

Graduate Program Policies And Procedures: 2023–2024

Department for the Study of Religion (DSR)

University of Toronto

(a.k.a., “The Handbook”)

This document overviews policies and procedures for the Graduate Programs of the Department for the Study of Religion for Academic Year (AY) 2023-2024. By replicating information that is also available on the department website, this document serves to archive policies in place as of July 2023. It also serves as a contract for students entering our programs in Fall 2023: these are the policies that will govern you for the full course of your degree, unless you opt into any new policies that may be implemented later. The [Department SharePoint Site](#) is the repository for this and other official documents.

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I. GRADUATE STUDY IN RELIGION

A. Fields of Specialization

The graduate program in the Department for the Study of Religion offers concentrated study in several fields of specialization, with the understanding that these fields will shift over time alongside the larger discipline. The fields play an important but fluid role in our curriculum and intellectual life. At the present time, the department recognizes ten fields:

- Anthropology of Religion
- Buddhist Studies
- Global Christianities
- Islamic Studies
- Jewish Studies
- Philosophy of Religion
- Religion, Culture, and Politics,
- Religions of the Americas and Turtle Island
- Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity
- South Asian Religions

B. Program Governance

The Department's graduate program is governed by the Department's faculty, with authority for certain decisions delegated to either the Executive Committee (consisting of Chair, Director of Graduate Studies or "DGS," Associate Chair–Undergraduate, and Department Manager) or the Graduate Curriculum Committee (chaired by DGS, and consisting of Graduate Placement Officer, Graduate Administrator, four additional faculty, and one graduate student representative).

C. Graduate School Regulations

All graduate students in the Department are further governed by the relevant rules and regulations of the School of Graduate Studies of the University of Toronto, as described by the [SGS Calendar](#). Important sessional dates for the 2023-2024 academic year can also be found in the SGS Calendar.

II. THE M.A. DEGREE

A. Application to the Program

The Department admits new students annually in September. Applications for admission to the M.A. program are due in December of the previous year. The deadline for the receipt of completed applications for the 2023-2024 academic year is **December 13, 2023**. We highly

recommend that applicants reach out to potential supervisors before submitting their applications. Major factors considered in weighing applications include: record of academic excellence; coherence of proposed research project; ability to match the proposed research with faculty supervision; linguistic preparation/ realistic plan for language study. Admission to the MA program does not entail automatic subsequent admission into the PhD. Additional information pertaining to the 2023-2024 admissions cycle, including components of a complete application, is available at the department website.

B. M.A. Degree Requirements

The following are the minimum general requirements for the M.A. degree:

1. *Coursework.* The regular MA program requires six semester-long courses (i.e., in UofT parlance, six “half courses” equivalent to 3.0 FCE) plus the Major Research Paper (equivalent to 1.0 FCE). These shall consist of the following:
 - RLG 1200H: MA Method and Theory
 - 1 Gateway Seminar. At the MA level, the Gateway Seminar is meant to provide students with broad grounding in the Study of Religion. Students are thus encouraged to take Gateway Seminars in areas not directly pertaining to their research areas. Truly, you never know what brilliant ideas will be born of cross-fertilization between fields. While the Department strives to offer most Gateway Seminars on a two-year cycle, it cannot guarantee that a given seminar is offered in any given year—meaning that MA students aiming to complete their degree in one year will need to be intellectually omnivorous in selecting a Gateway Seminar.
 - 1 DSR Elective (i.e., graduate seminar offered by the DSR)
 - 3 Open Electives (i.e., graduate seminars offered by any department, including the DSR)
 - RLG2000Y: Major Research Paper
2. *Major Research Paper (MRP).* The culminating experience of the MA program is the Major Research Paper (MRP), which is credited under the designation of RLG2000Y. The MRP is based on primary research and is usually around 15,000 words in length (i.e., around 50 double-spaced pages), somewhat longer than a normal journal article. The MRP is researched and written under the supervision of the Academic Advisor, who will submit an official grade. The student will also receive input from an assigned Second Reader, who will submit a formal “peer review” of the MRP in parallel with the official grading process
3. *Languages.* Before completing the MA degree, students are required to give evidence of reading knowledge of at least one language, in addition to English, selected from languages of modern scholarship and/or necessary source languages. To satisfy the language requirements, students must pass a language requirement examination administered by the Department. Language courses are not accepted as equivalent.

