

# Religious Studies

Spring 2013

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES TO HOST KEY ATLANTA RELIGIOUS LEADERS AT THE RIALTO CENTER FOR THE ARTS



Religious Studies is proud to sponsor “Moving Atlanta to Higher Ground: How Religion Inspires Positive Change” at the Rialto Center for the Arts on Wednesday, February 6th at 5 p.m. The Department, in cooperation with the Community Foundation and the Higher Ground Group, will bring four long-time Atlanta faith leaders, the Rev. Joanna Adams, Imam Plemon El-Amin, the Rev. Joseph Roberts, and Rabbi Alvin Sugarman, to the Rialto stage for a moderated panel discussion on religion and key issues affecting metropolitan Atlanta. WXIA anchor Ted Hall will moderate this conversation. The event is free and open to the public, and audience members will be invited to present their own questions to the panel. For further information about this event contact Dr. McClymond at [kmcclymond@gsu.edu](mailto:kmcclymond@gsu.edu).

The founders of Higher Ground Group come from different religious traditions, but they share common experiences of working for several decades for change in Atlanta. Working together, Higher Ground’s leaders draw from their experience to draw attention to key issues affecting the greater Atlanta community. They speak regularly to these issues throughout the city and in the media, and they produce the Higher Ground Group blog (see [www.highergroundgroup.org](http://www.highergroundgroup.org)). The evening with these leaders is part of the Department’s year-long focus on religion and civic engagement, which provides private sessions for students and public events through our Religion and Public Life Program. For more information go to [www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion) and click on “Religion and Public Life Fellow.”

## UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY!

As part of the university’s centennial celebration, the Department Alumni Board is campaigning to establish the first undergraduate scholarship award for a Religious Studies major. Our Board members have already generously pledged \$14,000, so we only have \$11,000 to go! Our goal is to complete the campaign by the end of summer 2013.

Recent studies indicate that the single most important factor affecting a GSU student’s progress toward graduation is financial need. Religious Studies attracts strong students, and many of them juggle family, work, and their studies. A departmental scholarship will relieve some of the financial demands for a promising undergraduate major.

Contributions can be made as one-time or pledged gifts spread over a period of time. For further information contact Kathryn McClymond or Carla Lavender, Director of Development for the College of Arts & Sciences (404-413-5109 or [clavender@gsu.edu](mailto:clavender@gsu.edu)).

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# Welcome from the Chair



Friends,

As we look ahead to GSU's 2013 centennial celebration, I've been thinking about the Department of Religious Studies' unique contribution to the life and mission of the university. What keeps coming to mind are recent conversations with colleagues about our students. Lately we've found that more and more students struggle to engage material in a robust manner. They struggle to understand complex issues, to challenge other thinkers' arguments, and to construct new ideas. Our students sense that *what* they know is inadequate – our experience is that *how* they know is also inadequate. Our fundamental task as educators is to teach them how to think more deeply and to imagine more richly.

The field of religious studies is ideally suited to this challenge. Engaging diverse cultures tends to throw a monkey wrench into students' prior notions of reality. Students who open their minds to religious history, culture, anthropology, art, politics, and practice find themselves looking at the world with fresh eyes. They reflect on their own values and experience, and they begin to see that learning is about more than increasing their store of information; it involves imagining the world differently.

My personal goal for this centennial year is to articulate more effectively how Religious Studies builds strong imaginations. I invite you to join us. When you share your time, your financial resources, your internship opportunities, and your contacts in the Atlanta community with our students, you help Religious Studies build nimble imaginations and a lifetime of learning. Thank you for your support and Happy 2013!

*Kathryn McClymond*

*Professor & Chair, Department of Religious Studies*



*Sitting: Nadia Latif, Abbas Barzegar  
Standing (L to R): Isaac Weiner, Molly Bassett, Monique Moultrie,  
Jonathan Herman, Kathryn McClymond, David Bell, Tim Renick, Louis Ruprecht  
\*Not pictured: Wesley Barker*

## FACULTY

### Wesley Barker

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## Abbas Barzegar:

Dr. Barzegar was the featured guest on "Meet Your Muslim Neighbor," a show on Atlanta's WAIB, an interfaith broadcasting network. The first episode focused on the Sunni-Shiite conflict and the second on understanding Islamic political violence.



