

The PhD Handbook

The Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies

Guide for Doctoral Students

Last revised: May 2021

N.B.: The official version of the PhD Handbook is the web version available online (<https://uwaterloo.ca/religious-studies-phd/phd-degree-requirements/phd-handbooks>). The Handbook contains materials useful for doctoral candidates in the Laurier-Waterloo PhD. As much as possible, the requirements and policies in this book reflect the most up-to-date requirements and policies in each institution (Laurier and Waterloo). In instances where the Handbook differs from those, the official requirements and policies of the student's institution will take precedence. Please report suggestions and errors to the joint program director.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: My background is not in religious studies, but I took some courses that involved the study of religion. Can those courses be counted toward the minimum admission requirement?

A1: For the purpose of meeting the admission requirement of ten (10) courses in religious studies, applicants may petition, in writing, to count selected courses as religious studies equivalents. Generally, no more than five (5) courses in other fields will be counted as religious studies equivalents. The petition should accompany the application for admission to the PhD. The questions to be addressed for each course are (1) how the course helped prepare you in the study of religious diversity in North America and (2) in what ways the course is relevant to your proposed dissertation area. The first question is the primary one since this admission requirement concerns preparation in the study of religion. Since transcripts contain minimal information about actual course content, the case for counting a course can be strengthened by the inclusion of a course description, syllabus, and/or descriptions of papers or other kinds of research conducted in the course.

Q2: I have a theology degree. If I apply, will my courses automatically count toward the religious studies requirement?

A2: Religious studies and theology are not the same thing. Like philosophy, anthropology, and other such fields, theology is an allied field. When we receive an application for admission from an applicant in such fields, we look at specific courses, deciding which, if any, we will count toward the minimum for admission: ten (10) courses in religious studies. Normally, we accept no more than five (5) courses as equivalents from any allied field, including theology. If you cannot meet the minimum, you must take qualifying courses to be able to apply for admission into the PhD program. Taking such courses does not guarantee admission, but it may enable you to compete successfully with other applicants.

Q3: I want to propose writing a dissertation on a theological topic. Is that a possible?

A3: Theological reflection is a fact of religion; therefore, studying it is as important as studying any other facet of religion such as ritual, myth, sacred places, or ethics. In addition, there are theologians among the faculty, just as there are historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the study of religion, some theological issues and methods are within our purview and fit well within such a program; others do not. Our decision is made on a case-by-case basis. It is important to recognize that the Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies is not a theological degree offered from within a religious tradition but a religious studies degree with a focus on religious diversity.

Q4: I would like to study an ancient, textual topic. Should I apply for admission?

A4: Even though we have faculty whose research and expertise lie in ancient areas, the PhD's focus is exclusively North American. If your real interest is one of the ancient civilizations, ours is not the right program for you. However, if your interest lies, say, in the reception of, or the use of, some ancient text in North America, then the Laurier-Waterloo PhD program might be a good match.

Q5: I would like to study an Asian topic. Should I apply for admission?

A5: That depends. Only if your research focus is on Asian religions in North America. Even though we have faculty whose research and expertise lie in Asia, the PhD's focus is exclusively North American, so if you wanted to study Asian religions in North America, the Laurier-Waterloo Ph.D. program might be a good match.

Q6: My home university will be the University of Waterloo. Because of the joint program, will I also have student privileges at Laurier? For instance, will I be able to get parking, lockers, and access to the Athletic Complex and other resources normally granted to Laurier students with a student card?

A6: The joint program gives you access to the library, courses, colloquia, and faculty at either university. But for most other resources, such as the use of athletic facilities and parking, you must use the resources of your home university.

Q7: I want to get a jump on reading. Are course syllabi and required reading materials available before the start date?

A7: If you want more details about a course, contact the professor who teaches it.

Q8: What happens during our orientation?

A8: Orientation is partly social, partly academic. Mainly, you'll meet other graduate students, talk with faculty, receive academic counselling, and register for courses. Attendance is mandatory because we review in detail the requirements of the PhD program.

Q9: Can work done in courses be channeled toward my dissertation, or do I have to avoid my dissertation topic when I work on course papers?

A9: By all means, explore possible dissertation topics by writing papers and doing projects on potential dissertation topics. There is no problem with your using a term paper as the seed from which a dissertation grows.

Q10: Does fieldwork require a student to deal with the university ethics committee? And must I complete fieldwork to graduate? May I use other research methods?

A10: Yes, all field research, whether conducted by students or faculty, whether in the course or outside a course, requires an appropriate ethical clearance, as well as adequate academic preparation. Other research methods are certainly an option, but you must discuss with your committee about which methods would be the most appropriate for your particular topic and acquire proper clearance to use those methods.

Q11: What if a teaching assistant (TA) needs to travel to do research and there are conflicts with teaching duties?

A11: To maintain your teaching (or research) assistantship, you must be available to do the work, which is typically in the fall or winter. So, try to travel during the spring and summer. If you must travel during the fall or winter, discuss the issue with the professor for whom you are a teaching assistant and see if it is possible to rearrange your work schedule. If not, the first priority must be the TA commitment.

Q12: Is there a reading week or other down-time for PhD students?

A12: Yes, you will find the dates for them in the calendar. They are the same for all graduate students.

Q13: The handbook refers to the "subfield" over which we will be examined during the field exam. What do you mean by "subfield?"

A13: Any subdivision of religious studies; the larger "area" that contains your dissertation topic. There is no universally agreed upon list of subfields, so, in practical terms, your supervisory committee defines your subfield in consultation with you.

Q14: Do I have to be physically present on campus during the spring and summer?

