

Religious Studies

The School of Humanities

Chair

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Degrees Offered: B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

The undergraduate major includes courses in methodology (textual, historical, normative, and sociocultural approaches to the study of religion) and religious traditions (African religions, Buddhism, Christianity, comparative religions, Islam, and Judaism). The graduate program offers research degrees in 10 fields (see below). Within these clearly defined fields, students acquire a broad knowledge of religious studies with enough flexibility for interdisciplinary pursuits.

The Department of Religious Studies, in cooperation with the University of Texas Health Science Center, also offers a **Ph.D. in biomedical ethics** for students seeking to combine a rigorous training in religious studies (particularly theoretical approaches to ethics) with an interest in clinical and policy issues related to health care. The focus on health care distinguishes the program from those that concentrate more exclusively on moral philosophy or clinical ethics. Both the academic track and the professional track enable students to develop skills in interpreting religious/cultural texts and practices while engaging with theoretical and concrete issues in ethics, and the second track also prepares students to exercise clinical judgment, interpret cases, and engage in clinical research.

Degree Requirements for B.A. in Religious Studies

For general university requirements, see Graduation Requirements (pages 16–18). Students majoring or double-majoring in religious studies must complete:

- 30 semester hours (10 courses), or 24 semester hours (8 courses) for double majors
- 24 hours (8 courses) at 200, 300 or 400 level, or 18 hours (6 courses) for double majors

All majors must take:

- RELI 101 *Introduction to Religion* in the first or second year
- 2 introductory courses in religious traditions (1 western, 1 non-western)

Honors students will participate in a senior seminar and write an honors thesis.

In addition, students must also satisfy the distribution requirements and complete no fewer than 60 semester hours outside the departmental requirements for a program totaling at least 120 semester hours. See Distribution Requirements (page 17) and Majors (pages 19–20).

Degree Requirements for M.A. and Ph.D. in Religious Studies

The graduate program accepts a limited number of qualified students. A distinguished undergraduate record and high scores on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) are essential and, for Ph.D. applicants, an advanced degree in the humanities is desirable. For general university requirements, see Graduate Degrees (pages 60–65). Students admitted into the program will normally receive financial assistance in the form of a tuition waiver and a stipend. As part of their training and in return for their stipends, students in their second year and beyond are expected to serve as research assistants or teaching assistants. Students receiving stipends may also be asked on occasion to assist the department in other ways.

The M.A. in religious studies is normally a two-year program. Requirements are as follows:

- A total of 12 courses, including
 - 8 courses in 4 fields of religious studies (see list of fields below)
 - 2 department seminars
 - 2 independent research courses for preparation of comprehensive papers or thesis
- A passing grade on a reading examination in a foreign language (either a language of scripture or commentary in a tradition or a language of scholarship)
- Satisfactory completion of 2 comprehensive papers (demonstrating a grasp of a subdiscipline or topic that goes well beyond what is expected of a term paper) or a thesis

The Ph.D. in religious studies is normally a five-year program. Requirements are as follows:

- 18 Courses (54 hours required):
 - 6 courses in the major field
 - 3 courses in each of two minor fields (see list of fields below)
 - 2 department seminars (one or more of which may count as a major or minor course) to be taken in each of the first two years
 - 4 to 6 elective courses chosen in consultation with the student's adviser
 Courses in the department's M.A. program (including the department seminars) count for credit toward the Ph.D.
- Passing grades on reading examinations in 1 foreign languages, at least 1 of which must be a language of scholarship in the student's chosen field
- Passing grades in 5 qualifying examinations: 3 in the student's major field, 1 in each of the students 2 minor fields. (In place of examinations, the relevant faculty member may, in consultation with the student, substitute papers that demonstrate a thorough grasp of the field.) The nature and content of the examinations or papers will be determined one year prior to the date the student expects to write them, which is ordinarily the end of the third or beginning of the fourth year in the program.
- Oral discussion of dissertation proposal
- Satisfactory completion of dissertation and oral defense

Reading Lists. Students should become broadly familiar with the literature of their majors and minors; reading lists will be provided. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this material such that they draw on it on their exams and the dissertation itself. The graduate seminar (see below) is, in part, an introduction to areas of the reading list and to the techniques for engaging in deep, independent reading.

Fields of Study. Religion and contemporary cultures, scriptural interpretation, ethics and philosophy of religion, mysticism, psychology, and religious practices are fields of study in this program. These fields will include courses covering one or more of the following traditions: African and African-based religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and new and alternative religions. Ph.D. students may concentrate in one or more of these traditions in the context of their major and minor fields.

Students interested in a major or minor in biomedical ethics may take it as a concentration in ethics and philosophy of religion or as part of the Rice–University of Texas joint Ph.D. program in biomedical ethics, described below.

Professional Development

Opportunities may be available for Ph.D. candidates to teach undergraduate courses in the department. Opportunities to teach courses in local colleges and universities may also arise. Limited funds are also available for Ph.D. students to attend conferences to present their research. The department encourages these and other efforts to prepare students for academic careers.

Rice–University of Texas Joint Ph.D. Program in Biomedical Ethics

This program offers students opportunities for research and/or internships in clinical ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center across from the Rice campus. It is especially appropriate for students seeking a career in a clinical or policy setting. The requirements are the same as those for the Ph.D. program as described above, except that the student will be required to take 7 courses in the major field, 2 of which will be in clinical ethics or health policy. In addition, one of the student's major exams will focus on issues of relevance for clinical ethics and/or healthcare policy.

See RELI (pages 510–521) in the Courses of Instruction section.