

**Department of Religion
Rice University**

**Master of Arts Program
Graduate Studies Procedural Handbook
2019-2020**



Department Chair, Elias Kifon Bongmba
Department Director of MA Studies, Claire Fanger

Table of Contents

Welcome Message from the Chair, Elias Kifon Bongmba	3
Welcome Message from the Dept. Director of MA Studies, Claire Fanger	5
Department Contacts.....	6
General Information pertaining to Rice Graduate Programs	7
Degree Requirements.....	9
Program Timeline	9
Candidacy	12
Masters Thesis Defense Procedures	13
Modern Research Language Requirement and Exam Procedures.....	15
Primary Source Languages	16
MA Graduate Student Annual Report Form.....	17
Part 1 (Graduate Student).....	17
Part 2 (Director of MA Studies).....	19
MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form.....	20
Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination	21
Checklist for MA Candidacy, Religion	22
Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree form.....	23
Checklist for Graduation	24
School of Humanities Review & Approval Form for Independent Study Courses.....	25
Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism (GEM) Certificate Program.....	26
Request for GEM Certificate	29

Welcome Message from the Chair, Elias Kifon Bongmba



It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Department of Religion and our graduate program in Religion. In keeping with Rice University's open doors and the university's current banner campaign, let me say in IsiZulu, *Siyanamkela*. We are delighted to welcome you to the global quest for excellence in the studies of religion animated by and grounded in critical research in the different areas of our concentrations. We deploy a methodological pluralism to rethink major paradigms and ask new questions on the major religious traditions and lesser-known traditions of the world. The Department of Religion has been at the center of rice's intellectual and community life, and we are proud to continue that tradition. We welcome you to an intellectual culture and research practices that have gone through different innovations, leading us to a position that is grounded in the best historical traditions in the study of religion that shape our multidisciplinary intellectual engagements.

The History of Religions has offered us a broad place on which to stand, but also built a community of scholars whose critical investigations and articulations put us on the cutting edge of innovative scholarship in the study of religion. The tradition has created space for us to develop theoretical and methodological groundings in historical and critical textual studies in several religious traditions from around the world; psychological and sociological analysis of religious phenomena, historical studies of many religious traditions; cultural and theological analysis of religious traditions and their interaction with our environment as well as the human community.

Our department has a rich tradition of developing research in different religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, African American Religions, and African Religions. Our department, in studying historic traditions has developed critical tools to analyze their core values and sense of community, but more importantly for us as a faculty, promoted the training of the next generation of specialists, who will ask new questions about the human condition, the nature and our common habitat, explore and analyze key texts and traditions that have shaped and will shape our common destiny. In doing this over the years in the department we have created the conditions for all graduate studies initiatives to work with students to ask important questions about science, art, the meaning of life, as they explore new theories and ask difficult questions about the dynamic intersubjective bonds which we must interrogate through prisms like gender, race, sexuality, class, politics, and for the brave, aliens.

The history of our department is a testament to a commitment to excellence in its intellectual inquiries, which have explored religious, social, political, textual traditions, and literary and artistic studies from around the world, even before the conceptualization of the notion of the global in recent decades. To give you only one example from our past, permit me to remind us of the research of the late distinguished Chair of our Department, Professor Niels Nielsen whose research and publications covered a range of subjects in the Humanities as he studied lectured, and published papers and books on the political and cultural revolutions that took place in

Europe, on Human rights, the contribution of the literary imagination to Human rights in the work of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. Our legacy of inquiry has included studies in medical ethics and humanities and social ethics, to name only a few.

We are delighted to welcome you to the global quest for excellence in the studies of religion animated by and grounded in critical research in the different areas of our concentrations. We deploy a methodological pluralism to rethink major paradigms and ask new questions on the major religious traditions and lesser-known traditions of the world. Our concerns are broad, including but not limited to critical ethics, culture, race, gender, science fiction, emotions and what it means to understand things that are often taken for granted like emotions such as happiness, human well being and thriving, or even how and what to think of the end of life. Our goal is to bring these traditions and themes to the classroom and work with you to build a research and teaching portfolio grounded in the best intellectual traditions of the past but also attuned to the needs of the culture and communities we share in common. As you work on your area of specialization, we invite you to participate in symposiums, seminars, the department's Rockwell Conferences, The GEM Certificate Program, and Seminars and programs offered by the Jewish Studies program, and The Center for Engaged and Collaborative Learning (CERCL). Once more, in KiSwahili, *karibu* to Rice.

