



Religious Studies Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

The University of Calgary Graduate Candidacy [Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program specific requirements associated with the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy under the *Regulations*.

Candidacy Regulations

Admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree is a judgment by the faculty members in the graduate program that the student is prepared to successfully complete the requirements of the doctoral degree program. Subject to any extension allowances, doctoral students must complete all candidacy requirements within 28 months of first registration. Those students who have transferred from a Master’s program must complete all candidacy requirements within 36 months of the first registration in that Master's program.

A. Statement of Purpose

Students demonstrate their readiness to advance to candidacy through familiarity with both primary and secondary literature associated with their academic stream (Eastern Religions, Nature of Religions, or Western Religions), familiarity with theory and methodology in the study of religion, competence in at least two research languages other than English, and have a well-developed plan for their thesis that will advance the knowledge of the discipline and contribute to the scholarly literature in the field.

The Student’s knowledge and preparedness in these areas are assessed through course work and a Field of Study Examination. The Field of Study Examination consists of two written examination papers plus an oral examination. The written papers and oral examination are evaluated by the committee members. Details of these components are provided below.

B. All doctoral students in the Religious Studies Graduate Program must successfully complete the following components:

1. All coursework requirements outlined in the [Graduate Calendar](#).
2. Language requirements
3. Thesis Proposal
4. Two written Field of Study examinations
5. One oral Field of Study examination



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Language Requirements

Students should consult with Supervisors to determine the appropriate language requirements for their research areas. All students must demonstrate reading knowledge of at least two research languages other than English. The foreign language requirement may be satisfied in any of the following ways:

- Successful completion of a written language examination administered by the Religious Studies Program. The exam will consist of a passage from a scholarly work (of c. 300-400 words) relevant to the student's research area which the student will have to translate into English. The student should be able to translate the passage into good English to demonstrate that he/she has correctly understood the text overall. The grade is pass or fail. The supervisor will administer the exam and grade the translation in conjunction with another faculty member who has expertise in the language in question. In the event that a second person with expertise in the required language is not available, the Graduate Program Director, in consultation with the Supervisor, may seek an expert from outside the program. The exam should be 3 hours in length and dictionaries may be used.

If the Supervisor and other faculty member are not able to come to an agreement on the outcome of the exam, the Supervisor will ask the Graduate Program Director (GPD) to enlist another faculty member to assess the examination. The majority decision will then be the accepted grade.

Up to two re-examinations of each language are permitted. Failure on a third attempt will require withdrawal from the program.

- Successful completion of the above written language examinations at the MA level.
- Successful completion (with a final grade of "B" or higher in all courses taken at either the undergraduate or graduate level) at any stage of the student's university program of at least two full-course equivalents in each language. Language courses taken at the graduate level are in addition to degree course requirements.

The timeline for completion of the language requirements is 28 months.

Thesis Proposal

The proposal should include a hypothesis, statement of methodology, review of existing research, and projected contribution to scholarly knowledge. Further details regarding the required content and format of the thesis proposal can be found in the Religious Studies Graduate Student



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Handbook. The proposal should be no more than 20 pages in length (excluding bibliography and title page). In preparing their proposal students are strongly encouraged to discuss it with their supervisor and members of their supervisory committee.

Thesis Proposal Submission and Meeting

Doctoral students must complete a written Thesis Proposal, which is approved by their Supervisory Committee in a Thesis Proposal Meeting. The Thesis Proposal must be approved by each member of the student's Supervisory Committee, acknowledged by individual signature and date on the front cover no later than 24 months after admission to the program with a completed Master's degree. The Supervisory Committee must unanimously approve the Thesis Proposal. The Thesis Proposal Meeting should take place no earlier than two weeks and no later than two months after the completion of the other candidacy requirements.

