

**Sarah Islam \*10 \*22**  
Minneapolis, MN

*Recent Graduate School Alumni Trustee Candidate*

Currently a postdoctoral fellow with the Co-Produced Religions Project at the Institute for Advanced Study, Sarah Islam grew up in Texas as a first generation college student. Through her undergraduate scholarship at the University of Texas-Dallas, she interned at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. and studied at the American University in Cairo. These experiences helped her discover her true passion: pursuing impact-driven international legal and public policy work that enhances the well-being of disadvantaged groups.

After college, she spent several years in Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE studying Arabic and pursuing archival research in Islamic legal history. As a Boren and Fulbright Fellow, Islam conducted two research projects examining the inner workings of religious pluralism and family law in Egyptian courts, and how such systems impact women in Muslim and in minority Jewish and Christian communities in Egypt.

She then came to Princeton, where she obtained her M.A. in Near Eastern Studies in 2010 with a focus on contemporary Islamic legal practice, gender, and social movements. After receiving an Arthur Liman Public Interest Law Fellowship administered by Yale Law School, Islam worked for a public interest law NGO in Washington D.C., conducting research on Islamic family and criminal law, as well as issues on free speech and international religious freedom. During the Obama administration she served on advisory councils at the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Justice. She continues to work with the U.S. Commission on International

Religious Freedom on international human rights and public law issues. Among other projects, she has been invited to present at the United Nations on issues related to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). She was also invited to contribute to a U.S. Supreme Court case amicus brief arguing for a position of rehabilitative justice that minors not be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for non-homicide offenses.

After working in Washington D.C., Islam returned to Princeton for doctoral studies. In connection with her work in international criminal law, her dissertation, which won the Bayard and Cleveland Dodge Memorial Prize for Best Dissertation in Near Eastern Studies in 2023, examines the evolution of blasphemy as a legal category among capital crimes in Islamic legal history. Her work has been published by Sage, Brill, and Oxford University Press and supported by the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation, Social Science Research Council, and Fulbright Program. She is currently being funded through the National Endowment for Humanities to turn her dissertation into a book.

For over half a decade while pursuing her doctorate, Islam was appointed to several University committees focused on maintaining, evaluating, and enhancing University programming. These included the Priorities Committee, the search committee for the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Princeton Task Force on the Future of the Graduate School. Islam notes, “Being a historian is a solitary enterprise. As rewarding as the experience is in terms of research, I missed working in a team setting. When I first joined the Strategic Planning Committee for the Future of the Graduate School as a member of the Academics working group, I was of course happy to

contribute to improving our campus offerings and contributing my prior professional experiences to this endeavor. What I loved about the experience though, was the collegial synergy of our group members in creating a positive impact for our university community.”

In addition to her research, Islam sits on the board of directors of Karamah, a public law NGO that provides advocacy training in criminal law to female lawyers in the Global South, and volunteers as a “Big Sister” with a nonprofit to mentor at-risk youth.