RELIGIOUS STUDIES (RELI)

Inquiry into religion as a continuously evolving source of ethical ideas, cultural values, social critique, and human connection in the contemporary world

Program Highlights
Religion has continually shaped human experience in the world, globally and locally, both in the past and in the present. It is an organizing principle within every society and a frequent source of conflict, conflict resolution, and of ideas that can both reinforce and challenge existing social norms and moral values. Many of the world’s most pressing issues and problems—from fostering sustainable and equitable development, to peacemaking and the protection of human rights to assessing the full ramifications of scientific and technological developments on all forms of life—require new moral philosophies and ethical responses that can reach across cultural and religious differences, while drawing upon the fundamental values, beliefs, and traditions that continue to guide human beings across the globe. A master’s degree in interdisciplinary religious studies explores the role of religion in intellectual and cultural life, the connections between religion and social justice, and the social impact of religious traditions. As an interdisciplinary program, students analyze the effects of religious ideas, movements, and practices from multiple perspectives and through the methodologies of both the humanities and the social sciences, fostering strong academic skills in critical and comparative thinking.

Who’s in the Program
Students are from all walks of life and backgrounds, but a unifying characteristic is an interest in the role of religion in global affairs, anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, or conflict analysis and resolution. Students are challenged to think critically and constructively about the religious foundations of values and ethics, as well as the important—but often misunderstood—role that religions play in today’s complex world.

Why Mason
The Washington, DC metropolitan area is rich in the presence of many major religious traditions and their places of worship. Students have the opportunity to study a wide range of religions in the context of their own communities and among their contemporary practitioners. The region also has abundant non-profits, service organizations, and research opportunities. Students can take advantage of this to earn credit toward their degree through internships and other service learning opportunities throughout the region.

Career Paths
The MAIS concentration in religious studies is particularly relevant for students who are interested in careers in law, national and international government, print and media journalism, library sciences, archives and museums, public and social service, teaching, advanced graduate studies, religious communities and institutions, and organizations that address conflict and its aftermath. Students who have completed degrees in this program have used the knowledge and skills they acquired to advance existing careers in government, education, and the military, while others have gone on to advanced graduate study at various institutions, including Harvard Divinity School.

...it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion...
Abington v. Schempp, U.S. Supreme Court (1963)
MAIS: A Master’s With A Mission

The Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) program in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences consists of multiple established degree paths that exist in partnership with academic units and faculty across the University. It offers a home for students with broad academic interests who seek a master’s degree that will help them to create a better world. While their degree paths may vary dramatically, our students share a desire to address critical problems facing the world today.

Available Degree Paths
- Computational Social Science - Energy and Sustainability
- Individualized Studies – Religious Studies – Social Entrepreneurship
- Social Justice and Human Rights – War and the Military in Society
- Women and Gender Studies

Faculty and Research
The Religious Studies Department offers courses on all of the major religions, as well as comparative courses that examine religious philosophies and issues from a cross-cultural perspective. Our faculty include experts on the interdisciplinary study of religion in most major geographic regions, including the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and North and South America. The Religious Studies Department also has a strong cluster of faculty whose research and teaching focuses on the unique aspects of religion in the Americas, including religions of indigenous peoples, as well as American religious movements, such as evangelical Christianity and Mormonism; American civil religion and the intersection of religion, politics, law, and public policy; and the cultural expressions of religion in literature and film. A host of faculty partners in History, Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology provide important, multidisciplinary perspectives on religion globally, and in the Americas.

Degree Requirements - 36 Total Credits

Required Courses - 8 Credits
- MAIS 796 ProSeminar
- MAIS 797 Interdisciplinary Studies Proposal
- RELI 600 Interdisciplinary Pathways in the Study of Religion
- RELI 630 Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion

Interdisciplinary Competencies in Religious Studies - 9 Credits
Students take 3 courses from a list of competencies in areas such as Religion, Philosophy, History, and Anthropology, to complement their interests, skills and professional experience.

Elective Courses - 15-18 Credits
Students take 5 or 6 elective courses that complement the student’s competencies, and/or reflect the topic of their project or thesis.

Capstone Project or Thesis - 1 or 4 Credits

How to Apply
Along with the completed Application for Graduate Admission and application fee, applicants should submit:

- Official transcripts from previous institutions of higher education attended
- Goals statement
- Two letters of recommendation
- Resume
- Formal writing sample of at least 1,000 words

See chss.gmu.edu/admissions for complete details on the application process.

An Accelerated Master’s pathway (BAM) is available to current undergraduates. For more information about this program, visit: chss.gmu.edu/accelerated-masters/about

Contact Information
Interdisciplinary Studies
George Mason University
Email: mais@gmu.edu
Website: mais.gmu.edu