

GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN RELIGION SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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Please note, the M.A. degree is awarded under extenuating circumstances only.

GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN RELIGION SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

I. INTRODUCTION

Graduate students in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University forge unique, creative, and rigorous programs of study that emphasize both research and teaching.

The study of religion at Syracuse focuses on the category “religion” as an intellectually provocative and problematic concept rather than simply as a descriptive, institutional, or phenomenological label. The Department takes two premises as fundamental to its educational program: 1) study of religion must be interdisciplinary, and 2) study of religion must investigate the material, textual, historical, and cultural dimensions of religions as well as the theories used to produce and analyze them.

The Graduate Program in Religion in Syracuse University's College of Arts and Sciences was founded in 1955. It has offered study toward the Ph.D. since 1969. Ph.D. training includes teaching mentorship and experience.

The hallmarks of our PhD program in religion are creative interdisciplinarity, theoretical reflection, and the rigorous investigation of material, textual, cultural, aesthetic and political dimensions of religions. Our curriculum gives sustained attention to religion, theory, bodies, gender and materiality. In their first two years, students gain an overview of religious studies theories and methods culminating in a comprehensive exam in two parts. In other coursework, students can explore religion and spirituality in modern societies, both local and global, through the lenses of anthropology of religion and history of religions. They may also analyze how religions shape and are shaped in aesthetics, ethics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and political and culture theory. They can also investigate literary and performative expressions of religion, including scriptures, through the lenses of history, philosophy, literary theory, and rhetoric. In their third year in the program, every student must write one comprehensive exam in a religious or regional tradition and one methodological exam on either (a) communities and identities, (b) critique, image, and politics, or (c) texts and contexts.

Currently the department can support study of the following traditional or regional religious cultures:

African American	Hindu
American	Jewish
Buddhist	Middle Eastern
Christian	Muslim
East Asian	South Asian
Indigenous	

Students must also take the two-semester seminar on theories and methods in the study of religion (REL 601-603) and one other departmental seminar each semester.

II. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Department and the University hold students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in assignments, exams, and to all stages of the writing of theses and dissertations. Serious sanctions up to and including expulsion from the graduate program can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

In coursework, the Department of Religion leaves AI policy to individual faculty members, but students need to be advised and prepared for the AI statement required on dissertations. PhD dissertations must include a page signed by the candidate stating that no generative AI has been used to compose this dissertation or stating how AI was used, specifying the platform and application, and the advance approval of the prospectus/dissertation committee.

III. DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS

The Department and the University value diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this program that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation. You are invited to meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information. CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process. <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu>

IV. ADVISING

- A. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the faculty, will assign the initial advisor for all new, first-year Ph.D. students. Students may subsequently change advisors, by permission of the Director.
- B. After completion of the Ph.D. comprehensive examinations, a dissertation director shall be selected by the student from among the faculty tenured in the Department. The director's advice and signature will be required throughout the prospectus and dissertation stages of Ph.D. studies.
- C. At all levels, the advisor performs the important function of advising and consenting on such matters as course selection, designing the student's Program of Study, petitioning the Graduate Committee, and submitting requests to sit for examinations.

V. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

A. Residency, Courses, and Credits

1. The Department admits students who have already earned an M.A. (24 credits) in religious studies (or its equivalent). As part of their PhD studies, they must complete a minimum of 36 course credits and 12 additional dissertation hours.
2. Of the Ph.D.'s 36 course credits, 18 must be taken as required seminars offered within the department. The remaining 18 credits may be distributed between graduate level courses offered in other departments within the university (or in a university in the area with whom we have reciprocal registration) and/or independent studies arranged with a faculty member in the department or the university with the approval of the advisor. Any additional credits may be distributed as needed with the approval of the advisor. All graduate students are required to take the sequence REL 601 and 603 and the other REL graduate seminar offered each semester.
3. Special requirements for recipients of a Foreign Language Areas Studies Fellowship are as follows: Due to the requirement of the FLAS program for language study in each semester, FLAS students will be able to count language courses as part of their normal course-load and program of study in the Department of Religion. However, in order to correct for the loss of contact-hours in the study of religion (i.e., the three credit-hours per semester that are devoted to language study), FLAS students must insure that advanced language courses (i.e., courses beyond elementary instruction) contain contents that pertain directly to the study of religion (e.g., reading primary documents in a given religious tradition, for example, the Ramayana).
4. Candidates who fail to complete the language requirements according to the stipulations below may lose financial aid awards until such requirements are met.
5. B.D., Th.M., M.Th., or other degrees representing theological school completion, will ordinarily be accepted as the equivalent to an M.A. in religious studies. Courses taken at the graduate level at another accredited institution will be evaluated on a course-by-course basis by the Graduate Committee, up to 30 hours of credit equivalent to an M.A.
6. Students may, with proper approvals, sit in on undergraduate courses as a part of the work they may do for graduate-level course requirements.
7. The Religion Department recognizes that at times students may need to pursue lines of study independently, that is, outside of regularly offered graduate seminars. Such independent study may be pursued through the Department's Research and Writing (Independent Study) courses. These are guided by a faculty member and are as vigorous and comprehensive as regular graduate seminars in terms of their requirements for advanced study. Research and Writing courses are offered to support specific research interests of students that are not available in the curriculum and that will enhance a given student's program in breadth or depth; they are not to be used *solely* to prepare for doctoral examinations. Students must

negotiate an agreement on a Research and Writing course with an individual faculty member, who has complete discretion whether to guide it and, if so, on what terms. To register, the student and faculty member must together complete the Proposal for Independent Study form and register under one of the Research and Writing numbers (REL 719-799).

8. Before a Ph.D. can be awarded a student must have accrued a total of 12 dissertation hours. This is normally done by registering awarded tuition credits not used for graduate courses for dissertation hours during the first two years in the Ph.D. program.
9. Students are strongly advised to complete all work for courses in the semester in which they are taken; in the event that an Incomplete is requested, students are required to complete the course work and thus to remove the Incomplete by the first weeks of classes in the subsequent term.

B. Language Requirements

1. PhD students are required to learn at least two languages (not distinguishing languages of scholarship from source languages): at least one by time of matriculation into the Ph.D. program. A language competency plan will be reported by the student's advisor at the Review of Graduate Students no later than the student's second year. Language competency must be demonstrated by passing (grade B- or better) coursework through the 202-level or language placement exam administered by LLL or an equivalent department, and at most one by department's reading competence exam. Documented certification of successfully completed language examinations at other institutions will be accepted for entering Ph.D. candidates.
2. Departmental language examinations can be used to demonstrate competency in at most one of the two required for the Ph.D. Departmental examinations will test the student's ability to produce a rough translation of a short (approximately one-page) passage from a classic text or contemporary journal article. Candidates will have up to three hours to read the passage and compose a translation that accurately reflects the meaning of the passage. The student may make use of a dictionary appropriate to the language being tested. Use of computers is not permitted. Assessment will be made according to whether the translation is sufficiently accurate, such that citing the translation to substantiate an argument would not be incorrect. The scale of assessment will be: pass; pass with minor errors; not pass (major errors).
3. The Department will maintain sample translation examinations for student review.
4. Language examinations will be administered by the Department of Religion three times yearly (January, May, August).
5. Credit for courses fulfilling language requirements will not count towards the degree. Language study *beyond the language requirements* may count for credits towards the Ph.D. degree (grade B or better) up to the existing

limits for non-departmental courses (12 hours) only if the content directly relates to a student's program of study within religion and are not elementary courses. Normally this would include advanced reading courses in religious texts in original languages or contemporary literature, newspapers, etc. directly associated with the student's research field.

6. Each student should be proactive in developing a language competency plan with their advisor, so that the student can best seek opportunities for funded language study according to their scholarly needs.

C. Comprehensive Examinations

Three comprehensive examinations are designed to promote an interdisciplinary, individualized program and to prepare the student with a clearly defined and recognizable geographic and/or tradition-based specialty as well as a concentration that defines their methodologies and their thematic concerns within the broad field of religious studies.

