



RELIGIOUS STUDIES
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June 12, 2019

Re: Religious Studies Newsletter, 2018-19

Whew! After a rough fall quarter in the wake of the Camp Fire, the Religious Studies Department is pleased to join others in Sproul Hall in recalling a year of extraordinary growth and collegiality. Aside from graduate courses taught and those devoted to independent study with instructor supervision, the department offered a total of forty-three lower and upper-division courses covering an unprecedented spectrum of topics. Instructors included thirteen faculty members and two graduate students. Steadfast!

Congratulations to the Class of 2019! At our end-of-year party on May 29, the department was able to acknowledge and recognize the outstanding work of Religious Studies majors, minors and affiliates. Appreciation was given first to peer-advisors Cynthia Alvarado and Dinar Kurji, both of whom were staunch peer-advisors throughout the year. For her multi-year service at weekly RST Tea, Dinar was given a glowing orange teapot, one that, we hope, will slake the desires of many a soul in years to come. A special shout-out was also given to Caroline Tyler Smith for an independent research project with Dr. O'Keefe in which she distributed and evaluated over one-thousand questionnaires in order to assess the viability of a minor in medical humanities for STEM students at UC Davis in years to come. Our awards ceremony began by acknowledging the winner and two finalists in the Writing Prize for Best Undergraduate Paper: Megan West (winner), Aeric Chancellor (finalist) and Karyn Utsumi (finalist.) Impressive work! The department will post winners' papers on its website in the near future. Citations for Outstanding Performance went to Francesca De Las Alas, Gurleen Bassi, Ramsey Huffor, Saba Mahdavi, Geovanna Medel, and Adnan Perwez. Additionally, three students received certificates for completing their Honors Theses: Francesca De Las Alas, Adnan Perwez and Geovanna Medel. Every year, the department gives a Citation for overall service to the department and to its members – faculty, students and staff. This year's prize went to Cynthia Alvarado. Finally, the department joined the College of Letters and Sciences in recognizing Adnan Perwez for the Outstanding Senior Award. Since trying to produce a newsletter describing the accomplishments of so many champions is sheer folly, let what is written here stand on its own as our humble tribute.

Special thanks to our extraordinary staff! Without them, the department would be little more than a shady grove of intraspecies cogitation. Amy Lowrey, Lorenzo Zúñiga, Chris Meares, Heavenly Clegg, Sarah Davis, Mandy Bachman, Renee Ortez, Maria Ruby, Anthony Drown and Omar Mujaddedi: rock our world you do! We greatly appreciate your hard work, foresight and patience.

Our lecture series this year, including our Paul A. and Marie Castelfranco Talk Series and our "Notes from the Field" workshops, provided faculty, students and RST devotees alike with bounteous fare, in substance and in spirit. A sampling of the cornucopia goes as follows:



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Paul A. and Marie Castelfranco Talks:

- Dr. Tanya Luhrman (Stanford University, Anthropology Department), "Mind and Spirit: How the Way People Think About Thinking Shapes the Way They Experience Gods and Spirits" (November 1, 2018)
- Dr. Michelle LeWica (Concordia College, Religion Department), "This is [a Woman] Who Like to Eat!": Gender, Power, Religion and Disobedient Bodies" (April 4, 2019)
- Dr. Daisy Deomampo (Fordham University, Anthropology Department), "Transnational Reproduction: The Bioethics of Crossing Borders for Fertility Services" (April 18, 2019)

'Notes from the Field' Talks:

