All students are responsible for the information contained in the current Mount St. Mary’s College Catalogue and in this GRST handbook.
INTRODUCTION

Mount St. Mary’s College Graduate Religious Studies Department (GRST) follows all policies and procedures set down for Graduate Programs in the current Mount St. Mary’s College Catalogue. The catalog also contains information on all of the following GRST topics: Admission requirements, unit requirements capstone project, comprehensive examinations, transfer of credit, certificate programs, continuing education for pastoral and catechetical Ministry and the role of the Graduate Religious Studies Academic Review Board (ARB).

This Graduate Religious Studies Faculty and Student Handbook contains information not included in the catalogue and outlines the practices and procedures of Mount St. Mary’s College Graduate Religious Studies Department.

The Graduate Religious Studies Director (GRST Director) administrates the Graduate Religious Studies Programs under the supervision of the Religious Studies Department Chair (RST Chair) and in consultation with the ARB.

ADMISSION

All applications for admission go directly to the Office of Graduate Admissions, Building 10, Chester Place, Los Angeles, CA, 90007. Once the Office of Graduate Admissions has processed the application the student’s file is sent to the GRST Director. All members of the ARB review it and make their comments in writing. These are included in the student file. If one or more ARB members are not available, it will suffice to have the GRST Director and the RST Chair review the application. If either one is unavailable another GRST faculty member will be asked to help the Director or the Chair review the application.

Writing Prompt: In addition to the regular admission procedure outlined in the current college catalogue, the candidate for the M.A. in Religious Studies Program must give proof of her/his ability to write a quality research paper. The GRST Director will give a list of questions to the applicant. These questions will cover the four areas of the curriculum (Sacred Scripture, Systematic Theology, Christian Ethics, and Studies in Ministry.) The student will choose two of the four areas and answer one question in each area. The student has two weeks to research and write a paper on each question. Each paper will be referenced and between three (3) and five (5) pages in length, double-spaced and use Times New Roman 12 font.

The GRST Director and the RST Chair will review the prompt. Once approved, the GRST Director will inform the candidate of the results.

The GRST Director will appoint a graduate advisor who will meet with the student prior to registration each semester. The RST Program Assistant will keep an accurate list of students and their advisors.

Non-B.A. Candidate Admission to Graduate Religious Studies: In extraordinary and exceptional cases, a student may petition to apply for admission to the M.A. program in Religious Studies even if s/he does not have the prerequisite B.A. degree. The applicant must first submit a detailed resume and then meet with the Director of Graduate Religious Studies, the Department Chair and the Graduate Dean. If they agree, the applicant will then be invited to submit a request for a portfolio review. Once the Director of Graduate Religious Studies, the Department Chair and the Graduate Dean have approved this, the applicant prepares and submits an academic portfolio for review by the ARB and the Graduate Council. (Copies of successful portfolios are available in the Graduate Religious Studies Office for on-site consultation.). The Director of Graduate Religious Studies must warn the student that preparing and submitting a portfolio does not guarantee admission.
The criteria: The portfolio must prove that the student is capable of true scientific theological
research, critical thinking and writing, and has a history of contributing to public theological
discourse. The portfolio should be submitted in a three ring binder and include the following:

Personal Page: Name, address, telephone number, email address, and if possible a picture.
Application Form for Graduate Admission.
Statement of Interest: A written statement of no more than two or three pages indicating why
the candid feels s/he should be admitted to the M.A. Program.
A detailed resume with the following information: education; work/experience related to
Religious Studies, with accompanying telephone numbers for contact purposes.
Supplementary Documentation: List of published and unpublished works with samples;
copies of certificates of religious studies; transcripts and/or professional evaluation of studies
done in or outside of the United States; copies of any tests that may indicate capacity to
study at the Master’s level; work-related evaluations; proof of conferences, classes,
workshops, retreats in theology that the applicant has given; copies of writings, papers and
written assignments; annotated bibliography of theological works read in the last two years.
Three (3) letters of recommendation dealing with applicant’s ability to do advanced studies
with appropriate telephone numbers for contact purposes.

FEES AND FINANCIAL AID:

The Graduate Religious Studies Department follows the financial policies and fee scale for
Graduate Students as it appears in the current Mount St. Mary’s College Catalogue.
Limited financial aid is available to matriculated students who have completed six units of credit,
who have maintained a 3.0 cumulative GPA and who can prove financial need. These students
must complete the Graduate Program Payment Form (Blue Form) each and every semester they
request a scholarship from the Graduate Religious Studies Department.

