

# Proposal for a New Doctoral Program in Religious Studies

Submitted to Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty, Duke University  
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## Introduction

The Department of Religious Studies seeks to create a doctoral program in the historical, cultural, and social study of religions. To do so, it will be necessary to move from the Graduate Program in Religion (GPR), for which the Department has shared responsibility with Duke Divinity School since 1960. Over the last decade and more the Department has developed interests that no longer fit within the long-standing template of study that has organized the GPR. The dominant role of Christian studies in Bible, church history, and theology and Christian ethics serves the Divinity School very well but does not match many of the principal interests in the Department. The primary reasons for the divergence of the two units are two-fold:

1) *Different intellectual foci among several newer faculty in the Department, oriented toward the study of non-Christian religions, non-traditional methodologies, and an approach that stresses cultural and social “contact zones” rather than organizing the program as a set of siloes focused on single religions.* The GPR is structured in circumscribed domains, with four of its eight functional tracks devoted to the study of Christianity. As the Department experiences the imminent retirement of several senior faculty and hiring new and younger colleagues over the next two years, it will aim to strengthen the newer foci and to develop stronger relations with numerous departments and programs in A&S and beyond.

2) *The need to align the structure of doctoral study with the mission of the Department.* Three of the GPR’s eight active tracks are populated singularly by members of the Department; two are populated entirely by Divinity faculty; the remaining three tracks each have one person from the Department and at least one to four from Divinity. This makes changing, retiring, or adding new tracks very difficult. The Divinity School understandably needs to maintain its focus on Christianity for its students in those tracks it controls and dominates. The fate of the undergraduate mission of the Department depends very much on developing new expertise in faculty and course development to attract Duke undergraduates. Our undergraduate and graduate components need to work harmoniously, particularly in view of the small size of the Department’s faculty. The reorganization of the Department’s strategic planning in light of the need to re-situate itself within the ecology of Duke, especially in undergraduate instruction. As a small humanities department with few majors, nearly all of our enrollments are students from across and beyond A&S. If the Department is to thrive, it must accommodate existing and new faculty who offer undergraduate courses that attract a considerable diversity of students while attracting and educating the best doctoral students. This means pursuing its own strategic plan without programmatic constraints.

The Department’s most recent External Review (2019) noted that “The relationship with Duke Divinity School exerts a gravitational pull on many features of Religious Studies’ function, from

the conceptions of tracks to faculty appointment priorities.” One of the four principal recommendations made by the report was that the Department “look seriously at the possibility of offering its own PhD program to replace the current one offered jointly with the Divinity School.” Since then, the Department has been carefully reviewing and reflecting on the recommendations of the report. In February 2022, the faculty of the Department voted unanimously to explore the possibility and process of forming a separate PhD and began initial conversations with the Deans of Arts and Sciences and with the leadership of the Divinity School, as well. One year later, the faculty of the Department voted to move forward with the proposal during its Spring retreat held in February 2023. In the summer of 2023, with the support of a Provost Reimagining Doctoral Education (RiDE) graduate assistantship, the Department gathered information on doctoral programs in religious studies at eight peer institutions in order to study how colleagues in leading programs are conducting doctoral education.

Finally, while the proposed PhD program is new, we would note that there is precedence for its establishment in that our partner in the GPR—the Divinity School—established its own, separate doctoral program, the ThD, in 2006. Upon the creation of a new PhD in Religious Studies (housed in A&S), our colleagues in Divinity may choose to expand their existing ThD or to create a new PhD program of their own.

## **I. Rationale and Justification**

The Department seeks to create a doctoral program that brings the substantial scholarship and expertise of existing and imminent members of the Department to bear on the preparation of doctoral students for success in the academic profession or in related non-academic fields such as museum or foundation work.

- a) The Department wishes to establish a program of advanced study that responds and will continue to respond creatively to the evolving shape of the field of the academic study of religions. As currently configured, the GPR “track” model reflects a familiar “traditions” model of the study of religions in which individual religious traditions are examined in artificial isolation from one another (e.g., “early Christianity” and “New Testament,” “American religion”). A “contact zone” approach frames any religion as a domain of interaction rather than as an intrinsic whole characterized by purity, essence, or timeless character. History, sociology, and cultural analysis are the tools for undertaking the approach the Department seeks to install. This means that far greater fluidity and interactivity need to prevail than currently allowed by the rigidity of the track template of the GPR. A doctoral program that devotes more than half of its faculty and track membership to one religion is unable to accommodate what we envision. The contact zone approach supports the Department’s desire to re-align itself within the larger Duke ecology in order to work more closely with a number of departments in the humanities and to build working relationships with faculty and programs in the natural and social sciences (i.e., neuroscience, psychology, cosmology, cultural anthropology, philosophy). The Department’s successful collaboration with Classics, History, Sociology, Art History, AMES, and AAAS to date urges that it can expand its outreach when its graduate and undergraduate programs are more deliberately aligned with its strategic plan.

- b) The Department is actively undertaking an internal shift. The current list of graduate courses taught by faculty in the Department (see Appendix A) clearly demonstrates the new direction in many courses, but also the vestige of a much older concentration on a few religious traditions. Our new strategic plan seeks to hire colleagues who work within contact zones and cross-cultural approaches to religious traditions and communities rather than in a siloed approach to a single tradition.
- c) 11 of the current 45 doctoral students work with advisors in the Department. Of the 36 faculty members of the GPR, the Department currently numbers 10. This minority status prevents the sort of structural change that the proposed program seeks to undertake. And the desired direction of development we envision would not suit the Divinity faculty's principal interest in Christianity.
- d) A convergence of compelling factors makes the time right for serious review and change: (1) the School of Arts & Sciences is currently launching a new curriculum that seeks serious engagement across many disciplinary lines in undergraduate education; (2) most humanities departments are suffering a continuing long-term decline in undergraduate enrollments; (3) the next four to six years will likely see a significant retirement of senior faculty in the Department; (4) the opportunity to hire new colleagues with training and research interests that will take the department beyond traditional intellectual boundaries is already upon us; (5) the Department's strategic plan is outdated and needs to take account of the ecology of Duke as seriously engaged in interdisciplinary studies; (6) the 2019 External Review suggested several helpful structural changes in the department, including the development of an independent doctoral program; and (7) the future of religious studies at an institution committed to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics depends heavily on meaningful engagement with STEM disciplines at both undergraduate and graduate levels.
- e) Finally, we would note that while the GPR is a single program in its organizational structure and its name, *in practice the programs already exist in largely separate spheres* in which the drift apart from one another is evident. Of the eight currently active tracks, only three include faculty from both units. The parallel (rather than integrated) nature of the two programs is evident in the fact that Departmental doctoral courses are offered under the GPR course code ("RELIGION") while Divinity courses are almost never created or even cross-listed under that heading but rather under Divinity-specific codes (in a recent development, Divinity's registrarial system does not allow the creation of cross-listed courses). Similarly, Departmental classes follow the A&S calendar, while those offered by Divinity School faculty follow the Divinity School calendar. In this on-the-ground reality, we have witnessed two separate programs—and sets of experiences for students—taking shape.

## II. Description of Program

We imagine a smaller, more integrated doctoral program, admitting two or three students each year (i.e., we imagine 2 or 3 admits/year). The program might consist of three areas of concentration: religions in ancient and medieval eras, religions in Asia and Asian diasporas, and

religion & culture and religion & science. Future hires in the Department will reflect integrative and interdisciplinary approaches.

a) *Strategic objects and educational goals.*

The Department of Religious Studies has been engaged in reflection on its strategic plan for over one year, having discerned that the gradual downsizing of department faculty—from 18 in 2012 to the present number of 12—no longer made possible the “silo” model of our areas of specialization consisting of three or more members in the following broad areas: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, with corresponding doctoral tracks. Moreover, we have found that this organization of intellectual pursuits has tended to isolate us from one another. Intensified by COVID, this isolation has eroded collective efforts, shared participation in department-sponsored events, and a sense of esprit de corps. We recognize that the rigid system of tracks in hiring colleagues and in the organization of graduate study has been significantly responsible for the limitations we now wish to overcome. We have realized that our foci, structure of study, and our dominant engagement with the Graduate Program in Religion has tended to limit the Department’s engagement with the broader array of Duke’s undergraduates. We feel we have not adequately pursued opportunities involving students from across the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences.

Strategic planning undertaken for over a year has led the Department of Religious Studies to reach a conclusion already recommended by the most recent External Review (2019): “a stand-alone PhD in Religious studies would have advantages for the unit and allow wider collaborations with other FAS units... [and] it would free the Department to better fulfill its distinctive mandate” (p. 8). Even in our undergraduate program, the track model of the GPR has tended to silo Religious Studies faculty into fields defined by religious traditions (Christian Theological Studies, Early Christianity, Islamic Studies, World Christianity), geographies (American Religion, Asian Religions), or canonical scriptures (Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and New Testament), a structure that fails to represent our inherently interdisciplinary and agile field. The track “Religion, Aesthetics, and Society” is an exception to this pattern, and more representative of the broader field of Religious Studies. Isolation within tradition-based sub-fields has eroded our collective efforts, impacted our sense of esprit de corps, and, most importantly, hampered us from involving and inspiring diverse students from across the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences at Trinity College.

In response, the Department has determined to pursue the following strategic goals:

1. Foster an ethos of intellectual participation that creates and sustains a community of learning among faculty and students.
2. Design and operate a small, cutting-edge doctoral program in the study of religion that stresses student-faculty interaction as a mutual responsibility in which the practice of mentoring, collaboration, and intellectual engagement with one another are core community values. Individualized specialization will not be allowed to eclipse the practice of intellectual community.

3. Develop programmatic initiatives that regularly bring faculty and students together for intellectual engagement in issues that matter to the academic study of religion.
4. Teach courses that engage undergraduates in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences in innovative, new ways, re-energizing our curriculum and demonstrating the relevance of the academic understanding of religion for their domains of study.
5. Hire and retain colleagues of scholarly, pedagogical, and professional excellence who endorse and actively contribute to the ethos and efforts set out in this strategic plan.

The proposed doctoral program will include the academic study of diverse religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Confucianism, Judaism, and Islam, and will engage in comparative studies. But it is important to say that the program will not be limited to these traditions or their historical relations. ‘Religion’ includes but is not limited to traditional forms of belief and practice. Attention to the arts, literature, theory, politics, social institutions, the environment, sciences, philosophy, technology, and media will move through a significant number of the courses offered, as they also do through the scholarly work of the faculty themselves. The program will seek to engage students in exploring how religions can be understood as cultural practices that are structurally interwoven with institutions of power and authority, commerce, trade, professions and social stratification, domestic life, tribal and national communities with significant implications for all manner of the social organization of peoples inside and outside of religious groups.

