

Master of Arts in Religious Studies

Why study Religious Studies?

IMPORTANT: The Religious Studies Graduate Program is currently suspended. The department is not accepting graduate applications for the 2025-26 academic year.

Religions have been and remain among the most powerful forces shaping human history. Their discourses and practices inform the way we perceive ourselves, those around us, and existence at large, even when we are not actively religious. They are central to understanding both what divides us and what unites us. The academic study of religion is a trans-disciplinary endeavor to understand from an objective perspective how religious traditions shape the lives of their adherents, without seeking to promote or disprove any specific belief system. Religious Studies acquaints students with the diversity of religious cultures and introduces them to key methods and theories employed in their examination as "religion."

For those interested in working towards a Ph.D. in Religious Studies and a career in academics, or embarking on an equivalent level of training in a related profession, the Department of Religious Studies is equipped to help the individual student acquire the skills needed for advanced levels of study, whether it be specialized work in languages, methodological approaches, or area studies. The study of religion being an inherently interdisciplinary field, and department faculty share synergies with colleagues and programs across the campus that enable students to seek specialized training in a diversity of regions, cultures, and approaches to the study of religion. Our faculty is committed to help students articulate the intellectual and professional objectives that have brought them to study of religion, and to acquire the training to see these goals to fruition. The Department of Religious Studies at KU is able to provide substantial financial support for students seeking the MA degree.

Admission to Graduate Studies

Admission Requirements

- All applicants must meet the requirements outlined in the Admission to Graduate Study (<https://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/admission-to-graduate-study/>) policy.
- Bachelor's degree: A copy of official transcripts showing proof of a bachelor's degree (and any post-bachelor's coursework or degrees) from a regionally accredited institution, or a foreign university with equivalent bachelor's degree requirements is required.
- English proficiency: Proof of English proficiency (<https://gradapply.ku.edu/english-requirements/>) for non-native or non-native-like English speakers is required. There are two bands of English proficiency, including Admission and Full proficiency. For applicants to online programs, Full proficiency is required.

Graduate Admission

The KU Department of Religious Studies is not currently admitting new graduate students or accepting applications.

If admissions resume in the future, eligibility criteria for admission to the M.A. program follow Graduate Studies' admission policy (<http://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/admission-to-graduate-study/>). Non-native

speakers of English must meet English proficiency requirements (<https://gradapply.ku.edu/english-requirements/>) set by Graduate Studies. A Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies is not required for admission, but the department expects applicants to demonstrate experience in the humanities and social sciences. Additional application requirements will be communicated through the Religious Studies website (<https://religiousstudies.ku.edu/>).

For additional questions regarding the program, please contact the Chair of Religious Studies, Dr. Jacqueline Brinton (<https://religiousstudies.ku.edu/people/jacqueline-brinton/>). Applicants may also contact the department directly:

The University of Kansas
Department of Religious Studies
Bailey Hall, Room 308
1440 Jayhawk Blvd. | Lawrence, KS 66045
785-864-4663 | rstudies@ku.edu

M.A. Degree Requirements

The department offers thesis and non-thesis M.A. options. The requirements for these are:

1. 30 (thesis) or 33 (portfolio option) graduate credit hours, chosen in consultation with the student's advisor or the Graduate Director. At least 50% of the coursework for the master's degree must be at the 700 level or above. Coursework must include the following:

(a) REL 701 Approaches to the Study of Religion (3 hrs)

(b) Three graduate seminars (courses numbered 700 or above, excluding REL 800 Readings and REL 899 Thesis), of which two must be chosen from the following set of theory and method-oriented seminars (9 hrs):

Code	Title	Hours
REL 727	Seminar in Religion, Text and Textuality	3
REL 747	Seminar in Religion, Society and Social Change	3

(c) One course focusing on Western Religious Traditions and one course focusing on Non-Western Religious Traditions (see Table below). (6 hrs)

(d) At least 12 hours (4 courses) in an articulated concentration of the student's own design. These courses may overlap with those in (b) and (c) above.

(e) For thesis students, 1-3 credit hours of REL 899 Thesis.

(f) A total of at least 18 (thesis) or 21 (portfolio option) graduate credit hours in Religious Studies, including (a)–(e) above, plus electives if applicable. Remaining hours may be taken outside of the department.

2. A final examination:

(a) For the thesis option, the student must write and orally defend a thesis that meets minimum department and University requirements.

(b) For the portfolio option, the student must produce and orally defend a research portfolio.

Religious Studies final oral exams are closed to the public. If any individual outside the committee would like to attend, they

need to obtain consent from the student and all members of the committee prior to the exam date. All exam options may result in a grade of Satisfactory, Honors, or Unsatisfactory. In cases of an Unsatisfactory grade, the student may repeat the exam only with the approval of the exam committee, Director of Graduate Studies, and Department Chair. In no cases may an exam be taken three times.

Graduate Handbook

Further information on fulfillment of degree requirements and other department policies and procedures can be found in the Department of Religious Studies Graduate Handbook.

University Policies and Requirements

A list of all policies of the Office of Graduate Studies is available in the Policy Library (<https://policy.ku.edu/office/Graduate-Studies/>).

Approved Courses for Requirement 1(c)

Code	Title	Hours
A. Western Religious Traditions		
Select one of the following:		
REL 525	Jews and Christians	
REL 731	Studies in Christianity	
REL 761	Seminar in Western Religious Thought: _____	
B. Non-Western Religious Traditions		
Select one of the following:		
REL 509	Religion in Japan	

At the completion of this program, students will be able to:

- conduct and articulate original research through writing seminar-based research papers of high quality and/or a thesis.
- apply and critique methodological and theoretical models relevant to scholarship in religious studies.
- exhibit substantive knowledge of a religious tradition or traditions, a geographical/cultural area of religious activity, and/or methodological approach.
- carry out research and learning responsibilities in an ethical manner.