

Department of Religion  
Rice University

Master of Arts Program  
Graduate Studies Procedural Handbook  
2018-2019



Department Chair, Professor April DeConick  
Department Director of MA Studies, Brian Ogren

## Table of Contents

Welcome Message from the Chair, Professor April DeConick .....	3
Welcome Message from the Dept. Director of MA Studies, Professor Brian Ogren .....	4
Department Contacts.....	5
General Information pertaining to Rice Graduate Programs .....	6
Title IX and Sexual Discrimination .....	6
Degree Requirements.....	8
Program Timeline .....	8
Candidacy .....	11
Masters Thesis Defense Procedures .....	12
Modern Research Language Requirement and Exam Procedures.....	13
Primary Source Languages .....	14
MA Graduate Student Annual Report Form.....	15
Part 1 (Graduate Student).....	15
Part 2 (Director of MA Studies).....	17
MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form.....	18
Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination .....	19
Checklist for MA Candidacy, Religion.....	20
Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree form.....	21
Checklist for Graduation .....	22
School of Humanities Review & Approval Form for Independent Study Courses.....	23
Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism (GEM) Certificate Program.....	24
Request for GEM Certificate .....	27

## Welcome Message from the Chair, Professor April DeConick



The motto of Rice University is strikingly bold. "Unconventional Wisdom." It is a motto that we love to own because it describes the kind of intellectual community that we create and foster in the Department of Religion. To study here means to challenge the status quo, to investigate what is not obvious, to reimagine what was, is and can be when it comes to religion. To study here means to enter an intellectual community where critical thought, disciplined training, and innovation intersect with religion.

We are a bold international faculty with specialties that range across many fields and approaches. We are marvelously interdisciplinary and pluralistic, studying everything from the rich diversity of early Judaism and Christianity to superhero comics and the paranormal, from medieval and renaissance mysticism and magic to African witchcraft, from the origins of Islam to modern apocalypticism and cultural pessimism, from Buddhist models of the mind to Freudian psychology, from modern art and spirituality to hip hop, from the ancient New Age to the modern-day expansion of gnosticism.

Why study religion? Why do it differently from the churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and theological schools? Religion is a powerful force with many facets and layers. It is part of a bigger historical, social, cultural and political network that links us to the way we perceive our world and our place, as human beings, within it. Many people grow up in a particular religious tradition, which comes to define their view of themselves and their relationship to others and the world. The classes we offer, the conferences we sponsor, and the books we write aim to create a space for stepping back and viewing religion from other angles and perspectives, for asking questions that may be considered "way-out" or even "banned" by the religions themselves. We seek answers that help us face and overcome religious intolerance by informing us about other views, challenging our religious stereotypes, and addressing fears that sometimes lead to hostility and violence.

This does not mean that our approach is antithetical to religion. While we approach religion from the perspective of free and informed intellectual inquiry, we do so with an empathy that does not privilege any particular religion. While we take sincerely the claims of religions and religious people, our investigations are not bound to the authority of any particular religious community, scripture, or person. For our students, this perspective often leads to religious awareness and self-evaluation. It facilitates a conversation that promises to reveal shared understandings and real differences between religious people, some of which have existed for centuries. It offers a place for all of us - faculty and student alike - to freely seek the difficult and risky answers to the whys and wherefores of religion. Studying with us means engaging questions of human diversity, purpose and meaning in a global world. It is a study that takes very seriously religious pluralism, that engages the modern reality of religious diversity, and assists us in trying to build understanding across the lines of religious difference. Welcome to our community!

## Welcome Message from the Dept. Director of MA Studies, Professor Brian Ogren



Welcome to Rice University and to your home in the Department of Religion. We are a diverse community of scholars with faculty of international standing, and you will find that we offer a uniquely congenial environment while still representing varied specialties and approaches. While here, you will be able to work closely with our faculty in attaining both a broad background in the study of religious currents and a strong theoretical framework for the academic study of religion. We are delighted to have you in the department and we look forward to your engagement and involvement, in our classes and beyond.

As the director of M.A. Studies, I will be readily available to you throughout your program, to help you develop your individual curriculum, to put you in touch with the scholars with whom you would most like to work, and to help you navigate your way. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have. I look forward to getting to know you and to accompanying you on this journey.

## DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PHONE</b>	<b>EMAIL</b>
Chair	April DeConick	713-348-4995	adeconick@rice.edu
Director of MA Studies	Brian Ogren	713-348-2893	Brian.E.Ogren@rice.edu
Department Administrator	Marcie Newton	713-348-5201	mdnewton@rice.edu
Graduate Administrator	Lydia Westbrook	713-348-2092	lydiaw@rice.edu

## General Information pertaining to Rice Graduate Programs

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/>
- Regulations and Procedures for Thesis Master's Graduate Degrees: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-thesis-masters-degrees/>
- Code of Student Conduct: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/rights-responsibilities/code-student-conduct/>
- Dispute Resolution: Petition and Appeals ([http://ga.rice.edu/GR\\_disputes/](http://ga.rice.edu/GR_disputes/))
- Academic and Judicial Discipline: Petition and Appeals <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/>

In addition to being in compliance with the regulations stated in this departmental handbook, students must also be in agreement with 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 graduate 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.

### 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).

### **Accommodations for Physical, Sensory, Cognitive, Learning, & Psychological Disabilities**

The Department of Religion is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, learning and psychological disabilities. At the MA level this includes dimensions of program requirements such as the Comprehensive Examination. Students in need of special consideration are encouraged to visit Rice Disability Support Services ([www.dss.rice.edu](http://www.dss.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 MA Studies no later than one month prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examination.

### **Department of Religion Definition and Statement on Satisfactory Progress**

Satisfactory academic progress is defined as completing the requirements of the MA program in an adequate and timely manner as outlined in this Handbook. Students completing coursework must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0. Additionally, students must submit a thesis prospectus by the end of the second semester, complete the modern research language requirement by the end of the third semester, pass a Comprehensive Examination and submit and orally defend a Thesis.

Candidacy is to be achieved by the middle of the fourth semester. Furthermore, all MA students at Rice University have five years from initial enrollment to complete the degree.

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

## Degree Requirements

- Complete a minimum of 30 hours of courses approved for graduate credit at Rice University
  - At least 24 hours of coursework (including Graduate Methods Seminars) must be in the Department of Religion (RELI)
  - At least 12 hours of the RELI coursework must be seminars where research papers are required (see the Director of MA Studies with any questions about individual courses)
- Complete two Graduate Methods Seminars:
  - RELI 527 (History and Methods: 19th Century)
  - RELI 559 (History and Methods: 20th Century)
- Earn an overall GPA of at least 3.0
- Pass one secondary language reading exam (French or German)
- Pass a comprehensive exam on Method and Theory in the study of religion
- Submit a Master's thesis developed from a paper in a course
- Pass an oral defense of thesis with three faculty members in the Department of Religion
- Follow the candidacy, defense, and thesis submission guidelines described in the General Announcements (<https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-thesis-masters-degrees/>)
- Meet all university graduation requirements as documented in the Rice General Announcements for [Thesis Master's Programs](#).

## Program Timeline

### First Semester (Fall)

- RELI 527 or 559
  - 1 elective course
  - 1 elective course
- TOTAL 9 credits**

### Second Semester (Spring)

- 1 elective course
  - 1 elective course
  - 1 elective course
- TOTAL 9 credits**

- MA Thesis Meeting (April) : A MA Thesis Committee is formed by the student consisting of the Director of MA Studies and two faculty members in the Department of Religion. The committee will meet at end of semester with the student and the student will present their thesis topic and a 500-word prospectus. The Committee will set up research and writing goals for the student's third semester (Fall) when the student will enroll in RELI 801.
- Submit an Annual Assessment Report (June deadline)



### **End of Second Semester (May):**

Optional intensive language course and examination to satisfy language requirement. The optional language course alternates between French and German each year.

### **Third Semester (Fall)**

- RELI 527 or 559
- REL 801 – Research for MA Thesis (3 credit hours)
- 1 elective

**TOTAL 9 credits**

- Language Exam Requirement must be completed by end of semester
- MA Thesis Meeting (December): Committee meets with student and reviews student's progress on thesis and makes recommendations for research and writing for final semester.

### **Fourth Semester (Spring)**

- RELI 801 – 9 credit hours
- 1 elective (optional) 3 credit hours
- 1 elective (optional) 3 credit hours

**TOTAL 9-15 credit hours depending on course selection**

- Comprehensive Exam in Methods (first Friday in February)
- Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree submitted immediately after successful completion of Comprehensive Exam.
- Written Thesis due no later than fourth Friday in March (3/27/20)
- Oral Defense (by third week in April in order to graduate in May)
- Final Thesis Submission to Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies by University deadline in April to graduate in May (see Academic Calendar).

## **Coursework**

### **Required Courses**

RELI 527 History and Methods: Nineteenth Century or Equivalent (Seminar)

RELI 559 History and Methods: Twentieth Century or Equivalent (Seminar)

RELI 801 Research for MA Thesis (taken 2X)

## Courses Outside 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.

Up to two courses (six credit hours) may count towards the MA in Religion. This does not preclude a student from taking additional courses outside the department and exceeding the overall total credit requirements for the MA.