C. Duration of Degree

The MA program is designed for flexibility and may be taken either full-time or part-time. The full-time MA can be completed in either one highly compressed year, with intensive summer study, or in two or three more relaxed years. The part-time MA can be completed in two or more years, provided the student enrolls and completes all the requirements for the degree within six years

D. The Advising Process

1. *Primary Supervision.* Upon enrollment in the program, the MA student is paired with a primary Academic Advisor, chosen on the basis of supervisory expertise in the student's stated area of scholarly interest. Before the start of the academic term, the student, the Academic Advisor, and DGS will have an Intake Meeting to work out the student's individualized program of study.
2. *Second Reader.* During the Intake Meeting, the DGS, Advisor, and student will nominate a Second Reader for the MRP. It is expected that the student will have informal conversations with the Advisor as they research and write their MRP. In some cases, the Second Reader might play a significant role in shaping the project. In other cases, the Second Reader will play a more hands-off role. In all cases, the Advisor will provide comments on drafts of the MRP before the final submission.

When the student completes their MRP, they will submit it to the Advisor for a formal mark. At the same time, they will submit the MRP to the Second Reader, who will write a short peer review, as though the MRP were a formal submission to an academic journal, recommending revisions in a short paragraph that will be read by the student, the advisor, and the DGS, and will become part of the student's file within the department. While the Advisor may take the reader report into account in assigning a grade, the reader report and grade are independent assessments and will be received as such by the department.

The purpose of assigning Second Readers to MA-level MRPs is fourfold: (1) To encourage MA students to foster relationships with faculty beyond the primary supervisor; (2) To ensure that students with interdisciplinary projects receive appropriate academic advising; (3) To expose students to a version (non-blind) of the peer review process; (4) To support a faculty-wide culture of excellence and academic transparency at the MA-level.

III. THE PH.D. DEGREE

A. Application to the Program

The Department admits new students annually in September. Applications for admission to the Ph.D. program are due in December of the previous year. The deadline for the receipt of completed applications for the 2023-2024 academic year is **December 13, 2023**. We highly recommend that applicants reach out to potential supervisors before submitting their applications. Major factors considered in weighing applications include: record of academic excellence; coherence of proposed research project; ability to match the proposed research with faculty supervision; linguistic preparation/ realistic plan for language study; background preparation in the study of religion. Additional information pertaining to the 2023-2024 admissions cycle is available at the department website.

B. Advising Process

When a student enters the program, the DGS matches them with a First-Year Advisor, based on their research interests. In an inaugural Intake Meeting, the student works collaboratively with the First-Year Advisor and DGS to craft a coherent plan of study for the first year and record it in the Programme Memorandum (stating research area, required languages, and required courses). During the first year, it is the student's right to select their Supervisor. (In most cases, this will be the First-Year Advisor).

According to SGS policy, students are required to meet with their Supervisory Committee at least once annually. (That is a bare minimum, and most committees will meet more often.) This annual meeting will be the basis for completing the Annual Progress Report, which must be submitted to the Graduate Administrator by May 30. The student is responsible for convening this annual meeting. Students are also welcome to convene additional committee meetings at any point during the year. In Year 1 of the program, the student's annual meeting will be with the Supervisor; the DGS may also attend this meeting, on an as-needed basis.

In Year 2, ideally by around February, the student and Supervisor will have formed a General Exams Supervisory Committee of usually 3 faculty members, at least two of whom (including the Supervisor) must be DSR Core or Affiliate Faculty as listed on the department website. The proposed committee must be submitted to the DGS for approval by May 30 of Year 2. The Year 2 annual supervisory meeting will be with the Exams Committee. After the exams and by the end of Year 3, the student will progress to the Thesis Proposal. In consultation with the Supervisor, the student will decide whether they want the Exams Committee to continue as the Dissertation Committee or whether they would like to make changes to committee composition at this time.

Advising is the work of the full Supervisory Committee. While the Supervisor should take on a primary role in supporting students, all Committee members play important roles in providing students with intellectual and institutional support.

At the DSR, we encourage students and faculty to have open and honest conversations about differences in supervisory styles. No style is wrong, but there can be mismatches between a supervision style and what a student needs. To facilitate such conversations, we provide Appendix A, “Supervisory Styles,” which offers one vocabulary for talking about such issues.

C. Program Requirements

The Ph.D. curriculum is designed to equip students with both breadth and depth in their area of study, working simultaneously to (a) furnish them with the skills they will need to complete their dissertations; and (b) orient them to the larger scholarly areas that they will read and teach about throughout their doctoral careers and beyond. The curriculum during the first three years funnels students from breadth to depth, as marked by four key program components:

