1.0 Areas of Study

1.1 The Ph.D. program is highly flexible. It can prepare someone to become a professor of religious studies. It also provides the ability to bring a deep and theoretically sophisticated understanding of religion and its influences to other professions, such as medicine, nursing, law, political leadership, policy-making, journalism, counselling, or informatics. The Ph.D. 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
   - the practice and study of religion in a digital age

2.0 Course Requirements

2.1 72 semester hours (s.h.) are required to complete the Ph.D. degree.

2.2 The following four-course sequence is required of all Ph.D. and M.A. 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 Four graduate seminars are required (in addition to the four-course sequence), at least two of which must be in Religious Studies. Also, students may have individualized requirements as determined in consultation with their Core Advisory Committee.

2.4 Students must take at least one course or graduate seminar in one or more departments other than Religious Studies.

2.5 Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or above (not including language courses, other than those approved for content by the student’s Core Advisory 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.

2.6 A maximum of 24 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 Departmental Program of Study and, subsequently, on the Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Form (a Graduate College document) after being approved by the student’s Core Advisory Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies.

2.7 A maximum of 12 s.h. of thesis credit may count toward the 72 s.h. requirement.

3.0 Foreign Language Requirement

3.1 Students must demonstrate competency in foreign languages as determined by their Core Advisory Committee. Competency in Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, French, German, Sanskrit, Hindi, Greek, Latin, Spanish, or other languages may be required, depending on the student’s area of research.

3.2 All Ph.D. students are required to demonstrate competency in at least one language other than their native language. Evidence of satisfactory progress in foreign language acquisition is an important element in the evaluation of the Departmental Program of Study.

3.3 Students are encouraged to begin as soon as possible to acquire the language competencies that are necessary for pursuing advanced research in their area of specialization.

3.4 The means for assessing language competencies are determined by the student’s Core Advisory Committee. Students who focus on English-language scholarship may be required to pass a specified course in their foreign language of choice. Students for whom language competency is essential for reading primary texts in their area of expertise 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.

3.5 Entering students who already have competency in one or more of their research languages may demonstrate this competency at any time by translating 1-2 pages of text chosen by their advisor, with satisfactory results noted in their record.
3.6 Credits earned in courses that focus on foreign language skill-building do not count toward the department’s 72 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 Core Advisory Committee. Letters of completion are placed in a student’s file.

4.0 **Residency Requirement:** The Graduate College Manual addresses the residency requirement in Part 1, section XII, C. [http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/manual-part-1-section-xii-doctors-degrees#1.12.C.](http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/manual-part-1-section-xii-doctors-degrees#1.12.C.)

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, the advisor also serves as a student’s Ph.D. Dissertation Director.

5.2 Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week in each semester of their program, including semesters of dissertation 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 (if any) they will take in the next semester. 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 the Guidelines and Benchmarks for Ph.D. Success, available on the departmental website in the “Ph.D. in Religious Studies” section. Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to a loss of funding and/or dismissal from the program. Students must clearly and consistently demonstrate that they are able to produce high-quality research papers (as assessed by their Core Advisory Committee). Otherwise, they will be dismissed from the program.

7.0 **Core Advisory Committee.**

7.1 Students identify a three-member Core Advisory 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 Core Advisory Committee in each fall semester of their program 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 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 **Early Program Plan:** During their third semester, in consultation with their advisor and the other members of their Core Advisory Committee, students develop an Early Program Plan for the Ph.D. in
Religious Studies, indicating the courses they will need to take to realize their objectives. This plan must be discussed with and approved by the student’s committee. The committee chair composes a brief account of the discussion. This account, along with a copy of the plan, is placed in the student’s file.

9.0 Departmental Program of Study

9.1 During their fourth semester of residency, in consultation with their Core Advisory Committee, students prepare a Departmental Program of Study, which shows the degree requirements they have met and the requirements they have yet to meet. This document is submitted electronically by the student to the Departmental Administrator and then discussed by the Religious Studies faculty.

9.2 After reviewing the Departmental Program of Study and the student’s overall progress, the Religious Studies faculty makes a decision about whether the student is permitted to continue in the Ph.D. program.

9.3 For approval of the Departmental Program of Study and permission to continue in the Ph.D. program, the following conditions must be met:

- Completion of three of the four required graduate courses
- Completion of at least two graduate seminars
- Evidence of the ability to write strong scholarly papers, as assessed by the student’s Core Advisory Committee (at least two substantial papers must be submitted to the committee for review)
- A cumulative University of Iowa GPA of at least 3.4 (excluding language courses that do not count towards the 72 s.h.)
- Satisfactory progress toward the language and other course requirements of the student’s program, as agreed upon by the Core Advisory Committee
- Acceptable adherence to the department’s Guidelines and Benchmarks for Ph.D. Success

9.4 Students who have their Departmental Program of Study approved and are permitted to continue in the program are expected to complete their Comprehensive Examination and their Dissertation Prospectus Defense within five semesters.

