

Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Religious Studies is an advanced research degree leading to a dissertation. Research and writing skills are developed to the level necessary to participate in professional academic discourse. A doctoral degree is awarded on the basis of evidence that the recipient possesses knowledge of a broad field of learning and expert mastery of a particular area within that field. Progress through the doctoral program is determined by coursework, language requirements, qualifying examinations, and a dissertation. As a means of tailoring the program to the needs and interests of individual students, the number and content of the qualifying examinations will be individualized by the doctoral committee.

The faculty of the Religious Studies department offer a rich curriculum that touches on all aspects and time periods of Buddhism, as well as a comparative study of other religions within a Buddhist context. Departmental research focuses on textual studies, area studies (e.g., Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia), sociology, anthropology and ethnography, philosophy, and the arts. In terms of disciplinary perspective, research method and theoretical framework, any approach to the humanities and social sciences is possible.

UWest's doctoral students work closely with their advisors to define their area of research within the field of Buddhist studies and to design a course of study to support their area of interest. Building upon the foundation of their master's level study, students refine both content and method to achieve doctoral-level research and writing. Campus resources include the Lewis R. Lancaster Research Library, home to an impressive collection of Buddhist texts, the Institute for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism, the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon, and the Rare Sanskrit Buddhist Manuscript Preservation Project. The university also partners with neighboring institutions to provide students access to coursework to support informed comparative studies.

Researching Buddhism requires students to have sufficient proficiency in a canonical (e.g., Pali, Sanskrit, and Classical Chinese) or research language (e.g. Japanese, German, and French) to utilize primary source materials. Therefore, the department expects students to possess or acquire expertise in at least one canonical or research language appropriate to their research area.

Program Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete the PhD in Religious Studies program will be able to:

- Critically examine and discuss historical and contemporary Buddhist practices, traditions, ideas, and perspectives.
- Conduct critical comparisons of historical and contemporary Buddhist practices, traditions, ideas, and perspectives to those of at least one other world religion (e.g., Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, etc.)
- Critically evaluate and utilize appropriate frameworks and methodologies germane to the study of religion.
- Demonstrate a working knowledge of one canonical or research language sufficient to read and understand primary and secondary sources related to their area of study.
- Develop and articulate a critical perspective and engage in sustained analysis about specific religious traditions, as well as issues in the field of religious studies.
- Frame scholarly publications and professional presentations within the larger intellectual, professional, and ethical domains of the discipline.
- Articulate the individual and social value of furthering the academic study of religion.

Program Requirements

Area	Required Units
Core Courses	9
Content Courses	42
Qualifying Examinations	0
Research Training	12
Dissertation	0
Total	63
Language Requirement (units not degree applicable)	
Research or Canonical Language	12

Core Courses (9 units): All students complete three core courses during the first three semesters. Students must earn a minimum grade of B in all core courses. Students who do not earn a B may repeat that course one time only to achieve a passing grade.

Courses	Units
REL 500 Proseminar on the Study of Religion	3
REL 600 History & Theory of the Study of Religion	3
REL 607 Research Methods	3

Content Courses (42 units): All students select 42 units of content courses in consultation with their advisor. With department approval, students may complete courses at designated partner institutions such as Claremont School of Theology to broaden exposure to other religions.

Students must earn a minimum grade of C in each content course applied to graduation. Students who do not earn a C may repeat that course one time only to achieve a passing grade.

Courses	Units
REL 505 Women in Buddhism	3
REL 521 Buddhist Meditation Practicum	3
REL 530 Topics in Buddhist Meditation	3
REL 540 Buddhist Hermeneutics	3
REL 585 Religion & Environmentalism	3
REL 627 Buddhism & Ritual	3
REL 630 Seminar: Buddhist Texts in Canonical Languages*	3
REL 636 Seminar: Buddhist Texts in Translation*	3
REL 639 Topics in the Study of Religion*	3
REL 640 Topics in Comparative Religion*	3
REL 641 Topics in Buddhist Studies*	3
REL 645 Seminar: Regional Buddhist Traditions*	3
REL 653 Vajrayana Buddhism	3
REL 655 Perspectives in the Study of Chan/Zen Buddhism	3
REL 657 Humanistic Buddhism & Current Issues	3
REL 659 Buddhism in the US	3
REL 670 Spread of Buddhism to Central Asia & China	3
REL 671 Buddhism & Globalization	3

*Topics announced each semester. Topical courses may be taking three times for credit with advisor approval, but specific topics may not be repeated for credit.