- i. *Method and Theory (RLG 1000Y)*: This required seminar orients students to religious studies as a broad discipline (or anti-discipline) that spans multiple histories, geographies, methodologies, and intellectual orientations. It asks students to conceive of themselves and their work in the broadest possible terms, part of a shared intellectual enterprise with everyone else in the department.
- ii. *Gateway Seminar*: Our Gateway Seminar program, which launched in 2020, is designed to better orient our students to the major fields within the study of religion. Students are required to take at least one seminar, normally in their “own” field. Although the content of Gateway Seminars will vary by instructor, the expectation is that these seminars offer a broad survey of the field, with attention to both classic and recent scholarship, and culminate in students designing an undergraduate syllabus. For some students, the Gateway Seminar will confirm their core scholarly identity, teaching them how to read broadly in their field even while pursuing specialized research. For others, especially students of a more transdisciplinary bent, the Gateway Seminars will provide crucial grounding in legible teaching and job fields. All students are invited to take more than one Gateway Seminar. To be a scholar in the twenty-first century is to wear multiple disciplinary hats. These seminars are a hat-conferring mechanism.
- iii. *General Exam 1 (Subfield)*. The first of the two General Examinations grounds the student in their subfield. It spotlights one corner of the terrain covered by the Gateway Seminar (e.g. “Early Islam” rather than “Islamic Studies”), but still asks that the student conceive of themselves as responsible for a broad area of knowledge larger than their own research topic. The subfield can usefully correlate to a teaching field or job market field. Students may choose to take two subfield exams.
- iv. *General Exam 2 (Topic)*: Finally, the student narrows their focus to the particular topic of their dissertation. By this point in the program, the student should have a clear sense of how their research fits into a scaffolded structure of scholarly

knowledge. This component of the program orients the student to the culminating product of their PhD: the dissertation.

The following are the minimum general requirements for the Ph.D. degree:

1. *Coursework.* The PhD program requires one full-year course and six semester-long courses (i.e., in UofT parlance it requires one “full” course equivalent to 1.0 FCE, and six “half-courses” equivalent to 3.0 FCE) distributed on a “1-2-3” principle. These shall consist of the following:
 - RLG 1000Y: PhD Method and Theory in the Study of Religion (2 semesters)
 - 1 Gateway Seminar
 - 2 DSR Electives (i.e., graduate seminars offered by the DSR)
 - 3 Open Electives (i.e., graduate seminars offered by any department, including the DSR)

This coursework requirement is a minimum. Students are welcome and encouraged to take courses beyond this requirement. Although they do not count towards fulfilling the degree requirements for coursework, language courses should be part of the students’ coursework, as fits their program of study.

PhD students might take up to two directed readings (RLG1501H/RLG1502H) to cover areas of interest that might not be covered in course offerings.

Courses in the 5000 series at the Toronto School of Theology, taught by DSR Cross Appointed Faculty and approved by the Director of Graduate Studies, can be taken as RLG4001H (and thus can count towards DSR electives).

The PhD also offers a number of collaborative specializations, offered jointly with other units at the University of Toronto. Currently, we offer the following collaborative specializations:

- Bioethics
- Book History and Print Culture
- Diaspora and Transnational Studies
- Environmental Studies
- Ethnic, Immigration, and Pluralism Studies
- Jewish Studies
- Knowledge and Media Design
- Mediterranean Archaeology
- Sexual Diversity Studies
- South Asian Studies
- Women and Gender Studies
- Women’s Health

For a complete list of course requirements for these specializations, see Appendix B.

2. *Professionalization Seminar (SRD4444Y)*). The professionalization seminar equips students with the institutional know-how they need to succeed in graduate school and beyond. It is organized into 12 modules (equivalent to a one-semester CR/NCR course) spread over five years, with specific modules addressed to particular points in students' academic programs. The professionalization seminar should be completed by the end of the fifth year. For a student to be eligible to apply for sixth-year funding, they must have completed all 12 modules.

General Structure of Professionalization Seminar:

- Pre-Candidacy Unit: 6 modules (2/yr) to be completed by the end of Third Year
- Job Market Unit: 6 modules to be taken in the Fourth and/or Fifth Year
- Annual Grant Writing Workshop

In AY 2023–24, the following modules or equivalent will be offered:

First-Year Modules:

- 1: “Your Research Toolbox: Zotero, Scrivener, etc...”
- 2: ”Making the Most out of UofT Libraries

Second-Year Modules:

- 3: “The AAR/SBL: A User’s Guide”
- 4: “Orientation to General Exams”

Third Year Modules:

- 5: “Publishing as a Graduate Student”
- 6: “Ethics Approval Process”
7. “Elevator Pitch Workshop”

Fourth/Fifth Year Modules:

- 8: “Academic Job Search: Orientation and Overview”
- 9: “Cover Letter and CV Workshop”
- 10: “Teaching Dossier Workshop”
- 11: “Applying for Postdocs”
- 12: “Careers Beyond the Classroom: Know Your Worth!!”
- 13: “Alumni Showcase”

The 12-module requirement indicates a bare minimum of the workshops students can and should attend. Students are also strongly encouraged to attend the “Wild Card” professionalization seminars regularly offered by the department (e.g., on podcasting), as well as workshops offered by the [Graduate Centre for Academic Communication](#) (GSAC), [Centre for Graduate Professional Development \(CGPD\)](#), and [Teaching Assistants’ Training Program](#) (TATP).