A14: Graduate students register for three terms, that is, for the entire year— fall, winter, spring/summer. A few graduate courses may be offered in the spring/summer, and you might want to take one or more of them. Alternatively, you might need to be away conducting library or field research elsewhere. Or, you may be away studying languages or preparing for exams. In all these instances, you are still officially registered and paying tuition but not necessarily physically present. On rare occasion, you may wish to take an official leave, in which case you are not paying tuition, but neither are you building up residence credits. These situations require forms, reasons, and signatures; see the Calendar for specific procedures.

Q15: May I take undergraduate courses as part of my PhD?

A15: No. You may take only graduate courses, those numbered 600 or above. If you are required to take extra courses for admission, some of those may be undergraduate, but only if the director approves them for your specific case.

Standard Timeline

(for completion of the PhD in four years)

Year 1	Fall	<p>Courses: RE/RS 700 + elective (s)</p> <p>In consultation with supervisory committee, work on dissertation project proposal in order to apply for external funding. Applications for external funding are required in order to retain internal scholarships.</p> <p>Language(s) Study TA</p>
	Winter	<p>Courses: RE/RS 710 + elective(s)</p> <p>In consultation with supervisory committee, develop and refine dissertation project proposal</p> <p>Language(s) study TA</p> <p>File PhD Progress Report by end of April Study for General Comprehensive Exam</p>
	Spring Summer	<p>If necessary, continue coursework</p> <p>Discuss preliminary draft of dissertation project proposal, along with the language proposal, with supervisory committee and director</p> <p>Language(s) study and/or exam Study for General Comprehensive Exam</p>
Year 2	Fall	<p>Study for General Comprehensive Exam</p> <p>Take General Comprehensive Exam (approximate date: mid-November)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAURIER STUDENTS: Register for RE 800 until you pass the General Exam <p>Language(s) study, if necessary TA</p>
	Winter	<p>Study for and take Field Exam (approximate date: mid-May)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAURIER STUDENTS: Register for RE 801 until you pass the Field Exam <p>TA</p> <p>File PhD Progress Report by end of April Consult with supervisory committee regarding dissertation proposal</p>
	Spring Summer	<p>Oral presentation of dissertation proposal (approximate date: mid-June)</p> <p>Submit final draft of dissertation project and language proposal by first Friday in August</p> <p>Submit fieldwork component of research project to university ethics committee, if necessary to begin dissertation research in the Fall</p>
Year 3	Fall	<p>Dissertation research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course work, language examinations, comprehensives, oral presentation of the dissertation proposal, and final dissertation approval must be completed successfully before dissertation writing will be authorized • LAURIER STUDENTS: Register for RE 899 (Doctoral Dissertation) each semester until graduation <p>TA (unless away engaged in field research) Take non-credit course in teaching (optional)</p>

	Winter	<p>Dissertation research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laurier Students: Register for RE 899 (Doctoral Dissertation) each semester until graduation <p>TA (unless away engaged in field research) Take non-credit course in teaching (optional) Consult with supervisory committee by end of May</p>
	Spring Summer	Dissertation research and writing
Year 4	Fall	<p>Dissertation writing</p> <p>TA or part-time teaching of one course (expected but not required)</p> <p>Public presentation (as scheduled by the director). You may do the public presentation at any time towards the end of your program. It must be completed at the very latest by the end of the term in which you defend your dissertation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laurier Students: Register for RE 898
	Winter	<p>Dissertation writing</p> <p>TA or part-time teaching of one course (expected but not required)</p> <p>If not graduating, meet with supervisory committee by end of May</p>
	Spring Summer	<p>Dissertation defense (as scheduled by Graduate Studies)</p> <p>Graduation (June, as scheduled by Registrar)</p>

Program Requirement Checklist

WLU-UW PhD in Religious Diversity in North America

STUDENT NAME:

DATE OF PROGRAM ENTRY:

SUPERVISOR:

HOME INSTITUTION:

WLU

OR

UW

COURSE WORK AND EXAMS

COURSE/EXAM	COMPLETION DATE
RE/RS 700	
RE/RS 701	
AT LEAST 2 ELECTIVES:	
1.	
2.	
GENERAL EXAM	
FIELD EXAM	

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

- Language Requirement Proposal on File
 RE/RS 702 Milestone

_____ Date Completed

DISSERTATION

- Oral Presentation

_____ Date Completed

- Proposal Accepted by Joint Committee

_____ Date Completed

Dissertation Defended/Accepted

Date Completed

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Presentation Completed

Date Completed

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS

20__ 20__ 20__ 20__ 20__ 20__

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Email: _____

Phone: _____

The Joint Committee

of the Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies

The Joint Committee is the coordinating and governing body of the Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies. The directorship rotates between the two universities on a three-year cycle. The director is selected by the department; if there is a dispute, the joint committee elects the director. Although each university and department retains its legal autonomy, the joint program is administered through the cooperative efforts of the Joint Committee, the membership of which consists of the two chairs, the two graduate officers, the director, and a student representative from each of the two universities. The Joint Committee supervises, among other things, the following: admission, the core courses, the General Examination, the supervisory structure, language requirements, the dissertation, and the oral presentation processes.

The Supervisory Committees

The role of a supervisory committee is to provide expertise in the student's area of research, write and evaluate the field exam, offer guidance and feedback, and assist the student in achieving a timely completion of degree requirements. Supervisory committees are approved by the joint committee, and the director oversees the supervisory process.

Supervisory committees typically consist of at least three members of the Religion and Culture / Religious Studies faculty from both universities. The final defense will also include a reader from another department at one of the two universities and an appropriate external examiner from a third university. A change in membership can be initiated by the supervisor, committee member, student, or director.

Supervisory committees may be convened as needed but should meet at least once a year. Supervisors and doctoral candidates typically meet more frequently.

