

Religious Studies, Ph.D.

The doctoral program in the Department of Religious Studies trains students to become advanced practitioners of the study of religion—researchers, scholars, teachers, and facilitators of informed public discourse. It can prepare a person to become a college professor or to bring a nuanced, critical understanding of religion and its influences to such careers as medicine, nursing, law, diplomacy, ministry, social advocacy, journalism, counseling, and informatics.

Doctoral 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 can 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. Many Ph.D. students work, 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 Ph.D. students complete their studies in six years; five for those who are accepted into the program with an M.A. and transfer credit.

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 Doctor of Philosophy program in religious studies requires a minimum of 72 s.h. of graduate credit. Students may transfer up to 24 s.h. of credit from another accredited graduate school. They must maintain a cumulative g.p.a. of at least 3.40 in University of Iowa coursework.

Course requirements for the Ph.D. vary according to concentration area. However, all students must complete the following eight required 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
GRAD:6217	Seminar in College Teaching	3
Three graduate seminars, including at least two in religious studies (prefix RELS)		9
Total Hours		22

During their fourth semester in residence, students must submit a departmental program of study, which must be approved by the religious studies faculty. To gain approval to continue in the Ph.D. program, students must complete three of the required courses listed above and two of the graduate seminars; show satisfactory progress toward the language and course requirements of their individual programs; demonstrate the ability to write scholarly papers at a level satisfactory for the Ph.D., as assessed by their advisor and core committee members (at least two papers must be submitted to the committee); and have a cumulative University of Iowa g.p.a. of at least 3.40 (language courses that do not count toward the Ph.D. are excluded).

Students must pass a comprehensive examination based on a bibliography that covers their main focus area within religious studies (the history, influential figures, perennial debates, and/or theoretical approaches); a secondary chosen area of focus, distinct from the dissertation topic; and an area of specialization or dissertation topic. The comprehensive exam includes an oral defense. Students also must write a dissertation prospectus and a dissertation based on original research, both of which are defended orally. They may count a maximum of 12 s.h. of dissertation credit toward the degree.

Students working toward a Ph.D. may receive an M.A. upon completing at least 30 s.h. of coursework and successfully passing the comprehensive examination.

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 Ph.D. 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 Ph.D.

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 [p. 1] in this section of the Catalog. Students are advised to view the Department of Religious Studies website, most notably the faculty pages, to ensure 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.

Areas of concentration include:

- religions in the Middle East, Ancient Near East, and Mediterranean;
- religions in Asia;
- religions in Europe and the Americas; or
- religion, ethics, and society.

All application materials must be received by January 15 to receive full consideration for fall admission.

Financial Support

All Ph.D. students in religious studies receive funding for at least four years. The department offers financial support for graduate students primarily in the form of teaching assistantships.

The department awards the Gilmore Scholarship for doctoral students who study the intersection of religion, the visual arts, and humanistic values every few years.

The Department of Religious Studies also has a number of smaller scholarships awarded to graduate students for excellence annually. In addition, Ph.D. students can apply for funds from the department for research and conference travel expenses.

The department also assists Ph.D. students in applying for funding that gives them time off from teaching to focus on exams and dissertation writing.

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 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 rare language skills; and they gain expertise in the use of digital technologies for research and teaching.

Students who earn a Ph.D. in religious studies often go on to become scholars and teachers in university or college settings. Other degree recipients have become professional ethicists, leaders of nongovernmental organizations, school

or church administrators, nonacademic educators, digital media specialists, and government employees in the area of international affairs.

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		
72 s.h. must be graduate level coursework; up to 24 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 PhD 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
RELS Graduate Seminar course ^d		3
Elective course ^e		3
		Hours
		9
Spring		
RELS:5200	Varieties of Religion in the Contemporary World	3
GRAD:6217	Seminar in College Teaching	3
Elective course ^e		3
		Hours
		9
Second Year		
Fall		
RELS:5300	Genealogies of Religion	3
RELS Graduate Seminar course ^d		3
Elective course ^e		3
		Hours
		9
Spring		
Submit PhD Plan of Study ^f		
RELS:5100	Teaching and Public Engagement	1
Elective course ^e		3
Elective course ^e		3
Elective course ^e		3
		Hours
		10
Third Year		
Fall		
Graduate Seminar course ^d		3
Elective course ^e		3
		Hours
		6
Spring		
Elective course ^e		3

Elective course ^e	3
Hours	6
Fourth Year	
Fall	
Elective course ^e	3
Elective course ^e	3
Hours	6
Spring	
Comprehensive Exam ^g	
Elective course ^e	3
Elective course ^e	3
Hours	6
Fifth Year	
Fall	
Dissertation Prospectus and Defense ^h	
RELS:7950 Thesis ⁱ	3
Hours	3
Spring	
RELS:7950 Thesis ⁱ	3
Hours	3
Sixth Year	
Fall	
RELS:7950 Thesis ⁱ	3
Hours	3
Spring	
RELS:7950 Thesis ⁱ	2
Final Exam ^j	
Hours	2
Total Hours	72

- a Students must complete RELS:5100; RELS:5200; RELS:5300, RELS:5400, GRAD:6217, three graduate seminars, and a dissertation. 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 Three graduate seminars must be taken prior to completion of the degree, including at least two in Religious Studies (prefix RELS); consult with faculty advisor regarding the appropriate courses and sequence.
- e Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate graduate level elective coursework and sequence.
- f During the fourth semester, in consultation with faculty advisor and core committee, submit a comprehensive plan that includes work already completed and work yet to be completed, along with a paper written in the first three semesters at the University of Iowa.
- g Typically completed during fourth year spring semester.
- h During the semester after the comprehensive exam, students must submit a draft of their dissertation prospectus to their dissertation committee, followed by a two-hour oral defense. A prospectus must be approved by a majority vote before students are permitted to proceed with writing the dissertation.
- i Maximum of 12 s.h. of dissertation credit may be counted towards the degree.
- j Dissertation defense.