

Program Details

Program Overview

The Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MRel in MENA Studies) is a unique and innovative multidisciplinary postgraduate program based in the MENA region. It focuses on providing a strong theoretical understanding of the region and the issues that it faces, combined with an emphasis on developing applied skills needed to work in the region and among MENA communities worldwide. It is based upon a strong theological and Biblical framework in that each module weaves scripture and theology into its theory and practice. The program is also designed to bring Arab (including Lebanese) and non-Arab students together in an environment that encourages an exchange of ideas, fosters deeper understanding of each other's culture and values, and builds meaningful relationships.

The MRel is a flexible distance-learning program with two 2-week residencies per year in order to enable people to continue with their existing jobs and lives. Being based in the region, the program has built in site visits to the work of NGOs, churches and other organizations, as well as conversations and dialogue with key leaders, intellectuals and influence brokers. The program exposes students to the rich historical, cultural and religious heritage of the region.

The MRel is a program of the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES), which is part of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) based in Beirut, Lebanon. IMES' mandate is *to bring about positive transformation in thinking and practice between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and beyond*. The Institute of Middle East Studies is responding to the increasingly urgent need to dispel mutually false perceptions between peoples of different religions and cultures, which eventually result in inadequate practice in social, religious, political, and personal spheres. IMES's flagship event is the Middle East Consultation held during the third week of June each year since 2004 and is focused on promoting understanding of Islam, and encouraging positive and fruitful interaction between Christians and Muslims. For additional information about IMES, please visit: IMESLebanon.wordpress.com.

Program Structure

Core Instructional Modules

The MRel is organized into modules rather than courses. This allows for more effective multidisciplinary enquiry and learning. The overall program consists of a total of 90 credits (1 credit is worth 30 hours of time investment). These are broken into four modules (12 credits each for a total of 48 credits), individualized language learning and electives (18 credits), and the final project (24 credits). The four core instructional modules are:

- MENA Islam (12 credits)
- MENA Christianity (12 credits)
- MENA History, Politics and Economics (12 credits)
- Cultural Analysis in the Context of the MENA (12 credits)

Instruction and learning is through a combination of 2-week residencies and the use of distance learning technologies that facilitate discussion and feedback. A core module consists of three parts.

1. **Pre-residency** (10 weeks): This is an online component where students complete assigned reading, provide written assignments and participate in virtual discussion groups. Students remain within their home country during this period.
2. **Residency** (2 weeks): This is on-site in Beirut at IMES and is comprised of lectures, discussions, group work, field visits, and conversations and dialogue with key leaders. This is the time during each module when students and faculty are together in the same location for a unique and intensive learning experience.
3. **Post-residency** (10 weeks): This is also an online component and consists of a research assignment based on a topic related to the instructional module. The students are also involved in online discussions during this period while back in their home countries.

Induction Module Introduction to the MRel and online learning Short online module prior to entering first Core Module	FLOW OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM												Language Study + Electives 18 Credits Specified proficiency as mutually agreed to be acquired over course of study
	YEAR 1						YEAR 1						
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	
	Oct - Dec 10 weeks Pre-Residency Online			Jan - Mar. 10 weeks Post-Residency Online			Apr - June 10 weeks Pre-Residency Online			July - Sept 10 weeks Post-Residency Online			
	January Residency (2 weeks)						June: Middle East Consultation (1 week) ¹						
	Core Module - MENA Islam						June - July Residency (2 weeks)						
							Core Module - MENA History, Politics and Economics						

Research Methods Module + Final Project Orientation Online tutorials	FLOW OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM												Final Project 24 Credits Within one year of completion of all four modules
	YEAR 2						YEAR 2						
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	
	Oct - Dec 10 weeks Pre-Residency Online			Jan - Mar. 10 weeks Post-Residency Online			Apr - June 10 weeks Pre-Residency Online			Jul - Sept. 10 weeks Post-Residency Online			
	January Residency (2 weeks)						June: Middle East Consultation (1 week) ²						
	Core Module - MENA Christianity						June - July Residency (2 weeks)						
							Core Module – Cultural Analysis in MENA						

* No module is a prerequisite for another. You may enter the program at any time, bearing in mind that each module is offered every 2 years.

The MRel is designed to provide prospective students with a certain degree of flexibility. They may choose to enter the program at the beginning of any instructional module and then proceed to complete the remaining modules and the final project. Although no module is a pre-requisite for another, students should keep in mind that each module is taught only once every two years. For a week before their first module, the students participate in an online induction module, which covers the expectations of the Master’s program as well as an introduction to using the online learning platform Moodle. This module is considered a prerequisite for the program and must be successfully completed before starting any other module.

