

The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities

(2009 - 2012)



The Institute of Ismaili Studies





The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities is a post-graduate course offering foundational modules in the study of religion, and the history, thought, literature, and art of Muslim societies, as well as specialized modules on Shi'ism and Ismailism. The aim of the programme is to engender a sympathetic, yet critical examination of many of the issues that are faced by contemporary Muslims; from the debate amongst Muslim intellectuals regarding the re-examination of aspects of the Islamic heritage, to the challenges faced by contemporary Muslim societies in their endeavour to modernize and develop.

The programme emphasizes the analytical frameworks and critiques of the social sciences and humanities as they apply (or fail to apply) to the study of the phenomenon of religion in all its aspects. The programme thereby seeks to integrate the discourse of various academic disciplines such as history, anthropology, political science, philosophical analysis, literature, aesthetics, art, and the study of religion, into the study of Muslim societies.

The programme is committed to the reality of the diversity of Muslim societies whether deriving from geographical or historical factors, or perspectives on scriptural interpretation, or as a result of intellectual, aesthetic, or individual experiential orientations. An area of particular focus is the study of Shi'i Islam and, more so, the study of the Ismaili community, its history and its teachings, as understood within the broader context of Islamic history and culture.

The Graduate Programme combines intellectual training with exposure to practical and field issues in the contemporary context. It is designed to train individuals to play an important role in academic and community life. The programme acts as both preparation for a research degree and as a stepping stone to a variety of career opportunities around the world.

Programme

Language Study: Arabic or Persian

Arabic is compulsory for all students throughout the first two years of the programme. The Department runs three levels of Arabic and students are placed according to their prior knowledge and experience. The overall aim is to equip students with the skills needed to read Arabic texts, in different disciplines and from different periods, in the original. Prior to the start of the first year, students undertake a 3-4 week Intensive Arabic Pre-sessional course at the IIS. At the end of the first year (in July) students participate in a summer Arabic immersion programme in Syria.

Students who are already fluent in Arabic take Persian, in order to read and understand core Persian texts. Persian language study includes participation in a summer Persian immersion programme in Iran.

First Year

The first year of the Programme consists of sustained language learning in Arabic or Persian, along with the following core courses:

Core courses

- *Encountering Islam*: This course surveys various aspects of Islam in order to give students an understanding of the historical and contemporary expressions, practices and experiences of Muslim peoples. The course explores the origins of Islam, the development of its fundamental concepts, institutions and practices within local contexts, its role in the formation and elaboration of Islamic civilization, the response of contemporary Muslims to their tradition as well as their relationship with the West.
- *Introduction to Islamic History I and II*: Islamic history is delivered as two courses, across two terms. The aims of these courses are: 1) To familiarize students with the main stages in the emergence, development and spread of Islam, both as a religion and as a political and social system in the pre-modern and modern periods; 2) to introduce classical Islamic religious, political and social institutions; 3) to establish a framework for the study of Islamic history as a whole; 4) to stimulate a questioning and analytical attitude; 5) to encourage skills in oral and written communication.
- *History of the Ismailis*: This course provides a survey of Ismaili history from the earliest periods to early modern times. Starting with the pre-Fatimid period in Ismaili history, it then covers the Fatimid period itself when Ismaili thought and literature attained their summit and made important contributions to Islamic thought and culture. It then examines the so-called Alamut period in Nizari Ismaili history when this branch of Ismailism managed to establish a viable state in Iran and Syria. During the Alamut period II the Nizari Ismaili made important contributions to Islamic civilization. The final part of the course focuses on the post-Alamut period in Nizari Ismaili history when the Ismaili lived in scattered communities from Syria to South Asia.

"The Arabic programme in Damascus was an unforgettable experience. We were immersed in the local culture of an Arab country, and had opportunities to travel around Syria, especially to the important site of Salamiyya where the hospitality we received was overwhelming. In addition to the language skills gained there, the cultural awareness it provided will never be forgotten."