PhD Progress Report

Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies

NOTE: As of 2021, the WLU FGPS has created a new PhD progress report format. Please refer to the information relayed at <https://students.wlu.ca/academics/graduate-and-postdoctoral-studies/managing-your-program/progression-and-activity-reports.html> and fill out the report provided at this link. For UofW students, please refer to the format provided by UofW Graduate Studies. If none is available. Please use the report noted below.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- It is the student's responsibility to ensure that this report reaches the director on time and that the appropriate signatures are included.
- No later than April 15, each PhD student completes parts A1- A6 electronically and then submits this report to the supervisor.
- The supervisor completes parts B1- B7 and then submits the entire report to the other committee members for comment and evaluation (C1). If a supervisor has not yet been established, the director or graduate officer must complete Part B.
- No later than the end of May, the supervisor and committee meet to review and sign the full report with the student (Part C).
- The supervisor forwards the fully reviewed and signed report to the director for signature (Part C).
- The director provides a copy of the full report to the student and the supervisor, retains a copy for the departmental file, and files the full, original report with the Office of Graduate Studies.

*Late submission of this progress report may result in a delay of the student's financial support.

PART A: STUDENT REPORT (to be completed by the student)

Student:

ID #:

Dept.:

Date of entry into program:

Respond to the following questions and then forward this report to your supervisor:

A1. Details of progress made since the last report (or toward meeting degree requirements since beginning the program if this is the first report), e.g., courses completed; comprehensive examination preparation, writing, or oral defense; thesis proposal, research, chapters written or revised.

A2. Indicate all scholarships that you have applied for and those you've been awarded since last May 1 (or since entry into program, if this is your first progress report). Differentiate between "applied for" and "awarded," and provide dollar values for those awarded.

A3. List any conference presentations and publications you have made since last May 1 (or since entry into program, if this is your first progress report). Differentiate between "refereed" and "non-refereed," also between "invited," "contributed", etc.

A4. Indicate your teaching responsibilities since last May 1 and comment on the progress you've made in your development as a teacher.

A5. List your specific goals for the next year (e.g., program requirements (courses, comprehensive examination, thesis, etc.). Indicate the expected dates for their completion.

A6. What is the anticipated date (month/year) for the completion of degree requirements?

PART B: SUPERVISOR'S REPORT (to be completed by the student's supervisor). Complete each section that is *relevant to the student's stage in the doctoral program*.

B1. How often did you, as supervisor, meet with the student over the last reporting period:
 monthly once per term once per year other (specify):

B2. How often did the supervisory committee as a whole (if established) meet with the student over the last reporting period:

monthly once per term once per year other (specify):

B3. The comprehensive requirement was completed on (date):

OR I have discussed the comprehensive exams with my student and they are expect to complete this requirement by (date):

B4. The language requirement was completed on(date):

OR I have discussed the language requirement with my student and they expect to complete this requirement by (date):

B5. The public presentation requirement was completed on (date);

OR, I have discussed the public presentation requirement with my student and they expect to complete this requirement by (date):

In the comments section (**B10**), please justify, if necessary, any expected date of completion that exceeds the deadline for your program.

B6. Supervisors should respond to a draft of the PhD thesis in a timely fashion. Please answer the following *only* if draft research was submitted by the student during the year.

B7. Comment on progress made in accomplishing goals set out in last report (or toward meeting degree requirements since beginning the program if this is the first report). Refer to the attached student report.

B8. Comment on specific goals for the next interval of ____ months:

B9. Anticipated date for the completion of degree requirements (mo./yr.):

B10. Additional Comments:

PART C: OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS (to be completed by full supervisory committee)

C1. Evaluation of overall progress since last report:

[S] Satisfactory [M] Marginal* [U] Unsatisfactory*

Position	Name	Evaluation	Signature	Date
Supervisor				
2 nd Member				
3 rd Member				

4 th Member (if any)				
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**If progress is deemed marginal or unsatisfactory, include here a detailed explanation of what must be accomplished over the next 6 months in order to remedy the situation.*

C2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This completed report has been seen by me and (*check one:*)

I see no need to append additional comments.

I am appending additional comments (as section D).

Student's Signature:

Date:

Assoc. Chair, Grad (or Grad Officer) Signature:

Date:

Joint Director's Signature:

Date:

The Director files the report with the Office of Graduate Studies, ensuring that a copy of the full report is sent to the student, supervisor, and departmental file

General Comprehensive Examination

There are two comprehensive examinations, each based on a bibliography. The purpose of the **general comprehensive exam** is to ensure breadth and to assess competence in the religious diversity of North America and in religious studies. The purpose of the **field exam** is to focus an area of specialization containing the dissertation project (see p. 22). The general comprehensive exam is conducted by the joint committee and the field exam is conducted by the student's supervisory committee. A candidate has only two opportunities to complete each of the examinations successfully. Failing either exam twice results in an expulsion from the program. These examinations normally take place by the end of the candidate's second year in the doctoral program. To be permitted to take the examinations at a later time, a candidate must petition the director for an extension. Extensions are normally granted only once and, then, only for one term.

The general comprehensive exam is usually offered mid-November, though it can be delayed in exceptional circumstances. It is based on a common bibliography prepared by the Joint Committee. The examination questions are the same for all members of a cohort and answered in two stages:

1. Part A: One four-hour sitting (with a 15-minute break) where students answer 1 out of 2 questions
2. Part B: One take-home style exam written over a 24-hour period where students answer 2 out of 3 questions.
3. Students will be asked to sign a form agreeing to not discuss their work with other students within the 24-hour period.

Members of the Joint Committee read and assign preliminary percentage marks to each question on the general exam. These are averaged to arrive at the final mark for the exam. The student must attain an average grade of 77% for the whole exam in order for a student to pass.

