

**Department of Religion  
Rice University**

**Graduate Studies  
PhD Program**

**Procedural Handbook  
2025-2026**



Department Chair: Brian Ogren

Director of Doctoral Studies: William Parsons

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## 1. Welcome

### 1.1 Welcome Message from the Chair, Brian Ogren

It is my pleasure to welcome to Rice University and to your home in the Department of Religion!



We are delighted that you have chosen to study with us and to participate as a graduate student in our wonderful community. During your time here and beyond, you will be part of a firm support network of compassionate mentors and congenial peers. We are a diverse community of scholars with faculty of international standing, and you will find that we offer a uniquely amiable environment while still rigorously representing varied specialties and approaches that are on the cutting-edge of scholarship. We encourage methodological pluralism, and while here, you will be able to work closely with our faculty in attaining both a broad background in the study of historical and contemporary religious currents and a strong theoretical

framework for the academic study of religion. We are committed to training the next generation of experts and we look forward to your engagement and involvement, in our classes and beyond. In this last regard, we encourage you to participate in symposia, seminars and conferences, both here at Rice and elsewhere.

As the Department Chair, I will be readily available to you throughout your program, as will the Director of Graduate Studies, your faculty advisor, and our Graduate Program Administrator Lydia Westbrook. We are here to help you develop your individual curriculum, to set goals, to put you in touch with the scholars with whom you would most like to work, and to help you navigate your way. This handbook explains the basics of your program, including course and exam requirements, assessment forms, proposal explanations, important phone numbers, and more. Please familiarize yourself with it and refer back to it as a first point of reference. Beyond that, please feel free to contact me with any questions, concerns, and curiosities, academic and beyond. I look forward to getting to know you and to accompanying you on this journey.

## 1.2. Welcome Message from the Director of Doctoral Studies, William Parsons



In my role as Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS), welcome to the Department of Religion here at Rice! We are thrilled that you chose Rice and aim to make your stay here as pleasant and easy as possible. The Department abides by the definition of a university social space as pluralistic, secular and critical, enjoining all who enter into a multi-disciplinary dialogue about how to define religion, its many accoutrements, and its socio-historical and cultural manifestations. So defined, the study of religion is creative and innovative and asks you to contribute in an original way to an ongoing tradition of scholarship.

While acclimating yourself to Rice, Houston at large, your housing and fellow students, you will also have time to decide on courses that best fit your desired intellectual trajectory. You will have a lot of help, from your faculty advisor to the DDS to Lydia Westbrook (our Graduate Program Administrator). The handbook you are reading is ground zero in that regard. It is designed to help you navigate all the nooks and crannies of your graduate career. It explains the basics of your program: course requirements, yearly assessment forms, qualifying exams, dissertation work, and more. Please pay close attention to the table of contents and familiarize yourself with the basic rules and hurdles that mark your program. Additionally, don't forget to visit the Rice Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral studies webpage.

Remember: any outstanding questions you may have can be answered by your faculty advisor, myself as DDS, and Lydia. Do not hesitate to reach out. You are embarking on but the first step in a long and productive career. The friendships you make and intellectual maps you traverse will deepen through time, affecting your future work and contribution to humanity. Enjoy the process!

## 2. Contact Information and Important Dates

### 2.1 Department Contact Information

Title	Name	Phone	E-Mail
Chair	Brian Ogren	713-348-2893	brian.e.ogren@rice.edu
Director of Doctoral Studies	William Parsons	713-348-2712	pars@rice.edu
Department Administrator	Adriana Chiaramonti	713-348-5109	acc.14@rice.edu
Department Coordinator	Cindy Pereira	713-348-4994	cp82@rice.edu
Graduate Program Administrator	Lydia Westbrook	713-348-2092	lydiaw@rice.edu

### 2.2 Key Department Dates for 2025-26

**Language Exams** – ALL exams will commence at 9:00am\* in HUMA room 215 unless specified in advance:

Friday, September 12, 2025

Friday, November 14, 2025

Friday, January 16, 2026

Friday, March 13, 2026

\*French and German exam takers will have two hours; all other language exam takers will have three hours to complete their exams.

**Comprehensive Exams** – ALL exams will be 9:00am – 1:00pm in HUMA room 215, unless specified in advance:

Wednesday, October 15, 2025

Friday, October 17, 2025

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Friday, October 24, 2025

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Friday, March 27, 2026

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Friday, April 3, 2026

**Annual Report and Second Year Review – last day of the Spring 2026 semester:**

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

**Teaching Request Form for AY206-27 – first Friday of Spring 2026 semester:**

Friday, January 16, 2026

### 3. Rice University Policies

#### 3.1 General Announcements

Refer to Rice University's General Announcements for:

- Regulations and Procedures for All Graduate Students: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/#text>
- Regulations and Procedures for Doctoral Degrees: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-doctoral-degrees/>
- Code of Student Conduct: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/rights-responsibilities/code-student-conduct/>
- Dispute Resolution: Petition and Appeals <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/rights-responsibilities/dispute-resolution/>
- Academic and Judicial Discipline: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/#text>
- To change advisors, meet with the Director of Doctoral Studies. If the advisor is the Director of Doctoral Studies, students should meet with the Department Chair.

In addition to being in compliance with the regulations stated in this departmental handbook, students must also follow the General Announcements and the Code of Conduct. In case of conflicting information, university-wide regulations take precedence over department-wide regulations, which take precedence over research group-wide regulations.

If in doubt, students should seek help first at the department level (graduate administrator, Director of Doctoral Studies, advisor, and/or department chair) and then at the central administration level (Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies).

