



Graduate Program Guide, 2025–26

This document lays out the arc of graduate work in Religious Studies and elucidates a number of intradepartmental conventions and norms. It is not an official statement of UVa policy. For that, consult the GSAS website (<https://graduate.as.virginia.edu>) and the GSAS Record (<https://records.ureg.virginia.edu/index.php>). This document aims only to articulate GSAS rules and regulations within the context of the department.

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I. Sources of Information

You will find many resources, formal and informal, among faculty, staff, and other graduate students in the Department. Faculty members in specific research areas will always be a primary source of advice. Consult with them regularly.

A vital source of information about standing in and progress through the program is the Student Information System (SIS). If there is ever a discrepancy between your status on SIS and your own understanding of your standing and/or progress, contact the Graduate Coordinator immediately.

Degree requirements and other policies are specified in [The Record of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences](#). For requirements for your specific research area within the Department, consult with your advisor and faculty in your research area.

If you have questions, please contact our Graduate Coordinator, Jenni Via (434-924-6706, jas4rd@virginia.edu). As necessary, Jenni may put you in contact with the current Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), Charles Mathewes (ctm9d@virginia.edu) and/or the current Director of MA programs, Erik Braun (ecb2j@virginia.edu).

II. Degree Programs: PhD and MA

The PhD in Religious Studies requires a minimum of 45 graded graduate credit hours and 27 hours of non-topical research hours. PhD students typically take three three-credit graded courses and three credits of non-topical research each semester. In consultation with their advisor, students sometimes opt to take four graded courses in a semester.

(Non-credit hours are effectively “empty credits,” the purpose of which is to get graduate students to 12 credits each semester. During coursework, three three-credit graded courses + three hours of non-topical research is the norm.)

Students generally finish coursework in their first five semesters, complete their language exams and comprehensive exams by their sixth semester, and defend their dissertation proposal in their seventh semester. GSAS tracks students’ progress and does not look kindly on missed deadlines.

Up to 15 graduate credit hours may be approved from a relevant master’s degree, thereby affording a PhD student “advanced standing.” Students with advanced standing typically finish coursework in four semesters, complete their comprehensive exams in their fifth semester, and defend their dissertation proposal in their sixth semester.

Ideally, the PhD will be completed within six years. Longer may be required in certain research areas, especially those involving extensive language study and/or field work. GSAS imposes a deadline of eight years for completion of all PhD degree requirements, including the dissertation.

Doctoral students can earn a master’s degree *en route* upon completion of their language and comprehensive exams for the PhD, as specified individually within each student’s Language Plan and Exam Plan. In addition to completing all necessary requirements, students must complete the master’s degree Request Form for the MA to be conferred.

The Master of Arts in Religious Studies requires a minimum of 30 credit hours. There are two paths: (a) 24 graded credits, six credits of non-topical research hours, and a thesis; or (b) 30 graded credits and an exam. Acquisition of reading competence in one research language in addition to English is required. MA students usually take three (but sometimes four) three-credit courses per semester. The typical time to program completion is two years; GSAS imposes a maximum five-year deadline for completion of all MA degree requirements.

The MA is a flexible program is designed for two sorts of aims: (a) credentialing students academically so that they may pursue further graduate study, and (b) exploring topics in religion for reasons of professional development and/or personal interest. The MA degree may be taken in the same research areas as the PhD program or it may be tailored to reflect particular interests. Students generally take at least three courses in one religious tradition or cultural area and at least two courses in method and/or theory. With the permission of their academic advisors and relevant instructors, students may take graduate courses in any appropriate department.

III. Planning Your Program

It is the responsibility of each student to know the graduate program's requirements and policies. Students can keep up to date with their academic status, billing, and course enrollment by checking the Student Information System (SIS) and by seeking advice from their advisor, the Graduate Coordinator, and the DGS. A student should be in frequent contact with their advisor with respect to course selection, academic planning, and the like.

A. Milestones

To help PhD students meet requirements on time, a series of “milestones” marks the stages and pace of doctoral study. Each milestone must be communicated to the Graduate Coordinator, who will enter it into SIS. Make sure that you—and, as necessary, faculty members with whom you work—submit the appropriate documentation for each milestone. If you miss a milestone at the appropriate point in your program, you may be contacted by GSAS, which is not always a happy turn of events.

MA students do not have analogous milestones; the shape and speed of their program will be determined in consultation with their advisor.

If unforeseen and difficult circumstances interrupt your academic progress, contact your advisor and the DGS immediately.