Language Preparation (12 units): Students must earn 12 units in a research or canonical language appropriate to their area of research. Canonical languages include Pali, Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, etc. Modern research languages include Japanese, German, French, etc.

This coursework is required but is not degree applicable, and may be waived based on a student's prior experience, education, and/or proficiency.

Qualifying Examination Preparation: Qualifying examinations must be completed within one semester following the completion of all core and content coursework and the language requirement. Students are encouraged to enroll in REL 705 during the semester they are preparing and planning to take their examinations. Course may be repeated one time only in the subsequent semester. Units are not applicable to graduation.

Courses	Units
REL 705 Qualifying Examination Preparation	3

Research Training (12 units): After successful advancement to candidacy, students complete a total of 12 units in advanced graduate-level research and writing.

Note: REL698A may be applied to research requirement one time only.

Courses	Units
REL 698A Dissertation Proposal Seminar	3
REL 698B Dissertation Writing Seminar	3
REL 710 Dissertation Research	3

Continuous Enrollment: Upon completion of the 12-unit research requirement, doctoral candidates must maintain continuous enrollment while engaged in writing, defending, and submitting the dissertation by enrolling in a designated course. These units do not apply to graduation.

Courses	Units
REL 698B Dissertation Writing Seminar	1
REL 715 Continuous Enrollment Research	1

Teaching Practicum (optional): Upon advancing to candidacy, students are eligible to enroll in teaching practicum. This 1-unit course allows students to gain valuable practical teaching experience. While this course is not required, it is strongly recommended for any student who plans to work in higher education upon completion of the PhD. Upon completion of this practicum, students may have the opportunity to teach an undergraduate course at UWest. Units are not applicable to graduation.

Courses	Units
REL 690 Teaching Practicum	1

Qualifying Examinations: Students are expected to petition to take the qualifying examinations when they have completed a minimum of 51 units of doctoral coursework and have fulfilled the language requirement.

The qualifying examinations cover three subject fields to be determined individually between the student and members of the doctoral committee. Students are encouraged to take REL 705 Qualifying Examination Preparation during the semester they are preparing and planning to take their examinations. Qualifying examinations must be completed within one semester following the completion of 51 units of coursework.

Students are expected to consult with their committee members to prepare reading lists that will serve as the basis for each of the three field examinations. These examinations are written and must be taken on campus. Examinations take place a two-week period, with three hours allowed for each examination. No access to books, notes, the Internet, or any other resource is allowed during the examination.

Qualifying examinations are graded pass, fail, or pass with distinction. If a student fails an examination, the doctoral committee will decide if and when it may be repeated. Additional work may be required before the student is eligible to retake an examination. . Failing any qualifying examination twice in a row may result in termination of the student's enrollment in the program.

Additional guidelines and details regarding the qualifying examinations can be found in the Religious Studies Graduate Student Handbook.

Advancing to Candidacy & Continuous Enrollment

A student advances to candidacy status upon successful completion of the qualifying examinations and payment of the candidacy fee. Continuous enrollment is required to maintain candidacy status through all stages of the dissertation process, beginning with advancement to candidacy and ending at the close of the term during which the dissertation is accepted by the library. Candidacy lapses automatically if the student loses graduate standing by academic disqualification or failure to comply with university policy on continuous enrollment.

A readmitted student who was a candidate must again advance to candidacy and thereafter enroll as a candidate for at least one academic semester before the degree may be conferred. Readmission after a break in enrollment is not guaranteed.

The Dissertation Phase

Research Training: Upon advancing to candidacy, the candidate enters the dissertation phase and is eligible to undertake advanced graduate-level research and writing. While engaged in the dissertation process, PhD students first complete 12 units of research. Upon completion of the research requirement, students maintain status by enrolling in one unit of continuous enrollment each term until the dissertation is accepted by the library.

Stage 1: Preparing the Proposal

During this stage, candidates begin work on the dissertation proposal under the supervision of their doctoral committee, outlining their intended dissertation project. The dissertation project must be an original piece of research based on primary sources that makes a relevant contribution to the student's field of study.

The proposal is reviewed by the doctoral committee, after which students attend the proposal defense to present their proposal and respond to the questions of the committee. During the proposal defense, the committee decides whether the proposal is accepted, accepted with revisions, or rejected.

Candidates are expected to submit the dissertation proposal during the semester immediately following their advancement to candidacy.

