NELC faculty are engaged in a wide variety of individual research endeavors with emphases including post-colonial theory, intercultural exchange, literature as performance, gender theory, literary dynamics in exilic or diaspora communities, children’s literatures, linguistics, legal theory, and comparative religion. Departmental research on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literatures and cultures is characterized by the study of these, not as isolated entities, but rather, as integral to wider Near Eastern cultural developments.

Faculty in NELC have been leaders in numerous national and international team research projects including:

- the Ottoman Text Archive Project, an international effort to make a vast collection of documents crucial to understanding the history and cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire accessible in a central web-based text archive;
- federally-funded grants for innovative Arabic distance learning programs;
- national grant initiatives to develop more effective and advanced pedagogies for proficiency in Arabic and Persian;
- organizing and hosting international conferences as well as a Western Jewish Studies Association conference; and
- a $1 million, three-year U.S. Department of State grant for developing educational partnerships with institutes of higher learning in Uzbekistan.