The uniqueness of the MRel program is that while as an academic degree program it provides a strong theoretical foundation in Middle Eastern and North African studies, thus preparing students for additional advanced studies if desired, it also provides hard skills and tools that a graduate from the program can use to effect change. Each module provides both.

Applied hard skills include:

¹ MEC attendance is encouraged but not mandatory. Students may earn up to 4 academic credits per MEC:

IMESlebanon.wordpress.com/mec.

MENA Islam	MENA Christianity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frameworks to understand Christian-Muslim dialogue • Strategies for Christian-Muslim dialogue • Peace-building and conflict transformation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to articulate Christian doctrine using a contextually-appropriate contemporary idiom, within the broad lines of historical orthodoxy • Understanding Christian-Christian relations • The ability to develop strategies for interchurch cooperation • Peace-building and conflict transformation strategies
MENA History, Politics and Economics	Cultural Analysis in the Context of the MENA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual analysis • Needs assessment and problem analysis • Project design (developing the logic for change) • Peace-building frameworks and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural exegesis • Developing culturally appropriate theological frameworks for ministry

Language & Electives Study

Over the course of the program, students must complete 18 credits worth of language learning and electives. In fulfillment of this requirement, students may select from the following:

- Students may complete up to 18 Credits of *relevant* elective courses.
 - For mother-tongue Arabic speakers: minimum of 4 credits of classical Arabic OR 8 credits of another regional language that will demonstrably support the student’s ministry/work.
 - For non-mother tongue Arabic speakers: minimum of 8 credits of Arabic or another regional language that will demonstrably support the student’s ministry/work.
 - The balance of the 18 credits may be acquired by taking approved courses in Bible, theology and/or missiology from an approved graduate-level institution. [Pre-approval is required for all elective courses.]²
- Up to 8 credits may be acquired by completing extra work on the Final Module Projects [a maximum of 2 extra credits per module].
- Qualified students may earn up to 18 Credits with the completion of a Major Paper on Arabic Literature and Culture.
- Up to 8 credits may be acquired by attending IMES’s annual Middle East Consultation and completing relevant coursework [4 credits per Middle East Consultation].
- Student may earn up to 4 credits of pre-approved *Cross-Cultural Work in Context*.³
- Students may complete an *approved* Directed Study on a topic relevant to the MENA context or Arabic literature [4-8 credits] under the direction of an IMES faculty member.

Language Study Guidelines

² If you are unsure as to whether a course qualifies, please contact: MRel@abtslebanon.org. If a student wishes to take a non-theological course relevant to the MENA context they must demonstrably prove how it supports them in their Final Project.

³ *Cross-Cultural Work in Context* must be experienced in a cultural context distinct from the vocational context which served as the basis for the student’s admission to the MRel in MENA Studies Program (i.e. those non-Lebanese students living and working in Lebanon cannot use their current work in Lebanon to fulfill this requirement).

Before starting language instruction, accepted students should contact the IMES office in order to obtain a language learning contract to be signed by the student, his or her instructor, and a member of the MRel Leadership team. All language study takes place during the student's own time (not during the two week residency times in Lebanon) and is the responsibility of the student to organize.

For a student to earn credit:

- Language Learning Contracts must be submitted at the start of each module.
- A Report of Progress signed by the student's language instructor is required of each student at the end of each module.

The number of hours spent in language instruction (both formal and personal study) is to be reported on in the progress report. Therefore, it is imperative for the student and instructor to keep a log. For non-Arabic speakers, Arabic is likely to be the language of choice. Other options, however, include Syriac, Coptic, Persian, Turkish, Armenian, Amharic, Ethiopic, Patristic Greek or some other mutually agreed upon language of the Muslim or Eastern Christian world that will demonstrably further the students' academic and professional goals, helping them to be more effective in their vocational context.⁴

Students should bear in mind that language study costs on average between \$8 and \$20 per hour of structured instruction. This remuneration is left to the discretion of the student and his or her instructor or learning institution. Generally about half of the language learning hours will be structured with a tutor or in a classroom. The remaining may be fulfilled through personal study, intentional conversation, use of audio-visual materials, etc.

A Note Concerning the Language of Major Assignments

Written assignments of at least 2 of the 4 modules need to be written in Arabic for mother-tongue Arabic speaking students. However, all students are encouraged to complete the MRel Final Project in English, as doing so will help facilitate their application to further academic studies should this be their choice.