In addition, Dr. Barzegar and Dr. Latif have been awarded a grant from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Institute of International Education (IIE) through the USIP Public Education for Peacebuilding Support Initiative for peacebuilding and conflict resolution related events.

The USIP is an independent, non-partisan, national institution established and funded by Congress to increase the nation's capacity to manage international conflict. For more information, visit [www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)

## Wesley Barker:

At the AAR in November, Dr. Barker delivered a paper entitled "To Know the (M)other: Rethinking Maternity through Irigaray's Deconstruction of Sexual Difference." This paper is being revised for publication in an edited volume on theorizing maternity and theology. She also participated in a special topics forum entitled, "Imagined Solidarities: Common Cause or Conflicting Interests among Undergraduate Students and Their Faculties?"



## Molly Bassett:

This fall, Dr. Bassett joined AAR steering committees on Religion in Latin America and the Caribbean and on Stand-Alone MA Programs in Religion. In September, she lectured at Connecticut College – "The Skin(ny) on (and off) Aztec Gods," and in November, she co-facilitated an AAR Roundtable called "Teaching the Intangibles: Learning Outcomes in Religious Studies and Theological Studies Classrooms" with Rhodora Beaton (St. Katherine's). She's looking forward to completing finishing touches on her book manuscript in the spring term.



**Jonathan Herman:** Dr. Herman's foray into the world of popular media, *Taoism for Dummies*, is scheduled for June publication by Wiley Publication. His article "The Spiritual Illusion: Constructive

Steps Toward Rectification and Redescription" is forthcoming in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, the journal of the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR). His chapter on "Civil Discourse or Simple Discord? Competing Visions for Religion in the Public Schools" will appear in *Civility and Education in a World of Religious Diversity: Challenges of Robust Pluralism* (Routledge), and his article "The One Gave Birth to the Two: Revisiting Martin Buber's Encounters with Chinese Religion," was accepted for publication by the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. If

all goes according to plan, Dr. Herman will be leading a contingent of GSU undergrads on a Maymester program in China.

## Kathryn McClymond:

Dr. McClymond has been asked by The Teaching Company to produce a Great Courses series entitled "The Great Mythologies Collection." This 60-lecture series will introduce the classic stories of many world religious traditions. She was also recently elected to the Program Committee for the American Academy of Religion. In addition to setting program policies, this committee is responsible for designing and reviewing the overall program structure; establishing types, categories, and regulations governing program units; approving the formation and renewal of program units; and advising the Executive Director and the Director of Meetings on important programmatic aspects of the meeting.



## Monique Moultrie:

Dr. Moultrie will be giving a public lecture for the Philosophy and Religious Studies department at Spelman College on February 12, 2013. The lecture will focus on oral histories of several black LGBT women religious leaders with the intent of highlighting religious communities as a potential site for resistance movements. She is a respondent for the Black Cultures and the Study of Religion group during the regional AAR





meeting in March 2013. Finally, she will be presenting at an AAR Status of Women in the Profession retreat on Work-Life Balance in June 2013.



**Tim Renick:** Dr. Renick was appointed to the position of Vice Provost. As Vice Provost, he oversees the University's academic

programs, directs its enrollment offices and strategies, and spearheads campus-wide efforts to raise graduation rates. Dr. Renick recently presented on strategies to promote student success at national meetings in Chicago, Charleston and New Orleans. He serves as principal investigator on major grants from the National Science Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation. His article "Just and Unjust Peace" was published in the October issue of *The Christian Century*.

### Louis Ruprecht:

Dr. Ruprecht had a very busy semester this past fall. He published: "Policing the State: Democratic Responses to Police Power



Gone Awry, in Memory of Kathryn Johnston (1914-2006)," scheduled for February 2013 release and "Classics at the Dawn of the Museum Era: The Life and Times of Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849)." In addition, he has written the following articles: "Response to Carol Matusch;" "Muted Strains of Emersonian

Perfection: Reflections on Cornel West's Tragic Pragmatism."

At AAR, Dr. Ruprecht presented the following lectures: "Detachment and Re-attachment: Some Reflections on Religion, Spirituality and Art," "Mixing Men and Myths," "Pep-Talks in Dark Times." He also presented "Chicago Was Almost an Olympic City: Between Capitalism and Nationalism, or, Between Body and Religion."

