

MANUAL FOR GRADUATE STUDIES
2020-2021



DEPARTMENT of
RELIGIOUS
STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®

<https://religion.ua.edu/>

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The following contains guidelines for graduate study in the Religion in Culture MA program at the University of Alabama. Care has been taken to ensure that the policies and procedures outlined in this manual are current, for both the Department and the University. However, these policies and procedures can be subject to change, at times with little notice, so with respect to logistical details (e.g., due dates or current forms), it is the student's responsibility to double-check the accuracy of a statement with her/his advisor, with REL's Director of Graduate Studies (Dr. **Steven Ramey**) and with the appropriate handbook or website.

As changes and updates are made to this document, it will be reposted as a PDF on the Department's website and the current version is always available from the REL Graduate Director; a header on the document signifies the date of the version that is currently in circulation.

Students are also recommended to make full use of resources posted at the UA Graduate School, such as those found at:

<https://graduate.ua.edu/current-students/>
<https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/academic-policies/>

Where policies differ, the Graduate School's policies take priority.

Master of Arts Program

This MA, which applies social theory to the study of religion with an emphasis on the public humanities and which utilizes expertise of current REL faculty, combines the two specialties of the Department; it will therefore prepare students for doctoral level work in the academic study of religion while also giving them practical writing and online communication skills that they can also use in a variety of careers outside the university. Taking seriously ongoing debates on the relevance of the humanities, this degree ensures that all students not only acquire academic tools to examine religion as a cultural and historical site where social groups are made and remade but also gain expertise in effectively sharing these findings with audiences well beyond the academy (e.g., learning video production, public writing and blog posting, as well as recording/podcasting) and using digital skills to analyze and interpret data (e.g., enhancing digitized archives, coding, computational methods, etc.). This two-fold aim, supplemented also by attention to co-publishing original scholarly research with REL faculty members, learning grant-writing skills, working closely with BA majors and Core Curriculum courses, coincides with the University's goals: to produce new knowledge; communicate it widely across the state and the country; work toward increasing external funding on campus; enhance graduate education; increase undergraduate research; promote the humanities; and teach practical and thus transferable computer-based skills to all students.

Department Information

Main Office:

212 Manly Hall
(205) 348-5271
Fax: (205) 348-6621
religiousstudies@ua.edu

Mailing Address:

Department of Religious Studies
Box 870264
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0264

Who's Who

Russell T. McCutcheon: Department Chair

*Ultimately responsible for all decisions concerning the Department. This is the person to see for questions that an advisor and/or graduate director can't answer.

*russell.mccutcheon@ua.edu, 348.8512

Steven Ramey: Director of Graduate Studies

*Responsible for overseeing the MA program, leading the graduate colloquium, advising incoming students, and chairing the REL Graduate Committee. This is person to see for questions about logistical matters regarding the degree in general or questions that an advisor can not answer.

*steven.ramey@ua.edu, 348.4218

LeCretia Crumpton: Administrative Secretary

*Responsible for overseeing the Department's main office and implementing Department policies and initiatives. This is the person to see for any paperwork signing, questions about course registration, and/or issues with the MA office.

*lscrumpton@ua.edu, 348.5150

Graduate Committee

The MA in Religion in Culture is directed by the REL Graduate Committee, appointed by the Department Chair and chaired by the Graduate Director. Along with Prof. Ramey, its members currently include: Prof. Merinda Simmons. The Graduate Committee's duties include functioning annually as the acceptance committee, assigning supervisors to students, and generally overseeing the operation of the graduate program. Students with concerns related to the degree are, of course, free to speak with members of the committee but are recommended to speak directly with the Graduate Director.

Faculty Advisor

During the first semester, each grad student will discuss their developing interests with the Graduate Director, who advises incoming students. Considering each student's needs, the Graduate Committee will assign a faculty advisor during the fall semester. Where deemed appropriate, the Graduate Director will continue to serve as the advisor for some students. The advisor's role (whether the Graduate Director or another faculty member) is to assist in keeping students on track with required/relevant curriculum, certificates, and internship opportunities.

Should a student choose to pursue a thesis project, their advisor will also chair their committee.

If the expertise of the supervisor who is initially appointed differs from the interests or thesis that a student eventually develops, then students can petition, directly with the REL Graduate Director, for a change of supervisor.

