thesis committee chair**. Students work closely with their advisor on chapter drafts, adhering to an agreed upon schedule and outline. The complete thesis draft must be approved by the student's advisor before submission to the full committee.

Students can expect to make minor or major revisions after the thesis defense.

Portfolio/Thesis Timeline to Completion

The candidate should prepare a timeline with their advisor to establish deadlines for completing sections of the MA Portfolio or Thesis. If you are doing the thesis track, it is advised to submit the thesis chapter by chapter according to an agreed upon schedule and/or have a complete first draft submitted to your advisor at least 6-8 weeks in advance of the anticipated defense date. In general, the *entire portfolio or thesis* should be sent to the committee **no later than one week before the scheduled defense** unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Final Exam/Portfolio Defense

Each candidate for the Master's degree is required to complete a defense of the MA Thesis, MA Portfolio, or Comprehensive Exams after the other requirements for the degree have been substantially completed, including completion of all but the final semester of course work and substantial completion of the thesis or non-thesis requirement.

A student must be registered either for course work, directed readings/portfolio preparation, thesis research, or "Candidate for Degree" at the time the examination is taken. A student who misses the defense deadlines set by the Graduate School may have a grace period until the last weekday before the beginning of the next term in which to hold their defense.

Every term the Graduate School sets dates by which the final examination must be completed and by which the thesis in its final form must be submitted. It is the responsibility of the candidate to find out (1) the University deadlines for defending a MA thesis or portfolio in the chosen semester of their graduation and (2) the official procedures for submitting a final version of the thesis to the University.

Important deadlines to remember:

1. The defense for the MA Thesis, MA Portfolio, or Comprehensive Exams must be passed by the posted deadline for the semester.
2. For students producing an MA Thesis, it must comply in mechanical features with the University of Colorado Graduate School Specifications. These guidelines are available on the Graduate School website:
<https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/academic-resources/thesis-dissertation-specifications/specifications-preparation-masters-theses> The thesis must be filed with the Graduate School by the posted deadline for the semester in which you plan to graduate.

Again, it is the student's responsibility to be aware of all guidelines and deadlines for completion of the thesis and other commencement requirements.

The defense will typically involve the student presenting a brief overview of the contents of the portfolio, as well as opportunities for committee members to ask questions, raise issues, and offer feedback. Students should consult with their advisors prior to the defense to finalize the details of the format.

MA candidates must have their advisor's approval to bring the thesis to defense before they arrange a defense date with other committee members. Contact the Graduate Program Assistant to schedule the conference room in Eaton Humanities (HUMN 230) to hold your defense. Any location outside of Humanities will be the responsibility of the student to arrange. This should be done as soon as possible.

1. The candidate will be required to defend the entire MA Thesis or Portfolio.
2. Notice of the defense date must be given to the Graduate Program Assistant to be filed with the Graduate School office at least two (2) weeks in advance.
3. The names of the members of the MA Thesis, MA Portfolio, or Comprehensive Exams defense committee must also be submitted for approval by the Graduate School at this time. Ideally, this information is given to the graduate school at the beginning of the fourth semester in the program.
4. At least 2 of the 3 members of the portfolio committee must vote affirmatively for the student to pass. If there are more than three members, a majority is needed to pass.

If a student fails the defense, s/he may not attempt it again until 3 months have elapsed. The student may retake the defense only once.

Thesis Submittal

The Graduate School accepts theses electronically, uploaded as a pdf document, through the [ProQuest website](#). This site contains information on converting word documents to pdf documents, and has a helpful section of frequently asked questions. The uploaded thesis is expected to be the final version, approved by the faculty advisor and committee. Students must also submit a [thesis approval form](#) (TAF) to ensure that the final copy has been accepted by the thesis committee. The TAF must be uploaded as part of the electronic thesis [submission process](#) through [UMI/Proquest](#), as a supplementary file. Further information on the TAF may be found on the Graduate School website:

<https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/content/thesis-approval-form>

If you would like to have your thesis pre-checked for correct formatting and adherence to guidelines, you may email a PDF to: gradinfo@colorado.edu.

DEPARTMENT SPECIFICS

E-mail – The University and the department consider your university e-mail address an official means of communicating with you, so be sure to check this address daily if you do not have it forwarded.

The RLST-grads Listserv – The Graduate Program Assistant maintains an e-mail listserv for all graduate students in the department: rlst-grads@colorado.edu. This listserv is used to communicate important information about deadlines, fellowships, job openings, events, etc. All students are subscribed with their colorado.edu e-mail addresses.

Department Website – The Religious Studies Department website is <https://www.colorado.edu/rlst/>. Look here for up-to-date information about courses, faculty interests, and upcoming events, as well as for an annually updated version of this handbook. A department calendar of important events will also be listed for planning purposes. Graduate students will be listed on this website with information about research interests, contact information, TA/GA position (if applicable), office hours and location, and a photo. If, for any reason, you wish to change any information on the website, please contact the Graduate Program Assistant at religious.studies@colorado.edu

Photocopying and Scanning – The department's photocopy machine is available for graduate students. The access code is the last four digits of your student ID (not the same as the Buff One Card number). Use the photocopy machine for duplicating syllabi, paper assignments, and exams. The machine is also set up to allow for scans to your colorado.edu email address. Instructions for photocopy/scan use can be found in the copy room.

Offices – Graduate student teachers are assigned offices in either Eaton Humanities 260 or 216. Offices are shared, with a desk assigned to each TA/GA for the semester. At the end of each academic year, and/or upon your graduation from the program, it is your responsibility to remove any items (personal or department-related) so that the desk can be used by another student. It is also the collective students' responsibility to maintain a clean and orderly office environment by collecting and disposing of any garbage and cleaning out the microwave and refrigerator on a regular basis. Failure to maintain a clean office could result in loss of those amenities for graduate students.