M.A. IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES: See current catalog for Admission Requirements, Unit
Requirement, Capstone Project and Comprehensive Examination information.

If a student is not registered in any courses or is on a Leave of Absence (LOA), the Religious
Studies Department and Faculty withholds all advisory services.

INDEPENDENT STUDY COURSES: In extraordinary cases and after consulting the student’s
Graduate Advisor, the GRST Director may allow a student to take an independent study course
(1-3 units). With the advisor’s approval, the student submits a written petition to the GRST
Director who consults the RST Chair and the ARB. An independent study course requires a
contract between Mount St. Mary’s College and the instructor teaching it. It also requires a
contract between the student and the instructor on file in the Graduate Religious Studies Office
and the Registrar’s Office prior to granting permission. Only after the RST Chair, the GRST
Director, the ARB and the Graduate Dean have examined and signed these two documents will
permission be granted.

The Student Contract: The Registrar’s Office will provide the Student Contract Form for
Independent Study. It must contain the following elements: The instructor’s syllabus; a reading
list; a series of meeting dates; the method of evaluation; the date on which the grade will be
handed in to the Registrar’s Office, the signature of the student, the instructor and the GRST
Director or the RST Department Chair and the Graduate Dean.
TAKING A COURSE OUTSIDE OF THE GRST DEPARTMENT
In certain cases a student is allowed to take courses in an MSMC Graduate Department other than the GRST Department. The student must first discuss this with his/her faculty advisor. With the signed agreement of the advisor, the student then submits a petition to the GRST Director who consults the ARB. After careful examination, the ARB advises the GRST Director who then informs the student of the final decision.

BOOK ORDERING FOR COURSES:
At times a graduate course requires the student to purchase and read a text prior to the beginning of the course. It is strongly suggested that the student look into purchasing it online rather than waiting for it to appear in the bookstore. There are various ways of purchasing it at a discount rate and the Graduate Religious Department Office is more than willing to help you in this matter.

MSMC STUDENT E-MAIL AND ANGEL LEARNING:
Every Graduate Religious Studies student must have and use a Mount St. Mary’s College e-mail address. E-mail is the official source of information between Mount St. Mary’s College and students.

The student must also have an MSMC e-mail address to use Angel Learning. Angel Learning is the online learning platform used at Mount St. Mary’s College. Professors use it in order to provide students with information, to receive student submissions, to hold online discussions and to facilitate student interaction.

CAPSTONE PROJECT
Choice of Thesis or Research Essay: By the time the student has completed twelve units, s/he must, with the advice and approval of her/his Graduate Advisor, decide whether to apply to do the Thesis or the Research Essay. A student who intends to continue in a doctoral program after obtaining the M.A. in Religious Studies at Mount St. Mary’s College, is strongly encouraged to do the Thesis.

THE THESIS (RST 290)
The thesis (RST 290) is worth four (4) units. It demonstrates the student's creative academic contribution to a specific field of interest. It is the culmination of a student's research, creativity, and scholarship. A thesis research project involves not only grappling with a theological issue, but also acquiring a better understanding of the general discipline and development of thought in the theological discipline in which the student is working.

Graduate Advisor, Director of Thesis, Readers: The Graduate Advisor, the Director of Thesis and Reader must be full-time or part-time MSMC faculty members. In extraordinary cases, the Reader may be an accredited faculty member from another college or university.

The Director of Thesis: By the time the student has completed twelve units, the student should be ready to choose a Director of Thesis. This is done under the guidance of the Graduate Advisor and the Director of Graduate Religious Studies. The Religious Studies Chair must confirm the choice of the Director of Thesis.

Research:
The student should begin to reflect on the choice of a research topic as soon as possible after being admitted to the program. By the time the student completes nine units the student should have a clear idea for a topic.
While taking the first nine units, the student will do some preliminary research and get acquainted with the current trends in the field of the student’s interest by reviewing recent books, conference proceedings and current issues of theological journals or reviews. The best way to do this is by writing a review of the each article, book etc read. This review will describe the strengths and weaknesses of the material being considered.