In addition to the academic milestones listed below, every student (MA and PhD) must submit a Progress Report form to the Graduate Coordinator at the end of every year.

Language Plan—by the end of the first semester

Filed by the end of the first semester, in consultation with your advisor, this plan specifies which language(s) you are required to learn and at what level of proficiency. If your plan involves more than two languages, it should specify which languages must be completed before moving to comprehensive exams and which may be completed later. This plan may be revised later by

permission of your advisor and the DGS. (An email from you and your advisor is the best way to begin the process of acquiring such permission.)

Comprehensive Exam Plan—by the end of the second semester (PhD students only)

Filed by the end of the second semester and developed in consultation with your advisor, this plan lists the specific exams the student will take and the faculty with whom the student hopes to take them. It may be revised later by permission of your advisor and the DGS. (Again, an email from you and your advisor to the DGS can begin the process of acquiring such permission.)

Completion of Language Requirements—by the end of the fifth semester (or fourth with advanced standing) for PhD students; by the end of the program for MA students

Students must ensure that for each language exam they take, the department or faculty member administering the language exam sends the results to the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator will then enter the results in SIS. If your advisor has approved the completion of a course or some other activity to fulfil a language requirement, your advisor must email the Graduate Coordinator stating that you have completed that language requirement. PhD students should complete at least one language, and preferably two, before starting comprehensive exams. Failure to do so will hinder progress through the program.

Completion of Comprehensive Exams—by the end of the sixth semester (or fifth with advanced standing) (PhD students only)

GSAS wants PhD students to complete comprehensive exams by no later than the end of the sixth semester, or by the fifth semester with advanced standing. At the discretion of faculty, some exams may be taken during coursework. Faculty should communicate the passing of each exam via email to the Graduate Coordinator, who will make the relevant entry SIS. The student attains “candidacy”/ABD status once the required exams are recorded in SIS as passed.

MA students who opt to do a comprehensive exam (instead of writing a thesis) will likely take that exam in their final semester.

PhD Dissertation Prospectus Defense—by the end of the seventh semester (or sixth with advanced standing) (PhD students only)

Within six months after completion of a PhD student’s language requirement and comprehensive exams, a conference is held to discuss the student’s dissertation proposal (sometimes also called a “research prospectus”). The Graduate Coordinator will prepare paperwork for the committee members to sign upon the successful defense of the proposal; the director of the dissertation should ensure that the signed paperwork is returned to the Graduate Coordinator, who will record the results in SIS.

PhD Dissertation Defense (“final exam”)—by the end of the sixth year, but extension up to an eighth year is possible (PhD students only)

While writing your dissertation, submit yearly Progress Reports to the Graduate Coordinator. The last milestone to be recorded is the dissertation defense.

B. Advising

Students should have an advisor in place as soon as possible. Students should email a faculty member directly to ask them if they would be willing to serve as an advisor. If necessary, the DGS can assist you with this choice, but it is better for students to identify a faculty member whose interests fit with theirs and get in touch with them. Notify the Graduate Coordinator as soon as you have established who your advisor is.

Graduate students should meet with advisors before or during the first weeks of the semester. That is especially important for incoming students. MA students should discuss course selection and their pathway through the program; PhD students should discuss their Language Plan and Exam Plan with their advisor and ascertain the requirements for comprehensive exams in their first year of study.

Students should remain in contact with their advisor throughout every semester in the program.

If you are a PhD student, your advisor during coursework will not necessarily serve as your thesis or dissertation director. You may change advisors until the time at which you formulate a dissertation proposal.

When you take non-topical research hours, enroll under your advisor's name.

C. Coursework

Graduate-level courses are those numbered 5000 and above. All doctoral students are required to take RELG 7360, "Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion" in their first semester. MA students are encouraged, but not required, to take this course.

As noted, PhD students in Religious Studies are required to complete a total of 72 graduate credit hours (also known as "credits" and "hours"). At least 45 of these credits *must* be graded graduate coursework, and up to 27 *may* be in "non-topical research." 45 hours of graded coursework translates to 15 classes, which should normally be completed in 5 semesters. Those who enter with a master's degree can apply for advanced standing during their first semester. If granted, advanced standing reduces the coursework requirement to 30 hours (which, typically, translates to 10 classes).

The course requirement for the MA in Religious Studies generally involves 30 credit hours, but only 24 of these must be graded courses if a thesis is written. MA students are not awarded advanced standing for prior graduate coursework.

