Religious Studies, PhD

The doctoral program in the Department of Religious Studies trains participants to become advanced practitioners of the study of religion as researchers, scholars, teachers, and facilitators of informed public discourse. Some graduates become professors at colleges or universities while others bring a nuanced, critical understanding of religion and its influences to such careers as health care, law, diplomacy, ministry, social advocacy, journalism, counseling, and informatics.

PhD students train to analyze the ways in which diverse religious traditions originate, develop, and interact over time, and learn to identify and use multiple methods for the study of religion, including historical, philosophical, ethical, literary, linguistic, psychological, ethnographic, and digital approaches. Students typically draw on the expertise of several different members of the religious studies faculty and also are encouraged to work with faculty members in other UI departments who specialize in their areas of interest. Many PhD students work, for example, with scholars in the departments of Anthropology; Asian and Slavic Languages; Classics; Communication Studies; English; Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies; and History.

The program offers a collegial intellectual community, including a departmental colloquium series, a collaborative reading group in critical theory, and an ethos of mutual support among graduate students.

Graduate study in the Department of Religious Studies is highly flexible and personalized, and is shaped to individual students’ interests concordant with existing faculty expertise.

Areas of Current Faculty Expertise

Religions of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean

Religion, law, and politics in the Islamic world; the history of interpretation of the texts and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Greco-Roman and Egyptian religion and culture; digital humanities.

Religions of East Asia

Religious traditions of China and the political, social, and economic factors that have shaped them; modern religion and culture in Korea, most notably Christianity; religion and gender in transnational perspective; religion and empire.

Religions of the United States and the Atlantic World

History and ethnography of religion in the United States; African American religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, and African diaspora religions); West African religions; religion, media, and the negotiation of technological change; Latina/o/x Christianity.