Soon after arriving on campus for the start of the degree program, each student should meet with the Graduate Director to chart out the degree and get a sense of the course of study (what classes they will take when). ***Based on this and subsequent conversations, both will develop and sign a degree plan by the beginning of October that the REL Graduate Director will keep on file.***

This document is prone to change over time (possibly requiring that it be updated periodically), but it will serve as the road map to ensure the timely completion of the degree. It will also specify courses outside of REL (e.g., language training) that students will need to complete.

What Questions Go Where

Professor	Content and logistics related to the course at hand
Faculty Advisor (when assigned)	MA course plan; Thesis/Comprehensive exams/Culminating project; Questions/Concerns about a class's professor
Graduate Director	MA course plan (when not assigned a different advisor), General info about MA program or graduate studies at UA; Graduate Colloquium; Questions/Concerns about advisor
Department Chair	General info about Department or the University; Questions/Concerns about Grad Director

REL Graduate Faculty

Michael J. Altman, Assistant Professor (colonialism; media studies; Asian religions in American culture)

Steven L. Jacobs, Professor (biblical studies; translation and interpretation; Holocaust and genocide studies)

Nathan Loewen, Assistant Professor (globalizing discourses within the philosophy of religion; development studies; digital technology and networked learning)

Russell T. McCutcheon, Professor (myths and rituals; the history of religious studies; secularism; relations between the classification "religion" and the rise of the nation-state)

Richard Newton, Assistant Professor (American cultural politics; African American history; New Testament in Western imagination; Islam)

Steven Ramey, Professor (migration studies; Hinduism and Islam; South Asian religions in southeastern U.S.; religious subgroups)

K. Merinda Simmons, Associate Professor (rhetorics of authenticity; theories of gender and race, Southern and Caribbean Studies, literary theory)

Edith Szanto, Assistant Professor (Islam; Middle Eastern religious traditions, history, and politics)

Vaia Touna, Assistant Professor (ancient Greco-Roman world; modern Greece; methodological issues in the study of religion)

Theodore L. Trost, Professor (American religious history; religion and popular culture; Bible and the category "scripture;" religious rhetoric in literature and film; song writing)

Jeri Wieringa, Assistant Professor (Digital humanities; computational methods for the study of religion; American religious history; women and gender in American culture)**

** Formal appointment as Graduate Faculty is pending.

Degree Timeline

Although adaptable to student needs, the Department advises the following structure and timeline for completing the MA in a timely manner (i.e., two-year period).

*For UA Graduate School deadlines, please also consult:
<https://graduate.ua.edu/current-students/student-deadlines/>*

SEMESTER 1

Be enrolled in at least 9 hours of coursework: REL 501, 502, and another seminar

ASAP upon arriving to campus: Check-in with LeCretia Crumpton in the Main Office (Manly 212), *even if not a GTA*. If a student is a GTA, she will have some paperwork for them to fill out.

Required Workshops/Trainings: (*consult the Graduate Director for annual dates of these required workshops around or before the start of the Fall semester*)

- Department Orientation
- Graduate School Workshop for new GTAs
- GROW (Graduate Orientation and Welcome)
- A&S Mandatory Legal Training for GTAs (Action card required)

ASAP (but before the end of the first week of classes): Initial meeting with Grad Director to discuss a degree plan.

By early October: Develop and complete signed degree plan with Graduate Director

SEMESTER 2

Be enrolled in at least 9 hours of coursework, typically including Academic Writing Workshop and History of the Field

By end of first summer: Complete online educator program course through CCS: <http://itas.ua.edu/teaching-online/online-educator-program.php>; to be eligible for employment as an REL online instructor requires successful completion of this certificate (see below).

SEMESTER 3

Be enrolled in at least 9 hours of coursework

Early Semester (as scheduled by A&S): Attend Dave Bauer Grant Writing Seminar (completed in the fall of the 2nd year)

Oct. 15 or before: Thesis proposal due to advisor (if pursuing this route)

Before end of semester: Thesis proposal defended before committee (if pursuing this route)

SEMESTER 4

Be enrolled in Capstone Seminar (REL 590) and 6 hours of other relevant courses (6 hours of 599 if pursuing thesis)

By end of degree: Complete Digital Humanities certificate. See below.

Registration period or before: Apply for graduation through <http://mybama.ua.edu>

Getting Started

Student ID (ACT Card)

The Action Card or ACT Card is the student ID. Graduate students need it to use the library, recreation center, health center, attend events, obtain tickets and paychecks (if applicable), and to do just about everything else, too. Students can also place money in their student account and use in on-campus dining halls.

