Information for Senior Religion Majors

General Advice for Second Semester: The department expects all of you to work diligently on your thesis and encourages you to keep back-ups of all thesis materials. In the spring semester, you should set aside a minimum of fifteen hours per week for work on your thesis, in addition to weekly meetings with your advisor. Remember to allow additional time for any typing, revising, printing, or photocopying that may be required--and build in even more time for unforeseen emergencies.

Length: Your completed thesis should be no more than 40 pages (excluding bibliography and end notes).

The work of the Senior Seminar in Religion consists of five stages: I) the formulation of a thesis proposal; II) presentation of the proposal; III) presentation of a portion of work in progress; IV) the writing and submission of first and final drafts; V) oral discussion with department faculty. We have already accomplished stages I-IIIa in the first semester (RELG398). This information sheet summarizes the seminar's second semester (RELG399) activities, meeting times, and due dates. Attendance at all sessions, careful preparation, and active participation are required.

We will meet on Tuesday, January 19th to debrief after winter break and to prepare for the work of the semester in RELG399. Please schedule a meeting with your advisor before our next meeting on January 26th.

IIIb. Presentation of A Writing Sample Of Work In Progress

Tuesday 1:30-4, January 26 and February 2, 2016.

Prepare a writing sample of 4-5 pages and an outline of your project for presentation and discussion. Select a portion of your writing that best represents the central claim or argument of your thesis, its most crucial interpretation, or the key to the whole that you see emerging. Also prepare a brief outline that shows how you think this portion of writing will fit into the thesis as a whole.

***Please note that at this point we expect you to have written more than 5 pages, but we want you to present only 4-5 pages of that work.

Submission of Your Excerpt: 1 Electronic Copy in MS Word to Moodle. Please place one electronic version (Microsoft Word) inside the Moodle course web page by 5 p.m. of the Saturday preceding your presentation (Saturday, January 23 for those who present the first week; Saturday, January 30 for those who present the second week). If you need assistance in submitting your electronic copy, send your Word document as an email attachment to the convener, Naomi Koltun-Fromm (nkoltunf@haverford.edu) and she will place it on Moodle. Each of you will be expected to read and comment on all of these documents before the Tuesday seminar. You should download and/or print your own copies from the Moodle site.

Written responses to writing selections:
Each response should be at least one paragraph in length and should consist of three things:
1. a concise summary of the basic point, question, or theme of the writing selection;
2. the single most important question the writing sample leaves you wondering about; and
3. the best advice you have for the author.

Send electronic versions (MS Word) of each response to Naomi Koltun-Fromm (nkoltunf@haverford.edu). In addition, send or bring a copy of each of your responses to the authors of the samples. Written responses will be assessed for the extent to which they demonstrate careful reading and thoughtful consideration of the writing samples.

Presentation of a portion of written work and outline. At these seminar meetings, those presenting will be asked to comment briefly on their work and especially to identify questions they would like to have considered by the
group. Everyone should come prepared to offer comments and raise questions in order to help each presenter make progress on his or her project. After these sessions, you should continue to meet weekly with your thesis advisor(s). It is strongly recommended that you submit to your advisor at least 5 pages of thesis draft per week.

IIIc. Presentation of a Second Writing Sample
Tuesday 1:30-4 February 16th and 23rd
In these sessions we will share 10 pages of writing, but in smaller groups to be determined before hand. Please share a piece you feel could particularly benefit from a group workshop. We will follow the procedure from above, but we will read fewer papers each.

IV. The Writing and Submission of the First and Final Drafts

Monday March 21, 12 noon, FIRST DRAFT OF THESIS DUE. Each of you should submit a complete computer-printed draft of your thesis to your advisor. By "complete" we mean a draft in which all principal sections are present and in proper order, and one in which a reader can follow your argument from beginning to end. The precise state of the draft and the date when your advisor will return it to you with comments are to be worked out individually with your advisor.

Monday, April 18th, 12 noon, SENIOR THESIS DUE.
By 12 noon, submit 8 hard copies of your thesis of about 40 pages, plus one electronic copy, complete with bibliography, notes (presented in conformity with the Chicago Manual of Style, 13th Edition, unless another standard style sheet is agreed upon with your advisor), and a one or two page Abstract that clearly and concisely summarizes your thesis (this should be included at the very beginning of your thesis, before your introduction). All theses will be read by all members of the department. The copies and electronic version must be delivered to Gail Heimberger (Administrative Assistant) on the second floor of Gest. This deadline is non-negotiable, and failure to meet it will result instantly and automatically in a one-position change in the grade for the thesis (e.g., from 3.0 to 2.7); the grade reduction will increase one position for every subsequent 24 hours the thesis is late. Please note: neither your advisor nor the convener of the seminar can authorize any extension. Only the department as a whole, generally in consultation with the student's dean, can authorize any extensions, which must be requested in advance.

IVa. Tuesday, April 19th, 1:30pm - Senior Party and Discussion.
We will all meet informally with food and drink to celebrate the completion of your theses and to share insights on the thesis-writing experience. Each student will share a brief summary of his or her thesis so that all can hear and learn.

