

## MA Religions and Cultures Thesis Option est. 2024 DEPARTMENT GUIDELINES

The MA program prepares students to see religious and cultural phenomena in a broad perspective and to develop knowledge and skills that will be useful for a variety of careers in a globalized world. The goal is to qualify students for an academic or applied path. Students who wish to go on to advanced study in particular religious traditions or cultural-geographic areas are advised to begin language study as soon as possible. Language credits do not count toward the MA program unless they are at an advanced level.

When students enter the program, they are assigned an advisor, who normally oversees their thesis. (Advisors may be changed during the program, depending on the interests of the student and availability of faculty members.) Students undertaking field work for the thesis may be required to acquire ethics approval.

The program totals 45 credits. There is one required course, RELI 6001, Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, and four elective courses. Two research preparation exercises, the thesis Proposal, and the thesis account for the rest of the credits. These components are described below.

Every student must meet with the Graduate Program Director (GPD) at least once per year for advising, registration, and progress update.

### PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Students normally take RELI 6001, Method and Theory, in the fall term of their first year. A common path in the first year is to also take Research Preparation I and one elective in the fall term, and Research Preparation II along with two electives in the winter term. This leaves one elective to be taken in any term of the second year. Although students usually register for the Thesis (RELI 6033) in the winter term of the second year, **work on the thesis should begin immediately following submission of the Thesis Proposal**, with a view to completing the program in two years. A diagram of the usual path is below. Students may follow different paths, for instance if they wish to proceed more slowly or take a term to do research abroad. Note that summer is also an official term. Students sometimes do a “research preparation” course in the summer term or take a course when available.

YEAR ONE, FALL TERM RELI 6001, Method and Theory in the Study of Religion (3 credits) RELI 6022 Research Preparation I (3 credits) PASS/FAIL One elective (3 credits)	YEAR ONE, WINTER TERM RELI 6023 Research Preparation II PASS/FAIL (3 credits) Two electives (6 credits)
YEAR TWO, FALL TERM RELI 6030 Thesis Proposal (3 credits) One elective (3 credits) in this or winter term	YEAR TWO, WINTER TERM RELI 6033 Thesis (21 credits) One elective (3 credits) in this or fall term

- **RELI 6022 RESEARCH PREPARATION I** (3 credits) PASS/FAIL

**Calendar description:** In this initial phase of the research preparation, students, under the guidance of their supervisor, develop and submit a statement describing the scope and content of their intended thesis research.

**Further Department guidelines:** Students engage in discussion with their advisors to identify and survey the general area they will work in for their thesis. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the advisor for an initial meeting. Students may go so far as to define a topic and approach if these are clearly enough in view. A brief (500 word) statement with the scope, content and a working title is to be submitted by the end of the term. Students whose thesis might include fieldwork (which usually takes the form of interviews) should familiarize themselves with the requirements for Ethics certification, as the process of writing up an Ethics application and acquiring approval through the Office of Research takes some time.

- **RELI 6023 RESEARCH PREPARATION II** (3 credits) PASS/FAIL

**Calendar description:** This course continues to prepare students for the Thesis. Students develop an annotated bibliography and submit it to the supervisor.

**Further Department guidelines:** Students submit an annotated bibliography of approximately 10 titles relevant to their area of research or topic of their Guided Research Paper. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the advisor for an initial meeting, in which key items may be suggested and research strategies discussed. It is not expected that students will have completely read each item listed in the bibliography. Generally assessing the item should be enough for a brief annotation, including stating how it is relevant to the research. Attendance at a research training session conducted by the library may be assigned as part of the research preparation.

With the agreement of a student and their advisor, an elective course may be substituted for the second or both Research Preparations. This may be beneficial for students completing a shorter thesis, especially if the thesis does not involve fieldwork requiring an ethics review.

- **RELI 6030 THESIS PROPOSAL** (3 credits) PASS/FAIL

**Calendar description:** Students submit a thesis proposal on a topic chosen in consultation with the thesis supervisor, to be approved by the Graduate Program Director or the Department's Graduate Studies Committee. A thesis proposal outlines the student's proposed research, locates that research in relation to existing scholarship, clarifies methodology and research questions, and includes a bibliography of at least ten academic sources along with any primary materials such as editions of critical texts.

**Further Department guidelines:** Students are encouraged to use the summer following their first year to make progress on developing their thesis proposal. This allows work on the thesis to begin sooner.

- **RELI 6033 THESIS** (21 credits) ACCEPT/REJECT

**Calendar description:** The thesis is a work of original research on an aspect of one or more religious traditions or cultural concerns in the past or in contemporary times. Theses are examined by two readers.

- **Further Department guidelines:** Theses range from approximately 12,000 to 30,000 words in length. Theses are assessed by the advisor and a second reader from the department, elsewhere in the university, or another institution. The two readers may assess the thesis as “Accepted as Submitted” (which can include small changes such as fixing footnotes or word choices); “Accepted with Minor Modifications” (a number of more consequential edits, and perhaps adding in some references to scholarship); or “Accepted with Major Modifications” (more significant revisions required). The assessment of both readers and specific suggestions and requirements for revision should be communicated by the advisor through email to the student, MA Graduate Program Director, and Graduate Program Assistant. If major modifications are required, the revised thesis must be re-submitted within a maximum time of one year.

There is a precise format, process and deadlines for submitting the thesis; see <https://www.concordia.ca/sgs/thesis-office/masters-thesis-route.html> (note, however, that the Department of Religions and Cultures does not require a defence). Theses must be made publicly available on *Spectrum*, the Concordia University Research Repository; see <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/> for the required process. The title of the Thesis will appear on the student's transcript.