## Independent Study Courses

Expectations for independent study courses are available through posted syllabi. 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.

## Advising

The Director of MA Studies will meet regularly during the semester with each student to provide guidance on courses and requirements.

The advisor for all students in the Religion MA program is the Director of MA Studies. Any issues that cannot be brought to the Director of MA studies should be brought to the Department Chair.

## Annual Assessment Report

In addition to regular meetings with the Director of MA Studies, the annual report is a tool that monitors progress in the program.

In the first week of April, the Director of MA Studies will send electronic forms of the MA Student Annual Report to all students in the program. Each student will complete the student portion of the form and return to the Director of MA Studies for comments one week before the Prospectus Meeting with the students' MA Thesis Committee.

The Director of MA Studies will schedule a meeting with the student and their Thesis Committee to discuss the report.

The Director of MA Studies uses the information from the form and meeting to write letters to students who are not making appropriate progress in the program. Written letters are distributed to each of these students. A copy of the letter will be placed in the student's file.

## Modern Research Language Requirement

To be completed by the end of the third semester.

Students must demonstrate proficiency in one modern research language, either French or German, by passing a reading and translation examination.

See page 14 for more information on language requirements and examination procedures.

## Comprehensive Exam

The Comprehensive Exam on **Methods and History of the Study of Religion** has a written and oral component. The written exam will be administered every year on the first Friday in February. Students are given four hours to complete the written exam.

Written exams will be reviewed within a reasonable period of time and returned to the student. The student will then schedule an interview with the Faculty Examiner to orally defend the written exam by responding to questions related to the exam.

If there are deficiencies in the written exam 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 in need of special accommodation for the Comprehensive Examination are encouraged to visit Rice Disability Support Services ([www.dss.rice.edu](http://www.dss.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 MA Studies no later than one month prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examination.

## Candidacy

Upon successfully passing the Comprehensive Exam, students will meet with the Graduate Administrator to compile and submit the appropriate paperwork for candidacy. This includes the Checklist for Master's Candidacy (page 20) and the Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree (page 21).

## MA Thesis Prospectus

In April of the first year (second semester), a MA Thesis Committee is formed by the student consisting of the Director of MA Studies and two faculty members in the Department of Religion. The committee will meet at end of semester with the student and the student will present their thesis topic and a 500-word prospectus. The Committee will set up research and writing goals for the student's third semester (Fall) when the student will enroll in RELI 801.

In December of the second year (third semester), the MA Committee will meet with the student to review progress on the thesis and make recommendations for research and writing for the final semester.

**The Masters Thesis must be written by the fourth Friday in March and defended by the third week in April in order to graduate in May.**

## Masters Thesis 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 Director of MA Studies.

The event proceeds in four simple stages:

1. Thesis writer will briefly (in no more than 10-15 minutes) summarize his/her thesis 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 thesis.
4. Finally, the MA candidate is brought back into the room and informed of the results of the deliberation.

Three outcomes are possible: (1) pass; (2) fail; and (3) revise. In the latter case, the candidate has six months from the date of defense to make all necessary revisions, but graduation will be postponed until the final submission of the thesis.

For full details of all the requirements and procedures around the oral defense, see [graduate.rice.edu/thesis](http://graduate.rice.edu/thesis).

**NOTE:** Students will meet with the Graduate Administrator to review ALL university requirements related to the thesis defense, submission, and degree conferral, no later than the beginning of the fourth semester

## Modern Research Language Requirement and Exam Procedures

### Requirements

Students must demonstrate proficiency in one modern research language, either French or German, by passing a reading and translation examination.

Students must complete the language requirement by the end of the third semester.

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

1. The recommended path is for students to enroll in the specially designed intensive summer course offered by Center for Language and Cultures at Rice. The course is held in May and alternates between French and German each year. *Students who pass the exam at the end of the course will have satisfied the Department of Religion's language requirement.*

2. The second path for students to obtain proficiency in French and 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.

After receiving approval to take the exam from the Director of MA Studies, and Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze, students must submit the book from which they would like to be tested at least three weeks before the exam to either Dr. Fanger (for French) or Dr. Henze (for German). If the book is approved, the faculty member will select an appropriate section and use it to test the student. Examinations are graded by Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze.

Written language examinations in the department are taken 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 department during the summer will follow the instructor's rules regarding language exams.