The general examination has three thematic areas of coverage (see p. 19 for complete bibliography):

1. Theory and general religious studies
2. North American religion: history and historiography
3. Religious diversity in North America: case studies and approaches

77%, that is, B+, is the minimum passing grade for each of the comprehensive exams. WLU transcripts record a "pass" or "fail." UW transcripts record a "completion" (or not). The joint program retains percentage marks on file for future use, for example, when faculty are writing recommendations. Bibliographies, exam questions, answers written by students, preliminary marks, and final marks become part of the joint program's record for a student. These are the standards that apply to the comprehensive examinations:

Letter	GP	%	Meaning
A+	12	90-100	Exceptional
A	11	85-89	Excellent

A-	10	80-84	Very good
B+	9	77-79	Good
F	0	<77	Failing

These are the criteria for evaluating comprehensives; the items are not of equal value:

1. QUESTION, TOPIC

Do the answers respond directly to the question? Do they stay on topic?

2. QUALITY OF WRITING

Are grammar, spelling, and sentence construction well handled? Are the answers well organized, clear, readable, and logically coherent?

3. BASIC IDEAS, DEFINITIONS, THEORIES, METHODS

Do the answers demonstrate comprehension of the readings? Do the answers handle these materials analytically and reflectively rather than naively?

4. CONCRETENESS, DETAIL

Do the answers root generalizations in concrete examples and specific illustrations? Do the answers show a grasp of relevant details?

5. ORIGINALITY

Does the exam exhibit originality of thought and/or independent thinking? Do the answers demonstrate an ability to synthesize, apply, critique, or in some other way go beyond mere summaries of readings?

6. SELECTION AND HANDLING OF SOURCES

Do the answers systematically and clearly distinguish the writer's contributions from the ideas of others?

Instructions for the General Comprehensive Examination

Examination, Part A:

- 1) The doors of the examination room will be opened approximately 10 minutes before the start of the examination. Students will be permitted to enter the examination room quietly up to one half hour after the scheduled start of the exam. Students arriving late will not be allowed any extra time.
- 2) Students must not begin the examination or attempt to read the examination questions until instructed to do so.
- 3) Examinations may be written with computers provided by the university. These will be disconnected from the internet, and you can only use its word processor programs, typically Word or WordPerfect. You may use the word processor's dictionary, spell checker, etc. At the end of the exam, you must provide an electronic copy of your exam with your name and date. Save your file regularly since no allowance will be made for computer crashes. Come prepared to write or continue writing the exam by hand in case of computer problems.
- 4) Students may not leave the exam room before completing and submitting the exam unless accompanied by a presiding officer. Students are not permitted to submit their examination and leave the examination room until 1 hour after the examination has begun. In no case may a candidate leave the room temporarily, for any reason, until 30 minutes after the start of the examination. To avoid disrupting others, students must remain seated and may not leave the examination room during the last 15 minutes of the examination session.
- 5) At the close of the examination period, students must stop writing immediately.
- 6) A student who leaves before the examination is over must hand in all completed and attempted work, including notes made during the exam.
- 7) Talk or any form of communication between students is absolutely forbidden. No information of any kind is to be written on the question paper or on scrap paper for the purpose of assisting other students. Responses to questions must not be done in an exaggerated way or in a manner that will involve transmission of information to others.
- 8) Students must remain seated during the examination period. A student needing to speak to the presiding officer (e.g. to ask for additional supplies or to request permission to leave the examination room for any reason) should seek out the presiding officer as notified at the beginning of the exam.

- 9) Questions concerning possible errors, ambiguities or omissions in the examination paper must be directed to the presiding officer who will investigate them through the proper channels. The presiding officer is not permitted to answer questions other than those concerning the examination paper.
- 10) Students must not use or attempt to use any improper source of information. No student may bring into the examination room any books, notes or other material containing information pertaining to the examination. Any item brought into the examination room is subject to inspection. Students may not use portions of pre-existing documents, such as term papers, to answer questions.
- 11) No briefcases, backpacks or other bags and carriers may be brought to the desk site where the candidate is writing the examination. They must be put at the front of the examination room in a place designated by the presiding officer before a candidate takes a seat.
- 12) No electronic or communication devices will be allowed in the examination room, including cell phones, blackberries, pagers, etc. Translation dictionaries (e.g. English-French) or other dictionaries (thesaurus, definitions, technical), including electronic ones, are not allowed unless indicated on the examination paper.
- 13) Bottled water, food or other drinks are allowed in the examination room, subject to the approval of the presiding officer. Students with health problems that warrant relaxation of this regulation should provide medical documentation to the presiding officer prior to the beginning of the examination. Such students should restrict themselves to those items and packaging that will least distract other students.
- 14) Students are expected to write their examinations in an honest and straightforward manner. Where there are reasonable grounds for believing a violation of exam protocol has occurred, the candidate will be subject to the disciplinary procedures and sanctions according to the university calendar. Examinations are bound by the regulations of the university where the student is registered.

Specific Instructions for General Comprehensives:

- 1) Part A offers a choice of two questions, students answer one.
- 2) Part B (take home), students answer two of three questions.
- 3) On both parts, students should construct precise, well organized answers. Accurate references to specifics (e.g., authors, books, articles, events, data, and case studies) will strengthen your answers.
- 4) Examiners will look for depth and breadth in both individual answers and in the examination as a whole.

- 5) The student's name and a consecutive page number should appear on each page.

General Comprehensive Exam Bibliography

THEORY AND GENERAL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
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- McCloud, Sean. 2007. *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
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Afzal, Ahmed. 2014. *Lone Star Muslims: Transnational Lives and the South Asian Experience in Texas*. New York: New York University Press.