He was also the panel organizer on the "Power, Politics, and the Sacred: A Consideration of Jeffrey Stout's Blessed are the Organized" with Molly Farneth, and "Imagined Solidarities: Common Cause or Conflicting Interests Among Undergraduate Students and Their Faculties," with Richard Carp.

**Isaac Weiner:** Dr. Weiner recently completed work on his book manuscript, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism*. Look for it out from NYU



Press sometime in 2013! He also presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago this past November. On a personal note, the Weiners were thrilled to welcome their second child, Ezra Gordon Weiner, who was born on November 23. Dr. Weiner looks forward to introducing Ezra to everyone in the department!

## ISAAC WEINER, RECIPIENT OF DEAN'S AWARD

Dr. Isaac Weiner was selected as a recipient of the Dean's Early Career Award in the College of Arts and Sciences. The Dean selects the recipients of these awards personally. His selection signals that a faculty member is producing instruction and scholarship of extremely high quality. The award recognizes outstanding faculty members who provide superb educational opportunities to GSU students and who generate exciting scholarship that enhances GSU's research profile. This recognition is a public acknowledgment of all the efforts that Dr. Weiner has made to the Department, the College, the University, and our profession.

As a Dean's Early Career Award recipient, Dr. Weiner will be introduced to College Board members, alumni, and significant donors at the Dean's Early Career Award celebration in February, 2013.

Congratulations, Dr. Weiner!



January 2013 kicked off Georgia State's centennial celebration. The university will host several events in commemoration of its history. More information can be found on the university's website at [www.gsu.edu](http://www.gsu.edu).

## ANNUAL STUDENT SYMPOSIUM & GRADUATION CELEBRATION

Each year the department holds the Annual Religious Studies Student Symposium, a fun and intellectually stimulating forum where students present their work to an audience of their peers, professors, friends, and family. This is also the time we recognize student award winners, our graduating undergraduate and masters students, and highlights from the past year.

This year's symposium will be held on **Tuesday, April 9, at 3:00 pm** in the Troy Moore Library located in the General Classroom Building room 939. All are invited to come and hear our students' work, honor our graduating students, enjoy stimulating conversation, reunite with old classmates and professors, and look back on a great year.

## LOUIS RUPRECHT DELIVERS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT PHD CEREMONY



Dr. Louis Ruprecht was asked by the President and Provost to deliver the commencement address at the GSU Hooding Ceremony held at the Rialto, December 2012. A great honor, Dr. Ruprecht gladly accepted and gave the graduates an inspiring message.

## FACULTY PROJECTS

### RELIGIOUS SOUND MAPPING PROJECT

Kathryn McClymond and Isaac Weiner are spearheading a project to document the sounds associated with various religious communities, events, and individual practices in metropolitan Atlanta. As part of the Fall '12 "Hindu Sacred Texts seminar," graduate students made digital sound recordings of various Hindu communities in Atlanta. Under the guidance of Jen Ament, a professional radio producer, students were trained to record festival celebrations, dance performances, private puja observances, and meditation gatherings. Claire Murata Kooy is archiving these recordings, and the long-term goal is to produce a sound "map" that allows the public to click on an icon for a religious community in Atlanta and listen to sounds associated with that community. In Spring '13 Isaac will expand the project by asking students in his "Religion in America" and "Asian Religions in America" classes to make recordings as well.

To invite students to your religious event, contact Isaac at [iweiner@gsu.edu](mailto:iweiner@gsu.edu). Look for a link to the map from the Department website in summer 2013!



### RELIGIOUS LIFE STORIES PROJECT

[story@gsu.edu](mailto:story@gsu.edu)

*All welcome -  
come tell us your story!*

For more info, go to [www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion)

## SAVE THE DATES!

- **January 25**  
12:00 pm  
Pizza Friday
- **February 6**  
5:00 pm reception  
6:00 pm event  
Rialto
- **February 12**  
Time: TBA  
Dr. Moultrie's Lecture at Spelman College
- **February 14-16**  
8:30 am  
United States Institute of Peace "The Missing Peace Symposium"  
Live webcast at [www.usip.org/webcast](http://www.usip.org/webcast)
- **February 15**  
12:00 pm  
Pizza Friday
- **March 15-17**  
SECSOR 2013  
[groups.wfu.edu/secor](http://groups.wfu.edu/secor)
- **April 9**  
3:00 pm  
Annual Student Symposium
- **April 26**  
12:00 pm  
Pizza Friday



