

Postdoctoral Fellowship in Jewish/Muslim Relations

The rift between Jews and Muslims is among the most serious in the world today. Whatever one's political views, the need for Jews and Muslims to understand one another better, and to develop friendships and co-operative relationships, could not be more obvious.

With this need in mind, the University of Illinois at Chicago has developed a groundbreaking initiative in Jewish/Muslim relations. As a school with a large Muslim population, in one of America's most ethnically diverse cities, and with a large group of professors with a strong, sympathetic interest in both Judaism and Islam, UIC is well-situated to take the lead in this area.

The heart of the initiative is a course in Jewish/Muslim relations, to be taught each year by a postdoctoral fellow selected from a nationwide competition for that purpose. Any of a large variety of topics can provide the subject matter of this course: it might take up views of Abraham, Joseph or Moses in the Torah and the Quran; the Islamic context of Maimonides's philosophy; similarities and differences between the Islamic and Jewish legal systems; shared Jewish and Islamic history, in Spain, Iraq, the Balkans, or the United States, or any of a myriad of other topics.

The point of this course, and the fellowship, is three-fold:

1) to provide incentives, in the scholarly world, for young scholars with a strong research interest in either Judaism or Islam to develop knowledge of the other tradition as well – we propose a postdoctoral fellowship precisely to attract scholars at the beginning of their career, just coming out of programs in either Jewish or Islamic Studies, so that they can take the results of this year's work with them wherever else they go,

2) to provide a venue for Jewish and Muslim students to investigate one another's traditions together, and

3) to bring the results of this scholarly and pedagogical work to the wider community of Chicago: in the form of presentations by the postdoctoral fellow at mosques and synagogues, Jewish and Islamic schools and cultural centers, and the like, but also in the form of students trained in such a program who go on to work in Jewish or Islamic organizations in the area.

Scholars are well situated to break through stereotypes and provide cool voices to calm down debates clouded by passion. There is a dearth of scholarly work bridging the Jewish and Islamic communities. The UIC Fellowship – which is unique in the world – is one step towards improving that situation.