Welcome Message from the Director of MA Studies, Professor Claire Fanger



Welcome to Rice University and to your home in the Department of Religion. We are a diverse community of scholars with faculty of international standing, and a uniquely congenial environment for the development of intellectual interests and writing skills pertinent to Religious Studies. While here, you will be able to work closely with our faculty in attaining both a broad background in the study of religious currents and a strong theoretical framework for the academic study of religion. We are delighted to have you in the department and we look forward to your engagement in our classes and beyond. As the director of M.A. Studies, I will be available throughout your time here to help you develop your individual curriculum, to put you in touch with the scholars with whom you would most like to work, and to help you navigate the sometimes confusing administrative exigencies of our program. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have, whether academic or bureaucratic. I look forward to getting to know you and to accompanying you on this journey.

DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

TITLE	NAME	PHONE	EMAIL
Chair	Elias Bongmba	713-348-2759	bongmba@rice.edu
Director of MA Studies	Claire Fanger	713-348-2893	cfanger@rice.edu
Department Administrator	Marcie Newton	713-348-5201	mdnewton@rice.edu
Graduate Administrator	Lydia Westbrook	713-348-2092	lydiaw@rice.edu

IMPORTANT DATES for 2019-2020:

Friday, February 7, 2020 – Comprehensive Exam (second-year students only)

Friday, March 13, 2020 – FINAL Deadline to submit Written Thesis (second-year students only)

Monday, April 6, 2020 – Annual Report due (all students)

Monday, April 6, 2020 – Thesis Prospectus due (first-year students only)

Wednesday, April 15, 2020 – FINAL Deadline to schedule Oral Defense of Written Thesis (second-year students only). An earlier defense date is encouraged.

Monday, May 4, 2020 – FINAL Deadline to schedule MA Thesis Topic and Annual Report meeting (first-year students only).

NOTE: Students are responsible for meeting program deadlines. Any reminders are a courtesy and should not be relied upon. Consult the Academic Calendar for other key dates pertaining to all students: <https://registrar.rice.edu/calendars>.

General Information pertaining to Rice Graduate Programs

Refer to Rice University's General Announcements for:

- Regulations and Procedures for All Graduate Students <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/>
- Regulations and Procedures for Thesis Master's Graduate Degrees: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-thesis-masters-degrees/>
- Code of Student Conduct: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/rights-responsibilities/code-student-conduct>
- Dispute Resolution: Petition and Appeals: <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/rights-responsibilities/dispute-resolution/>
- Academic and Judicial Discipline: Petition and Appeals <https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/>

In addition to being in compliance with the regulations stated in this departmental handbook, students must also be in agreement with the General Announcements and the Code of Conduct. In case of conflicting information, university-wide regulations take precedence over department-wide regulations, which take precedence over research group-wide regulations.

If in doubt, students should seek help first at the department level (graduate administrator, director of graduate studies, advisor, and/or department chair) and then at the central administration level (Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies).

When planning vacations, students should be mindful of ongoing academic obligations and responsibilities. Students should consult with their advisors to be certain that all department obligations are met.

Title IX and Sexual Discrimination

Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of sexual, relationship, or other interpersonal violence, harassment or gender discrimination to seek support. There are many options available both on and off campus for all graduate students, regardless of whether the perpetrator was a fellow student, a staff or faculty member, or someone not affiliated with the university.

Students should be aware when seeking support on campus that most employees are required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to Title IX professionals on campus who can act to support that student and meet their needs. The therapists at the Rice Counseling Center and the doctors at Student Health Services are confidential, meaning that Rice will not be informed about the incident if a student discloses to one of these Rice staff members. Rice prioritizes student privacy and safety, and only shares disclosed information on a need-to-know basis.

If you are in need of assistance or simply would like to talk to someone, please call Rice Wellbeing and Counseling Center, which includes Title IX Support: **(713) 348-3311**. Policies, including the Sexual Misconduct Policy and Student Code of Conduct, and more information regarding Title IX can be found at safe.rice.edu.