3. *Languages*

Language study is integral to the study of religion, as to the humanities more broadly. There is simply no way to understand a religious lifeworld without knowing the

languages associated with it. Top-notch researchers are also able to read scholarship in multiple languages. Although language courses do not count toward DSR degree requirements, we strongly encourage our students to make full use of the unusually extensive language offerings of the University of Toronto.

The Department supports language learning in a number of ways, including:

- Regular DSR courses in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, and Hebrew, as well as occasional courses in other languages.
- Links on our “Graduate Courses” webpage to language courses in other departments (including FSL 6000, “Reading French for Graduate Students,” and GER 6000, “Reading German for Graduate Students”).
- Summer Language Fellowships. Part of the Graduate Program Fund, these fellowships are especially earmarked for first- and second-year PhD students, but all students (including MA) are eligible to apply. Students are encouraged to talk to faculty members about appropriate summer language programs in their area and to look for relevant UofT summer courses.
- SELECT (Study Elsewhere of Less Commonly Taught) Language Fellowships, funded by SGS, to support the study of languages not usually available at UofT, and now administered by the DSR.
- Language Tutors. Most years, we are able to hire a limited number of tutors to work intensively with students. Starting in AY 2023–24, we will be regularizing the Language Tutor Program, which previously has been run on an ad hoc basis. To hire a Language Tutor, there must be at least three students interested in studying a given language. They must apply to the Graduate Administrator and DGS by the first day of classes, with a reasonable budget. Priority will be given to less commonly taught languages.
- Students interested in French are encouraged to look into the [Explore-Second Language Program](#) run by the Canadian government. Applications are due in February.

The Department maintains a minimal standard language requirement to ensure that all students have the basic multi-linguistic competency requisite to top-notch humanities scholarship. It is expected that most students will pursue language study well beyond the bare requirement, especially in language-intensive fields.

At minimum, students are required to pass two departmentally administered Language Exams prior to taking their General Exams. A Supervisory Committee may also require a student to be tested on additional languages, and these additional language exams need not happen prior to the General Exams. Students may be examined on any two languages, but may not be examined on the classical and modern forms of a single

language. Departmental Language Exams are offered thrice annually, usually in September, January, and April. Students may repeat the exams as often as necessary.

The exams ask students to translate a passage of around 350 words into English within three hours, using only a paper dictionary. Exams are double-blind and set by faculty both inside and outside the Department, depending on expertise and availability. It is expected that examiners will choose passages generic enough to assess reading proficiency without the students requiring knowledge of highly specialized vocabulary. In cases where highly specialized language is present, examiners will provide a glossary.

While taking their exams, students are encouraged to skim the passage once to get a general sense of it prior to beginning translation. They should also leave time at the end to re-transcribe their translation in a clean copy without multiple crossings-out. Students should pay special attention to rendering the grammar of the original language in such a way as to demonstrate comprehension. Sense-to-sense (rather than word-to-word) translation is the norm, but this can only be judged fairly if the target translation closely reflects the original. For example, verb tenses, grammatical structures (main clauses, subordination, relation, concession etc.), and subject-object and noun-adjective relationships must all be rendered clearly to reflect the original language, while expressing the sense in English.

Language Exams are assessed on the following scale:

- *Excellent*: A+ to A: High-advanced knowledge, appropriate for a primary language of research. Translation consistently demonstrates thorough understanding of grammar and syntax, with possible isolated errors consistent with high proficiency in the language.
- *Good*: A- to B+: Solid knowledge of the language, demonstrating competence of a kind that would allow for the reading of scholarly articles or for use as a secondary or tertiary language of research. Translation is mostly free of major errors that misconstrue basic grammar and thus alter the meaning of the passage. It may include several minor errors. An isolated instance of a misconstrued grammatical form (e.g., confusing morphologically similar case endings) need not necessarily qualify as a major error if the student otherwise exhibits high competence in the language.
- *Fair*: B: Student has some functional knowledge of the language, but with limitations that significantly constrain its possible use or result in a muddled English translation. The translation conveys the general sense of the passage while misunderstanding important details. An exam assessed as fair may have no more than two major errors.
- *Poor*: B- or lower: Serious and pervasive problems of comprehension indicating that extensive additional study is needed

PhD students require a “Good” (B+) or higher to pass. MA students require a “Fair” (B) or higher to pass. MA students who complete a language requirement with a grade of

“Good” (B+) or higher are exempt from having to repeat this language if they are admitted into the PhD program. In cases where a student’s research necessitates higher competency in a language, a Supervisory Committee may require an “Excellent” score; such a requirement must be communicated in writing to both DGS and Graduate Administrator well in advance of the exam.

