

Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success

Department of Religious Studies, University of Iowa

Standard Benchmarks

- **Prior to the start of classes or during the first week of the first semester of the academic year:**

Meet with your advisor to plan the year ahead; plan on enrolling in one of the department's four required graduate courses, one of which is generally offered each semester; choose a possible graduate seminar; review with your advisor the Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success and the department's Mutual Expectations of Graduate Students and Advisors document. Begin to familiarize yourself with the M.A. Program Book.

- **During the first semester of your program:**

Create a file that will become your Bibliography for either your MA exam or MA thesis; add texts to it with input from your advisor and other faculty members, and distinguish between works you have already read and works yet to be read.

- **By the end of midterm week in each semester of your program:**

Discuss your proposed courses for the following semester with your advisor (and with the rest of your M.A. Committee, once it is formed); complete a **Planned Course Schedule** and ask your advisor to sign it and send a copy of the document to the Department Administrator for your file.

- **During the second semester of your program:**

Work with your advisor to form an M.A. Committee, which includes your advisor and two other tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the UI, at least one of whom must be in the Department of Religious Studies. The members of this committee must be named by the end of midterm week.

By February 1 (of each year), complete an **Annual Progress Report**; send a copy to your advisor for approval; after receiving approval, send copies to the other members of your M.A. Committee; and also to the Department Administrator. Your report is reviewed by the faculty as a whole, and a copy placed in your student file.

- **During the third semester of your program:**

MA Exam option: Begin working with your advisor and other committee members to identify the areas on which you will be examined.

MA thesis option: Begin writing by early this semester and plan to complete a draft of the thesis by the beginning of your fourth semester.

- **During the fourth semester of your program (usually the final semester):**

Work with the Department Administrator and your advisor to schedule the Final Examination (either the written exam, for the Non-Thesis Track, or the M.A. Thesis Defense, for the Thesis Track). The Exam/Defense must be scheduled during the academic

year, when faculty members are in residence and before posted Graduate College Deadlines.

- Submit to the Office of the Registrar an **Application for Degree**, available in the Registrar's office and on line at <http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/forms/students.aspx>. The deadline for the application is posted on the Registrar's website each semester.
- MA Exam track: At least three weeks prior to the Final Examination, provide the Department Administrator with the information needed to complete and file the **Nondoctoral Plan of Study Summary Form** and the **Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree** (Graduate College documents) by the Graduate College Deadline.
- M.A. with Thesis Track: Notify the Department Administrator when the title of the thesis and the date and time of the thesis defense have been determined so the **Nondoctoral Plan of Study Summary Form** and the **Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree** (Graduate College documents) can be filed by the deadline.

Copies of the penultimate text of the thesis are in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the M.A. Thesis defense.

Steady Progress toward Degree

- **Language study.**

Clarify with your advisor and the rest of your Core Advisory Committee, early on in your studies, which language training program, if any, you will follow to acquire the ability to read original materials in the languages that are relevant to your degree and career objectives.

- **Timely completion of coursework and incompletes.**

As a department, we strongly discourage M.A. students from taking course grades of Incomplete ("I"). However, we understand that there are sometimes extenuating circumstances that necessitate a student taking an Incomplete. If you do take an incomplete, with the instructor's permission, you are expected to turn in any and all remaining assignments within 30 days of the last day of the course. Failure to do so will compromise your standing in the graduate program.

- **Cumulative GPA of 3.2.**

Your GPA should never drop below this level. Your GPA does not include language courses other than those approved for content by your M.A. Committee. If your GPA does drop below the department's minimum, you will be placed on probation and receive a letter with a deadline to rectify the situation or be dismissed from the program.

- **Failure to Progress.**

M.A. students who fail to meet the standard benchmarks for success, as listed above, and who do not show adequate progress toward their degree, as judged by the departmental faculty as a whole, will be dismissed from the program.

Guidelines to M.A. and Post-M.A. Success

- **Initiate and maintain regular communication with your advisor.**

Think of your advisor as your mentor who is committed to your success. Keep in mind that you may one day ask your advisor and other faculty members to write letters of recommendation for you. Cultivating these relationships is important.

- Do not rely on your advisor to keep on top of your program requirements; meeting these requirements is ultimately your responsibility
- Do not rely on your advisor alone for instruction and guidance; take advantage of the diverse experiences that inform the Religious Studies faculty.
- **Adhere to (or exceed) the standard benchmarks for success.**

- **Participate actively in departmental events.**

Students and faculty are part of a dynamic learning community in Religious Studies. Participating in department-sponsored events is an important component in your education. It helps you to build collegial relationships that could prove important to the rest of your career. The Religious Studies faculty strongly encourages your participation in colloquia, lectures, social gatherings, and the like. We value your input and believe that it will contribute to faculty members' own intellectual growth.

- **Be proactive and keep an open mind about your future.**

Take advantage of department-sponsored, CLAS-sponsored, and university-sponsored events that focus on preparing for post-graduate success in the ever-changing marketplace of higher education.

We as a department are actively involved in helping to prepare our M.A. students for a range of career possibilities. Depending on their areas of interest, M.A. students might find "Versatile Ph.D." initiatives here at the University of Iowa to be useful.

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