When planning vacations, students should be mindful of ongoing academic obligations and responsibilities. Students should consult with their advisors to be certain that all department obligations are met.

#### 3.2 Title IX and Sexual Discrimination

Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of sexual, relationship, or other interpersonal violence, harassment or gender discrimination to seek support. There are many options available both on and off campus for all graduate students, regardless of whether the perpetrator was a fellow student, a staff or faculty member, or someone not affiliated with the university.

Students should be aware when seeking support on campus that most employees are required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to Title IX professionals on campus who can act to support that student and meet their needs. The therapists at the Rice Counseling Center and the doctors at Student Health Services are confidential, meaning that Rice will not be informed about the incident if a student discloses to one of these Rice staff members. Rice prioritizes student privacy and safety, and only shares disclosed information on a need-to-know basis.

If you are in need of assistance or simply would like to talk to someone, please call Rice Wellbeing and Counseling Center, which includes Title IX Support: (713) 348-3311. Policies, including the Sexual Misconduct Policy and Student Code of Conduct, and more information regarding Title IX can be found at [safe.rice.edu](http://safe.rice.edu).

### **3.3 Accommodations for Physical, Sensory, Cognitive, Learning, and Psychological Disabilities**

The Department of Religion is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, learning and psychological disabilities. At the PhD level this includes dimensions of program requirements such as the Comprehensive Examinations. Students in need of special consideration are encouraged to visit the Rice Disability Resource Center (<http://drc.rice.edu/>) and provide documentation in order to receive a Reasonable Accommodations Request and Accommodation Letter. The letter should be given to the Director of Doctoral Studies no later than one month prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examinations.

## **4. Department of Religion PhD Program General Information**

### **4.1 Brief Program Timeline**

Year One:	Coursework and regular meetings with advisor
Year Two:	Coursework; complete secondary modern language requirements (French and German) by the end of summer; and prepare Second-Year Review
Year Three:	Finish outstanding coursework/work on prospectus; prepare for and take Comprehensive Exams
Year Four:	Finalize and defend Dissertation Prospectus; take Dissertation Writing Workshop (course #TBD) or Mellon Seminar by eighth semester.
Years Five and Six:	Finish work on dissertation research; defend dissertation

### **4.2 Definition and Statement on Satisfactory Progress**

Satisfactory academic progress is defined as completing the requirements of the PhD program in an adequate and timely manner as outlined in this Handbook. Furthermore, to maintain satisfactory progress the following is required:

- \*Students completing coursework must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0.
- \*Submission of Annual Assessment Reports and a Second Year Review. If progress is deemed unsatisfactory at the Second Year Review, the student will automatically be put on probation for the following fall semester.
- \* ~~French and German~~ Language requirements are to be completed by the end of the second year.
- \*Successfully completion of Comprehensive Examinations by the end of the third year at the latest.
- \*Achievement of Candidacy by the beginning of the fourth year.
- \*Complete and defend a prospectus developed in consultation with the primary advisor, no later than the end of the seventh semester (and preferably by the end of the sixth semester). See Form

F-6 at the end of this handbook.

\*Students must submit and orally defend a completed dissertation by the end of the fifth year, but no later than the eighth year.

Students who do not make satisfactory progress in the program will be notified by letter from the Director of Doctoral Studies and will be placed on probation. In conjunction with the Director of Doctoral Studies, the student will create an improvement plan for the following semester. After another semester of unsatisfactory progress, the department has the right to dismiss a student from the program.

### **4.3 Advising: First Year Students**

First year students are expected to meet regularly with their primary advisor. Through these meetings, the advisor provides guidance related to coursework, language training, and other dimensions of the program. In addition, questions regarding the general structure of the Ph.D. program should be brought to the attention of the Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS) at any time. First-year students who would like a student mentor should contact their advisor.

### **4.4 Graduate Students transferring between Advisors**

Graduate students occasionally change study area and/or faculty advisor for a variety of reasons. It is also the case that the student's advisor may believe it is best for the student to have a different advisor. To arrange such a change, the student or advisor should initiate discussion of any concerns they have about the advisership as soon as possible. Where adviser and student agree, the transfer can be done at any time. Please advise the DDS about any such transfer when it happens.

If the DDS learns from a student or advisor that they are considering such a transfer, the DDS is required to make sure that both the student and advisor are alerted. (The person seeking the change in advisership, ideally, should provide the alert.) If necessary, mediation options can be made available by the DDS involving a meeting between student, advisor and DDS (and incoming advisor if necessary or desirable) to help sort any problems related the transfer, since the outgoing adviser may still need the student's assistance with research or teaching and the student may still need or benefit from the outgoing adviser's advice in some respects.

### **4.5 Independent Study Courses**

A syllabus is required for every Independent Study course. Students must contact the individual professor if wanting to take an Independent Study course. In general, independent study courses require students to read a selection of material worked out by the instructor or in consultation with the instructor. Students are expected, based on readings and scheduled meetings, to develop resource materials related to a research project or comprehensive examinations.

Contact the Graduate Program Administrator regarding Independent Study Courses.

### **4.6 Publishing and Presenting Work**

Students should be in touch with the primary advisor to discuss presentation and publishing

opportunities. In addition, graduate seminars typically provide opportunities for students to present their research. Department sponsored conferences and meetings also offer presentation opportunities.

#### **4.7 Professional Training**

As part of their degree, all graduate students will train as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for RELI 101 *What is Religion?* For at least one semester over the course of the academic career in the department.