The Department cannot be responsible for administering exams in all human languages used throughout time. Students are thus encouraged to schedule exams in two of the following Regularly Examined Languages:

Regularly Examined Languages:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Anishinaabemowin | 14. Japanese |
| 2. Arabic (classical and modern) | 15. Latin (classical and late) |
| 3. Aramaic (biblical and Talmudic) | 16. Mohawk |
| 4. Bengali | 17. Nepali |
| 5. Burmese | 18. Newar |
| 6. Chinese (classical and modern) | 19. Pali |
| 7. French | 20. Persian |
| 8. German | 21. Panjabi |
| 9. Greek (Attic, classical, and Koine) | 22. Russian |
| 10. Gujarati | 23. Sanskrit |
| 11. Hebrew (biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern) | 24. Spanish |
| 12. Hindi | 25. Syriac |
| 13. Italian | 26. Tamil (classical and modern) |
| | 27. Telugu |
| | 28. Tibetan (classical and modern) |
| | 29. Urdu |
| | 30. Yiddish |

If a student would like to be examined in a language not on the list of Regularly Examined Languages, they should have their Supervisor place a request with the Director of Graduate Studies attesting that it is necessary for the student to be examined in the language in question and providing the names of three possible examiners (to maintain the blindness of the exam process). In such cases, administrative concerns will be primary (i.e., can the Department feasibly offer an exam in this language?). Other considerations may also play a role, such as whether the proposed language might fall within the scope of a language already on the list of Regularly Examined Languages (e.g., Catalan and Spanish, Awadhi and Hindi).

In AY 2023–24, the Department is experimenting on a trial basis with providing an extra set of supports for students studying French, by far our most commonly examined language and the one most often taken by students who struggle with language acquisition. During the year, the DGS will consult with students to consider how we can

better support the study of French. The Graduate Program will also happily provide financial support to student-organized French reading or conversation groups.

4. *General Exams.* All Ph.D. students are required to pass a set of General Examinations. These exams are intended to demonstrate a mastery of broad scholarly literature within the student's field of specialization as well as specific literature relevant to the student's dissertation and related areas of research. These examinations also signal the teaching competencies of the student.

By around February of the second year, the student should have formed the General Exams Supervisory Committee. There must be at least three members of the Exams Committee, with at least two them DSR Core or Affiliate faculty (as listed on the department website). The examiners and the student work together to define the specific focus of the examinations and design the reading lists. The faculty who will supervise and examine each reading list will be usually determined by expertise, and can vary from one to all members of the Exams Committee for each list.

The student will submit the readings lists to the DGS and Graduate Administrator by May 30 of the second year, alongside the Annual Progress Report, for inclusion in the department library. Students are encouraged to meet regularly with committee members to discuss their readings while preparing for exams. Ideally, exams will be completed by February of the third year but must be completed by May at the latest.

Reading lists for the General Examinations cover two subjects, serving complementary functions (breadth and depth):

- a) **Subfield.** A “Subfield” is a medium-sized body of knowledge smaller than one of the department’s standing *Fields* but broader than the dissertation *Topic*. If “Islamic Studies” is a field, “Anthropology of Islam” or “Early Islam” might be a subfield. If “Religion, Culture, and Politics” is a field (or, better, an anti-field), “Religion and Media” or “Religion, Race, and Empire” might be a subfield. The DSR understands that subfields are mobile bodies of knowledge, the contours of which will change organically over time. It maintains an archive of recently examined subfields and asks that students, in constructing their lists, strike a balance between deferring to precedent and tweaking lists to keep up with current scholarship.
- b) **Topic:** The “Topic” is a bespoke body of knowledge tailored to the student and their dissertation. It can be quite idiosyncratic, covering specialized monographs, methodological or theoretical work, or other material deemed relevant by the committee. The topic reading list must be accompanied by a one single spaced page **Brief Rationale** that explains how the texts on the list build toward the proposed dissertation research. This Brief Rationale is a bridge to the dissertation proposal.

Optionally, a student may choose to take an extra Subfield exam, for three exams total. This is entirely the student's choice. This option is in place for students who want to demonstrate competence in an area they see as integral to their larger scholarly profile, but which might otherwise be excluded from their exam structure. This option is especially appropriate for students whose work is clearly interdisciplinary.

The General Examinations include both **written** and **oral** components. The student should take both components within a period of no more than four weeks. Additional guidelines regarding General Examinations will be supplied to the student and the Supervisory Committee after the student files their "Meeting to Plan the General Examination" with the Graduate Administrator with their Second Year Annual Report. Under normal conditions, both oral and written exams will take place in person at the DSR.

Written Exams: The written examinations are set by the examiners, normally with an equal contribution of questions by each member of the committee. In most cases, students will be given the opportunity to choose from a selection of questions. Examiners are not to share exam questions with students prior to the exam, but students are encouraged to consult with their committee members about themes that have emerged in their reading preparation. Written exams are to be completed without aids, unless aids are specifically designated by the examiners. Examples of past lists, exams, and answers are available on SharePoint. All exams are to be written in three hours. The DSR adds an extra hour for the collecting of thoughts, for **four hours total**. Each written examination is then assessed individually by the relevant examiner and assigned a mark of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, with at least one sentence of qualitative feedback. If all written exams are satisfactory, the student proceeds to the oral.

