

# Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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# Contents

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies . . . . .	5
Program Description . . . . .	5
Admission to the Program . . . . .	5
Requirements for Completion of the Degree . . . . .	5
Relationship of the MALS to Interdisciplinary Doctoral Degrees . . . . .	5
Coursework . . . . .	5



# Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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## Program Description

The master of arts in liberal studies (MALS) degree program enables mature individuals to pursue part-time, interdisciplinary studies at the graduate level without specializing in any one subject area. Offered at night and during the weekend, courses provide participants the opportunity to extend the best experiences of baccalaureate liberal education to the graduate level. Students admitted to the program will identify their own interests within the wide array of graduate courses in The College of Arts and Sciences and will plan individualized programs of study with the cooperation of the director of the program.

The end result of each participant's matriculation should be a challenging experience that samples the richness of literature, the fine arts, history, and those principles of the social and natural sciences that affect our lives. UMKC is fortunate to have the additional cultural resources of a wide array of museums, libraries, archives, and special exhibits within the Kansas City area. Many of the courses available for the M.A. in liberal studies curriculum are designed to take specific advantage of these community resources.

### The 21st Century: Complex Communities, Cultures and Critical Choices

The broader unifying experience of courses, offered M.A. in liberal studies participants, is the opportunity to explore some of the basic issues affecting life in modern urban America. Students explore problems such as the environment, international conflict, and social problems of the modern city, topics which are not single topics of study, but intricate, complex issues. The interdisciplinary nature of the M.A. in liberal studies coursework provides the mechanism to look at these problems, and others, with a deeper understanding of exactly how contemporary problems are interrelated with one another and with past history.

Each semester, the critical choices theme is reflected through the offering of at least one of the following courses:

- A&S 510 Methods of Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary History of the 1930s
- A&S 511 Methods of Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary History of the 1940s
- A&S 512 Methods of Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary History of the 1950s
- A&S 513 Methods of Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary History of the 1960s
- A&S 514 Critical Choices: Methods of Inquiry in Science

Each of these courses is designed to explore, in an interdisciplinary manner, interrelationships among contemporary issues and past history and influences upon contemporary decision making.

## Admission to the Program

Individuals admitted to the program must have a baccalaureate or equivalent degree, and mature academic interests. A minimum undergraduate grade-point average of 3.0 is desirable but can be offset by professional and career accomplishments outside academe. Individuals applying for admission to the program also are required to have an in-depth interview with the program director. Approval is required before any student

is officially accepted into the program. The director also functions as principal graduate adviser in this program and approves each participant's individual plan of study.

## Requirements for Completion of the Degree

The degree is a 36 credit hour program. Generally, each participant's plan of study will consist of three parts; however, exceptions in the plan of study may be approved by the director to accommodate an individual's specific interests or special education or career backgrounds. The three parts of the matriculation plan include:

- Introductory seminar, which must be completed before any other coursework;
- The body of coursework itself; and
- A final capstone seminar, taken during the last semester.

A written thesis is not required, but individuals who wish to complete a thesis project may apply 3 credit hours toward their degree requirements. An individual who works well independently and who has a particular interest that lends itself to detailed research is especially encouraged to consider the thesis option. With the thesis option, the participant will select a faculty adviser other than the director of the program, who will direct the plan of study and research.

## Relationship of the MALS to Interdisciplinary Doctoral Degrees

The College of Arts and Sciences has a strong tradition of interdisciplinary studies at both the baccalaureate and doctoral levels.

For the bachelor of arts and bachelor of liberal arts degrees, The College's integrated studies in the humanities curriculum (more commonly known as "cluster courses") and the Program for Adult College Education (PACE) are two programs that consist almost entirely of interdisciplinary coursework. At the advanced level of doctoral work, most of the departments in the College participate in the campus Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program, which requires studies in at least two fields.

The M.A. in liberal studies degree continues the tradition of interdisciplinary work in the college at the intermediate level between baccalaureate and doctoral work. In a few cases, students completing this degree may find the transition to doctoral work as the appropriate next step. However, students should recognize that the degree is not designed to provide students in the program with specific subject skills usually associated with targeted career objectives in traditional research areas.

Students interested in coordinating their M.A. in liberal studies coursework with future doctoral work at UMKC are strongly encouraged to make this intent known at the outset of their work. Without initial planning conducted with a committee of doctoral faculty, a student's master's coursework may not be appropriate to later doctoral studies.

## Coursework

Program participants begin by enrolling in A&S 509: Critical Choices: Methods of Inquiry into the Liberal Arts. On completion of this required 3 hour introductory seminar, which is described below, participants earn 30 credit hours based on an individual study plan. In advance of each semester, a list will be published of departmental courses open to M.A. in liberal studies participants and offered at night and during the weekends. Program participants are also free to enroll in any other course offered in The College of Arts and Sciences, as long as they meet the entry requirements of the instructor and the department. At the conclusion of the program, individuals enroll in a required 3 hour capstone seminar, A&S 520: Critical Choices: Final Research Project and Capstone Seminar, described later.

**A&S 509 Critical Choices: Methods of Inquiry into the Liberal Arts (3 hours)**

Offered each fall and winter semester, this required seminar meets four weekends throughout the semester. Team-taught by faculty from the humanities and the social and natural sciences, the class also includes guest presentations by other faculty in various fields and research librarians. The goals of the seminar are:

- Refresh the research skills of adults who may be returning to formal classes for the first time in many years;
- Provide an introduction to a vast array of research resources;
- Refine writing skills; and
- Help each student define his or her area of emphasis within the program.

Sessions introduce participants to the use of the Miller Nichols Library on the main UMKC campus, as well as other area libraries, such as the Linda Hall Library of Science and Technology, the Truman Library, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The seminar also studies the different methods and research issues addressed by the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. The seminar also provides opportunity for each student to define an individual research question as a unifying theme in the selection of classes throughout his or her matriculation and as a final project to be investigated in the capstone seminar of the program, A&S 520.

**Individual Study Plans (30 hours)**

A benefit of the MALS program is that it does not conform to any single fixed curriculum. Individuals develop their own plans of study in consultation with the director of the program or a graduate adviser designated by the program director. No more than three courses (9 hours) may be taken within any one department without permission of the department and the director of the program. Two courses (6 hours) may be taken from another school at the university outside of The College of Arts and Sciences. No more than 12 hours at the 400 level (or 300 level when permitted by the department) can be applied to the plan of study.

Students are free to identify their own areas of study, or to choose from among the following areas of focus:

- Black Studies;
- Communication and Film Studies;
- Executive Leadership; or
- Hospitality Studies.

For students who wish to write a thesis, up to 3 hours may be applied toward the completion of the degree. Students are encouraged to exercise this option concurrently with the capstone seminar or soon after its completion.

**A&S 520: Critical Choices: Final Research Project and Capstone Seminar (3 hours)**

This course brings together MALS participants in the last semester of their work. Each participant in the seminar defines a final project and spends a semester developing it and presenting the findings to the group at the conclusion of the course. Each project is intended to be thought-provoking, and to cut across disciplinary lines in the examination of a question relevant to the area of emphasis that the student has followed throughout the program. In addition, guest faculty representing the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences help students understand how contemporary issues and problems are interrelated with one another and with past history.