Students are strongly encouraged to approach this training as a real and integral part of the mentoring process and as essential to their graduate education.

Depending on their research area, some students may be trained as Editorial Assistants (EA) for academic journals headquartered in the department. This training does not take the place of RELI 101 TA training.

#### **4.8 The Committee on Graduate Studies and Standing, Department of Religion**

The committee consists of the DDS, the Chair of the Department, and at least one other faculty member as appointed by the Chair. The committee will meet at the end of each semester and at other times when needed. All documents related to graduate life (e.g., annual reports; comprehensive exams; PhD prospectus; fellowships and stipend reports) are sent to the graduate committee. Annual Reports must be completed by the last day of the spring semester each year. Second-Year Reviews do not take the place of the Annual Report requirement.

The committee is tasked with: 1) ensuring the proper progress of graduate students; 2) the vetting and approval of awards, fellowships, research funding, and training; 3) approval of curriculum issues; 4) the adjudication of any relevant graduate conflicts and issues.

## 5. Degree Requirements

Degree requirements are also posted in the General Announcements here:

<https://ga.rice.edu/programs-study/departments-programs/humanities/religion/religion-phd/#requirementstext>

### 5.1 Course Requirements

#### 5.1.1 Minimal Course Requirements

Ninety credit hours in graduate level courses are required for the PhD. Thirty-six credit hours must be taken in 500 and 600 level seminars and include the required seminars below. Students are expected to make satisfactory progress toward the degree in a timely manner and maintain a minimum GPA of B (3.0). Students typically take three courses each semester.

In addition to the 36 required hours above, all incoming students are required to take HUMA 500– Humanities Beyond Disciplines, a two-credit, S/U course, in their first year. HUMA 500 does not count towards the 36 required credit hours of seminars required by the department.

The Department recognizes and embraces the fact that the study of religion is an interdisciplinary project that requires forms of knowledge and methodologies from different intellectual traditions. We thus encourage each student to take coursework outside the Department. However, *no more than one-fourth of all credits* counted towards the Ph.D. in Religion will be accepted from other departments. This does not preclude a student from exceeding the overall total credit requirements for the PhD, however, additional courses cannot impede a student's progress towards meeting Comprehensive Exams, Candidacy, and Dissertation Prospectus deadlines.

#### 5.1.2 Required Seminars - to be taken in the first two years:

RELI 650 - Methods I

RELI 651 - Methods II

HUMA 500 Humanities Beyond the Disciplines (does not count toward 36 seminar hours required by the department)

The seminars will generally draw most of their required readings from the bibliographies developed by the faculty for the first Comprehensive Exam. See the Comprehensive Exams section in this Handbook for more details.

#### 5.1.3 Additional Course Requirement – to be taken before achieving candidacy:

##### **Pedagogy Practicum (RELI 530)**

As an integral part of the department's apprenticeship program, RELI 530 is a semester-long practicum through which a graduate student apprentices with a faculty member teaching an

undergraduate course in order to be trained in all aspects of course design, lecturing, advising, and grading. This requirement is fulfilled by training as a Teaching Assistant for RELI 101. While not required, students may also additionally serve as a Teaching Assistant with a particular professor. The Graduate Program Administrator *must* be informed of all TA assignments prior to the beginning of the semester.

#### **5.1.4 RELI 800 – Research for Dissertation**

While writing their dissertation, students will be enrolled in RELI 800 with their faculty advisor. **Students are required to submit their chapters in progress to their advisor by the last day of classes each semester.**

## **5.2 Language Requirements**

### **5.2.1 Language Requirements**

Demonstrate proficiency in at least one modern language, French, German, Spanish, or another language necessary for the students's area of specialization, by passing a reading and translation examination.

Students working in ancient languages must pass examinations in the languages of their primary source original language texts in consultation with their advisor. These are in addition to the modern research language examination and must be completed prior to comprehensive exams.

All language requirements must be completed by the end of the summer of the second year.

### **5.2.2 Modern Language Requirements**

All Ph.D. students are expected to pass a reading exams in at least one secondary modern research language, that is, one language in which modern scholarship is written. In the past, these languages have been French or German. All language exams must be completed and passed prior to setting up with the advisor the comprehensive exams. Ideally, students should be completing their language requirements in their second year of coursework. These exams must be taken by the end of summer of the second year.

Two paths for students to obtain proficiency in French or German:

- a. The recommended path is for students to enroll in specially designed intensive summer courses offered by Center for Language and Cultures at Rice. These courses, normally taught at the end of April and early May, alternate annually between French and German. Students are advised to find out in advance which language will be offered during a given year. The exam given at the end of the courses serves as the proficiency test. The summer exam date is set by the professor of the summer language course.
- b. The second path for students to obtain proficiency in French or German is through self-study and examination. The French examination is coordinated and administered by Dr. Fanger. The German examination is coordinated and administered by Dr. Henze. When necessary, other members of the Department of Religion faculty may assist in this process.

After receiving approval to take the exam from the student's advisor and Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze, students must submit at least three weeks before the exam to Dr. Fanger (for French) and Dr. Henze (for German) the book from which they would like to be tested. If the book is approved, Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze will select an appropriate section and use it to test the student. Examinations are graded by Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze. Students will have two hours to complete language examinations in French or German.

Written examinations for French and German are taken from 9:00am-11:00am the second Friday of September, November, January, and March.

Students may use a conventional language dictionary during the exam. This excludes computer or internet dictionaries and access to computer or internet translation aids. Students who take exams administered by the language departments during the summer will follow the instructor's rules regarding language exams.