To ensure theoretical and methodological competence, students are required to pass comprehensive examinations in theory and methods, based on a fixed bibliography, at the end of the fall semester of their first two years of course work. Following completion of all course work and language requirements, they must also pass comprehensive examinations in both a methodological concentration and a traditional or regional religious culture, as listed at the beginning of these guidelines; bibliographies for these examinations are partly set by the faculty and partly constructed by the individual student in conversation with relevant faculty mentors.

A "request to sit" for the second and third exams should be filed no later than March 1 during the final semester of course work; it should include descriptions (roughly 150 words each) and bibliographies for each exam, as well as a rationale for the entire slate of exams (roughly 200 words). The student should propose to the DGS a slate of first readers for each exam. Once these faculty members have agreed to serve in this capacity, they must approve the exam descriptions and bibliographies submitted with the "request to sit" and will subsequently serve as primary drafters as well as readers of the exams. When the "request to sit" has been approved by the Graduate Committee, the DGS appoints a second reader for each exam, in consultation with appropriate faculty members. (Note that in the case of the Texts and Contexts concentration exam, both faculty readers will be determined by the selected bibliographic modules and both will participate in drafting the exam.) At least three different faculty members should be involved in the assessment of the second and third exams, which should ideally be written by different faculty members.

1. The Comprehensive Examination in Theories and Methods takes place in two parts for each rendition of REL 601 and 603 on a designated day in December or January.
 - a. Written on a computer not connected to the internet or other external inputs.
 - b. Students may bring to the exam two (2) pages of personal notes or three (3) books/articles without annotations.
 - c. The answers for each of the two exams must not be longer than 2,500 words.
 - d. Bibliographies will follow those for the course syllabuses of REL 601 and 603 which Ph.D. students are required to take. Although the course designs of 601 and 603 will vary with the instructor, each seminar will cover the standard texts each year.
 - e. The faculty members offering 601 and 603 that year will write questions pertaining to that seminars' figures and topics and will evaluate the responses to those questions.
2. The Comprehensive Examination in the Concentrations:
 - a. Written on a computer not connected to the internet or other external inputs.
 - b. Students may bring to the exam two (2) pages of personal notes or three (3) books/articles without annotations.
 - c. Scheduled with the administrative staff from 8:30 am to 5 pm on a day in January of the student's third year.
 - d. Maximum length of answer: 3,500 words
 - e. Bibliographies consist of a maximum of 30 books or essays, comprised of both a standardized list developed by the concentration faculty and a specialized list developed by the student in consultation with the advisor and/or another relevant concentration faculty member who is serving as first reader for the exam. 50% of the books must come from the standard list, up to 50% from the specialized list.
3. The Comprehensive Examination in a Traditional or Regional Religious Culture
 - a. Written on a computer not connected to the internet or other external inputs.
 - b. Students may bring to the exam two (2) pages of personal notes or three (3) books/articles without annotations.
 - c. Scheduled with the Graduate Administrator from 8:30 am to 5 pm on a day in January of the student's third year.
 - d. Maximum length of answer: 3,500 words
 - e. Bibliographies consist of a maximum of 30 books or essays, comprised of both a standardized list developed by the

concentration faculty and a specialized list developed by the student in consultation with the advisor and/or another relevant concentration faculty member who is serving as first reader for the exam. 50% of the books must come from the standard list, up to 50% from the specialized list.

