

2024

# Handbook for the Department of Religious Studies



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER  
UNIVERSITY



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Chair

Religious Studies Department

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Department of Religious Studies is committed to offering intellectually stimulating instruction and an enriching environment to all students in its courses. This Handbook will enable us to achieve these goals more efficiently. All students following an honours or advanced major in Religious Studies shall receive a copy of this Handbook, and all staff members shall also receive a copy.

Although care has been taken to include or refer the reader to all relevant information, members of the Department, whether students or staff, are individually responsible for adhering to the responsibilities and regulations that apply to them, as set out in the

University Calendar and elsewhere. Suggestions for improving this Handbook are welcome and may be directed to the Chair.

## THE WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department focuses on the role which religion has played and continues to play in the life of the individual and society. Religion addresses itself to fundamental questions relating to the meaning of human existence. Religious answers to these questions reflect the encounter between human beings and the transcendent. The Department's courses, therefore, examine the relationship between religion and society, recognizing that the answers provided by religions are both shaped by and shape the society of which they are a part.

The Department's courses are intended for a broad range of undergraduate students who may also complete a major, an advanced major, or honours program in Religious Studies. Students in other disciplines can expect their appreciation of these disciplines to be enriched through a study of religion. Courses will be of interest both to students who are associated with a particular religious tradition as well as to students who have no formal religious affiliation.



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# ORGANIZATION OF THE FACULTY



## 1. COMPLEMENT

- 1.1. The Department normally has a complement of six full-time faculty members. The responsibilities of the faculty are contained in the *Collective Agreement*. This section addresses itself only to the departmental responsibilities of those who have a particular role within the Department, namely the Chair and the Library Representative.

## 2. CHAIR

- 2.1. The Chair is appointed by the President of the University for a renewable three-year term after consultation with the appropriate Dean and, by letter, with all members of the Department and senior honours students in the Department.
- 2.2. The Chair is generally responsible for carrying out the policies and programs of the Department's faculty.
- 2.3. According to the Collective Agreement (2.0.2, 2.2), the Chair, among other specific duties, shall:
  - 2.3.1. convoke at least two meetings of their faculty during the academic year for the discussion of the objectives of the Department and the implementation of those objectives;
  - 2.3.2. in consultation with the Dean of their faculty and with their Department determine the courses of instruction to be offered by the Department in each academic year and allocate instructors of those courses;
  - 2.3.3. provide some supervision for all students doing majors or honours programs in his/her Department;
  - 2.3.4. be responsible for the recruitment and selection of qualified staff in the Department; be responsible for the assessment of members of their Department and submission of such to their Dean;

- 2.3.5. have general supervision over the instruction and research of the Department;
  - 2.3.6. be responsible for the preparation of relevant materials for the University Calendar.
- 2.4. In accordance with the particular needs of the Department, the Chair shall:
- 2.4.1. be responsible for public information about the Department, such as the Home Page and social media;
  - 2.4.2. see that all staff members as well as advanced major and honours students in the Department receive a copy of the Department Handbook.

### **3. LIBRARY REPRESENTATIVE**

- 3.1. The responsibilities of the Library Representative are:
- 3.1.1. to act generally as a liaison between the Department and the University Library;
  - 3.1.2. to forward requests from the Department's faculty to the appropriate Library staff.

# PROGRAMS



## 4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1. Students following a major in a subject other than Religious Studies may take one or more courses in Religious Studies as an elective; four courses as a Religious Studies pair; or eight courses for a minor. Religious Studies may also be chosen as a subsidiary subject in an honours program.
- 4.2. Students wishing to follow an honours, an honours in Religious Studies with subsidiary, an advanced major, or a major program in Religious Studies shall meet with the Chair of the department in the academic year in which the major or honours is declared, to discuss course patterns. See section 4.1 of the *University Calendar*.
- 4.3. Students who wish to follow the honours or advanced major must consult the Chair of the Department by April 1 of the sophomore year to obtain approval of proposed course patterns, and again by April 1 of the junior year for advice on thesis and senior seminar requirements.

There is no prerequisite for courses in Religious Studies.

- 4.4. Candidates for the BA with an honours or an honours in Religious Studies with subsidiary must take RELS 490 (thesis).

