RELIGION IN CULTURE, MA

Description

Taking the Department's motto seriously -- studying religion*in* culture -- this MA degree explores cross-disciplinary social theory and applies it to the study of religion, seeing each site studied as a test case in identity formation. Unlike other graduate programs in the study of religion, the MA in Religion in Culture at The University of Alabama presses beyond mere description and cross-cultural comparison, instead using social theory to understand the effects that narratives, practices, classification systems, and institutional structures have on social groups and their members. The degree program maintains this approach with a combination of analytic tools and digital skills, training students to use innovative technologies so as to communicate their findings effectively to wide audiences.

Two Key Foundations

The premise of the degree is that the work taking place in our field has wide relevance. **Critical analysis** and **innovative communication skills in the public humanities** are therefore both cornerstones of this MA. While all students will carry out their own independent research and gain co-writing experience with their supervisor, courses will require them to produce original article-length research papers and to create substantive digital presentations. These emphases begin in the first semester of the program, with two Foundations courses: one in social theory and the other in public humanities. In consultation with their supervisor, their culminating thesis project will emphasize one or the other of these two modes of scholarly communication -- allowing students to tailor the thesis to suit their own interests and career plans.

Supervision

Supervisors are assigned by the graduate committee during a student's first semester typically, based on the **statement of purpose** and discussions, both in seminars and informal conversations. The statement of purpose is vital as the primary means by which the graduate committee determines whether there is sufficient overlap of faculty expertise with incoming students' interests and needs. (The assignment of a supervisor is open to revision, at the discretion of the graduate director, should student interests change.) Faculty supervisors assist students in navigating the degree program, advising courses based on student interests, and mentoring the completion of a culminating thesis project.

Degree Structure

The **36 credit hour** graduate degree (2 years of course work, including the final thesis) focuses on providing students with two critical foundations: (i) becoming conversant in contemporary social theory and applying it to their area of interest in the study of religion and (ii) developing competencies in the tools of the public, digital humanities. In their first semester students will be not only reading widely in social theory (and applying it to an historical, regional, or ethnographic example of their choice) but also gaining familiarity with a wide variety of digital tools (from video and audio recording and editing, to making web pages and working with "big data") that will assist them in sharing their research. Students are also encouraged in their second semester to take a course examining the history of the study of religion in order to think critically about the application and relevance of those foundational elements in the field of religious studies.

Accelerated Masters Program (AMP)

Qualified undergraduates during their junior year can apply for the Accelerated Masters Program. If accepted, during their senior year they will take 4 MA courses that will count towards their BA Religious Studies major and MA Religion in Culture degree. After their senior year, they will need to complete 24 additional credit hours in the MA program to complete the graduate degree.

Relevance of the Degree

The program is designed not only for students hoping to pursue doctoral work but also for those aiming to use these skills in any number of other professions -- places where the analytic skills gained from working in social theory are enhanced by their communication skills and digital expertise. Rigorous coursework and original research with the mentorship of faculty prepares students for prestigious PhD programs; meanwhile, experience applying digital platforms to those research interests equips students with sought-after skills that can be applied to a number of careers.

Non-credit Colloquium

A required, non-credit **Graduate Colloquium** meets twice each semester and exposes students to a range of professional issues relevant to higher education today. The kinds of topics covered include, but are not limited to: teaching, C.V. preparation, applying for future graduate study, and career opportunities outside academia.

Internships

Although not required, the degree's aim to help prepare a wide variety of students for futures beyond their M.A. means that the Department encourages its graduate students to consider participating in an internship at some point in their degree. The Department has already established relationships with a variety of on- and off-campus groups which are eager to work with our graduate students, and our students earn course credit in REL 565. Whether students hope to apply to a Ph.D. or look for work in any number of other careers, the practical experience of putting their various skills to use during an internship will come in hand.

Funding

There are a limited number of **graduate teaching assistantships** (GTA) -- full or partial -- that are awarded annually on a competitive basis. Full GTA positions (i.e., 0.5 FTE) come with a full stipend and full tuition waiver (whether in- or out-of-state); partial GTA positions (e.g., 0.25 FTE) come with a half stipend and half tuition waiver.

Contact

For more information, contact Prof. Vaia Touna (vaia.touna@ua.edu), REL's graduate director.

Admissions

Students seeking an M.A. degree in the study of religion at The University of Alabama must first have earned an undergraduate degree in either the academic study of religion or related field and demonstrate how their areas of interest intersect with the program and Religious Studies faculty expertise.

In addition to the minimum Graduate School admission requirements, to be considered for regular admission an application must include:

- CV
- Statement of Purpose including the planned program of study

- Writing sample
- Three letters of recommendation.

Note: students who have graduated from UA's Religious Studies program -- if overlapping with current faculty -- do not need to submit letters of recommendation. Only one letter of recommendation is required of those students who have not majored in REL but who have taken courses with current faculty.