**Thesis Proposal:**

Once the Director of Thesis is appointed and has examined and approved the student’s thesis topic, the student will formally submit it to the GRST Director who will submit it the ARB for review and approval. This process must be completed, at the very latest, by midterm of the semester before the student enrolls in RST 290.

Please note that in order to submit the thesis proposal the student must use the Graduate Thesis Proposal Form from the Office of Graduate Religious Studies, Building 2, Doheny Campus

**Length:** The thesis is to be a minimum of eighty-five (85) pages in length and should not exceed one hundred (100) pages. (The paper will be penalized if it goes beyond one hundred pages).

**Format:** To write the thesis, the student uses Kate L. Turabian’s, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** The Graduate Thesis must reflect the development of the student’s thought and research. The student’s voice must be heard in the Graduate Thesis. Therefore, the student will adhere to the College’s Academic Integrity Policy as presented in the current Mount St. Mary’s College Catalogue. Failure to do so may result in a “Fail” grade and possible dismissal from the program. (Please note: Professors at Mount St. Mary’s College have access to programs that can quickly detect plagiarism.)

**Critical Thinking:** The Thesis must be neither a series of quotations strung together and only punctuated by the student’s thoughts, nor an “opinion” paper in which only the student’s voice is heard without reference to the sources which have contributed to the development of the thought or argument. The Thesis must truly be a research project that demonstrates the student’s logic, understanding and insights on the topic. It must be written in the student’s own voice.

**THE RESEARCH ESSAY (RST 291)**

The Research Essay (RST 291) is worth one (1) graduate unit. It is a document that shows the student’s ability to research and present all sides of a theological topic. It presents the current state of the question (*status quaestionis*) of research on a particular topic within its historical context. It gives insight into the student’s understanding of the general discipline and of the specific topic. It also demonstrates the student’s ability to integrate the material researched and to present it in a coherent and informative manner. Through this work the student shows that s/he has a better understanding of the subject than when s/he began the research and can communicate this understanding in writing.

**Length:** The research essay is a minimum of forty-five (45) pages in length and a maximum of sixty-five (65) pages. (The paper will be penalized if it goes beyond sixty-five pages.)

**Method:** The remarks regarding the thesis format, reference, appendices, proposal development, grading research and tips apply equally to the Research Essay.

**SOME USEFUL WRITING TIPS**

**Title:** The topic should be written out in the form of a succinct title when the student begins work. This is the “working title.” It will change during the course of research and writing because the
student’s final goal may shift. The Director of Thesis or Director of the Research Essay should approve the final title before the Capstone Project is submitted. It should tell the reader exactly what the student is writing about and what the goal of the paper is. It should be clear and concise and the project should “live up to” the title. The student should try to make it accurate rather than “novel” or “snappy”.

Table of contents: The table of contents should take the form of an outline. When someone reads the table of contents, that person should be able to get a quick idea of what the research project is about and the logical succession of ideas.

Introduction: The student should write the introduction only when the body of the paper is finished. It concisely explains the purpose of the paper (goal and objectives) and how this purpose will be carried out in each and every chapter. The introduction should be brief and to the point. At the end of the introduction the student may add a small paragraph of acknowledgements.

Bibliography: The bibliography should be the list of books, articles, internet web pages, etc. that the student has actually used. It should be done according to the Turabian (Chicago) style. The student may add a section containing suggested further reading at the end of the bibliography. The student must develop a reference system if there are personal interviews, if there is material never published before, or if there are materials that are new and have no references.

Conclusion: In the conclusion, the student briefly summarizes her/his writing itinerary. The conclusion provides an “aerial” snapshot of the topic and the logic of the student’s insights. In this section of the paper, the student offers the not only the conclusions deduced from the facts presented in the body of the work but also their possible ramifications.

Referencing: Referencing the Capstone Project is essential: Footnotes give credit to authors, sources and works used. They are also meant to clarify points that might logically distract from the main text’s flow of thought or argumentation but which enhances the reading of the text. Footnotes are also used to make the foreign language text of a quotation available to the reader who is provided with an English translation in the main text. The student should avoid using foreign words in the text that may distract. The Graduate Religious Studies student is required to use the Turabian (Chicago) Style.

Appendices: The appendix is the place where the student includes supporting material that will distract from the logical succession of ideas if it is inserted in the text. Statistics, maps, etc. may be placed in the appendices only if they support the material in the main body of the text. Appendices should not be used as a parallel text on another topic.