Stage 2: Dissertation Writing and Defense

Candidates prepare the dissertation after passing the proposal defense. The doctoral committee provides feedback throughout the dissertation writing stage, approves the dissertation, and conducts the dissertation defense, a final oral examination.

Ordinarily, students defend the dissertation just prior to its completion. Students must be actively enrolled when defending. The defense must be scheduled during a regular academic session (fall or spring semester) and is open to all members of the academic community.

Stage 3: Dissertation Submission

After passing the dissertation defense, the candidate makes all necessary revisions and submits two copies, including one printed for binding and one electronic, to the library in accordance with the library's formatting and binding guidelines. The revised dissertation must be submitted to the library no later than one semester after passing the defense. During this semester, the candidate must maintain continuous enrollment by enrolling in REL 715.

Graduate Portfolio: In addition to these requirements, students must submit a portfolio of their work to the department for assessment and review. Portfolio guidelines are found in the Religious Studies Graduate Student Handbook.

Important guidelines and procedures regarding the composition of the doctoral committee, dissertation proposal, dissertation defense, and final submission of the dissertation can be found in the Religious Studies Graduate Student Handbook.

Graduation Requirements

A minimum of 63 post-baccalaureate semester units in graduate courses as specified for each candidate by the doctoral committee appointed by the department chair or graduate advisor;

Fulfillment of the language requirement;

A minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0;

A Pass in the qualifying examination, taken when the student has completed a minimum of 51 units of doctoral coursework;

Submission to the library of a research dissertation demonstrating critical judgment, intellectual synthesis, creativity, and skill in written communication.

Degrees are awarded at the close of the semester in which all requirements have been fulfilled, the dissertation has been accepted by the library, the Petition to Graduate form has been filed with the Registrar's office, and the graduation fee has been paid.

Continuous Enrollment: After finishing all coursework students must maintain continuous enrollment through the term during which the dissertation is accepted by the library. Failure to register and pay the associated tuition and fees may interfere with residence requirements and lead to lapse of candidacy status.

Minimum Grade Requirement: Students must earn a minimum grade of B in all core courses and a minimum grade of C or Pass in content courses. Students who do not earn a passing grade as specified may repeat that course one time only to achieve a passing grade.

Course Restrictions: Students may apply no more than 6 units (two courses) of Directed Reading & Research and 6 units (two courses) of independent study towards graduation.

Students are allowed no more than 12 units of unfinished coursework (i.e. incompletes and withdrawals) over the duration of the program.

All coursework must be at the graduate level; graduate courses previously applied to a bachelor's degree cannot be applied to graduation.

Transfer of Credit from Other Institutions: Students may be granted a maximum of 30 units of transfer credit for applicable graduate-level coursework towards the 51-unit course requirement. Courses with a B (3.0) or higher are eligible for consideration. Applicability is determined by the department chair or advisor.

Application of Credit from Prior UWest Enrollments: Students may apply toward the 51-unit course requirement a maximum of 36 units of graduate coursework completed at UWest in a master's level program or under enrollment. Courses with a B (3.0) or higher are eligible for consideration. Applicability is determined by the department chair or advisor.

Time to Degree Standards

Doctoral students are expected to advance to candidacy within four years from their original start date, and to complete all degree requirements, including publication of the final dissertation, within seven years from their original start date. The maximum time to degree allowed after all approved extensions is ten years from the original start date. The maximum time to degree will be adjusted for students entering with transfer credit.

Students are evaluated annually for time-to-degree progress. If the established time to degree standard is reached and the student has not completed a required milestone, such as qualifying exam, advancement to candidacy, dissertation proposal, or dissertation defense, the student is placed on departmental monitoring for a period of one additional term. If at the end of this term adequate progress has not been achieved toward the milestone, the student is placed on academic probation for one additional term.

A student may be dismissed upon recommendation of the department and with the Chief Academic Officer's approval if adequate progress is not observed during the probation period. If dismissed prior to advancement to candidacy, the dismissal is permanent.

If dismissed after advancement to candidacy, the student may petition for reinstatement under the following condition only:

Student submits with the petition an acceptable first draft of the dissertation that clearly demonstrates it is reasonable to expect that the student may defend and publish the final dissertation no later than ten years from the original start date in the program.

If reinstatement is granted, the student must retroactively pay continuous enrollment tuition at a rate of one unit of tuition per term for each fall and spring term that has elapsed since the last term of enrollment. Tuition will be charged at the rate in effect at the time of reinstatement.

Reinstated students who fail to publish the final dissertation within ten years of the original start date are permanently dismissed.