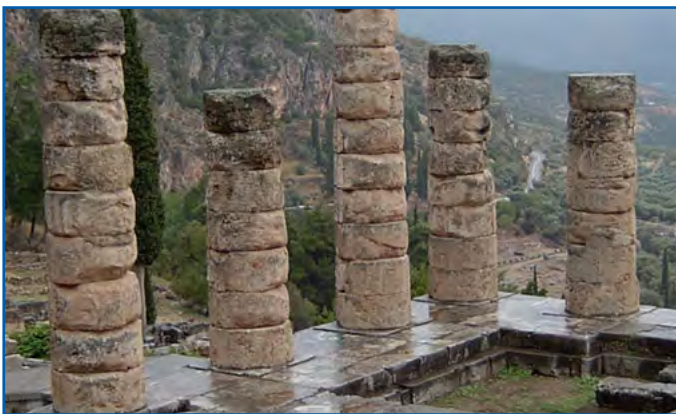
# STUDY ABROAD IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## CHINA



Do you have a plan for May 2013? Spend time in Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, Luoyang, and Dengfeng! You get to visit famous Chinese sites like the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Olympic Park, the Terra Cotta Warriors, the Confucius Temple, the Shaolin Temple, the Great Wild Goose Pagoda, the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, the Shanghai Acrobats, and much more. Students choose two courses -- all taught in English by University of System of Georgia instructors -- from a list of fifteen, covering eight different departments. All courses will earn students six hours of GSU credit. Best of all, students experience Chinese culture by staying on campus at a major university, getting to know a host family, pairing with a Zhengzhou University "buddy," shopping in the local markets, and so on. Contact Dr. Jon Herman, [jherman2@gsu.edu](mailto:jherman2@gsu.edu) today for more info!

## GREECE: Sites, Saints, and Sanctuaries



Students will have the opportunity to study abroad in Greece through the Center for Hellenic Studies in Maymester 2013. The program will bring students to Athens, Delphi, Olympia, and Corfu for an exploration of Greek culture and language. For more information, contact Dr. Louis A. Ruprecht, [lruprecht@gsu.edu](mailto:lruprecht@gsu.edu).

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES INTERN: *In My Own Words*

This past fall, the Department began offering an internship course, giving students the opportunity to apply classroom skills in the workforce. Alicia Clay, MA student, gives her perspective as an intern working for a non-profit organization.



"My internship through the Department of Religious Studies has given me the truly rewarding opportunity to work with a great Atlanta non-profit organization, the Higher Ground Group. The Higher Ground Group is an interfaith organization

made up of four Atlanta faith leaders who raise awareness about important social issues facing Atlanta. The focus of my internship has been planning an event which will feature members of the Higher Ground Group discussing the role of religion in civic engagement. I've been involved with all facets of the planning for the event including the development of theme and content, drafting a press release, and building an extensive contact list. In addition to working with the faith leaders from the Higher Ground Group, I have also had the opportunity to work with a great group of women at EOS Marketing and Communications and the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta. Through my internship, I have seen the great work done in the non-profit sector as well as the marketing and public relations aspect of event planning. This internship has given me valuable project management experience and the chance to make connections in the profit and non-profit sectors."

For more information about the internship program, contact Dr. Isaac Weiner, [iweiner@gsu.edu](mailto:iweiner@gsu.edu).

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES STUDENT FORUM

The Religious Studies Student Forum had an exciting semester. In October, the Forum hosted "Halloweens: Fall Harvest Traditions." Several of our graduate students and Dr. Bell gave presentations on various religious and non-religious traditions. The majors were excited to participate in this standing-room only event.



In November, the Forum and the Student Veterans Association co-sponsored the *Faith & Freedom* panel discussion. Alum John Rivenbark, BA '06 MA '08, was one of the panelists as well as first year MA student Natalie Barber. The discussion was facilitated by major Karli Myers-Robinson.