To obtain an ACT Card, go to this link: <http://actcard.ua.edu/>. For questions, call the action card main office number at 205.348.2288.

Licenses and Registrations

Any student paying in-state tuition must get an Alabama driver's license within thirty days of moving here. Contact:

Department of Motor Vehicles
State Trooper's Office
2645 Skyland Blvd.
Tuscaloosa
(205) 553-0729

To obtain an Alabama license plate, bring the car, title or lienholder information, personal identification, and current registration to:

County Tag Office
Tuscaloosa County Courthouse
714 Greensboro Ave.
Tuscaloosa
(205) 349-3870

Information on voter registration, hunting and fishing licensees, and boat registration is also available at the courthouse.

Religious Studies Student Association (RSSA)

Graduate students are expected to join the Department's [Religious Studies Student Association](#). It is a group that allows graduate students to interact with and mentor REL undergraduates (possibly taking a leadership role in some of their events). Please speak with the faculty member who serves as the RSSA Advisor.

Degree Guidelines

General Requirements

***Course Work:** Each student must complete a minimum of 36 credit hours of courses numbered 500 or above. 15 of these hours come from REL's graduate core curriculum (see below). An additional 21 hours will be completed in consultation with the student's faculty advisor. These may include independent study courses, seminars in REL, and, depending on the student's program of study, graduate courses from other departments and/or courses in foreign languages (through the Department of Modern Languages and Classics).

***Core Curriculum:** 6 of these hours are constituted by two foundations courses to be taken during the first Fall semester of graduate study: REL 501 (Social Theory & Religious Studies) and REL 502 (Public Humanities & Religious Studies). Another 6 hours will be taken in the Spring through an academic writing workshop and a seminar on the history of religious studies as a field. The only required coursework in the second year is the 3-hour REL 590 Capstone Seminar offered in the final Spring semester. For students pursuing a thesis, 6 hours of REL 599 (thesis research) will be required as well.

***Graduate Colloquium:** Twice each semester, first-year graduate students are required to attend a session (lasting approximately 90 minutes) of a non-credit-conferring Graduate Colloquium, led by the Graduate Director. This colloquium consists of meetings at which students and the Grad Director (along with occasional relevant guests) will discuss a variety of professional issues in the study of religion in particular or higher education in general (e.g., library research, pedagogy, social theory, technology, professional development, job market skills, etc.).

***Social Theory Reading Group:** Once per semester, MA students will meet to discuss a contemporary academic article relevant to the field of religious studies. Second-year MA students organize this group for all MA students. It is the decision of the organizers whether faculty will participate or it will be limited to graduate students.

Course Descriptions

***REL 501 Social Theory and Religious Studies (3 credit hours)**

This graduate seminar introduces students to some of the terms and methods used in social theory and cultural analysis. As such, it presents the academic study of religion as an inevitably interdisciplinary field that draws from a host of various thinkers and texts.

Readings and discussions will be centered on critical concepts important to studies of identity, text, and society.

*REL 502 Public Humanities and Religious Studies (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to public humanities and digital humanities approaches to the study of religion. Students learn methods and tools for conducting digital research and explore ways to communicate theoretical and religious studies research to public audiences through digital media. Students are introduced to a number of digital tools for research, scholarly communication, and public engagement and will work to apply those tools to their individual research interests and goals.

*REL 504 Special Topics (3 credit hours)

To illustrate the gains of applying social theory to the study of religion, this course will draw upon current examples to study in light of the skills gained in the social theory foundations course. Specific content will be determined by faculty responsible for the course each semester. *This course may be repeated for a maximum of 9 hours for differing topics.

*REL 511 History of Religious Studies (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar surveys the origins, objects of study, and pivotal thinkers that scholars often highlight when outlining the historical development/current shape of Religious Studies as an academic field. By course end, each student will narrate the study of religion in light of their own research interests.

*REL 512 Debates in Method & Theory (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar will acquaint students with contemporary debates and authors, emphasizing the work of a newer generation of scholars, in order to consider more closely the tools that scholars use to study religion, the various contexts in which they carry out their work, and some of their wider implications.

