

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES, MA

## Degree Requirements

The M.A. in Religious Studies is a course intensive program that requires a total of 36 hours of coursework and the submission of a portfolio in the final semester of the program. At least 12 of the 36 hours in coursework must be in courses numbered 700 or above, and one of these courses must be "REL 700: Theory and Method in the Study of Religion." The remaining 24 hours may be in courses at either the 600-level or 700-level.

No less than one month before the end of their final semester, students must submit a final portfolio to a committee consisting of one professor of their choice and the graduate director. The final portfolio includes the student's resume, personal statement, a selection of 3 papers (at least 1 theoretical) from any graduate-level courses they have taken during their M.A. coursework, and a 12-15 page reflection paper that discusses their intellectual trajectory, engagement with theory and method, and personal growth across the 3 papers and the way in which the student's views of "religion," broadly defined, have developed. In addition, students will present and discuss their portfolio with their committee in a meeting lasting no longer than one hour. The portfolio will be graded pass/fail (with an option to resubmit) and the committee will consider its overall presentation, clarity of expression and purpose, depth of reflection, and the student's articulation of what they have learned through their course of study.

## Thesis Option

A thesis option may be pursued by students who wish to undertake substantial independent research and who are already thinking and writing in a succinct, analytical, and sophisticated manner. Permission to write a thesis to complete the M.A. in Religious Studies is dependent on submitting a thesis proposal that earns the approval of the graduate director and proposed primary thesis advisor. If no faculty member in the Department for the Study of Religions agrees to serve as Primary Advisor, then the student cannot write a thesis. Students writing a thesis must also form a thesis committee of 3 faculty (2 must come from the Department for the Study of Religions) and pass an oral defense of the thesis before the committee.

The M.A. in Religious Studies Thesis Option requires a total of 36 hours course work. At least 12 hours of coursework (not counting thesis research hours) must be in courses numbered 700 or above, and one of these courses must be "REL 700: Theory and Method in the Study of Religion." A further 18 hours may be in courses at either the 600-level or 700-level (not counting thesis research hours). The final 6 hours are to be taken as thesis research (REL 791 and REL 792), typically in the final semester of study. Students who write an M.A. thesis do not submit a portfolio for graduation.

## Thesis Proposal

In order to write a thesis, the student must have a primary thesis advisor from the Department for the Study of Religions faculty, and a committee comprising two additional faculty in relevant areas of research (one of whom must also be a member of the Department for the Study of Religions). Students interested in writing a thesis to complete the M.A., are encouraged to seek out a primary thesis advisor before the end of their second semester in the M.A. program. To receive permission to write an M.A. thesis, the student must submit a well-researched thesis proposal in her or his third semester of study (by or before October 15th) that earns the approval of the graduate program director and the

primary thesis advisor. The proposal must be 6-10 pages in length, with a clear synopsis of the thesis argument, proposed chapters, a timeline for chapter submission, and an annotated bibliography. If the student cannot demonstrate both their ability to pursue the thesis independently and that enough preparation has been done to lead to the successful completion of the thesis in the fourth semester, the advisory committee will withhold approval of the thesis option and the student will continue in the course intensive program that is the norm for the M.A. program. The decision to approve or not approve the thesis proposal will be made jointly by the Graduate Program Director and the primary thesis advisor by or before October 31st.

## Thesis Length and Quality

The length of the thesis is to be decided between the student and the primary faculty advisor, but the department recommends no more than 100 pages. At minimum, the department expects that the thesis should be a publishable, article-length paper (35-50 pages) accompanied by substantial sources. It should be original work and can be a heavy reworking of a previous term paper or other research efforts. The thesis process culminates in an oral examination by a committee of at least three faculty members who must assess the thesis according to the normal guidelines (see Graduate Handbook).

## Language Requirements

In addition to the University's requirements for the M.A., the Department for the Study of Religions strongly recommends and encourages proficiency in a foreign research language relating to the student's area of study, whether ancient or modern. Proficiency is normally a minimum of two years of work in a specific language at the university level or equivalent and may include, but not limited to, the following:

- Hebrew
- Greek
- Sanskrit
- Arabic
- Spanish
- French
- German
- Chinese
- Japanese

A second research language is not required, but may be advised depending on the student's area of study and their plans after graduation (i.e., whether or not they plan on pursuing a Ph.D.). For example, students working on the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, or Sanskrit literature may be advised to learn German (the German Department offers a reading course for graduate students most summers: GER 001: German for Science and Humanities).

For additional degree requirements, see Requirements for Degrees (<https://bulletin.wfu.edu/graduate/requirements-degrees/>).