

## **Gwendolyn Gillson**

Illinois College

Department of History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Religion

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### **-----Professional Appointments-----**

**Illinois College**, Associate Professor of Asian Studies, Department of History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Religion, 2024-present.

**Illinois College**, Assistant Professor of Asian Studies, Department of History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Religion, 2019-2023.

**Oberlin College**, Visiting Assistant Professor of East Asian Religions, Departments of Religion and East Asian Studies, 2018-2019.

### **-----Education-----**

**Ph.D.** and **M.A.** 2018 and 2015. University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.  
Religious Studies

**M.L.I.S.** 2012. University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.  
Concentration: Archives

**B.A.** 2009. Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter, MN.  
Major in Religion, Minors in Sociology/Anthropology and Music

**Kenkyū-in (Visiting Researcher)**. 2016-2017. Bukkyō University, Kyoto, Japan.

**Participant**. 2014. Japanese Language Program for Specialists (in Cultural and Academic Fields). Japan Foundation. Japanese Language Institute. Rinku Town, Japan.

### **-----Publications-----**

#### ***Books***

*The Essential Guide to Buddhism*. Editor. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. Print version of: *Buddhism: The Basics*. Part of *Bloomsbury Religion in North America*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. doi: 11.5040/Buddhism.

#### ***Journal Articles***

“A Tepid Liberation: Sectarianism in Scholarship on Hōnen and Women.” *Journal of Religion in Japan*. Forthcoming.

“Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy: A Workshop about Integrating Theory Across the Curriculum.” *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 36, no. 3 (2025): 1-10.  
<https://celt.miamioh.edu/index.php/JECT/article/view/1197>.

- “Feasting with Buddhist Women: Food Literacy in Religious Belonging.” With Paulina Kolata. *Numen* 68, no. 5/6 (2021): 567-592. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341640>.
- “Feminist Ethnography in the Study of Religion.” *Religion Compass* 15, no. 12 (2021): 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12419>.
- “Traversing the Nenbutsu: The Power of Ritual in Contemporary Japanese Buddhism.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 46, no. 1 (2019): 31-51. doi: [dx.doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.46.1.2019.31-51](https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.46.1.2019.31-51).

### **Book Chapters**

- “Women in Japanese Buddhism from 1900 to 2025.” In Emily Simpson and Monika Schrimpf (eds.), *Handbook of Women in Japanese Buddhism*, MHM Limited. In press.
- “Introduction to Buddhism.” In *The Essential Guide to Buddhism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024): 1-32. doi: 10.5040/9781350971066.001.

### **Book Reviews**

- Pure Land: History, Traditions, and Practice* by Charles B. Jones. *Reading Religion*. 2025. <https://readingreligion.org/9781611808902/pure-land/>.
- Monks, Money, and Morality: The Balancing Act of Contemporary Buddhism*, edited by Christoph Brumann, Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko, and Beata Switek. *Pacific World Journal Series* 4, no. 4 (2023): 131-137. <https://pwj.shin-ibs.edu/2023/7074>.
- Buddhism and Business: Merit, Material Wealth, and Morality in the Global Market Economy*, edited by Trine Brox and Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg. *Asian Ethnology* 80, no. 1 (2021): 241-243. <https://asianethnology.org/articles/2334>.

### **Born Digital**

- “The Affective Obligations of Collecting.” *Collecting Religion*. October 28, 2024. <https://collectingreligion.wordpress.com/2024/10/28/the-affective-obligations-of-collecting/>.
- “Reflective Journaling in Any Context.” *A Proven Practice: Reflections on Teaching Online*. Religious Studies News (American Academy of Religion). October 1, 2020. <https://rsn.aarweb.org/proven-practice-reflections-teaching-online-part-2>.
- “Predictability (and Flexibility) in Times of Crisis.” *Teaching and Learning During Crisis*. Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. August 12, 2020. <https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2020/08/predictability-and-flexibility-in-times-of-crisis/>.

