

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 and M.A. with Thesis 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* as well as the department.

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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 geographic or thematic areas of concentration:

Geographic

- Religions of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean
- Religions of East Asia
- Religions of the United States and the Atlantic World

Thematic

- Religion, Ethics, and Society
- Religious Diversity in Public Life
- Religion and Gender
- Religion and Race
- Religion and Media
- Religion, Health, and Cycles of Life

2.0 Student Advising

- 2.1 The department assigns incoming students an academic advisor to help craft their program of study. Normally, for a student who takes the thesis track, the advisor also serves as their M.A. thesis director. Students may change their advisor to reflect their developing area of research with approval of the Director of Graduate Studies (hereafter DGS).
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 By the end of the first year, students are required to develop an [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#), student-driven, working documents that help to clarify goals, strategies, and timelines, and enhance communication, in consultation with their advisor.
- 2.4 Students whose interests or circumstances shift over the course of their studies may request of their advisor a change in the membership of their committee, to be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies (hereafter **DGS**).

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 All students are required to take:
RELS:5400 Colonial Knowledge Production and its Discontents: Religion and the Academy
- 3.3 M.A. students are not required but are encouraged to take the graduate course in teaching:
GRAD:6217.
- 3.4 Students are required to take 3 additional courses (4000 level or above) in the Department of Religious Studies.
- 3.5 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 take at least one course or graduate seminar in one or more departments *other than* Religious Studies.
- 3.7 A maximum of 6 s.h. of thesis credit may count toward the 30 s.h. requirement.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.2 or above (not including language courses, other than those approved for content by the students' 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.

4.0 Annual Review of Graduate Students

- 4.1 The Religious Studies faculty conducts a review of all graduate students each spring to determine that students are adhering to the stated benchmarks for success (see the [Benchmarks and Guidelines for Ph.D. Success](#)).
- 4.2 Prior to this review, students are required to submit to their advisor, the DGS, and the graduate program administrator an [Annual Progress Report](#). A copy of the report is subsequently placed in the student's file.
- 4.3 Students whom the faculty do not consider to be meeting stated benchmarks will be notified in writing by the DGS following the faculty meeting.
- 4.4 Students who do not pass the Annual Review are able to appeal the decision at the next faculty meeting by submitting to the graduate administrator for dissemination to the faculty a one-page plan to address faculty concerns and meet benchmarks. Faculty will vote on the original progress report and supplemental plan.

4.5 Students who do not adhere to the stated benchmarks for success are subject to loss of funding and/or dismissal from the program.

5.0 Language Requirements

5.1 All M.A. students are required to demonstrate competency in English and at least one other language.

5.2 Students must demonstrate language competencies that are necessary for advanced research in their areas of expertise, as determined by their advisory committee.

5.3 The means for assessing language competencies are determined by a student's advisory committee.

- Students whose primary research focuses on English-language scholarship may demonstrate their competency in a language other than English by passing a final exam at the completion of a sufficiently advanced UI language course, earning the grade of B or better.
- Entering students who already have competency in one or more of their research languages may demonstrate it by translating 1-2 pages of text chosen by their advisor (dictionary allowed).
- Students for whom additional or multiple language competencies are essential generally demonstrate their competency in working closely with their advisor. Otherwise, they too may show competency by translating 1-2 pages of text (dictionary allowed).
- When necessary expertise is not available at the University of Iowa, a faculty member outside the department may be asked to assist in evaluating a student's language proficiency.
- Letters from advisors that attest to language competencies are placed in students' files.

5.4 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 students' advisory committee.

6.0 Residency requirements

Residency requirements are set by the University and can be found here:

<https://registrar.uiowa.edu/residency>.

7.0 Registration Requirements

The Graduate College *Manual* addresses registration requirements in Part 1, section XII, C.

<http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/manual-part-1-section-xii-doctors-degrees#1.12.C>.

8.0 Advisory Committee

8.1 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 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.

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

8.3 Students whose interests or circumstances shift over the course of their studies may request a change of committee, to be approved by their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

9.0 Request for Change of Status to the Ph.D.

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

9.3 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 statement 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

9.4 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.

