

Advising Guidelines of the Department of Religious Studies

This Graduate Student Handbook is meant to guide students through the PhD program in the Department of Religious Studies. While the following sections are organized by academic year and focus on the year-by-year activities of students and advisers in our program, this section will focus on the advising structures and resources available to students. It includes information about the advising relationships students will form at each stage of their time at Yale, the responsibilities of graduate students and their advisers, as well as the responsibilities of the ADGS, the DGS and the department at-large. This section should also answer questions about what to do when students have concerns either about academic or personal matters or about their advising relationships.

The Department of Religious Studies is committed to confronting and contesting racism, anti-Blackness, and the legacies of colonialism. Our goal is to interrogate how the study of religion, in its historical constitution and current practices, contributes to systems of inequity in structures of evaluation, curation of ideas, and mechanisms for the development of intellectual leaders. We strive to create a collaborative environment that supports and empowers all our members and that fosters debate on the ethical implications of intellectual engagement.

We encourage both students and faculty to recognize each other holistically, as people with non-academic responsibilities. We wish to create an inclusive teaching and studying environment and encourage students to speak out in case they encounter discrimination, have Title IX concerns, need accommodations due to disability, or otherwise wish to discuss a situation. Students and faculty should be aware of the Graduate School's (GSAS) [Guide to Advising Processes for Faculty and Students](#).

Advising Structure

1. Adviser of record

The Department of Religious Studies encourages doctoral students to work with multiple faculty throughout their coursework, qualifying exams, and dissertation writing.

Pre-candidacy, the adviser of record is typically the ADGS of the student's primary subfield. Formal advising meetings are held at least twice per year (once per semester). At those meetings, one of two options is available. Either the student, in consultation with the ADGS, selects one or more other faculty members to be present, or the advising meetings are held with the entire teaching faculty in the subfield present.

Post-candidacy, the adviser of record is the dissertation adviser (or advisers, when dissertations are co-advised). Selection of the dissertation adviser(s) is done by the student no later than at the defense of their dissertation prospectus. The committee that examines the dissertation prospectus is made up of 3-4 faculty (one, or in some cases two, of whom may be selected from outside Yale in consultation with the student's primary adviser(s)). The dissertation committee consists of faculty who are committed to help guide the student through the dissertation completion progress, both in terms of substance and process. Students are encouraged to work closely with committee members throughout the completion of the dissertation.

2. Adviser selection

During coursework, students are encouraged to take some of their courses with faculty who are possible dissertation advisers and committee members. Getting to know relevant faculty helps students envision the fit between their interests and those of faculty. Coursework and qualifying exams offer opportunities for students and faculty to interact in both formal and informal settings so that students can feel confident in their adviser selection.

3. Changing Advisers

For various reasons, it can become necessary to change advisers along the way, due to irreconcilable differences, an adviser leaving for another institution, new and relevant faculty arriving, a shift in student interests, or other circumstances.

Pre-candidacy, when the ADGS is the adviser of record, a student who wishes to make a change should consult the DGS, who can assist the student in determining whether a primary subfield switch is appropriate as well as helping the student to identify which faculty members should be involved in the advising process.

Post-candidacy, the DGS and/or the ADGS of the subfield assists the student in identifying and approaching the new adviser. In cases where the adviser and ADGS are the same person, the DGS assists the student similarly. If the DGS is also serving as ADGS for the subfield and as the student's adviser, the department chair guides the student through the process. If the switch is initiated by the adviser, they should begin by consulting the ADGS for the subfield to determine who another appropriate adviser might be. In order to enable clear communication, the ADGS remains available for consultation by both student and adviser throughout the process of switching to a new adviser. If the ADGS and the adviser are the same person, the DGS serves in a similar way. If the DGS is also serving as ADGS for the subfield and as the student adviser, the department chair guides the student through the process. The DGS is always available for consultation regarding any questions or problems that might arise; for any concerns involving the DGS, the department chair serves as the point of contact.