## 5. MAJOR PROGRAM (UNIVERSITY CALENDAR 4.1.4)

- 5.1. In March of their first year, students will be expected to declare major and minor subjects.
- 5.2. The student shall meet with the Chair in the academic year in which the major is declared to discuss future course selection.
- 5.3. The course pattern for a major in Religious Studies is:
  - 36 credits in Religious Studies;
  - 24 credits in another subject, the minor subject;
  - 12 credits in each of two other subjects (two "pairs");
  - 36 credits in electives.
- 5.4. To qualify for a major degree, the candidate must have:
  - fulfilled the course and pattern requirements for the program;
  - fulfilled the course requirements of the Department; and
  - maintained a general average of 55 in their fourth year

## 6. ADVANCED MAJOR PROGRAM

- 6.1. Admission
  - 6.1.1. A student who wishes to follow the advanced major program in Religious Studies should contact the Chair of the Department.
  - 6.1.2. The application form must be signed by the Chair and should be returned to the Dean's office by April 1 of the student's second year.
  - 6.1.3. Students will be advised of their acceptance to the program in the summer following their second year.
  - 6.1.4. The normal admission requirements are:
    - a minimum average of 65 in each of the first and sophomore year;
    - grades of at least 65 in the major subject
- 6.2. A thesis in the form of a research report is required for an advanced major degree.
- 6.3. The course pattern for the advanced major is:
  - 36 credits in Religious Studies;
  - 24 credits in another subject, the minor subject;
  - 12 credits in each of two other subjects (two "pairs");
  - 36 credits in electives.
- 6.4. Completion
  - 6.4.1. To qualify for the advanced major degree, the candidate must have:
    - been admitted to the program;
    - earned an average of 65 in the first two years as well as a minimum grade of 65 in each major course in the first two years
    - earned an average of 70 as well as an average of 70 in the major courses in the last two years,
    - fulfilled the thesis requirements of the Department
  - 6.4.2. A student who fails to satisfy one or more of the requirements for the advanced major degree may be eligible for the major degree.

## 7. HONOURS PROGRAM AND HONOURS WITH SUBSIDIARY

### 7.1. Admission Honours and Honours with Subsidiary

- 7.1.1. A student who wishes to enter the honours program or the honours with subsidiary program in Religious Studies should contact the Chair as soon as possible.
- 7.1.2. The application forms must be signed by the chair and returned to the Dean's office no later than April 1 of the student's second year.
- 7.1.3. Students will be advised of their acceptance into the program in the summer following their sophomore year.
- 7.1.4. The normal admission requirements are:
  - an average of at least 75 in 60 credits completed during the first two years; and
  - an average of at least 75 in all the courses completed in Religious Studies during the first two years.
  - A minimum grade of 70 in each course in the in the honours subject
  - The same admission requirements apply to the subsidiary subject

### 7.2. Course Patterns

- 7.2.1. The course pattern for the honours program is:
  - 60 credits in Religious Studies; with the approval of the Department, up to 12 credits from other departments may be included;
  - 12 credits in each of two other subjects (two "pairs");
  - 36 credits in electives.
- 7.2.2. The course pattern for the honours with subsidiary program is:
  - 48 credits in Religious Studies;
  - 24 credits in the subsidiary subject
  - 12 credits in one other subject ("pair");
  - 12 credits in honours, subsidiary and/or electives
  - 24 credits in electives

### 7.3. Thesis

- 7.3.1. Departmental and University regulations regarding dates for the selection of thesis supervisor and of the choice of topic must be followed.
- 7.3.2. The Department's requirements for the honours thesis are explained below,

### 7.4. Completion

- 7.4.1. To qualify for the honours degree, the candidate must have:
  - been admitted to the program;
  - earned an average of at least 75 in all the courses completed during the four years of the program
  - earned an average of at least 75 in all Religious Studies courses completed during the four years of the program
  - normally earned grades of not less than 70 in each course in Religious Studies;
- 7.4.2. fulfilled the thesis requirements of the Department A student who fails to satisfy one or more of the requirements for the honours degree may be eligible for the advanced major degree, providing the requirements for that degree have been met, or for a major degree.
- 7.4.3. Students may choose the honours program in Religious Studies with a subsidiary subject, or choose Religious Studies as subsidiary. Information about the honours with subsidiary subject is available in the *University Calendar*, section 4.1.5.



# PROCEDURE FOR APPEALS



## 8. RESOLUTION

- 8.1. Students are encouraged to try to resolve disagreements regarding the application of regulations or grades in a course with the faculty member(s) with whom they disagree.

## 9. COMMITTEE ON STUDIES

- 9.1. Decisions resulting from the application of academic regulations may be appealed to the committee on studies of the appropriate faculty.
- 9.2. Appeals must be in writing and must be made within thirty days of the date of notification of the decision.
- 9.3. Further information about an appeal of an academic regulation may be found in the *University Calendar* 3.12.

## 10. LIMITATION

- 10.1. Only final grades can be appealed.
- 10.2. Consult the *University Calendar* 3.13 for the University's grade appeal procedure.