Accommodations for Physical, Sensory, Cognitive, Learning, & Psychological Disabilities

The Department of Religion is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, learning and psychological disabilities. At the MA level this includes dimensions of program requirements such as the Comprehensive Examination. Students in need of special consideration are encouraged to visit Rice Disability Support Services (<https://drc.rice.edu/>) and provide documentation in order to receive a Reasonable Accommodations Request and Accommodation Letter. The letter should be given to the Director of MA Studies no later than one month prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examination.

Department of Religion Definition and Statement on Satisfactory Progress

Satisfactory academic progress is defined as completing the requirements of the MA program in an adequate and timely manner in accordance with the deadlines outlined in this Handbook. Students completing coursework must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0. Additionally, students must submit a Thesis Prospectus and Annual Report by the first Monday in April of the second semester, arrange an MA Thesis Topic and Annual Report Meeting with the MA Director and Thesis Committee members by the first Monday in May, complete the modern research language requirement by the end of the third semester, pass a Comprehensive Examination and submit and orally defend a Thesis.

Candidacy is to be achieved by the middle of the fourth semester. Furthermore, all MA students at Rice University have five years from initial enrollment to complete the degree.

Students who do not make satisfactory progress in the program will be notified by letter from the Director of MA Studies and will be placed on probation. In conjunction with the Director of MA Studies, the student will create an improvement plan for the following semester. After two semesters of unsatisfactory progress, the department has the right to dismiss a student from the program.

Degree Requirements

- Complete a minimum of 30 hours of courses approved for graduate credit at Rice University
 - At least 24 hours of coursework (including Graduate Methods Seminars) must be in the Department of Religion (RELI)
 - At least 12 hours of the RELI coursework must be seminars where research papers are required (see the Director of MA Studies with any questions about individual courses)
- Complete two Graduate Methods Seminars:
 - RELI 527 (History and Methods: 19th Century)
 - RELI 559 (History and Methods: 20th Century)
- Earn an overall GPA of at least 3.0
- Pass one secondary language reading exam (French or German)
- Pass a comprehensive exam on Methods and Theory in the Study of Religion
- Submit a Master's thesis, ideally developed from a paper in a course, or written in tandem with coursework
- Pass an oral defense of thesis with three faculty members in the Department of Religion
- Follow the candidacy, defense, and thesis submission guidelines described in the General Announcements (<https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-thesis-masters-degrees/>)
- Meet all university graduation requirements as documented in the Rice General Announcements for [Thesis Master's Programs](#).

Program Timeline

First Semester (Fall)

- RELI 527 or 559
 - 1 elective course
 - 1 elective course
- TOTAL 9 credits**

Second Semester (Spring)

- 1 elective course
 - 1 elective course
 - 1 elective course
- TOTAL 9 credits**

- Form a MA Thesis Committee consisting of the Director of MA Studies and two faculty members in the Department of Religion
- Submit a 1000-word Thesis Prospectus to the MA Thesis Committee and the Director of MA Studies by first Monday in April. See page 13 for Thesis Prospectus format.
- Submit an Annual Report by the first Monday in April.
- Arrange meeting for review of MA Thesis topic and Annual Report. Students will arrange a meeting by the first Monday in May with their Thesis Committee to

present their thesis topic. In collaboration with the Committee, student will block out research and writing goals for the third semester (Fall) when the student will enroll in RELI 801.

End of Second Semester (May):

Optional intensive language course and examination to satisfy language requirement. The optional language course alternates between French and German each year. Information will be provided in spring.

Third Semester (Fall)

- RELI 527 or 559
- RELI 801 – Research for MA Thesis (3 credit hours)
- 1 elective

TOTAL 9 credits

- Language Exam Requirement must be completed by end of semester
- MA Thesis Meeting (December): Student will arrange a meeting with their Committee to review student's progress on thesis and make recommendations for research and writing for final semester.

