

## **Religious Studies MA Thesis Guidelines**

MA students have three options for the culmination of the MA program: (1) the completion and defense of a MA Thesis, (2) the MA portfolio option, or (3) MA comprehensive exams. Students select the thesis option with the goal to produce a MA thesis (approx. 50-125 pages), under the guidance of a primary Faculty Advisor, usually on the basis of a previous term paper or other research effort. The thesis process culminates in an oral examination by a committee of at least three faculty members who must approve the thesis and must be accompanied by an intellectual biography.

### **Preparation for Thesis**

Students who wish to write a thesis are encouraged to begin thinking about possibilities for their thesis project early on in the MA program and to speak with their Faculty Advisor about the process. It is also advisable to consider taking an independent study in the first year and a half of the program to conduct reading and research in a broad field of interest in order to come to know the literature. The MA thesis process takes place over a full year with three credits dedicated to the prospectus and three credits to write and defend the thesis. Students must be at least in their second year and be in good academic standing, including no Incompletes before embarking on MA thesis hours, portfolio, or comprehensive exams.

### **Thesis Committee**

Thesis candidates are encouraged to assemble a thesis committee during the semester prior to submitting the prospectus. Committees are constituted by a minimum of three faculty members, one of whom is the student's advisor and one of whom may be from outside of the Department. The candidate must have had a class or independent study with each committee member. Exceptions will only be considered through student petition.

### **Prospectus Guidelines**

The candidate is required to submit and defend a prospectus for the MA thesis in the semester before they wish to write and defend the thesis or, in exceptional cases, the beginning of the semester in which they are defending the thesis. Students should consult with and agree on deadlines with their Faculty Advisor.

The candidate should submit a first draft of the prospectus to their Faculty Advisor several weeks before this deadline. The prospectus should be 10-15 pages and include the following:

- a clear statement of the thesis topic and argument
- a rationale as to why it constitutes original research
- a contextual framing of the project in terms of existing literature
- an account of the methodology and primary source material to be employed
- a contextualization of the theoretical issues to be engaged in the thesis
- a statement concerning its contribution to the discipline of religious studies
- a provisional chapter outline and bibliography
- a timeline from proposal to completion

## **Timeline to Completion**

The candidate should prepare a timeline with their Faculty Advisor to establish deadlines for drafts of individual sections of the MA thesis as well as a firm deadline for the complete first draft. It is advised to have a complete first draft submitted to your advisor at least 4-6 weeks in advance of the anticipated thesis defense date.

Students are strongly advised to work together with their Faculty Advisor on several revisions of the MA thesis before it is shared with the rest of the thesis committee. MA candidates must have their Advisor's approval to bring the thesis to defense before they arrange a defense date with other committee members. It is up to the candidate to contact Barbara Middlebrook to schedule the conference room and to contact each member of the thesis committee to schedule the defense, after their Advisor's approval.

## **Submitting the Thesis**

The penultimate version of the thesis must be submitted to the thesis committee no later than one week prior to the date of the scheduled thesis defense. It is a courtesy to check with individual members of the thesis committee to see if they need the thesis earlier for any reason. Anticipate holidays and breaks in the timing of this.

## **Thesis Defense**

The thesis defense is usually scheduled for 1 ½ - 2 hours. The candidate should come prepared to give some introductory remarks about the thesis, its argument and contribution to the field of religious studies. At the conclusion of the defense, the thesis committee may ask for major or minor or revisions be made to the MA thesis. It is up to the committee to stipulate the revision review process and timeline. The most common process is for the Faculty Advisor to review and approve changes, though the committee may wish to be involved if the revisions are substantial.

## **Final Deposit of the Thesis**

The deadline for deposit of the thesis with the University comes before the end of the semester in which the student plans to graduate, and thus the thesis defense needs to be scheduled well in advance of those deadlines, leaving a minimum of two weeks between oral defense and deposit in case of required revisions, determined at the defense.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to find out (1) the University deadlines for defending a MA thesis in the chosen semester of their graduation and (2) the official procedures for submitting a final version to the University. Any questions regarding this should be directed to Barbara Middlebrook: [barbara.middlebrook@colorado.edu](mailto:barbara.middlebrook@colorado.edu).

Submit the final, revised version of the thesis to the University electronically prior to the appropriate deadline.