Inside this Issue

Chair’s Letter........................................P. 2
Calendar of Events ...............................P. 4
Graduate Student Spotlight...............P. 5
Religious Studies Student Forum....P. 6
As a college student, I loved the day the course schedule posted. Seeing the list of new classes in my humanities department alongside interesting courses in other programs made my heart sing. With paper, pencil, and highlighters in hand, I drew a week’s calendar and plotted my options: required courses wedged between Honors seminars and everything else I was dying to take. It was a little bit of heaven.

As an undergrad, I was in a relatively small program in a large state university that seemed to offer up magic each semester. My major had few prerequisites. That’s university-speak for the fact that I had a lot of freedom as a student.

Our Department of Religious Studies reminds me of my undergrad program. Both have faculty who know their students’ names, both host interesting programs with free food (!!!), and both offer curious students a space to examine pressing questions about life, meaning, big ideas, and the future.

I could go on and on about our classes, our research, our internships, our Fellowships, our study abroad courses, our digital projects, our alumni board, and our Pizza Tuesdays. They are some of the best you’ll find—anywhere!

Instead, I’ll welcome you:

Whoever you are, and whatever questions bring you to the Department of Religious Studies, you are welcome. Make our department your home at Georgia State. In your time here, major in what matters, and then use your degree to make a difference.

Make our department your home at Georgia State.
Dr. Moultrie will present her work at the University of Missouri’s Black Studies conference in St. Louis (October 2017) and at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Boston (November 2017). She is on the faith planning team for the Let’s Talk about Sex conference in New Orleans (October 2017) and is on the Scholarly Advisory Group for the Rolling the Stone Away conference honoring LGBTQ religious leaders in St. Louis (October 2017).

Monique Moultrie
Associate Professor
mmoultrie@gsu.edu

Dr. Moultrie was promoted to Associate Dean of Faculty Development for the College of Arts and Sciences on July 1st. In addition, she published a blog, “Listening for Diversity: The Religious Sounds Maps Project and ATL Maps,” which was published on the Atlanta Studies site in September. She presented the Harold and Doris Durfee Lecture in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American University in Washington, D.C., last March. Dr. McClymond has a forthcoming article in a special issue of *Religions* titled “Comparison as Conversation and Craft.”

**Join our Listserv!**

For updates on talks, conferences, events, and other information, join our listserv. To subscribe, email Dr. Molly Bassett at mbassett@gsu.edu.

**DEPARTMENT NEWS**

**Brett Esaki**
Assistant Professor
Director of Graduate Studies
besaki@gsu.edu

On top of learning how to be a dad of his cute 3-month old, Dr. Esaki has been researching his next book-length project, tentatively titled *Asian American Radical Spirituality*. In this vein, he is excited to announce that he has concluded his online surveys on “flow” in Asian American hip hop and choices of spirituality by Asian American women in academia. The next steps are filling in more detail with in-depth interviews—coming soon. He also recently presented sociological research at Kennesaw University’s Zuckerman Museum of Art; it was for the grand opening of the exhibit “Sacred and Queer” which features art from traditional and new religious movements that explore the fluidity of gender and sexuality.

**Jon Herman**
Assistant Professor
Director of Undergraduate Studies
jherman2@gsu.edu

Dr. Herman organized and will be participating in the panel titled “Contemporary Perspectives on a ‘Perennial’ Figure: The Intellectual Legacy of the Late Huston Smith (1919-2016)” at the American American of Religion’s Annual Meeting in Boston, November 2017. In addition, he is in the process of completing an article on the Western transmission of Daoist millenarianism.

**Kathryn McClymond**
Professor
Associate Dean of Faculty Development
kmcclymond@gsu.edu

Dr. McClymond was promoted to Associate Dean of Faculty Development for the College of Arts and Sciences on July 1st. In addition, she published a blog, “Listening for Diversity: The Religious Sounds Maps Project and ATL Maps,” which was published on the Atlanta Studies site in September. She presented the Harold and Doris Durfee Lecture in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American University in Washington, D.C., last March. Dr. McClymond has a forthcoming article in a special issue of *Religions* titled “Comparison as Conversation and Craft.”

**Monique Moultrie**
Associate Professor
mmoultrie@gsu.edu

Dr. Moultrie will present her work at the University of Missouri’s Black Studies conference in St. Louis (October 2017) and at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Boston (November 2017). She is on the faith planning team for the Let’s Talk about Sex conference in New Orleans (October 2017) and is on the Scholarly Advisory Group for the Rolling the Stone Away conference honoring LGBTQ religious leaders in St. Louis (October 2017).

**Join our Listserv!**

For updates on talks, conferences, events, and other information, join our listserv. To subscribe, email Dr. Molly Bassett at mbassett@gsu.edu.