Oral Exam: The Oral Examination is conducted equally by all examiners and is chaired by the Supervisor. It is to be completed within a two-hour session. Questioning is to be based primarily on the student's written answers but may extend to other matters contained in the reading lists. Entirely new matters unrelated to the written papers or the reading lists are not to be introduced.

Assessment: At the end of the oral exam, the examiners decide whether the student's overall performance on the General Examinations should be assessed as Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. In the case of Conditional Pass, the committee will stipulate a reasonable condition by which the student might demonstrate appropriate expertise in the given area of knowledge (e.g. by writing a major paper), as well as a date by which this condition is to be met. If the condition is not met, the examination is downgraded to Fail. A student receiving Fail for a part or for the whole of the examination may be re-examined once, provided the examination takes place not later than nine months after the date of the first examination. Any examiner, or the student in consultation with the Graduate Director, may request a further reader/examiner for part or all of the written examination, when there is reason to think this would be helpful.

Tips for Taking General Exams: For many students, this will be the last set of formal exams they ever take. The exams thus serve a ritual function, marking a key transition moment in the life of the scholar. You graduate from PhD Student to PhD Candidate, going from (to use the medieval guild lingo) the apprentice to journeyman phase of your scholarly training. After your exams, you enter the liminal stage of the “ABD” (All But Dissertation), almost-but-not-quite a certified scholar.

The real point of the General Exams is the reading. Never again are you likely to have such a vast expanse of time in which your primary job is to read. Luxuriate in that fact. The exams are there to get your adrenaline up so you can plow through a big stack of books. To do this right is to transform how you think. On the other side of your exams, you will have built a map of scholarship in your head, and that map will shape your thinking going forward. That mental map is what makes you a scholar.

There are important differences among fields in religious studies and thus differences in the length of exams lists. For many students, the exams process will be an exercise in “bulk reading.” Bulk reading may not be the most satisfying kind of reading. It is like one of those flyby bus tours of Europe (“It’s Tuesday. This must be Lithuania.”) that exposes you to lots of places so you know where you want to return later. Bulk reading also forces you to learn to read in different ways: the twenty-minute read (gutting a book like a fish, to yank out what’s most essential), the two-hour read (sinking into it, but not too much), the two-day read (letting it get under your skin). Later on, you can revisit your favorite books, learning to live with them so they shape you over a lifetime. The exams process also trains you how to inhabit a question that is essential for any voracious scholarly mind: “What are the ten or fifteen most important things on X topic, and how quickly can I responsibly read them?”

The oral exam is often a moment when students make the transition into being an expert on a particular topic, as they are often the person in the room with the best handle on the books under question. By the end of the oral exam, the discussion usually turns to the next steps in the dissertation research process, as you reflect on how the reading has shaped your own research questions.

5. *Thesis Proposal.* Upon completing General Exams, the student has three months to complete the Thesis Proposal. It must be approved by the exams committee and submitted to the Department no later than **August 15** of the third year. (Unless otherwise communicated to the DGS and Graduate Administrator, it will be assumed that the Exams Committee continues unchanged as the Dissertation Committee)

Expiration: If a doctoral student has not achieved candidacy by the end of third year (that is if they have not taken their exams and submitted the thesis proposal), they will not be allowed further registration unless an extension is requested from and approved by SGS.

The Thesis Proposal should be 10–15 pages long, exclusive of bibliography, and should include the following components:

- A working title
- A concise statement of the thesis topic and relation to scholarship in the field, with a statement of how the thesis will “constitute a significant contribution to the knowledge of the field” ([SGS Calendar/ Degree Regulations](#))
- A discussion of the principal sources and methods of inquiry
- An outline of expected chapters
- A timeline of research
- A brief bibliography

In composing the Thesis Proposal, a student should consult closely with the Supervisor and the Supervisory Committee members. After the Committee members have given their comments on drafts of the proposal, the student submits a final draft to the Supervisory Committee. When the proposal is finished, the Supervisory Committee meets to give final approval on the Thesis Proposal. The student must submit a final PDF of the approved thesis proposal to the Graduate Administrator.

Under University policy, thesis research that involves the use of human subjects, as, for instance, in the case of interlocutors, interview subjects, or survey respondents, requires the advance approval of the University’s Review Committee on the Use of Human Subjects. Students may secure the application forms for such a review online at the [Research Ethics office](#).