# THESIS



## 11. PREAMBLE

The thesis represents a valuable opportunity for advanced students to gain sophisticated knowledge of a specific topic and to learn in a more profound way the standards of the discipline of religious studies. The main purpose of the thesis is twofold: to prepare students for advanced study and to provide students with an opportunity to do extensive research into an area that interests them. By the end of the process of researching and writing, each student will be able to make a more informed choice about the particular course of study they wish to pursue.

## 12. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- 12.1. All students enrolled in the advanced major or honours program must write a thesis in their senior year.
- 12.2. All advanced major and honours students must meet with the Chair of the Department in March of their junior year to discuss their thesis topics and potential supervisors.
- 12.3. Once a student's topic and supervisor have been approved, the student is responsible for meeting regularly with the supervisor to discuss the thesis.
- 12.4. A thesis can be either a critical review of literature on an issue relevant to religious studies or an historical study of a religiously significant event, theory, or person.

12.5. The student bears primary responsibility for meeting all deadlines.

### 13. CHOICE OF TOPIC

- 13.1. The student is responsible for selecting a topic and for eliciting the approval of the topic from the Chair and from the proposed supervisor.
- 13.2. A student may choose any topic that relates to the study of religion, as long as they can find a supervisor for the topic in the Department.
- 13.3. Religious Studies is a broad discipline that addresses many kinds of issues in many different ways. While the Department strives to accommodate the interests of each student, it is incumbent on the student to develop a specific topic and to justify clearly his or her approach to the topic.
- 13.4. The following list of possible topics indicates both the wide range of possibilities and the need for specificity:
- Historical: "The Roles and Status of Women in the Pauline Churches;" "Aquinas and Luther on Merit;" "The 'Great Awakening' and Canadian Piety."
  - Review of Literature: "Islamic Perspectives on Religious Pluralism;" "Theories of Biblical Inspiration;" "Homosexuality and the Canadian Churches."

### 14. PROPOSAL

- 14.1. All advanced majors and honours students will submit a proposal to their supervisor and the Chair of the Department.
- 14.2. The proposal will be approximately six pages long. It will include:
- a thesis statement identifying the issue the student wishes to address;
  - an explanation of the proposed method;
  - a brief statement of the argument;
  - and a reasonably complete bibliography (2-3 pages).
- 14.3. The proposal is to follow an appropriate format, such as the MLA Manual of Style or the Chicago Manual of Style.
- 14.4. The student will submit the proposal to their supervisor and to the Chair in three stages: (1) a first draft normally by April 1 of the student's third year; (2) a revised proposal by September 15 of their final year; (3) a final version by September 30. At each stage, the supervisor will provide feedback on the proposal within a week.
- 14.5. Along with the proposal, the student shall submit to his/her supervisor an individual timetable specifying deadlines for the parts of the thesis.

### 15. HONOURS

All senior honours students register for RELS 490 (six credits). This will be one of the regular courses taken by the student in their senior year.

- 15.1. Supervision
- 15.1.1. Supervision of Honours theses will be the responsibility of two parties: a) the supervisor and b) the second reader.

15.1.2. The student chooses the supervisor and the second reader, with the consent of each and with the approval of the Chair.

15.1.3. The responsibilities of the supervisor are:

- To notify the student of the regulations governing the thesis, especially the schedule;
- To offer advice and support in arriving at a workable topic and an appropriate bibliography;
- To monitor the student's work as it progresses, and to comment on it in a timely manner;
- To determine, in consultation with the second reader, the final grade of the thesis.

15.1.4. The responsibilities of the second reader are:

- To give advice and support in the writing of the thesis, at the request of either the student or the supervisor;
- To notify the supervisor of any and all meetings with a student concerning the thesis;
- To read the final draft of the thesis;
- To consult the supervisor about the evaluation of the thesis in its final form.

## 15.2. Grading

15.2.1. There are three possible grades: Honours Pass with Distinction (a grade of 85 or higher); Honours Pass (75-84); Fail (below 75).

With the consent of the supervisor and approval of the Chair, a student who entered the course as an honours student is able to receive credit for RELS 490 even if they are unable to complete the thesis.

15.2.2. The written proposal will count for 10% of the grade of the thesis. The grade will be determined by the supervisor in consultation with the Chair.

15.2.3. The final version of the thesis will count for 80% of the grade of the thesis. This grade will be determined by the supervisor, in consultation with the second reader. The supervisor will arrive at the grade using the following scheme: 60% for content; 30% for writing style; and 10% for adherence to the approved format.