9.5 Students who are not permitted to continue in the Ph.D. program may be dismissed or directed to complete the remaining requirements for a terminal M.A. degree (Non-Thesis Track).

10.0 The Doctoral Committee.

10.1 After the Departmental Program of Study is approved, students confer with their Core Advisory Committee about the formation of a Doctoral Committee.

10.2 The Doctoral Committee consists of five faculty members, each of whom must hold a tenured or tenure-track position. Ordinarily, this committee includes the three members of the Core Advisory Committee, and the student’s advisor serves as chair. At least three members of the committee must be part of the Religious Studies faculty.

10.3 Students are required by the department to have at least one member of their committee be a member of the faculty of the University of Iowa from outside the department.

10.4 In exceptional cases, the committee chair may request permission (with the endorsement of the Director of Graduate Studies) from the Office of the Dean of the Graduate College to include a recognized scholar from another academic institution as a member (see Manual, Section XII, P).
10.5 Led by the committee chair, the Doctoral Committee is responsible for planning, constructing, and evaluating the written and oral components of the Comprehensive Examination, as well as supervising, directing, and evaluating the dissertation and its oral defense.

11.0 The Comprehensive Examination Bibliography.

11.1 In preparation for the Comprehensive Examination, students confer with the members of their Doctoral Committee to compile a Bibliography of Works to be Read (often called a Comps Bibliography). Students are encouraged to start compiling their bibliographies early in their programs.

11.2 Students also confer with their committee members about a proposed dissertation topic, which will be the focus of one part of the written exam.

11.3 At least six months prior to the Comprehensive Examination, students confer again with their Doctoral Committee to finalize their bibliographies.

12.0 Further Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination.

12.1 The Comprehensive Examination takes place during a student’s third or fourth year in the program, and must be completed by the end of the fourth year. It is the expectation that students will have finished all required coursework by the end of the semester in which they take the exam (outside of a possible 12 Thesis hours).

12.2 Students who are unable to meet this expectation by the end of the fourth year may apply for an extension if the extension is endorsed by their advisor and other Doctoral Committee members.

12.3 Students work with their advisor and the Departmental Administrator to schedule a date and time for their written exam and for the subsequent oral defense. Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

12.4 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the Comprehensive Examination, the student must provide the Departmental Administrator the information needed to complete the Request for/Report of the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination (a Graduate College document). This request is then filed by the Departmental Administrator. A portion of the Request for/Report of the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination is returned to the department by the Graduate College and put in the student’s file to be used to record the results of the Comprehensive Examination.

12.5 A Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet (also a Graduate College document) must accompany the department’s request of the Graduate College for permission to conduct the Comprehensive Examination. This plan indicates credits transferred from other institutions (if any), courses taken at the University of Iowa that apply toward the Ph.D. degree, and courses in progress or to be completed after the exam. The document is completed by the Departmental Administrator in consultation with the student and the faculty advisor. It is filed by the Departmental Administrator.

NOTE: Students who have outstanding incompletes in any of their courses are not permitted to take the Comprehensive Examination.

13.0 The Comprehensive Examination.

13.1 As stated by the Graduate College, “The comprehensive examination is not a deferred qualifying examination. It is intended to evaluate a candidate’s mastery of the subject at or near the end of the candidate’s formal preparation and prior to the completion of the dissertation.” Manual, Section XII, K.

13.2 The Comprehensive Examination (commonly called Comps) includes both written and oral exams. At least two members of the Doctoral Committee contribute questions to the written exam.
13.3 The written exam has three sections, and each section is scheduled for three hours. Students are allowed an additional 30 minutes to think and plan their answers before writing. The three sections of the exam are ordinarily taken within the span of a week. Students are not permitted to access written materials during the exam (electronic files, internet, books, articles, or notes). A room with a computer for word-processing is provided.

13.4 The three-part written exam covers the following areas.

- The student’s main field within religious studies (its history, influential figures, perennial debates, and/or theoretical approaches).
- A secondary area of focus chosen by the student, distinct from the dissertation topic.
- The student’s area of specialization or dissertation topic.

For each part of the exam, students are ordinarily asked to choose from among various options.

13.5 Students are advised to select exam areas and titles in light of their career objectives, as these titles are likely to be included on the c.v.

13.6 Approximately two weeks after the last part of the written exam has been completed, students meet with their Doctoral Committee and defend their answers at a two-hour oral exam (commonly called the Comp Oral). The results of the Comprehensive Examination are recorded on the Request for/Report of the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination, which is filed by the Departmental Administrator.

13.7 If the Comprehensive Examination is assessed as Satisfactory, the student proceeds to the next step in his or her degree program.

13.8 If the Comprehensive Examination is assessed as Reservations (with more than one committee member noting reservations), the Doctoral Committee must stipulate the conditions for the removal of the reservations and the date by which the conditions must be met (see Manual, Section XII). Failure of the student to meet the deadline results in a failed examination.

13.9 If the Comprehensive Examination is assessed as Unsatisfactory (with more than one committee member voting to fail) the student may be dismissed from the program, or (at the student’s request), the Doctoral Committee may permit the student to be re-examined. Re-examination may occur no sooner than four months after the first examination. The Comprehensive Examination may be repeated only once.

