

**INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY**

Einstein Drive  
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2010-2011**

**INSTRUCTIONS for REFEREES**

\_\_\_\_\_ has selected you as a reference for his/her application to be a Member in the School of Social Science during the 2008-09 academic year. We would appreciate your evaluation of the candidate's proposed research, and his or her ability to carry it out.

Please email your reference to [sssrecs@ias.edu](mailto:sssrecs@ias.edu), and put "Reference for CANDIDATE'S NAME" in the subject line. Also, be sure to include your own name, title and institution within the text of the reference letter.

**Reference emails must be received by November 1, 2009.**

\*\*\*\*\*

***Background***

Each year, the School of Social Science invites some fifteen to twenty scholars from a large applicant pool. The group is interdisciplinary and international, and scholars are expected to pursue their own research. A completed doctorate or equivalent is required of all applicants.

The following thematic focus for 2010-11 is neither an exclusive nor excluding theme; it is expected that only one-third of the accepted scholars will pursue work relating to this theme. We describe it below in case it is helpful to you in composing your reference letter.

***Secularism***

In the light of what, for many, is being defined as a world-wide resurgence of religiosity both as a spiritual and political force, attention has been drawn to the question of the secular. For those who take secularism to be one of the foundational principles of modernity, the appearance of religious-based movements constitutes a critical challenge to the established ways of life associated with liberalism and democracy. Those skeptical of the universalist claims of liberalism argue that sharp oppositions between the secular and the religious, modernity and traditionalism, obscure historical and political processes of state-building, colonial domination, and post-colonial negotiation. Although the question of secularism is a broad one, recent discussions have focused on Islam, on its compatibility with the practice of state religious neutrality; on the assimilability of Muslim minorities in the nominally secular nations of Western Europe; on the relationship between democratic elections and the coming to power of Islamic religious parties in North Africa and the Middle East.

We don't intend to resolve the disputes between universalists and particularists or to offer a conclusive answer to the many questions posed about Islam. Rather we want to study with those who take different positions on these questions to see what their various approaches reveal. We approach the theme with the following questions: what has been the history of secularization in different places in the world? What are the forms secularism has taken? How has secularism been defined and by whom? Is religion the opposite of secularism? Are there characteristics that define ours as a "secular age?" Can we say that there are secular subjects whose very constitution differs from those who are non-secular? Is secularism synonymous with liberal values of equality and emancipation? Does secularism promote economic development while religion discourages it? What about gender equality? Can we detect a universal principle of secularism amidst the many particular instances of it?

Should you wish more information about the Institute for Advanced Study, please visit our website at [www.ias.edu](http://www.ias.edu).