1. Full-time status

Generally, graduate degree students are required to complete at least two consecutive semesters with full-time status. Full-time status is defined as 12 credit hours per semester. Only very rarely will GSAS permit students to enter with part-time status. Normally, the total of 12 credit hours is accomplished each semester by taking three graded graduate courses (3 credits each, totaling 9) *and* 3 credits of "non-topical research." You may not register for more than 15 credits, regardless of the grading option, without submitting a petition for permission to take an overload. That petition should be directed to the DGS via email (with the student's advisor cc'ed), who will make a judgment as to whether the petition should be passed on to GSAS.

Undergraduate courses, including language courses, do not count toward the minimum number of graduate credits required for graduation. Audited courses appear on transcripts but do not earn course credit. Note that MA students are charged for both undergraduate and audited courses, and that undergraduate courses (but not audited courses) are included in the 15 credit-hour enrollment limit for any given semester.

Whenever full-time status is not required or when a student takes leaves of absence, voluntary withdrawal, or “doctoral completion status,” it is not necessary to enroll in 12 credits. Enrollment in UVa’s student health plan, however, does require full-time status. Note that some student loans may become payable if full-time status is not maintained, and that international student visas may require full-time status.

2. Graduate Grading Scale

The graduate grading scale is generally understood by faculty in Religious Studies as follows:

A+	Exceptionally outstanding performance in every respect
A	Excellent performance
A-	Very solid work
B+	Solid work
B	Minimal graduate level performance, not at the level expected of PhD students
B-	Below minimal standards for graduate level work; graduate credit awarded but contributes to lower GPA
C, D, F	Failing (no graduate credit given, GPA further lowered)

Other grades:

S	Satisfactory
U	Unsatisfactory (S and U are given for non-graded courses)
IN	Incomplete
NG	No Grade yet submitted
AU	Audit
CR	Credit
NC	No Credit

See the Graduate Record for other information on grading and crediting. A minimum GPA of 3.0 must *always* be maintained to avoid loss of funding, academic probation, or enforced withdrawal by GSAS.

3. Incompletes (IN) and Audits

Incompletes are discouraged and always require the permission of the instructor. Whenever a grade of IN (“incomplete”) or NG (“no grade”) is recorded for a graduate course, the student must complete the work for that course within one semester (not counting the summer semester) from the time at which the incomplete was incurred. After that, the grade automatically reverts to an F, and the faculty must petition GSAS to change it. While an F is on one’s record, the GPA is reduced accordingly and an academic audit from GSAS often follows. Failure to convert

incompletes, NGs, and Fs to letter grades may also mean withdrawal of fellowship funding and teaching assistantships. In addition, by GSAS policy students carrying more than one incomplete are barred from registering for classes.

4. Advanced Standing

Students entering the PhD program with an appropriate graduate degree in hand (MA, MTS, MDiv, etc.) may petition for advanced standing at the end of their first semester. To do so, they must complete an application, available from the Graduate Coordinator, and they must procure a signature from a faculty member in the student's research area. (Ideally, this faculty member will be the student's advisor). Applications are submitted to the Graduate Coordinator to be approved by the DGS and GSAS. Advanced standing is not automatically granted. The content and quality of a student's graduate work before entering our PhD program, as well as preparation with respect to program standards within the Department of Religious Studies, are assessed.

If advanced standing is granted, up to 15 hours of the 45 graded hour requirement are waived. Note well: students with advanced standing will need to complete their language exams and comprehensive exams a semester earlier than students without advanced standing.

D. Language Requirements

1. MA degree candidates must demonstrate by exam reading competency in one research language. MA degree candidates may also be expected to have knowledge of other languages (to be determined by their advisors), depending on their program of study.

2. PhD students must obtain competency in at least two research languages and additional languages as specified in their language plan. As noted, students must file a Language Plan appropriate to their course of study, developed in consultation with their advisor. It may be revised later, but only by permission of the DGS and their advisor.

3. At least one language requirement must be met before beginning comprehensive exams. Students who have elsewhere taken and passed institutionally administered language exams—and can present evidence to this effect—may be exempted from taking the exam again and may be considered to have satisfied the language requirement, at the discretion of their advisor. All language requirement results should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator.

4. To schedule reading-level exams in French, German, Latin, or Greek, students must consult the relevant UVa department to see when and how that department administers language exams. For other language exams, check with your advisor.

5. Language study may be undertaken independently of UVa. Some reading-knowledge graduate language courses are offered. Regular undergraduate language courses can be taken or audited during the academic year, but they will not count toward your graduate credit hour requirements. UVa may not offer all of the language courses that you might need; meeting various language requirements remains your responsibility.