4. **Request-to-Sit:** For all students the Request-to-Sit submitted to the Graduate Committee will include the final bibliographies (including both standardized and specialized lists) for the comprehensive exam in the Concentration and the Tradition or Region which the student has chosen, along with the intended dates for taking the exams. Prior to the administration of the exams, the Graduate Studies Committee must approve all questions for students' exams.
 - a. The Concentration and Tradition or Region exams must all be taken no later than the month of January of the student's third year in the Ph.D. program.
 - b. Comprehensive examinations test the student's ability to conceptualize, analyze, and organize discrete bodies of material and to know these well enough to recall them in teaching situations and in scholarly conversation and debate. The comprehensive examinations are not considered finished papers but are highly informed, on-the-spot answers to specific questions posed by the examiner as delimited by the approved narrative and biography for each exam. Therefore, the examinees' access to data including outside sources and their own notes will be restricted. The length of their answers on each exam should not exceed a total of 3,500 words. On the day of each examination, students will pick up the examination from the office staff in Hall of Languages 441 at 8:30 a.m. and go to an assigned place to take the exam. They may use only the assigned computer in the room where there will be no Internet access or external drive capacity. Although the examination may likely be completed in four to six hours, a student may take up to eight hours to finish it.
5. **Procedural Stages:**
 - a. Requests to sit must be completed and approved during the spring semester of the second year.
 - b. The Graduate Committee shall review each request to sit, and, with whatever modifications it requires, the form shall be filed in the student's permanent file and the student notified of the committee's action.

- c. Before sitting for exams, students must have met all eligibility criteria (language requirements, removal of incomplete).
- d. The faculty members of the Graduate Committee will review questions submitted by faculty members and may request modifications in the examination texts where necessary.
- e. A copy of each exam will be placed on permanent file in the Director's office, and will be made available for perusal by other graduate students upon request.
- f. The Theories and Methods exams after 601 and 603 will be graded by the faculty members who offered each seminar in current year.
- g. The comprehensive exam in the Concentration will be graded by the person who wrote the questions and the Director of Graduate Studies will appoint one other member of the concentration in consultation with the faculty of the concentration.
- h. The comprehensive exam in the Tradition/Region will be evaluated by the faculty member who wrote the question plus another faculty member who specializes in the area appointed by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with faculty members who specialize in the area.
- i. When all reports from readers for all exams taken during a given examination period have been received, the faculty members of the Graduate Committee shall assess the overall results of each student's examinations. The committee shall have discretionary authority to require a student, on the basis of received evaluations, to retake one, several, or all of the examinations under conditions to be determined by the Committee, or to require some alternative means for a student to demonstrate quality competence in area(s) where the committee desires further evidence.
- j. The Graduate Committee in evaluating the overall results either initially or after the student has retaken the exams or prepared the required equivalent work, may judge the results as:
 - i. Pass with distinction
 - ii. Passing and qualifying to continue onto the prospectus and the dissertation.
 - iii. Low passing but without qualifying to continue in the program. In these cases the student will be awarded a terminal M.Phil. degree.
 - iv. Fail.
- k. Students will receive reports of their overall results, together with comments provided by the readers of the individual examinations. Students may also seek additional feedback on individual examinations from their Advisor and from the faculty persons who wrote the examinations.
- l. Upon final certification by the Graduate Committee that a student has completed all requirements relating to comprehensive examinations, the Graduate Certification Office shall be so notified

and a Program of Study – approved by the advisor and Department Chair – filed. Copies shall be placed in the student's permanent record, and a letter shall be written to the Syracuse University Library (and/or other libraries in specific cases) certifying the student's status and requesting that appropriate library usage privileges be extended to the student to pursue his/or her dissertation research.

D. Prospectus, Dissertation and Oral Defense

1. Prospectus

After a candidate has successfully fulfilled all curricular requirements and passed his/her Comprehensive Examinations, he/she will submit a dissertation Prospectus which will also bear the approval of his/her dissertation advisor. (The dissertation advisor need not be the same person as the academic advisor; the latter's responsibilities are terminated upon the candidate's fulfillment of all curricular requirements.) *Note that the prospectus must be defended within one year from the semester in which the student passes their comprehensive exams.*

2. Guidelines for Writing the Prospectus

The prospectus is an important step in both giving initial shape to, and making argument for, a thesis topic and dissertation design. It is therefore a projection and an instrument of research rather than a definitive statement. The prospectus should be between 4,500 and 6,000 words long, not counting the bibliography.