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- Zubrzycki, Geneviève. 2016. *Beheading the Saint: Nationalism, Religion, and Secularism in Quebec*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Field Comprehensive Examinations

The field exams are usually scheduled to take place by May 15, though they can be delayed in exceptional circumstances. They are organized by the student's supervisory committee. In consultation with the student, the committee will decide on an individualized bibliography, a format (sit-down exam, essay, take-home exam, timing, etc.), and a set of questions. To ensure consistency of length, procedure, and level of difficulty among field exams, bibliographies, formats, and examination questions must be approved by the director, in consultation with the Joint Committee. All members of the student's supervisory committee read and assign preliminary percentage marks for each part of the field exam. These are averaged to arrive at the final mark for the exam. The student must attain an average grade of 77% for the whole exam in order to pass.

Students must enroll for the comprehensive examination during the term in which they begin the process. To be permitted to take the examinations later, a candidate must petition the director for an extension. As with the general comprehensive exam, only one such extension will be allowed, and then for one term.

1 Bibliographies for field exams are typically at least 30 books.

2 Bibliographies are negotiated between the student and all members of the supervisory committee. The final decision remains with the committee.

3 Exams are marked by all members of the supervisory committee.

4 Doctoral students are invited, but not required, to submit a list of suggested questions to the supervisory committee. Supervisory committees are free to use, not use, or modify questions proposed by doctoral candidates.

6 Exams are due from dissertation supervisors to the director one month ahead of the date on which the student takes the exam.

Languages

Before beginning actual dissertation research and writing, doctoral students must demonstrate competence in at least one language other than their own primary language, and that language must be relevant to the proposed program of research. Regardless of how the requirement is satisfied, a student's competence must be at a sufficiently high level that it is adequate to the tasks of scholarly research. Ordinarily, for textual research advanced reading knowledge is expected; whereas, for field research, intermediate speaking knowledge is the norm. In some circumstances, both may be required.

Competence can be assessed in a variety of ways. The most common ways are: departmental testing, standardized testing, and course work. Normally, a minimum of two years (4 terms) of university-level study, with a minimum of B+ average, is required for the joint committee even to consider a course-based language proposal. The reason for doing so is that courses may or may not teach the appropriate skills needed for the proposed research. Although the forms and lengths vary, a typical departmental exam of a student's written language competence takes two hours and requires a translation, with a dictionary, of a scholarly passage of approximately 500 words.

Students may re-take a language exam up to two times. After that, they must petition for approval from both their supervisory committee and the joint committee.

In certain cases, undergraduate language training may be taken free of charge, but you should check your university's regulations concerning the limitations on, and payments for, undergraduate language courses. In general, the departments and universities assume no financial responsibility for either language training or language testing; these costs must be borne by the student.

Language requirements must be proposed to the joint committee by the student with the approval of all members of the supervisory committee. The following form may be submitted earlier but must be fulfilled by the end of the third year in the PhD program.

Language-Requirement Proposal

Name of applicant:

Date:

Names of supervisor and supervisory committee members:

1. What language(s) do you propose?
2. What level (intermediate, advanced) and type (reading, listening, speaking) of competence do you propose?
3. Explain your reasons for proposing this configuration. To what scholarly uses will you put this linguistic competence?
4. What level (none, beginning, intermediate, advanced) and type (reading, listening, speaking) of competence do you currently have in the proposed language(s)?
5. If you are not currently competent in the language, how (course work, independent study, tutor, etc.) will you gain the proposed type and level of competence?
6. How do you propose to demonstrate this competence?

Signatures

Student:

Date:

I consider the above proposal appropriate for this student's PhD program, including the dissertation project.

Supervisor:

Committee member # 1:

Committee member # 2:

Marking for PhD Courses and Milestones

WLU #	UW #	Credit	Title	Required or optional	How recorded @WLU	How recorded @UW
RE700	RS700	.5	Religious Diversity in North America	R	Letter	%
RE710	RS710	.5	Approaches to the Study of Religion in North America	R	Letter	%
		.5	First elective course	R	Letter	%
		.5	Second elective course	R	Letter	%
RE702	Milestone		Language requirements	R	P/F	CR/NCR
RE800	Milestone		General Exam	R	P/F	CR/NCR
RE801	Milestone		Field Exam	R	P/F	CR/NCR
	Milestone		Oral Presentation of Dissertation Proposal	R	P/F	CR/NCR
	Milestone		Dissertation Proposal accepted by joint committee	R	P/F	CR/NCR
RE898	Milestone		Public Presentation	R	P/F	CR/NCR
RE899	Milestone		Dissertation	R	CPL	ACC/NACC
RE6XX	RS6XX	.5	[other electives]	O	Letter	%

Directed Studies

Laurier-Waterloo PhD in Religious Studies

Note: Directed studies, which may be proposed using this form, are only offered in cases where (a) it can be demonstrated that such a course is in the best interests of the student's intellectual/research progress and (b) it does not cause an undue hardship on an instructor's teaching load.

Instructor's Name:

Student's Name:

Proposed Term of Study:

Proposed Title for Course:

Reason for Proposing the Course:

Student's Signature:

Instructor's Signature:

Graduate Officer's Approval:

Director's Approval:

Date:

Attach a syllabus with proposed reading list, methods of evaluation, deadlines, and meeting frequency. Copies should be sent to the graduate officers and director for approval

Dissertation Project Proposals

The doctoral dissertation process has five parts: the dissertation project proposal (presented in the sixth semester), submission of the final proposal (reviewed and accepted in early Fall or seventh semester), the dissertation itself, the public presentation of the research project, and an oral defense of the dissertation.