- b) *Degree requirements* for the program are those that are typical for the PhD in Religious Studies: two years of full-time coursework (four semesters of three graduate-level seminars per term); demonstrated proficiency in reading two modern research languages relevant to the student’s field of study, in addition to demonstrated reading skill in relevant ancient languages; preliminary exams consisting of three written exams, namely (1) a general field exam, (2) a specialized area exam, and (3) a minor area (reflecting courses—typically three—taken outside of the student’s area of concentration), followed by an oral defense of the exams. Students will be required to participate in RCR training and to pursue the Graduate School’s Certificate in College Teaching. Students will also be required to participate in mock interview sessions, and a course on writing in the profession to be regularly offered by the program. Students in their first year will be assigned Research Assistantships, with a particular eye toward fostering research relationships with faculty mentors; students in their second year will be offered Teaching Assistant positions; and students who have completed their exams may request to offer an undergraduate course in the Department. Beginning in their second or third year, students will be encouraged to submit paper proposals to relevant professional societies. A student-faculty reading and discussion group will regularly review student abstracts and paper and panel proposals for conferences.
- c) *Curriculum*. Students will be required to complete four semesters of full-time coursework, amounting to 12 credit hours per term. There will be two required courses for all doctoral students. The first is REL 912, Theorizing Religion. This course covers major critical approaches that have been employed in the field of Religious Studies from

the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present.<sup>1</sup> Students are expected to enroll in REL 912 during their first semester in the program. Otherwise, there is no sequencing of coursework. The other course will be an adaption of the current course REL 710S, Academic Writing for Ancient Studies. The new course will be entitled Academic Writing for Religion Scholars, which will cover the preparation of scholarly essays, curricula vitae, letters of application, and fellowship proposals.

- d) *Listing of existing courses.* See Appendix A
- e) *Brief backgrounds and bios of faculty.* See Appendix B
- f) *Distance learning.* No distance-based components will be involved in the programs. Students must participate in coursework in person and are expected to be in residence as much as possible throughout the program, with the exception of research and language training. Cohort, face-to-face instruction, and direct faculty access are the Department's guiding ideals for a nurturing intellectual community. The use of Zoom or other software platforms for oral exams, prospectus defenses, and dissertation defenses for participation of non-Duke faculty will be allowed.
- g) *Student research.* Students are strongly encouraged to submit work for publication, present work at scholarly conferences, and to contribute book reviews in their fields to journals. Faculty mentoring will feature this.
- h) *Target audience.* Given the cultural, ethnic, geographical, and historical spread of faculty and student research interests, the target audience will always consist of diverse and international students. Successful applicants will typically have completed a master's degree in a relevant humanities or social sciences field by the time of matriculation, although in rare cases a very strong undergraduate degree in Religious Studies may earn direct admission to the PhD. Mastery of at least one research language and facility with essential ancient languages, so that one may enter directly into doctoral seminars, is essential. Scholastic excellence is a non-negotiable criterion for admission to the program. Admitted students are expected to have strong skills in speaking and writing English. Gender balance will be an important concern in every admission cycle.

### **III. Relationship of the New Program with other Duke programs**

- a) *Similar or related programs at other universities.* Schools with comparable curricula include the PhD in Religious Studies at Yale University, Brown University, and the University of Pennsylvania. Other strong doctoral programs in religious studies that we have examined and found to offer a range of coursework and faculty expertise that avoid

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<sup>1</sup> This course is already a requirement for our student in the MA program in Religious Studies, and while it is not currently required for doctoral students, it is required for those who wish to teach in the Department. We anticipate that there will be a sufficient number of students, even with the transition to the smaller cohort, to continue to offer the course annually even with the transition to the new PhD program, but of course will adjust, if necessary, based on enrollments.

an overspecialized curriculum focusing on one religious tradition or the deeply siloed study of one include Indiana University and the University of California at Santa Barbara.

- b) *Distinguishing features of the proposed program.* Institutions like Duke, Chicago, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale are largely populated at the undergrad level by students in STEM fields. Graduate programs in the study of religion, however, attract faculty trained much more traditionally (usually at these same institutions, with histories rooted in Protestant divinity schools). This means that undergraduate teaching rarely exceeds the footprint of the faculty's graduate training and professional identity. The study of religion and sciences is virtually untouched. This does not bode well for the future of religious studies in the undergraduate curriculum because it drives deeper the rift between the study of religion and the sciences. Large swaths of undergraduates at Duke who are majoring in the sciences find little if any connection between the study of religion and their particular fields. Our desire to situate the study of religion at the intersection of culture, science, and society will ideally fit the Department's undergraduate program to the ecology of Duke students and place its graduate program in religious studies at the front of future development in the field.
- c) *Reliance on other units at Duke.* The Department of Religious Studies already works closely with Classical Studies, English, AAHVS, Sociology, AAAS, ICS, GSF, and History in the training of doctoral students, cross-listing courses and sharing membership on exam and dissertation committees at Duke (as well as at UNC). The Department hopes and expects to maintain a good working relationship with faculty in Divinity, particularly in the study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, New Testament, and Early Christianity. In addition to relying on the already established connections to several departments in the Humanities at Duke and UNC, the Department envisions as a key aspect of its strategic plan developing substantive connections with departments in the natural and social sciences such as Evolutionary Anthropology, Psychology, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Political Science. This will be a new development that is realized by hiring faculty trained in both religious studies and in aspects of the history, traditions, and epistemologies of science and technology, and fostering new coursework and collaborations to shape the academic study of religion in a way that is both attentive to historical relations between religions and the sciences and to the contemporary world in which our students live and will one day work.
- d) *Anticipated consequences.* The faculty of the Department is convinced that the future of the academic study of religion at Duke will thrive when our approach to the study of the history of human belief, creative expression, philosophy, ethics, and ritual is able to develop in keeping with our own understanding of the field as an academic discipline and with the keen opportunities presented in the ecology of the School of Arts & Sciences. This will comport with the field as it is understood in the wider academy, with the interdisciplinary character of Duke, and with the Department's faculty, whose research and teaching cut across many different boundaries. We are eager to train students not only in the established methods such as literary analysis, performance theory, and cultural anthropology, but also to forge innovative pathways in the discipline, such as those that explore the relationship between religions and such scientific fields as astronomy,

cosmology, technology, medicine, healing, population and migration studies, geology, and the environment. These new pathways will bring our doctoral program, and the students we train, into alignment with the needs and interests of our undergraduate students and begin to remedy the isolation of doctoral study in siloed tracks that heavily favor Christianity and Christian-adjacent fields such as the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. We are confident that this broader approach will engage contemporary college students at Duke in the areas they wish to explore. Assuming that the Divinity School will continue its existing ThD or craft its own PhD program focused on Christian Studies (e.g., Christian Theological Studies, World Christianity, Liturgics, Christianity and the Arts, etc.), the Department anticipates that our relationship with Divinity faculty will continue in key respects and even develop along the variety of pathways. For example, we imagine that some Divinity faculty with particular depth in the Religious Studies approach to might be extended secondary appointments in the Department (and vice-versa) or become Associated Faculty (see Appendix F, Hiring Plans).

#### IV. Market research for the proposed program

- a) *Evidence of demand*: For each of the last several years, 150-165 applications to the Graduate Program of Religion have consistently demonstrated steady interest in doctoral study of religion at Duke. While many of these applicants were to fields dominated by faculty in the Divinity School, applications to tracks dominated by Department faculty have consistently numbered over 50, and applicants to other tracks who wish to study with faculty in the Department add another 25 to the total annual applicant pool that the Department expects would continue for the new program. Of those 75 applicants, the Department expects to accept between two and three each year, resulting in a six-year cohort of 12 to 18 doctoral students. These would be joined by the six to ten MA students in our existing program to bring the graduate student population to between 18 and 28 in total.
- b) *Evidence of expected opportunities*: Research analyzing eight of our primary current competitors (Brown, Princeton, Yale, University of Chicago, Penn, University of Texas-Austin, University of California Santa Barbara, Indiana University) shows that the proposed program will be ideally placed to continue to compete directly in areas of study that are shared by most of the doctoral programs (the study of ancient Mediterranean religions; the history of the Hebrew and Christian bibles; the history of the Qur'an; the historical relations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the study of Buddhism and Islam). The other major area in which the faculty excels is in the study of religion and culture (i.e. media, the arts, literature, material culture, and theory). Research examining the structure of doctoral programs at peer institutions indicates that Religion & Science is an under-recognized area of teaching and research that Duke is ideally situated to support. With proper faculty hires and course development, the Department plans to develop this area into a signature domain of study. To do so, the Department will proceed with the priority specified by the RiDE Report: to ground the development of Religion & Science as a concentration in the ecology of Duke, relying on the strength of programs across campus. We will work with faculty in many different science departments who are already interested in aspects of religion in their own research. They might include such



colleagues as Dan Scolnic in Physics; Diego Bohorquez, Gastroenterology, Medical School and Neurobiology and Cell Biology; Keisha Cutright, Fuqua School of Business; John Green, Political Science; Maureen Craig, Psychology and Neuroscience; Sara Gaither, Psychology and Neuroscience; Tamar Kushnir's Early Childhood Cognition lab; Patty Van Cappellen, Assistant Research Professor at the Social Science Research Institute; Maria Smoski in Psychiatry, Psychology, and Neuroscience; and Tom Szigethy, the associate dean/director of DuWell. Curricular and research discussions between faculty members in our department are already underway with Scolnic, Bohorquez, and Van Cappellen.

## **V: Financial projections and Transition**

Given the fact that to a significant extent, the GPR has already been running as two parallel programs, the establishment of a new PhD in Religious Studies will require minimal financial disruption to the current program as it winds down over the next five or six years. The total number of FTEs in the new program will be between 15 and 18, which is significantly less than the current number of 26 FTEs in the GPR. Because the proposed program is not strictly new but composed of a redirection of existing funds and faculty from one doctoral program to another, a business plan for the next five years needs to sync the abatement of the GPR to the ramping up of the new program.