Hussein Hirji
Class of 2007

- *The Qur'an: Meaning, History and Text*: The course aims to provide a basic introduction to the major issues confronting the student of the scripture of Islam. The first half of the course presents the traditional account of the canonization of the Qur'an, its arrangement, style, self-identification, basic doctrines, and how it functions as a source of Islamic law and theological teaching. The second half focuses more specifically on the variety of critical methodologies that have been used in modern Qur'anic studies, linking these to precedents in the field of Biblical studies. The course closes with an introduction to the 'theologies of the Qur'an', ie: the long running Kalam discussion of concepts such as the scripture's miraculous inimitability (I'jaz al-Qur'an) and uncreatedness (qidam al-Qur'an).
- *Approaches to the Study of Religion*: The emergence of 'religion' as an analytical category or as an object of study is deeply associated with the advent of modernity. Given that the advent of modernity is the core problematic of social theory, the study of religion demands acquaintance with this body of theory.
- *Reflections on Method in the Social Sciences*: An introduction to debates about method in the social sciences. Students will engage with terms such as 'induction', 'deduction', 'positivism' and 'relativism', with problems of fact and value and problems of evidence and interpretation (theory). Through a critical reading of classic texts by sociologists and anthropologists including Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Karl Marx and Jürgen Habermas, students will acquire knowledge of the key debates that will enable them to begin developing their own research questions and research plans.
- *Anthropology of Muslim Societies*: An introduction to the anthropological study of Muslim societies and Islam through close readings of ethnographic texts from a variety of regions.
- *Islam in Regional Contexts (S. Asia / Africa)*: A significant characteristic of Islam, throughout its history, has been the plurality and diversity of its adherents. Although the fundamental tenets of Islam, expressed through the *shahada*, are common to all Muslims, the way Islam is practised in different regions of the world reflects the interpretation of the people and the interaction of their beliefs with the pre-established culture. The aim of the course is to explore such varieties of expression with reference to practices in South Asia and Africa.
- *Knowledge, World, Action*: This is a course on modern philosophy, which aims to introduce students to key concepts and methods of inquiry. Topics covered will be: truth and reasoning; the problem of induction; causation; time; free will; scepticism about the external world; the analysis of knowledge; philosophy, ethics and insight; and the grounds of political obligation.
- *Literature of Modern Muslim Societies (The Novel)*: This course offers a close analysis of novels written by modern and contemporary Muslim writers. Each year the choice of novels may be revised. Those studied recently have included: Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion*, M.G.Vassanji's *No New Land*.





- *Literature and Culture:* The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to literary analysis and cultural argument. The course is not a survey or history of literary and cultural theory. It seeks, rather, to develop the analytical skills required to seriously engage with literary and critical texts. The emphasis will be on careful examination through group discussion of key arguments and textual passages.

Second Year

The second year of the programme builds upon the foundations laid in the first year and offers more specialized courses and electives, with a continued commitment to language learning.

Core courses

- *Shi'i Tradition:* The course will examine the historical and conceptual origins of the Shia tradition. Its formative development and contemporary expressions will be reviewed through a range of approaches, including a review of historical, textual, literary and exegetical texts.
- *Tasawwuf: The Mystical Dimension of Islam:* This course introduces the salient features of the Sufi mystical tradition within Islam. It will cover the historical background of the tradition, the foremost personalities who played a major role in its development, the primary concepts promoted in Sufism and their manifestation in both a religious and social context, as well as the classical works that present both Sufi theory and practice. The relevant issues are approached through a close reading of passages from such classical texts and form the basis for conceptual analysis and intensive discussion.
- *Philosophy of Religion:* This course is intended to develop the kind of analytical thinking which is relevant to the concepts found in religious discourse. The relation between religious and secular culture will be explored and the terms, themselves, analyzed. Students will read major philosophers, whose ideas have had an explicit or tacit relationship to issues of importance in religion. These will range from Plato and Aristotle, through representatives of the medieval philosophical tradition common to the scriptural faiths, to philosophers who have been influential in the shaping of the modern world, from Hume and Kant to Heidegger and Wittgenstein.
- *Modern Islamic Thought:* This course traces significant developments in Islamic thought during the modern period. It seeks to develop an awareness of illustrative trends, methods and ideas in modern Islamic thought focusing on the long 20th century, highlighting its dynamism and diversity, from Islamists to their intellectual opponents, who also work in an Islamic idiom. It encourages a contextual approach that underlines the complexities and nuances of Islamic positions, and develops an appreciation of the central concerns and persistent problematics of modern Islamic thought. It also seeks to encourage an

awareness of the shifting backgrounds and credentials of would-be spokespersons for Islam in the modern period.