The purpose of the dissertation project proposal is to ensure that the candidate's project is feasible and represents an **original and important contribution to knowledge**. A well-developed proposal also helps the candidate to clarify the project in their own mind, as well as to create a common set of expectations among their supervisory committee members.

The process for the dissertation project proposal is as follows:

- A preliminary dissertation project proposal is developed in conversation with the supervisor and supervisory committee members.
- After completion of the field exam, the candidate gives an oral presentation of the proposal at an event organized by the Joint Committee (see below).
- The candidate then submits a complete draft of the proposal, approved by their supervisory committee, to the program director for the Joint Committee's approval.
- The committee votes to approve the proposal or asks the candidate to revise and resubmit it.
- Once the proposal has been approved, the candidate may then begin actively researching and writing the dissertation, while also working to meet other remaining program milestones.

Requirement checklist

- **Requirements for submission**
 - The proposal cover sheets (see p. 32) must be signed and dated by the student as well as all members of the proposed supervisory committee.
 - It is the student's responsibility to secure signatures and to submit the proposal to the director before the deadline set by the Joint Committee.
 - The suggested length for a proposal is 4,000-5,000 words, plus a bibliography.
 - The proposal must follow a proper academic style guide.
- **The proposal will include the following elements:**
 - a title (this should invite engagement but also be clear about the nature of your project; often a subtitle will explain the project more precisely);
 - an abstract of about 150 words;
 - a brief, annotated Table of Contents that includes clear chapter titles and one or two sentences describing the chapter contents;
 - a brief timeline of how the student and committee envision the project developing;
 - an outline of language skills required for your project and your progress to date in developing those skills;
 - a bibliography for the project (about 30 sources).

Crafting the Proposal

There is no template for a dissertation project proposal, but you could look to the criteria provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for the criteria for a successful proposal. (SSHRC guidelines can be found here: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/fellowships/doctoral-doctorat-eng.aspx#5>.)

Any proposal must answer four questions:

1. What are you going to study? SSHRC criteria: "You should have a specific, focused, and feasible research question" (or questions), as well as objective(s)
2. How are you going to do it? SSHRC criteria: "You should offer a clear description of the proposed methodology"
3. What is the significance of your project? SSHRC criteria: "Explain the significance and expected contributions to research"
4. How are you positioned to undertake this project? SSHRC criteria: "Describe you relevant training, such as academic training, lived experience or traditional teachings"

Examining these questions in some detail will help the Joint Committee make decisions about the clarity, viability, and value of your project.

1. What are you going to study?

The criteria for a successful dissertation is **an original and important contribution to knowledge**.

A guiding question. What is the question your thesis will answer? A dissertation must have one—and only one—topic that can be summed up in a guiding question. Developing a guiding question will allow you to define the scope of your project with sufficient precision to avoid being lost or overwhelmed. It allows you to decide what to study and, equally important, what to ignore.

Originality. Your dissertation must be original. That means it cannot simply summarize scholarship to date. There are a variety of ways one can be original:

1. Find a new source of data.
2. Develop or correct a theory (use new data to develop a new explanation or correct an old one).
3. Apply a theory to a new or unexplored phenomenon.
4. Apply a theory from a different discipline to a religious phenomenon (e.g., apply theories of how social movements grow from sociology to a new religious movement).

The point is that you must find something that has not been done before.

Importance. To be considered "important," your project must first be substantial and rigorous, displaying a high level of research and writing. Your project must also be of scholarly interest. You might ask the question, *important to whom?* This is why a dissertation project begins with a literature review. You must discover who your audience might be, what the state of the question is among those scholars, and what has been done (and left undone) by researchers working in that area. One scholar suggests that the best ways to be original and important are to:

1. Fill a hole (address a topic that other scholars have overlooked).

2. Correct a mistake (find evidence that challenges a widely held belief or that challenges a theory).
3. Break new ground (for example, by studying a group that has never been examined or by applying an innovative theoretical framework to a group).

You may find other ways as long as you explain the contribution your dissertation will make. This again highlights the necessity of a literature review in order to contextualize your thesis project in on-going academic and public debates and to ensure that your contribution is **original and important**.

2. How are you going to study it?

At some point in the proposal, you need a detailed discussion of theory, method, and your “data set” or source of information, such as interviews of a specific population, primary source material, printed matter, web sites, or creative material (films, TV shows, art works).

Theory. Theory provides explanation. Many scholarly works are criticized for being merely descriptive. Theory moves your project beyond description to analysis and critique. In fact, you may find that your topic is best understood using a variety of theories. In any case, you will need to outline a clear theoretical framework and to demonstrate the explanatory value of that framework. What will your theoretical approach explain that a) is valuable, and b) we cannot get in any other way?

Method. It is also important to describe your method—the steps you will take to answer your question—in clear and simple terms. How will you gather your data (interviews, archival research, surveys, online searches, viewing films, etc.)? What method will you use to analyze your data (statistical analysis, coding, discourse analysis, etc.)? Again, you may find yourself using a variety of methods (for instance, reading official texts describing religious norms and then interviewing people to see if they actually follow those norms). You should show that your method is appropriate both to your chosen theoretical framework and to the goals of the dissertation. Again, ask yourself what your methodological approach will give you that a) is valuable, and b) we cannot get in any other way.

Data set. Your proposal should include a detailed description of your data set (what exactly you will look at). If you are doing content analysis, for example, what books or journals will you read? If you are doing historical research, what archives will you visit? If you plan to interview people, how will you choose your participants? What kind of interviews or surveys will you use? How many participants will you interview? What kind of questions will you ask? How will you gain access to members of a religious community? Again, you should explain the benefits of using this particular data set over others.