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION (RST 298)

All students who wish to be granted the M.A. in Religious Studies are required to take the Comprehensive Examination.

Purpose RST 298 (Comprehensive Examination) is worth one (1) unit. It demonstrates the breadth and the depth of the student’s theological knowledge, understanding and integration of that knowledge during the time spent in the Graduate Religious Studies Program. It consists of questions taken from the four areas of the Graduate Religious Studies Curriculum: Sacred Scripture, Christian Ethics, Systematic Theology and Ministry.

Method, Time and Date The GRST Director sets the method, date and time for the Comprehensive Examinations.

Preparing Questions: At the end of each graduate course, the student develops a general question that covers one unit of credit and is of sufficient breadth and depth to deal with the subject matter. This means that for a one-unit course, the student develops one question; for a
two-unit course, two questions; for a three unit-course, three questions, etc. This will be done for all courses with the exception of RST 290, RST 291 and RST 298.

**Submitting Questions** After completing all course work, and after discussing the questions with the Graduate Advisor and the Director of Thesis, the student will submit them to the Director of Graduate Religious Studies one month prior to the date on which the examination will occur. The Director of Graduate Religious Studies or/and the Religious Studies Chairperson, or their delegates will then prepare the questions the student will answer during the comprehensive examination.

**Examples:** The following are examples of questions the student might submit. Note that they are sufficiently deep and broad enough to provide a clear idea of student knowledge of the topic. Remember, however, that the questions chosen will be “reconstructed” into a new question that will appear on the exam. These questions serve only as examples of questions the student should submit.

**Sacred Scripture:**

- Explain the development of each of the prophets’ theology in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the effect of these writings on later Scriptural passages in the Old Testament and on Jesus’ self understanding in one of the Synoptic Gospels.
- The book of Revelation depends heavily on the “apocalyptic” vocabulary in use at that time. Describe the development of that vocabulary and the effects of early Hebrew Apocalyptic literature on specific passages in the Book of Revelation.

**Systematic Theology:**

- “Christ if the Fundamental Sacrament” Explain how this statement has developed in Eucharistic Theology, the impact it has on all the Sacraments, but most especially on the theology of the Eucharist. Although you do not necessarily have to quote each author directly, you are to be detailed in presenting the thought of at least three major authors.
- Describe the issues and questions that have developed around the letter of Paul to the Philippians.

**Christian Ethics**

- There are varying opinions on stem cell research. You are to briefly describe three theological positions on the subject and provide the arguments used by the proponents of those positions. You are then to elaborate on the complex theological issues involved and the scientific and moral questions raised.
- Describe the issues and themes developed in current theologies of liberation. You are to go into detail and discuss various positions, theologians and ramifications of these positions.

**Pastoral Theology and Ministry:**

- Describe Practical Theology. Give an overview of the opinions of three authors and explain how it is applied to a specific pastoral situation.
- Describe the position of three Theologians of Hispanic Ministry regarding the major pastoral pronouncements of the Bishops of the United States. Why do the Theologians of Hispanic ministry NOT write in Spanish?
Correcting Examination: There are two correctors for the Comprehensive Examination. The correctors will be chosen from full time, part time or adjunct faculty at Mount St. Mary's. In extraordinary cases, an accredited faculty member of another college or university may be invited to be a corrector.

Grading: The student is graded on the ability to organize the response; the creative integration of information acquired in coursework; logic and development of arguments and conclusions; coherence of presentation; grammar and spelling. If the examination is handwritten, clear penmanship and legibility are required.

LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH IN THE COMPLETION EXERCISES:

The Graduate Religious Studies Department wishes to put into practice Mount St. Mary's College policy on diversity and inclusiveness. It recognizes that it serves a culturally rich and ethnically diverse population. While respecting the limits of its own accreditation and recognizing that English is its theological language, the Graduate Religious Studies Department also wishes to serve and honor those whose primary language for theological reflection and communication is one other than English. To that end, it observes the following practice regarding the use of languages other than English in the completion exercises:

Thesis: While obtaining permission for the thesis, a student may also petition to write the graduate thesis in a language other than English, under the following conditions:

The Director of Thesis and reader must be fluent in the language chosen.
The student must present a detailed 15 to 20-page summary of the Thesis in English when it is completed.
Upon completion, the student will meet and discuss the Thesis with the Director of Thesis and the reader in English.
The petition is to be presented to the Director of Graduate Religious Studies during the semester prior to registering for RST 290 (Thesis). The Director of Graduate Religious Studies will then consult the Religious Studies Chairperson, the Graduate Advisor, the Director of Thesis, and the reader before granting permission.