Final Project

Upon successful completion of all four modules, students must submit a final project before being qualified for graduation from the program.⁵ The Final Project is worth 24 ECTS credits and constitutes over 25 percent of the total degree. (1 ECTS credit is worth 30 hours of time investment, leading to a total of 720 hours devoted to the Final Project).

Some students may prefer to write a research-oriented paper with demonstrable application whereas others may prefer to complete a practical project with solidly researched foundations. *While both of these are encouraged, it is important to remember that the Final Project is expected to have both research-oriented and applied components.* It is not required that these two components be equally weighed in each project.

Final Project Prerequisites

⁴ If the student will be in Lebanon during pre and post-residential portions of the program, a list of suggested language learning locations is available at the IMES office or contact MRel@abtslebanon.org.

⁵ Under special circumstances, a student can officially begin work on his or her final project following the successful completion of three out of the four core modules. However, the final project may be submitted for final review only after the completion of all four core modules.

Leading up to and during their last module residency and before beginning [the Final Project](#), students:

- Complete the *Research Methods Module* online – broken into multiple tutorials completed at different stages throughout the program,
- Participate in the *Final Project Orientation* online,
- Electronically submit a *Project Proposal* for approval,
- Determine a *supervisor* for the final project in conversation with IMES Leadership and submit a supervision agreement.

Working on the Final Project

Once the student's final project has been approved by MRel Leadership the student is free to start working on it. The written component of the final project is up to 25,000 words in length and needs to demonstrate a certain level of creativity and innovation, although not one comparable to a doctoral level project. It is expected that the Final Project be submitted within one year of completion of the last module. Students are able to apply up to two times for extensions up to three months at a time for a fee. Extensions beyond 18 months must be accompanied by a letter demonstrating extenuating circumstances.

Echoing the overall design of the MRel in MENA Studies program, the Final Project must intentionally incorporate academic, applied, and theological/missiological components. However, as mentioned above, students are given the option to choose between an academic paper with demonstrable application and a practical project with solidly academic foundations. Additional information will be made available as part of the *Final Project Orientation*.

Program Location

An academic department of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), IMES is located in the foothills on the outskirts of Beirut, in Mansourieh. Located on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Lebanon is rich in history, archeology, culture and religion. Historically it has been a place of learning with the foremost school of law in the Roman Empire being located in Beirut (ancient Berytus). This tradition continues with Beirut hosting some of the top educational institutions in the region. Exemplifying an 'east meets west' ethos, Lebanon has long been regarded as the gateway to the Middle East. It could be said that the capital city of Beirut embodies the beauty and pain of diversity, playing host to a dizzying array of religious and social groups. As the current epicenter of the global refugee crisis, however, Lebanon has come under immense pressure in recent years with over a quarter of its population now Syrian, Iraqi or Palestinian refugees. Yet in spite of the trauma of civil war and the current refugee crisis, Lebanon remains a place of creative ideas and intrigue, an ideal location for those called to cross-cultural ministry, Christian-Muslim engagement, community development, or peacebuilding.

Beyond the Program

The MRel program is designed for individuals who want to be involved in addressing the real issues facing the Middle East and North Africa. Opportunities may arise for them with relief and development NGOs addressing poverty and humanitarian crises, with church and mission organizations seeking to engage with Islam and historic Christianity, as well as with advocacy and peace-building organizations. These opportunities may be based in the MENA region or outside of it.

The MRel program works closely with a range of NGOs and church agencies where top graduates of the program would be able to do supervised internships to gain practical and professional experience.

Admissions Requirements

- A recognized undergraduate degree (a first degree in Theology is not necessary)

- A TOEFL score for non-native English speakers. The requirement may normally be met with a score of 575 on the paper-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or 230 on the computer based TOEFL or 88 on the internet-based TOEFL. Applicants who have earned a first degree taught entirely in the English language may apply for exemption from the TOEFL even if English is not their native language. Appropriate proof of eligibility needs to be submitted with the application.
- A demonstrated level of competency in Modern Standard Arabic for native Arabic speakers
- A completed application form (please refer to the Admissions Checklist to make sure you have submitted all necessary documents, preferably together at one time)
- 3 - 5 years of post-undergraduate work and/or ministry experience preferred