Your supervisory committee, as well as the Joint Committee, will be asking whether your data set is appropriate. Will the data you seek to collect help you answer the core question of your dissertation project? Is it appropriate in size, i.e., sufficiently large to answer your thesis question but not so large as to be unfeasible? The committees may ask if you have access to the information you need. For example, some archives and religious sites are closed to outsiders. Do you foresee any opportunities or barriers to gaining access to your data? One of our students attempted to interview members of a religious institution, but its leaders told its members not to participate.

Connecting theory, method, and data set. In the theory and method sections, you will have to explain how the application of your theoretical framework and method to your data set serves the goals of your project. Each section will also need to address the most important and up-to-date

scholarly works, including criticism of your selected theoretical framework and method so that you can discuss their limitations and shortcomings.

Ethics. You must also consider the ethical issues in conducting and disseminating your research. Is there potential for harm in your research project? How will you protect the agency and dignity of your participants? Does your research meet the criteria set out in the latest Tri-Council Policy Statement on research involving humans? What obstacles might you face in receiving ethics clearance from your institution? Who will benefit from your study and how?

3. Why is it significant? (So what?)

Many dissertations—along with other scholarly publications—languish unread because, while they may be excellent in all technical respects, they fail to address a question of real significance. Other projects fail to demonstrate how they contribute to the ongoing scholarly or public discourse on a topic. What is the significance of your project? Put differently, why should people care about the work into which you have put so much time and energy? This is a question that is best answered in clear and direct terms, rather than vague assertions of importance.

Audience. In order to explain the significance of your project, you must first imagine an audience for your scholarship. Who would benefit from reading your research: which scholars? Educators? Community members? Stakeholders? Policy makers? Individuals? Why would it matter to them? How might they use your insights? To whom is your work “important”? Which scholars will want to read your dissertation or the publications that derive from it? Part of the answer will come from your literature review. What does your research add to on-going debates among scholars? Will you fill a hole, correct a mistake, or break new ground? How will your project open new avenues of research? How will it contribute to other members of society, including the community that you are studying?

4. How are you positioned to answer this important question?

Scholarly experience and qualifications. Identify your particular skills, experiences, and resources that will help you to answer your dissertation’s question. You may want to highlight:

- any academic training (specialized courses or specific professors) that will help you conduct this research;
- any non-academic experience that qualifies you for the project;
 - E.g., you lived in or travelled to the region that you are proposing to study or you were employed by an NGO that worked closely with the community you wish to study.
- language skills you possess appropriate to the proposed project;
- special access to resources (for example, as an insider, you might have access to data that outsiders are not allowed to see);
- any other skills, experience, or access to resources that would make you a “good fit” for this study.

Positionality. Finally, you should address the issue of “positionality” in your proposed project. What challenges and opportunities does your position in society present for your ability to conduct this research? In terms of the community you wish to study, are you an “insider” or “outsider”? What impact will that have on your project? Will issues such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religion affect how you will conduct this research? Are there unequal power dynamics that may challenge the ethical or scholarly integrity of your study?

Concluding remarks. While there is no template for a successful dissertation project proposal—or for a successful dissertation, for that matter—a solid proposal must inform the community of what question you will answer, how you will answer it, why the answer matters, and why you are the best person to answer that particular question.

Oral Presentations of Dissertation Proposals

The Joint Committee organizes and moderates an event allowing students who have passed both of their Comprehensive Exams to present a draft of their dissertation project proposal. This event usually takes place in the sixth semester after most students have completed their Field Exams.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an occasion for collegial reflection and feedback about the dissertation project proposal before it is submitted for approval by the Joint Committee (usually in the seventh semester). Hence the Joint Committee will invite the candidates, their supervisors and committee members, all members of the religion departments of both institutions (including adjunct members), and other interested faculty and students to participate. It is recommended that first year doctoral students (students in the third semester of their program) attend the oral presentations.

The Joint Committee shall set the parameters for oral presentations but, normally, candidates will be allotted 20 minutes or so to present their proposal, followed by discussion from audience members who may question any part of the project (theory, method, data set, guiding questions, ethics, feasibility, etc.). The spirit of the discussion period is one of positive critique and helpful suggestion. This is not an examination.

The presentation of the dissertation project proposal should address what question you will answer, how you will answer it, why the answer matters, and how you are qualified to answer that particular question (see guidelines in previous section). The presentation should be prepared in close consultation with the supervisor(s) and other committee members.

The presentation of the dissertation project proposal is not graded, not even on a pass/fail basis. However, in making its decision on whether to approve the final dissertation project proposal (usually in the seventh semester), the Joint Committee may consider if the candidate has responded effectively to criticisms and comments made at the oral presentation event.

Dissertation Project Proposal Cover Sheet

[Dissertation Title]

[Personal Data]

Student's name (printed)

email address

I approve this proposal and recommend its acceptance by the Joint Committee, thus authorizing the commencement of dissertation research and writing.

Signatures and dates of the supervisory committee:

Faculty Name (printed)

Signature

Date

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Public Presentations

Two of the founding values of the Joint Laurier-Waterloo Doctoral Program in Religious Diversity in North America are civic responsibility and public intelligibility. From the beginning, the program emphasized that scholarship should in some way be of value to society and, in order to serve that role, had to be presented in a manner that a non-specialist, educated audience could understand it. This idea of rendering scholarship accessible to a non-specialist audience also serves the purpose of promoting interdisciplinary research, since even scholars who are not immersed in the particular discourse of religious studies (or its many sub-discourses) need to be presented with an accessible version of highly specialized research.