### **5.2.3 Language Proficiency Exams for Primary Source Research Languages**

Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Arabic, and Tibetan

These language exams are required for students who need to work in primary source original language texts. They are meant to prepare the students for dissertation research and their scholarly career. Ordinarily, they do not replace the requirement for the student to pass a proficiency tests in a modern research language.

Professors responsible for these exams should be consulted directly by the student.

- Cook [Arabic]
- DeConick [Greek and Coptic]
- Fanger [Latin]
- Henze [Hebrew and Syriac]
- Ogren (medieval and modern Hebrew)
- Klein [Tibetan]

Working with the professor, the student will prepare texts in genres deemed most relevant to the student's area of research.

Although the format of the exam is at the professor's discretion, the proficiency exam must consist of a minimum of three passages chosen from genres in which the student has been working. At least one of the passages must be a sight passage. Students will have three hours to complete language examinations in the primary source research languages listed above.

Written examinations are taken from 9:00am-12:00pm the second Friday of September, November, January, and March.

Students cannot use computer or internet dictionaries or access computer or internet translation aids, except in cases where the professor determines otherwise. Whether traditional lexicons can or cannot be used is the professor's prerogative.

The language exams determined central to the student's field of study must be completed and passed prior to setting up Comprehensive Exams.

### **5.3 Comprehensive Exams, Candidacy and Non-Thesis MA Degree**

#### **5.3.1 Comprehensive Exams**

All students are required to pass their Comprehensive Exams no later than the second semester of their third year. Preparing for Comprehensive Exams should be done in consultation with their advisor. Students are not allowed to substitute research papers in place of exams.

The Comprehensive Exams are four in number:

#### I. Methods and History of the Study of Religion

#### II. Religious Traditions or Graduate Areas of Concentration

- African-American religions
- African religions
- Biblical religions
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- New Age and New Religious Movements
- Bible and Beyond
- Early Christian Studies
- Global Christianity
- History of Religions in America

#### III. Methodological Foundations

- Religious Ethics
- Contemplative Studies
- Gender Theory
- History of Religions
- Philosophy of Religion
- Psychology of Religion
- Religion and the Social Sciences
- Biblical Criticism and Scriptural Interpretation
- Theology
- Cognitive Study of Religion

#### IV. Thematic Concentration

Together, the Comprehensive Exams are designed to give the student a broad and solid reading foundation that he or she can draw on for the rest of his or her career.

Students should consult with their advisors about the exams and obtain from them the

appropriate reading lists and setup their Comprehensive Exams Committee. This committee shall consist of no less than three faculty members in the department, including their advisor. These faculty will be involved in the writing and grading of the exams.

Students must set up their exams in conversation with their advisor and turn in the completed Comprehensive Exams Declaration Form (F-3) to the Graduate Program Administrator no later than two weeks prior to the exams.

Comprehensive Exams are administered every year from 9:00am-1:00pm on a Tuesday and Friday schedule in the third and fourth weeks of October, and again in the third and fourth weeks of March. If an exam date falls on an official holiday or university break, the exam will be scheduled to take place on the first working day following the break day. Students will have four hours to complete each written exam question.

NOTE: In extenuating circumstances, students can petition for taking their Comprehensive Exams outside of Houston. Approval from the entire Comp Exam committee is required.

The Comprehensive Exams Committee will review the exams within a reasonable period of time. Upon completion of the written exams, the student will check on availability of rooms with the Department or Graduate Administrator and then schedule an oral interview (one to two hours) via Doodle Poll or email with the examiners. Oral interviews are expected to be in person. In extenuating experiences, students can take orals via zoom. During this interview, the student responds to questions related to the written examinations. The student will bring a copy of form F-4 Evaluation of Comprehensive Exams (found at the end of this handbook) to the Oral Comprehensive Exam meeting.

If there are deficiencies in the written exams that are not addressed adequately by the student during the oral interview, the Comprehensive Exam Committee can require the student to write a short essay (15-20 pages) addressing the deficient areas.

Students who fail the Comprehensive Examination will be automatically be dismissed from the program.

### **5.3.2 Achieving Candidacy: Procedures**

In thesis programs, the attainment of candidacy marks the completion of all requirements for the degree other than those related to research leading to the writing, submission, and defense of the thesis.

In order to achieve PhD Candidacy, Comprehensive Exams must be successfully passed no later than the seventh semester (though the sixth semester is expected) of the program and the Dissertation Committee must be identified.

When the student is ready to petition for Candidacy she/he should contact the Graduate Administrator who will assist with compiling and submitting the appropriate paperwork.

The student will meet with the Graduate Program Administrator to compile the following:

1. The Checklist for PhD Candidacy (with appropriate documentation)
2. Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Doctoral Degree (F-9)

All students are required to achieve candidacy no later than the first semester of their fourth year, but are encouraged to do so sooner. This should be done in consultation with their faculty advisor.

### **5.3.3 Master's Degree**

The Candidacy M.A. degree is granted “on the way” to a PhD. The Candidacy M.A. degree is granted when a student has completed all PhD coursework requirements, passed required language examination(s), and passed the Comprehensive Examination.

When PhD Candidacy Requirements are met, students will meet with the Graduate Program Administrator to submit their Petition for Approval of Candidacy form and Candidacy Master's Degree form to the office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS).