- a) *Faculty*: We expect that our current staffing, as well as hires we anticipate requesting as part of our department's overall strategic plan (in light of upcoming retirements), will be sufficient to staff the courses required to offer this PhD. In the next three or four years, as many as four senior faculty are expected to retire. Two current faculty members are departing Duke for positions at other institutions. While this degree of change is challenging, we recognize it as a keen opportunity for programmatic innovation and renewal. The Department is in the midst of hiring two colleagues in a clustered search. These colleagues will help us realize the contact zone approach—rather than replacing the expertise of soon-to- retire faculty, these hires will seek colleagues who work at the intersection of cultural settings, most likely in the Mediterranean, South Asia, and the Americas.
- b) *Students*: Currently, A&S provides the GPR funding for 26 FTEs; our target size for this new PhD in Religious Studies is 15 to 18, with an admit rate of 2 to 3 students per year. If we succeed at that admission rate, we will have sufficient funds to routinely offer a 6<sup>th</sup> year of funding to students with the assistance of significant endowments attached to the GPR.
- c) *Staff*: At present, the Divinity School and the Department share the cost of the DGSA, so the one cost incurred by this program would be the half-salary of this line. However, there is a need for additional staffing in the Religious Studies Department overall, so our intent is to request a new staff assistant position in Religious Studies who will work with our current staff assistant (who serves as DUSA) with particular responsibility as DGSA, working with the DGS overseeing both our MA and the new PhD program.

- d) *Transition:* We recognize and appreciate the challenge of creating a new PhD program out of an existing program as complicated as the GPR, and we wish to minimize disruption to currently enrolled students to the greatest extent possible. We expect that all students currently enrolled in the GPR will be able to choose between transferring to the new program or remaining in the GPR until they graduate with normal funding in both cases. (Admissions to the MA in Religious Studies and to the ThD would not be affected, as these programs are not part of the GPR.) Given that the current DGS (Ross Wagner) comes from the Divinity School and the current ADGS (Anna Sun) is from the Department—each now at the start of a new three-year term—we envision that these two administrative roles will continue to work as partners through the transitional period. Because the GPR will need to continue to administrate the existing students who choose not to transition to the new program in the Department, Anna Sun will remain ADGS until all of those students have graduated. Another member of the Department will be appointed as the first DGS of the new doctoral program.
- e) *Funding:* The Kearns endowment will be the source of financial support for the new program. But given the complexity of its relation to the Department and Divinity, there will need to be legal work to determine the use of the funds. If Divinity develops its own doctoral program, both units will likely split income from Kearns to support their respective programs. We urge that the “Graduate Program in Religion” be terminated when all current students have graduated. Funding for the Department’s new PhD program will from several endowments (Arcapita, Norman, and Kearns), but we will also need to explore the possibility of funds budgeted by Trinity. The Department’s current annual operating budgeted amount is \$15,000, which must cover all departmental expenses. We have no income from MA fees since we must return it to students in order to be able to have any matriculate.

Not including FTEs, we anticipate the cost of the program will be \$19,000 (itemized in Appendix C).

The GPR will need to be walked down for several years until current students complete their degrees. As this occurs, funding for students in the Department will increase. The financial components of this transitional period, including the division and reallocation of endowments, will be worked out in consultation with the Deans of A&S and the Dean of Divinity in light of the endowments’ individual indentures.

- f) See the attached cost schedule regarding FTE’s and necessary support for doctoral students (Appendix C supplement).

## **VI: Student Community**

- a) *Promoting diversity.* Given the considerable diversity in the ethnicity, racial, geographical, sectarian, and historical nature of religions, applicants to our program will continue to exhibit desirable diversity. Indeed, without the dominance of applications focused on the confessional study of Christianity, we expect diversity to increase. Our interest in international students is considerable since they bring with them language

skills, wide-ranging interests, and personal motivation for diverse approaches to the study of religions. Our diverse faculty, which we seek to maintain, and their interest in gender, race, and ethnicity as key factors in the study of religion, will ensure that priority is given to diversity among admitted students. The academic study of religion foregrounds critical attention to difference, and this will be a foundational principle in the proposed doctoral program.

- b) *Student support.* Students are currently well aware of the two cultures embedded within the GPR as it now exists, and some openly complain about it. With the creation of the new PhD, we will remedy the current sense of discord by creating a more unified and coherent cohort. We regard the smaller size of the new program as a strength rather than a weakness, as it will make it significantly easier to foster a true sense of common endeavor among the students in residence. From recruitment weekend and orientation onwards, we will plan student activities to ensure that students in the program will share a sense of common intellectual mission (taking advantage of a diversity of texts, time periods, and geographies studied). We also intend to enhance the experience of intellectual community through symposia and guest speakers and by improving faculty mentoring as well as peer mentoring among students. By developing closer relations to programs across A&S, we will improve the breadth of the student community. Students currently have the option of participating in the Certificate of College Teaching program. We feel that this single opportunity is not enough to improve student community, so we will be exploring additional activities and programs.
- c) *Number of international students.* Among the 15 doctoral students currently working primarily with faculty in the Department, 5 are international students. The Department will certainly maintain this ratio and seek to increase the number of international students by two or three.
- d) *Summary of career development services.* The Department will require doctoral students to participate in the College Certificate Program, offer a required writing course, and offer mock interviews.
- e) *Co-curricular initiatives.* The Department has resources to bring speakers to campus, stage symposia, and support student/faculty reading groups. We will continue to participate in the student-run joint Duke/UNC Religious Studies Theory Reading Group; the Duke/UNC reading group on Christianity in Antiquity; the Elizabeth A. Clark Center for Late Ancient Studies; and the New Testament/Jewish Studies Colloquium. We will continue to support student learning and professional opportunities such as discussing conference papers and abstracts.

## **VII: Program Evaluation**

- a) *Benchmarks for evaluating the success of the program.* We currently conduct exit interviews of all graduating doctoral students. We also conduct annual evaluations. The new graduate teaching evaluations will help a great deal in assessing classroom contributions to the program. Individual tracks also conduct periodic evaluations of

student performance and progress. Because the new program will be smaller and include the active participation of all faculty in the Department for admissions decisions, the faculty will undertake an additional procedure of discussing each student's progress in a meeting devoted to the subject once each semester. Principal benchmarks will be: applicant/matriculation yield ratio, academic stature of applying and admitted students, rate of diversity among admitted students, student performance in language exams and preliminary exams, and student satisfaction with the program.

- b) *Third-year review.* The Department will enthusiastically prepare for a third-year review of the program's performance, collecting data each year by tracking all features of performance: application volume, matriculation numbers, retention, progress of students measured by milestones and learning assessments, along the way identifying problems that develop and strategies for their resolution.
- c) *Learning Assessment Plan.* Appendix D contains the instrument used to determine student progress and learning outcomes.

### **VIII: Risk Assessment**

- a) *Enrollment.* From 2016 to 2023, the number of graduating students in the GPR has been nearly equal among those working with Divinity faculty and those working with Department faculty (28 dissertations advised by Department faculty; 33 by Divinity faculty). In view of the disparity in the overall distribution of students among the two units (15 currently working with Department faculty and 28 with Divinity), the fact that each unit has graduated close to the same number demonstrates that time-to-degree and successful completion of the dissertation are very high among projects directed by Department faculty. The current number of doctoral students working with Department advisors is the size proposed for the new doctoral program.
- b) *Implementation.* The curriculum is largely in place, though imminent hires will introduce new courses that serve the focused mission of the new program. We anticipate four hires at mid-career or junior levels in the next two years, with approximately four retirements over the next three to five years. Total faculty numbers will be constant. Two senior colleagues are leaving Duke at the end of the current academic year. The Department will undertake to add additional faculty in the coming years in light of the new mission taking shape.
- c) *Reputational factors.* 10 to 15 years ago, the GPR enjoyed an enviable reputation. Although that reputation has subsided to some degree with the retirement of several luminary figures in the Department and in Divinity who played important roles in the GPR by attracting outstanding students, the Department is very happy to engage in a period of rebuilding itself over several years to enhance its reputation of excellence. We see undeveloped opportunities to work with colleagues in numerous settings at Duke and to attract a new generation of ambitious colleagues in a series of faculty searches. We believe the Department can become a leader in modelling the interdisciplinary study of religions.

- d) *Financial factors.* Trinity currently supports 26 FTEs. We will be requesting no more than 18. The Kearns endowment is substantial and will easily support our program as well as the walk-down of the GPR over the next six to eight years. Should Divinity develop a doctoral program, or expand its ThD program, it is conceivable that Kearns could continue to support both units.

## **IX. Letters of Support**

- a) Supporting statements from the Dean of Trinity College. See Appendix E.

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## **List of Appendices**

**Appendix A: Courses**

**Appendix B: List of Key Faculty**

**Appendix C: Financial Projections; Cost Schedule**

**Appendix D: Learning Assessment Plan**

**Appendix E: Letters of Support (*attached to end of this document*)**

**Appendix F: Additional Information Supporting the Proposal**

- 1. Structure of doctoral study in the Proposed Program**
- 2. Hiring Plans**
- 3. Collaboration with STEM fields, the Social Sciences and the Humanities & the Arts**
- 4. Curriculum, Exams, Coursework; Sample Three-year Template of Course offerings**
- 5. Mentoring and Student Community**
- 6. Contact Zone Approach**
- 7. Demand**

**Appendix G: Mentoring and Advising Policy and Guidelines**

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## **Appendix A: Courses**

Religion 503S.	The Black Radical Tradition
Religion 505S.	Dystopia, Speculation, and the Transhuman
Religion 511S.	The Fetish: The Role of Things in Spiritual, Economic and Sexual Life
Religion 527S.	Islam and Human Rights
Religion 532S.	The Evil Eye in Material Culture from Late Antiquity to Islam
Religion 564S.	Toleration, Freedom of Conscience and Religious Liberty
Religion 580S.	History of Buddhist and Christian Interactions
Religion 581S.	Pan-Asianism, Religion, and the State in Modern Asia
Religion 605S.	Blackness, Social Death, and the Volatile Sacred