4. Other Mentorship

The Department of Religious Studies practices collaborative mentoring at every stage of a student's progression through the degree program. Students are highly encouraged to reach out to any faculty who might interest them or who they think might be helpful for their professional development.

5. Dissertation Committee Selection

The dissertation committee is typically selected in close collaboration between the student and their primary adviser(s). Attention should be paid to the composition of the committee, ensuring that the student's areas of interest are adequately covered. The student should expect to meet with their primary adviser(s) at least a few times per semester and should expect either oral feedback (in the form of an extended discussion) or written feedback within a reasonable time whenever the student submits written work. The frequency of meetings with other members of the dissertation committee is up to the student, but at least occasional meetings are expected. If a dissertation is being co-advised, it is typically helpful to meet with both advisers at once in order to prevent cross-communication. Although there is often overlap between a dissertation committee and the readers of a dissertation, the adviser(s) and student may identify other readers for field-specific reasons or due to changes in faculty composition during the course of dissertation writing.

6. Other Departmental Advising Roles

The Graduate Registrar (Heather Roberts) is the primary point of contact for deadlines, registration, dissertation submission, and other formal matters. The Operations Manager (Lauren Gonzalez) deals with various practical matters for the department and also assists the Registrar.

7. Professional Development and Job Market Advising

Candidates' first point of contact for job market advising is their dissertation advisor and the ADGS for their subfield. They assist candidates in determining their fit with academic jobs as well as in developing and polishing application materials, which are typically workshopped in subfield-specific contexts. All faculty are encouraged to help students identify potentially publishable papers and to guide them through the process of submitting and revising journal articles. Subfields typically also workshop proposals for the American Academy of Religion conference and other relevant conferences. The Yale Seminar in Religious Studies and other ad-hoc colloquia may offer advice on publishing (such as turning a dissertation into a monograph) or on seeking non-academic jobs. In addition, students are highly encouraged to take advantage of workshops and resources offered by the Office of Career Strategy (<https://ocs.yale.edu>).

8. Funding Structure.

Doctoral students in the Department of Religious Studies are included in Yale's six-year funding package for graduate students in the Humanities, described here: <https://gsas.yale.edu/resources-students/finances-fellowships/funding-phd-students>. Students typically teach in their 3rd, 4th, and 6th year (6th-year funding is described here: <https://gsas.yale.edu/resources-students/finances-fellowships/funding-phd-students/sixth-year-funding-initiative>), although in individual cases some students will take their University Dissertation Fellowship either earlier or later than the 5th year.

9. Time to Degree.

The standard time to degree is six years (outside of leaves). In some circumstances, candidates require more time to finish the dissertation, for example, in order to complete more research.

10. Work-Life Balance Expectations.

Doctoral students are encouraged to develop sustainable working habits early in their doctoral study and are encouraged to consult their advisers, their ADGS, or the DGS if they are finding sustainability difficult (for example, if an adviser expects working hours that eat into students' capacity to take care of their mental or physical health or that eats too far into their family/social life). Sustainable and consistent working habits, with breaks timed around the academic calendar or other appropriate markers of accomplishment (the completion of qualifying exams, for example), are vital for student health and success and the department is committed to student wellbeing in this regard.

11. Communication Expectations.

Doctoral students and advisers are expected to be in regular communication throughout the program, with frequency and type of communication determined by where students are in their program as well as by individual needs and preferences. Advisers are encouraged to make clear to students what their availability is and their preferred form of communication (no email on weekends, phone vs Zoom vs in person meetings, etc), while students are encouraged to describe their communication needs to their advisers. Collaboratively, advisers and students should establish clear expectations on both sides for the frequency and speed of communication.

12. Remediation.

If either a student or an adviser is not meeting the responsibilities outlined below, the first point of contact should be either the ADGS or the DGS. If the DGS is involved in the situation, the first point of contact should be the Department Chair. Either party may initiate a meeting with the relevant person, and students are encouraged to identify another faculty person who they feel comfortable with who may attend either the initial meeting where concerns are raised and/or a follow-up meeting/meetings to establish a plan of action in the situation. The DGS (or Department Chair, if DGS is involved) will make every effort to assist in remedying the situation, including mediating between parties or identifying alternative faculty resources (for the student) or assisting in clarifying the responsibilities of and resources available to students who are struggling to meet the requirements of the program.

