

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.

Graduate Study Concentration

Graduate study is 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.

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.

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
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		3
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 graduate study in religion suits their objectives best. Students may indicate one of the department's traditional areas 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.

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.

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Course	Title	Hours
Academic Career		
Any Semester		
30 s.h. must be graduate level coursework including 24 s.h. completed at the University of Iowa; up to 6 s.h. of graduate transfer credit allowed upon approval. More information is included in the General Catalog and on department website. ^{a, b}		
Students often develop plans of study either in relation to traditional areas of concentration or by theme. ^c		
Hours		0
First Year		
Fall		
RELS:5400	Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion	3
Graduate Seminar course		3
Elective course ^d		3
Hours		9
Spring		
RELS:5200	Varieties of Religion in the Contemporary World	3
GRAD:6217	Seminar in College Teaching	3
Elective course ^d		3
Hours		9

Second Year

Fall

RELS:5300	Genealogies of Religion	3
Elective course ^d		2
Hours		5

Spring

RELS:5100	Teaching and Public Engagement	1
Elective course ^d		3
Elective course ^d		3
Final Exam ^e		
Hours		7
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.
- d Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate graduate level elective coursework and sequence.
- e Final comprehensive exam.