Religion 606S.	Hebrew Biblical Texts
Religion 620.	Exegesis of the Hebrew Old Testament
Religion 630.	Exegesis of the Greek New Testament: Synoptic Gospels
Religion 635S	Exegesis of the Greek New Testament: John's Gospel
Religion 636S.	Passion Narratives in Greek
Religion 663.	Islam and Modernism
Religion 665S.	Islamic Philosophy & Mysticism (Sufi Approach to Philosophy)
Religion 700.	East Asian Studies Core Course: Fields and Methods
Religion 703S.	Aramaic
Religion 707.	Introductory Sanskrit Language and Literature
Religion 708.	Intermediate Sanskrit Grammar and Readings
Religion 710S.	Academic Writing for Ancient Studies
Religion 765S.	Existentialism, Nihilism, and Religion
Religion 770.	Islamic Interconnections
Religion 771S.	Islam, Medicine, and Healing
Religion 772S.	Cross-Cultural Encounters
Religion 773S.	Islam, Law, and Society
Religion 774S.	Ideology and Religion in Muslim Central Asia
Religion 775S.	Sociology of Religion
Religion 777S.	Gandhi's Modernity
Religion 786S.	Islam, Art, and Society
Religion 790.	Readings in Buddhist Texts
Religion 791S.	Literary Translation: History, Theory, Practice
Religion 799.	Special Readings in Religion
Religion 809.	Selected Sanskrit Readings
Religion 815S.	Readings in Early Christian Literature: Greek
Religion 844S.	Protestants and Pictures
Religion 846S.	Visual Culture of Modern Christianity
Religion 854S.	The Social Organization of American Religion
Religion 859S.	Roman Catholic Visual Piety in the Modern Era
Religion 879S.	Religion and Media
Religion 881S.	Jerusalem/Istanbul
Religion 882S.	Spaces, Bodies, and Narratives: Mapping Religion in Colonial India
Religion 884S.	Religion and Technology
Religion 885.	Christian Manuscript Culture
Religion 887S.	Introduction to Rabbinic Literature
Religion 888S.	Biblical Hebrew Advanced Prose Syntax
Religion 890.	Special Topics in Religion
Religion 890S.	Special Topics in Religion
Religion 895S.	Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation
Religion 900S.	African American Religion through the Literary Imagination
Religion 910S.	Ethnography of Religion
Religion 911S.	Religious Material Culture
Religion 912S.	Theorizing Religion
Religion 913S.	Comparative Ritual Theory
Religion 914S.	Modernity of Religion

Religion 916.	Topics in the Study of Japanese Religions
Religion 919S.	Transnational Confucianism
Religion 920.	Ibn Arabi's Sufism: Islamic Theoretical Mysticism
Religion 925S.	Exegesis of the Hebrew Text of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
Religion 930S.	Death and Dying in Late Antiquity
Religion 934S.	Synoptic Gospels in Greek
Religion 935S.	Gospel of John in Greek
Religion 936S.	Passion Narratives in Greek
Religion 937S.	Historical Jesus
Religion 946S.	Comparative Medieval Philosophy
Religion 947S.	Comparative Studies (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)
Religion 952S.	Doctoral Seminar in Early Christianity
Religion 996S.	Teaching in Religion

### **Appendix B: List of Key Faculty (listed in alphabetical order)**

1. Marc Brettler, PhD, Brandeis University. Hebrew Bible and the history of its interpretation.
2. Mark Chaves, PhD, Harvard University. Social organization of religion (primary appointment in Sociology)
3. Mark Goodacre, PhD, Oxford University. New Testament and Christian origins
4. Mona Hassan, PhD, Princeton University. Global Islamic history
5. Daniel Herskowitz, PhD, Oxford University, Modern Jewish Thought (to begin at Duke in January 2025)
6. Richard Jaffe, PhD, Yale University. Modern Japanese Buddhism
7. Mohsen Kadivar, PhD, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran. Islamic studies and intellectual history
8. Jennifer Knust, PhD, Columbia University. Early Christian texts and their reception
9. David Morgan (Dept chair), PhD, University of Chicago. Material culture of religion
10. Anna Sun (currently Associate DGS in the GPR), PhD, Princeton University. Confucianism, ritual studies
11. Joseph Winters, PhD, Princeton University. Black religious thought, African American literature, critical theory

### **Appendix C: Financial Projections and Cost Schedule**

Trinity currently provides 26 FTEs annually to the Graduate Program in Religion. Support from Trinity for 15 to 18 FTEs of the new doctoral program will come directly from these currently budgeted funds. The Kearns Endowment, devoted to the doctoral study of religion at Duke will continue to support the new program.

Cost schedule:

Rates	Actual 24-25 FTE		Annual					
	Per Semester	Per year	1st year	2nd Year	3rd year	4th Year	5th year	6th year
<b>Tuition</b>								
Ph.D. Students (per semester - Yrs 1-3 AY)	\$ 32,560.00	\$ 65,120.00	\$ 65,120.00	\$ 65,120.00	\$ 65,120.00	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ph.D. Students (per semester - Yrs 4+ AY, All Stu	\$ 4,500.00	\$ 13,500.00	\$ 4,500.00	\$ 4,500.00	\$ 4,500.00	4500 (3 semesters)	4500 (3 semesters)	4500 (2 semesters)
<b>Total tuition</b>	<b>\$ 37,060.00</b>	<b>\$ 78,620.00</b>	<b>\$ 69,620.00</b>	<b>\$ 69,620.00</b>	<b>\$ 69,620.00</b>	<b>\$ 13,500.00</b>	<b>\$ 13,500.00</b>	<b>\$ 9,000.00</b>
<b>Fees</b>								
Transcript Fee (charged first term); Any student	\$ 120.00	n/a	\$ 120.00					
Student Recreation Fee (charged fall and spring	\$ 187.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00	\$ 374.00
Activity Fee (charged fall and spring); Any student	\$ 18.45	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90	\$ 36.90
Student Services Fee (charged fall and spring); A	\$ 12.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00	\$ 24.00
Health Fee (charged fall and spring)	\$ 484.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00	\$ 968.00
Health Fee (charged summer)	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00
<b>Graduate Audit Fee (charged per audited cours</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00 not usual</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>	<b>\$ 535.00</b>
<b>Other</b>								
Ph.D. Student Fringe Benefit Rates	9.3% or (\$1860)	\$ 3,720.00	\$ 3,720.00	\$ 3,720.00	\$ 3,720.00	\$ 1,255.50	\$ 1,255.50	\$ 1,255.50
Duke Student Medical Insurance	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64	\$ 3,461.64
Duke Student Dental Insurance	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00	\$ 329.00
<b>Tuition/ Fees total</b>	<b>\$ 46,277.09</b>	<b>\$ 88,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 79,538.54</b>	<b>\$ 79,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 79,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 20,834.04</b>	<b>\$ 20,834.04</b>	<b>\$ 16,334.04</b>
<b>Recommended Stipends - Ph.D. Students All Position Types</b>								
<b>Recommended Stipends for Ph.D. Students</b>								
The stipend rates listed below are the amounts recommended by The Graduate School. They apply to Ph.D. students in programs housed in Trinity, Nicholas, Pratt, Nursing, Medicine, and Sanford. Ph.D. programs provide either 9- or 12-month funding, depending on each program's available resources. Current and prospective students should check with their programs to								
First Year- Fifth year matriculants- Stipend	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Summer funding	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
<b>Funding /Support total</b>	<b>\$ 20,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 40,000.00</b>	<b>apply for funding</b>
<b>Tuition &amp; Support Total</b>	<b>\$ 66,277.09</b>	<b>\$ 128,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 119,538.54</b>	<b>\$ 119,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 119,418.54</b>	<b>\$ 60,834.04</b>	<b>\$ 60,834.04</b>	<b>\$ 16,334.04</b>
Sixth years apply for funding or they teach (instr	\$ 6,100.00							
Teaching assistant-Graders (\$3,050)	\$ 67,100.00							
								* we ask for what is needed
<b>Other Program Support ( yearly)</b>								
Kearns Summer language fee	\$195-\$1,365							
Kearns Teaching & Learning Coordinators (2 per	\$ 4,000.00							
Kearns mini grant( conference fees)	\$ 6,000.00							
Kearns Post- Prelim Travel (30% of conference tr	\$ 4,000.00							
Track allowances( 10 tracks@\$2K per year)	\$ 20,000.00							
<b>Where do fees get charged?</b>								
Tuition 1689142 A&S; recreation fee 1680032 TGS; fees 1686126 TGS								
Health insurance 1686120; dental 1689161								

The DGS will receive one course reduction each semester. We do not anticipate any other form of compensation or replacement costs for this service. There will be no additional faculty costs. Staff will consist of an administrative assistant/program coordinator at half-time, ideally shared with another slot. This staff person will work closely with the Dept's business manager. Tuition and benefits costs are fully funded annually by A&S as 3 FTEs. An accompanying schedule of expenses for tuition and student support are attached to this document. We anticipate the following costs per annum:

\$2,000	Annual Welcome dinner
\$5,000	Conference reception
\$4,000	Programming (guest speakers, colloquia, reading group)
\$5,000	Student conference travel and professional memberships
\$3,000	Student recruitment

\$19,000 Total

The Kearns Endowment will cover some of this, but that is already the resource that supports summer costs for students. The Dept has the Norman endowment, which covers one FTE for a student engaged in the study of Christianity.



Instructional costs are very minimal. There are no labs or expensive equipment to support, no special facilities.

The program will rely fundamentally on the existing faculty and administration of the Dept of Religious Studies. All classes are held in existing spaces in and beyond the Dept in Gray Building, where faculty offices are located. We will rely on the Career Services Center, the Graduate School's Teaching & Learning program, and its admissions process. We anticipate no budget impact of any kind in this respect. Library services are conducted by the Divinity Library, which is housed in Gray.

## **Appendix D: Learning Assessment Plan**

### **Doctoral Program in Religious Studies: Outcomes & Assessment**

#### **I. Program Outcomes**

- A. Objective: To enable students to demonstrate key skills and launch their desired careers on the best footing

Outcomes: In this program, by the time students graduate, they are expected to:

1. present at a national or international conference
2. demonstrate superior abilities in grantsmanship by securing competitive fellowships
3. show evidence of having submitted articles or book reviews for publication
4. demonstrate effective teaching in their course evaluations
5. enter the job market with professionally crafted materials and preparation for interviewing
6. exhibit timely completion of degree
7. secure placement in the job market

- B. Objective: To monitor and evaluate student progress toward the timely completion of degree requirements

Outcomes: In this program, by the time students graduate, they are expected to:

1. demonstrate mastery of the fundamental concepts, methodologies, and literature in their specified sub-fields determined by their primary advisor and committee
2. demonstrate command of suitable research languages
3. present their research effectively orally and in writing
4. articulate and defend an independent and significant research project in the field

## II. Assessment

### A. Assessment Plan for the Completion of Critical Milestones

Objective: To enable students to demonstrate key skills and launch their desired careers on the best footing

Outcome	Evidence of Outcome	Frequency of Collection	Semesters Report Due
present at a national or international conference.	Annual evaluation Evidence of presentations give at national or international conferences and symposia	Annually	Odd years
demonstrate superior abilities in grantsmanship by securing prestigious fellowships.	Annual evaluation Evidence of grants and fellowships received	Annually	Odd years
submits articles or book reviews for publication.	Annual evaluation Evidence of works in press or under review	Annually	Odd years
demonstrate effective teaching in their course evaluations.	Course Evaluations Positive evaluations	Annually	Odd years
enter the job market with professionally crafted materials and preparation for interviewing	Program records Participation in workshops, symposia, conferences	Annually	Odd years
exhibit timely completion of degree	GPR records	Annually	Odd years
secure placement in the job market	Feedback from students: job	Annually	

