



*Graduate Theological Union*  
the crossroads...where religion meets the world

We are delighted that you are considering doctoral studies at the Graduate Theological Union. To help you in your discernment process, we offer the following list of questions to guide you through various parts of the application process and help you decide whether doctoral studies and the GTU are right for you.

1. What are your specific goals for pursuing a doctorate?

- Do you hope to teach? If so, at what sort of institution? In what department or field (i.e., what “general course” would a school hire you to teach)?
- Do you hope to write? If so, in what journals? For which presses? Who would your audiences be?
- Do you have other goals? What are they?

*Most applicants come with broad backgrounds and interests, and many will go out to pursue broad interests and goals. However, a doctoral program entails 3-4 years (at most) of course work and a highly specialized research project. (It is helpful to think of the image of an hour glass, with the doctoral program being the narrow passage between your broad background and your broad future.) You do not want to waste the limited time or the rather considerable energy and financial resources it will require.*

2. What specifically do you intend to do during your Ph.D. program?

- Given that you have some background to build upon (which you need not repeat) and some specific goals (designated above), what do you hope to do with the brief time you will have in the program?
- What specific skills will you need to develop?
- What specific theories/disciplines/subjects will you need to address?

*The doctoral program should lay a basic foundation for about a decade of your work—not **everything** you would like to read or learn—but the most important skills, methods, and issues which will enable you to “go to work” after you complete your*

3. How does the program you specified in number 2 above, build upon your prior education, reading and experience? What is the background preparation you have for this course of study?
4. What sort of dissertation do you envision yourself doing (not the specific topic, but the type of topics and the type of research and writing you envision)? How does that help you to locate yourself in the appropriate GTU Area of Study?

The following exercises can help you discern the appropriate Area of Study:

- After you have narrowed your area of interest to two (or at most three) areas, request or pick up the detailed Area protocols, which specify specific course requirements, details regarding comprehensive examinations and required bibliographies. Determine whether the program/training envisioned fits your needs as a scholar.
- Identify the key faculty in the Area of Study you are considering, review their current research and teaching interests, and read some of their major publications (these are often listed on the faculty pages of the GTU website: [http://www.gtu.edu/faculty\\_directory.php](http://www.gtu.edu/faculty_directory.php) Does this sort of scholarship match or compliment the kind of work you want to do as a scholar?

If you are considering Interdisciplinary Studies as your Area of Study:

- **You need to have a clear footing in the GTU – in one of its Areas of Study and with one of its faculty as your primary advisor. If we cannot identify an available, appropriate and willing primary advisor based on your Statement of Academic Purpose and application, we cannot admit you to IDS, no matter how gifted you are.**
- Talk with an IDS faculty representative to ensure that you understand both the program and how to ensure that you are properly located with the GTU.
- It is wise to meet or correspond with faculty from your closest GTU Area of Study to determine whether they see you as well-grounded in their field.

*About 80% of applicants to the GTU doctoral program are basically qualified to do doctoral work, but we cannot admit all of those students to our program. Thus an extremely important factor in admissions is **the statement of purpose: its clarity, its focus, its demonstration of building on prior background and its demonstration of a good fit with the GTU program.***

5. How does your background and proposed scholarship fit with the GTU program, resources and the Area of Study to which you are applying?

- “Fit” is not merely a general matter of the GTU’s ethos, ecumenism, location or relationship with UCB. It has to do with whether **the specific program of study you have described** fits well with our programs and our faculty resources—whether this is the best place for you to pursue the program of study you envision. The more research you do about the fit between the GTU’s resources and your program of study, the stronger and more convincing your statement will be.

Studying and working through these questions will make visits and interactions with faculty easier and more profitable for all parties.

*If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the GTU Admissions Office.  
**800/826-4488 [gtuadm@gtu.edu](mailto:gtuadm@gtu.edu)***

*These questions were prepared by Dr. Judith Berling, former GTU Dean, Professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions and Convener of the Interdisciplinary Studies Area.*