GENERAL DESCRIPTION

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Founded in 1890 by John D. Rockefeller, the University of Chicago is a private, coeducational institution located on the South Side of Chicago. Under the leadership of its first president, William Rainey Harper, the University introduced innovations that are now considered commonplace in American colleges and universities: the four-quarter system, extension courses and programs in the liberal arts for adults, the junior college concept, equal opportunities for women in education, and an emphasis on broad humanistic studies for undergraduates.

Throughout its history, the University has sought to maintain an atmosphere of free, independent inquiry that is responsive to the needs of communities outside the University itself. Today, the University includes six graduate professional schools (Business, Divinity, Law, Medicine, Public Policy, and Social Service Administration), four graduate divisions (Biological Sciences, Humanities, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences), the undergraduate College, and the Graham School of General Studies.

William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was also a distinguished Semiticist and a member of the Baptist clergy. He believed that the academic study of religion should be a central endeavor of a great research university, to prepare scholars for careers in teaching and research, and ministers for service to the church. These commitments led him to bring the Morgan Park Seminary of the Baptist Theological Union to Hyde Park, making the Divinity School the first professional school at the University of Chicago.

The Divinity School continues to pursue Harper’s vision of an institution devoted to systematic research and inquiry into the manifold dimensions of religion. One of the world’s leading institutions in the academic study of religion, the Divinity School prepares students for careers of scholarship, teaching, and public religious leadership. The School generates knowledge about the history, theology, beliefs, and practices of world religions through a broad and rich array of methodological and theoretical approaches that is deeply informed, intellectually curious, and honestly engaged. The result is a diverse community of scholars and professionals who guide the public’s understanding of religion.

Work at the Divinity School encompasses the full range of the academic study of religion. Faculty are organized in 4 committees (Constructive Studies, Historical Studies, Literature, Media, and Cultural Studies, and Social and Cultural Sciences of Religion) and 11 areas of study—Anthropology and Sociology of Religion; Bible; History of Christianity; History of Judaism; History of Religions; Islamic Studies; Philosophy of Religions; Religion, Literature, and Visual Culture, Religions in the Americas; Religious Ethics; and Theology.

Degree Programs Overview

The Divinity School offers the following degree programs:

• Master of Arts in Religious Studies (AMRS)- a flexible program designed for those who are interested in developing a broad basis of understanding in religious studies. It is an ideal program for those practicing other professions, such as law, medicine, business, education, journalism, the arts, etc.

• Master of Arts in Divinity (MA)- a two-year program providing a foundation in the academic study of religion and its adjacent fields. It offers the freedom and structure for students to develop their interests and hone their linguistic and analytical skills; students have the opportunity to study the cultures, languages, thought, practices, and institutions of religious traditions, both ancient and modern. We prepare our students for doctoral study in religion or related fields but also encourage the program as a means to pursue other professions or areas of interest for which the study of religion is an important component. Our students go on not only to become professors at the nation’s top universities, but also to careers in law, medicine, journalism, public policy, education, and the arts, among other fields.

• Master of Divinity (MDiv)- The Master of Divinity (MDiv) program at the University of Chicago Divinity School is a dynamic three-year curriculum combining coursework in the study of religion and the arts of religious leadership with significant field work in multiple settings, alongside ongoing participation in a cohort-based learning community that nurtures students’ spiritual, professional and personal formation. Rooted in the Divinity School’s historic commitment to the training of scholarly ministers, today’s program welcomes students of many traditions—Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Confucian, Christian and humanist—as they prepare for engagement in an ever-increasing variety of contexts alongside students anticipating ordination and traditional vocations in religious community leadership. Coursework in their traditions’ histories, languages and texts, their theologies, philosophies, and ethics, and anthropological studies of living communities deepen students’ understandings of their own commitments and those of the communities they will serve, while multi-religious cohort conversations expand students’ religious imaginations and equip them for thoughtful and innovative public engagement in our increasingly diverse religious landscape. Situated in the heart of a major research university, within walking distance of five seminaries and surrounded by Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods, MDiv students may tailor their learning to their anticipated contexts with dual degree programs in social work, policy, or law; interdisciplinary certificate programs in areas of interest such as health care, conflict studies, and gender and sexuality; or additional denominational studies at neighboring schools. An emerging concentration in chaplaincy helps
students build upon several strong CPE training programs in the city with select courses in social work and policy and an advanced MDiv seminar in spiritual care; field placements in medical centers, university chaplaincy offices, advocacy organizations and other institutional settings further extend the practice. Whether or not they elect to pursue these compound programs, all MDiv students are encouraged to engage coursework offered by other University departments and professional schools to gain the multidisciplinary sensibilities requisite for skillful and adaptive religious leadership, community-building and meaning-making in complex and multivalent public spaces. MDiv students may participate in dual degree programs with the University’s Irving B. Harris School of Public Policy (MDiv/MPP), Law School (MDiv/JD), and the School of Social Service Administration (MDiv/MASW).

- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) - a rigorous, interdisciplinary course of study that prepares students for careers in research, teaching, and publicly-engaged leadership. Doctoral students conduct original and advanced research in pursuit of expert knowledge about the human phenomenon of religion. Students study the world’s religions using a variety of methods including constructive, historical, social scientific, and modes of literary and visual analysis. Students may focus their work in one of eleven Areas of Study or through a multidisciplinary course of study designed by the student in consultation with faculty. Students develop a sophisticated grasp of methods and theories, gain a broad understanding of religion as a phenomenon that exceeds any single approach or disciplinary orientation, and join others in the creation of new knowledge.

Non-Discrimination Statement

In keeping with its long-standing traditions and policies, the University of Chicago considers students, employees, applicants for admission or employment, and those seeking access to University programs on the basis of individual merit. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, age, status as an individual with a disability, protected veteran status, genetic information, or other protected classes under the law (including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). For additional information regarding the University of Chicago’s Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct, please see: http://harassmentpolicy.uchicago.edu/page/policy (http://harassmentpolicy.uchicago.edu/page/policy/).

Accreditation Statement

The Divinity School is accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. All degree programs are approved.