

Religious Studies 498 - "Advanced Project"

This is a supervised research project or other creative work, required of intensive Religious Studies majors, to be completed in the senior year. Non-intensive Religious Studies major may choose to take the 498 Advanced Project to satisfy their requirement for a Group C course (under the pre-2014 catalogs) or for a 400 level course (under the 2014-15 catalog and later)

Approaches and topics vary considerably in the 498 Advanced Project. Some students, using the model of the traditional senior thesis, conduct formal research and present a substantial term paper, while others prefer a more "creative" approach, choosing instead to write a play, a spiritual autobiography, or a cycle of poems. Whichever approach one takes with the form of the project, the content of the work should draw from and bring together knowledge from a substantial part of the courses they have taken during their program of study in Religious Studies.

Past projects have included "Discovering the Miracles of Jesus and the Faith Response", "Modal Interpretations of St Anselm's Ontological Argument", "The History and Practice of Prison Ministry", "Medieval Female Mysticism: Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe", and "Islam: The Transformation" and have ranged from 25 to 60 pages. Whatever the approach or the topic, the aim of the Advanced Project is to give students the opportunity to do two things at once: to reflect broadly on their study of religion in general, and to bring into focus what they have learned in other courses by concentrating on a subject of particular interest or concern.

- Intensive majors, for whom this course is a requirement, would be well advised to begin considering what their project might be as early as possible, and certainly **by the middle of their senior year** they should have some possible directions in mind.
- Also **no later than mid-term of the student's penultimate semester**, the student should ask one of the Department's faculty to serve as a director or "first reader." This will normally be someone with whom one has worked before in another course or courses and whose interests one shares. The director of the 498 Advanced Project must be a professor in the Religious Studies Department.

The main point of this initial meeting is to discuss guiding interests and preliminary ideas and to begin thinking through both approach and resources. Faculty will also explain their own specific procedures and expectations. How many times and how often will the student be asked to meet with the faculty member during the research and preparation of the project? What is the deadline for completion? How long should the project be? In the case of a formal paper, what manual of style is to be followed, and what formatting requirements should be observed?

- As the thesis nears completion, the student must select two other professors to act as readers for the final presentation. The thesis committee must include three professors.

The director of the thesis must be from the Department of Religious Studies; one or both of the other two readers may be professors from outside the department but must meet with the approval of the director of the thesis. The two readers must be professors at USC or with another approved college, university or seminary. The two readers must be approved by the director at least one month prior to the scheduled thesis defense.

The student may invite pastors, friends, employers, family members, or friends to attend the defense as non-participating guests.

- The last stage of an Advanced Project is its formal presentation before the committee composed of one's director and the two other faculty readers. Students are given the opportunity to explain why they chose their particular topic and what they believe they have accomplished and learned. Committee members then pose questions which are designed to encourage the student's further reflection, and criticisms and recommendations for improvement are offered.

This presentation should be scheduled far enough in advance of the end of the semester that the committee's suggested revisions (if any) can be incorporated in a final draft of the project in time to be graded and the final grade submitted to the Registrar.