Individual Responsibilities

This section of the advising guidelines outlines for students and advisers how to approach their advising relationship and helps students understand what they can expect from various advisers.

Responsibilities of the Student

1. Complete academic requirements by the given deadlines. The Graduate School set certain deadlines for the completion of a student's coursework, the Qualifying Exams, and the Thesis Prospectus. In addition to these formal deadlines we expect students to also complete the requirements for courses. The Department requires students to take 12 courses for credit.
2. While you are taking courses, meet with your ADGS and one (or more) other faculty member(s) at least once during the semester, preferably early on in the semester to discuss your choice of courses.
3. Maintain clear communication with the adviser(s) and help establish good practices for scheduling meetings. Be clear about limitations to your schedule, especially regarding religious observance or family obligations. Keep in mind that your advisor(s) may have similar limitations.
4. Discuss research expectations with the adviser(s) no later than during your third year. This should include topics such as time spent on outside collaboration, and time spent on professional development.
5. Submit materials with enough time for proper faculty review and response. As a rule of thumb give faculty two weeks to read and respond to your material (unless otherwise agreed upon). These materials may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Dissertation chapters
 - b. Material for discussion at regular meetings
 - c. Requests for letters of recommendation
6. Submit Dissertation Progress Reports (DPR) in a timely manner.
7. Keep the adviser(s) aware of upcoming deadlines, meetings, and other responsibilities. Be proactive in the advising relationship. For example, take the initiative to arrange meetings, keep the adviser informed of any circumstances that might affect academic progress, come prepared to advising meetings, consult with the adviser about presenting or publishing work.

8. Remain open to feedback and be willing to discuss difficult academic ideas and differences of opinion.
9. Commit to regular attendance at departmental talks and events according to departmental and adviser expectations.
10. Welcome prospective students and help them understand departmental or research group practices and culture.
11. Finalize membership of the dissertation committee with the help of the primary adviser(s).
12. Discuss your funding structure with your adviser and understand when this structure may change.
Talk with your adviser(s) and/or the DGS about possible sources of funding outside the university.
13. Consider career goals and discuss them with the adviser(s) and ADGS by the beginning of admission to candidacy.
14. As you advance to candidacy, establish your expected timeline towards degree, and come to a consensus about these expectations with your adviser(s) and dissertation committee.
15. Be aware of mental health and wellness resources offered by the university.
16. Meet with the DGS, ADGS, and/or dissertation committee members to intercede if issues arise related to the adviser(s)'s responsibilities.

Responsibilities of the Adviser(s) and Co-Adviser(s)

1. Establish expectations with each student for communication, including the preferred means (e.g. email, text, phone, etc.), the best contact times, and shared expectations around response times.
2. Establish expectations with each student for how often you will meet to discuss the student's work.
Dissertation advisor(s) should meet regularly with their advisees and discuss the students' progress.
3. Communicate with your students about reasonable working hours, amounts of time for vacation, and other activities necessary for students' mental and physical health.
4. Be cognizant of limitations to the student's schedule, including religious observance and family obligations, while establishing responsibilities #1-3.
5. Understand the required department and GSAS milestones for students in your program. Recognize when completion of these requirements may require an adjustment to research responsibilities, such as when a student must reduce time devoted to research to prepare for a qualifying exam.
6. Help the student develop an individualized timeline for completing academic requirements and meeting professional goals.
7. Discuss career goals and opportunities with the student early in their graduate career (by the beginning of admission to candidacy at the latest) and continue these discussions regularly. In particular, discuss opportunities to attend conferences and to submit publications to help advance students' careers.