**FACULTY DIRECTORY**

**Abbas Barzegar**
Visiting Lecturer
abarzegar@gsu.edu
Specializations: Sunni-Shi’a Polemics, Political Islam

**Molly Bassett**
Associate Professor
Chair
mbassett@gsu.edu
Specializations: Mesoamerican Religions: Arts of the Americas; Ritual and the Body; Deities and Death; Creation and Cosmology

**David Bell**
Senior Lecturer
davidbell@gsu.edu
Specializations: Religion & Social Sciences; Psychology of Religions & Moral Identity; History of Religion & Science in American

**Brett Esaki**
Assistant Professor
Director of Graduate Studies
besaki@gsu.edu
Specializations: Religions of American Minorities, Art, Spirituality, Poststructuralism

**Jon Herman**
Associate Professor
Director of Undergraduate Studies
jherman2@gsu.edu
Specializations: Theory & Method, Chinese Religion, Comparative Mysticism

**Kathryn McClymond**
Professor,
Associate Dean of Faculty Development
kmcclymond@gsu.edu
Specializations: Ritual Studies, Moral Injury, Comparative Study of Religion, Hinduism, Judaism

**Monique Moultrie**
Associate Professor
mmoultrie@gsu.edu
Specializations: Religion & Race, Sexual Ethics, Women & Religion

**Tim Renick**
Professor,
Vice Provost & Vice President for Enrollment
trenick@gsu.edu
Specializations: Religion & Ethics, History of Christianity
# Calendar of Events

## September

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Labor Day Holiday  &lt;br&gt;University Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Pizza Tuesday - 12:20 PM  &lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Yasmeen Salaam  &lt;br&gt;Carver's Produce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## October

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pizza Tuesday - 12:20 PM  &lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: MA student, Jonathan Clayton  &lt;br&gt;“Coming Out of the (Broom)Closet: An Intro to Modern Paganism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>World Religions Carnival  &lt;br&gt;Co-sponsored by RSSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Spring 2018 Course Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pizza Tuesday - 12:20 PM  &lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Graduate Student Panel  &lt;br&gt;Jonathan Clayton  &lt;br&gt;Mallory Reed  &lt;br&gt;Stefani Sarabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pizza Tuesday - 12:20 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## November

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>AAR 2017 Annual Meeting  &lt;br&gt;Boston, MA  &lt;br&gt;www.aarweb.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break  &lt;br&gt;(University Closed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pizza Tuesday - 12:20 PM  &lt;br&gt;Guest speaker: Jason Lesandrini, GSU Alum  &lt;br&gt;Executive Director of Wellstar Medical &amp; Organizational Ethics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## December

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fall Semester Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>Final Exams Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fall 2017 Commencement  &lt;br&gt;Location: McCamish Pavilion at Georgia Tech  &lt;br&gt;For more info, go to commencement.gsu.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-31</td>
<td>Winter Break  &lt;br&gt;(University Closed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spring 2018 Semester begins Monday, January 8, 2018
Jonathan Clayton

My name is Jonathan D. Clayton, I’m originally from Memphis, TN, I’m a first year MA student in Religious Studies at Georgia State University, and come to GSU from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville with a BFA in 2D Studio Art (Photography Concentration) and Religious Studies with a minor in American Studies. I’m most interested in researching religion in the US South, modern Paganism, and especially the ways in which modern Paganism functions in the US South.

While I was finishing my BFA, Dr. Kathryn McClymond came to UTK to give a lecture for the Religious Studies department there. Due to inclement weather, the talk was cancelled, but I had the opportunity to meet with her one-on-one in a coffee shop just off campus. I talked to her about my interests and about the program here at GSU. Georgia State appealed to me because it is situated in Atlanta – the de facto capitol of the South. Living in Atlanta would give me an advantage when trying to establish relationships with many different types of Pagans given that they make up such a relatively small percentage of the population. Atlanta has all the diversity and conveniences of a large metropolitan city, while retaining so many elements that make it distinctly Southern. Dr. McClymond also mentioned the funding GSU had available for MA students, which is relatively unheard of in the humanities. This opportunity only increased my interest in the program.

GSU’s Religious Studies department and Atlanta’s Pagan population have already begun to prove just how right this choice was for me. I have access to Religious Studies scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds and I’ve been able to make contact with several local Pagan groups and organizations of various types, attend Pagan Pride Day as a part of my research, and talk to local practitioners. These types of experiences are invaluable, especially in such a wide variety of religious traditions, and will only further reinforce the foundations of my aspirations for the future.

After completing my Masters degree, I plan to pursue a PhD in Religious Studies, and these experiences will be incredibly valuable in continuing and deepening my understanding of Paganism in the South. Along with the formal education GSU provides and individualized support from faculty and staff, the combination of these experiences allowing me to see a more solid path ahead of me in my fields of interest that has seemed inaccessible before. I’m so glad I chose GSU and know this was the right choice to make.

Mallory Reed

My name is Mallory Reed, and I am from Milton, Pennsylvania. I completed my undergrad education at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I double majored in Biology and Middle Eastern Studies. I entered college as a Biology major, with the goal of going to medical school and becoming a doctor. In my second year of college, I took an introductory Arabic class to fulfill a graduation requirement. I loved the class and the language and decided to continue both with Arabic and with classes about the broader Middle East. I was drawn to classes in the departments of International Studies, History, and Religious Studies.