## **-----Grants, Fellowships, and Awards-----**

- ASIANetwork Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow Program Grant**, Grant Director and Fellow Mentor, ASIANetwork, 2024-2026
- Alice Margret Engelbach Memorial Grant for Asian Studies**, Illinois College, 2020-2025
- Malcolm Stewart Award**, Illinois College, Integrating Racially Conscious Pedagogy Across Campus, 2024
- Small Project Grant**, Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, 2023-2024
- Speakers Bureau Grant**, ASIANetwork, 2023-2024

**Don P. Filson Award for Vision for the Future**, Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Integrating Theory across the Curriculum, Illinois College, 2022  
**Collaborative International Research Grant**, American Academy of Religion and the International Association for the History of Religions, 2022  
**Malcolm Stewart Award**, Illinois College, 2021  
Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Integrating Theory across the Curriculum, Co-Coordinator  
**Richard T. Fry Faculty Collaboration Grant**, Illinois College, 2020  
Asian Studies and the Environment Curriculum Development Group, Coordinator, 2020  
**Student Senate Faculty/Staff of the Month**, Illinois College, March 2020  
**H. H. Powers Faculty Travel Grant**, Oberlin College, 2019  
**Presidential Graduate Research Fellowship**, University of Iowa, 2012-2018  
**Graduate Student Senate Travel Fellowship**, University of Iowa, 2018  
**U.S. Fulbright Graduate Research Fellow**, Japan-United States Fulbright Commission, 2016-2017  
**Japanese Studies Doctoral Fellowship**, Japan Foundation, 2016-2017, declined  
**Graduate Fellow**, Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy, 2016  
**Alice Lampe Heidel and John B. Heidel Teaching Award**, University of Iowa, 2016  
**Graduate Research Scholarship in Religious Studies**, University of Iowa, 2015  
**Louis B. Penningroth Award for Teaching and Mentoring**, University of Iowa, 2015  
**Center for Asian and Pacific Studies Language Scholarship**, University of Iowa, 2014  
**Stanley Summer Scholarship for Asian Language Study**, University of Iowa, 2014  
**Kansai Summer Language Institute Grant**, Japan Foundation, 2014  
**Theta Alpha Kappa**, University of Iowa, 2014, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2009  
**Beta Phi Mu**, Lambda of Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma, 2013  
**Robberson Conference Presentation and Creative Exhibition Travel Grant**, University of Oklahoma, 2011  
**Floy Elliott Cobb Scholarship**, University of Oklahoma, 2011  
**Nannie B. Trammell Scholarship**, University of Oklahoma, 2010-2011  
**Phi Beta Kappa**, Eta of Minnesota, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2009  
**President's Scholarship**, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2005-2009

#### **-----Conference Participation-----**

##### **Peer-Reviewed Presentations**

“Religious Labor in the Making of Buddhist Worlds.” Roundtable organizer and participant. With Beiyin Deng, Courtney Bruntz, Paulina Kolata, Julia Cassaniti, and Thomas Borchert. American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Conference, November 2025, Boston, MA.

“A Discourse of Our Own?: On the Merits (and Demerits) of a Cohesive Vocabulary for Embodiment in the Study of Religion.” Roundtable participant. With Kimerer L. LaMothe, Adrienne Krone, Melissa Wilcox, and Isobel-Marie Johnston. AAR Annual Conference, November 2025, Boston, MA.

“How Do I Feel About That: Embracing the Affective Realities of the Scholar.” International Association for the History of Religions World Congress, August 2025, Kraków, Poland.