15.2.4. The oral defence of the thesis will count for 10% of the grade of the thesis, and will be determined as for the final form of the thesis (5.2.3). The oral defence will be open to the public, and all members of the Department will be among those individually invited to the defence.

15.2.5. The supervisor will determine the grade of the thesis in consultation with the second reader. If there is any question whether to assign a Pass or a Pass with distinction, the supervisor makes the final decision. The supervisor will inform the Chair of the final grade by the last day of final examinations.

## 15.3. Final Form

15.3.1. In its final form, the thesis must be between 35 and 60 pages, with an ideal length of 40-50 pages. It should be an interesting, accurate, and fluid piece of writing, drawing on the best available sources of information and presenting the topic with argumentative clarity and insight.

15.3.2. The final draft of the thesis must be submitted to the supervisor and second reader no later than March 5. The supervisor and second reader must read this draft, make comments and corrections on the draft, and return it to the student no later than March 15. The student must submit the final version of the thesis no later than March 31.

#### 15.4. Defence of Thesis

- 15.4.1. The thesis defence provides the student with an opportunity to describe the outcome of the project and its relationship to scholarship. As well, the student will be given an opportunity to explain the more problematic aspects of their research and answer questions from the audience about the its content.
- 15.4.2. The thesis defence will begin with an opening 10-minute synopsis of the project from the student, followed by discussion.
- 15.4.3. The thesis defence will normally take place no later than the last day of classes.
- 15.4.4. It is the responsibility of the Chair to make arrangements for the defence.

### 16. ADVANCED MAJOR

- 16.1. Supervision of the advanced major thesis is the responsibility of two parties, the supervisor and the second reader.
- 16.2. The supervisor determines the grade for the thesis.
- 16.3. In its final form, the thesis must be between 25-50 pages, with an ideal length of 30-40 pages. It should be an interesting, accurate, and fluid piece of writing, drawing on the best available sources of information and presenting the topic with argumentative clarity and insight.

### 17. SCHEDULE

- 15 March: Third-year honours and advanced major students must have consulted with a potential supervisor and the Chair about a topic by this date.
- 1 April: Deadline for submitting draft of thesis proposal to supervisor and Chair
- 15 September: Submission of revised proposal to supervisor and Chair
- 22 September: Supervisor's report to student (Honours)
- 30 September: Final version of proposal to supervisor and Chair; topic and supervisor approved
- 7 October: Student informed of grade for proposal (Honours); Second reader approved by Chair (Honours)
- 10 February: Final rough draft to supervisor
- 24 February: Final draft to supervisor and second reader
- 4 March: Final draft returned to student for correction
- 18 March: Final version to supervisor and second reader (University regulation)
- On or Before Last Day of Classes: Defence (Honours)
- Before Last Day of April Examinations: Supervisor to inform Chair of grade for RELS 490

## DIRECTED STUDY



### 18. POLICIES

- 18.1. The *University Calendar* 3.5 states: "The directed study course permits a student of exceptional ability and motivation to pursue, on a tutorial basis, an individualized program of study. The program does not provide alternative instruction in areas which are normally offered by the department. A directed study course may earn no more than six credits."
- 18.2. To be eligible for a directed course, the student must have:
- completed 12 credits in the Department;
  - attained a minimum average of 70 in the 12 credits;
  - written consent from the Department
- 18.3. A student interested in such a course should consult with the Department Chair and the appropriate faculty member before April 1 of the preceding year. Formal application must be submitted by the Chair to the appropriate dean at least four weeks prior to commencement of the term. The Chair submits an outline of the study, and lets the Dean know when it is to be offered and to what student (provide the student ID). If the student is already registered in a full course load then they should also identify which course will get dropped or whether it is an overload situation for the student. The outline needs to include a weekly schedule, marking scheme etc.
- 18.4. While the Department does not require students in any of its programs to take a senior seminar or directed course, it does encourage all honours and advanced major students to notify the instructors of their Religious Studies courses that they are pursuing Religious Studies as their major subject.

## PRIZES



The Religious Studies department selects the recipients of the following awards:

- The Camille LeBlanc Prize for first year Religious Studies  
This prize goes to the first-year student with the highest grade in a Religious Studies course.
- The Flying Officer Wallace MacDonald Memorial Prize for third year Religious Studies  
This prize goes to the Junior student making the highest average in Religious Studies courses.
- Annette Ahern Memorial Essay Prize in Religious Studies  
This prize goes to a Senior Student for the best research paper in a third or fourth year Religious Studies course.
- The John and Mary Fraser Prize for Senior Religious Studies.  
This prize goes to the senior student who showed the most proficiency in Religious Studies.