Fourth Semester (Spring)

- RELI 801 – 9 credit hours
 - 1 elective (optional) 3 credit hours
 - 1 elective (optional) 3 credit hours
- TOTAL 9-15 credit hours depending on course selection**

- Comprehensive Exam in Methods and History of the Study of Religion (first Friday in February)
- Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree submitted immediately after successful completion of Comprehensive Exam. Meet with Graduate Program Administrator to assemble paperwork.
- Written Thesis due no later than before Spring Break in March.
- Oral Defense scheduled not later than April 15th in order to graduate in May.
- Final Thesis Submission to Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies by University deadline in April to graduate in May (see Academic Calendar).

Coursework

Required Courses

RELI 527 History and Methods: Nineteenth Century or Equivalent (Seminar)

RELI 559 History and Methods: Twentieth Century or Equivalent (Seminar)

RELI 801 Research for MA Thesis (taken 2X)

Courses Outside the Department

The Department recognizes and embraces the fact that the study of religion is an interdisciplinary project that requires forms of knowledge and methodologies from different intellectual traditions.

Up to two courses (six credit hours) may count towards the MA in Religion. This does not preclude a student from taking additional courses outside the department and exceeding the overall total credit requirements for the MA.

Independent Study Courses

Expectations for independent study courses are available through posted syllabi. In general, independent study courses require students to read a selection of material worked out by the instructor or in consultation with the instructor. Students are expected, based on readings and scheduled meetings, to develop resource materials related to a research project.

Advising

The Director of MA Studies will meet regularly during the semester with each student to provide guidance on courses and requirements.

The advisor for all students in the Religion MA program is the Director of MA Studies. Any issues that cannot be brought to the Director of MA studies should be brought to the Department Chair.

Annual Report

In addition to regular meetings with the Director of MA Studies, the Annual Report is a tool that monitors progress in the program.

The Director of MA Studies will send a reminder for students to complete the MA Student Annual Report (page 17) to all students in the program. Each student will complete the student portion of the form and submit it to the Director of MA Studies for comments by the first Monday in April.

The Annual Report and the Thesis Prospectus will be discussed at the MA Thesis Topic and Annual Report Meeting, arranged by the student with the Director of MA Studies and their Thesis Committee by the first Monday in May.

The Director of MA Studies uses the information from the form and meeting to write letters to students who are not making appropriate progress in the program. Written letters are distributed to each of these students. A copy of the letter will be placed in the student's file.

Modern Research Language Requirement

To be completed by the end of the third semester.

Students must demonstrate proficiency in one modern research language, either French or German, by passing a reading and translation examination.

See page 15 for more information on language requirements and examination procedures.

Comprehensive Exam

The Comprehensive Exam on **Methods and History of the Study of Religion** has a written and oral component. The written exam will be administered every year on the first Friday in February from 9:00am until 1:00pm. Students are given four hours to complete the written exam.

Written exams will be reviewed within a reasonable period of time and returned to the student. Students must pass the Comprehensive Exam to achieve Candidacy-

Students in need of special accommodation for the Comprehensive Examination are encouraged to visit Rice Disability Support Services (www.dss.rice.edu) and provide documentation in order to receive a Reasonable Accommodations Request and Accommodation Letter. The letter should be given to the Director of MA Studies no later than one month prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examination.

Candidacy

Upon successfully passing the Comprehensive Exam, students will meet with the Graduate Administrator to compile and submit the appropriate paperwork for candidacy. This includes the Checklist for Master's Candidacy (page 22) and the Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree (page 23).

MA Thesis Prospectus

By the first Monday in April of the first year (second semester), students will submit a 1000-word prospectus following the format below. Students will arrange a meeting by the first Monday in May with their Thesis Committee to discuss their Thesis topic as well as their Annual Report (also due by first Monday in April). In collaboration with the Committee, student will block out research and writing goals for the third semester (Fall) when the student will enroll in RELI 801.

In December of the second year (third semester), the MA Committee will meet with the student to review progress on the thesis and make recommendations for research and writing for the final semester.

The Masters Thesis must be submitted to the Thesis Committee before Spring Break in March of the fourth semester and defended not later than April 15th in order to graduate in May.

