M.A. Degree Program Book
Department of Religious Studies, University of Iowa

This document sets forth the requirements and procedures for completing the M.A. without Thesis or M.A. with Theses degrees in Religious Studies.

The Religious Studies graduate program operates under the rules of the University of Iowa Graduate College as set forth in *Manual of Rules and Regulations* ([http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/graduate-college-manual](http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/graduate-college-manual), hereafter *Manual*). Students should read the *Manual* carefully and refer to it as needed during their academic program. The Graduate College posts its deadlines for meeting various requirements at [https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/deadlines](https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/deadlines).

All degree-granting departments and programs must adhere to the requirements of the Graduate College, although they may have requirements that are more (but not less) stringent than the general requirements of the Graduate College. *Students are responsible for reading and adhering to the rules and regulations of the Graduate College* as well as the department.

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Director of Graduate Studies

Revised 02/02/2022
1.0 Areas of Study.

1.1 The M.A. program in Religious Studies is flexible. It can provide a student with a survey of the world’s diverse religions, or it can focus on a chosen area of study, depending on a student’s personal and career objectives. The M.A. program can accommodate individual students’ interests within the limits of existing faculty expertise.

1.2 Programs are often developed in relation to one of the following traditional 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; religion and gender in transnational perspective; religion and empire

- **Religions of the United States and Transatlantic World**
  History and ethnography of religion in the US; 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; religions’ relationships to gender, race, ethnicity, and social justice; ethics of medicine and biotechnology; religion and health
1.3 Programs can also be developed by theme. Common themes include:
- Religious Diversity in Public Life
- Religion and Gender
- Religion and Race
- Religion and Media
- Religion, Health, and Healing

2.0 Student Advising.

2.1 Students work closely with an assigned academic advisor (hereafter advisor) to develop a program of study that best meets their personal and career objectives. Normally, for a student who takes the thesis track, the advisor also serves as their M.A. thesis director. Regarding the departmental expectations for all parties to an advising relationship, see Mutual Expectations.

2.2 Students are required to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in consultation with their advisor. IDP’s are student-driven, working documents that help to clarify goals, strategies, and timelines, and enhance communication.

2.3 Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week of each semester of their program, including semesters of thesis writing. A main function of this meeting is to discuss and agree on the students’ best registration choices for the upcoming semester. Priority of registration should be given to the four-course sequence and to the required graduate seminar. The usual load for M.A. students is 9 semester hours (s.h.) per semester.

2.4 Students form a three-member advisory committee consisting of their advisor from within the department (who chairs the committee) and two other tenured or tenure-track members of the faculty, at least one of whom must also have an appointment in Religious Studies. The members of this committee must be named by the end of midterm week during the second semester
of a student’s program, which is usually after completing 9 s.h. of graduate coursework.

2.5 The members of this committee ordinarily serve also as members of the final exam committee (non-thesis or thesis).

2.6 Students meet with their advisory committee regularly, at least once per semester, to discuss their progress and the direction of their studies. Students are encouraged to request meetings whenever a need for consultation arises.

2.7 Students whose interests or circumstances shift over the course of their studies may request a change of advisor to be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies (hereafter DGS), their current advisor, and their requested new advisor. They may also request changes in the membership of their committee, as approved by their advisor.

3.0 Course Requirements.

3.1 30 semester hours (s.h.) are required to complete the M.A. degree. Students choose either the Non-Thesis Track or the Thesis Track.

3.2 The following four-course sequence is required of all Ph.D. and M.A. students. Each course is offered on a two-year cycle.
- Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion (RELS:5400) (3 s.h.)
- Genealogies of Religion (RELS:5300) (3 s.h.)
- Asian Religions in the Modern World for Graduate Students (RELS:5200) (3 s.h.)
- Teaching & Public Engagement on Topics of Religion (RELS:5100) (1 s.h.)

This sequence is the heart of the graduate program. It provides all students, regardless of background, with a strong foundation in methods and theories, as well as insight into the history of the
concept of religion and its academic study. The sequence prepares students to teach an introductory course in Religious Studies and to construct educational events for the public. In addition, the sequence provides students with a shared intellectual experience that spans their first two years in the Religious Studies program and lays a foundation for lasting collegial relationships.