- *Gender and Representation*: This course will examine gender and its multifaceted representations in Islamic societies. It studies the representation of gender in scripture and oral tradition, and the writings of ‘authoritative’ scholars, as well as the voices of Muslim women.
- *The Tasks of a Critique of Islamic Reason*: Approaches to the debates in contemporary Islamic thought, including those interpretations considered by many to be radical and original.
- *Architecture and Muslim Societies*: The course will focus on the formation of political and religious identity through the medium of architecture. It will examine monuments located throughout the Islamic world, focusing on key buildings that were of particular importance in the development of identity. Lectures will be organized typologically, examining structures of both secular and religious function and exploring themes such as the transference and meaning of form, the notions of paradise and light, the projected identity of rulers, the formation of religious identity and the iconography of decoration. The course is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of the thousands of monuments found in Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southern Asia. Rather, it is intended to be an introduction to general themes relevant to architecture in the Islamic world
- *Research Design and Methods*: This course is an introduction to qualitative research methods. Through active engagement with the research process, the course encourages critical reflection at all stages. The main aim of the course is to facilitate the process of designing a research proposal for a small-scale field-based study and to provide students with the knowledge and skills to carry out the study.

Electives

The availability of elective courses depends on student interest. Therefore, not all elective courses are offered every year.

- *Ismailis in Modern Times*: An exploration of the history of the Ismaili Imamate and the Ismailis in the late-modern period (late 18th century to the present) and an examination of how this legacy bears on contemporary concerns. Particular attention is paid to regional studies of Ismailis residing in different parts of the world, following diverse traditions.
- *Education and Muslim Societies*: How ought emerging generations of Muslims to be educated? This question has posed a fundamental and standing challenge to the social reform agenda of Muslim states and communities in the modern period. Pressed with the imperative of delivering universal education to their constituencies, policy-makers and educators in Muslim countries have resorted to diverse strategies of educational reform. The models of responses that have emerged

reveal different forms of relationships that have been forged between historical and contemporary conceptions of education, justified by contrasting understandings of what constitutes the ‘educated Muslim’ in the modern age. The aim of this course is to interrogate these responses, and to identify the issues and implications that have arisen as a consequence.

- *Topics in International Development:* The course aims to introduce and explain historical and modern efforts in national and international development, elaborating on the important issues and challenges confronting the international community. It will also examine how these issues and challenges are being addressed by different stakeholders and to what effect.
- *Human Rights, Civil Society, Islam:* The notions of human rights and civil society are central to modern political philosophy. This course will examine the debate amongst Muslim intellectuals and leaders regarding the applicability of these notions to "Islamic" societies. Students will also review the actual contemporary state of affairs with regards to these notions in Muslim countries through reports of international and local organizations.
- *Topics in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition:* This course surveys the fields of inquiry known in Arabic as *kalaam* and *falsafa*, which are usually translated as Islamic theology and philosophy. The course will explore the subject matter and problems of these fields of inquiry through selections from English translations of key texts. Topics to be covered will include God, Prophecy, Creation, Ethics, the role of reason, nature and causality, human free-will versus divine omnipotence, the problem of evil, and the conflict between *falsafa*, whose origins lie in translations of Greek texts into Arabic and *kalaam*, which represents a rational religious view of the world inspired by the religion of Islam, and “orthodox” opposition to any rationalist inquiry of revealed faith.
- *Literature of Classical Muslim Societies:* This course will look at selected themes and genres from Classical Muslim societies across different countries and cultures. The themes and genres may vary from one year to the next. Students will study religious themes (Revelation, the veneration of the Prophet and his family, devotional literature, religious teaching, mystical texts) as well as other themes such as love and the Court. They will also explore various genres including: *Belles Lettres*; travelogues such as the *Safarnamehs* and *rihlas*; biography and autobiography; social critique and satire; storytelling and drama.
- *The Age of the Fatimids:* The course will take a multi-faceted, thematic approach to the Fatimids, addressing their historical origins, the religious and social organisation of their state, and the centrality of the Imam. It will also focus on their cultural contributions and their encounters with neighbouring dynasties and empires, particularly the Umayyads, the Abbasids and the Byzantines, before concluding with a summary of the development of the Nizaris and Musta’lis after the schism of 1094CE.