## **5.4 The Dissertation**

### **5.4.1 Dissertation Committee**

A student's Dissertation Committee is made up of a minimum of two faculty members within the department and one faculty member at Rice, but outside the Department of Religion. The outside committee member need not be an expert on the subject of the dissertation. In certain circumstances, Rice faculty from outside the Department of Religion can serve as dissertation committee co-advisors with the consent of a co-advisor from the department and a vote from departmental faculty

Committee members from outside Rice University are not allowed except in extreme circumstances, and are only allowed as a fourth member of a committee. Committee members outside of Rice must be approved by the Director of Doctoral Studies. While the creation of the dissertation committee is done in consultation between the faculty advisor and the student, the final decision for the composition of the committee falls to the faculty advisor, not the student.

### **5.4.2 Dissertation Prospectus**

Students are required to complete a Dissertation Prospectus no later than the end of the seventh semester.

- A draft prospectus should be approved by the Advisor in principle before Comprehensive Exams are taken.
- Once Comprehensive Exams are passed, the draft prospectus should be used to invite faculty members onto the dissertation committee.
- A prospectus defense meeting will be arranged by the student where the committee and the Director of Doctoral Studies will meet and discuss the proposal and the prospectus is orally defended. At the end of the meeting, the prospectus will either be passed or returned for modifications or resubmission.

- Minimum Prospectus requirements: 4000-5000 words

Prospectus Format:

Abstract:

Articulate the question and the thesis in 500 words. State Question/Literature Review Section outlining the secondary research on the student's question and/or a literature review, with a discussion of the student's contribution to the state of the question.

Approach:

Explain the approach to the materials, with reference to theorists and/or methods appropriate to the student's question.

Contents:

Describe the planned content of each chapter of the dissertation.

Timetable:

Set up timetable for completion of the project, with real deadlines for completion of each chapter.

### **5.4.3 Dissertation Time Boundary**

The dissertation should be written and defended by the end of the sixth year, and not later than the eighth year in the program. As part of the writing process, students must meet with the chair of their dissertation committee at least once a semester to discuss their progress.

Students at the dissertation writing phase enroll in RELI 800 - Research for Dissertation with their faculty advisor and must submit their chapters in progress to their advisor by the last day of class each semester.

### **5.4.4 Dissertation Defense Procedures**

The dissertation defense, also called the oral defense, is a public event that is announced to the Rice Community via the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The event's length is usually between an hour and a half and two hours and is moderated by the Advisor of the particular candidate.

The event proceeds in four simple stages:

1. The student will briefly (in no more than 10-15 minutes) summarize his/her dissertation topic and research.
2. The committee members engage the student via any questions that they choose to ask. Normally, each committee member will be given a separate turn to query the writer.
3. After the questions are exhausted and the committee feels like it has heard what it needs to hear, the writer and any audience members will be asked to leave the room, at which time the committee will deliberate and come to a decision about the dissertation.
4. Finally, the Ph.D. candidate is brought back into the room and informed of the results of the deliberation.

Two outcomes are possible: (1) pass or (2) fail.

If a student passes the oral defense, revisions of the written thesis may be requested by the Dissertation Committee before final submission. Graduation may be delayed if revisions are not completed in time to meet University deadlines.

If a student fails the oral defense, a second defense may be scheduled. Students who fail a second time will be dismissed from the university.

Full details of all requirements and procedures regarding the oral defense and thesis submission can be found at <https://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>.

**NOTE:** Students should contact the department's Graduate Program Administrator to review ALL university requirements related to the dissertation defense, thesis submission, and degree conferral, *no later* than the beginning of the semester they intend to defend.

## 6. Annual Reviews

### 6.1 Annual Assessment Review and Report

In addition to regular meetings with the primary advisor, the Annual Report is a tool to monitor progress in the program. The Annual Report is due no later than the last day of the semester per the Academic Calendar.

- The Annual Report is completed online and is posted on the Forms webpage on the Department's website (<https://reli.rice.edu/forms>). A sample can be found at the end of this Handbook.
- A meeting is required between the student and their advisor as part of the Annual Report process.
- Failure to submit the Annual Report on time will be considered grounds for probation.

### 6.2 Second-Year Review

Every graduate student participates in a Second-Year Review in order to ensure the proper progress and development of each Ph.D. student and to measure the quality of the program.

- Students are required to provide their portfolio, including progress narratives, all seminar papers, unofficial transcripts, language completion forms, and two annual reports. The portfolio is submitted by the student to each member of the review committee one week in advance of the oral review.
- For the narrative, the graduate student writes a 5-10 page narrative discussing his/her progress in the program to date, strengths and weaknesses, research trajectory, and plans to complete the degree.
- A 90-minute oral review is scheduled by the student with his/her review committee.

The review committee consists of the Advisor, the Graduate Director, and any other faculty member who may sit on the student's thesis committee. These faculty members should be selected in consultation with the Advisor and solicited by the student.

- The Graduate Director provides advisor, student AND the Graduate Program Administrator with written summary of feedback from the review committee regarding progress toward the degree.
- If progress is deemed unsatisfactory at the Second-Year Review, the student will automatically be put on probation for the following fall semester.

NOTE: The Second Year Review is not a substitute for the Annual Assessment Report. **Both** are required at the end of the second year.

## 7. Teaching Opportunities

### 7.1 Department of Religion Graduate Student Instructor

Each student may apply to teach a total of one to two courses.

- The student teaching the course will receive \$5,000 in compensation.
- Students must select courses already offered in the course catalog and in consultation with their advisor.

#### Qualifications

- The student must be in at least the fourth year of the Religion Ph.D. program at the time the course is taught.
- The student must be in good academic standing at the time the course is taught.
- The student must have successfully completed Pedagogy Practicum (RELI 530).

