Religious Studies, M.A.

The Master of Arts program in the Department of Religious Studies is designed for students who wish to advance their understanding of a particular area of religious studies or explore multiple traditions and topics beyond the undergraduate level. Many M.A. students choose to later pursue a Ph.D. Many others bring their advanced education to such careers as medicine, nursing, law, diplomacy, ministry, social advocacy, journalism, counseling, and informatics.

M.A. students analyze the ways in which diverse religious traditions originate, develop, and interact over time. Students learn to identify and use multiple methods for the study of religion, including historical, philosophical, ethical, literary, linguistic, psychological, ethnographic, and digital approaches. Students draw on the expertise of the religious studies faculty and also are encouraged to work with faculty members in other UI departments who specialize in their areas of interest. M.A. students have worked, for example, with scholars in the Departments of Anthropology, English, History, and Asian and Slavic Languages and Literatures, as well as in Classics and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies.

Graduate study in religious studies is flexible. It can accommodate individual students’ interests within the limits of existing faculty expertise.

Programs of graduate study are often developed in relation to one of the following traditional areas of concentration:

**Religions in the Middle East, Ancient Near East, and Mediterranean**
- Religion, law, and politics in the Islamic world; the history of interpretation of the texts and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Greco-Roman and Egyptian religion and culture; digital humanities

**Religions in Asia**
- Religions of India, China, and Korea in the context of political, social, and economic factors; religion and gender in transnational perspective; religion and empire

**Religions of Europe and the Americas**
- The Reformation; the Reformed tradition; history and ethnography of religion in the United States; African American Christianity and Islam; religion, media, and the negotiation of technological change

**Religion, Ethics, and Society**
- Religion and morality; human rights; religion’s relationships to gender, race, and ethnicity; ethics of medicine and biotechnology

Programs of graduate study are developed also by theme. Popular themes include religions’ relationships to public life, gender, race, media and technology, and human health and well-being.

It is the expectation that M.A. students will complete their studies in two years.

For more detailed information on graduate programs in religious studies, contact the Department of Religious Studies or visit Graduate Program on the department’s website.

### Requirements

The Master of Arts program in religious studies requires a minimum of 30 s.h. of graduate credit. Students must complete 24 s.h. of the credit required for the degree at the University of Iowa and must maintain a cumulative g.p.a. of at least 3.20. The M.A. is offered with or without thesis.

Requirements for languages and other research tools vary according to the student’s study focus. Students are supervised by a three-person committee consisting of an advisor and two additional faculty members.

All students complete the following five courses.

**Code** | **Title** | **Hours**
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RELS:5100 | Teaching and Public Engagement | 1
RELS:5200 | Varieties of Religion in the Contemporary World | 3
RELS:5300 | Genealogies of Religion | 3
RELS:5400 | Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion | 3

**One graduate seminar**

**Total Hours** 13

Students select remaining coursework depending on their interest area and in consultation with their core committee. In their M.A. thesis work, students demonstrate and refine their research and writing skills. They may count a maximum of 6 s.h. of thesis credit toward the degree. Students must defend their thesis. Those who choose not to write a thesis must pass an examination that tests their competence in completed coursework.

### Admission

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website.

Applicants to the M.A. program are required to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test. GRE scores are a few of the many factors taken into consideration in assessing promise for the successful completion of the M.A.

Application materials must include an application form; a transcript of all undergraduate and graduate work (one copy must be sent to the University’s Office of Admissions, and a second copy must be sent to the Department of Religious Studies); an application or waiver of consideration form for graduate assistantships; three confidential letters of recommendation; and a writing sample that demonstrates the applicant’s ability to engage in critical analysis. Applicants also must submit a statement of purpose that explains their objectives for graduate study and states which area of concentration or an area that is defined more by theme; see Overview in this section of the Catalog. Students are advised to view the Department of Religious Studies website, most notably the faculty pages, to ensure that their area of interest is well-supported by faculty expertise. For details, see
Graduate Admission, Financial Aid, and Additional Funding on the department's website.
All application materials must be received by January 15 to receive full consideration for fall admission.

**Career Advancement**

Graduate students in religious studies acquire a wide range of competencies that are useful for almost any career they pursue. Students gain research skills; they master the craft of writing; they learn to plan, manage, and complete large projects; they gain teaching skills that are useful both inside and outside the academy; they learn to argue a point persuasively; they gain the ability to communicate with others about controversial issues; they learn how to understand and mediate differences in religious perspectives and values; they acquire highly valued language skills; and they gain expertise in the use of digital technologies for research and teaching.

Students who earn a M.A. often gain admission to excellent Ph.D. programs in religious studies and in other areas of study, such as journalism and mass communication. Others have gone on to divinity school, law school, and into careers within media and communication, church leadership, government, and public service.