I discovered the Master's degree program at Georgia State University through a flier that was circulated to students in Religious Studies courses at F&M. I was initially attracted to the program because it offered an opportunity to obtain a broad education of religion in general. During my time as an undergraduate, I focused solely on Islam. While I was able to gain an in-depth and thorough understanding of Islam, my interest in the field of religion was strong enough that I wanted to continue in a Master's program. The program at GSU seemed perfect for me. I would be able to study all of the major world religions in a new city, with funding provided by the GSU Religious Studies Department.

My time at GSU has been even more rewarding than I initially thought. I came into the program with a strong interest in Islam. However, the expansive knowledge of the Religious Studies faculty and the many different courses offered spiked my interest in a field very different from my initial interest. Last spring, I took a course with Dr. Bassett entitled “Animals & Religion.” Throughout the course of that class, we looked at different religious traditions and how individuals within those traditions relate to the natural world. For many cultures, things have animacy that the Western perspective does not generally recognize. For example, in some indigenous cultures, the pelt of a jaguar is believed to endow the individual who wears it with the strength and speed of a jaguar. My interest was peaked by the idea of objects - like an animal pelt - having agency and being more than simply objects.

I am currently working on a thesis project with Dr. Bassett that is focused on the animacy and agency of things, specifically artificial intelligence. I am interested in technological advances and the idea that they have or will have agency and how that alters our understanding of the world around us.
The Religious Studies Student Forum (RSSF) is a student run organization that aims to be a bridge between the Religious Studies department and Georgia State’s students. RSSF fosters this connection through events that present scholarly perspectives on interesting topics related to religion. Additionally, RSSF is interested in creating fun and new events that will attract new students into thinking about and working with religion. Having a variety of voices helps us create diverse, interesting programming and events. If you would like to join or find out more about RSSF, contact us or find us on OrgSync, https://orgsyn.com/23830/chapter.

If you’re interested in filling the vacancy of Secretary, please email Nancy.

**AWARDS & RECOGNITION**

**Monique Barlow** successfully defended her thesis “I am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A History of Transgender Identity and What It Means For Progressive Christianity.” Dr. Monique Moultrie directed the thesis committee, and Dr. Brett Esaki and Dr. Louis Ruprecht served as committee members. She is currently enrolled in the Political Science PhD program at Georgia State.

**Cassandra Velasco** (MA ‘17) is the 2017 recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant award. This recognizes a graduate teaching assistant for providing excellent instruction to our undergraduates. Cassie is accepted the Part-time Instructor position here in the Department for the 2017-18 academic year. She is teaching Perspectives 2001 and Rels 2001 online.

**Joshua Hilton** is the 2017 recipient of the Alumni Undergraduate Scholarship for scholarly achievement and service to the Department.

**LaValla Wilson**, MA+NPM candidate, received a Student Innovation Fellowship to support her final project, the development of an app to assist homeless youth. LaValla’s project draws on her professional experience in higher education to reach one of the goals she set for herself in our program: helping homeless youth gain access to educational opportunities.

The Fellowship “allows students to develop expertise and share ideas around emerging technologies and instructional innovations, with particular attention to enhancing learning and research at Georgia State University through the innovative use of technology.”

**Brandon Render** (MA ‘17) is the 2017 recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Student Award for scholarly achievement and service to the Department.
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Lauren Cooper (MA ‘16) accepted the full-time position of Administrative Specialist, Administrative supporting both the Departments of Religious Studies and Philosophy at GSU.

Erika Dorland (MA ‘10) is a Business Development Executive for the company Brilliant Data. In June 2017, Erika was interviewed on a popular, international data science podcast called Super Data Science. In the interview, Erika discussed the strange overlap of religion and data science, stating many data science tools use religious terminology.

Scott Grubman (BA ‘05) is partner with the law firm of Chilivis Cochran Larkins & Bever, LLP in Atlanta.

Sahar Farooqui (MA ‘17) accepted a position as Senior Editor at the American Academy of Religion’s national office. She is working directly with the AAR Director of Meetings in order to produce the AAR’s annual conference program.

Calling all Alumni! We want to hear from you! Send your updates to Felicia Thomas at fthomas@gsu.edu

Congratulations to our Spring and Summer 2017 graduates!

Pictured from L to R: Sahar Farooqui, Jenny Nunn-Stanley, Brandon Render, Ryan Mixson, Sarah Fitoussi, Tami Kennedy.

Scott Grubman (BA ‘05) is partner with the law firm of Chilivis Cochran Larkins & Bever, LLP in Atlanta.

Sahar Farooqui (MA ‘17) accepted a position as Senior Editor at the American Academy of Religion’s national office. She is working directly with the AAR Director of Meetings in order to produce the AAR’s annual conference program.

Congratulations to our Spring and Summer 2017 graduates!

Pictured from L to R: Sahar Farooqui, Jenny Nunn-Stanley, Brandon Render, Ryan Mixson, Sarah Fitoussi, Tami Kennedy.
FINANCIAL GIFTS:

- Increase our undergraduate scholarship award amount
- Enhance public programming
- Make unique educational experiences possible, such as student research opportunities, the Religion and Public Life Fellow Program, etc.
- Support faculty research and public presentations of their scholarship