L to R Natalie Barber, Jeremy Jefferson, Rev. Dr. Curtis Lester, Dr. David Smith, Bill Humble, John Rivenbark



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Religious Studies at Georgia State University



# Graduate Student Awards & Placements

## FALL 2012 GRADUATES

**Ilani Blanke** successfully defended her thesis: "Bad Religion: Ex-Mormon Fiction Reinforces Normative Views of American Religion," December 2012. Dr. Weiner directed her committee, and Dr. McClymond and Dr. Bassett served on it.



(L-R) Dr. Molly Bassett, Dr. Issac Weiner, Ilani Blanke, Dr. Kathryn McClymond



**Carrie Black** received her MA in Religious Studies, December 2012.

Congratulations, Carrie!

## SEAN KEANE, RELIGIOUS STUDIES WRITING CONSULTANT

Third year MA student, Sean Keane, will be the Religious Studies 2001 Writing Consultant for Spring 2013. Sean previously taught the introductory religious studies course. He will hold office hours in the library, giving students one-on-one assistance with writing. Congratulations, Sean!



## WRITING EXCELLENCE



**Suzanne Degnats** presented her paper "The Narrative of the Near-Death Experience" at the Ernest Welch Symposium on Death, December 2012.

Suzanne conducted interviews with 10 individuals about their near death experiences (NDEs). She analyzed the data with regard to changes in religiosity that occurred after the NDE, and she explains that the changes noted were more subtle than one might imagine (and than commonly portrayed in popular media). Suzanne comments in her abstract, "By understanding the effects of the near-death experience without the Hollywood hype, we can gain valuable insight to a life event that is neither an ending nor a beginning, but one of many in the continuing human march towards death."

**Robert Jones**, first-year graduate student, represented the department at the Ernest G. Welch Symposium on Death, December 2012.

His paper was titled, "The Value of Mortality". "It is a look into the images and feelings that are associated with death through the psycho-spiritual frameworks of religious ideology, ritual activity, esoteric occultism, and popular culture. Along with an exploration into ways of formulating entirely personal methods of understanding death that may draw from, but are not restricted to any of the aforementioned areas."



**Kathryn Yates** has been selected to present a paper entitled, "The Slippery Semantics of Neutrality," at Florida State University's graduate symposium in February. This year's symposium's theme is "Politics of Religion."



Congratulations, Kathryn!



**Holly Adams (MA '09)** is currently working on her dissertation for a PhD in Cognitive Psychology at GSU. She was awarded a Second Century Initiative Fellowship in Nonhuman Primate Social Cognition and Evolution of Behavior, and is currently working on a project to demonstrate rhesus monkey's ability to use symbols for communication. In addition, Holly continues her interests in the cognitive science of religion with her projects in prayer, attention and memory; and embodied cognition and ritual theory. Presently, she is conducting experiments for her dissertation on the effects of prayer on memory distortion. She also is using Transcranial Doppler Sonography (TCD) to measure cerebral bloodflow velocity (CBFv) during prayer. If you're interested in her work, you may contact her at the IDEA lab (215 Kell) or [hadams7@student.gsu.edu](mailto:hadams7@student.gsu.edu)

**Rachel Blume (MA '11)** is currently an ISJL Education Fellow, working with Jewish communities across the Southern region (14 states) that range in size from 5 students to over 300 students, many of which have limited access to professional Jewish resources. The ISJL's mission is to ensure that all Jewish children in the Southern region receive an excellent Jewish education no matter where they live or the size of their religious school. The Education Fellows work to create a common body of Jewish knowledge by assisting teachers in implementing the comprehensive religious school curriculum (written by Fellows and other Jewish professionals), traveling twice a month to the communities served by the education team, creating religious school programming for all age groups, leading Shabbat and holiday services, assisting with the recruitment of new communities and potential new Fellows, and finally organizing and directing an annual education conference.

"My Fellowship will be ending in May of this school year, and while I will continue to work in the Jewish community in a volunteer capacity, I will be attending law school in the fall of 2013. I have a few offers on the table, but have not formally decided which school I will be attending."



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: LORI ANN FEIG-SANDOVAL

In 2006, Lori completed coursework for her master's in Religious Studies at GSU but left before writing her thesis to return to the full-time home-based educating of her young son. In the 1990's, Lori had taught Logic and Critical Thinking in the GSU Philosophy Department after having earned her Master's of Communications in 1984, and her Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy (Magna Cum Laude) in 1982, both from GSU. She also holds a degree in nursing (RN) from Riverside City College (1978).