E. Exams

1. MA Theses or MA Exam

The MA degree requires either an MA examination (with 30 credit hours of graded graduate coursework) or an MA thesis (with 24 graded hours, plus six hours of non-topical research). MA exams or theses must be approved by two Religious Studies faculty members. The examining faculty must report the results to the Graduate Coordinator using the Final Exam Form.

2. PhD Comprehensive Examinations (and the *en route* MA)

Familiarize yourself with the number, format, timing, and procedures for the comprehensive PhD exams required in your area of study (for which, see the Religious Studies website). Each research area has different comprehensive exam expectations and procedures. In consultation with your advisor, identify the exams you will take and identify two possible faculty members to administer each exam (usually a primary and secondary reader). By the end of the first year, you must file an Exam Plan, approved by your advisor, with the Graduate Coordinator.

Exams must be completed no later than your sixth (or fifth, if you have advanced standing) semester in the program. In consultation with their advisor, students should email the relevant professors asking if they would be willing to administer a particular exam. Students should also propose a date at which they plan to take the exam. Usually the student and two faculty members engage in a collaborative effort to compose the reading list for the exam, but the process varies across research areas. Once you have taken an exam, the primary faculty member should email the results to the Graduate Coordinator.

Doctoral students who successfully complete all required language exams and comprehensive exams required have met departmental and University requirements for the MA degree. They may apply to receive the MA *en route* by conferring with the Graduate Coordinator.

F. PhD Dissertation Prospectus/Proposal

Students must submit and defend a dissertation proposal developed in consultation with their proposed dissertation director and a committee within one semester of completing their comprehensive exams. PhD students are strongly advised to begin thinking about a dissertation topic early in their studies, to discuss possibilities with their faculty advisors and instructors, and to use opportunities provided by seminars and tutorials to develop ideas.

It is the student's responsibility to find a faculty member willing to serve as director for the dissertation. (The director may or may not be the advisor who guided the student through coursework and exams.) The director and student will discuss the dissertation topic and possible membership of the dissertation committee. The committee usually consists of the director, at least two other members of the Department, and someone from another UVa department who belongs to GSAS's graduate faculty. The faculty member from outside Religious Studies serves as the GSAS representative. The internal members of the committee should be chosen well before the defense of the proposal; the GSAS representative may be chosen later. While the GSAS representative is not required to have expertise in the dissertation's research area, it can be very valuable when they do. All members of the committee must be full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty at UVa.

Permission for emeritus faculty or faculty from other institutions to serve on a committee must be granted by the graduate dean and cannot be assured in advance.

The candidate must write a formal proposal for the dissertation. The director will discuss with the candidate the length, scope, and nature of the proposal and comment on drafts. The director will also determine if the candidate's grasp of foreign languages is adequate and if the candidate requires further language training. When the proposal is ready, the director and/or the student will convene a meeting so that the candidate can defend it.

The proposal defense usually consists of the candidate briefly outlining the dissertation's argument, followed by questions and suggestions from members of the dissertation committee. The candidate and/or the director should take notes during the defense, as it can help in the formulation of a richer and better-conceived project. There are three outcomes of a proposal defense: (a) pass without revision; (b) pass, conditional upon revisions (and if revisions are required by the committee, a candidate may be required to distribute the revised proposal to the other committee members and to the Graduate Coordinator for filing); (c) fail. If the defense is unsuccessful, the director will work with the candidate to develop a better proposal and another defense will be arranged. If the second proposal cannot be approved, the candidate may be advised not to continue with the doctoral degree. If a dispute arises at this point, the DGS and finally the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies will mediate.

Whenever a dissertation proposal is formally defended, the director and each committee member must each fill out separate and confidential dissertation proposal assessment forms. These completed assessments forms should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator. The results of this assessment are not part of the advising process and are not shared with the PhD student. They comprise one part of the department's statistical reporting to the University. The Graduate Coordinator or DGS provides the forms and rubrics for the dissertation proposal assessment.