3.3 Whereas Ph.D. students are required to take a course offered by the Graduate College, which focuses on the advancement of essential teaching skills, M.A. students are encouraged, but not required to take this course. If an opportunity arises for an M.A. student to serve as a Teaching Assistant (T.A.) for the department for more than one semester, enrollment in this course is expected.
• Seminar on College Teaching (GRAD:6217)

3.4 One graduate seminar in Religious Studies is required (in addition to the four-course sequence). Also, students may have individualized requirements as determined in consultation with their advisory committee.

3.5 If a graduate seminar in Religious Studies is not offered in a semester when a student’s program requires one, students may take a graduate seminar in another department. With the approval of their advisor, they may also request to take a course that a faculty member is teaching at or above the 3000 level, while doing additional readings and meeting regularly for more advanced discussion. Students register both for the course and for an Individual Study: Graduates (RELS:7900). To count as a graduate seminar substitute, a final research paper is required.

3.6 Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.2 or above (not including language courses, other than those approved for content by the student’s advisory committee). Students who drop below this minimum are placed on academic probation and sent a letter from the DGS indicating that they must raise their GPA by a specified deadline or be dismissed from the program.
3.7 A maximum of 6 s.h. of relevant graduate work may be transferred from another accredited graduate school or professional program, as approved by the DGS. Transferred courses and credits must be listed on a student’s Nondoctoral Plan of Study (a Graduate College document) after being approved by the DGS.

3.8 A maximum of 6 s.h. of thesis credit may count toward the 30 s.h. requirement.

4.0 Language Requirements.

4.1 All M.A. students are required to demonstrate competency in English. There are no standard requirements for additional language acquisition. However, a particular language requirement may be specified by a student’s advisory committee if a facility with that language is judged necessary for writing on a chosen M.A. thesis topic.

4.2 Students who hope to pursue a Ph.D. after earning their M.A. degree are advised to begin, during their M.A. program, to meet anticipated Ph.D. language requirements.

4.3 In cases where additional language training is judged by the advisory committee to be necessary, the means for assessing competency are determined by the committee. Ordinarily, students are expected to translate 1-2 pages of text chosen by their advisor (dictionary is allowed). Letters from advisors that attest to language competencies are placed in students’ files.

4.4 Credits earned in courses that focus on language skill-building do not count toward the department’s 30 s.h. requirement. Credits earned in content-oriented foreign language courses (e.g., courses in which students read primary texts that are relevant to the study of religion) may count toward that total, as approved by the student’s advisory committee.
5.0 **Residency requirements.**


7.0 **Annual Review of Graduate Students.**

7.1 The Religious Studies faculty conducts a review of all graduate students each spring. Prior to this review, students are required to submit to their advisor an Annual Progress Report, a summary of which is presented by the advisor to the rest of the faculty. A copy of the report is subsequently placed in the students’ file. The department’s administrative assistant (hereafter admin) must also receive a copy of each Annual Progress Report.

7.2 For a detailed description of departmental expectations of student progress see [Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success](https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/benchmarks-and-guidelines-for-m-a-success). Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to dismissal from the program.

8.0 **Request for Change of Status to the Ph.D.:**

8.1 After successful completion of three semesters in the Religious Studies M.A. program at the University of Iowa, students may request a change of status to the Ph.D. program.

8.2 Requests will be considered in the spring semester only, and they must be submitted by January 15. Applications for a change of status will be considered along with all other incoming Ph.D. applications for the fall semester.

8.3 The following documents will need to be submitted to your file for the request:

- At least one letter of recommendation from a faculty member in the Department of Religious Studies
• A current printout of the student’s UI Grade Report
• A personal essay that explains the student’s objectives for Ph.D. study and indicates their likely advisor
• A recent writing sample
• An application (or waiver of consideration) for departmental financial assistance

8.4 Once the faculty approve the request, the Department Administrator submits the official form through the university’s workflow system. This form routes to your advisor before going to the Graduate College for approval.

9.0 The Final Examination for the M.A. Degree (Both Non-Thesis and Thesis).

9.1 M.A. students must pass a final examination to earn their degree. On the non-thesis track, they take a written exam constructed by their advisor and at least one other member of their advisory committee. On the thesis track, they submit an MA thesis and defend it at a thesis defense, which serves as their final exam. No written exam is required for the thesis track.

