



# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## CELEBRATING 5 YEARS 2005-2010



FALL 2010

### RELIGIOUS STUDIES 'RUSH WEEK'

We appreciate all of our Religious Studies undergraduate majors, so we're dedicating one week of this semester to focus on our majors, potential majors, and our student group, the Religious Studies Student Forum. Mark your calendar for "Religious Studies Rush Week," coming September 13-17. For details contact Felicia Thomas at [ftthomas@gsu.edu](mailto:ftthomas@gsu.edu) or stop

SEPTEMBER	2010	
Monday 9/13	 T-SHIRT DAY!	Get your Religious Studies t-shirt (FREE) from the department!
Tuesday 9/14	 BASEBALL NIGHT	Dr. Jon Herman, Undergraduate Director, will take 25 lucky Religious Studies majors to an Atlanta Braves home game.
Wednesday 9/15	 MOVIE NIGHT	"Religulous" by Bill Maher will be shown at Cinefest at 6pm. FREE FOOD and discussion.
Thursday 9/16	 'JOB SHOP'	Love Religious Studies but not sure what your career options are? This is the workshop for you!
Friday 9/17	 ICE CREAM SOCIAL	FREE ICE CREAM while supplies last and other free give-away items. Plus lots more information on being a Religious Studies Major!

## DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES 5TH ANNIVERSARY 2005-2010

This year the Department of Religious Studies celebrates its fifth anniversary as a freestanding academic department at Georgia State. Along with that we celebrate five years of offering a Masters degree in religious studies. Throughout this year we'll be celebrating in several ways, with high-profile speakers, fun events for students, and a gala celebration in the spring to accompany our annual Spring Student Symposium.

### Dr. Charles Long to Present 5th Anniversary Public Lecture

Dr. Charles H. Long, author of *Alpha: Myths of Creation and Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, will be visiting the department and giving a public lecture in late October as a part of our 5th anniversary celebration. As a doctoral student, Long studied with Joachim Wach at the University of Chicago, where he later joined the faculty.

Long worked with Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa in founding the journal *History of Religions* and establishing the University's History of Religions course of study. Most recently, Long taught at the University of North Carolina and the University of California Santa Barbara. His lecture (time and date to be announced) will touch on the theme of 'the unimaginable in history.'

### Dr. Renick Promoted to Professor

It is with great pleasure that we announce that Dr. Timothy Renick was promoted to the rank of Professor on July 1, 2010. The rank of Professor is reserved for faculty who have accomplished exceptional research, instruction, and service achievements. In particular, faculty members must have their research recognized by outside evaluators as making significant contributions to scholarly conversations in their field. Dr. Renick is best known among students for his book *Aquinas for Armchair Theologians* (Westminster/John Knox Press), but he is also a contributing editor for *Christian Century* and has published numerous articles in the field of religion and ethics.

Most recently Dr. Renick has turned his attention to the field of religious studies itself, researching the pedagogy of religious studies in public universities. He was appointed Chair of the American Academy of Religion's working group on "The Religion Major and Liberal Education" (2006-present), and he secured a national Teagle Grant (\$75,000) for a two-year study of the religion major's contributions to undergraduate education (2006-08). The quality of this research was recognized when the grant from the Teagle Foundation was renewed.

Congratulations to Dr. Renick!

For more information go to:

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



## Letter from the Chair



Five years ago, the Department of Religious Studies was established as a stand-alone department at Georgia State University after two decades of being housed within the Department of Philosophy.

At the same time that the Department was established, a Masters degree program in Religious Studies was inaugurated. Since that time the Department has grown dramatically. Our faculty has increased to include eight tenured or tenure-track faculty members, a permanent lecturer, and a visiting instructor. Our course offerings have expanded to cover a wide variety of religious traditions as well as intriguing topical and interdisciplinary perspectives on religion (e.g., religion and race; religion and sport; religion, the theater and violence).

Our faculty members are increasingly recognized for the caliber of their work. Our two new faculty members, Dr. Molly Bassett and Dr. Isaac Weiner, were both awarded University Research Initiation Grants this year to pursue their first book projects. Dr. Lou Ruprecht was awarded a one-semester fellowship by the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University (Fall '10) and Dr. Vincent Lloyd was awarded a one-year fellowship by the James Weldon Johnson Institute at Emory University (Fall '10 -Spring '11). Both Dr. Renick and Dr. Herman continue to serve in leadership roles on committees for the American Academy of Religion in addition to pursuing their academic research.

