

Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty
Resolution on the Proposal for a PhD in Religious Studies
December 3, 2024

The Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty (ECGF) considered a proposal by the Department of Religious Studies to establish a PhD program in Religious Studies. Since 1960, the Department, in coordination with the Divinity School, has offered a PhD in the Graduate Program in Religion (GPR). However, given more recent shifts in the Department's interests and expertise, it has determined that the GPR PhD no longer matches its needs, and therefore has proposed to establish a separate PhD program that would be housed entirely within the Department.

ECGF considered the proposal and its revisions at meetings held on April 2, April 16, October 22, and November 19, 2024. Concerns raised at meetings included the Department's capacity to administer a stand-alone PhD program, particularly given a substantial number of current or forthcoming faculty departures and retirements, how the proposed new RS PhD would distinguish itself from the existing GPR PhD, and how the new RS PhD program might impact the existing GPR PhD program.

Resolution

After meetings with the Chair of RS, the DGS of GPR, and others, and after reviewing batches of supporting documents from RS, ECGF has concluded that the intellectual and institutional rationale for establishing a new PhD in RS is sound and compelling, and that Department is well-positioned to staff and administer the new program (assuming that the four faculty members who are projected to retire in the next three or four years are replaced in an expeditious fashion). ECGF notes that RS has secured support for this program from faculty members in an array of different units at Duke, including departments in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM.

Following the November 19, 2024 meeting, the ECGF resolved that it supports the establishment of a new a stand-alone PhD program in RS. The new program would admit a cohort of 2 or 3 students a year and would be structured based on different "contact zones," wherein religions are understood not as singular units but rather as "domains of interaction."

If the RS PhD is launched, it is understood that the GPR will continue, and current students will be supported as normal, at least until such time as all current students have graduated or are no longer in the program.