For full consideration of possible funding, applications to begin the program in the fall semester must be completed no later than **December 1**. Applications to begin in the spring semester are possible as well and must be submitted no later than **October 15**.

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

Curricular Requirements

It is expected that, in their first Fall semester, all graduate students will enroll in both REL 501 and REL 502 along with an additional graduate seminar. The aim of this first semester is to acquire skills (social theory + public humanities skills) while also beginning to explore, in those courses, the specific historical, regional, or ethnographic e.g. on which each student will focus during their culminating research project.

In all subsequent semesters (i.e., Fall and Spring), students will normally enroll in three courses (for 9 credit hours), so as to complete the degree in 2 academic years.

With permission of their supervisor and in consultation with the Graduate Director, some of these hours may be taken outside the Department, so that students can benefit from campus-wide resources (e.g., language training necessary for carrying out their research).

In their final Spring semester, students pursuing the formal thesis option will usually enroll in 6 hours of Thesis and 3 hours of the Capstone Seminar (a collaborative course dedicated to supporting their research by inviting feedback from a faculty member other than their supervisor as well as from all other students in their cohort). Students pursuing the non-thesis option will take the 3-hour Capstone Seminar, as well as six hours of electives relevant to their research.

Thesis Option		Hours
Required Courses		
1. Six hours of Foundation courses will be taken in the Fall semester of the 1st year:		
REL 501	Social Theory Foundations	3
REL 502	Public Humanities Foundations	3
2. Nine hours of required courses will be taken in the Spring of the second year:		
REL 590	Capstone Seminar	3
REL 599	Thesis Hours	6
Elective Courses [1]		**21**
REL 503	Methods Digital Study of Rel	
REL 504	Special Topics	
REL 511	History of Religious Studies	
REL 512	Debates in Method and Theory	
REL 521	Self & Society	
REL 522	Power & Persuasion	
REL 523	Discourse & Practice	
REL 524	Past & Present	
REL 525	Identity & Place	
REL 560	Independent Study	
REL 561	Independent Study	
REL 565	Religion in Culture Applied	
REL 580	Academic Writing in REL	
Total Hours		**36**

Non-Thesis Option		Hours
Required Courses		
1. Six hours of Foundation courses will be taken in the Fall semester of the 1st year:		
REL 501	Social Theory Foundations	3
REL 502	Public Humanities Foundations	3
2. Nine hours of required courses will be taken in the Spring of the second year:		
REL 590	Capstone Seminar	3
Elective Courses [1]		**27**
REL 503	Methods Digital Study of Rel	
REL 504	Special Topics	
REL 511	History of Religious Studies	
REL 560	Independent Study	
REL 565	Religion in Culture Applied	
REL 525	Identity & Place	
REL 522	Power & Persuasion	
REL 521	Self & Society	
REL 561	Independent Study	
REL 580	Academic Writing in REL	
REL 524	Past & Present	
REL 512	Debates in Method and Theory	
REL 523	Discourse & Practice	
Total Hours		**36**

Footnotes

[1]   In consultation with your supervisor, students will complete an additional twenty-one hours of graduate course work, including independent study courses and seminars in REL, plus graduate courses from other departments (in consultation with your supervisor and the Grad Director). For e.g., depending on the student's program of study, courses in foreign languages, taught through Modern Languages and Classics, and may be recommended. In addition, a required, non-credit Graduate Colloquium, led by the Graduate Director, meets monthly, to discuss a variety of professional issues in the study of religion in particular, or higher ed in general. REL faculty are invited as well.

Transfer Credit

Graduate-level credit earned at an accredited institution where a student was enrolled in the graduate school may be submitted for review for inclusion in the REL degree program.

Evaluation of credit for transfer will not be made until the student has enrolled in the graduate school of the University of Alabama. Courses that received a grade of less than a "B" will not be accepted for transfer of credit.

A student initiates at the Office of the Graduate School the request for transfer of graduate credit obtained at another institution. The student must also ensure that the Office of the Graduate School has an official transcript of the credit involved.

With the approval of the student's advisory committee and the Dean of the Graduate School, up to 12 hours of coursework for a graduate degree may be transferred from another institution. All credit toward the master's degree must have been earned during the six years immediately preceding the date on which the degree is awarded. Details about the Graduate School's policy on Transfer Credit is available in the Degree Requirements section of the Graduate Catalog.

Accelerated Master's Program (AMP)

Graduate School information on the Accelerated Master's Program.

Capstone Seminar Requirement

All students in the Spring semester of their final year will enroll in REL 590 Capstone Seminar as their culminating experience in the M.A. Religion in Culture program. This is required for students completing either Plan I or Plan II.