G. PhD Dissertation and Defense

A doctoral dissertation in Religious Studies is a major scholarly undertaking that should demonstrate (a) a high level of research skill, (b) sophistication of method, (c) originality or distinctiveness of insight, (d) specialized knowledge, (e) mastery of the area of study, and (f) clarity of argumentation and composition. The dissertation director helps to determine the arrangement and length of the dissertation in consultation with the candidate. Not all dissertations can readily be converted into a publishable book manuscript; however, the director and the candidate should endeavor to choose a topic that not only enables the candidate to contribute significantly to scholarship but also enables the candidate to use chapters of the dissertation as material for scholarly articles or to use the entire dissertation as the foundation for a monograph. The director may also advise the candidate as to which chapters (or sections of chapters) can be the basis of conference papers and discuss which conferences may be suitable for the presentation of scholarly work.

At the start of the candidate's dissertation work, the director will indicate how often they should meet. Candidates should expect to meet with their directors frequently. Arranging meetings or conversations is the joint responsibility of advisor and candidate.

The advisor and candidate should work out a schedule that includes specific dates for the submission of drafts of complete chapters. It is the candidate's responsibility to submit work that, even in draft form, is well written and carefully researched. Typically, candidates may expect detailed written and/or oral comments on a well-prepared chapter from the director within a month of submitting it. The director should indicate if the work, as it progresses, is meeting the criteria indicated above. Also, the director will recommend how much and what sort of revision should be undertaken and when the revised material should be resubmitted. The director may also suggest that other members of the committee read and respond to parts of the dissertation at this stage. (If conflicting advice is given to the candidate, it is the responsibility of the director to resolve this conflict.)

The candidate must give at least one month notice of when a draft of the entire dissertation will be submitted to the director. The candidate can expect to receive written and/or oral comments on it within two months. At this time, internal members of the committee may also read the draft and make comments, which may be given to the candidate in writing or orally. The director and candidate will then discuss how best to integrate comments from members of the committee.

The dissertation director determines a date for the defense of the dissertation in consultation with the candidate and the members of the committee. The dissertation director will chair the defense of the dissertation in a room arranged by the Graduate Coordinator. It is the joint responsibility of the candidate and director to confirm that an external member of the committee has agreed to serve. Prior to the defense date, the committee assumes the dissertation document, as submitted, is in a form ready to be defended.

Technically, the defense constitutes the final examination for the PhD. After a successful defense, the “final exam” form is signed by the committee members and submitted to GSAS.

The defense usually consists of the candidate giving a brief account of the dissertation, followed by questions from committee members, including the director. The examination usually takes one and a half to two hours. After a period of questioning and discussion, the candidate is asked to leave while the committee consults. The committee can (a) decide to approve the dissertation and its defense “as is,” without stipulating revisions. Or it can (b) stipulate revisions to the dissertation that must later be approved—revisions that may or may not entail a further defense. (A timeframe for completing revisions should be settled by the director in consultation with the committee and candidate.) Or (c) the committee may decide that the dissertation has not been successfully defended and determine whether or not (and when) a subsequent defense should be held. After its deliberations, the director and the committee will call the candidate back and report its decision. As with the dissertation proposal defense, if a dispute arises at this point, the DGS and Chair may be called upon to mediate. The committee and/or the external faculty representative may also consult with the dean of the Graduate School. Upon final approval, the candidate should meet with the Graduate Coordinator about the procedure for electronically submitting the completed dissertation to the University.

H. Formal Submission of Thesis or Dissertation; Degree Application Deadlines

Students should consult the Graduate Coordinator for regulations concerning thesis or dissertation submission. See also <http://gsas.virginia.edu/enrolled-students/thesis-submission>

Students who anticipate completing all degree requirements for the MA or PhD (including thesis or dissertation defense) by the date of graduation in any given semester must arrange for three things to be communicated to SIS or the GSAS Registrar by way of the Graduate Coordinator:

1. Application to graduate. Students must apply in SIS to graduate. Usually within a month of the application deadline, the Graduate Coordinator reviews the student's record to certify through SIS that all academic requirements have been, or will be, met. For May degree candidates, this SIS entry is due by January 31, for August candidates by June 30, and for December candidates by September 30.
2. The exact title of the MA thesis (if applicable) or PhD dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator by March 15 for May graduation, July 1 for August graduation, and October 1 for December graduation.
3. The final exam form certifies that the MA exam or thesis has been passed or that the PhD dissertation has been successfully defended, and that all degree requirements have been met. It is signed by the approving committee members and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator. It is due by April 30 for May graduation, July 31 for August graduation, and November 30 for December graduation. The final exam form must be signed by the required departmental officials and by all the approving examiners.

I. Time Limitation, Leaves, Doctoral Completion Status, and Extensions

According to GSAS regulations, all PhD requirements (courses, languages, comprehensive exams, dissertation) are to be completed within eight curricular years from the date of matriculation into the PhD program, and all MA requirements are to be completed within five years from the date of matriculation.