14.0 Post-Comprehensive Registration: Students who are “post-comp” must continue to be enrolled in the Graduate College during each fall and spring semester, from the time of the Comprehensive Examination through the semester in which they complete all requirements for the degree.

15.0 Dissertation Prospectus and Defense.

15.1 Within the first semester following the successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination, students must submit a draft of their Dissertation Prospectus to their Doctoral Committee.

15.2 Students should consult departmental Guidelines for the Dissertation Prospectus. They are encouraged to consult with all members of their Doctoral Committee prior to the defense of the prospectus.

15.3 Students work with their advisor and the Departmental Administrator to schedule a time for a meeting known as the Prospectus Defense, at which all members of the Doctoral Committee are
present. The defense must be scheduled for the regular academic year when faculty members are in residence.

15.4 Students meet with their Doctoral Committee for a two-hour oral defense of their prospectus, at which time students receive guidance on how best to proceed with their dissertations. A prospectus must be approved by a majority vote before students are permitted to proceed with writing the dissertation.

15.5 If the Doctoral Committee judges that the student does not yet have a viable plan for a dissertation, and the committee members wish to see a revised prospectus before permitting the student to proceed, the prospectus may be revised and the prospectus defense process repeated.

16.0 Doctoral Dissertation and Preparation for Graduation.

16.1 The Doctoral Dissertation is a work of original scholarship that demonstrates firm knowledge of, and makes important contributions to, a chosen field of study. It is generally about 200 pages long (double spaced). Students should consult the departmental Guidelines for the Doctoral Dissertation.

16.2 According to Graduate College regulations (Manual XII.O), once students have passed the Comprehensive Examination, they have a maximum of five years to complete the research, writing, and defense of the dissertation. If, after consultation with the advisor, it is clear that this deadline cannot be met, students may write to their advisor requesting an extension. If the advisor approves the request, he or she transmits the request to the Director of Graduate Studies, who presents it to the graduate faculty of Religious Studies with his or her recommendation. If the faculty approves the student’s request, the Director of Graduate Studies writes a letter to the Office of the Dean of the Graduate College requesting the extension. The extension, if granted, is ordinarily for one year. Requests for multiple extensions seriously inhibit projected career success.

16.3 During the semester in which students expect to graduate, they must submit to the Office of the Registrar an Application for Degree available in the Registrar’s office or on their web site. The deadline for this application is posted each semester at www.registrar.uiowa.edu.

16.4 First Deposit of the dissertation must be made in the specified ETD (electronic thesis/dissertation) format of the Graduate College by the first deposit deadline in the session in which the degree is to be conferred.

17.0 Dissertation Defense.

17.1 Students should consult with their advisor and the Departmental Administrator to arrange the date and time of the Final Examination or Dissertation Defense, which normally must fall within the semester in which the First Deposit of the dissertation is made.

17.2 The Dissertation Defense is scheduled for two hours. The entire Doctoral Committee is present (up to two committee members may participate by remote link). Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year when faculty members are in residence. Defenses are open to the public.

17.3 At least three weeks prior to the Dissertation Defense, a Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree must be submitted to the Graduate College. The student provides the Departmental Administrator with the information needed to complete the form. After the DGS approves the completed form, it is filed by the Departmental Administrator.

17.4 Copies of the penultimate text of the dissertation must be in the hands of all Doctoral Committee members at least three weeks prior to the defense. The Departmental Administrator must be notified of the title of the dissertation.
17.5 The dissertation defense is evaluated as either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. If the defense is judged Satisfactory, the Doctoral Committee members initial the Request for/Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree, sign a Certificate of Approval, and also complete the signature page of the dissertation.

17.6 Two negative votes make the Final Examination Unsatisfactory. In case of a report of Unsatisfactory, candidates may not present themselves for re-examination until the next session of the regular academic year, when most faculty members are in residence. The examination may be repeated only once.

17.8 The Final Deposit of the successfully-defended dissertation must be made to the Graduate College by the posted deadline in the student’s graduation semester. The final deposit must be made no later than the semester (summers excluded) following the session in which the Final Examination is passed or the dissertation is successfully defended. Failure to meet this deadline requires re-examination of the student.

18.0 Graduation: Students are encouraged to celebrate their accomplishments at the Graduate College’s graduation ceremony, at which many faculty members “hood” their graduating Ph.D.’s.

19.0 Placement

19.1 As they are writing their dissertations, students are encouraged to register with the University’s Educational Placement Office, which assists students in creating an official electronic dossier. Instructions on setting up the placement file and submitting letters of recommendation can be found at http://www.education.uiowa.edu/edplace/eportfolio/ and http://www.education.uiowa.edu/edplace/forms/

19.2 Students should request letters of recommendation from the faculty members who know their scholarship and teaching best and are committed to their success.

19.3 The Department encourages students to review online job postings in The Chronicle of Higher Education and Openings On-Line.