- “Writing Out of the Pure Land: Memoirs of the Pure Land Nuns’ School.” International Association of Buddhist Studies Conference, August 2025, Leipzig, Germany.
- “A Tepid Liberation: Hōnen, Women, and Pure Land Buddhist Scholars in Contemporary Japan.” ASIANetwork Annual Conference, March 2025, San Antonio, TX.
- “Finding Ways to Move in Joy.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2024, San Diego, CA.
- “Women’s Creative and Precarious Labors in Crafting Buddhist Spaces in Japanese Cities.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2023, San Antonio, TX.
- “Navigating the Daily Affects of Academic Labor.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2023, San Antonio, TX.
- “Institutionalizing a Sense of Belonging through the First Year Experience.” Making Excellence Inclusive Conference, October 2023, Charleston, IL.
- “Supporting Asian Studies at Increasingly Professionally Oriented Institutions.” ASIANetwork Annual Conference, April 2023, Columbus, OH.
- “Gendering Religious Labor in Asian Communities.” Roundtable presider, organizer, and participant. With Paulina Kolata, Dana Mirsalis, Kati Fitzgerald, Natasha Heller, and Napakadol Kittisenee. AAR Annual Conference, November 2022, Denver, CO.
- “Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Integrating Theory Across the Curriculum.” Shaping Anti-Racist Scholarly and Pedagogical Practice through Developing Collaborative, Interdisciplinary, Cross-Institutional Resources.” With Kacie Wills. Modern Language Association, Presidential Panel, January 2022, Washington DC (remote).
- “Collect, Collaborate, and Connect: A Case Study of Campus and Community Engagement.” With Samantha Sauer, Abby Garret (student), and Stacey Bile (student). Conference on Illinois History, October 2021, Springfield, IL.
- “Roundtable: Aesthetics of Buddhist Belonging in/through Objects and Action.” With Paulina Kolata, Erica Bafelli, Jane Caple, Levi McLaughlin, Dominique Townsend, and Frederick Shröer. UK Association for Buddhist Studies Annual Conference, July 2021, Edinburgh, Scotland (remote).
- “Gods, Monsters, and Reserved Intimacy in East Asian Pedagogy,” Teaching East Asia in the Humanities, April 2021, Berkeley, CA (remote).
- “Consuming Buddhism: Women and Transnational Buddhist (Dis)Connections through Food and Body.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2019, San Diego, CA.
- “Bosses, Boyfriends, and Buddhism: Kikuchi Yūken-sensei and Young Japanese Women’s Search for Meaning,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference, March 2018, Washington D.C.
- “Buddhist Ritual against Vulnerability: Japanese Women’s Use of Pure Land Ritual to Create the Emotional Basis of Social Bonds,” AAR Annual Conference, November 2017, Boston, MA.
- “Supplementing the *Uchi* through Buddhism: Japanese Women’s New Visions of Stranger and Neighbor,” AAR Annual Conference, November 2017, Boston, MA.
- “Meditation is Zen: The Conflict Concerning Meditation in Worldwide Jōdo Shinshū,” Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2015, St. Paul, MN.
- “Code as Self: An Analysis of the Global English of Asian Code,” Craft, Critique, Culture Conference, April 2015, Iowa City, IA.
- “Divining for Love in Japan: Use of ‘Kitsune Tarot’ for Building Love, Business, Education, and Relationships,” Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2014, St. Paul, MN.

- “Pure Land and Politics: An Examination of the Religious Underpinnings of Burakumin Political Action in the Postwar Period,” James F. Jakobsen Graduate Conference, April 2014, Iowa City, IA.
- “Speaking of the Pure Land: A Comparison of the Commentaries on the *Guan Wuliangshao-jing* of Huiyuan and Shandao,” James F. Jakobsen Graduate Conference, April 2013, Iowa City, IA.
- “Taking the Mystery Out of Aging: Eight Decades of Older Adult Detectives,” with Connie Van Fleet, National Popular Culture Association, April 2011, San Antonio, TX.

### **Conferences/Symposia Organized**

- Co-Founder and Organizer, Gendering Labor in Contemporary Asian Religions, Lund, Sweden, June 2022.
- Graduate Student Co-Chair, Upper Midwest Regional AAR Conference, April 2017, St. Paul, MN.
- Chair, Graduate Student Council Student Roundtable Series, American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, November 2016, San Antonio, TX.
- Graduate Student Co-Chair, Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2016, St. Paul, MN.
- Chair, Careers Outside the Academy, University of Iowa, April 2014, Iowa City, IA.
- Chair, Three Minute Thesis at the University of Iowa, April 2014, Iowa City, IA.
- Graduate Student Chair, Religion, Literature, and the Arts Conference, September 2013, Iowa City, IA.
- Organizer, Oklahoma Library Association Conference, March 2012, Norman, OK.

### **Presider/Chair**

- “Secular Asia and Religious Pilgrimage.” ASIANetwork Annual Conference, March 2025, San Antonio, TX.
- “New Approaches to the Politics of Memory in Northeast Asia.” Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, March 2025, Columbus, OH.
- “Violent Bodies, Beautiful Bodies, Othered Bodies.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2024, San Diego, CA.
- “Exploring Buddhist Realities.” Midwest AAR Regional Conference, February 2024, Springfield MO.
- “Strengthening Asian Studies: Meaning Making in Professional Programs and Asian Experiences.” ASIANetwork Annual Conference, April 2023, Columbus OH.
- “Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in South Asia.” Midwest AAR Regional Conference, March 2023, Springfield, MO.
- “Reading into Hindu and Buddhist Worlds.” Midwest AAR Regional Conference, March 2023, Springfield, MO.
- “Service and Surveillance in Asian Religions.” Midwest AAR Regional Conference, March 2022, Springfield, MO (remote).
- “From School to the Streets: Graduate Student Activism,” with Joshua Reno, Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2017, St. Paul, MN.
- “World Religions: Asian Religions.” Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2016, St. Paul, MN.