Internships

Students are not required to complete an internship. Any student who wishes to learn through an internship should discuss options for enrolling in REL 565 Religion in Culture Applied with their supervisor and the Graduate Director. The Graduate Director will set up each internship in consultation with the advisor and interested student.

Plan I – Thesis Process Requirements

In consultation with the Grad Director and supervisor (if applicable), a student can opt to complete a defended thesis as the culminating project (defined as a piece of original research that is potentially publishable as an academic article).

If pursuing the formal/official thesis option, certain deadlines must be met. By the end of the first semester, a student should know what kind of thesis they will pursue (see two options below), as well as its broad research topic.

All MA students who choose Plan I will complete 6 thesis hours in their second/culminating year of study. These hours will be completed under the supervision of a faculty advisor and will require a public defense at its completion.

If choosing Plan I, a student will have a choice between two thesis options: a traditional written thesis or a digital project. In both cases, you will form a committee to direct the development of the project and formally defend both the proposal and the work upon completion. The faculty advisor will oversee the process and offer feedback and guidance along the way.

- Traditional Thesis: This will culminate in an article-length (25-35 pages) project of original, substantive research that can be submitted for peer review publication.
- Digital Project: This will culminate in a substantive, research-based digital project that relies upon social theory and digital skills gained across the degree program.

Plan II – Non-Thesis Process Requirements

In consultation with the Grad Director and supervisor, a student can opt to pursue either of the following non-thesis options. 1) the comprehensive exam route, which can entail a set of exams in the last semester or, 2) participation in the already required REL 590 Capstone Seminar — this later route is recommended, as it can still result in an original seminar paper that you present to faculty and students. If choosing the comprehensive exam route, the student should declare that choice by the end of the second semester. Failure to declare by the end of the second semester will default to the culminating experience in the Capstone Graduate Seminar.

Time Limit for Degree Completion Requirements

The Department of Religious Studies normally expects completion of the degree program within two years. However, for multiple reasons, students may take longer to complete their degree. For more details on the general policies of the Graduate School, consult the Degree Requirements section of the Graduate Catalog.

Academic Misconduct Information

The Department of Religious Studies expects its graduate students to interact with each other, their professors and the REL staff, and undergraduate students in a professional and courteous manner. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, each of the following acts when performed in any type of academic or academically-related matter, exercise, or activity: cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information, misrepresentation, and abetting any of the above. For more information on academic misconduct, consult the Misconduct section of the Graduate Catalog.

Withdrawals and Leaves of Absence Information

Any student considering a leave of absence or withdrawing from the program is encouraged to consult their supervisor and the Graduate Director. For more information about processes in the Graduate School, consult the Withdrawals and Leaves of Absence section of the Graduate Catalog.

Academic Grievances Information

Students with a concern about a course or a grade (or similar dispute) should consult the appropriate faculty in the following ascending order. First, the instructor of the course, then the student's supervisor, then the Graduate Director, and finally the Department Chair. Details about the academic grievance process in the Graduate School is available in the Grievance Information section of the Graduate Catalog.

Grades and Academic Standing

The requirements to maintain academic standing are available in the Grades and Academic Standing section of the Graduate Catalog.

Graduate School Deadlines Information

Student deadlines as set by the Graduate School are available in the Student Deadlines section of the Graduate Catalog.

Application for Graduation Information

Each candidate for a master's degree must apply for graduation (through myBama) no later than the registration period for the semester or the first session of the summer term in which requirements for the degree are to be completed. Consult details in the Degree Requirements section of the Graduate Catalog.

Funding for Students

The department of Religious Studies puts significant effort into securing funding for graduate students. The Graduate Committee in the department makes decisions about merit-based funding for graduate students and nominations for university-wide fellowships for each academic year. Typically, a funding offer is for one year, with GTA and GRA positions for the subsequent years determined in the preceding spring.

Decisions within the committee are merit-based, reflecting the application materials for first year students and current performance of returning students.

Offers of funding can be revoked based on performance not meeting expectations. Failure to make academic progress towards the degree and failure to complete assigned duties in an acceptable time frame (for GTA and GRA positions) are grounds for revocation of funding. Faculty may bring any concerns to the Graduate Director, who will meet with the student as appropriate to address the concerns and to make a plan for resolving the concerns, including a time frame for reevaluation.

If academic progress or the timely completion of duties are not resolved in a timely fashion, the Graduate Director, in consultation with the Graduate Committee, concerned faculty, and the department chair, will make a decision about revocation of continued funding. A student receiving a notice of revoked funding may appeal the decision of the Graduate Committee to the chair.

In extreme cases where the actions or inaction of the GTA / GRA is detrimental to student learning and / or the functioning of the department, the Graduate Committee may revoke funding immediately and without warning. Students facing an immediate revocation may appeal the Graduate Committee decision to the chair.