MA Thesis Prospectus Format Requirements

1000 words (not counting bibliography)

- The prospectus must have a working title.
- The opening paragraph should give necessary background for the topic, introduce primary author(s) or text(s) under consideration and articulate the main investigative question/thesis.
- The body of the prospectus should elaborate the issues introduced in paragraph one. Important secondary research on the student's question should be discussed, though a thorough literature review is not expected in the brief scope of this prospectus. However students should indicate their own position on the material and make clear by the end of the prospectus what they hope to add to existing literature on the topic
- The prospectus should include a brief bibliography at the end, not to exceed one page, documenting the major primary and secondary sources the student expects to consult.

Masters Thesis Defense Procedures

The dissertation defense, also called the oral defense, is a public event that is announced to the Rice Community via the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The event's length is usually between an hour and a half and two hours and is moderated by the Director of MA Studies.

The event proceeds in four simple stages:

1. Thesis writer will briefly (in no more than 10-15 minutes) summarize his/her thesis topic and research.
2. The committee members engage the student via any questions that they choose to ask. Normally, each committee member will be given a separate turn to query the writer.
3. After the questions are exhausted and the committee feels like it has heard what it needs to hear, the writer and any audience members will be asked to leave the room, at which time the committee will deliberate and come to a decision about the thesis.
4. Finally, the MA candidate is brought back into the room and informed of the results of the deliberation.

Two outcomes of the oral defense are possible: (1) pass or (2) fail.

If a student passes the oral defense, revisions of the written thesis may be requested by the Thesis Committee before final submission. Graduation may be delayed if revisions are not completed in time to meet University deadlines.

If a student fails the oral defense, the Director of MA Studies, may schedule a second examination. Students who fail a second time will be dismissed from the university.

Full details of all requirements and procedures regarding the oral defense and thesis submission can be found here: <https://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>

NOTE: Students will meet with the Graduate Administrator to review ALL university requirements related to the thesis defense, submission, and degree conferral, no later than the beginning of the fourth semester.

Modern Research Language Requirement and Exam Procedures

Requirements

Students must demonstrate proficiency in one modern research language, either French or German, by passing a reading and translation examination.

Students must complete the language requirement by the end of the third semester.

Two paths for students to obtain proficiency in French or German

1. The recommended path is for students to enroll in the specially designed intensive summer course offered by Center for Language and Cultures at Rice. The course is held in May and alternates between French and German each year. *Students who pass the exam at the end of the course will have satisfied the Department of Religion's language requirement.*

2. The second path for students to obtain proficiency in French and German is through self-study and examination. The French examination is coordinated and administered by Dr. Fanger. The German examination is coordinated and administered by Dr. Henze.

After receiving approval to take the exam from the Director of MA Studies, and Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze, students must submit the book from which they would like to be tested at least three weeks before the exam to either Dr. Fanger (for French) or Dr. Henze (for German). If the book is approved, the faculty member will select an appropriate section and use it to test the student. Examinations are graded by Dr. Fanger or Dr. Henze.

Written language examinations in the department are taken the second Friday of September, November, January, and March.

Students may use a conventional language dictionary during the exam. This excludes computer or internet dictionaries and access to computer or internet translation aids. Students who take exams administered by the language department during the summer will follow the instructor's rules regarding language exams.

Primary Source Languages

Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Arabic, and Tibetan

The study of these languages is available and is recommended for students who plan to carry out scholarship in which primary sources are in original language texts. Exams are given for these languages, and while such exams **are not required** for the completion of the M.A., they are highly encouraged for those planning to pursue a scholarly career. **These languages do not replace the requirement for the student to pass a proficiency test in a modern research language, typically either French or German.**

Professors responsible for these languages should be consulted directly by the student.