- *Religion, Law, Society*: This course, on the one hand, examines parts of the legal history and heritage of Islam and the development of the tradition of Islamic law (including Shia and Ismaili law); and on the other hand, reflects upon the nature and concept of law coming from this heritage and its influence on other aspects of society. Three broad topics are covered in this course: the history of Islamic legal thought from the formative period; the crystallisation of Islamic legal thought into works of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*; and, comparative law and legal orders.
- *Abrahamic Religions and Sacred Law*: Perspectives on Islamic law, looking at a variety of issues and aspects related to contemporary life including banking, commerce, business, etc.
- *Culture and Development in Historic Islamic Cities*: This course looks at the development of cities, within the Islamic context, from a cultural perspective. Tracing the development of cities and cultures from the seventh century, it analyses the diverse traditions around the world as they developed and interacted with each other. It also explores the commonalities and divergences between Islamic and Christian-European cultures. The theoretical discussions are complemented by case studies from Aleppo, Fes, Cairo and the Aga Khan Historic Cities programme.
- *Development Challenges Facing Central Asia*: A range of topics including: dispelling myths; Central Asian societies in transition; the challenges of poverty; traditional institutions, local government, devolution and decentralization; association, expression, ownership and empowerment; gender and developments; education, employment and unemployment; social capital and human resource development.

Field Projects

The field project is an integral part of the Graduate Programme and is designed to encourage each student to formulate and conduct a research project which can serve as a basis for continued post-graduate study or career development. Students will conduct research during the summer of their second academic year. The Field Project is an opportunity for students to produce an original piece of research. Given the short period of time available to conduct research, the final research paper will often, although not necessarily, take the form of a case study. The disciplinary framework and methodology are open to discussion with the staff of the Department of Graduate Studies.

Each student's project must be approved by the Department of Graduate Studies. Students will be guided through the development of a project proposal through a course on Research Methods, which is taken in the second year. Towards the completion of this course, students will be expected to submit a project proposal, including a budget proposal for their project. Approved projects are awarded modest funding to contribute to the cost of travel to and from the place of research and project-related expenses.

Students have carried out field projects in:

- Canada
- Germany
- India
- Iran
- Japan
- Kenya
- Kyrgyzstan
- Lebanon
- Morocco
- Pakistan
- Switzerland
- Syria
- Tajikistan
- Tanzania
- Turkey
- UK
- USA
- Yemen

Universities attended by Graduate Students for the third year of study have included:

- University of Oxford
- University of Cambridge
- University of London:
London School of Economics
& Political Science
School of Oriental
& African Studies
Kings College
Institute of Education
Centre for International Studies
and Diplomacy
- University of Edinburgh
- Sussex University
- University of Durham
- University of Warwick
- University of Exeter
- Harvard University
- Tufts University
- University of Pennsylvania
- Columbia University

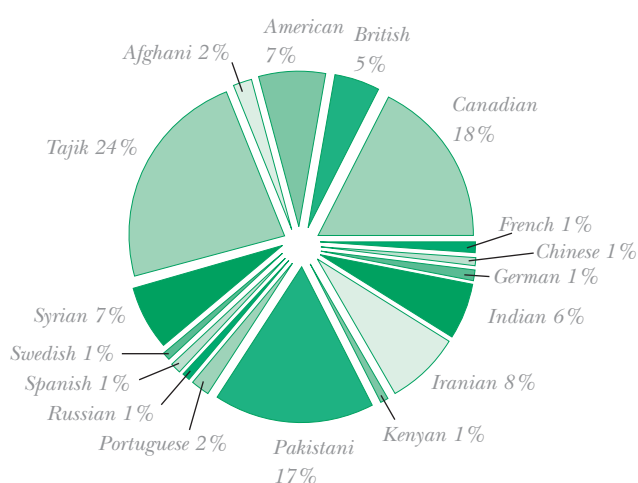
Students will be evaluated on the presentation of their research project, in the form of an essay of 10 000 words. The essay will be evaluated by an internal examiner and two external examiners. Students must pass the field project in order to be conferred with the IIS's post-graduate award in Islamic Studies and the Humanities. Students should also be aware that funding for their Master's work in the third year is dependent on the timely receipt of their research papers.

Field Trips

In order to have a direct encounter with the societies being studied, students undertake two field trips. First-year students visit Cairo, Egypt and second-year students visit Andalusia, Spain.

