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 health care, 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 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.

Concentration Areas

These are some of the potential general areas of concentration.

Religions of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the 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 of East Asia

Religious traditions of China and the political, social, and economic factors that have shaped them; modern religion and culture in Korea, most notably Christianity.

Religions of the United States and the Atlantic World

History and ethnography of religion in the United States; African American religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, and African diaspora religions); West African religions; religion, media, and the negotiation of technological change; Latina/o/x Christianity.

Religion, Ethics, and Society

Religion and morality; religion, emotion, and affect; human rights; religion’s relationships to gender, race, and ethnicity; ethics of medicine and biotechnology; religion and health.

Themes

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

Additional Information

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

Students who want to apply to the graduate programs are advised to review the faculty profiles on the Department of Religious Studies website to ascertain whether their area of interest is well-supported by faculty expertise.

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.

Learning Outcomes

- Teaching success: students understand how to teach religious studies at public universities, and if they serve as teaching assistants during their graduate program, they show effectiveness in reaching a diverse audience of students.
- Critical knowledge of the field: graduate students are familiar with foundational texts in their field, as well as influential scholarship that critically engages these texts and seeks to move the field in new directions; students identify ways in which they can contribute to the corpus of texts that compose their field.
- Academic skills: graduate students read carefully and think critically, and they write in clear and compelling ways about topics related to the study of religion.
- Religion and social equity: graduate students have a critical understanding of the historical entanglement of global religions with racism and misogyny; they can articulate religions’ relationships to unjust power structures, as well as religions’ contributions to greater social justice.
- Professional engagement: graduate students demonstrate successful participation in the life of the department, their subfield, and the broader field of religious studies; they communicate about their learning with students from other fields.

Requirements

The Master of Arts program in the Department of 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 focus of study. Students are supervised by a three-person committee consisting of an advisor and two additional faculty members.

All M.A. students must complete the following five courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELS:5100</td>
<td>Teaching and Public Engagement (on topics of religion)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:5200</td>
<td>Asian Religions in the Modern World for Graduate Students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELS:5300</td>
<td>Genealogies of Religion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REL:5400 Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion 3

One graduate seminar 3

Students select remaining coursework depending on their area of interest and in consultation with their advisory 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 to their committee. 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.

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 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 graduate study in religion best suits their objectives. Students may indicate one of the department’s traditional areas of concentration or an area that is defined more by theme [p. 1]. Students are advised to view the Department of Religious Studies website, most notably the faculty pages, to ascertain whether their area of interest is well-supported by faculty expertise.

Moreover, students are encouraged to contact relevant faculty members prior to applying for graduate study in order to explore areas of mutual interest. It is helpful to include information about such contacts in their statement of purpose. The strongest applications show how students would benefit from working with multiple members of the faculty. 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 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, health care, libraries, museums, church leadership, government, and public service.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

Religious Studies, M.A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELS:5400</td>
<td>Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Seminar course</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elective course</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELS:5200</td>
<td>Asian Religions in the Modern World for Graduate Students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAD:6217</td>
<td>Seminar in College Teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elective course</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELS:5300</td>
<td>Genealogies of Religion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective course</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Total Hours 30

a Students must complete RELS:5100, RELS:5200, RELS:5300, RELS:5400, GRAD:6217, and one graduate seminar. Courses may be offered at different times, so students should work with faculty advisor and the department to determine appropriate courses and sequence.

b Students must complete specific requirements in the University of Iowa Graduate College after program admission. Refer to the Graduate College website and the Manual of Rules and Regulations for more information.

c Traditional areas of concentration may include religions in the Middle East, Ancient Near East, or Mediterranean, religions in Asia, religions of Europe and the Americas, or topics related to religion, ethics, and society. Popular
themes include religions' relationships to public life, gender, race, media and technology, and human health and well-being. Students work with a faculty advisor to determine an area of concentration that best suits their interests.

- Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate graduate level elective coursework and sequence.
- Final comprehensive exam.