8. Discuss research expectations with the student early in their graduate career. This should include topics such time spent on outside collaboration, and time spent on professional development.
9. Give clear, constructive, and timely feedback on the student's work. In particular, give feedback and approve the prospectus and the dissertation, complete Dissertation Progress Reports, and review all related written work by the appropriate deadlines.
10. Assist the student and consult with them when they choose other members of the Dissertation Committee.
11. Read the Dissertation Progress Report (DPR) and provide written feedback.
12. Discuss with each student their individual funding structure, making clear when they need to teach or fulfil other responsibilities outside their research to receive their stipends.
13. Be familiar with mental health resources offered by the university so that you can suggest them if your student approaches you for help.
14. Discuss with the DGS, ADGS, and/or dissertation committee members if issues arise related to the student's responsibilities.
15. Remain open to feedback and be willing to discuss difficult academic ideas and differences of opinion in order to facilitate all students' success.

Responsibilities of the Dissertation Committee

1. Meet with the student to discuss the dissertation prospectus.
2. Come to committee meetings having reviewed all relevant materials.
3. Review the prospectus and dissertation within the amount of time established by the relevant subfield guidelines and practices (between two weeks and a month is a reasonable rule of thumb, depending on length of materials as well as time of year).
4. Provide support for the student if there is tension between the adviser and the student.
5. Establish a timeline to graduation with the student and work with the student and adviser(s) to ensure this timeline is followed.
6. Indicate any other program-specific responsibilities of the Dissertation Committee.

Responsibilities of the Assistant Director of Graduate Studies (ADGS)

1. Ensure that students know how to access policies and procedures and are informed of any updates. Distribute information to individual student cohorts regarding relevant milestones and opportunities. Ensure student cohorts and their advisers understand expectations and process for completing these milestones.

2. Schedule appointments with first- and second-year students for the beginning of the semester and include at least one other faculty member in these meetings. Meet with students in the higher years in regular intervals (at least once per year, with the possibility of greater frequency as needed and desired).
4. Schedule a group meeting for graduate students in your field of study once or twice a year. This can be an informal meeting at the beginning of the academic year, for instance.
5. In collaboration with other relevant faculty and the adviser, advise on the job market and career paths, including participation in conferences and professional meetings.
6. Offer guidance to students about the process of identifying a new adviser if the adviser and the student have irreconcilable differences, the student's focus has changed, the adviser leaves Yale, etc.
7. Provide formal or informal exit interviews with graduating students for feedback on department guidelines/practices. For example, were the responsibilities of student, adviser, DGS, and thesis committee met? Were timelines reasonable? How could the program improve the advising/mentoring experience?

Responsibilities of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

1. Run a student orientation for incoming graduate students and ensure that students know how to access policies and procedures and are informed of any updates. Distribute information to individual student cohorts regarding relevant milestones and opportunities. Ensure student cohorts and their advisers understand expectations and process for completing these milestones.
2. Identify whom students can turn to (DGS, ADGS, Chair, GSAS Deans, etc.) if challenges arise in working with their adviser and be familiar with other University resources for student support (Dean's Designees, Title IX office, Office of Institutional Equity and Access, etc.).
3. Know who the student leaders of the program are and meet with them regularly. (A leader may be the student representative for the Graduate Student Assembly [GSA] or other appointed or elected student[s] in the program.)
4. Offer guidance to students about the process of identifying a new adviser if the adviser and the student have irreconcilable differences, the student's focus has changed, the adviser leaves Yale, etc.
5. Reach out to students when problems between them and their advisor(s) become apparent. Address the students' concerns and try to develop equitable channels of communication between them and their advisor(s), ADGS, or dissertation committee members.
6. Explain to students what happens if they are not demonstrating adequate progress toward a degree or do not pass qualifying exams.
7. Explain the Dissertation Progress Report (DPR) and its usefulness to advisers and students. Make sure students, advisers, and the DGS complete their portions of the DPR by the required deadline.
8. If a student is not making sufficient progress toward the degree or producing quality work, make sure that this information is communicated in writing to the student, along with necessary steps to remain or

return to good academic standing, including deadlines and consequences for failure to meet these requirements.