



Department of  
**Comparative Religion**

**Cynthia Visscher**

MA '07, Ph.D. '12

Faculty Specialist II and Graduate Advisor,  
Department of Comparative Religion,  
College of Arts and Sciences,  
Western Michigan University

**Dr. Cynthia Visscher** spent the first part of her career in social service and health care organizations where she developed an interest in person-centered care, cultural understanding and interfaith relations. Visscher took what she calls a mid-career gift to herself and completed her Master of Arts in Comparative Religion in 2007. Her masters thesis focused on culturally competent healthcare and human services and formed the foundation for the Spirituality, Culture and Health program and much of her teaching and field training work today.

The next step was the WMU doctoral program in Sociology. While writing her dissertation, she worked with Dr. Steve Covell, her thesis advisor in Comparative Religion, to develop an online graduate certificate in Spirituality, Culture and Health. The certificate became the first of its kind in the nation. She then spearheaded the drive to expand the certificate to a full-fledged M.A. program.

Her dedication to the program, her students and the department has led to an outstanding program where students can take their transformative WMU experience back to those they serve in health, social services and community-building professions.



Department of  
**Economics**

**Isabel Ruiz**

Ph.D. '06

Associate Professor and Fellow in Economics,  
Blavatnik School of Government and Harris  
Manchester College, University of Oxford

**Dr. Isabel Ruiz** is an Associate Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford. She is a Fellow in Economics at Harris Manchester College where she is also a Tutorial Fellow, and an Adjunct Faculty member at the Blavatnik School of Government. She is Associate Editor for the Oxford Review of Economic Policy (OXREP) and the co-convenor of the Economics of Forced Migration Project (Econforced). Prior to her current position, Ruiz was Associate Professor of Political Economy and Director of Studies in Economics in Continuing Education at the University of Oxford and Assistant Professor in Economics at Sam Houston State University.

Ruiz's research interests are broadly in labor, development and political economy. Her most recent work draws from these three areas and focuses particularly on the economics of migration—with an emphasis on forced migration. Ruiz is co-convenor of the Economics of Forced Migration project, Econforced, a research initiative which provides quantitative evidence on the impacts of displacement on host communities, the displaced and the communities of origin. She is currently working on a research project using conjoint survey experiments to increase understanding of the factors that affect individual attitudes and policy preferences towards migration in the context of south-south migration and in the UK.

Ruiz is a Fellow at the International Migration Institute (IMI) at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, and a Global Labor Organization (GLO) Fellow. She is also an affiliate (and part of the management board) of the Latin American Centre at Oxford.