There are two major qualifications to keep in mind:

1. If you need to interrupt your studies or need to study elsewhere, you may elect to take a “leave of absence” or “voluntary withdrawal” (see the Graduate Record for definitions) and apply to be reinstated later. In so doing, you avoid tuition and fees, postpone your expected date of graduation, and may preserve financial aid (subject to DGS and GSAS determination). You may take up to two cumulative years of leave during your enrollment, during which you will not have official status as a UVa student.
2. PhD students who have finished all degree requirements except the dissertation (i.e., SIS shows that all your credit-hour requirements have been met, language and comprehensive exams taken, and dissertation proposal approved) and are actively writing a dissertation may seek Doctoral Completion status after year six. This is an “affiliated” status of enrollment with a lower fee. It permits a student to retain email and electronic library access, but it renders a student ineligible for health coverage, student visa status, and student loan deferral. One can seek this status for four consecutive semesters without filing for an extension.

Extensions: Based on their academic program requirements or individual situations, and with written approval from their advisor, students may petition GSAS (through the Graduate Coordinator and DGS) for an “extension of time.” This petition must outline a timeframe in which the remainder of their program will be completed. The decision about such extensions is made by GSAS.

If you are past the time-to-degree limitation and your approved time extensions have run out, voluntary withdrawal may be required by GSAS until you are ready to graduate. Your faculty advisors may continue to mentor you, but they are not required to do so. When ready to graduate, you must apply for reinstatement as a student. If out for more than two years, you may have to reapply to GSAS, in which case readmission is not guaranteed. Full-time enrollment is required if you wish to be covered by student health insurance, keep student loans from coming due, and maintain student status for international visas.

If a student is not making satisfactory progress at any point in a student’s degree program, GSAS may, in consultation with the Department, enforce withdrawal.

Satisfactory progress has two dimensions: (a) the *quality* of the student’s coursework, exams, and research, and (b) the *timeliness* with which requirements are met. Whether a student is making satisfactory progress is judged by the faculty and research area committees, which are in the best position to monitor student work. A student may be denied permission to proceed at any time that the faculty determines that progress is unsatisfactory.

Fellowships and financial support are always subject to your remaining in good standing at the University (completion of the requirements of all courses on time and without incompletes), to periodic faculty review of the quality of your work, and to good progress toward your degree. Failure to make satisfactory progress may result in the cancellation of financial support and/or enforced withdrawal from the program.

You will know if you are making satisfactory progress during annual reviews. Students meet with members of their research area once a year for a review and evaluation of their progress, including a discussion of the yearly progress report which the student must submit to the Graduate Coordinator (who, in turn, distributes it to the relevant faculty). Appointments are arranged by faculty in their research area, usually at the end of April or in early May. It is the prerogative of the faculty members to recommend to the DGS and GSAS denial of permission for a student to proceed in the program. The main purpose of the meeting, however, is to help students stay on track and for faculty to see how they can support students in their academic development. Reports from these meetings are filed with the Graduate Coordinator.

IV. Paying for Your Program

A. Tuition and Fees

Tuition and fees vary according to many factors: the program you are in (MA-only or PhD track); Virginia residency status; the number of credits you take if you are an MA student; whether you are enrolled “off-grounds”; whether GSAS allows you to enroll part-time (rarely); and—for doctoral students—your curricular year in the PhD program. MA student tuition is

charged on a per credit basis. Tuition, fees, billing, registration, and related policies often change. Be sure to consult with the Graduate Coordinator if you have questions or concerns.

For some full-time PhD students doing research or working on theses or dissertations away from UVa and surrounding counties, lower tuition rates and some lower fees are charged. The Graduate Coordinator provides information about these “off-grounds” rates and who is eligible for them.

B. Fellowships and Teaching Assistantships

Financial support awards are communicated to PhD students by a letter of commitment sent soon after they are notified of admission. It is current GSAS policy is to offer substantial support packages to full-time PhD students for six years, provided that the student maintains satisfactory progress toward the degree. Students with additional financial needs should pursue UVa work-study opportunities, outside funding, or contact Student Financial Services. PhD financial support does not cover summer coursework tuition and fees. Students who seek course credits during the summer will need to register for the appropriate summer session and pay the required fees. Contact the Graduate Coordinator if you plan to seek course credits in the summer.