“Dealing with The Dossier: A Proactive Approach to Documenting Your Teaching” by Raj Balkaran. American Academy of Religion Conference, November 2015, Atlanta, GA.

**-----Invited Talks-----**

“Supporting Asian Studies in Today’s Academic Climate (for not much money).” Globalizing the Curriculum: Enhancing East Asian Studies in Appalachian Colleges. May 2025, Wheeling, WV.

“Feeling Buddhism: Crafting Community Among Women in Japan.” Department of Religious Studies and Center for Asian and Pacific Studies Colloquium, September 2023, University of Iowa.

**-----Teaching Experience-----**

**Illinois College**

Buying Gods (crosslisted with Economics)  
Cults and the End of the World  
First Year Seminar: Living and Dying in East Asia  
Gods, Monsters, and Sex in East Asia  
Healing and Healthcare  
History and Political Science Senior Capstone (two course sequence)  
Japanese History and Religion  
Killing in the Name of God(s)  
Space, Place, and Religion  
Views of Japan (study-abroad course to Japan)  
World Religions

**Oberlin College**

Chinese Thought and Religion  
First Year Seminar: Life, Death, and Religion in East Asia  
Gender and Sexuality in East Asian Religions  
Japanese Thought and Religion  
Seminar: Globalization and East Asian Religions

**University of Iowa**

**Instructor**

Religion and Social Life: Cults, New Religious Movements, and the End of the World

**Teaching Assistant**

Bible and the Holocaust  
Introduction to Buddhism  
Religions in a Global Context  
Religion and Liberation  
Women and Islam in the Middle East

**Guest Lectureships**

“Buddhism, Women, and Food in Japan.” Japanese Culture and Society, Dr. Abhishek Nanavati. Illinois College, November 2024.

“Intimacy in Japan.” Modern Love Seminar. Dr. Jaclyn Tabor. Illinois College, October 2022, September 2024.  
“The Importance of Intercultural and Linguistic Training.” Global Science and Healthcare, Dr. Larry Zettler and Dr. Margaret Marek. Illinois College, February 2024.  
“Space, Place, and Religion.” Space, Place, and Identity Graduate Seminar. Dr. Cynthia Chou. University of Iowa, September 2023.  
“Introduction to Ethnography.” Transfer Seminar. Dr. Adam Porter. Illinois College, September 2021.

### **-----Professional Service-----**

#### **Journal Editor**

*Body and Religion*. Issue 7.2 – current.

#### **American Academy of Religion**

Co-Chair, Body and Religion Unit, 2021-present  
Steering Committee Member, Body and Religion Unit, 2020-2021  
Asian Religions Section Chair, Midwest Region, 2021-2024  
Student Director, Graduate Student Committee, Upper Midwest Region, 2015-2017  
Chair, Student Roundtable Series, 2016-2017  
Student Representative, Upper Midwest Region, 2015-2017

#### **National**

ASIANetwork Speakers Bureau Director, 2025-present  
Community Engaged Research Steering Committee, Robert H. N. Ho Foundation, American Council of Learned Societies, 2025  
Addressing Bias in Buddhist Studies, participant and representative  
Methodology in Buddhist Studies, participant  
Critical Language Scholarship Reviewer, American Councils for International Education, 2023-present  
MEXT Scholarship Guest Judge, Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago, 2025

#### **Illinois College**

Program Coordinator for Asian Studies, 2023-present  
Academic Director of the First Year Seminar Program, 2022-2024  
Common Reading Program Selection Committee, Chair 2022-2024  
Higher Learning Commission Reaccreditation Committee, 2024-2025  
Phi Beta Kappa Committee Member, 2019-present  
Secretary, 2025-present  
Gender and Women’s Studies Committee, 2020-2021, 2024-present  
Japanese Club Advisor, 2019-present  
Theta Alpha Kappa Religion Honor Society Coordinator, 2020-present  
Resource Allocation Committee, 2022-2024  
ASIANetwork Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow Search Chair, 2024  
Julian M. Sturtevant Campus Leadership and Service Award Selection Committee, 2024  
Bystander Intervention (Green Dot) Facilitator 2022-2024  
BluePrint General Education Revision Committee, 2022