## Primary Source Languages

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

The study of these languages is available and is recommended for students who plan to carry out scholarship in which primary sources are in original language texts. Exams are given for these languages, and while such exams **are not required** for the completion of the M.A., they are highly encouraged for those planning to pursue a scholarly career. **These languages do not replace the requirement for the student to pass a proficiency test in a modern research language, typically either French or German.**

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

-Dr. Cook [Arabic]

-Dr. DeConick [Greek-Coptic]

-Dr. Fanger [Latin]

-Dr. Henze [Hebrew-Syriac]

-Dr. Klein [Tibetan]

## MA Graduate Student Annual Report Form

### Part 1 (Graduate Student)

This part of the report is to be filled out by the student and e-mailed to the Advisor.

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

Director of MA Studies: \_\_\_\_\_ Year matriculated: \_\_\_\_\_

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

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 year at Rice and how we might make this happen).
3. Outline your academic plans for the next academic year.
4. Outline your progress and plans regarding your thesis.
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.

**Language Exam**

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

**OR**

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

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

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

**Comprehensive Exam**

Methods and History of the Study of Religion Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

Planned completion date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thesis and Prospectus**

Thesis Committee Members:

1) Director of MA Studies: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Dept. of Religion Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Dept. of Religion Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_



## Part 2 (Director of MA Studies)

This section of the form is to be completed by the Director of MA Studies as a follow-up to the Prospectus meeting. The student will be given a printed copy of this report and a hard copy will be given to the Graduate Program Administrator for placement in the student's file.

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

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

Director of MA Studies: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Director of MA Studies 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.

## MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form

After completion, this form must be turned in to the Department Administrator to be placed in the student's file.

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

Date of Prospectus Review Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Committee Members Present:

Director of MA Studies: \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Religion Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Religion Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Thesis Prospectus Approval:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of MA Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination

After completion, this form must be turned in to the Department Administrator to be placed in the student's file.

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

Written Exam Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Oral Defense of Written Exam Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Additional Comments:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Checklist for MA Candidacy, Religion

---

Graduate Student

Date

- 1. Coursework  
*At time of candidacy* student must have earned a minimum of 27 credit hours. A minimum of 30 credit hours is required for the degree.
- 2. Submission of Annual Report
- 3. Required Courses  
RELI 527 HISTORY & METHODS: 19th CENTURY  
RELI 559 HISTORY & METHODS: 20th CENTURY
- 4. Language Proficiency  
Pass a reading translation exam in French OR German.
  - Date Passed \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination
- 6. Approval of Prospectus.
- 7. Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree (C-2)

---

Graduate Administrator Signature

Date



## Checklist for Graduation

- Required Courses
  - RELI 527 HISTORY & METHODS: 19th CENTURY
  - RELI 559 HISTORY & METHODS: 20th CENTURY
  
- Language Proficiency
  - Pass a reading translation exam in French OR German.
  - Date Passed: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Pass Comprehensive Examination
  - Date Passed: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form
  - Date: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Thesis Approved by Committee to schedule oral defense
  
- Oral Defense
  - Date: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Final revisions submitted and approved
  - Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## 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.

### Requirements for the Certificate

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 *Intention of Completion of GEM Certificate*** (in-house form) to the department coordinator, a semester in advance of bestowal. Certificates will be awarded each spring at our departmental graduation ceremony.



## 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 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 505: American Metaphysical Religion (Kripal)
- RELI 522: Islam's Mystical and Esoteric Tradition (Cook)
- RELI 526: Magic and Popular Religion (Cook)
- RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)
- RELI 541: Creating Magic (Fanger)
- RELI 551: Divine Sex (Fanger)
- RELI 562: Kabbalah Seminar (Ogren)
- RELI 566: Pain, Ecstasy & Embodiment in Religious Experience (Fanger)
- RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)
- RELI 574: The Bible and the Brain (DeConick)
- RELI 588: The History of Religions School (Kripal)
- RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)
- RELI 602: The Sacred Spaces of Secular Modernism (Brennan)
- RELI 615: Secret Religion (DeConick)

**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.

## Request for GEM Certificate

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

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

Projected date of MA 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: \_\_\_\_\_

RELI 505: American Metaphysical Religion (Kripal)

RELI 522: Islam's Mystical and Esoteric Tradition (Cook)

RELI 526: Magic and Popular Religion (Cook)

RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)

RELI 541: Creating Magic (Fanger)

RELI 551: Divine Sex (Fanger)

RELI 562: Kabbalah Seminar (Ogren)

RELI 566: Pain, Ecstasy & Embodiment in Religious Experience (Fanger)

RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)

RELI 574: The Bible and the Brain (DeConick)

RELI 588: The History of Religions School (Kripal)

RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)

RELI 602: The Sacred Spaces of Secular Modernism (Brennan)

RELI 615: Secret Religion (DeConick)

- 2 semesters (minimum) of RELI 600 GEM Research Forum  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Semester enrolled and completed: \_\_\_\_\_

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