### C. Assessment Plan for the Demonstration of Scholarly Skills as Measured by Key Milestones

Objective: To monitor and evaluate student progress toward the timely completion of degree requirements

Outcome	Evidence of Outcome	Frequency of Collection	Semesters Report Due
demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts and methodologies in their specified sub-fields determined by their primary advisor and committee.	Preliminary examinations	at students' preliminary examinations	Even years
demonstrate knowledge of the literature in their specified sub-fields determined by their primary advisor and committee.	Preliminary examinations	at students' preliminary examinations	Even years
Demonstrate command of suitable research languages	language exams	Results of students' successful completion of language exams	Even years
present their research effectively orally and in writing.	Preliminary examinations Dissertation	at students' preliminary examinations and at students' final dissertation defense	Even years
articulate and defend an independent and significant research project in the field.	Dissertation	at students' final dissertation defense.	Even years

**Appendix E: Letters of Support** (*see attachment at end of this document*)

**Appendix F: Additional Information Supporting the Proposal**

#### 1. Structure of doctoral study in the Proposed Program

The Department entered the last year of its strategic review with the assumption that doctoral tracks are counterproductive, and indeed, they are a source of some of the very problems we have come to recognize as needing remedy. An important conceptual pivot is to the idea of “contact zones.” By this we mean spaces where religions, cultures, and societies meet. This framework

has emerged as one way of describing the kind of interdisciplinary engagement that most excites the entire faculty. We have therefore adopted it as a priority in collaborative re-imagining and curricular development, and as a hiring goal. It is a key aspect of our current search for two colleagues at the rank of Assistant Professor.

## **2. Hiring plans**

Two searches are currently underway as a cluster hire. A single search committee, composed of two senior colleagues in the Department and two additional colleagues (from History and Cultural Anthropology) will review the applicant pool and coordinate their recommendations of candidates for the Department's consideration. The appointments will be at the rank of Assistant Professor, which is important since the current faculty consists largely of full professors. The doctoral program we envision will include current Religious Studies faculty, including our new colleagues once they join us, and also faculty from other departments and schools at Duke. The Associated Faculty will be invited to participate in admissions decisions, recruitment efforts, teaching, and exam and dissertation committees. While final decisions on admissions and the task of advising will belong to Department faculty, Associated Faculty members will be asked to indicate their preferences in the admissions process each year. Included among the Associated Faculty will be colleagues in the social and natural sciences as well as the humanities and the Divinity School.

## **3. Collaboration with STEM fields, Social Sciences, and Humanities and the Arts**

We seek to expand and deepen collaboration with colleagues and programs across Trinity. Collaboration with STEM fields at Duke will be pursued by particular faculty members and doctoral students according to their scholarly interests. By "collaboration" we intend deliberate engagement in fields as measured by coursework and consultation with faculty in STEM fields at Duke to the degree that it informs the student's work within the study of religion. The point is not for religious studies students to do degree work in the sciences, but to explore how knowledge of the sciences can inform the academic study of religion. Though some are at an early stage of development, there are several current engagements among our faculty with STEM colleagues: Jennifer Knust is designing a Constellation course on the cosmos and the history of cosmology with Daniel Scolnic (Physics). Mohsen Kadivar has taught a successful course on science and religion (REL 287) that has benefitted from consultation with science faculty (Al Goshaw in Physics, now retired), and his course was accepted for cross-listing by Neuroscience (NEUROSCI 237). Larissa Carneiro teaches a very popular course on psychedelics and religion and is currently working with Diego Bohorquez, Gastroenterology, Dept of Medicine, Duke School of Medicine, to develop research project that they may submit to Bass Connections. Mark Chaves and Anna Sun are sociologists who teach courses on the sociological study of religion. Patty van Cappellen, a social psychologist and research professor in Duke's Social Science Research Institute, has guest-lectured in David Morgan's "Theorizing Religion" grad seminar. Significant involvement in interdisciplinary initiatives within the Humanities will only increase. Our faculty have designed and actively participated in several FHI Humanities Labs, Bass Connections projects, and curricular innovations like Focus and Transformative Ideas while also contributing to inter-disciplinary centers like the Elizabeth A. Clark Center for Late Ancient Studies (which gathers faculty and students from Religious Studies, Classical Studies, History,

and Art History), and to Asian and Middle Eastern Studies as well as the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute (APSI). Nearly all of the tenured faculty hold secondary or joint positions in humanities or social science departments. Our hope is to add to the number of undergraduate courses cross-listed with natural and social science departments in order to attract more undergrad students in these fields and to direct doctoral students to appropriate seminars in other departments. We already have several courses cross-listed with sociology, history, and cultural anthropology.

#### **4. Curriculum, Exams, Coursework, three-year sample course offerings**

See accompanying edited list of courses with instructors who teach the courses regularly in a three-year rotation. Courses that are not regularly taught or that will not likely be offered again have been removed from the list of courses. Courses taught by faculty who have just departed Duke or who will soon retire have also been removed unless we anticipate that other faculty or new faculty may likely offer the courses. Finally, courses owned by other departments have been minimized since we are not able to predict the regularity of the courses.

There will be no specified tracks in the doctoral program. We expect students and faculty to form an integrated community of learning that does not splinter into discrete religious traditions or historical epochs. We believe that students learn best when they learn together rather than in isolated domains of specialization. Their coursework and dissertations will certainly reflect a focus of interest that is marketable in the profession of teaching and research.

We are currently in the process of searching for two new colleagues. The search does not specify field of specialization, so we cannot indicate what new courses might be added. But the search indicates our interest in colleagues engaged in interdisciplinary study in religion and the sciences.

Given the small size of the faculty and the proposed doctoral program, the courses that remain on the list accompanying this memo serve three broad purposes: 1) classes supporting the undergraduate major and minor in religious studies which will be taught by faculty as well as in some cases by doctoral students; 2) courses that directly address the interdisciplinary nature of study that the department seeks to develop in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences; and 3) graduate courses that will be offered regularly as the cornerstones of the training of doctoral students.

The third group of courses fit together to create the foundational curriculum for doctoral students. This is not a comprehensive listing of all seminars on the books, but a selection of those seminars that are regularly offered and that work together to frame the range of courses that students will choose from. The new doctoral program will be more structured than the current Graduate Program in Religion, which carries no required coursework and allows students to do all their work in a single area.

We will introduce a modest distribution requirement among “core courses” and one required seminar, REL 912: Theorizing Religion, which examines important models for defining and studying religions since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The distribution requirement stipulates that doctoral students enroll in three seminars drawn from the list of “core courses,” each of which employs a different methodological approach to sources of information, e.g., textual analysis, historical studies, ethnography, literary interpretation, or art historical study.

The other curricular requirement is that students are expected to enroll in at least one seminar that includes comparative study.

The remaining seven classes of the doctoral students’ coursework will focus on their respective areas of interest such as a particular contact zone or intersection of religion with the arts, humanities, or natural or social sciences. Students may take up to five courses outside of the department.

This distribution of coursework not only corresponds to the exam structure, it also responds to the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the study of religions. The challenge for program coherence and effective preparation of students in the field is to promote an interactive community of study that resists restrictive or balkanizing specialization. Given the broad range of kinds of evidence in the study of religion and the diverse methodological means of treating evidence, our doctoral program seeks to make the scrutiny of evidence a key feature of student learning and program coherence.

See the attached sample of a two-to-three-year course template, which includes the required course and the core courses as well as number of prominent electives supporting more focused configurations of study.

Students will be expected to complete three written examinations followed by an oral defense of their written work. The first exam will feature method and the nature of evidence; the second exam will focus on definitions of religion in relation to the student’s area of interest; and the third exam will treat the subject matter, history, and historiography of the student’s chosen area of study. Preparation for the exams will begin with a student’s consultation with their advisor, identifying two additional faculty, one of whom may be outside the department. The student will then consult with all three members of the exam committee, drawing up a reading list of between 30 and 35 key texts which will form the basis for each exam. Each faculty member will compose a list of exam questions. The advisor will compile these questions for each exam and may, with the student’s knowledge, choose to include relevant questions from other members of the committee for each exam. The student will not see the questions before the examination. The exam is not an open book format and each exam is limited to three hours, to be proctored by the advisor or an administrative assistant. The written exams are distributed among the faculty committee and an oral defense is scheduled shortly after the exams are distributed. Faculty will decide after the oral defense if the student has passed.

Two research language exams must be successfully completed by the time students complete coursework (2 years) and before they are allowed to take preliminary exams. Ideally, students will be in command of any primary languages of study (e.g. Greek, Latin, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese) at the time of matriculation. Research languages are defined as any modern language in which reading knowledge is necessary as a tool in the student’s research. The exam consists of

two hours to translate one thousand words with only the use of a dictionary. Students who fail to pass the exam may retake it within six weeks as many times as necessary to produce a passing grade. The texts will be chosen by the student's advisor and must be original to the language of examination and taken from a scholarly and recent publication. The student will not have access to the text before the exam.

### **Doctoral Program in Religious Studies: Three-Year Sample Course Template**

#### **Year 1**

Fall: REL 912S: Theorizing Religion, Winters  
REL 911S: Material Culture in Theory & Practice, Morgan  
REL 930: Death and Dying in Late Antiquity, Knust  
Div 764: Becoming Divine: A History of Eastern Orthodoxy, Smith (Div)

Spring: REL 719: Academic Writing for Scholars of Religion, Brettler  
REL 900: African American Religion thru the Literary Imagination, Winters  
REL 909S: Contact Zone: The Mediterranean, Knust, Wagner (Div), Gonzalez (Classics)  
HIST/REL/AMES 774: Ideology and Religion in Muslim Central Eurasia

#### **Year 2**

Fall: REL 912S: Theorizing Religion, Winters  
REL 775S: Sociology of Religion, Sun  
Contact Zone: Europe, Herskowitz, Gellen (German), Jimenez (Classics)  
REL 840: Luther and the Reformation in Germany, Rittgers (Div)

Spring: REL 946S: Comparative Medieval Philosophy, Kadivar  
REL 917S: Modern Buddhism, Jaffe  
AAHVS/REL: Islam and Art, Griebler (Art History)  
REL 913: Comparative Ritual Theory, Sun

#### **Year 3**

Fall: REL 719: Academic Writing for Scholars of Religion, Herskowitz  
REL 771: Islam, Medicine, Healing, Hassan  
REL 937S: Historical Jesus, Goodacre  
REL 802: Atheisms before Secularism, Knust and Griebler (Art History)

Spring: Classics/REL: Religion in the Classical World, Casias (Classics)  
REL 912S: Theorizing Religion, Herskowitz  
REL 770: Islam and Its World, Hassan  
REL 909S: Contact Zone: East Asia, Sun, Jaffe, Allison (Anthro)

## **5. Mentoring and Student Community**

See the accompanying "Mentoring and Advising Policy and Guidelines" (Appendix G) which will be posted on the program's webpage. Initial advisors are assigned to matriculants in order to assist them with orientation, course selection, and identification of campus resources. The DGS will pair each student with a faculty person whose interests generally align. At the end of the first or second semester, a formal advisor will be assigned to the student based on the student's choice and the faculty person's agreement to serve as advisor.