V. May 2-4 Oral Discussions.
There will be a sign-up sheet for the oral discussion available when you hand in your thesis in Gest. All orals will take place between Monday (May 2th) and Wednesday (May 4th). Sign up will be in order of submission of theses--the earlier you turn in your thesis, the greater your choice of times. Allow 60 minutes for the oral and subsequent discussion with the department. Your final grade for senior seminar will be sent to you by email shortly after the oral exam.
Summary of Due Dates

- First meeting January 19, 2016 debriefing
- **January 26 and February 2, 2016. Presentation of 5 page sample plus outline.** By 5 p.m. on the Saturday before you are scheduled to present, place one copy of your writing selection on the Moodle web site. Please do not call your document "thesis sample" or "Relg 399b," but save it under your own name for easy identification.
  All of you will write a one-page response to the samples being discussed at each meeting. Bring one copy of your responses to the meeting; send an electronic copy to Naomi Koltun-Fromm (nkoltunf@haverford.edu).
- **February 16 and 23, 2016. Preparation and Presentation of 10 page Writing Sample.** Procedures as above.
- **Monday, March 21st AT NOON, FIRST DRAFT DUE (1 copy to advisor).**
- **Monday April 18th AT NOON, SENIOR THESIS DUE (8 hard copies, one electronic version delivered to Gall Heimberger in Gest) by 12 noon.**
- **Tuesday, April 19th, AT 1:30, POST-THESIS GATHERING AND PARTY.**
- **Monday-Wednesday May 2-4 – SENIOR ORALS: (Sign up for times when you submit thesis).**

Grading Procedures

You will receive a regular course grade for Rel. 399b, which will appear on your transcript. This overall grade is comprised of three separate grades that evaluate:

- your participation in the seminar process outlined above: "Participation" in the seminar means 1) punctual attendance at all seminar events, 2) careful preparation, especially the reading of your colleagues' work in progress, and 3) regular meetings with your advisor and submission of writing, according to the schedule mutually agreed upon.

- the quality of your thesis: "Quality" of thesis (see attached description). Your thesis will be read by all members of the department who will mutually agree upon a grade for the written thesis. This grade will be factored into your final grade for the thesis and seminar after the oral.

- the effectiveness of your oral: "Effectiveness" of the oral conversation. The effectiveness of your oral discussion will be factored into the final grade for the thesis and for the seminar as a whole. All members of the department will participate in your oral discussion and the grading of your thesis and course work.
What Should You Aim For in a Thesis?

Writing a thesis that you and the faculty will be proud of is a considerable challenge. Although you will draw on a variety of skills you have practiced in other courses, you will now be constructing a work that will be longer (40 pages) and far more complex than any paper you have previously written. The following description offers one way of looking at some of the various aspects of the challenge of thesis writing.

1. Thesis, Argument and Evidence. All presentations should make a specific claim (the thesis) and present an argument for that claim on the basis of evidence. The nature of the claim, the presentation and exposition of the argument, and the character of the supporting evidence will vary from field to field and from topic to topic. But a mere summary of a text is not a thesis; a simple recital of facts is not an argument; and the sheer assertion of opinion is not evidence. Your claim should be clear to any knowledgeable reader; the argument that articulates the claim should be easily discernible, and it should progress from point to point with precision and according to some sort of logical progression. Both claim and argument should be supported by clear and convincing evidence.

2. Use of Sources. Your project should be firmly grounded in your own analysis of the relevant primary sources. You should be able to come to independent judgments about the meaning and significance of these sources, and your analysis of them should be characterized by precision and attention to detail. Resist the temptation to summarize rather than analyze primary sources, or to use them as illustrations of general assertions of your own. We also expect you to draw on relevant secondary sources, and they should also be used analytically and critically. While you should not allow any secondary source to predetermine your own insights into the primary material, there are circumstances in which a judicious use of secondary sources can aid you early on in the formulation of your project. The best theses will bring their arguments into debate with some arguments of other scholars in the field. You should specify in the notes references to sources of all kinds, whether quoted directly, paraphrased, or summarized. Plagiarism is best avoided by coming to your own judgments on the basis of primary sources without prematurely filtering them through secondary sources. All sources to which you are indebted must, of course, be cited in the footnotes and bibliography.

3. Originality, Inventiveness, Creativity, Willingness to Explore. These terms characterize work that goes beyond mere summary (however careful, fair, complete and elegant) of an issue in order to explore new possibilities or offer insightful and original analyses. Hard to specify, but "we know it when we see it." These qualities most clearly set apart A papers from B papers; strive for them.

4. Organization and Coherence. This involves setting out the argument, evidence, sources, and insights in a clear, well-ordered way that any intelligent reader can follow. This is the transformation of heterogeneous materials into a cogent, persuasive essay. The way a paper is laid out is important: it should be the precise literary form that best articulates the progression of your argument (to be distinguished from the actual progression of your inner thought processes as you come to conceive of your argument). You must transform the private progression of thoughts in your mind into an orderly public presentation written for a competent reader. It may be useful to imagine the reader of your thesis as an intelligent and well-educated person who has relatively little knowledge of your topic. Your job is not only to inform the reader about the topic, but to persuade her/him of your argument.

5. Presentation. Your thesis should attain the greatest degree of physical perfection possible: we are referring here to proofreading, spelling, page lay-out, illustrations (if any), table of contents, title, index (if any), etc. Writing an essay is a craft--like building a fine piece of furniture--and the physical presentation of your essay conveys a number of messages to your reader, including how you regard the thesis itself and how you want your readers to approach it.