As always, we take great pride in our students' accomplishments as well. As most of you know, we now offer multiple sections of our new Core course, "Introduction to World Religions," a topical introduction to the study of religion. Over the past year I have been particularly impressed by our graduate teaching assistants, who give themselves fully to the instruction of undergraduates. They receive outstanding student evaluations, with comments such as, "Please do not let her go. . . she will be a valuable asset to the Religious Studies Department" and "she is the best professor so far in my academic career at GSU" and "this was the single most enjoyable class I have ever taken at GSU." These graduate instructors have become important ambassadors for the study of religion at GSU.

Our undergraduates are equally remarkable. We have former majors working in government programs, the private sector, and educational institutions throughout metropolitan Atlanta, but we also have students in such far-away places as South Korea and Japan. Several of our majors have moved on to graduate work. Most recently Matt Lyons (B.A. '10) was accepted to the M.T.S. program at Harvard Divinity School (the entry into their doctoral program) as a Presidential scholar.

As we look ahead to the next five years I anticipate continuing growth. Our alumni are active (see the article in this newsletter on graduate Heather Abraham, part of our new spotlight on alumni). This fall we welcome our newest faculty member, Dr. Abbas Barzegar (Emory University, Islamic Studies). In this difficult economic climate, when many universities have downsized their faculty, even eliminated entire departments, the Department of Religious Studies is thriving.

### Religious Studies Faculty

#### **Abbas Barzegar**

Assistant Professor  
abarzegar@gsu.edu

#### **Molly Bassett**

Assistant Professor, Director of Graduate Studies

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#### **David Bell**

Lecturer  
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#### **Kate Daley**

Visiting Instructor  
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#### **Jonathan Herman**

Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies

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#### **Vincent Lloyd (on leave)**

Assistant Professor  
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#### **Kathryn McClymond**

Associate Professor, Department Chair  
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#### **Tim Renick**

Professor, Associate Provost for Academic Programs

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#### **Louis Ruprecht, Jr. (on leave)**

Professor, William Suttles Chair  
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#### **Isaac Weiner**

Assistant Professor  
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**ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:**  
**Heather Abraham**  
 BA '07, MA '09 and 'Religion Nerd'



Heather Abraham completed both her B.A. and M.A. degrees in religious studies here at Georgia State University. Her masters thesis, "The Phenomena of Mary: A Study of the Virgin Mary as Experienced at Our Lady of Ephesus," provided a fascinating overview of a pilgrimage site in Ephesus shared by Christians and Muslims. As a student Heather was exposed to a wide variety of approaches to and issues in the study of religion. However, she felt that something was missing: an outlet for students of religion to record and publish their responses to religious thought and practice. Her website, [www.Religion.Nerd.com](http://www.Religion.Nerd.com), was launched in response to that need.

Religion Nerd is a daily e-magazine dedicated to informing the public about world religions and the central religious issues shaping American and international culture, politics, and society. The website which has quickly gained a public and academic following with readership growing daily. Religion Nerd has talented and insightful contributors with interests in religion and politics, art, history, sports, law, culture, and interfaith issues and dialogue. Religion Nerd has received much interest from professional religion news writers, students and faculty from GSU and other universities, and religious "insiders." Visit the Religion Nerd website at: [www.ReligionNerd.com](http://www.ReligionNerd.com)



**New Faculty Member**

The Department of Religious Studies is delighted to announce that **Abbas Barzegar** began his time with us this Fall.

Dr. Barzegar brings a wealth of prior experience in Atlanta to the position. He has previously taught for us in the Department of Religious Studies, as well as at Spelman College and Emory University's Candler School of Theology. He is interested in initiating a new line of research on the changing face and fortunes of the Islamic community in Atlanta. We are delighted to welcome him and his family to the Department of Religious Studies here at Georgia State University.

# AAR 2010

The American Academy of Religion's annual meeting will be held here in Atlanta October 30—November 1 at Hyatt Regency Hotel. Please visit <http://www.aarweb.org> for more information.

