

What College is Meant to Be

# Request for Proposals (RFP): *Virtues and Vices of Spiritual Yearning*

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INVITING **PHILOSOPHICAL** AND **EMPIRICAL** RESEARCH ON SPIRITUAL YEARNING  
FUNDING PROJECTS UP TO \$100,000 FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECTS  
AND UP TO \$250,000 FOR EMPIRICAL PROJECTS.

**TWO YEAR RESEARCH GRANTS**

STARTING: OCTOBER 1, 2026

CONCLUDING: SEPTEMBER 30, 2028

*Join a rigorous research community of **ten teams** working in alignment across disciplines*



**Hope** COLLEGE



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

# Introduction and Project Overview

It seems like there is a tragedy at the heart of the human experience. On the one hand, spiritual fulfillment seems like an integral part of human flourishing—being spiritually unfulfilled frequently correlates with disorders like anxiety and depression. On the other, however, we might worry that spiritual fulfillment dampens one’s spiritual curiosity and will correlate with a host of intellectual vices like closed-mindedness, intellectual arrogance, and more. We might worry that human flourishing, then, requires us to walk a line where we yearn for the spiritual in our lives, but are doomed to never be (virtuously) fulfilled.

At the same time, spiritual longing has clear moral stakes. Being spiritually fulfilled might inspire virtues such as courage, justice, temperance, and love, even as distorted forms of fulfillment may harden into moral vices that are expressed through tribalism or fanaticism. Indeed, we might wonder if moral virtues like humility and love are precursors to spiritual yearning.

The aim of this Call for Proposals is to explore the empirical and theoretical contours of the virtues and vices of spiritual yearning by administering a funding initiative. Key questions include: What does virtuous spiritual yearning look like? Does spiritual satisfaction lead to intellectual vice (lack of curiosity, etc.) while also promoting moral virtue (generosity, etc.)? Does spiritual unfulfillment lead to poor mental health outcomes? How does spiritual yearning relate to concepts like existential meaning or epistemic angst? What is the epistemic value of spiritual yearning? And does yearning open people up to intellectual vulnerabilities (e.g. gullibility to charismatic leaders or misinformation in the pursuit of truth)?

The **Virtues and Vices of Spiritual Yearning** initiative, funded by Hillsdale College, invites interdisciplinary research proposals that explore the dual aspects of spiritual yearning. As traditional religious participation wanes and alternative spiritual frameworks emerge, this initiative seeks to address how spiritual longing can foster intellectual virtues—such as openness, humility, and curiosity—and avoid intellectual vices, including dogmatism, arrogance, and incuriosity. By bridging philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and related disciplines, this initiative aims to contribute to human flourishing and foster innovative research.

The project will support both theoretical and empirical research, bringing together diverse scholars to investigate critical questions about spirituality’s role in identity, purpose, and meaning.

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## Call Objectives

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This call for proposals seeks to:

1. Develop a theoretical framework for understanding spiritual yearning and its associated virtues and vices.
2. Integrate philosophical and empirical approaches to refine our understanding of spiritual dissatisfaction, fulfillment, and their psychological and social implications.
3. Foster collaboration among scholars across disciplines to create a vibrant research community.
4. Contribute to public discourse and practical applications in spiritual development, mental health, and community programming.

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## RFP Research Themes & Questions

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Proposals should address one or more of the following themes:

**1. Theoretical Exploration:**

- Definitional clarity of spiritual yearning: What differentiates it from other forms of longing?
- Applications of virtue ethics or virtue epistemology: How can spiritual yearning strike a balance between fostering growth and avoiding stagnation?
- Historical perspectives: Insights from philosophy, theology, or religious history on spiritual yearning and human flourishing.

**2. Empirical Investigation:**

- Psychological mechanisms linking spiritual yearning to mental health, well-being, and relational dynamics.
- The role of spiritual yearning in fostering or inhibiting intellectual virtues.
- Examining the predictors and consequences of spiritual yearning, especially over time.

**\*\*All empirical projects are strongly recommended to include the newly developed measure of spiritual yearning (Wilt et al., 2025) to provide consistency and comparisons across projects.**

**3. Special Populations:**

- Investigations into “religious dones” and “nones”: How do those unaffiliated with formal religions navigate spiritual longing?
- Cross-cultural perspectives: How do diverse traditions and contexts shape the experience of spiritual yearning?

## Grant Information

We invite applications for eight teams to join the two internal teams, one philosophically and theoretically inclined, and one empirically focused. The project is interdisciplinary in all aspects from internal teams to invited collaborators, as we create a community of scholars to make progress on the virtues and vices of spiritual yearning.

**Project Duration:** sub-grant projects will run for approximately two years.

- Starting: October 1, 2026
- Concluding: September 30, 2028

**Project Types:**

- Philosophy/Theoretical: Four projects of up to \$100,000 each
- Psychology/Empirical: Four empirical sub-grants of up to \$250,000 each

\*We are eager to fund a *diverse, cross-tradition* set of projects. We particularly welcome proposals that:

- examine spiritual yearning in non-Western or minority religious contexts;
- bring multiple traditions into direct conversation (e.g., Buddhist-Christian, Islamic-secular, Indigenous-Catholic); or are led by—or formed in equitable partnership with—scholars and communities in the Global South.

## Grant Eligibility

Scholars with expertise in philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and related fields. Early career scholars are encouraged to apply.