#### Application

- The application must be made in consultation with the student's advisor.
- The student must apply to teach a course from the Course Catalog (available online from the Registrar's Office).
- The student must submit the Graduate Teaching Request form (F-7), a letter of support from their primary advisor, the syllabus, a statement of teaching philosophy (no more than two pages in length), and a CV.
- The deadline for applications is:
  - The first Friday of the Spring semester for courses to be taught in the following academic year (Fall/Spring).
- Applications (Form F-7 found at the end of this handbook) are to be submitted to the Department Administrator, with a copy to the Director of Doctoral Studies and the Chair of the Department.

#### Selection Process

- Final approval of courses will be made by the Chair and the Director of Doctoral Studies.
- Students will be notified of the results.

## **7.2 Graduate Instructor for FWIS**

Freshman Writing Intensive Seminars (FWIS) are administered by the Program in Writing and Communication (PWC). Graduate Instructor and Teaching Assistant positions are available. The deadline to apply is generally February for the following academic year.

More information can be found at: <https://pwc.rice.edu/whom-we-serve/graduate-students/graduate-student-employment-opportunities>

## **Consultant Positions with CAPC**

As a stepping stone to teaching a FWIS course, the Center for Academic and Professional Communication (CAPC) hires graduate communication consultants. More information can be found at: <https://pwc.rice.edu/whom-we-serve/graduate-students/graduate-student-employment-opportunities>

# **8. Additional Funding/Certificate Opportunities**

## **8.1 Department of Religion Conference and Research Travel Awards**

The Department of Religion grants competitive travel awards of up to \$1,500 per fiscal year (July 1 to June 30) to assist its graduate students to travel to conferences and to conduct research during the academic year or the summer break. Deadlines are four times a year. Details can be found at: <https://reli.rice.edu/conference-and-research-travel-award>.

## **8.2 Conference and Research Travel Support – Dean’s Fund**

The Dean’s Conference, Research, and Professional Advancement Fund provides financial resources for students to travel to present at conferences or perform research. Information can be found at <https://humanities.rice.edu/graduate-research-funding>.

When possible, students must apply for Department of Religion funding (above) first, before applying for the Dean’s Fund.

## **8.3 Humanities Research Center**

The Humanities Research Center (HRC) administers the Marilyn Mars Gillet International Travel Fellowship as well as funding for visiting speakers and student-run conferences and workshops. Calls for applications are held throughout the year. More information can be found at <https://hrc.rice.edu/calls-deadlines>.

## **8.4 Certificate Programs**

Graduate students may work towards certificates in the following areas:

- The Center for African and African American Studies ([CAAS](https://caaas.rice.edu)) offers a University Graduate Certificate in African and African American Studies. Information can be found at: <https://caaas.rice.edu/graduate-certificate>.
- Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism (GEM) Certificate from the Department of Religion. More information in section 9 of this handbook and here: <https://reli.rice.edu/gem-certificate>
- Certificate in the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality from the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, Sexuality (CSWGS). Students may apply for a one-time *competitive* stipend of \$5,000 upon completion. More information can be found here: <https://cswgs.rice.edu/>.

## 8.5 Special Fellowships and Prizes

Each spring, department chairs are invited to nominate continuing graduate students for the following special endowed fellowships; the final recipients are chosen by the Graduate Council. The amount of the fellowship and the number of recipients vary from year to year.

- Lodieska Stockbridge Vaughn: To provide a fellowship for a graduate student whose record at Rice shows evidence of outstanding achievement and promise. Students must be nominated by their department. One award in Humanities is given each year.
- James T. Wagoner Fellow- Foreign Study Scholarships: Funding to conduct research in a foreign country. Funding ranges from \$3,500-\$15,000 and is related to the scholar's projected expenses for a year, semester, or summer.
- John Gardner Prize: The School of Humanities awards the \$1,000 John Gardner Prize to the student with the best dissertation in the School of Humanities. Nominations are determined by department. Dissertations are read by a committee of HUMA faculty from departments with graduate programs, and a joint recommendation is made to the Dean of Humanities for final approval.

## 9. Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism (GEM) Certificate Program

The [GEM Certificate](#) provides students with a theoretical orientation, which they then can apply to their chosen concentrations (i.e., African-American religions; African religions; Bible and Beyond; Buddhism; Christianity; Hinduism; Islam; Judaism; American Religion; New Age and New Religious Movements; etc.). Traditionally the study of religion has privileged the authoritative voices of the religious experts and the scriptural texts that uphold orthodox faith traditions. This traditional approach ignores, marginalizes, and even sometimes literally demonizes religious expressions that are against the grain or cannot be fit into the normative worldview. These same expressions have also been identified by orthodox faith traditions as "heresy." For too long, scholars have been reluctant to consider this "other" material central or vital to academic discussions of religion, while these alternative religious expressions have been pejoratively labeled as the stuff of charlatans, the mentally ill, or ignorant folk.

It is our opinion that such an approach has failed to consider fully the process of the construction of orthodoxy and heresy out of a plurality of competing religious voices. This failure creates and sustains political narratives of religion that serve to protect orthodoxies from criticism and promote their biases as historically sound. It disregards religious voices that are vibrant historical witnesses to the shaping of religious landscapes.

GEM is a new approach to the study of religion that does not privilege the public orthodox framings but takes seriously the heterodox and esoteric currents that have been actively repressed, censored, or marginalized in a variety of sociological, psychological, philosophical, and political ways. GEM takes into account the plurality of religious voices and expressions, including the neglected currents, in order to reconceive religion. This approach also engages the psychology and the phenomenology of religious experience, rather than relying exclusively on the authorial framings taught by the faith traditions and transmitted in their scriptural texts, interpretations and rituals. While we recognize that the comparative categories of gnosticism, esotericism and mysticism are modern constructs, each provides us with different nuances that can assist in asking the sort of dialectical questions that will result in a more honest assessment and thick description of religion and the religious traditions we study.