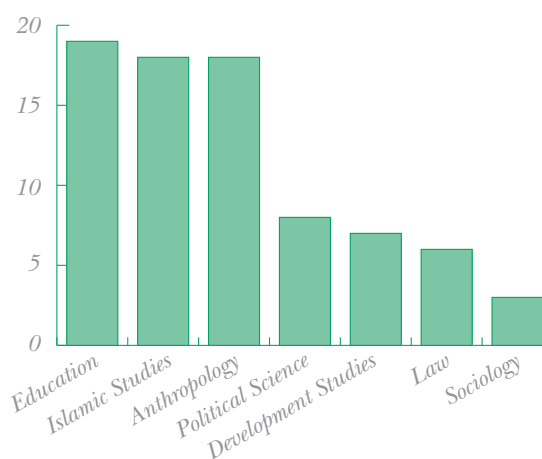
Third-Year Master's degree

Students spend the third-year studying for a Master's degree in a subject area which resonates with the aims of the Graduate Programme at a degree granting university. Although no longer resident at the IIS, all third year students are considered to be students of the Department of Graduate Studies. Students continue to be funded by the IIS and enjoy library borrowing privileges as well as the use of computer facilities at the IIS. Students must keep the Department aware of their academic progress and career plans. The Department may also invite third year students to return to the IIS to present their work.



Nationalities of GPISH students
(since 1994)

MA subject areas undertaken by
graduate students



Faculty

Graduate Programme students are instructed by lecturers who have made significant contributions to scholarship and are engaged in innovative research projects in their respective fields. Each student is assigned an Academic Advisor, to provide them additional academic support. Lecturers include IIS faculty and visiting scholars from leading international academic institutions:

Dr. Najam Abbas (IIS)
Prof. Mohamed Arkoun
(Sorbonne/IIS)
Prof. Ali Asani (Harvard)
Ms. Souad Baameur (IIS/KCL)
Dr. Jalal Badakshani (IIS)
Dr. Stefano Bianca (AKTC)
Dr. Farhad Daftary (IIS)
Dr. Alnoor Dhanani (IIS)
Dr. Aziz Esmail (IIS)
Dr. Benjamin Fortna (SOAS)
Dr. Laila Halani (IIS)
Dr. Feraz Hamza (IIS)
Dr. Faqir Hunzai (IIS)
Mr. Arif Jamal (ISMC)
Mr. Karim Javan (IIS/ISMC)
Dr. Shainool Jiwa (IIS)
Dr. Amir Kassam (Reading)
Dr. Thalia Kennedy (SOAS/IIS)
Ms. Safina Lakha (IIS)
Prof. Herman Landolt (IIS)
Dr. Dinah Manisty (IIS)
Ms. Mahnaz Marashi (SOAS/IIS)
Dr. Toby Mayer (IIS)
Mr. Luay Mohammed
(Westminster/IIS)
Prof. Eric Ormsby (IIS)
Dr. Aryn Sajoo (IIS)
Dr. Samira Sheikh (IIS)
Dr. Suha Taji-Farouki (IIS, seconded
from Exeter)
Dr. Shiraz Thobani (IIS)
Dr. Farouk Topan (SOAS)
Dr. Paul-Francois Tremlett
(SOAS/IIS)
Prof. Jerome Valberg (UCL)
Dr. Shamoon Zamir (KCL/IIS)



Resources

Department of Graduate Studies

The Head of Graduate Studies oversees all the activities of the department.

The GPISH Course Director is responsible for the academic aspects of the Graduate Programme. In addition, each student is assigned an Academic Advisor, who provides individual academic support.

Representatives from the student body sit on the GPISH Programme Board to ensure effective communication between the students and the department. There is a Student Affairs Fund available to cover the costs of cultural and social activities. Students also have access to a confidential welfare and counselling service.

The English for Academic Purposes Coordinator provides assistance with academic writing and oversees two preparatory programmes which are offered in Damascus, Syria and Khorog, Tajikistan.

The Financial Administrator deals with departmental administration and finances and the Academic Administrator is responsible for the scheduling of classes.

Library Resources

Over the past three years, the following presentations have been made by GPISH students at conferences around the world:

“Portraiture as Diplomatic Communication in the time of Mehmed II”
Sabrina A. Bandali (Class of 2008)
International Congress of Turkish Art – September 2007

“Negotiating Faith and Diversity: The Da’wa and Dawla of the Fatimids”
Salman Alibhai (Class of 2007)
BRISMES conference – July 2006

“Islam Past and Present: The Problem of Intercalation”
Sabrina Bandali (Class of 2008)
WOCMES conference – June 2006

“Ismaili Muslim Women as Public Leaders in Canadian Government and Politics”
Farrah Musani (Class of 2005) and
Schreen Noor Ali (Class of 2006)
Women As Global Leaders Conference – May 2006

Faculty and students have access to specialized library collections in Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Senate House as well as the Institute’s Library.