## FACULTY UPDATES

**Dr. Molly Bassett:** Dr. Bassett's current research extends her work on Mexica-Aztec teteo (deities) and their ixiptla (localized embodiments) by investigating the ritual production of material and human ixiptla and their animation. Archaeological, ethnohistoric and ethnographic data indicates that many Mesoamerican cultures (past and present) practiced temples and houses. In research supported by Georgia State's Cleon C. Arrington Research Initiation Grant Program, Dr. Bassett is exploring how deity embodiments were animated through rituals focused on the physical appearance, sensory organs and behavioral elements of ixiptla. Over the summer, she conducted field research in Mexico with the aim of including her results in her book project: *The Fate of Earthly Things: Mexica-Aztec Deities and Their Representation*

**Kate Daley:** Kate Daley has published three articles for [www.ReligionNerd.com](http://www.ReligionNerd.com). Daley's first article on Religion Nerd, entitled "Moral Monster: The Literary Vampire" was an adaptation of a paper she

wrote for a panel for last year's SECSOR panel on Arts, Literature, and Religion. Her second article, "Harry Potter and Aristotle's Cultivation of Virtue," gave voice to concerns regarding the polemic surrounding the "ethics" of the series of novels. Her third article, "Bayer Commercial Appropriates Ancient Story and Misses the Mark," highlighted a commercial made by the manufacturer Bayer in which an ancient religious story was appropriated and revised by the company, oddly enough, to promote buyer awareness regarding the possible side-effects of using Bayer manufactured birth control.

**Dr. Jonathan Herman:** In August, Jonathan Herman presented his paper "Penises are Religious, Vaginas are Spiritual" at the International Association of the History of Religions Quinquennial World Congress in Toronto. Dr. Herman also continues his AAR service on the Committee on Public Understanding of Religion.

**Dr. Vincent Lloyd** is on leave for the 2010-2011 academic year, although you

will see him around the department. He is the recipient of a one-year James Weldon Johnson Institute Fellowship at Emory University.

**Dr. Kathryn McClymond:** Kathryn McClymond presented the annual Savko Lecture at Ohio State University this past May. Her talk was entitled "The Execution of Saddam Hussein: An Exercise in Ritual Studies." In June McClymond presented the keynote address at the "Homo Ludens: Play, Culture and Religion" Symposium in Lausanne, Switzerland. Her talk, which focused on ritual mistakes in modern Olympics Games ceremonies, was presented as a public lecture at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne. Currently McClymond is working on her second book, tentatively titled *Ritual Gone Wrong: What We Learn From Ritual Disruption*, which is under contract with Oxford University Press.

## FACULTY UPDATES (Cont. from page 3)

**Dr. Louis Ruprecht:** Louis A. Ruprecht Jr. was recently a Visiting Fellow at the Secret Archives of the Vatican Library in summer 2010, where he completed a book manuscript, tentatively entitled *Winckelmann's Secret History: On the Birth of Art History and the Vatican's First Profane Museum*. It will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in December. Dr. Ruprecht recently published several essays including "Winckelmann and Casanova in Gary Laderman's Sacred Matters in Thesis Eleven 101.2 (2010)", "Moral Meaning and Social Change" [in *Emory Magazine* (Spring 2010)], and a book chapter entitled "Caught Between Enlightenment and Romanticism: The Complex Relation of Religious, Ethnic and Civic Identity in a Modern 'Museum Culture'," in *New Directions in Islamic Studies: Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism and Religion in the 21st Century*, Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, eds. In the fall semester, Dr. Ruprecht will be a Stanley J. Seeger Visiting Research Fellow in the Committee on Hellenic Studies at Princeton University.

**Dr. Isaac Weiner:** Thanks to a GSU Research Initiation Grant, Dr. Weiner spent two weeks (July 2010) in New York City wading through old Department of Health records at New York City's Municipal Archives and Reference Library. He is now studying how religion figured into early twentieth century efforts to abate urban noise



## ATTENTION

## ALUMNI!

Are you a graduate of the Department of Religious Studies? 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: [fthomas@gsu.edu](mailto:fthomas@gsu.edu)

[WWW.GSU.EDU/RELIGION](http://WWW.GSU.EDU/RELIGION)

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