Keys & Access – You will be assigned one key that will allow you access to your office as well as the copy room. In an effort to control key check-outs, you will be required to return your office key at the end of each academic year to the Graduate Program Assistant. You also have the ability to access different rooms/buildings on campus using your Buff One card. The Graduate Program Assistant can help you gain access to Eaton Humanities and the third floor Humanities library (HUMN 350) at your request.

Mailboxes – A mailbox for graduate students, in addition to faculty and staff mailboxes, can be found in the main copy/mail room in HUMN 273.

Graduate Student Organizations

The Student Organization for the Study of Religion (SOSR) is an organization of graduate and undergraduate students whose mission is to enrich the intellectual and community life of its members. Graduate students are encouraged to elect one or more members to serve as liaison to the department faculty, although the faculty is always open to the needs and concerns of any student.

Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG)

The Graduate and Professional Student Government represents the graduate and professional students at the university. GPSG provides a graduate voice in university decision-making, pursuing such issues as student fees, financial aid, graduate student employment, health care, child care, and more. GPSG members work with administrators, faculty, and other student groups, and they serve on university committees. GPSG also organizes events that give graduate and professional students the opportunity to learn about the university and diversify their academic experience by meeting people from other disciplines. GPSG provides various services to graduate and professional students, and offers limited awards, such as travel grants. Each year the graduate students elect a representative to the Graduate and Professional Student Government.

<https://www.colorado.edu/gpsg/>

Fellowships, Awards, and Grants

- I. Departmental fellowships will be awarded on the basis of the student's academic strength, as described under "Student Appointments" above.
- II. The Beverly Sears Graduate Student Grant provides awards of up to \$1000 to help support graduate students in projects and research activities. Details can be found on the Graduate School's website:
<https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/funding/awards-grants/donor-sponsored-graduate-student-grants>
- III. GPSG Travel Grants: The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) awards funding (up to \$300) to individual graduate students each academic semester to support travel to academic conferences, meetings, or other events related to the student's studies. Students are eligible to receive travel aid only once in their tenure as a CU Boulder graduate student. Please see the GPSG Travel Grants page for more details:
<https://www.colorado.edu/gpsg/grants-awards/travel-grants>

- IV. Look out for other announcements about graduate student funding from the Religious Studies Department, the Center for Humanities and the Arts, the Program in Jewish Studies, the Center for Asian Studies, and elsewhere.

CU BOULDER POLICIES

Student Ethics

Graduate students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of intellectual honesty and professional ethics in all areas of class work, research, publication, and teaching. Violations of these standards include cheating, plagiarism, or fabrication of research results. Breaches of academic integrity result in disciplinary measures, which can include any of the following: a failing grade for a particular assignment, a failing grade for a particular course, suspension or permanent expulsion from the university.

CU Boulder Student Honor Code

As a student and as a teacher, you will need to familiarize yourself with the policies and procedures of the CU Boulder Student Honor Code: <https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/honor-code>. Graduate students are also specially governed by the Graduate School's statement on Academic Ethics; see below.

Graduate School Statement on Academic Ethics

Graduate students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of intellectual honesty and professional ethics in all areas of class work, research, publication, and teaching. Violations of these standards include cheating, plagiarism, or fabrication of research results. Cheating in any form, such as copying from another person, using unauthorized sources, violating specified time limits for exams, or obtaining class materials without permission, is unacceptable. Infractions of academic integrity policies come under the jurisdiction of the CU Boulder Honor Code. For information, refer to the honor code web site: <https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/honor-code>.

For information on research misconduct, see: <https://www.colorado.edu/researchinnovation/rcr/research-misconduct>.

For the Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, go to: https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/sites/default/files/attached-files/graduate_student_bill_of_rights_and_responsibilitiesj.pdf.

CU Boulder Policy on Student Classroom and Course-Related Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning

environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity, and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which students express opinions.

Disruptive students in the academic setting hinder the educational process. Although disruptive student conduct is already prohibited by Regent Laws and the Students' Rights and Responsibilities Regarding Standards of Conduct, the purpose of this policy is to clarify what constitutes disruptive behavior in the academic setting; what actions faculty and relevant Assistant/Associate Dean's offices may take in response to disruptive conduct; and the authority of the Office of Judicial Affairs to initiate disciplinary proceedings against students for disruptive conduct. The full policy can be found at:
<https://www.colorado.edu/policies/student-classroom-and-course-related-behavior>.

CU Policy on Sexual Harassment

The Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking:
Prohibits all forms of *Sexual Misconduct*,¹ including conduct prohibited by Title IX and other *sexual misconduct*. This policy also defines and prohibits related misconduct, including *retaliation*, failure to report, providing false or misleading information, and failing to abide with the orders or sanctions of the Title IX Coordinator or other authorized officials.

For the complete text, see <https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5014>.

Departmental Grievances

A student who feels that he or she has been treated unfairly or outside of normal departmental policies is encouraged to attempt first to resolve a grievance with the faculty and/or staff member(s) involved. If this proves unsatisfactory, the grievance must be directed to the Chair of the department for formal departmental deliberation and consideration. If the student is dissatisfied at the departmental level, or all appeals have been exhausted, she or he may file a grievance with Graduate School in accordance with published grievance procedures.

Information on Graduate School Grievance Policy and Procedures, along with a Graduate Student Grievance Form, can be found on the Graduate School Policies and Procedures Page: <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/graduate-school-policies-procedures>.