The DGS will convene regular symposia each semester at which faculty and graduate students gather to discuss current projects, developments with the field of religious studies, and resources at Duke. The Dept will sponsor guest speakers on a regular basis. The Dept will encourage

student involvement in Teaching & Learning events. And each year the DGS will organize mock interviews and sessions on preparing job applications. Students who prefer to pursue jobs outside of the academy will benefit from working with the DGS to identify internship experiences before they graduate. When possible, the DGS will seek to arrange for consultations of these students and potential employers or persons within the industry that students have targeted for employment.

Teaching Assistants are of two kinds. The first and most common are graders in courses they are expected to attend regularly. These TAs do not lecture or conduct class. The second, compensated at a higher level, are those TAs whose duties include occasional lecturing and meeting with students.

The principal generator of community will be work-in-progress colloquia two or three times each semester in which both faculty and students will present their current research projects and welcome questions and comments from the group. In addition to this, guest speakers will be arranged as often as departmental funds allow, ideally once each semester. Finally, the DGS will urge graduate students to form reading and writing groups to support their preparation for exams and the production of their dissertations.

## **6. Contact Zone Approach**

This approach is an alternative to a traditional tendency to focus on a single geographical area or religious tradition, which often is the basis of a single national and cultural setting. There are certainly good reasons for such singularities in individual research endeavors, but restricting curriculum and training in this way produces limited specializations, easily misses the dynamic interaction of different groups, and falls into the modernist trope of “one nation—one language—one people—one religion,” which became the blueprint both for “religion” as a category and for conceiving the modern nation-state.

As most Religious Studies scholars now argue, religions happen on the move and consist of extensive cultural borrowings and interactions. We want to foster courses, conversations, and dissertations that focus on the zones of contact that do so much to shape religions, peoples, and nations. The aim is not to stipulate particular zones as normative, but to invite coursework and research that focus study within a conceptual framework that understands religions are not stable essences, but historically contingent, evolving forms of culture that configure human interaction and variously produce social order, disruption, and transformation. Pursuing this avenue of study will help dismantle the insulating effect of national and geographical specializations and make learning and study much more integrative and collaborative. Seminars will be defined more in terms of contact and mobility such as diasporas, colonial and decolonial dynamics, cultural borrowings and hybrids, migration, and cultural refashioning and adaptation in light of conquest, exploration, nation building, and immigration. Not all coursework will take this form, but a good deal will, especially theory-and-method coursework that all students will be required to take, and in colloquia, which will play a much greater role in the Department than they have hitherto.

## **7. Demand**



Over the last several years of admissions cycles, the Graduate Program in Religion has seen the following averages in applications by area of focus:

- Buddhism: 5 to 8 applications per year
- Islamic Studies: 5 to 8 applications per year
- New Testament: 30 to 40 applications per year
- Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: 15 to 20 applications per year
- Early Christianity: 20 to 25 applications per year
- Religion, Aesthetics, Society: 15 to 20 applications per year

Since prospective students in each of these areas are likely to be among those who apply for admission to the Department's doctoral program, it is reasonable to assume that the following projection for the total number of applicants is reasonable. We anticipate in the short term that the total number of applications will decline from the range of 90 to 120 per year to somewhere between 50 and 80.

### **Appendix G. Mentoring and Advising Policy and Guidelines**

The Doctoral Program in Religious Studies (DPRS) will seek to:

- (1) maintain effective channels of communication between the program and its students;
- (2) present expectations for both students and faculty;
- (3) sponsor a range of exercises and events to inform students and to encourage them to pursue opportunities provided on campus;
- (4) provide the organizational means for student-faculty liaison in order to enable the communication of student concerns regarding mentors and advisors;
- (5) continue to use effective administrative means of informing and documenting student milestones.

#### 1. Maintaining Effective Channels of Communication between Program and Students

In addition to the longstanding practice of encouraging students to approach the DGS on matters of concern, the DPRS also seeks formal feedback on advising and mentoring from current students by conducting exit surveys as students complete the PhD. In order to ensure anonymity, the survey is conducted online by sending a link to students who have successfully defended their dissertations.

The DPRS improves awareness of and access to key program data by linking to doctoral program statistics on the Graduate School's website.

#### 2. Expectations of both Students and Faculty

The DPRS will maintain and share on its website this set of expectations for faculty advising. The DGS will oversee the assignment of initial advisors for all matriculating students. Initial advisors will assist students for the period of one or two semesters. Once students have

determined the faculty persons with whom they will work, the DGS will formalize the agreement of faculty person and student.

Faculty advisors are responsible for:

- Informing students of program requirements and deadlines, academic and non-academic policies that pertain to doctoral students;
- Mentoring students in the conventions of academia and other relevant career paths and the search for employment
- Timely response to student inquiries for advice or assistance, including during faculty leave

These efforts supplement two practices of providing information to students:

- (1) stating relevant programmatic information regarding financial matters in each student's (re)appointment letter;
- (2) A Graduate Student Manual that covers a wide variety of matters in detail. Information of direct relevance to international students offers them additional information pertaining to their status as non-nationals.

The DPRS provides an information manual (Graduate Student Manual of the DPRS) that clearly articulates expectations regarding advising and program procedures, milestones and deadlines, exam formats, and relevant programmatic information. This resource will be posted on the DPRS website.

Peer advising is a recent initiative endorsed by the Graduate School and is something the DPRS will also promote. We will engage in peer advising by pairing our Masters students with doctoral students. But extending this effort to match new doctoral students with students at an advanced stage in the program provides additional support.

Upon matriculation, PhD students receive a temporary committee of two or more faculty who advise them on matters of coursework, language preparation and exams, and other items of academic relevance. The matriculation committee is in place for at least the first two semesters of the student's program. After that, the student should identify an academic advisor with whom to work toward the milestone of preliminary exams.

### 3. Sponsoring a Range of Exercises and Events

In order to encourage professional development in students, the DPRS will offer workshops and symposia in collaboration with the Teaching & Learning initiative already in place, and sponsors workshops for faculty in which mentoring and advising are the focus for discussion.

### 4. Providing the Organizational Means for Student-Faculty Liaison

The DPRS reinforces an existing organizational structure for student reporting by encouraging student representatives to the RS Dept's graduate council in their role as conduits for conveying

student concerns. A student representative on the Grad Comm will regularly convey student concerns.

For reporting problems whose resolution is better served by offices beyond the DGS or DPRS, such as instances of harassment, discrimination, or sexual misconduct, students are referred to the following resource provided by the Graduate School:  
<https://projects.gradschool.duke.edu/reporting/>

#### 5. Preparing for and documenting milestone events

The DPRS will offer a series of forms that students will be issued as they approach and prepare for milestone events. These forms include a Checklist for Dissertation Defense and the work of the Grad Comm, whose responsibilities include reviewing a formal proposal for the student's dissertation committee and dissertation proposal. The Graduate Student Manual includes further information on the milestones, including indication of what to expect with language exams, the formatting of preliminary exams, and basic information about the dissertation defense.

**Gary G. Bennett, Ph.D.**

Dean of Trinity College of Arts & Sciences

Professor of Psychology & Neuroscience and Global Health

104 Allen Building

gary.bennett@duke.edu

919-684-4510

February 14, 2024

I write to express my support for the proposal to establish a new doctoral program in Religious Studies. The current doctoral program, known as the Graduate Program in Religion (GPR), was established in 1960 through a collaborative effort between the Department of Religion (now Religious Studies) and the Duke Divinity School. While the collaborative effort behind the GPR has yielded numerous advantages, there is enthusiasm among Religious Studies faculty to fashion a doctoral program that mirrors the field's commitment to embracing diverse religious traditions within their multifaceted social, historical, and cultural milieus. The proposed restructuring accomplishes these goals, and fully aligns with Trinity's mission and values. I underscore the following considerations in the program's design:

1. **Student Education and Training:** The new program will provide students with rigorous education in methodologies, theoretical frameworks, research foci, and pedagogical approaches consistent with the broader field of religious studies as recognized throughout the academy, including our peer institutions.
2. **Faculty Hiring and Development:** Moving forward, faculty appointments will reflect the study of religions within their social, historical, and cultural contexts, in line with the evolving landscape of the academic discipline.
3. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** The proposal emphasizes enhanced collaboration within Duke University and Trinity College, fostering closer ties with departments in the humanities, as well as forging strong relationships with faculty and programs in the natural and social sciences.
4. **Alignment with Undergraduate Mission:** The revised graduate program will complement existing undergraduate offerings, such as the Religion & Culture curriculum, and facilitate exploration of innovative pathways that transcend traditional offerings bounded by specific religions.

5. **Profile and Clarity:** Trinity College has many Humanities departments widely regarded as among the best in the country. The new program will provide clarity and enhance the department's visibility as a secular program within the academic community.

6. **Inclusivity:** By broadening its scope and orientation, the new configuration aims to attract a more diverse graduate population, fostering inclusivity across various axes, including religious orientation.

The Department has developed the proposal with due deliberation and care. The process started with a recommendation by the 2019 External Review Report, which was followed by faculty discussion that led to a February 2022 vote to explore the possibility and enhanced by RiDE-supported research into other programs in summer of 2023. The decision to adopt the proposal and forward it for consideration by the Graduate School was passed by unanimous faculty vote.

The mechanics are sound, and broadly match peer graduate programs like Yale, Brown, and UPenn. Student demand is clearly and persuasively articulated. The curriculum will educate in core areas that compete directly with peer programs; however, the program positively differentiates in areas (e.g., religion and culture; religion and science) that are distinctively Duke. The program's financial underpinnings are straightforward, since, for poorly understood historical reasons, Trinity currently funds almost all of the GPR graduate students – both those working primarily in RS and those working in DDS.

As stated at the beginning, I lend my strong support and enthusiastic approval to my colleague's proposal.