## 9.1 GEM Certificate Requirements

12 credits of coursework and 2-semester enrollment in RELI 600 GEM Research Forum (1 credit course) are required.

- 3 Theory-Intensive Core Courses  
Students are required to complete one course in Gnosticism (RELI 581), one course in the Esotericism (RELI 587), and one course in Mysticism (RELI 558).
- 1 Thematic Course (from list of approved courses; see April DeConick or Jeff Kripal)
- 2 semesters of RELI 600 GEM Research Forum  
Students are required to enroll in consecutive Fall and Spring semesters during the same academic year. Although only one year of enrollment is required, students are encouraged to participate in the Forum throughout their time at Rice.
- Submission of Request for GEM Certificate (F-8) to the department coordinator, a semester in advance of bestowal. Certificates will be awarded each spring at the departmental graduation ceremony.
- Submission of [Declaration of Certificate](#) with the Registrar's Office.

## 9.2 Courses

### Theory-Intensive Core Courses (3)

These courses are essential to the certificate because they theorize the constructed categories under study: Gnosticism, Esotericism and Mysticism. They do so from the ancient world to the modern period, giving students the necessary historical sweep to fully engage the categories and the debates surrounding them.

### RELI 581: Gnosticism Seminar (DeConick)

What is Gnosticism? This course covers the construction of the category Gnosticism by scholars since the 1600s and its long-standing association with the concept of heresy and the literature and religions that people who call themselves Gnostics form. Literary, social, historical and cognitive methods are used to examine Gnostic religious currents and their survival into

modernity.

RELI 587: Western Esotericism Method and Theory (Fanger)

This course explores the relation between esoteric texts and the idea of "Western Esotericism." Examines primary writings from Agrippa to Madame Blavatsky and considers the historical and methodological approaches emerging as Esotericism is constructed as an academic area.

RELI 558: Mysticism: Theories & Methods (Kripal or Parsons)

This course is a history of the development of the modern category of "mysticism" from the seventeenth century to today, with side studies of cognate terms like "spirituality," "metaphysical religion," and the "paranormal," as these forms of extreme religious experience are interpreted by social-scientific and humanistic methods.

Thematic Courses (1)

Students are asked to select one additional thematic course which focuses on the study of one particular area in detail. This focus should reflect the student's interest. This list is kept updated annually by the Department.

List of Thematic Courses

RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)

RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)

RELI 584: Psychology, Religion and Culture (Parsons)

RELI 588: History of Religions (Kripal)

RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)

RELI 607: Archives of the Impossible (Kripal)

RELI 616: New Testament/Christian Origins (DeConick)

RELI 644: Visions and Visionary Practices (Fanger)

RELI 600 GEM Research Forum (2 consecutive semesters)

This forum meets monthly throughout the semester. Its purpose is for faculty and students to share, discuss and critique their current research (pre-publication) in GEM subjects in order to improve the quality of the papers and to mentor students in formal academic etiquette and oral communication skills. Students are asked to write academic reflections of each event, identifying key insights and issues that may impact their own research as scholars. At the end of the year, a conference is hosted on a GEM subject. An external keynote speaker is invited. Students are asked to participate as presiders, organizers, and speakers. This is meant to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to organize and host conferences, improve their oral communication skills, and to network with scholars at other institutions.

## **11. Forms**

- F-1 - Graduate Student Annual Report Form (Sample)
- F-2 - Comprehensive Exams Declaration Form
- F-3 - Evaluation of Comprehensive Examinations
- F-4 - Checklist for PhD Candidacy in Religion
- F-5 - Dissertation Prospectus Approval Form
- F-6 - Graduate Student Instruction Request Form
- F-7 - Request for GEM Certificate (Sample)
- F-8 - Petition for Approval of Candidacy for Doctoral Degree (Sample)
- F-9 – Candidacy MA Form (Sample)

## Graduate Student Annual Report Form (F-1)

Due to the Advisor no later than the last day of class in the spring semester.

### Part 1 (Graduate Student)

This part of the report is to be filled out by the student and sent to the Advisor.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of matriculation: \_\_\_\_\_

Concentration: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Area of Concentration (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Advisor (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ On probation (Y/N): \_\_\_\_\_

Total Religion Department courses: \_\_\_\_\_ Total courses outside department: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address(es): \_\_\_\_\_

Respond to the following prompts:

1. Outline your academic progress this past year (include areas of strength that you feel you are developing; areas of weakness that you wish to improve and how we might make this happen).
2. Identify areas of future interest (include what areas you would like to gain more knowledge of in the coming years at Rice and how we might make this happen).
3. Outline your academic plans for the next academic year, including summer.
4. Outline where you are in thinking about your dissertation (if not already writing).
5. List any professional papers, panel discussions, etc. (if any) that you have given in the last academic year.
6. List any publications (if any) that have appeared during the last year, indicating whether they are refereed publications or not.
7. List any pending publications with due dates.
8. List other honors or awards received during the last academic year.