The Institute’s Library has approximately 17,000 volumes, and serves as a major resource centre for scholars and students. The Library has a valuable and comprehensive collection of manuscripts, books and other materials relating to Ismaili Studies, and is one of the most significant central archives of Ismaili materials in the world.

Computing Facilities

Students enrolled in the Institute’s programmes have access to computing facilities, including Internet and e-mail, within the Institute. In addition, an IT loan scheme enables students to purchase a laptop computer.

Conference Fund

Students are encouraged to attend and participate in regional and international conferences. In particular, the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) is regularly attended by students and staff, in addition to more specialized conferences around the world.

Career Pathways

The completion of the three-year course of study will qualify graduates of the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities to pursue further education in Islamic Studies and related areas of the humanities and social sciences; to seek careers in specific fields; or to seek careers in areas which attempt to address pressing issues faced by contemporary Muslim societies. These may include: careers in religious education or the management of religious education programmes of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards or the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Committee in Tajikistan; careers in an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network or other non-governmental organizations, focusing on education, strengthening of civil society, cultural preservation, poverty alleviation or sustainable development; careers in one of the departments at the Institute of Ismaili Studies; careers in the media which represent Muslims and Islam to a wider audience; or careers as Muslim artists or writers who, through their work, represent individual perspectives towards their received heritage.

Past graduates of the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities are now engaged in careers and research in fields as diverse as social anthropology, Islamic studies, Iranian cinema, Islamic law, education, public health, ethnomusicology, art history, media studies, and as AKDN representatives.

While the Department of Graduate Studies does not place students in employment, it does provide opportunities to meet with recruitment officers of Jamati and AKDN institutions. Each year, the IIS holds a Career Pathways Seminar which provides students with an opportunity to learn more about the various career options available to them. The IIS also has a strong Alumni Office which offers competitive internships for IIS graduates.



Application and Admissions Procedure

Applications to the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and the Humanities are reviewed by an Admissions Committee. Application forms can be obtained from Student Services at the Institute. The application form must be completed in full and all supporting documentation attached.

To be eligible for admission applicants should have completed a first degree of good standing from an accredited university.

In view of the fact that the Graduate Programme is multi-disciplinary and issue-based, exposure to the academic study of Islam or the social sciences or the humanities is desirable, but not mandatory.

An acceptable level of English proficiency is required. Applicants from countries other than the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand must submit a TOEFL or IELTS score. The minimum scores required for entry to the Graduate Programme are: 580 (TOEFL); 237 (Computer-based TOEFL); 92 (Internet-based TOEFL); 6.5 (IELTS). Applicants who have completed at least one year of university-level studies in one of the above countries may be exempt from submitting TOEFL/IELTS scores.

Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed and will be required to sit for a written examination. Interviewers are meant to ascertain intellectual breadth, analytical skills and an interest in issues relating to the study of Muslim societies.

Admission to the Graduate Programme does not guarantee admission to a degree-granting university for the third year of study. Applicants are fully responsible for gaining admission.

Scholarships

Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and the Humanities

All successful applicants are offered an IIS scholarship that covers tuition fees and a monthly stipend for housing and living expenses. For further information please contact the Department of Graduate Studies Office.

Doctoral Scholarship Programme

A limited number of PhD Scholarship Awards are available from the Institute each year. These awards are considered in the context of the contribution the recipient might make to the evolving intellectual mandate of the Institute and are usually offered to current or past students of the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities. However, the Institute is prepared to consider applications of exceptional quality from other qualified students.

Contact Details

For all queries and an application to the **Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities**, please contact:

Admissions Office
Department of Graduate Studies
The Institute of Ismaili Studies
42-44 Grosvenor Gardens
London SW1W 0EB
UNITED KINGDOM
Tel: +44 (0)207 881 6000
Fax: +44 (0)207 881 6040
E-Mail: admissions@iis.ac.uk
Website: www.iis.ac.uk

For all queries and application to the **PhD Scholarship Programme**, please contact:

Department of Academic Research & Publications
The Institute of Ismaili Studies
42-44 Grosvenor Gardens
London SW1W 0EB
UNITED KINGDOM
Tel: +44 (0)207 881 6000
Fax: +44 (0)207 881 6040
E-Mail: darp@iis.ac.uk
Website: www.iis.ac.uk