-Dr. Cook [Arabic]

-Dr. DeConick [Greek-Coptic]

-Dr. Fanger [Latin]

-Dr. Henze [Hebrew-Syriac]

-Dr. Klein [Tibetan]

MA Graduate Student Annual Report Form – due by first Monday in April

Part 1 (Graduate Student)

This part of the report is to be filled out by the student and e-mailed to the Advisor.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Director of MA Studies: _____ Year matriculated: _____

GPA: _____

Total Religion Department courses: _____ Total courses outside department: _____

Cell phone: _____

Email address(es): _____

Respond to the following prompts:

1. Outline your academic progress this past year (include areas of strength that you feel you are developing; areas of weakness that you wish to improve and how we might make this happen).
2. Identify areas of future interest (include what areas you would like to gain more knowledge of in the coming year at Rice and how we might make this happen).
3. Outline your academic plans for the next academic year.
4. Outline your progress and plans regarding your thesis.
5. List any professional papers, panel discussions, etc. (if any) that you have given in the last academic year.
6. List any publications (if any) that have appeared during the last year, indicating whether they are refereed publications or not.
7. List any pending publications with due dates.
8. List other honors or awards received during the last academic year.

Language Exam

French planned completion date: _____ Date passed: _____

OR

German planned completion date: _____ Date passed: _____

Additional language (if any): _____

Planned completion date: _____ Date passed: _____

Comprehensive Exam

Methods and History of the Study of Religion Examiner: _____

Planned completion date: _____

Thesis and Prospectus

Thesis Committee Members:

1) Director of MA Studies: _____

2) Dept. of Religion Faculty Member: _____

3) Dept. of Religion Faculty Member: _____

Part 2 (Director of MA Studies)

This section of the form is to be completed by the Director of MA Studies as a follow-up to the MA Thesis Topic and Annual Report meeting. The student will be given a printed copy of this report and a hard copy will be given to the Graduate Program Administrator for placement in the student's file.

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____

Director of MA Studies: _____ Date: _____

Director of MA Studies Signature: _____

Provide a BRIEF written evaluation below of the student's progress in the program. Include (if any) concerns that you may have about the student's progress and plans that you and the student have agreed to implement in order to address these concerns.

MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form

After completion, this form must be turned in to the Graduate Program Administrator to be placed in the student's file.

Student Name: _____

Date of Thesis Topic and Annual Report Meeting: _____

Thesis Committee Members Present:

Director of MA Studies: _____

Department of Religion Faculty Member: _____

Department of Religion Faculty Member: _____

Comments:

Thesis Prospectus Approval:

Director of MA Studies

Signature

Date

Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination

After completion, this form must be turned in to the Department Administrator to be placed in the student's file.

Student Name: _____ Pass _____ Fail _____

Written Exam Date: _____

Exam Topic: **Methods and History of the Study of Religion**

Examiner's Signature: _____

Examiner's Signature: _____

Additional Comments:

Checklist for MA Candidacy, Religion

Graduate Student

Date

- 1. Coursework
At time of candidacy student must have earned a minimum of 27 credit hours. A minimum of 30 credit hours is required for the degree.
- 2. Submission of Annual Report
- 3. Required Courses
RELI 527 HISTORY & METHODS: 19th CENTURY
RELI 559 HISTORY & METHODS: 20th CENTURY
- 4. Language Proficiency
Pass a reading translation exam in French OR German.
 - Date Passed _____
- 5. Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination
- 6. Approval of Prospectus.
- 7. Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Master's Degree (C-2)

Graduate Administrator Signature

Date

SAMPLE ONLY
Go to <https://graduate.rice.edu/forms> and
download most current version.



PETITION FOR APPROVAL OF CANDIDACY FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE (C-1)

Requirements for achieving candidacy towards a thesis Master's degree are determined at the departmental level. Requirements may include satisfactory completion of all course requirements, all qualifying or preliminary examinations, and any foreign language requirements.

1. Name of applicant _____
(Last) (First) (M.I.)
2. Dept./Grad Program _____ Student ID# _____ Degree Type (e.g. MA, MS) _____

- Attach** to this application a recent transcript (printed from WebApps; see your coordinator).
- Attach** to this application a statement of the applicable departmental requirements for both course work and qualifying or preliminary examinations.
- Attach** student's departmental checklist to candidacy to document how the student has fulfilled departmental requirements.

3. Proposed thesis topic (tentative title) _____

4. Thesis Committee, subject to the approval of the GPS. **(type or print)** Please see the General Announcements for rules regarding the composition of thesis committees.

- (a) Thesis Director _____
Committee Chair within the department **(if different)** _____
 - (b) Member **within** the department _____
 - (c) Member **within or outside** the department _____
- Additional member(s) _____

*Thesis committees may later be changed. See <http://graduate.rice.edu/thesis> for processing and approval procedure.