Sincerely,



Gary G. Bennett  
Professor and Dean of Trinity College of Arts & Sciences  
Duke University



**Diego Bohorquez, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Medicine



[diego.bohorquez@duke.edu](mailto:diego.bohorquez@duke.edu)

Thu 10/31/2024

Dear David,

It was a pleasure meeting you. I am excited about the potential collaborations with Larissa and the Department of Religious Studies, particularly with your new doctoral program.

The program's focus on bridging religious studies with the arts, humanities, and sciences resonates deeply with my own research interests.

I am particularly intrigued by the possibilities of connecting your students' work with my lab's research on neuropods and the impact of food on decision-making. This intersection, especially when viewed through the lens of ethnobotanical research by scholars like Richard E. Schultes and Luis Eduardo Luna on medicinal and entheogenic plants, holds immense potential for interdisciplinary discovery.

I would be thrilled to support your program by engaging with faculty, hosting select students in my lab, and potentially serving on dissertation committees.

Please let me know if you would like me to put this endorsement in formal letterhead.

Have a great weekend,

Diego

**Diego V. Bohórquez, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor

Duke University

Box 2651, 221A MSRB1, 203 Research Dr. Durham, NC, 27510, USA

Our Lab:

[www.gutbrains.com](http://www.gutbrains.com)

Department of Classical Studies  
Box 90103, 233 Allen Building  
[classics@duke.edu](mailto:classics@duke.edu)

Telephone: (919) 681-4292  
Fax: (919) 681-4262  
<http://www.classicalstudies.duke.edu>

Tuesday 29 October 2024

Dear members of the Executive Committee,

I am writing to express support for the Department of Religious Studies in their creation of an interdisciplinary PhD program.

As a Roman historian in the Department of Classical Studies, I already have many occasions to work with Religious Studies faculty. We sit on dissertation committees together, teach each other's graduate students in courses, and attend the same campus lectures from visiting scholars. I intend to contribute to this new doctoral program, as I already contribute to other efforts of my Religious Studies colleagues.

In addition, I am a board member of the Late Ancient Studies Reading Group, which includes scholars from a variety of disciplines who study late antiquity. Trinity College already has the infrastructure to support this new doctoral program, and it therefore has my full support.

Sincerely,



Cassandra M. M. Casias  
Assistant Research Professor  
Department of Classical Studies  
Duke University



Keisha M. Cutright, PhD  
Professor of Marketing

Duke University  
The Fuqua School of Business  
100 Fuqua Drive  
Box 90120  
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Tel +1.919.660.7827  
Fax +1.919.684.2818  
www.fuqua.duke.edu

November 3, 2024

David Morgan, PhD  
Professor & Department Chair  
Department of Religious Studies  
Duke University

Dear Professor Morgan:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the proposed doctoral program in the Department of Religious Studies here at Duke. The interdisciplinary focus of this program, in seeking to deepen connections with the arts, humanities, and sciences, aligns closely with my own research interests in religion and consumption. Integrating these diverse fields within the Religious Studies doctoral program has the potential to foster unique and innovative approaches to the study of religion at Duke. I would be pleased to welcome doctoral students from the program into my seminars at Fuqua and am open to participating in dissertation committees, should the opportunity arise.

Thank you for considering my support for this exciting venture. I look forward to witnessing the positive impact this program will have on the study of religion at Duke and beyond.

Warm regards,

Keisha M. Cutright  
Professor of Marketing  
Fuqua School of Business



November 1, 2024

Dear David,

I am writing to convey my enthusiastic support for the new doctoral program in Religious Studies at Duke. Moving away from the shared program with the Divinity School will allow Religious Studies to develop a graduate program that is less confessional and more academic, which coheres with its place within and the mission of the Trinity School of Arts & Sciences at Duke. Moreover, the new doctoral program sounds very forward-looking in its comparatist approach (among religious traditions), its interdisciplinary focus (across departments and units in Trinity), and its emphasis on theoretical and methodological innovation.

The new graduate program is consistent with a positive and exciting move that I see happening across humanities departments and programs at Duke, which is to turn away from insularity and try to forge productive new connections and collaborations. I think that the FHI labs and Bass Connections have helped to do this, and a more outward looking and well-connected PhD program in Religious Studies would do this as well. Whether it is happening via temporary initiatives or through established departments, I think that humanities research, teaching, and innovation can only be strengthened by exploring questions and problems that reach across disciplinary and methodological divides.

As the incoming Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Duke, I am also thrilled to hear about this new PhD program, which will surely attract more doctoral students with an interest in Jewish Studies than the old program, given its ties to the Divinity School. The idea of students pursuing a doctoral degree in Religious Studies with a focus on Jewish Studies, but a strong grounding in comparative religions and interdisciplinarity is very exciting.

Sincerely,



Kata Gellen  
Associate Professor  
Department of German Studies, DUS  
Center for Jewish Studies, incoming director

# Duke UNIVERSITY

## DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

Box 90414, 2204 Erwin Rd.,  
Durham, NC 27708

November 4, 2024

Dear Prof. David Morgan,

I am writing to express my strongest support for the proposal to establish a new doctoral program in the Department of Religious Studies. As a scholar specializing in Jewish thought, Hebrew modern cultures, Israeli society and politics, and games and gamification, I find the proposal both timely and essential. It addresses many of my academic interests and practices.

Both as a scholar and a teacher, I see this proposal as aligning with the new directions that Religious Studies in my view has taken in recent years. It also reflects Duke University's commitment to exploring intersections and mutual inspirations between diverse disciplines.

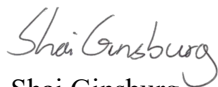
I fully support the shift from viewing religious traditions as autonomous entities to focusing on the contacts and exchanges that have shaped them. This approach not only aligns with current academic trends but also resonates with the experiences of our students, who navigate a world informed by interactions among multiple traditions rather than a single one.

Furthermore, I completely agree that the study of religion should not be limited to intellectual traditions or ritual practices. It must also consider how religion functions in everyday life, in conjunction with other "non-religious" practices. In my own research, exploring the relationship between religious practices and state power in contemporary Israel is paramount. It is essential for the understanding Israeli politics, society, culture, and economics.

Equally important is the investigation of the interplay between religion and technology. Contemporary religious practices and intellectual traditions cannot be fully understood without considering their interactions with and reliance on technology. Similarly, technology cannot be fully grasped without acknowledging its influence on religious practices and thought. Religious practices serve as a major means through which we assign meaning to technologies and integrate them into our daily lives. In turn, technologies shape religious practices and the world to which these practices seek to ascribe meaning and hope.

I am truly excited about this proposal and wholeheartedly support its implementation. It would greatly contribute to my own endeavors at Duke, and I am looking forward to collaborating with it.

Sincerely,



Shai Ginsburg

Associate Professor and Chair



Art, Art History & Visual Studies  
Box 90766  
114 S. Buchanan Blvd  
Smith Warehouse  
Durham, North Carolina 27708  
Fax: (919) 684-4398  
aahvs.duke.edu

Andrew Griebeler  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies  
andrew.griebeler@duke.edu

November 6, 2024

Dear Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the proposed doctoral program in Religious Studies. The department's vision for a non-confessional, methodologically diverse program aligns with my own teaching program at both graduate and undergraduate levels. For example, since my arrival at Duke in January 2024, I have taught two courses cross-listed with Religious Studies: Art and Architecture of the Islamic World, 6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c., and Visual Culture in Late Antiquity. I will also co-teach with Jennifer Knust in the cross-listed course, Atheisms before Secularism from Socrates to Spinoza, this upcoming Spring. I have also collaborated with Jennifer Knust in the context of the Elizabeth A. Clark Center for Late Ancient Studies and the Late Ancient Studies Reading Group.

I look forward to contributing to this program as an associated member, participating in admissions, offering courses, and serving on dissertation committees. This initiative promises to enrich our university's intellectual community and advance the critical study of religion across disciplines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew Griebeler".

Andrew Griebeler



Durham  
North Carolina  
27708-0766

DEPARTMENT OF ART,  
ART HISTORY & VISUAL STUDIES  
BOX 90766

TELEPHONE: (919) 684-2224  
FAX: (919) 684-4398

7 November 2024

Prof. David Morgan, Chair  
Department of Religious Studies  
Duke University  
Durham, NC 17708

Dear David,

As Chair of the Art, Art History & Visual Studies Department, I write in strong support of your department's proposal for a new doctoral program. While we have been pleased to work with the current shared program with the Divinity School, the proposed new program that focuses on the broader comparative religious dimension as well as includes important areas of study including art could not be a better fit for our program and our own graduate students. I anticipate a great deal of cross-departmental collaboration, programming, and complementary curriculum. In this regard, your proposed program would greatly strengthen and deepen the graduate experience in religion and the humanities, which will serve our students well as scholars and professionals.

Needless to say, our art history PhD program includes many overlaps in areas of interest with Religious Studies. We have specialists and attract students in a number of fields where religious traditions are important. We have, for example, recently hired two art historians in the medieval European area: one specialist in visual art that intersected and moved between Christian and Islamic contexts in the early medieval; the other works on the Catholic powers of the Iberian peninsula and their use of architecture to extend faith and political control. For each, their students will need a crucial background in a deep understanding of religions, their histories, and their points of contact. These are just the latest faculty who will welcome this new program. Other established faculty in the program work on the conflict between Protestants and Catholics as expressed in early modern architecture, the role of Jerusalem as an urban center for the three Abrahamic traditions, Buddhist art, pagan pre-Christian ritual sites, and modern Shinto practices in popular visual culture, to name the most prominent. Our research and our teaching thus depend on excellent and rigorous religious historical and theoretical training. We could not welcome your new approach with diverse traditions and "contact zones" more.

Thank you for asking whether we would support this initiative. I can, without reservation, say that it would be most welcome by students and faculty alike in our program. I believe it would be an excellent contribution to strengthening the graduate study of humanities at Duke.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul B. Jaskot', with a large, stylized initial 'P' and 'J'.

Paul B. Jaskot  
Chair and Professor of Art History & German Studies

3 November 2024  
Durham, NC

### **Letter of Support**

Graduate Program at the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University

It is my pleasure to express my strong support for establishing an independent doctoral graduate program within the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University. I wholeheartedly advocate for the academic study of religion and religious practices to be housed within its own program, distinct from the Divinity School.

The primary rationale for an independent graduate program is the increasing relevance of studying non-Christian religions and their practices in a world characterized by diasporas and migrant populations, which foster more hybrid and cosmopolitan religious societies. The academic study, teaching, and training of graduate students in Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other Asian and African religions must be a central focus of the Department of Religious Studies' academic mission. In particular, the study of Islam in the Americas and Europe should be a significant area of focus for graduate training and research.