6. *Colloquium*. Upper-year PhD students are required to give one formal presentation on their research to the Department community. They are encouraged to give this presentation relatively early so that they can receive early feedback on their work as it progresses. Ideally, students will give the Colloquium Presentation in Year 4 or 5, but it must be completed before the student can proceed to the dissertation defense. The Colloquium will consist of a presentation by the student, a response from a faculty member not on the student’s Supervisory Committee, and a Q&A period. Colloquium participation is recorded as credit/non-credit on the transcript as RLG4004H.
7. *Doctoral Dissertation*. Upon successful completion of the General Examinations and the thesis proposal, the student proceeds to the preparation of a doctoral dissertation in keeping with the approved proposal. The dissertation must embody the results of original investigation and constitute a significant contribution to the knowledge of the subject. The Supervisor is responsible for the direction of the dissertation, while the other Supervisory Committee members are responsible for giving advice about the dissertation. The student should keep all members informed of the progress of the work, preferably by the timely and periodic presentation of drafts of any work provisionally completed.
8. *Final Oral Defence*. The dissertation must be defended with the examiners at a final oral examination. After the Supervisor and the other Supervisory Committee members agree

that the dissertation is ready to go to examination, each of them is required to notify the Graduate Administrator of this in writing **three months prior to the planned date of the dissertation defense**. At this time, the student sends the Graduate Administrator a digital copy of each of the following: (1) the completed dissertation; (2) an abstract of the dissertation; and (3) an updated academic CV. Printed copies of the dissertation are only needed if a committee member requests one. When the Department receives the approvals and these materials, the process to arrange the final dissertation oral examination begins. Again, normally a period of twelve weeks is required between when the student brings the dissertation to the Department and the date of the examination, as the Department must certify to the School of Graduate Studies that all requirements except the dissertation examination have been completed.

At this time, the Committee also discusses possible names for the External Appraiser (a scholar at arm's length from the student with no University of Toronto affiliation, including status-only appointments) and the Internal-External Examiner (a UofT faculty member not on the Committee). Before contacting possible Externals, the Supervisor must get the approval of the DGS. The Supervisor must certify that the proposed External Appraiser is a recognized expert on the subject of the dissertation, has the necessary academic qualifications to appraise a doctoral dissertation, and has an arm's-length relation both with the candidate and with the Supervisor. Once the DGS and SGS have granted approval, the Supervisor can contact the prospective External, with follow-up by the Graduate Administrator.

The Department must nominate between four and six voting Examiners to SGS, with SGS strongly recommending five examiners: the Supervisor, two Supervisory Committee members, the Internal-External Examiner, and the External Appraiser. Any member of the Supervisory Committee over the 6 Examiners may attend the Defence as non-voting members. The External Appraiser prepares a written assessment that must be submitted to the Department at least two weeks in advance of the examination. This written appraisal is then given immediately to the student and all examiners, prior to the examination. The procedures for the Oral Defence are further described in [the SGS Calendar](#)

After the successful defense of the dissertation and completion of any required corrections or modifications specified at the defense, the dissertation is submitted electronically to SGS (for details see [Producing Your Thesis](#)) One bound copy must also be delivered to the Department for the Study of Religion dissertation library, which can be found outside the Graduate Administrator's office.

D. Timeline to Degree: An Overview

Year 1	Intake Meeting	<i>August/ September</i>
	Coursework	<i>September–May</i>
	SSHRC Application*	<i>October</i>

	OGS Application	<i>March</i>
	Language Exams	<i>September, January, and April</i>
	Professionalization Seminar	<i>Ongoing</i>
	<i>* domestic students only</i>	
Year 2	Coursework	<i>September–May</i>
	SSHRC Application*	<i>October</i>
	Exams Committee Formed	<i>By February (ideally)</i>
	OGS Application	<i>March</i>
	Language Exams	<i>September, January, and April</i>
	Professionalization Seminar	<i>Ongoing</i>
	Reading Lists due to DGS	<i>June</i>
Year 3	Language Exams completed	<i>By September (ideally)</i>
	General Exams	<i>By February (ideally)</i>
	Thesis Proposal	<i>3 months after Oral Exam</i>
	Ethics Board Approval	<i>As needed</i>
	Fieldwork Grant Applications	<i>As needed</i>
	Professionalization Seminar	<i>Ongoing</i>
Years 4, 5	Dissertation Research/Writing	<i>Ongoing</i>

At the end of Year 5 students exit the funded cohort.

To be eligible for a Dissertation Completion Award for Year 6, students must meet the following requirements by June of Year 5.

1. Two draft chapters submitted to DGS
2. Colloquium completed
3. Professionalization Seminar completed, including Job Market modules.

Years 6+ Students are strongly encouraged to complete their degree within 6 years, maximum.

Time limit: As per SGS guidelines, the time limit for the completion of all requirements for the doctorate, including submission of the dissertation, is SIX YEARS. Beyond Year 6, the student must request yearly program extensions for a maximum of four.