Financial award packages involve a combination of fellowships and teaching assistantships. Funded PhD students are expected to teach for eight semesters, although arrangements with some external fellowships or PhD Plus may reduce the number of teaching semesters. Teaching assignments are made on the basis of curricular need, with a view to the student’s development as a teacher. The DGS will request your course preferences each semester and try to make TA assignments based on them, but it is not always possible for preferences to be honored.

TAs are expected to follow the same University teaching policies as faculty members. As such, TAs are urged strongly to consult the online Faculty Handbook and to familiarize themselves with policies governing faculty activity. TAs should pay particular attention to the University’s policies on conflicts of interest and on preventing discrimination and harassment.

TA responsibilities in Religious Studies include running up to three discussion sections each week, attending course lectures, engaging in preparation for class, holding office hours, and grading. UVa supposes that this work will average a total of ten hours per week over a twenty-week period or 200 hours over the course of the semester. The Graduate School considers responsibility for three sections equivalent to quarter-time work.

TAs should talk directly with the professor who they are assisting prior to the onset of classes, so as to understand the scope and nature of their responsibilities.

C. Employment and Work-Study

Full-time graduate students who want to work more than 20 hours per week at UVa during periods of enrollment (excluding the summer) must request permission to do so from GSAS, via the DGS. Permission should be sought *prior* to the onset of work that exceeds 20 hours per week. Students should not assume that GSAS will approve requests to work more than 20 hours a week and understand that approval of such requests might entail a reduction of financial aid.

Students seeking work-study assistance must first complete a FAFSA form and then apply directly to the University's Student Financial Services (SFS) office. Qualification for work-study funding is determined by the federal government and jobs are offered on the basis of financial need.

Limited funds are available for employing graduate students to assist faculty members in grading papers and examinations, usually in non-sectioned undergraduate courses. Compensation is at an hourly wage rate. Typically, the Chair of the Department will alert students about the opportunity to serve as graders.

D. Application for Financial Aid

Since departmental financial aid is awarded to PhD students upon admission on the basis of academic achievement and promise (not financial need), there is no annual re-application process for departmental fellowships or teaching assistantships. Applications for UVa *non-departmental aid* that is based on financial need (student loans, work-study, restricted or need-based scholarships) must be submitted to Student Financial Services. Applications to that office, which include the FAFSA form, are due by March 31 of any given year.

E. Research Support

The Department has limited funds available to support language study and research travel. These are considered on a regular basis by the DGS; calls for research funding requests will be sent out at least once a semester. Not all requests can be met; those that are successful will likely be partially funded.

Outside Fellowships: Fellowship opportunities for graduate students are provided by a variety of independent foundations and agencies (e.g., the Charlotte W. Newcomb Foundation, Jacob K. Javits Foundation, Andrew Mellon fellowships, Woodrow Wilson fellowships, Buckner W. Clay Endowment, Rockefeller Doctoral fellowships, American Association of University Women, Skinner Episcopal fellowships, etc.). Students are urged to explore such opportunities and to become candidates for such awards whenever they are eligible.

Substantial outside awards received during the six-year commitment period may replace, contribute, or enhance the values specified in the commitment letter, in a fashion determined by the dean of the graduate school. You must notify the DGS and the Graduate Coordinator of awards received and are strongly advised to consult with them during the application process. In exceptional circumstances—determined, exclusively, by the GSAS dean—"on-package" students who receive full-year external fellowships that provide living support, received for the purpose of dissertation research away from Charlottesville, *may* extend the total time of funding support. Be sure to consult with the Graduate Coordinator and the DGS about these matters.

F. Inquiries and Appeals

Students with questions about their *departmental* financial aid awards, or who seek clarification about the basis, the amount, or the elements of the award, or who wish to appeal or request an award, may consult the Graduate Coordinator or the DGS. Students who have questions about a non-departmental award should generally contact the office through which the award is made.

G. Summer Session Teaching

The Department is sometimes able to offer one or two graduate students the opportunity to teach their own undergraduate course during the summer session. Students who have completed doctoral exams may submit a proposal to the Associate Chair in October. The Associate Chair will hold an informational session before proposals are due. The wage for summer teaching is additional to other support and has no bearing on the support levels announced in a student's commitment letter.

V. Academic Advising

The professional relationship between graduate students and faculty members is closer and more continuous than it usually is in undergraduate study. Graduate students tend to become apprentices to the faculty, and the success of this apprenticeship depends in some measure upon frequent contact. Academic advising, therefore, is an integral aspect of the whole process of a student's scholarly formation. Academic advising and supervision are provided to graduate students by the DGS, the Director of MA programs, the Graduate Committee, the research area committees, and individual members of the faculty, who form a team of advisors for the student.