Curriculum Review Committee, 2020-2022

Subcommittee: Revised Community and Civic Engagement, Reading Intensive, and Global Awareness, 2021

Division III (Social Sciences) Secretary, 2020-2021, and Chair, 2021-2022

Newman Student Civic Fellowship Committee, 2021

African American History and Studies Search Committee, 2021

Faculty Symposium Coordinator, Fall 2020

Luce LIASE Grant Curriculum Development Group Coordinator, 2019-2020

Accounting Search Committee Member, 2020

Individual Success Advisor, seven students, Spring 2020

### **University of Iowa**

Co-President, Religious Studies Graduate Student Organization, 2015-2016

Religious Studies Senator, Graduate Student Senate, 2012-2015

Chair, Graduate Student Success Committee, 2014-2015

Graduate Student Senate Representative, Graduate and Professional Student Allocation Committee, 2014-2015

Grant Reviewer, Executive Council of Graduate and Professional Students, 2013-2014

Graduate Representative, Undergraduate Studies Committee, 2014

Graduate Mentor, Academic Mentoring Committee, 2013-2014

Mentor Program Chair, Religion Graduate Student Organization, 2014

### **University of Oklahoma**

Secretary, Curriculum Committee, School of Library and Information Science, 2010-2012

President and Founder, Society of American Archivists at OU, 2011-2012

### **-----Professional Workshops Designed and Run-----**

“Landing a Tenure Track Job in the US.” Full day pre-conference workshop. AAS Annual Conference, March 2025, Columbus, OH.

“Integrating Racially Conscious Pedagogy Across Campus.” With Brittney Yancy and Kierstyn Worthem. Illinois College, Fall 2024.

“Getting a Tenure Track Job.” September 2023, University of Iowa.

“Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Integrating Theory across the Curriculum.” With Kacie Wills. Fall semester 2021, Illinois College

“Surviving and Even Enjoying Comprehensive Exams.” AAR Annual Conference, November 2019, San Diego, CA.

“Finishing the Dissertation On-Time and with Your Sanity Intact,” AAR Annual Conference, November 2018, Denver, CO.

“Student-Centered Learning: A Practical Guide,” AAR Annual Conference, November 2017, Boston, MA.

“Graduate Student Seminar: Online Presence and Identity.” With Joshua Reno, Upper Midwest AAR Regional Conference, April 2016, St. Paul, MN.



-----Curricular and Professional Development-----

**Getting Engaged in Public Scholarship**, AAR WebinAAR, 2025.

**Pedagogy Workshop**, Midwest Buddhist Studies Collective, 2025.

**Becoming a White Antiracist** (competitively selected year-long workshop), Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, 2023

**Fostering a Culture of Belonging**, Microcredential, Association of College and University Educators, 2023

**Inclusive Pedagogy Certificate Program**, AAR Committee on the Status of People with Disabilities in the Profession, 2022

**Race, Power, and Privilege eCourse**, SpeakOut, 2022

**College Green Dot Instructor Training** (bystander intervention training against sexual assault), Virtual Green Dot Institute, 2022

**Data Driven Decision Making** (utilizing data to drive equitable change on college campuses), SEA Change Institute, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2022

**What U.S. College Graduates Need to Understand about Religion**, American Academy of Religion, 2022

**Asian American and Asian Diaspora Reading Group**, AsiaNetwork, 2022

**Training the Trainer** (bystander intervention training against sexual assault), Bring in the Bystander, Prairie Center Against Sexual Violence, 2021

**Title III Faculty Development Workshops**, Illinois College, 2020-2021

**Engaging Blackness in Asian Studies**, Asia Network, 2021

**SpeakOut Summer DEI Institute for Faculty and Professional Staff**, SpeakOut, 2021

-----Professional Experience-----

**Intern**, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK, Summers of 2011 and 2012

**Intern**, Indian Land Tenure Foundation, Little Canada, MN, Summer 2010

-----Language-----

Advanced Proficiency: Japanese

-----Professional Affiliations-----

American Academy of Religion

ASIANetwork

Association for Asian Studies

International Association for the History of Religions

International Association of Buddhist Studies

Midwest Buddhist Studies Collective

National Women's Studies Association

Society for the Study of Affect

Society for the Study of Japanese Religions