The PI must have a Ph.D. or an appropriate terminal degree (e.g., Psy.D., DMin, D.Phil, JD, MD) and be affiliated with either (1) an accredited college or university, or (2) a recognized institution with academic interests (such as a research center or institute) prior to the beginning of the supported research. A letter of institutional support is required to accompany full proposals.

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## Application Process

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### Letters of Intent (LOI): Due February 1, 2026

Word Count: 1,000-1,500 words (excluding references)

A **letter of intent** that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, anticipated outputs/deliverables (e.g., journal articles, media interviews), and identification of which RFP question(s) (listed above) the project addresses, and a summary of the methodology and specific hypotheses in testable form. The letter should be between 1,000-1,500 words (references do not count toward this total).

**The amount of funding requested** (one sentence of rationale is fine for this). No budget narrative or justification is needed at this stage. The amount can be revised at the full proposal stage but should not normally exceed a 20% increase over that specified in the LOI.

A complete **curriculum vitae** for the project leader and all other team members (if applicable).

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### Full Proposals by Invitation Only: Due July 1, 2026

Selected applicants will be notified by March 15, 2026.

Those applicants who are invited to submit full proposals must include:

A **cover letter** with the title, amount requested, duration of the project, and team members (if applicable).

A **description of the work** to be carried out, not to exceed 6,000 words (references do not count toward this total). The description should include the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions the project addresses, a summary of the methodology and hypotheses (if the project involves new empirical research), and a statement describing how the proposed project could have broader impact. Additionally, a section outlining a list of related research questions that cannot be fully answered without additional disciplinary work will be included to prime and promote the multidisciplinary nature of the program.

An **open science statement (if applicable)** (not to exceed one page), in which applicants commit in advance to best practices in open science, including (1) preregistration of all hypotheses and of analytic code for all

confirmatory work; (2) sharing of all research materials; and (3) sharing of all research data. Proposals should meet the standards required to be awarded relevant badges as described here. If applicants have legal or ethical concerns about sharing their research data, they must provide an explanation in place of this statement.

A **project abstract** of up to 500 words that explains the project. It would be published on the project website (and possibly in Templeton materials) and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.

A **project timeline**

A **detailed budget** with accompanying narrative explaining line items. Overhead is limited to 10%, and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases.

**Approval** of the department chair and the institution's signing officials.

## Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on the following dimensions:

- **Depth and integration:** Proposed projects must bring the tools and resources of philosophy, psychology, and/or cognitive science to bear on seminal themes relevant to virtues and vices of spiritual yearning.
- **Conceptual grounding:**
- **Proposed empirical projects** should test hypotheses that clearly emerge from current literatures and that address fundamental questions.
- **Proposed non-empirical projects** must consolidate and develop existing theory and findings in such a way as to lead to new understanding of fundamental issues or potentially open new avenues for empirical work.
- **Scientific merit:** Proposed empirical projects must have realistic and rigorously developed methods, strong research design, and appropriate plans for analysis.
- **Capacity for success:** Projects will be evaluated to determine whether the project team has the experience, the proposed work is feasible, the budget is adequate and reasonable, and facilities required are available to make this project a success.

Full Proposal selection criteria will include:

1. Relevance of the project theme
2. Coherence of the intended research plan
3. Originality
4. Grounding in the literature
5. Innovation
6. Significance, especially within clinical, educational, and societal contexts
7. Feasibility of the project in the specified timeframe
8. Prior research accomplishments of the project leader and other team members
9. Quality of the budget justification
10. Balance and complementarity among the various projects to be funded

## Anticipated Timeline

December 2025:	Announcement of RFP
February 1, 2026:	LOI submission deadline
March 15, 2026:	Invitations for full proposals
July 1, 2026:	Full proposal submission deadline
August 1, 2026:	Final decisions announced
September 2026:	Launch conference
October 1, 2026:	Sub-grant projects begin
September 2028:	Closing conference
September 30, 2028:	Sub-grant projects conclude



## Convening and Collaboration

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A central component of the Virtues and Vices of Spiritual Yearning initiative is fostering collaboration and dialogue among sub-grantees and the broader research community. To this end, the project will convene two major gatherings:

1. **Launch Conference:** Tentatively scheduled for September 2026, this in-person conference will introduce sub-grantees to one another and to the broader project goals. Participants will present their proposed research, receive constructive feedback, and engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. Travel, accommodations, and meals will be covered for all participants.
2. **Capstone Conference:** Tentatively scheduled for September 2028 at or near a location of profound spiritual significance, this conference will serve as a culminating event for the project. Sub-grantees will present their final findings to a broader audience, including scholars, students, and public intellectuals. The event will focus on reflecting on key insights, fostering future collaborations, and celebrating the achievements of the initiative. Travel, accommodations, and meals will be covered for participants.

In addition to these conferences, quarterly virtual workshops will be organized throughout the grant period. These workshops will create opportunities for grantees to share updates, brainstorm solutions to challenges, and receive feedback on their ongoing research. The project's website will also host executive summaries of all sub-grantee projects to facilitate transparency and potential collaborations.

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## Expectations for Grantees

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1. Full participation in project activities, including quarterly workshops and conferences.
2. Adherence to open science principles (for empirical projects).
3. Minimum outputs expected: two papers and two presentations per project.
4. Contribution to interdisciplinary dialogue and community building.
5. Timely submission of deliverables, including interim and final reports.

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## Submission and Contact Information

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- Submit LOIs via: [VVSYProject@gmail.com](mailto:VVSYProject@gmail.com)
- For questions, contact: [VVSYProject@gmail.com](mailto:VVSYProject@gmail.com)

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