However, the prospectus needs to concern itself with the plausibility of the thesis and be indicative of the candidate's ability to argue and defend it appropriately. Cogency and clarity, then, are the primary qualities to be attained. No generative AI may be used to generate or assist in the writing of the prospectus without the approval in advance of all members of the prospectus committee.

The prospectus typically includes the following elements:

- a. a statement of the thesis, together with an explication of it.
- b. a survey of the literature pertaining to the argument, showing the need for this dissertation, assuring its originality, and articulating the contribution it will make to the field.
- c. a chapter by chapter projection indicating the general design of the dissertation.
- d. a bibliography, together with a demonstration of its availability.

3. Procedures for Submitting a Dissertation Prospectus

- a. Once the prospectus is written in compliance with the Guidelines for Writing the Prospectus, it shall be sent to the Graduate Director with the name of the Dissertation Advisor, who shall sign the prospectus as evidence of concurrence.
- b. Prospectus Committee consisting of the Dissertation Advisor, plus two other faculty members (one of whom will chair the Committee) appointed by the Graduate Director in consultation with the dissertation Advisor and student, will be constituted. This committee will conduct an oral evaluation of the prospectus. The Prospectus Committee operates independently from the Dissertation Committee (see E.2.a. below) and does not necessarily include the same faculty members (except for the advisor of the dissertation).
- c. The Prospectus will be circulated to all faculty members, who will be encouraged to submit critical comments in writing to the Prospectus Committee. All faculty members will be invited to attend and to participate in the oral evaluation. It shall be the responsibility of the Chair of the Prospectus Committee to insure that issues raised in writing by faculty be addressed in the oral evaluation.
- d. A report of the critical reflections and/or recommendations arising from the oral evaluation will be prepared by the Chair of the Prospectus Committee. The report, which will be signed by the Chair of the Prospectus Committee and the student, will be filed with the Director of Graduate Studies together with a copy of the Prospectus. A copy will also be given to the Dissertation Advisor.

4. Writing the Dissertation

The student is expected to establish an appropriate working relationship with the Dissertation Committee by consulting with the Dissertation Advisor who shall coordinate the advice and suggestions offered by the other members of the committee. The candidate will also, after consulting with the Advisor and securing his or her agreement, designate a First Reader who will be a member of the Dissertation Committee (see E.2.a. below).

- a. The Dissertation Committee will consist of the Dissertation Advisor, the First Reader, and the Departmental Reader with the latter being designated by the Director of Graduate Studies. The Departmental Reader must be a member of the Department of Religion. The Departmental Reader will read the dissertation on behalf of the Department and certify whether it is ready to go to the oral defense. All three Dissertation Committee members are to be tenure track or tenured faculty members employed by Syracuse University with relevant expertise and will typically be from the student's program and/or affiliated program faculty.

- b. The Dissertation Committee shall establish in advance and consistently require conformity with the committee's directions or questions of style and format. The Department of Religion requires, e.g., that all quotations in a foreign language be translated either in the text of the dissertation with the original in a footnote, or vice-versa. The Graduate School suggests the MLA guide sheet regarding form and style, but accepts the use of Kate Turabian's Guide for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press). Footnotes, rather than end-notes, are required. Consistency in form of documentation is absolutely requisite.
- c. The Department of Religion requires that all dissertations include a page signed by the student stating that no generative AI has been used to generate or assist in the writing of this dissertation. Or the page must state exactly how AI was used, specifying the platform and application, and the advance approval of the prospectus and dissertation committees.

5. Procedures for Submitting a Dissertation

- a. The Dissertation Advisor, First Reader and the Department Reader must each certify to the Director of Graduate Studies that the dissertation is ready for oral examination.
- b. The student shall present one copy of the dissertation for examination and approval to the Graduate School.
- c. The student shall secure from and file all necessary forms requesting the oral defense with the Graduate School.
- d. At least six copies of the dissertation, including the original, shall be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies no less than three weeks prior to the date when the student desires to be examined. This minimum time does not guarantee that the oral will be that soon.
- e. The Director of Graduate Studies, upon request of the student, may invite up to two faculty members in addition to the Dissertation Committee (usually but not necessarily from the faculty of the Department of Religion) to serve on the Dissertation Examining Committee. Additions can include: Syracuse University non-tenure track faculty members with a PhD or comparable doctorate (e.g., teaching assistant professor) and/or an individual who is external to the University, assuming the individual has appropriate subject matter expertise. Further, the Director of Graduate Studies may suggest any faculty member deemed appropriate to the Graduate School to serve as Chairperson of the Dissertation Examining Committee. The Graduate School requires that this chairperson be someone outside of the faculty of the Department of Religion. These six persons shall be the members of the Examining Committee for the oral defense.