Furthermore, the concept of religion is evolving from a theologically defined single system of beliefs into a field where cultural and historical practices intersect with technology and nature, as well as with other belief systems. This emerging academic perspective necessitates a doctoral program that is separate from a school of theology. I am confident that the new doctoral program will foster interdisciplinary connections with departments such as History, Cultural Anthropology, Music, the Medical School, and of course with the Islamic Studies Center that I currently direct.

In conclusion, the establishment of an independent graduate program within the Department of Religious Studies will be a significant step in positioning Duke University as a world-leading academic institution, equipped to address the challenges of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries. The program and my colleagues have my unconditional support.

Sincerely,



Adam Mestyan

Director, Duke University Middle East Studies Center  
Director, Duke University Islamic Studies Center  
Associate Professor, History Department



Duke University  
112 East Duke Building  
Box 90760  
Durham, NC 27708

November 8, 2024

Dear Professor Morgan,

Tel. (919) 684-5683  
Fax (919) 684-4652

I write in my capacity as chair of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies to express my deep enthusiasm at the prospect of a PhD in religious studies.

As an interdisciplinary scholar with investments in black feminist theory (and womanist theory), I am particularly excited at the prospect of working with religious studies doctoral students who are keen on pursuing projects that sit at the intersections of gender, race, and religion. Moreover, my hope is that courses I develop in the future – including a graduate level black feminist theory course, and a graduate level course on the intellectual history of black women -- would draw your PhD students. I know how much our graduate courses are benefitted from the truly interdisciplinary perspective of the students enrolled. Given the centrality of religion to black feminist theoretical perspectives and approaches, it would be tremendously exciting to have religious studies doctoral students in my courses. I also hope that doctoral students in your program would enroll in our GSF701, Foundations of Feminist Theory course, which is an interdisciplinary introduction to feminist theory.

I look forward to partnering with you, your colleagues, and your future doctoral students, and my colleagues in GSF are enthusiastic about working with your students in the years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer C. Nash". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jennifer C. Nash  
Jean Fox O'Barr Professor  
Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies  
Duke University



Cultural Anthropology  
205 Friedl Building, Box 90091  
Durham, North Carolina 27708

Telephone: (919) 684-5012  
Fax: (919) 681-8483  
[www.culturalanthropology.duke.edu](http://www.culturalanthropology.duke.edu)

November 3, 2014

Professor David Morgan, Chair  
Department of Religion  
Duke University

Dear David,

I am writing to express my support for the new curricular direction your department's graduate program is considering. As someone who's studied and written about religious experience in West Africa—whether more 'traditional' or contemporary Pentecostal—from an anthropological point of view, I'm deeply committed to an interdisciplinary approach to religious phenomena, one that opens itself not only to the study of belief and ontology but also to a consideration of the social, cultural and historical aspects of religious faith. I feel that adding a strong interdisciplinary focus to the study of religious experience will strengthen and amplify, not diminish, your graduate program.

I've been a committed affiliate of your department for many years. I'm presently serving on Religion's faculty search committee; I supported a candidate for hire in your department when I was chairing Duke's Africa cluster hire in 2020; and I've served on several PhD committees in your department. PhD advisees of mine in Cultural Anthropology have also taken graduate seminars in Religion and several invited you, among others faculty in your department, to serve on their PhD committees. Throughout these many encounters, I've very much appreciated the way in which your faculty has been open to interpretive and social scientific approaches and methodologies, and feel certain they'll embrace further growth in that direction.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance in supporting this exciting initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Piot".

Charles Piot  
Professor, Departments of Cultural Anthropology and African & African American Studies  
Chair, Duke Africa Initiative





November 7, 2024

Dear David,

Thank you for the invitation to become an associate member of the new doctoral program in Religious Studies, should it be approved. I am happy to accept this invitation and look forward to participating in the program as my schedule permits. My involvement would have to be coordinated with my primary responsibility in whatever doctoral program develops in the Divinity School.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ron Rittgers".

Ron Rittgers

Professor of the History of Christianity

Professor of History (secondary appointment)



**Prof. Dan Scolnic**  
*Physics Department, Duke University*  
*Durham, North Carolina 27708*  
*(203) 710-2609*  
*daniel.scolnic@duke.edu*

October 31, 2024

Dear Committee,

I write to convey my enthusiastic support for the Department of Religious Studies' proposed PhD program. The prospect of a doctoral program that includes the exploration of the historical and thematic relations between religions and the sciences promises to enrich the understanding of religion no less than science. I would enjoy working with doctoral students in Religious Studies as TAs in the undergraduate course on religion and cosmology that I am planning with Professor Jennifer Knust as part of the new Constellation program initiated for Fall 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Scolnic".

**Prof. Dan Scolnic**  
Associate Professor of Physics



5 November 2024

Dear Members of the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty,

I am writing to express my interest in continuing to work with my colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies should their proposal for a new PhD program separate from the current joint program with the Divinity School be approved.

This is my twenty-fourth year on faculty in the Divinity School. Since I joined the faculty in 2001, it has been my pleasure to work with members of the Department in the Early Christianity track of the Graduate Program in Religious Studies. Although I was about as junior as junior can get, the distinguished senior scholars Elizabeth Clark and Lucas Von Rompey welcomed me and incorporated my work into the program. Since Jennifer Knust's arrival as Prof. Clark's successor, we have worked together, alternating responsibilities as track convenor. My area of specialization is the history of Christian theology, i.e., the study of the intersection between Christian interpretation of the Scriptures and the use of Classical and Hellenistic philosophy to facilitate the explanation of Christian beliefs and practices. While Prof. Knust's specialization in manuscript studies and text criticism as well as the methodological assumptions differ from mine, we have seen these differences as complementary. Our students have benefited from these different approaches. Nevertheless, given the methodological differences between the Divinity faculty and our colleagues in the Department, I understand and appreciate the reason for the proposed separation. Should you approve their request, I still wish to continue the cooperative relationship that Prof. Knust and I have had over these years and am grateful to David Morgan for inviting me to serve in an associate with the new program. Even as our students in Early Christianity have drawn heavily on the expertise of colleagues in Classics and Women & Gender Studies to give our students a fuller understanding of religious practices and beliefs in the ancient Mediterranean world, I am happy to contribute my expertise in intellectual history to that same end for students in the new PhD program should it be approved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Warren Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

J. Warren Smith

J. Warren Smith, Professor of Historical Theology and Senior Fellow Center for Reconciliation  
Duke Divinity School Box 90968 Durham, NC 27708 [wsmith@div.duke.edu](mailto:wsmith@div.duke.edu)



**J. Ross Wagner**  
Associate Professor of  
New Testament

October 31, 2024

David Morgan  
Chair, Department of Religious Studies

Dear David,

This brief note is to confirm what I said in our conversation on Tuesday.

Should the new PhD program in Religious Studies be approved, I would be happy to serve as an associated member of the new program.

Since coming to Duke, collaboration with members of the Department of Religious Studies has been important to me both personally and professionally. However the institutional structures may evolve, I look forward to working together in the coming years to ensure that the study of religion in all its many manifestations continues to flourish at Duke.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Ross Wagner".

# Duke University

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
BOX 90015  
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA 27708

TELEPHONE: (919) 684-2741  
FAX: (919) 684-4871  
<http://english.duke.edu/>

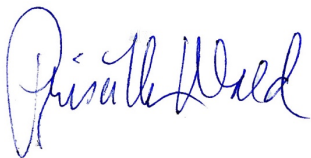
To: Executive Committee of Graduate Faculty  
From: Priscilla Wald  
Re: Support for Proposed PhD Program in the Duke Department of Religious Studies  
Date: November 7, 2024

Dear ECGF:

I am pleased to write in the strongest possible support for the proposed PhD Program in the Duke Department of Religious Studies. At present, the graduate program is shared with the Duke Divinity School, and while the shared program offers a fruitful collaboration between two distinct traditions of studying religion, the current emphasis on the study of specific religions and religious texts limits the focus, breadth, and approach to the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon. While the proposed PhD program would still allow for the areas covered in the current program, it would enable the Department of Religious Studies to expand its focus to include the exploration of religion as a phenomenon and a belief system across cultures and historical periods as well as its impact on human history. The proposed program, moreover, will encourage collaboration across disciplines.

I am excited about this program both because of my own work, which brings the study of both myth and the idea of the sacred in relation to science and politics, and because of the interest I have seen among my graduate students (as well as undergraduates) in bringing the study of religion in relation to literature, law, politics, medicine, and science. I have also seen a growing interest in the study of the post-secular in my own field of study; a special issue on the post-secular of the journal I co-edit—*American Literature*—for example, was one of the most widely circulated issues we have done in recent years. The timing for this new program could not be more urgent, moreover, considering the influence of religion in contemporary national and global politics. For all of these reasons, I am pleased to add my strongest possible endorsement to this proposal.

Sincerely,



Priscilla Wald  
R. Florence Brinkley Distinguished Professor of English

Department of Classical Studies  
Box 90103, 233 Allen Building  
[jcwoods@duke.edu](mailto:jcwoods@duke.edu)

Telephone: (919) 681-4292  
Fax: (919) 681-4292  
<http://classicalstudies.duke.edu>

Prof. David Morgan,  
Dept. of Religion Studies,  
118 Gray Building  
Duke University

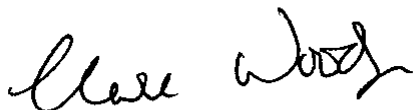
November 6, 2024

Dear David,

As a faculty member (and currently Chair) of the Department of Classical Studies, I am excited to write in support of the Department of Religious Studies' proposed new doctoral program. I have long enjoyed ties with Religious Studies through the Elizabeth A. Clark Center for Late Ancient Studies (which I directed from 2006-2011). The new doctoral program promises to further enliven that already lively, interdisciplinary center.

Since the core of my research focuses on early medieval texts (literary and ecclesiastical culture of the eighth and ninth centuries CE), I would look forward to collaborating with students in the new doctoral program. I offer graduate seminars that have attracted students from Religious Studies in the past, and which should continue to appeal to students in the new program. These include Latin Paleography and Manuscript Culture, and a variety of survey courses (in Latin and in translation) on Late Ancient and Medieval Latin Literature. I also remain keen to serve on dissertation committees for students in the new doctoral program, and to help with and/or direct any special topics examinations. In short, I look forward very much to seeing your plans for this new program come to fruition.

With all best wishes,



J. Clare Woods  
Associate Professor and Chair, Classical Studies