Research Essay: While obtaining permission for the Research Essay, a student may also petition to write it in a language other than English, under the following conditions:

The Director of Essay and reader must be fluent in the language chosen.
The student must present a detailed 5 to 10 page summary of the Research Essay in English when it is completed.
Upon completion, the student meets and discusses the Research Essay with the Director of Essay and the reader in English.
The petition is presented to the Director of Graduate Religious Studies during the semester prior to registering for RST 291 (Essay). The Director of Graduate Religious Studies will then consult the Religious Studies Chairperson, the Graduate Advisor, the Director of Essay and the other faculty reader before granting permission.

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1 The present practice was agreed upon by Larry Ryan, Ph.D., former Graduate Dean and Sr. Mary McKay, CSJ, Ph.D., former Director of Graduate Religious Studies in Fall 2003 in order to accommodate the growing number of Spanish speaking/writing students who had entered the M.A. in Religious Studies Program. It was formally approved by Mary Boyce, Ph.D., Provost on March 17th 2005 at a meeting attended by Dr. Eleanor Siebert, Ph.D., Acting Graduate Dean; Sr. Darlene Kawulok, CSJ, D. Min., Religious Studies Chair; Sr. Carol Brong, CSJ, Assistant Registrar.
**Comprehensive Examination:** In exceptional cases, and under the following conditions, a student may petition to do part of the comprehensive examination in a language other than English.

Two of the three essay questions may be written in the language chosen. The third essay question must be written in English.
The two correctors must be fluent in the language in which the paper has been presented.
After the written examination, the two correctors will examine the student orally and in English on the two essays written in the language chosen.
The petition is to be presented to the Director of Graduate Religious Studies during the semester prior to registering for RST 298 (Comprehensives). The Director of Graduate Religious Studies will then consult the Religious Studies Chairperson, the Graduate Advisor, the Director of Thesis and the Graduate Dean before granting permission.

**CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES:**

Since the Graduate Student is striving to become a professional theologian, the art of communicating research findings and theological reflection in writing is essential. Unless the student is able to do so, the student will not be granted the M.A. in Religious Studies. In other words, if the student completes all required courses for the M.A. in Religious Studies but does not successfully complete RST 290 or RST 291 and RST 298, the student will be encouraged to apply for the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Religious Studies.

**ADVANCED CATEchetical MINISTRY (RST263 ABC):**

Since its inception, the Graduate Religious Studies Program at Mount St. Mary’s College has had an excellent working relationship with the Office of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ORE).

In agreement with the Office of Religious Education, the Department of Graduate Religious Studies offers graduate credit to students taking the Advanced Catechetical Ministry Formation Program (ACM) sponsored by the Office of Religious Education.

The course in the current Mount St. Mary’s Catalog is RST 263 A,B,C Advanced Catechetical Ministry (2,2,2). It is described as a three-phase course that prepares Archdiocesan catechetical leaders for ministry to adults. The course consists of three areas: theological formation, ministry specialization and supervised practicum. It is an off-site cooperative program organized by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The Director of the Advanced Catechetical Ministry Formation Program in the Archdiocese is appointed by the Director of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and oversees the program at the Archdiocese and is the Instructor of the appointed by Mount St. Mary’s College.

The course consists of nine all-day seminars held at a site determined by the Office of Religious Education and meets the student contact requirements. With the knowledge and approval of the RST Department, the Office of Religious Education assumes the responsibility of recruiting and paying the instructors. Each year the list of instructors is reviewed by the Director of Graduate Religious Studies and a copy of the list is kept in the GRST Office. The Office of Religious Education not only supplies location but also any supplies needed.

Those who seek graduate credit from Mount St. Mary’s College must register through the Director of the Advanced Catechetical Program, attend the seminars and write an essay after each seminar session.

The Director of the Advanced Catechetical Ministry Formation Program registers students and submits grades. The program, methods and procedures are reviewed and supervised by the GRST Director and the RST Chair.