**SAMPLE ONLY –**  
students fill out form online at  
<https://reli.rice.edu/forms>

**Language Exams**

**French** planned completion date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date passed: \_\_\_\_\_

**German** planned completion date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date passed: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional language (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Planned completion date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date passed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Professional Training:**

**Have you been trained as a TA for RELI 101?**

**If yes, semester and year:**

**Have you engaged in any other professional training at Rice? Please explain:**

**Comprehensive Exams**

Only applicable after both language exams are passed

Exam 1 Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Tester: \_\_\_\_\_

Exam 2 Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Tester: \_\_\_\_\_

Exam 3 Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Tester: \_\_\_\_\_

Exam 4 Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Tester: \_\_\_\_\_

Planned completion date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date passed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Candidacy**

Petition for Candidacy form completed (date): \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

Prospectus complete (date): \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2 (Faculty Advisor)**

This section of the Annual Report is to be completed by the Advisor after a meeting with the student. Form must be completed by the last day of class in the spring term. The Advisor should see that the student is given a printed copy of this report. The Advisor should file another printed copy in the student's file in the main office. An electronic version should be uploaded to Box.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Provide a BRIEF written evaluation below of the student's progress in the program. Include (if any) concerns that you may have about the student's progress and plans that you and the student have agreed to implement in order to address these concerns.

**IMPORTANT:** In completing this section, please write regarding these markers of success:

- Successful completion of coursework
- Advancement with respect to language requirements
- Demonstration of satisfactory professional development (e.g., attending professional meetings, submission of paper proposals to various conferences, publications, adequate efforts to establish professional networks, participation in department events)



**Evaluation of Comprehensive Examinations (F-4)**

The student will bring this form to the oral interview portion of the Comprehensive Exams. After completion, this form must be turned in to the Graduate Program Administrator to be placed in the student's file.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Pass \_\_\_\_ Fail \_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam 1: Methods and History of the Study of Religion**

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam 2: Religious Traditions(s)**

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam 3: Methodological Foundations**

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam 4: Thematic Concentration**

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Examiner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments:

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## Checklist for PhD Candidacy in Religion (F-5)

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Graduate Student

Date

- 1. Coursework  
At time of candidacy student must have earned a minimum of thirty-six credit hours in 500 and 600 level seminars.
- 2. Annual Reports (see instructions and form on pages 15-19)
- 3. Required Seminars  
RELI 527 HISTORY & METHODS: 19th CENTURY **OR** RELI 610 METHODS I  
RELI 559 HISTORY & METHODS: 20th CENTURY  
HUMA 500 HUMANITIES BEYOND DISCIPLINES  
RELI 531 Pedagogy Practicum
- 4. Language Training (see pages 13-14)  
Pass reading exams in both French and German.
  - Language #1 date passed \_\_\_\_\_
  - Language #2 date passed \_\_\_\_\_
  - Original Language Proficiencies (if necessary for area of study) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Second-Year Review (see page 21)  
Each second-year student submits a substantive report in the spring semester and has an hour-long oral interview with the Director of Doctoral Studies and their faculty mentor. A summary of the report is given to the student on his/her progress in the program.
- 6. Comprehensive Exams Declaration Form (see form on page 26)
- 7. Evaluation of Comprehensive Examinations (include form on page 27)
- 8. Completed documents
  - Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Doctoral Degree (C-2)

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Graduate Administrator Signature

Date



**SAMPLE ONLY** –  
students fill out form online at  
<https://reli.rice.edu/forms>

**Teaching Request Form (F-7)**

Submit to Department Administrator and Director of Doctoral Studies by the first Friday of the spring semester for the following academic year.

Date received: \_\_\_\_\_

It is important to remember that this is a competitive process, and students are not guaranteed a course assignment.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in Program: \_\_\_\_\_

YES/NO (circle one) I have successfully completed Pedagogy Practicum RELI 530

YES/NO (circle one) I am currently enrolled in Pedagogy Practicum RELI 530

YES/NO (circle one) I have successfully passed Comprehensive Exams

I plan to take my Comprehensive Exams on \_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

Course Number in Catalog: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Title: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I would like to teach this coming spring semester

\_\_\_ I would like to teach next fall semester

Time preference: \_\_\_\_\_

**Checklist**

- Teaching Request Form
- Syllabus
- Statement of Teaching Philosophy
- C.V.
- Statement of Support from Advisor

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that teaching this course will be compensated in the amount of \$5,000 contingent upon the availability of funds, and that priority will be given to students in the sixth-eighth year of the program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature – Student)

**SAMPLE ONLY** – students fill out form online at <https://reli.rice.edu/gem-requirements> OR <https://reli.rice.edu/forms>

### Request for GEM Certificate (F-8)

Please submit this completed form to the Department Administrator in HUMA 225 when you have fulfilled the following the requirements.\*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Projected date of PhD graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

- RELI 581: Gnosticism Seminar  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- RELI 587: Western Esotericism Method and Theory  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- RELI 588: Mysticism: Theories and Methods  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- One thematic course from following list.  
Course number and name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_

#### List of Thematic Courses:

RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)

RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)

RELI 584: Psychology, Religion and Culture (Parsons)

RELI 588: History of Religions (Kripal)

RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)

RELI 607: Archives of the Impossible (Kripal)

RELI 616: New Testament/Christian Origins (DeConick)

RELI 644: Visions and Visionary Practices (Fanger)

- 2 semesters (minimum) of RELI 600 GEM Research Forum  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_
- Attach a copy of your transcript from ESTHER.
- Attach one paper you have written for a class, conference presentation, or publication that you think implements or incorporates into your own subdiscipline the knowledge and theoretical perspectives you have learned by participating in this certification program.
- Attach a 1000 word essay describing how your paper implements or incorporates into your own subdiscipline the knowledge and theoretical perspectives you have learned by participating in this certification program.