- f. All graduate students shall be notified of the date and invited to attend each oral defense.

6. The Oral Defense, Corrections and Revisions of the Dissertation

- a. The oral defense shall be conducted by three to five faculty members, which will include all three members of the Dissertation committee and up to two additional examiners, and the Chairperson of the Dissertation Examining Committee who serves as the representative of the Graduate School. All members of the faculty of the Department of Religion are invited to participate in the oral exam.
- b. The oral defense will lead to one of the following decisions:
 - i. Pass with minor corrections.
 - ii. Pass with revisions.
 - iii. Fail with opportunity for rewriting all or major portions of the dissertation to be defended at another oral.
 - iv. Fail with no opportunity for rewrite.
- c. It shall be the responsibility of the Dissertation Advisor and any other members of the Dissertation Examining Committee, at the discretion of the Committee, to certify to the Graduate School that all corrections and/or revisions required by the Committee have been completed to the satisfaction of representative(s) of the Examining Committee.

E. Graduation Requirements

The Graduate Certification Office requires the completion and filing of a number of forms, payment of certain fees, etc. before graduation is possible. The student is expected to fulfill all these requirements directly with the Graduate Certification Office.

VI. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE M.PHIL DEGREE

The requirements for this degree are identical to those for the Ph.D. degree (see V above), except that no Prospectus or Dissertation is required.

VII. DEGREE PROGRESS: TIME LIMITATIONS

A. Exams and Dissertation:

- 1. The comprehensive exams must be completed by the end of January in the student's third year in the Ph.D. program.
- 2. The defense of the prospectus should take place before the end of the spring semester of the student's third year. It must take place by the end of

the fourth year, or TA funding for the fifth year of study will be suspended.

3. According to Graduate School protocols, the time between the completion of Ph.D. comprehensive examinations and the completion of the dissertation shall not exceed five years.

B. General Proviso:

The Department of Religion, like the Graduate School, reserves the right to grant or not grant petitions extending these limitations, and to establish conditions on any approvals. Similarly, the Department of Religion may establish criteria for considering students 'inactive' in the program, and any special conditions for reactivation.

C. Sample timeline for PhD program:

Year	Summer	Fall	Spring
1	Language 1	Course work TA	Course work TA Theories & methods exam (Jan.)
2	Language 2 Field work Grant applications	Course work TA	Course work TA Request to sit (due March 1) Theories & methods exam (Jan.)
3	Comprehensive exam prep	Study for Comprehensive exams TA	Write Prospectus TA
4	Field work Grant applications Dissertation	Prospectus defense Field work Dissertation TA/320	Field work Dissertation TA/320
5	Dissertation	Dissertation TA/lower level course	Dissertation defense TA/lower level course

D. Evaluation of progress towards degree, probation, and suspension

1. The faculty of the Department of Religion meets to review all Ph.D. students' progress towards their degrees in an annual review at the end of the spring semester. In preparation for this review, students will be asked to fill out a short progress report in consultation with their faculty advisor, who must sign it. The

Director of Graduate Studies will report the outcome of each student's review to the student and their advisor.

2. Procedures for placing students on academic probation can be found in Academic Rules section of the Syracuse University Course Catalog. In addition, the Religion Ph.D. program may place a student on probation and, if the issues are not rectified in a timely fashion, on suspension for the following reasons:
 - a. And overall GPA in the program of less than 3.0
 - b. Failure to pass qualifying exams
 - c. Failure to meet milestone deadlines

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