Process of Thesis Proposal Meeting and Evaluation of Thesis Proposal

The student will submit the Thesis Proposal to the Supervisory Committee one week before the time proposed for an informal Thesis Proposal meeting. The primary purpose of this informal meeting is to provide the student with an opportunity to present and discuss their research plan, and for every member of the Supervisory Committee to have an opportunity to question the student on the Thesis Proposal and provide constructive feedback. Approval of the Thesis Proposal component is achieved when the Supervisory Committee judges that the Thesis Proposal demonstrates that the project can be carried out by the student to the required standard in a reasonable time. When evaluating the Thesis Proposal, the options available to the Supervisory Committee are "Approved without revision", "Approved with revisions", and "Not approved". Committee members who do not approve the thesis proposal should submit written comments to the student indicating what areas need to be improved in order for the proposal to pass. A second Thesis Proposal Meeting is required in the case of a verdict of "Not Approved". As per FGS requirement, the Thesis Proposal must be revised and resubmitted, and a second Thesis Proposal Meeting held within two to six months of receiving notification of the fail. Doctoral students may make two attempts to successfully complete the Thesis Proposal component, after two attempts they will be required to withdraw from the program.

Appeal of Thesis Proposal Evaluation

A student who fails has the right of appeal to the appropriate officer in the Faculty of Graduate Studies (see the Graduate Calendar, [Academic Regulations—Appeals—Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings](#)).

The Thesis Proposal must be passed before the Field of Study Examinations can be taken.



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Written Field of Study Examinations

The written Field of Study (FoS) examinations include two written and one oral components.

Format of the Written FoS Exam Papers

There are two written FoS examinations:

Examination A—theory and method in the study of religion

Examination B—religious beliefs and practices in context

The specific topics of the written examinations are chosen in relation to the student's Thesis Proposal and are based upon a bibliography for each examination established by the student in consultation with the Supervisory Committee. The two bibliographies (one for each examination) should consist of fifty bibliographical entries each. The bibliographies for the FoS examinations differ from the bibliography of the Thesis proposal, although there may be overlap between the content of the bibliographies.

Process of the Written Exam Papers

Written Exam Papers demonstrate knowledge of scholarly debate in the dissertation field, critical reading skills, a familiarity with a range of approaches and methodologies within the research area, and an ability to independently and effectively express arguments in written form. Before the papers are written the Supervisory Committee must approve the bibliography that they deem representative of the existing literature for each examination paper.

Each written FoS examination consists of a set of questions focusing upon a specific topic. Topics for each paper are set by the Supervisory Committee, approved by the Graduate Program Director, and given to the student two weeks prior to their due date. Both papers must be submitted at the same time to the Graduate Program Administrator by noon on the due date. No extensions will be permitted except when there is a medical condition or family crisis that can be well documented.

The Graduate Program Administrator (GPA) will then distribute the papers to the examination committee. The papers must each be 4,000—5,000 words, typed, double spaced, and follow normal scholarly conventions regarding format and citations. Each paper will be evaluated in terms of the student's command of the existing literature, knowledge of the field, and critical evaluation or original insights into the issues discussed.



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Written Examinations are evaluated on a pass or fail basis. The examination committee members should provide constructive feedback on the written exams. The individual evaluations of examination committee members will be submitted to Graduate Program Director (GPD) who will tally the results of the evaluations. For either paper, should the outcome of the final vote include one negative vote or less, the student will pass the exam.

A student who fails either Written Examination will be allowed to re-take the failed examination after at least two months and within six months of the failed examination. A second failure of a FoS examination will result in a student being required to withdraw (see the Graduate Calendar, section [Academic Regulations](#)—Candidacy—Candidacy Examination Outcomes).

In the case of failed written examinations, the student has the right of appeal. To do so they must directly approach the Faculty of Graduate Studies with their grounds for appeal. See Graduate Calendar – Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings.

Once the student has passed the Written FoS Examinations, the Graduate Program Director (GPD) will notify the Graduate Program Administrator (GPA) to set in motion the required paperwork to set up a formal oral exam based on the Thesis Proposal and the Field of Study Written Examinations.