*REL 521 Self & Society (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to terms and ideas related to constructions of the self and society and their relevance to the academic study of religion. Towards the end of the semester, a specific case study will serve as a site where students will apply theories discussed to analyze examples relevant in Religious Studies. Each student will also select an important work or issue in their chosen field of study in consultation with their advisor and analyze that work in depth in relation to the various issues discussed in the course.

*REL 522 Power & Persuasion (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to terms and ideas related to expressions of power and persuasion and their relevance to the academic study of religion. Throughout the course, a specific case study will serve as a site where students will apply theories discussed to analyze examples relevant in Religious Studies. Each student will also select an important work or issue in their chosen field of study in consultation with their advisor and analyze that work in depth in relation to the various issues discussed in the course.

*REL 523 Discourse & Practice (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to terms and ideas related to discourse and practice and their relevance to the academic study of religion. Throughout the course, students will apply theories to analyze examples relevant in Religious Studies, both ancient and modern. Each student will also select an important work in their chosen field of study in consultation with their advisor and analyze that work in depth in relation to the various issues discussed in the course.

*REL 524 Past & Present (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to terms and ideas related to the construction of the past and its relation to the present and their relevance to the academic study of religion. Throughout the course, students will apply theories to analyze examples relevant in Religious Studies, both ancient and modern. Each student will also select an important work in their chosen field of study in consultation with their advisor and analyze that work in depth in relation to the various issues discussed in the course.

*REL 525 Identity & Place (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces students to terms and ideas related to issues of identification and place and their relevance to the academic study of religion. Throughout the course, a specific case study will serve as a site where students will apply theories discussed to analyze examples relevant in Religious Studies. Each student will also select an important work or issue in their chosen field of study in consultation with their advisor and analyze that work in depth in relation to the various issues discussed in the course.

*REL 560, REL 561 Independent Study (variable 1-9 credit hours)

Independent studies courses provide students with the opportunity to pursue a topic of their choosing in relation to social theory and its relevance to the academic study of religion. Throughout the course, students will meet with the professor to select and discuss readings and writing assignments. *These courses may be repeated for a maximum of 9 hours for differing topics.

*REL 565 Religion & Culture Applied (variable 1-9 credit hours)

This course reflects the Department's aim to help prepare students with a wide variety of research and professional interests for futures beyond their M.A. To that end, the Department has established relationships with a variety of offices on- and off-campus whose workplaces rely on the kinds of skills students learn in the M.A. degree program. When students sign up for this course, they will be assigned to a supervisor working in one of these professional settings. This assignment will consist of participating in at least five hours per week of hands-on training, while also applying the analytical and digital skills gained in their M.A. coursework. Various projects will be determined by the supervisor overseeing the graduate student's work, in conversation with the Graduate Director. By the end of the semester, the student will have not only completed a number of site-specific tasks but also written at least one blog post for the Department's website synthesizing their take-aways from the experience.

*REL 580 Academic Writing in REL (3 credit hours)

This graduate seminar introduces MA students to the academic research and writing process. It attends to matters of craft and form as it takes students through the stages of brainstorming, drafting, editing, and revising scholarly prose.

*REL 590 Capstone Seminar (3 credit hours)

In this culmination class experience, normally enrolled in final Spring semester, students will integrate and apply the skills learned throughout the degree in relation to a specialized topic of the professor's choosing.

*REL 599 Masters Thesis (variable 1-9 credit hours)

REL 599 is an independent research course in which the student conducts Masters Thesis research under the guidance of a thesis advisor. Research projects will include the development of an original research question; in-depth research into relevant secondary

and primary sources; the production of an article length essay or equivalent digital project (as approved by the thesis advisor); and an oral presentation of the research. Students will meet regularly with the thesis advisor throughout the semester during which the course is undertaken. This course must be repeated for up to 6 hours for students pursuing the thesis option.

Language/Research Skill Competency

Depending on the program of study, courses in foreign languages, taught through the Department of Modern Languages and Classics, may be recommended. Such training would be considered in consultation with the faculty advisor. If it is determined to be beneficial, the Department may suggest that a student enroll in relevant courses immediately in order to ensure sufficient proficiency. The initial plan of study that students develop with the REL Graduate Director, in consultation with the student's advisor (if applicable), should identify such courses. Depending on the level of the language courses and the course plan, these courses may be additional courses that do not count towards the 36 hours for the M.A.

