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, 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.

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.

Director of Graduate Studies
Dr. Diana Cates

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1.0 Areas of Study:

1.1 The M.A. program is highly 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 student interests within the limits of existing faculty expertise.

1.2 Programs are often developed in relation to one of the following areas of concentration:
   - Religions in the Middle East, Ancient Near-East, and Mediterranean
   - Religions in Asia
   - Religions in the Americas and in Europe
   - Religion, Ethics, and Society

1.3 Programs are also developed across these areas or thematically, in relation to the department’s central focus: religion and public life, most notably religion's impact on the construction of individual and group identities and the dynamics of social change. This focus includes:
   - religion’s relationship to gender, race, ethnicity, and other markers of identity
   - religion and the study of religion in a digital age

2.0 Course Requirements:

2.1 30 semester hours (s.h.) are required to complete the M.A. degree. Students choose either the Non-Thesis Track or the Thesis Track.

2.2 The following four-course sequence is required of all M.A. and Ph.D. students. The courses are offered on a two-year cycle:
   - Methods and Theories in the Study of Religion (RELS:5400)
   - Genealogies of Religion (RELS:5300)
• Varieties of Religion in the Contemporary World (RELS:5200)
• Teaching & Public Engagement on Topics of Religion (RELS:5100)

This course sequence is the heart of our 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 introductory courses in Religious Studies and to facilitate informed conversations between religious and non-religious people of all kinds, so as to raise the level of public discourse on topics of religion. In addition, the courses provide students with a shared intellectual experience that spans their first two years in the Religious Studies program.

2.3 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 M.A. Committee.

2.4 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 M.A. Committee). Students who drop below this minimum are placed on academic probation and sent a letter from the Director of Graduate Studies indicating that they must raise their GPA by a specified deadline or be dismissed from the program.

2.5 A maximum of 6 s.h. of relevant graduate work may be transferred from another accredited graduate school or professional program. Transferred courses and credits must be listed on the student’s Nondissertation Plan of Study Summary Form (a Graduate College document) after being approved by the student’s M.A. Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies.

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

3.0 Foreign Language Requirement:

3.1 There are no formal requirements for foreign language acquisition in the M.A. Program. However, a particular language requirement may be specified by a student’s M.A. Committee if a facility with that language is judged necessary for writing a chosen M.A. thesis.

3.2 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.

3.3 In cases where foreign-language competency is judged by the M.A. 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 (use of a dictionary is allowed). Letters attesting that students have passed relevant language requirements are placed in students’ files.

3.4 Credits earned in courses that focus on foreign language skill-building do not count toward the department’s 30 s.h. requirement, even if the courses in which those credits are earned are above the 3000-level. 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 M.A. Committee. Letters of completion are placed in a student’s file.


5.0 Student Advising:
5.1 Students work closely with an assigned academic 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 the M.A. Thesis Director.

5.2 Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week in each semester of their program, including semesters of thesis writing. Students are not approved for registration until they meet with their advisor.

5.3 At this regular meeting, students discuss with their advisor the courses they will take during the next semester. Priority should be given to completing the four-course sequence and the required graduate seminar within two years. Students complete a Planned Course Schedule, and their advisor signs it. The document is placed in the student’s departmental file.

6.0 Annual Review of Graduate Students:

6.1 The Religious Studies faculty as a whole 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 student’s file.

6.2 For a detailed description of departmental expectations of student progress see Benchmarks and Guidelines for M.A. Success, available on the departmental website in the “M.A. in Religious Studies” section. Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to dismissal from the program.

7.0 M.A. Committee:

7.1 Students identify a three-member M.A. Committee consisting of their advisor (the committee chair) and two other tenured or tenure-track members of the faculty, at least one of whom must have an appointment in Religious Studies.

7.2 The members of this committee must be named by the end of midterm week during the second semester of the student’s program, which is usually after completing 9 s.h. of graduate coursework.

7.3 Students must meet with their M.A. Committee during the third semester of their program (usually in the fall) to discuss their progress and the direction of their studies. Students are encouraged to request additional meetings with their committee whenever a need for consultation arises.

7.4 Led by the committee chair, the M.A. Committee is responsible for planning, constructing, and evaluating the Final Examination for the MA.

7.5 Students whose interests or circumstances shift over the course of their studies may request of their advisor and of the Director of Graduate Studies a change in the membership of their committee.

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 This request is made by completing a Request for Change of Status to the Ph.D. and submitting it to the departmental secretary who records the request and forwards it to the Director of Graduate Studies.

8.3 In addition to submitting a Request for Change of Status to the Ph.D., students must add the following documents to their existing file:

- 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 her/his/their likely advisor
- A recent writing sample
- An application (or waiver of consideration) for departmental financial assistance

8.4 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.

9.0 Final semester:

9.1 Students must be enrolled in the Graduate College during each fall and spring semester of their program, including semesters of thesis writing. If all coursework has been completed, they may register for RELS:7950:0IND.

9.2 M.A. students must pass a Final Examination to earn their degree. On the Non-Thesis Track, they take a written exam only. On the Thesis Track, they submit an MA Thesis and defend it at an MA Thesis Defense. This oral defense of the thesis serves as their Final Examination. No written exam is required.

9.3 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the Final Examination, the Nondotal Plan of Study Summary Form and the Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree must be filed with the Graduate College. Students provide relevant information to the Departmental Administrator who completes the forms in consultation with the student’s advisor. The Departmental Administrator files the forms by the published deadline. A portion of the Request for/Report of Final Examination is returned to the department and put in the student’s file to be used to record the results of the Final Examination.

9.4 In the semester in which students expect to graduate, they must also submit to the Office of the Registrar an Application for Degree, available on the Registrar’s website at http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/Student/ApplyingforDegree/tabid/60/Default.aspx The deadline for the application is posted on the Registrar’s website each semester.

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 ordinarily take the final exam toward the end of the last semester in which they take classes or in the semester following the completion of their coursework.

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

10.5 Students work with the Departmental Administrator and their advisor to schedule the exam. Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

10.6 Students residing off campus may ask the Director of Graduate Studies 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.

10.7 The final examination is evaluated by the student’s M.A. Committee. It is assessed as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, and the assessment is recorded on the Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree.

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

10.9 If the examination is assessed as Unsatisfactory, the student may request a re-examination. If the request is granted by the M.A. 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 75-100 pages long (double-spaced). A Final Examination, also known as an M.A. Thesis Defense, takes place within two weeks. This is an oral exam.

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

11.4 Students should consult with their advisor and the Departmental Administrator to schedule the M.A. Thesis Defense. Copies of the penultimate text of the thesis must be in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the defense.

11.5 The Department of Religious Studies office must be notified when the title of the thesis and the date and time of the thesis defense have been determined.

11.6 The thesis defense is a discussion and defense of the M.A. thesis with all three members of the M.A. Committee in attendance. The defense is open to the public.

11.7 A thesis defense may be assessed as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, and the assessment is recorded on the Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree.
11.8 If the defense is assessed as Satisfactory, the student has fulfilled the departmental requirements for the M.A. with Thesis.

11.9 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.

11.10 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). The Thesis Certificate of Approval must be signed by all committee members and submitted to the Graduate College.

12.0 Graduation and Beyond:

12.1 Students are encouraged to celebrate their accomplishments at the Graduate College’s graduation ceremony. Students should notify their advisors if they plan to attend.

12.2 Students should request letters of recommendation from the faculty members who know their work well and are committed to their success.