FoS Oral Examination

The FoS Oral Examination must take place within one month of successful completion of the written FoS examinations. Both examinations are based on the approved bibliography used for the two written exam papers, and the thesis proposal.

Process/Evaluation of the FoS Oral Examination

A *Notice of Oral Examination* form must be completed no less than four weeks prior to the start of the examination and kept on the student's file for record-keeping purposes.

Neutral Chair: A member of the academic staff appointed by the Graduate Program Director chairs the examination. The Neutral Chair is not a member of the examining committee and is non-voting.

The Oral Examination is evaluated on a pass or fail basis. Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation. Should the outcome of the final vote include one negative vote or less, the student will pass the exam.

The Supervisor and the members of the Supervisory Committee will be part of the examination committee. In addition, there will be two other examiners: one who may or may not belong to the



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program and one who is external to the program and Department. The oral exam will last a maximum of two hours.

At the end of the examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room. Before any discussion of the student's performance, an unofficial, or straw, vote is taken whereby each examiner must identify which recommendation (pass/fail) he/she favours. This provides the committee with a frame of opinion on which to base a discussion of the student's performance. After discussion, a final vote is tallied.

A student has the option of giving a brief (up to 15 minutes) presentation at the beginning of the oral exam. The brief presentation is part of the maximum two hour exam period. There will be rounds of questions that arise from both the thesis proposal and the written FoS examination papers as well as works mentioned in the FoS written exam and Thesis proposal bibliographies. Questions to the student should be clear and succinct. The student should be given reasonable time to answer. Student answers should demonstrate appropriate graduate level knowledge and understanding of the subject matter that pertains to the examination questions. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation, or by leading the student.

Should the outcome of the vote on the oral examination include two or more negative votes, the Committee's recommendation to the Graduate Program Director for the respective component will be "fail".

A student who fails the FoS Oral Examination will be allowed to re-take the examination after at least two months and within six months of the failed examination. A second failure of this Field of Study Oral Examination will result in a student being required to withdraw (see the Graduate Calendar, section [Academic Regulations—Candidacy—Candidacy Examination Outcomes](#)).

Decisions on pass or fail are recommendations to the Graduate Program Director who may or may not uphold those recommendations.

In instance of a potential of a conflict of interest such as when the GPD is a member of the examining committee, the Department Head or a designate will substitute for the GPD.

Appeals

In case of failure students have the right to appeal. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (see *Graduate Calendar – [Academic Regulations](#) – Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings*).



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Thesis Proposal and Field of Study Examination Committee

The Supervisor

In consultation with the student, Supervisors are responsible for the appointment of examiners and the determination of their willingness and ability to serve on the examining Committee. The necessary documentation for the appointment of the Committee will be prepared by the Graduate Program Administrator and approved by the Graduate Program Director.

The Examination Committee

The Committee must contain a minimum of:

- The Supervisor;
- The Co-Supervisor, if applicable;
- All other members of the Supervisory Committee;
- A member who may or may not belong to the program;
- A member who is External to the Department.

The External Examiner

External examiners must normally satisfy the FGS criteria for examiners. See the Graduate Calendar, section [Academic Regulations](#)—Candidacy.

Suggested Timeline

RELS Program Ph.D. students should aim to complete their Candidacy Requirements according to the following timeline:

- Course requirements in the first two regular semesters in the program, i.e., by the end of the ninth month of their first academic year.
- Written Thesis Proposal by 24 months into the program.
- The timeline for completion of the language requirements is 28 months. (It is strongly recommended that the student aim to complete these examinations as soon as they are ready).
- A student entering a doctoral program with a completed Master's degree must submit the written components of the candidacy examinations no later than twenty-eight (28) months after initial registration in the doctoral program.

The timeline is a suggested guideline only. According to FGS Regulations, subject to any extension allowances, PhD students must complete all candidacy requirements within 28 months of first registration.