Thesis

In consultation with the Grad Director and the assigned supervisor (if applicable), a graduate student can opt for either 1) a defended thesis as the culminating project (defined as a piece of original research that is potentially publishable as an academic article), 2) the comprehensive exam route, which can entail either a set of exams in their last semester or, 3) participation in the already required REL 590 Capstone Graduate Seminar — this latter route is recommended, as it can still result in an original seminar paper that a student can present to faculty and students.

If pursuing the formal/official thesis option, certain deadlines must be met. By the end of their 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 option 1 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 a student chooses Option 1, they will have a choice between two thesis options: a traditional written thesis or a digital project. In both cases, they will form a committee to direct the development of the project and formally defend both their proposal and the work upon completion. Their 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 the social theory and digital skills gained throughout the degree program.

MA Advisory Committee

The Graduate School requires a thesis committee of no fewer than three faculty members, one of

whom must come from outside the Department. Unless exceptional circumstances arise, the faculty advisor will also serve as the thesis advisor.

For students who choose to do a thesis, by no later than October 15 of their second Fall semester (see schedule above), they will submit a thesis project proposal to their advisor, who will then distribute it to committee members. Working with the advisor, the student will schedule a defense of this proposal that will take place before the end of that Fall semester, in order to receive feedback from their committee en route to their final semester and thesis completion. Note: in consultation with the advisor, these steps can take place before these deadlines.

Academic Misconduct

REL expects its graduate students to interact with each other, their professors and the REL staff, and undergraduate students in a professional and courteous manner that exhibits the inclusiveness that is one of the core principles of the University of Alabama.

We require all students to abide by the concept of academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity, or academic misconduct, in the words of the UA Office of Academic Affairs “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; . . . acts performed in any type of academic or academically- related matter, exercise, or activity.” For more information on academic misconduct, see: <https://provost.ua.edu/academic-misconduct/>.

COVID-19

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class sessions; and (2) adhere to social distancing standards. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

If a student’s circumstances require an accommodation related to COVID-19, please consult with the Graduate Director as soon as possible.

Advising, Scheduling, and Registering

Students should seek input from the Grad Director or their faculty advisors (if assigned) regarding decisions related to coursework. The advisor or the Grad Director must approve the initial plan of study, revisions to it, and each student’s schedule each semester. Each October and March there is a two week Faculty-Student Advising Period. During this time, students should see the Grad Director or their advisor (if applicable) to get their schedule approved. Then, do the following:

- Log into MyBama account and register.
- Any student who registers for an Independent Study or Thesis hours must confirm that they

select the correct number of hours when registering. An Independent Study is typically a 3-hour course, and Thesis is typically for a total of 6 hours.

- Be sure to confirm the schedule when requested to do so by StudentReceivables.

Required Certifications

Students will each earn two certificates as part of the MA in Religion in Culture; neither incurs any additional tuition or fees. The Online Pedagogy Certificate will normally be earned by the end of the first Spring semester and the Digital Humanities Certificate by the end of the degree.

*Digital Humanities

Throughout the degree students will attend a variety of workshops offered by the department or other units on campus; the Graduate Directors will alert students to the workshop opportunities as they become available. Attendance in workshops, in addition to successful completion of REL 502, will be recorded and reported to the REL Graduate Director and will count towards the certificate. These workshops will have no assignments or “home work”; they are meant to enhance students’ digital skills, introduce them to others on campus working in the public and/or digital humanities, and model for them the self-initiation needed to acquire and hone new skills.

*Online Pedagogy (through College of Continuing Studies)

The College of Continuing Studies (CCS) manages all online courses for the University of Alabama, though content experts within Departments develop and offer these courses. The University requires an Online Pedagogy Certificate for all those who grade or develop these courses. It entails a web-based series of 10 courses (7 of which are required, with 3 electives) taken at a student’s own pace. While obtaining this certificate may assist MA graduates in obtaining work after their graduation, and will at least inform them of current developments in higher education, completion of the certificate will also make them eligible to be instructors-of-record for online REL courses. If a student hopes to be engaged in such teaching, and the opportunity to earn income—knowing that the Department prioritizes summer work and work for non-funded REL MA students—they must complete this certificate before the end of their first Spring semester or by the time they have earned at least 18 credit hours in the degree.

