The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts seeks to strengthen the quality and shape the character of church-related institutions of higher learning. Three closely related initiatives have been designed to accomplish this mission: a National Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities that sponsors a wide variety of activities and publications that explore the Christian character of the academic vocation; a Graduate Fellowship Program that supports graduate students who are exploring vocations in church-related higher education, and the two-year, residential Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship. As of 2018-2019 the Program has awarded seventy-nine two-year postdoctoral fellowships to teacher-scholars who seek to renew and enrich their intellectual and spiritual lives while preparing for teaching and leadership roles at institutions of church-related higher education. Fellows teach in the honors college (Christ College) and departments of the College of Arts and Sciences at Valparaiso University. In addition, Fellows conduct scholarship or creative work, participate in a two-year colloquium, and interact with representatives from a national network of 101 church-related colleges and universities.

Christine Hedlin earned her BA in English and Spanish from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, and her PhD in English from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in August 2018. At the University of Illinois she held six competitive fellowships, including a two-year Network for Neuro-Cultures fellowship, an interdisciplinary Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities fellowship, and a university-wide Dissertation Completion fellowship.

Hedlin’s primary field is U.S. literature of the long nineteenth century, with specific interests in women’s religious fiction, literary-religious histories, African American religion, theories of secularity, and the novel form. She also teaches and researches at the intersection of literature, religion, and mind-science, a juncture that informs an article she has published in the Journal of American Studies, “‘Was There Not Reason to Doubt?’: Wieland and Its Secular Age.”

Hedlin is currently revising her dissertation, “Novel Faiths: Nonsecular Fiction in the Late Nineteenth-Century U.S.,” into a book manuscript that considers how American Protestants used popular religious novels to catalyze changes in their faiths. In the project, she argues that the novel genre was uniquely suited to guide Protestant readers through moments of mid- to late-century theological flux. That was because its key formal features— its dealings in plots and protagonists and layering of multiple forms and points-of-view— allowed it to represent individuals’ experiences of multiple possible realities, both worldly and transcendent. Hedlin suggests that, using characters’ patterns of belief as models, religious novels taught readers how to move between faith and empiricism, straddling knowledges and hybridizing worldviews that might otherwise seem at odds. For these characteristics, the religious novel had a key role in helping liberal Protestant traditions evolve across the latter half of the nineteenth century. Liberal Protestants, including often women and racial minorities, used the novel as a key testing ground for new beliefs, helping them respond creatively or resiliently to seismic events like the rise of Darwinian evolution, the death toll of the Civil War, and the failures of Reconstruction.

Hedlin’s commitments as a teacher center, too, on the value of diverse knowledges and experiences. Students in her composition and literature courses learn to second-guess their first impressions; they reread texts, rework arguments, and recalibrate past beliefs. To encourage this flexible thinking, Hedlin designs lessons with variety and student collaboration in mind: her students draw mindmaps on chalkboards, type arguments into shared Google docs projected on overhead screens, and post homework entries to online discussion boards. At the UIUC Hedlin was named to the “List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent by Their Students” every term she taught and was appointed as a mentor for other instructors. At Valparaiso she looks forward to teaching in the interdisciplinary Christ College and the English department.