Academic Calendar 2018 – 2020

MENA Islam 2018	MENA Christianity 2019
8 October - 14 December 2018 (Pre-Residency) 7 - 18 January 2019 (Residency) 21 January - 29 March 2019 (Post-Residency) <i>**Christmas Break 15 December - 13 January**</i> <i>**Holy Week **</i>	14 October - 20 December 2019 (Pre-Residency) 6 - 17 January 2020 (Residency) 20 January - 27 March 2020 (Post-Residency) <i>**Christmas Break 21 December - 12 January**</i> <i>**Holy Week **</i>
MENA History, Politics & Economics 2019	Cultural Analysis in MENA Contexts 2020
8 April - 14 June 2019 (Pre-Residency) 24 June - 5 July 2019 (Residency) 17 July - 22 September 2017 (Post-Residency) <i>**MEC 2017 17-21 June** (Graduation 23 June)</i>	6 April - 12 June 2020 (Pre-Residency) 22 June - 3 July 2020 (Residency) 13 July - 18 September 2020 (Post-Residency) <i>**MEC 2016 15-19 June** (Graduation 21 June)</i> <i>**Post-Residency Travel Break 4-12 July 2020**</i> <i>**Annual Break 19 September - 11 October**</i>

Tuition and Costs

Below are the 2018-2019 MRel tuition rates. Financial aid for deserving candidates is available. To obtain an application for financial aid or for more information: MRel@abtslebanon.org.

1. Middle Eastern and North African Students (not in category 2): **\$1000/module**
2. Lebanese and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Students: **\$1575/module**
3. International Students: **\$2000/module**

Please note the following:

- The tuition rate applied is based on nationality, rather than on residency status, funding sources, or financial need.
- Western women married to Lebanese men will pay the Lebanese tuition rate, as the Lebanese law allows them to obtain Lebanese citizenship.
- Western men married to Lebanese women will pay the Lebanese tuition rate as well, even though the Lebanese law does not allow them to obtain Lebanese citizenship.

- Application for financial assistance **remains open to all students**, regardless of the tuition rate applied to them, based on their family’s financial status and need, and provided they continue to meet academic standards and other graduate profile criteria satisfactorily. Applications for financial aid are received, and grants awarded, on a module-by-module basis.

Total Program Cost to Students Over 3 Years	
One-time Application Fee	50 (additional \$25 for late applications)
Core Module Tuition Fees	4000 / 6300 / 8000
One-time Induction Module	158
Language Study	Costs will vary ⁶
Final Project	2520
Travel (Estimation from N. America)	0-8,000
Room & Board	0-3,000
Misc. (Books, etc.)	1,000
TOTAL (excluding language study)	7,728-22,728⁷

⁶ Students should bear in mind that acquiring 18 credits in language study (about 270 hours) may cost \$3000-\$4000 over 3 years.

⁷ **Tuition rates will be evaluated annually and are subject to increase.**

Important Deadlines 2018-2020

	Application Deadline	Last Date for Registration	Payment Due	Last Day to Drop
MENA Islam	Friday June 15, 2018	Friday Sept 14, 2018	Monday Oct 8, 2018	Friday Oct 19, 2018
MENA History, Politics and Economics	Friday Dec 7, 2018	Friday March 15, 2019	Monday April 8, 2019	Friday April 19, 2019
MENA Christianity	Friday June 14, 2019	Friday Sept 13, 2019	Monday Oct 7, 2019	Friday Oct 18, 2019
Cultural Analysis in MENA Contexts	Friday Dec 6, 2020	Friday March 6, 2020	Monday April 13, 2020	Friday April 17, 2020

General Principles:

- The deadline for new applications is **4 months** before the start of the initial module. A student who desires to apply after this deadline must pay a **\$25 late application fee**. Applications will stop being accepted **1 month** before the start of the pre-residency portion of the module.
- Notification of acceptance to the program will be by **2 months** before the start of the first module intended to be taken.
- Last date for registration for any module is **1 month** before the start of the pre-residency portion of that module. A student who desires to register after this deadline must pay a **\$25 late registration fee**. Registration will be closed **one week** before the start of the pre-residency portion of the module.
- The deadline for payment of a module is due by the **first day** of the pre-residency portion of that module. If payment has not been received by the **end of the first week** of the pre-residency portion of any module the student will automatically be dropped from the module.
- Induction Modules begin **one week prior** to the pre-Residency portion of any given module.
- The deadline for dropping a module is **2 weeks** into the pre-residency portion of that module. If dropped within this period, the student will receive an **80% refund** of the module fee⁸.

⁸ In the case that a student has already paid their fees and would like to drop a module before the pre-residency portion begins, this student will receive a 95% refund of the module fee. (5% accounts for administrative fees).