Lori has worked as a neonatal and pediatric ICU nurse, in mental health nursing, as the Director of the Downtown Branch of the Atlanta History Center, and as a freelance writer and book reviewer. Most recently she practiced full time homemaking and home-based educating of her son for eighteen years. In all of these occupations, she found herself contemplating the same themes: how to live intentionally, how to honor what is heartfelt about other people's beliefs and values, how to foster spiritual growth in a material world, and how to practice and teach compassion and equanimity. Lori has supported the Religious Studies Department because of these core curiosities and because she believes in the value of religious studies as an academic discipline to enhance understanding of the many religious impulses, themes, and experiences common within the worldwide human family.

## ALUMNI BOARD MEMBERS

Heather Abraham - BA '07, MA '09  
 Leslie Andrews - BA '12  
 Grené Baranco - BA '04  
 David Dreyer - BA '01  
 Lori Feig-Sandoval - BA '82  
 Derek Jackson - BA '97  
 Amna Shirazi - BA '97, JD '00  
 Betty Woodman - MA '03



To find out about joining our alumni board, contact Kathryn McClymond at [kmcclymond@gsu.edu](mailto:kmcclymond@gsu.edu)

**Dax Carver (MA '06)** and his partner, Darren, welcomed their daughter, Diana, November 2012. The couple also has a son, 17-month-old Gage, and they currently reside in San Francisco.

**M. Owais Khan (MA '11)** is currently pursuing his PhD in Religious Studies at Syracuse University with funding.

**Kelly O'Riley (MA '11)** is currently teaching sixth grade social studies (Geography and World Cultures) at Western Middle Magnet for the Visual and Performing Arts in Louisville, Kentucky. This year she also accepted the position of social studies department chair at the school. In the spring, Kelly will complete her program to

earn a Master of Arts in Teaching and full teaching certification (Social Studies and Language Arts 5-9). Kelly presented a paper this past October at a conference sponsored by the academic journal *Film & History*. Her paper was entitled "Black and/or White: The Cultural Influence of Michael Jackson's Music Videos."

**Cathye Schmidt (MA '12)** currently works at AllState Insurance as an automobile claims representative where she puts her research skills to use investigating automobile accidents. She plans on traveling to Israel and Jordan in the early spring.

## ATTENTION ALUMNI

Have you been recently promoted, accepted a new position, or worked on an interesting project either personally or professionally? We want to hear all about it. Send your news to Felicia Thomas, [ftthomas@gsu.edu](mailto:ftthomas@gsu.edu).

[www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion)

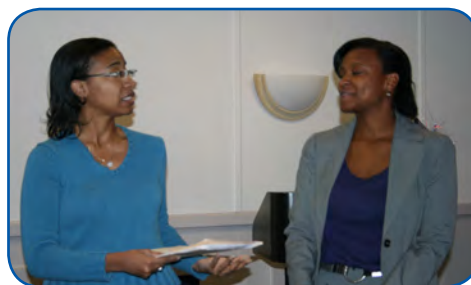
## Giving to Religious Studies

Thank you for your commitment to furthering the study of religion in a public university!

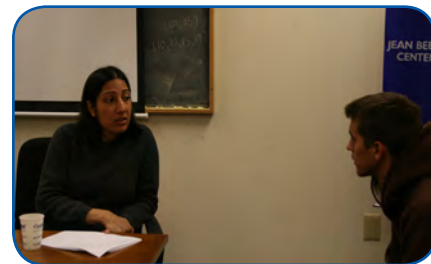
Our faculty are receiving national recognition for the quality of their research and the excellence of their teaching. And our students are taking a place on the national stage - presenting papers at the national religious studies conference, receiving prestigious scholarships, and finding new ways to connect their learning with the world around them. Private donors sustain the Department's mission of teaching, research, and service.

Contributions also allow us to provide public programs that are open to the public, such as the Religion and Public Life Fellows program.

For more information and ways to make a gift, please visit [www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion) and click on the "Alumni and Friends" tab.



*Dr. Monique Moultrie and Karli Myers-Robinson at the Faith & Freedom event, November 2012.*



*Dr. Nadia Latif speaking with a student after her Brown Bag Lunch presentation, November 2012.*



*Pizza Friday, August 2012.*