Extensions: Incoming PhD students no longer have the option to lapse their registration. Instead, **students can apply to extend their registration** beyond the time limit for their program for up to four years. Fees charged during this extension period will be calculated at the rate of 50% of the annual domestic fee.

Maternity and Parental Leave: Students are able to take maternity and parental leave according to the regulations published in the SGS Calendar.

E. Tuition and Funding

The University of Toronto offers to all incoming doctoral students a guaranteed funding package for 5 years of academic study, contingent upon the maintenance of good academic standing. Sources of funding include academic scholarships, internal awards, teaching assistantships (TA) and research assistantships (RA), which form the foundation of the funding package. If funding from these sources amounts to less than the A&S base funding package, University of Toronto Fellowships are provided to make up the difference. This funding package is marginally adjusted annually by the University, in light of cost of living, tuition, and budgetary considerations. For current details, please visit the [Graduate Funding in Arts & Science](#) website.

We encourage and support students to apply for external grants, especially the following:

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowships (SSHRC and CSGD)
- Ontario Graduate Scholarships (OGS)
- Connaught Fellowships
- Jackman Humanities Institute Graduate Fellows
- SGS Travel Grants
- Department Travel Grants
- FAS Language Study Abroad Grants
- SELECT language study grants

As a department, we understand that the SGS funding package is not adequate to the cost of living in Toronto. We are committed to finding ways to improve students' funding packages within the constraints of our resources.

F. Teaching

Graduate student teaching at the University of Toronto is governed by the collective agreement with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). As a department, we work to secure student-workers' labour rights as stipulated by the collective agreement, while also working to advise students about how best to develop their teaching expertise with an eye to future academic employment.

There are three main kinds of teaching opportunities within the Department:

1. *Teaching Assistantships.* TAs are assigned to courses on all three University of Toronto campuses (UTSG's Department for the Study of Religion, UTM's Department of Historical Studies, and UTSC's Department of Historical and Cultural Studies). TA duties may include marking, leading tutorials, attending lectures, responding to emails, and other activities as stipulated in the agreement signed at the beginning of term. The

assigning of TAs for a full academic year across three campuses is an immensely complicated task, overseen by the TA Coordinator who must balance a range of factors (including course times, hours allotted, etc.). Where possible, however, the Department will try to match students with TAs that help develop their scholarly profile. Student should feel free to indicate topic preferences when asked for their TA request. For current the CUPE agreement, please consult the [CUPE3902](#) website.

2. *Teaching Fellows.* In any given year, several advanced PhD students will be paired with a faculty member to co-teach a course as a Teaching Fellow. The expectation is that the faculty member will mentor and train their co-teacher, helping them to develop their broader profile as a teacher-scholar. A call for teaching fellows will be put out every spring.
3. *Course Instructors.* In a given year, there is likely to be a very limited number of opportunities for students to solo teach a course of their own design on one of the UofT's campuses. Such courses come up on an ad hoc basis, determined by undergraduate enrollment and departmental need. Students are highly encouraged to apply for these CI positions when they are posted. Priority is usually given to students who are advanced in their degree (post-candidacy) and to those who have not been solo course instructors before.

G. UTGSU and the DSR Graduate Student Association (GSA)

In addition to being a member of the University wide [Graduate Student Union](#), all graduate students of the Department are also members of the *DSR Graduate Student Association*, a self-governing organization that provides academic, social, and counselling services. The DSR GSA provides an essential linking mechanism for students to engage intellectually and socially outside of the more formal arrangements of the graduate program. In recent years, students have sponsored an annual Spring Symposium, published an annual volume of papers, and organized roundtable discussions. The Student Association is also instrumental in assisting DSR students in regards to conference activities, providing guidance on the preparation of papers, and in the organizing of sessions for learned society meetings in Canada and the United States. The Association also organizes social events, pub nights, and sporting events.

Mission Statement for the DSR GSA:

- a) To serve the interests of the graduate students of the Department for the Study of Religion (hereafter DSR);
- b) To seek and maintain fair representation for graduate students in the administration and decision-making of the DSR, particularly with regard to those matters directly impacting graduate students;
- c) To be a liaison between faculty of the department and students to ensure that students are informed of departmental policies;

- d) To provide representation to CUPE 3902 and the GSU on behalf of the students of the DSR;
- e) To ensure funding for the DSR GSA, including any and all potential grants available to student organizations of the same size;
- f) To participate in the orientation of new students, to coordinate social and academic functions, and to build the overall student community of the DSR.

Officers:

- o President
- o Vice-President
- o Secretary
- o Treasurer
- o Social Coordinator
- o Academic Coordinator
- o Graduate Student Union (GSU) Representative
- o Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3902 Representative (Shop Steward)
- o M.A. Representative and Members-at-Large.

The Chair of the Department and the Director of Graduate Studies are available to meet with the DSR GSA President and Vice-President at any time, but will have at least 2 scheduled meetings per year.