

**Macalester College  
Religious Studies Department  
Honors Program**

**General**

The honors program in Religious Studies gives students an opportunity to do advanced work in Religious Studies and to make an original contribution to the discipline. The honors program involves a year of intensive writing and research in which students work closely with a member of the Department to write a thesis. Students may take up to six credits of independent work in order to write the thesis. Students normally begin in the spring of their junior year by selecting an honors advisor in the Religious Studies Department who will help develop an honors proposal.

**The Honors Thesis**

While honors theses in Religious Studies vary, typical theses are focused on a single scholarly issue. They usually have an introduction and several chapters. The introduction typically does three things: provides an explanation of the issue and discusses why the issue is important, states the original thesis to be defended, and states what the various chapters are about. There is also typically a chapter that considers previous attempts to deal with the issue, and reviews the relevant scholarly literature. Finally, of course, there is a chapter devoted to defending the main position or thesis. Most honors theses are between 60 and 100 pages in length.

**The Oral Exam**

When the honors thesis is completed, the student defends it at an oral examination conducted by the Honors Examination Committee. The committee will be made up of the advisor (a member of the Religious Studies Department) and two other faculty, one of which may be from another institution. At the conclusion of the oral examination, the committee may accept the thesis, reject the thesis, or ask that the thesis be further revised and resubmitted.

## **Requirements for the Senior Honors Thesis**

The Department of Religious Studies reserves the senior honors thesis for those students who demonstrate academic excellence in the major or the minor. In order to provide students with the best possible direction from faculty, the department faculty has set the following criteria for those who wish to write the thesis:

- 1) They must have majored or minored in the discipline and be completing their junior year or entering their senior year.
- 2) They must have a GPA of 3.6 in the major or minor and 3.3 overall.
- 3) They must have demonstrated in previous coursework sufficient research and writing skills to complete the necessary research and to argue a clearly articulated thesis in a sustained fashion.
- 4) They must submit in writing a proposal, 400 to 600 words in length, on a topic in which they clearly have a keen interest.
- 5) Students must find a faculty member within the department able and willing to direct the student on her or his topic. Please note that individual faculty members have the right of refusal.
- 6) They must take responsibility for filling out all appropriate forms and meeting any general requirements specified by the Office of Academic Programs.

Students may petition the department to be an exception to policy, provided they have one faculty member's support in writing.

## Schedule

*If any of the dates listed below fall on a weekend, then the deadline will be the following Monday.*

**May 1:** The honors proposal is due (see attached form). The proposals should state the nature of the thesis, and the student's background for pursuing the project. The proposal must be submitted to the department chair and the advisor and be approved by both. Forms are available from the Religious Studies Department Coordinator. [December graduates should turn in their proposals December 1 of their junior year.]

**October 1:** A full thesis proposal and an annotated bibliography is due. The bibliography should be based on research done over the summer as well as any research done the previous spring. The names of those students whose projects have been approved by the chair and advisor will be forwarded to the Dean of Academic Programs. [For December graduates the due date is March 15.]

**December 1:** A report on the work completed for the honors thesis is due. The report should review the research that has been completed, update the annotated bibliography, and set out a time table for completion of the honors thesis. In addition, the report should contain a draft of a chapter of the thesis. [For December graduates the due date is September 1.]

**January 31:** The honors advisor submits the names of students who are approved to continue work on the honors thesis. By this date, the student and advisor should agree upon the members of the student's Honors Examination Committee. [For December graduates the due date is September 15.]

**April 1:** The completed thesis should be submitted to the members of the student's Honors Examination Committee and a date for the oral examination will be set. [For December graduates the due date is November 1.]

**April 20:** The Honors Advisor will inform the Dean of Academic Programs whether the student will be graduating with honors. [For December graduates the due date is December 1.]

**Proposal for Honors in Religious Studies**

*This form is due May 1 and is to be completed by the student applying for honors in the Religious Studies Department. Please complete the form and give copies to the department chair and your advisor as well as keeping a copy for yourself.*

1. What is the nature of your honors thesis?

2. How do you plan to proceed with the research and writing of the thesis?

3. How has your background prepared you to complete the proposed project?  
(In answering this question be sure to list the Religious Studies courses that you are taking or are have taken.)

4. Who is your honors advisor?

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Signature of Honors Advisor