5. Signatures:

Original signature of Department Chair or
Director of Graduate Studies

Date _____

Graduate Coordinator signature

Date _____

Dean of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Date _____

RETURN TO DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR

Checklist for Graduation

- Required Courses
 - RELI 527 HISTORY & METHODS: 19th CENTURY
 - RELI 559 HISTORY & METHODS: 20th CENTURY

- Language Proficiency
 - Pass a reading translation exam in French OR German.
 - Date Passed: _____

- Pass Comprehensive Examination
 - Date Passed: _____

- MA Thesis Prospectus Approval Form
 - Date: _____

- Thesis Approved by Committee to schedule oral defense

- Oral Defense
 - Date: _____

- Final revisions submitted and approved
 - Date: _____

School of Humanities Review & Approval Form for Independent Study Courses

Submit a copy of this completed form to the Office of the Dean of Humanities.

Department and Catalog Number: _____

Title: _____

Level: _____ Undergraduate Credit hours: _____
 _____ Graduate

Faculty Member: _____

Student: _____

Year and Term to be offered: _____

Include a description of project, research, or reading assignments or attach a plan of study or syllabus to this form.

The course plan or assignments as outlined above or attached hereto, has/have been discussed and agreed to by both parties as the work which must be successfully completed to receive course credit.

Faculty Member's signature

Date

Student's signature

Date

APPROVAL

Department Chair

Date

Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism (GEM) Certificate Program

The GEM Certificate provides students with a theoretical orientation, which they then can apply to their chosen concentrations (i.e., African-American religions; African religions; Bible and Beyond; Buddhism; Christianity; Hinduism; Islam; Judaism; American Religion; New Age and New Religious Movements; etc.). Traditionally the study of religion has privileged the authoritative voices of the religious experts and the scriptural texts that uphold orthodox faith traditions. This traditional approach ignores, marginalizes, and even sometimes literally demonizes religious expressions that are against the grain or cannot be fit into the normative worldview. These same expressions have also been identified by orthodox faith traditions as "heresy." For too long, scholars have been reluctant to consider this "other" material central or vital to academic discussions of religion, while these alternative religious expressions have been pejoratively labeled as the stuff of charlatans, the mentally ill, or ignorant folk.

It is our opinion that such an approach has failed to consider fully the process of the construction of orthodoxy and heresy out of a plurality of competing religious voices. This failure creates and sustains political narratives of religion that serve to protect orthodoxies from criticism and promote their biases as historically sound. It disregards religious voices that are vibrant historical witnesses to the shaping of religious landscapes.

GEM is a new approach to the study of religion that does not privilege the public orthodox framings but takes seriously the heterodox and esoteric currents that have been actively repressed, censored, or marginalized in a variety of sociological, psychological, philosophical, and political ways. GEM takes into account the plurality of religious voices and expressions, including the neglected currents, in order to reconceive religion. This approach also engages the psychology and the phenomenology of religious experience, rather than relying exclusively on the authorial framings taught by the faith traditions and transmitted in their scriptural texts, interpretations and rituals. While we recognize that the comparative categories of gnosticism, esotericism and mysticism are modern constructs, each provides us with different nuances that can assist in asking the sort of dialectical questions that will result in a more honest assessment and thick description of religion and the religious traditions we study.

Requirements for the Certificate

12 credits of coursework and 2-semester enrollment in RELI 600 GEM Research Forum (1 credit course) are required.

- **3 Theory-Intensive Core Courses**

Students are required to complete one course in Gnosticism (RELI 581), one course in the Esotericism (RELI 587), and one course in Mysticism (RELI 558).

- **1 Thematic Course** (from list of approved courses; see April DeConick or Jeff Kripal)

- **2 semesters of RELI 600 GEM Research Forum**

Students are required to enroll in consecutive Fall and Spring semesters during the same academic year. Although only one year of enrollment is required, students are encouraged to participate in the Forum throughout their time at Rice.

- **Submission of *Intention of Completion of GEM Certificate*** (in-house form) to the department coordinator, a semester in advance of bestowal. Certificates will be awarded each spring at our departmental graduation ceremony.