- Allison Coudert, "Jokes and the 18th-century European Unconscious" (October 18, 2018)
- Isa Blumi (Stockholm University, Institute for Turkish Studies), "Why Yemen's Ruin: How to Study Capitalism's Artifices of History" (November 13, 2018.)
- William Beeman (U. of Minnesota anthropology department), "Understanding the Zār: An African-Iranian Dance Healing Ritual" (December 4, 2018)
- Sarah Neace (GGSR Graduate Student), "'Rain of Rocks': Pentecostal Militancy, Afro-Brazilian Religion as Heresy, and Cosmic War" (March 8, 2019)
- Katie Harris (UCD History department), "Stolen Bones, Invented Saints: Historical Forgery in a Seventeenth-Century Case of Relic Identification" (March 19, 2019)
- Elizabeth Freedman (UCD English department), "Shakers Not Movers: Keeping in Time with Celibacy" (May 8, 2019)

Co-sponsored Religious Studies talks:

- Jamal Jones, "Notes on the Metaphysics of Classical Telugu" (GGSR talk, October 5, 2018)
- Amanda Lucia (UC Riverside Religious Studies Department), "'Reflecting on Reflections of Amma: The perils and profits of the celebrity guru'" (October 29, 2018)
- Özge Serin (Whitman College, Political Science Department), "Sovereignty and Turkish Hunger Strikes" (November 8, 2018)
- Shaman Hatley (University of MA, Boston, Asian Studies Program): "Before Haṭhayoga: Tantra, Immortality, and the Tale of Matsyendra" (April 18, 2019)

The department was also fortunate enough to be able to conduct a search for a new position in Jain Studies. This search was successful and has resulted in the hiring of Lynna Dhanani (Yale University). As part of the candidate review process each of the final applicants gave a lecture at Sproul Hall. For her presentation, Dr. Dhanani gave an address titled "Offerings in Verse from a Monk to a King: The Devotional Hymns of Hemacandra." Dr. Dhanani's academic interests include South Asian religions and intellectual history; Sanskrit and Prakrit language and literature; Indian devotional movements; Indian philosophy; and religion and ecology. We look forward to welcoming her in the fall quarter of 2020. Her partner, Ryan Brizendine, will be accompanying her to Davis and will teach several courses on Islam in the 2020-2021 year. A doctoral student at Yale's Islamic Studies program, he



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specializes in Islamic intellectual history and Quranic studies with a focus on Sufism and Islamic philosophy.

Over the past year, the department supervised faculty, teaching instructors, and graduate students through a host of professionalization activities and events. Among these was the drafting and formalization of a faculty mentoring program, creating a “Best Practices Guide for Teaching Assistants and Faculty” that has become a model for the College of Letters and Sciences, conducting peer-observations of Teaching Assistants, Acting Instructors, Lecturers and faculty members, and either organizing or supporting professionalization picnics and workshops for instructors and students in the Graduate Group for the Study of Religion. The department also continued to work closely with the Interdisciplinary Program in the Study of Human Rights, a program that continues to grow and create positive change both on campus and beyond.

Looking ahead to next year, the department offers special congratulations to two faculty members who have won major fellowships. Professor Mroczek won a Frederick Burkhardt Residential Fellowship for the 2019-20 year and will be spending much of her time at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. A specialist in early Judaism and Christianity, Dr. Mroczek will be researching stories about lost holy books and how those stories are themselves religious. Professor O’Keefe won a New Directions Fellowship from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In addition to working on a second book project on biomedical ethics and “technologies of life,” Dr. O’Keefe will spend part of her year expanding her knowledge of law and medicine through coursework and training at the law and medical schools at UC Davis. The department will miss both Eva and Meaghan next year but looks forward to their return in the fall of 2020.

On other fronts, Professor Miller will be taking his sabbatical next year in South Africa and is looking forward to returning to a continent that proved home to his final year of high school. Also, the department is looking forward to a visit by an external institutional review committee in 2019-2020, part of what all programs and departments undergo on a fairly regular basis at UC Davis. This event will involve all members of the department and will provide us with an important and exciting opportunity to reflect on what we have been up to and where we are headed. Stay tuned for more news in the fall.

To all, as you head into the long months of summer: Take care and prosper!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Flagg Miller".

Flagg Miller
Interim Chair
Professor of Religious Studies