Benefits of the Public Presentation

- Allows students to contribute to public debates on religious diversity
- Promotes connection between scholarship and civic responsibility
- Provides education opportunities for specific groups and communities
- Trains students for public policy work or other work in public fields
- Sharpens communication and teaching skills
- Gets students thinking about writing the dissertation as a book
- Trains students to present material to an interdisciplinary audience

Timing of the Public Presentation:

- The following guidelines apply:
 - Since you are presenting *your* research, the presentation should happen near to the end of your research. *We suggest this be completed in or by the Fall semester of the student's fourth year. However, it must be completed at the very latest by the final term of your studies, before you graduate.*
 - It is up to the supervisor to decide if a student is ready to address this milestone. Again, a conversation should be had about whether the student is ready to complete this milestone in the Fall semester of the student's fourth year.
 - Some things to consider about timing:
 - A presentation at an earlier time has the advantage that feedback from the public could direct the candidate to new sources of information or could add a new perspective.
 - A presentation at a later stage in research has the advantage of giving the candidate more material to present and more confidence in their conclusions. It would be more useful to the public audience.
 - Only under the most exceptional circumstances should the public presentation come after the dissertation has been defended.

Organizing the Public Presentation

- The student is responsible for organizing the public presentation.
- Look for a *public* audience. Avoid inviting only fellow scholars and specialists.
 - Try to generate a decently sized audience, i.e., do not limit yourself to a small, particular audience. For example, a talk on Mormons in Canada may be “intelligible” to a small group of non-professional Mormon historians or church employees, but we hope to define the term *public* more broadly.
- Hold the event off campus—or at least a publicly accessible place on campus (a public lecture hall instead of an obscure classroom).
 - Past examples: Canadian Forces base, public library, church assembly hall, seniors’ educational program (e.g., Third Age Learning).
- Schedule it for a time that the public will be available to come (avoid M-F, 9 am-5 pm).
 - Avoid public and religious holidays, March Break in public schools, and, if you can, the months of July, August, and December.
- Provide a welcoming environment.
 - Install signs directing the audience to the venue.
 - Some have provided refreshments, put up a display related to the topic, etc.
 - Have a moderator to introduce you, moderate questions, and thank the audience at the end.
- Publicize effectively
 - Publicity should start at least six weeks in advance.
 - Publicize the event in social media and other forums at least four weeks in advance.
 - Distribute flyers and posters broadly.
- Invite students and faculty in the program and related fields.

Craft your presentation appropriately.

- Do not “dumb down” your work even though must present it in an accessible way. The purpose of this exercise is to offer substantial and serious scholarship to a public audience. This is not a dissertation defense.
 - For example, you may present your research, but do not be afraid to speculate about related questions, take a stand on issues, or explain the significance of your study (if any) for broader public policy or other purposes.
- Use audio/visual material as appropriate to your material.
- Do not be afraid to be entertaining.

Requirements

- The student must approach the supervisor with a plan to make a public presentation.
 - The supervisor decides that the student is at an appropriate stage in their research to undertake a public presentation.
- The student must organize the venue, publicity, audio-visual equipment (if any), etc.

Evaluation

- The supervisor must attend the public event and should offer feedback to the candidate afterwards.
 - If the supervisor cannot attend, another member of the committee should.
 - If no one can attend (for example, for a student who has moved away), the supervisor or committee member should participate remotely or the event should be video recorded (including a shot of the audience).
 - It is best that other members of the supervisory committee could attend.

- Evaluation is made by the supervisory committee (although only the supervisor or one member of the committee is required to attend).
- Evaluation is on a pass/fail basis
- Criteria for evaluation
 - Was there a sufficient audience? (Was it an appropriate audience? Was it large enough? Was it a *public* rather than *specialist* audience? Were attempts made to promote diversity in the audience?)
 - Was the presented material appropriate?
 - Was the research solid?
 - Was the presentation accessible?
 - Was the audience engaged?
- After the presentation, the Supervisor shall report to the director of the Joint PhD program as well as the Graduate Officer and Administrative Assistant of the department in which the student is registered that the milestone has been reached.
- Laurier students must register for RE 898 for the term in which they are giving the public presentation while Waterloo University students will follow the procedure to record this as a program milestone.

Teaching and Teaching Assistantships

Doctoral candidates are expected to serve at least two years as teaching and/or research assistants and ideally teach at least one course. Teaching assistantships require work an average of 10 hours per week or 260 per year.

In the first term of their program, they should attend orientation sessions for TAs and abide by WLU and UW guidelines.

Both universities offer substantial resources to assist teaching assistants as well as candidates preparing for careers in university teaching.

Dissertation Guidelines

Dissertations submitted for a PhD in Religious Diversity in North America are typically structured as a monograph that makes an original and important contribution to their field. They have at least four or five chapters, which together address a central question, providing answers to that question (i.e., sustaining an argument) by drawing on evidence collected through original research. The monograph format also requires an introduction and conclusion, as well as conventional formatting (title page, abstract, citations, and reference list following a proper academic style). These are guidelines and not requirements. Students are expected to consult with their supervisors, committee members, and graduate coordinators in preparing for and writing their dissertations.

All dissertation projects are subject to research ethics protocols as specified by the policies set out by the university where they are registered (WLU/UW):

<https://students.wlu.ca/academics/research/human-research/research-ethics-board-review.html>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics>

The candidate must defend the dissertation orally after it has been approved for a formal defense by the candidate's supervisory committee and graduate coordinator.

For more information, please consult the general dissertation guidelines of your university:

<https://academic-calendar.wlu.ca/section.php?cal=3&s=950&ss=3969&y=80>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/thesis>

For examples, please see dissertations completed by graduates from both Laurier and Waterloo:

<https://wlu.ca/programs/arts/graduate/religious-studies-phd/dissertations.html>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/religious-studies-phd/completed-phd-dissertations>