Courses

Theory-Intensive Core Courses (3)

These courses are essential to the certificate because they theorize the constructed categories under study: Gnosticism, Esotericism and Mysticism. They do so from the ancient world to the modern period, giving students the necessary historical sweep to fully engage the categories and the debates surrounding them.

RELI 581: Gnosticism Seminar (DeConick)

What is Gnosticism? This course covers the construction of the category Gnosticism by scholars since the 1600s and its long-standing association with the concept of heresy and the literature and religions that people who call themselves Gnostics form. Literary, social, historical and cognitive methods are used to examine Gnostic religious currents and their survival into modernity.

RELI 587: Western Esotericism Method and Theory (Fanger)

This course explores the relation between esoteric texts and the idea of "Western Esotericism." Examines primary writings from Agrippa to Madame Blavatsky and considers the historical and methodological approaches emerging as Esotericism is constructed as an academic area.

RELI 558: Mysticism: Theories & Methods (Kripal or Parsons)

This course is a history of the development of the modern category of "mysticism" from the seventeenth century to today, with side studies of cognate terms like "spirituality," "metaphysical religion," and the "paranormal," as these forms of extreme religious experience are by social-scientific and humanistic methods.

Thematic Courses (1)

Students are asked to select one additional thematic course which focuses on the study of one particular area in detail. This focus should reflect the student's interest. This list is kept updated annually by the Department.

List of Thematic Courses

RELI 505: American Metaphysical Religion (Kripal)

RELI 522: Islam's Mystical Tradition (Cook)

RELI 526: People of the Book: Judaism and Scripture

RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)

RELI 541: Creating Magic (Fanger)

RELI 551: Divine Sex (Fanger)

RELI 566: Pain, Ecstasy & Embodiment in Religious Experience (Fanger)

RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)

RELI 588: The History of Religions School (Kripal)

RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)

RELI 615: Secret Religion (DeConick)

RELI 600 GEM Research Forum (2 consecutive semesters)

This forum meets monthly throughout the semester. Its purpose is for faculty and students to share, discuss and critique their current research (pre-publication) in GEM subjects in order to improve the quality of the papers and to mentor students in formal academic etiquette and oral communication skills. Students are asked to write academic reflections of each event, identifying key insights and issues that may impact their own research as scholars. At the end of the year, a conference is hosted on a GEM subject. An external keynote speaker is invited. Students are asked to participate as presiders, organizers, and speakers. This is meant to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to organize and host conferences, improve their oral communication skills, and to network with scholars at other institutions.

Request for GEM Certificate

Please submit this completed form to the Department Administrator in HUMA 225 when you have fulfilled the following the requirements.*

Name: _____

Projected date of MA graduation: _____

- RELI 581: Gnosticism Seminar
Semester enrolled and completed: _____
- RELI 587: Western Esotericism Method and Theory
Semester enrolled and completed: _____
- RELI 588: Mysticism: Theories and Methods
Semester enrolled and completed: _____
- One thematic course from following list.
Course number and name: _____
Semester enrolled and completed: _____

RELI 505: American Metaphysical Religion (Kripal)

RELI 522: Islam's Mystical Tradition (Cook)

RELI 526: People of the Book: Judaism and Scripture

RELI 532: Advanced Tibetan Language & Culture (Klein)

RELI 541: Creating Magic (Fanger)

RELI 551: Divine Sex (Fanger)

RELI 566: Pain, Ecstasy & Embodiment in Religious Experience (Fanger)

RELI 570: Buddhist Wisdom Texts (Klein)

RELI 588: The History of Religions School (Kripal)

RELI 589: Mutants and Mystics (Kripal)

RELI 615: Secret Religion (DeConick)

- 2 semesters (minimum) of RELI 600 GEM Research Forum
Semester enrolled and completed: _____
Semester enrolled and completed: _____

Attach one paper you have written for a class, conference presentation, or publication that you think implements or incorporates into your own subdiscipline the knowledge and theoretical perspectives you have learned by participating in this certification program

Attach a 1000 word essay describing how your paper implements or incorporates into your own subdiscipline the knowledge and theoretical perspectives you have learned by participating in this certification program