Teaching

Apart from working as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), MA students with at least 18 credit hours in the discipline can, with the permission of the REL Graduate Director and Department Chair, teach an online course of their own. These online courses (of which REL has several, all aimed at lower-level intro students, providing them with Core Curriculum Humanities credit) are already created and require instructors to interact in online discussion boards and to be responsive to the needs of the students who are enrolled. Having obtained the CCS Online Pedagogy Certificate, MA students are eligible for such work in summers or during their second year (with priority given to unfunded students). At present, these courses pay (before taxes) between \$3,000 and \$3,300 each.

Although the instructor-of-record, all MA students involved in their own online courses will be supervised by an REL faculty member. Their reappointment to this position, in subsequent

semester, will depend on their students' Survey of Instruction as well as feedback from the supervising faculty member.

Speak with the Graduate Director, well in advance, if interested in this opportunity to gain experience teaching.

Grant Writing

All students will be required to attend the College of Arts & Sciences Fall grant writing workshop for graduate students (the Bauer Grant Writing Seminar) in their second year and to attend the monthly Graduate Colloquium where grant writing is discussed. The Bauer Grant Writing Seminar is an open workshop.

Over the course of the degree program, each student will be required to assist, in consultation with the Graduate Director / advisor, in researching and writing at least one grant application. The Department understands this grant application in a wide sense and can involve funding opportunities with both on-campus offices (e.g., for travel funding) and off-campus agencies.

Transfer of Credits

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. Credit will not be accepted from any institution at which the student failed to receive a "B" average on all graduate work attempted, nor will a grade of less than a "B" transfer for credit.

A student initiates at the Office of the Graduate School the request for evaluation 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.

See: <https://catalog.ua.edu/graduate/about/academic-policies/degree-requirements/#mastersdegreestext>

Spring-Start Requirements/Exceptions

Normally, a student's program of study will commence in a Fall semester. However, there are certain cases in which beginning the program in the Spring is possible. Consult the Graduate Director for information about submitting an application in the Fall.

Part-Time Studies

Pursuing the REL MA is possible as a part-time student; speak with the Graduate Director for

more information.

Completion of the Program

The Department of Religious Studies normally expects completion of the degree program within two years. According to The University of Alabama Graduate Catalog: “All requirements for the Master’s degree must be completed during the six years (18 fall, spring, and summer semesters) immediately preceding the date on which the degree is to be awarded. There is no provision for an extension of the time limit beyond 6 years for master’s students.”

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.

Course Loads

According to [The Graduate School](#), minimum and maximum course loads per semester for full-time graduate students are as follows:

Status	Minimum	Maximum
0.5 FTE (“Full”) Assistantship	6 hours	12 hours
0.25 FTE (“Half”) Assistantship	9 hours	15 hours
Regular students	9 hours	15 hours

- Be aware, however, that some federal loan programs require a higher course load for full-time standing (generally 9 hours). The Graduate Director can assist students in meeting these outside guidelines with Pass/Fail options or directed study opportunities.

Graduate Council Fellows, Alumni Association “License Tag” Fellows and McNair Fellows must register for at least 9 but can register for up to 15 semester hours per semester during the year of these fellowships. Note: tuition is covered by these scholarships but fees associated with enrolling are not.

Student Support

Graduate Assistantships and Fellowships: Overview

The Department of Religious Studies attempts to fund as many students as possible with as much support as possible. The Department will award a limited number of assistantships to students annually on a competitive basis. In the second year of the program, there is the opportunity to participate in teaching online courses (see above). Speak to the Graduate Director to learn more.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA)

Graduate Teaching Assistantships that are full-time (20 hours per week = 0.5 Full Time

Equivalency) include full tuition, UA-provided health insurance with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, and a monthly stipend. GTAs typically work with large-enrollment introductory courses. While tasks are ultimately up to the supervising professor, typical duties include: 1) communicating with students about minor logistical or content questions; 2) grading student assignments; 3) overseeing a learning platform such as Blackboard, if applicable.

If a half GTA position is awarded (that is, a 0.25 FTE position, requiring 10 hours per week), then the student receives half of the monthly stipend and half of the tuition waiver, and must fund half of their own medical insurance costs.

Additional GTA openings for non-academic departments (e.g., working in the undergraduate residence system) are listed on the UA Human Resources website (www.hr.ua.edu). Work study positions may be available for students who qualify for the Federal Work Study Program through the Financial Aid Office.

