

RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM

HONORS PROGRAM GUIDE

The Honors Program is open to Religious Studies majors who have done superior work and who wish to devote a substantial part of their senior year to advanced, specialized, independent research and writing of a thesis.

Successfully completing an honors thesis will require sustained interest, exceptional ability, diligence, and enthusiasm. While admission to the Honors Program and completion of a thesis do not guarantee that students will be awarded honors in Religious Studies, most students find the experience as intellectually rewarding as it is rigorous.

Requirements: Candidates must have a minimum grade point average of 3.5 in the Religious Studies major and a 3.3 GPA overall.

Application Process:

Students should submit an honors proposal by **April 15** of their junior year. If accepted into the program, students should enroll in RELST 4995 in their first semester of the program, and RELST 4996 in their second. The application process consists of the following:

1. Identify a topic:

At the beginning of the spring semester of their junior year, students should identify a topic or research question of abiding intellectual interest. Students should bear in mind that an honors thesis is far more than a research paper, and therefore should propose a topic based on original research using primary sources. Students should make sure that they have the appropriate language skills for their proposed thesis.

2. Select thesis committee Chair:

Once students have a thesis topic in mind, they should approach a faculty member to supervise their work on the honors thesis (Chair of committee). The student's major advisor or the Director of Religious Studies can help identify a potential Chair appropriate to the topic. The student and the Chair will then review the student's transcript to make sure that the student is eligible for admission to the Honors Program (see admission requirements above). The Chair should also ensure that the student has appropriate and sufficient language skills for the proposed topic. Note: the student's RELST advisor may serve as the Chair, but this is not a requirement; the RELST advisor must at least serve as one of the committee members.

3. Select a thesis committee:

The student and the Chair will together identify one to two additional faculty members to serve on the thesis committee. It is the student's responsibility to contact (at least) one of these faculty members to request their participation on the committee before they submit their honors application. The thesis committee members should be:

- a. The professor who has agreed to supervise the student's work (Chair of committee)
- b. Religious Studies major advisor, if the advisor is not the Chair (Required)
- c. Another relevant RELST faculty member (Optional)

4. **Submit a thesis proposal:**

After consulting with the prospective Chair, the student must prepare a formal, well-conceived proposal for honors research. The proposal must include a statement of the research question, discussion of the relevant methodology and evidence, and a preliminary bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Additional components of the proposal are outlined on the honors proposal cover sheet.

Submit the cover sheet and proposal, by **April 15** of the student's junior year, to the following:

- all identified committee members
- Director of Religious Studies
- Religious Studies undergraduate coordinator (located in 409 White Hall)

5. **Admission to candidacy:**

At the end of the spring semester, the committee in consultation with the Director of Religious Studies will notify students about whether they have been admitted as candidates in the Honors Program.

****Note to students studying abroad:** Students who are not in residence during their junior year (e.g., because of participation in a Cornell Abroad Program) should correspond with their prospective Chair as well as the Director of Religious Studies early in the spring semester regarding application to the Honors Program. Keeping in mind that being off campus prolongs the application process, students who are abroad should plan ahead and make sure they begin in a timely manner in order to meet the April 15 deadline.

****Note to January graduates:** If your final semester is the Fall semester, you will need to start the application process during the previous fall semester, to give yourself one full year to complete the program. That will put your deadline for the application in mid-October of your junior year. Please consult with the prospective Chair and the Director of Religious Studies if this is the case.

Summer before senior year:

- Begin to gather research materials or supplies, identify and approach contacts, and, if possible, begin actual research on the project
- Undertake relevant research travel

First semester program requirements:

- Enroll in RELST 4995
- Undertake necessary research and begin writing
- Consult with committee members as needed throughout the semester (be sure to clarify with each member of the committee a schedule of meetings and due dates)

At the end of first semester, submit to the committee Chair for evaluation 15-20 pages of the thesis along with an outline of the whole project.

Second semester program requirements:

- Enroll in RELST 4996
- Intensive writing and editing, including additional research if necessary
- The thesis draft, normally between 60-100 pages in length, **is due** to the Chair by March 15

Final thesis evaluation:

Students must successfully complete the RELST major and must continue to maintain a minimum 3.5 GPA in the major and a minimum GPA of 3.3 overall.

After submitting the thesis draft, **no later than March 15**, students will receive feedback from committee members about required revisions; students will generally have two-four weeks to submit a final draft of the thesis. Be sure to set a clear date for submitting the final copy of your project to your committee.

In early to mid-May, a 'thesis defense' will be held with all committee members. The defense is a conversation between the honors candidate and all committee members, providing the candidate with the opportunity formally to present research in oral form and to address the substantive concerns of the committee.

The committee will determine final evaluation of the thesis after the thesis defense. Grades given for RELST 4996 are based on the student's **quality and effort**. Your thesis committee determines whether your project deserves *Latin* honors, and, if so, will recommend you to the members of the advisory board of the program. Students *may* be awarded Latin honors based on the board's evaluation of the **scholarly achievement** represented in the thesis.

Submit a final copy after the defense (with any revisions required by the committee) to the RELST undergraduate coordinator, located in 409 White Hall.

Determination of honors:

In evaluating a thesis, committee members take into consideration intellectual creativity, methodological innovation, scholarly rigor, and overall quality of presentation. Students should therefore ensure that the thesis is also well-written, impeccably edited, and abides by the footnote format conventional for their discipline of choice (e.g., Chicago, MLA).

- A student whose thesis is meritorious, well-argued, and relies on a methodologically sound use of primary sources may be awarded *cum laude*
- A student whose project shows considerable originality and scope, methodological sophistication, and uncommon quality may be awarded *magna cum laude*
- A student whose project is of truly exceptional quality, makes a real contribution to the field, and is deemed publishable may be awarded *summa cum laude*

In deciding on the specific level of Latin honors, the committee will consider a candidate's **complete** academic record, not merely the thesis. Accordingly, students should plan to bring a copy of their transcript to the thesis defense.