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is responsible for supervising the graduate program and for administering the policies of GSAS and the Department. The DGS is also responsible for advising graduate students, especially on issues relating to policies and requirements.

The Director of Graduate Admissions (DGA) and MA Programs is responsible for the recruitment of graduate students and for the running of MA programs in Religious Studies.

The Graduate Committee is responsible for upholding the policies of the graduate program in Religious Studies and, with the advice of the research area committees and in conjunction with the DGA, making decisions regarding admission, financial aid, special petitions from students, satisfactory progress toward the degree, etc. The Graduate Committee does not engage in the academic advising of individual students.

Research Area Committees design and implement the various programs of specialized study, and for advising students enrolled in those programs. The research areas comprise faculty members who offer instruction and supervise graduate student research. Since the committee members are normally also the course instructors of students in their area, they are well placed to monitor and appraise student progress and to offer well-informed academic advice.

Individual members of the faculty are constantly engaged in advising graduate students who take courses with them. This advising pertains especially to courses being taught, but it will often relate to the student's entire program of study. Graduate students who have reached the dissertation stage enter into a closer advising relationship with their dissertation director, who also advises students as they seek professional positions.

The Department regards the advising of doctoral candidates as one of its most important responsibilities. The PhD marks the highest level of scholarly achievement in Religious Studies, and it is the standard means by which a scholar seeks academic positions in colleges,

universities, and other institutions of higher education. Training for the doctoral degree has high standards, and faculty advisors must help to ensure that these levels of excellence are reached.

VI. Professional Development

The primary aim of graduate students in our department is to become teachers and research scholars in liberal arts colleges, research universities, and sometimes religious schools (seminaries of various kinds, divinity schools, etc.). However, many students pursue other careers for which the PhD makes them particularly well prepared. The PhD program offers in-depth training in the advanced study of religion—achieved through coursework, examinations, and research. Other important elements of professional academic life in which students need to become adept include the development of pedagogical competence (course conception and design, teaching skills and techniques, methods of assessment and evaluation), familiarity with and participation in professional scholarly organizations, sophistication about seeking academic and professional positions, and familiarity with the venues and procedures for publishing scholarly research, which are typically necessary for tenure and promotion.

The faculty is individually and collectively a rich resource for such matters. The Graduate Professional Development Committee pays special attention to preparing students for success in seeking academic jobs, usually offering to review application materials and hold mock interviews. Training in pedagogy is available from the University's Center for Teaching Excellence. Students should take the initiative to seek out relevant information and assistance.

VII. Resolving Problems and Conflicts

Graduate students may always consult with the DGS about questions, problems, or conflicts that cannot (or should not) be dealt with by their advisor(s) or the Graduate Coordinator. The role of the DGS is twofold: to protect and promote the interests of graduate students and to administer the policies of the faculty and GSAS.

For problems or complaints arising in connection with a particular course over which a member of UVa's faculty has supervisory and instructional authority, the student should first bring the issue to the attention of the faculty member. If the instructor is unresponsive, or if an understanding cannot be reached between the student and the instructor, the student may bring the matter to the DGS and/or the Chair of the Department, who may then serve as an arbiter or may submit the issue to the deliberation of a committee of faculty members. Problems of this sort will normally be handled within the Department. Note that the Chair will become involved in a student-instructor dispute only with reluctance and under compelling circumstances.

In cases of problems arising in connection with an established program of study over which a research area committee has supervisory authority, the student should first bring the issue to the attention of the research area committee. If the committee is unresponsive, or if an understanding cannot be reached between the student and the committee, the student may call the matter to the attention of the DGS and, if necessary, the Graduate Program Committee.

When problems or complaints arise in connection with general policies, requirements, and procedures of the Department with respect to its graduate program, the student should first bring the issue to the attention of the DGS, and then, if necessary, the Graduate Program Committee. Appeals beyond the Graduate Program Committee may be made to the Chair and the departmental faculty for consideration in a general session.

Issues arising in connection with general policies, requirements and procedures of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, or of the University of Virginia as a whole, should be brought to the attention of the Graduate Committee of GSAS, through the GSAS Dean, after consulting with the DGS.

When a student has reason to believe that they have suffered discrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, military status, national or ethnic origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, veteran status, or family medical or genetic information, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Chair; the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and/or the Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (<https://eocr.virginia.edu/>).