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

10.1 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.

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

10.3 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.

10.4 Exams must be scheduled for the regular academic year, when faculty members are in residence.

10.5 At least three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the exam or defense, an Exam Request must be submitted to the Graduate College. Students provide the departmental admin with the thesis title, committee members, date, time, and location of the defense. The admin submits the request through workflow for approvals.

11.0 Final Examination: Non-Thesis Track

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 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.
- 11.4 The final examination is evaluated by the student's advisory/exam committee as either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory and recorded by the committee on the workflow form initiated from the Graduate College.
- 11.5 If the examination is assessed as Satisfactory, the student has fulfilled the departmental requirements for the M.A. without thesis.
- 11.6 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.

12.0 Final Examination: Thesis Track

- 12.1 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).
- 12.2 Of the 30 s.h. required for the M.A. degree, up to 6 s.h. may be in the form of thesis credits.
- 12.3 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>
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 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.

- 12.6 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.
- 12.7 If the defense is assessed as Satisfactory, the student has fulfilled the departmental requirements for the M.A. with Thesis.
- 12.8 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.
- 12.9 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).

13.0 Graduation

Students are encouraged to celebrate their accomplishments at the Graduate College's graduation ceremony. Students who would like their advisors to accompany them should let their advisors know.

Appendix

This appendix is intended to help graduate students successfully engage the graduate program by providing guidance, outlining best practices, and describing departmental norms beyond the formal rules and procedures of the Program Book.

Advising and Committees

Students are assigned an academic advisor upon entering the program; they work closely with the advisor to develop a program of study that best meets their personal and career objectives. Students must meet with their advisor by the end of midterm week of each semester of their program, in part to plan for coursework. Priority of registration should be given in the first two years to required courses. Language training may also be a priority for some students. The usual load for Ph.D. students is 9 semester hours (s.h.) per semester.

Students form an advisory committee during their second semester of study. Students then meet with their advisory committee regularly, usually 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.

Regarding the departmental expectations for all parties to an advising relationship, see [Mutual Expectations](#).

Coursework

The required RS course 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. In addition, the course provides students with a shared intellectual experience and lays a foundation for lasting collegial relationships.

Students may have individualized requirements as determined in consultation with their advisory committee.

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.

Re the GRAD 6217 teaching seminar, ideally students take this in their first year to ensure their ability to excel as Teaching Assistants (T.A.'s). Students who have taken a comparable graduate teaching seminar at another institution or have already acquired several years of teaching experience may apply for a waiver of this requirement. Waivers must be approved by faculty vote.

Language requirement

Students are encouraged to begin as soon as possible to acquire the language skills that are necessary for conducting their proposed research.

The Comprehensive Exam

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.

Students are encouraged to begin compiling their bibliographies early. There are no standard bibliographies for all Ph.D. students because programs are tailored to individual goals.

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.

After a student has passed their comprehensive exam, members of the comps committee ordinarily continue as members of the student’s dissertation committee. In most cases, both of these committees include the members of the student’s advisory committee.

Prospectus

Students should consult departmental [Guidelines for the Dissertation Prospectus](#). They are encouraged to consult with all members of their dissertation committee prior to the defense of the prospectus.

Professionalization

Conferences

Students are strongly encouraged to attend conferences to gain familiarity with current research and to develop strong scholarly networks with other graduate students and faculty.

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to submit a paper to a conference. The department will sponsor workshops that help students to revise a seminar paper into a conference paper. The department also provides conference funding; see the Director of Graduate Studies for more information.

External Grants

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to apply for an external grant. The department will arrange workshops that assist students in locating and applying for grants.

Publications

Students are encouraged to consult with their advisor about the appropriate time to submit a paper for publication to a journal.

Placement

Before and as they are writing their dissertations, students are encouraged to consult with the Graduate Success Office for support in preparing application materials and making applications.

The Department encourages students to review online job postings in The Chronicle of Higher Education and Openings On-Line (American Academy of Religion).

Students should request letters of recommendation from the faculty members who know their scholarship and teaching 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.