Graduate Council Fellowships

Annually the Graduate Council of the Graduate School awards two types of Graduate Council Fellowships (GCF) on a competitive basis. These fellowships pay a stipend worth more than a typical GTA stipend and cover tuition/health care. *Students funded by these fellowships have no duties but to work on their degrees*, and must register for at least 9 but no more than 15 credit hours of graduate study. Students may not apply directly to the Graduate school for these fellowships; all Graduate School funding is awarded on the basis of a nomination of the student by the Department. There are three rounds of GCF nominations for incoming students, occurring in February, March, and April of each spring semester, and one round for returning students.

Other Graduate School Fellowships

*National Alumni Association (NAA): The NAA funds graduate fellowships on the basis of income from UA specialty license plates. To be eligible for these fellowships, a student must be a resident of the state of Alabama. Nominations for these awards are solicited from the Department in mid-March and require a statement from the student (students do not apply independently). The stipend for NAA fellowships are \$15,000 and include tuition and fees. Students have no duties other than to pursue their graduate studies, and are required to register for 9 semester credit hours.

*McNair Graduate Fellowships: The Graduate School funds a limited number of McNair graduate fellowships. These are awarded competitively based on departmental nominations, student statements, and letters of recommendation. As with other fellowships, students should not apply directly to the graduate school. McNair fellowships are preferentially awarded to students who were McNair Fellows at the undergraduate level. However, in some cases students who meet McNair eligibility requirements despite not having been McNair Fellows can apply.

More information about these and other fellowships may be found [here](#).

Other University Funding Sources

Graduate students can seek on-campus employment through the Human Resources Office of Student Employment: www.uastudentjobs.ua.edu

Intramural Research and Travel Support

This refers to research and travel support available from UA. There are several primary sources: (1) the Graduate Student Research and Travel Support Fund, administered by the Graduate School; (2) the Graduate Students Association (GSA) Research and Travel Fund; (3) College of Arts & Sciences student travel requests; (4) Student Government Association (SGA) through membership in the RSSA; and (5) Department requests. Please note that the availability of these funds may be rescinded due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and restrictions on travel.

(1) Graduate Student Research and Travel Support Fund

The Graduate School provides supplemental funding for graduate student research projects and travel to present research results at conferences. Departments may submit as many nominations as they deem appropriate, provided that each nomination be matched at least 1:1 with non-Graduate School funds.

Requests should be submitted [online](#) to the Graduate School.

Travel Awards are reserved for graduate students who have been accepted to present personally their own research (or creative activity) at a national or international meeting of their discipline's major academic/professional organization. For Research Awards, priority will be given to thesis, pre-dissertation, and dissertation research.

Requests for awards should be initiated by the student's faculty adviser and endorsed and submitted electronically by the department chair to the Graduate School. The request must include a budget, information about cost sharing, and, if travel is involved, a confirmation that the student will be personally presenting his or her own work.

Application deadlines are August 31 for Fall proposals, January 31 for Spring proposals, and April 30 for Summer proposals. The Graduate School will consider additional requests, pending the availability of funding.

After the three major deadlines, requests will be reviewed at the end of each month. Please see the [Graduate Catalog financial assistance page](#) for additional opportunities.

(2) Graduate Student Association (GSA) Research and Travel Fund

An application for funding requests can be downloaded from the GSA's webpage: <http://gradservices.sa.ua.edu/rt.cfm>. The GSA meets monthly to consider applications (apply as need arises, knowing that funding can become limited at the end of the year).

(3) College of Arts & Sciences Student Travel Requests

The College of Arts & Sciences awards travel funds to students four times per year. These applications are made directly by students to the College; however, they first must be reviewed and approved by the Department Chair. The application form can be found

on the College's website here: <https://www.as.ua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/AS-Student-Travel-Request-Form-2016-2017.pdf>

(4) Student Government Association (SGA)

Membership in the RSSA gives each student access to funding from The Financial Affairs Committee (FAC) of the SGA. The FAC allocates funds to registered student organizations like the RSSA. In order to be eligible for funding, groups must be registered with the SOURCE (<https://thesource.ua.edu/>) for at least one month, and the president must attend a Foresight Workshop or Officers Academy training session. All applications for funding come to the FAC through an online form submitted by the group's president, who must then attend the FAC meeting to answer questions from the committee.

(5) Department Requests

The Department of Religious Studies has a small amount of resources that may be available to graduate students on a case-by-case basis. Speak with the Graduate Director for more information and to learn about the application process.