9.2 Students must be enrolled during the semester in which the final exam occurs.

9.3 During the semester in which students expect to graduate, they must submit to the Office of the Registrar an Application for Degree. They must also notify the admin.

9.4 Students work with their advisor and the admin to schedule a date and time for their written exam or oral defense. Exams or defenses must be scheduled for the regular academic year when faculty members are in residence.

9.5 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the exam or defense, students must confer with the admin to complete the Graduate College Plan of Study and Exam Request (Graduate
College documents), which are submitted through the university workflow system by the admin.

10.0 **Final Examination: Non-Thesis Track.**

10.1 Students in the non-thesis track are required to take a final examination that seeks to gauge and extend the learning that they accomplished during their M.A. studies at the University of Iowa. On the non-thesis track the final examination is written only.

10.2 The written M.A. exam is scheduled for three hours. Ordinarily, students are asked to write on two or three questions (among options), which they can be expected to answer on the basis of their coursework. Students are not allowed to access written materials during the exam (electronic files, internet, books, articles, or notes). A room with a computer for word-processing is provided.

10.3 Students residing off-campus may ask the DGS for permission to take their exam off-campus under the following provision: the exam must be taken at an accredited college under the supervision of an officer of that college, with written verification from that officer.

10.4 The final examination is evaluated by the student’s advisory/exam committee. It is assessed as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, and the assessment is recorded on the Report of Final Examination, which is then submitted to the Graduate College by the admin.

10.5 If the examination is assessed as Satisfactory, the student has fulfilled the departmental requirements for the M.A. without thesis.

10.6 If the examination is assessed as Unsatisfactory, the student may request a re-examination. If the request is granted by the committee, then the student is given a second exam, but no
sooner than four months after the first attempt. The final exam may be repeated only once.

11.0 **Final Examination: Thesis Track.**

11.1 M.A. students on the thesis track are required to write an M.A. thesis that demonstrates an acceptable degree of competence in the tools and techniques of scholarly work in religious studies. An M.A. thesis is generally around 80 pages long (double-spaced).

11.2 Of the 30 s.h. required for the M.A. degree, up to 6 s.h. may be in the form of thesis credits.

11.3 Students should consult with their advisor and committee as the thesis is being prepared. The regulations of the Graduate College must be followed carefully; they are found on the Graduate College website [http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/theses-and-dissertations](http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/theses-and-dissertations)

11.4 Copies of the penultimate text of the thesis (paper or electronic, as preferred by each committee member) must be in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the defense. The departmental admin must be notified of the title of the thesis in order to submit the Request for Final Exam for Advanced Degree with the Graduate College.

11.5 The thesis defense is a discussion and defense of the M.A. thesis with all three members of the advisory/exam committee in attendance. The defense is open to the public.

11.6 A thesis defense may be assessed as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, and the assessment is recorded on the Report of Final Exam, which is then submitted to the Graduate College by the admin.

11.7 If the defense is assessed as Satisfactory, the student has fulfilled the departmental requirements for the M.A. with Thesis.
11.8 If the examination is assessed as Unsatisfactory, the student may request a re-examination. If this request is granted by the M.A. Committee, then the student will be given a second examination, but no sooner than four months after the first attempt. The final exam may be repeated only once.

11.9 **Final Deposit** of the approved M.A. thesis must be made with the Graduate College by the published deadline, following the defense. The deadline is usually ten days before graduation. (The *Manual* lists all the forms that must be filed with the final deposit).

12.0 **Graduation.** Students are encouraged to celebrate their accomplishments at the Graduate College’s graduation ceremony. Students who would like their advisors to attend should invite them to do so.

13.0 **Employment.**

13.1 Before and as they complete their final semester, M.A. students are encouraged to consult with the [Graduate Success Office](#) for support in preparing application materials.

13.2 Students should request letters of recommendation from the faculty members who know their work the best and are committed to their success. When requesting letters, students should send their letter-writers their c.v. and their letter/s of application, as well as information about how their recommenders should expect to receive institutional requests for recommendation letters, as these requests are not standardized. Recommenders may request additional information as well.