



GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES



SPRING 2010

## STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

How good are our students? We think they're terrific, and one thing that demonstrates that each year is 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. With a format modeled on that of an academic conference (including blind review of paper submissions), the symposium features student papers on a range of subjects. Last year's exciting edition included papers on such topics as Hindu metaphysics, Jewish identity, and "Wiccan fundamentalism."

This year's Symposium will be held on Thursday, April 15, at 4:00, in General Classroom Building 939, better known as the wonderful Troy Moore Library. You are all invited to come and hear our student's good work, share in the conversations, reunite with old classmates and professors, and enjoy the cookies and brownies. If you have any questions about this, contact Dr. Jonathan Herman at [jherman2@gsu.edu](mailto:jherman2@gsu.edu).

### New Faculty Member



The Department of Religious Studies is delighted to announce that **Abbas Barzegar**, currently a doctoral candidate in Emory University's Graduate Division of Religion, has accepted the invitation to join us in the fall of 2010. Mr. Barzegar is currently in residence in Kuwait, funded in part by an American Council of Learned Societies' Mellon Dissertation Grant for the 2009-2010 academic year; he intends to defend his dissertation in June.

That dissertation project, entitled "Remembering Community: Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam," offers a brilliant revisionist history of the early period of Islamic formation. Less interested in the historical record per se, Mr. Barzegar explores the role that historical narrative plays in the construction of historical memory and in the formation of new communal solidarities. The dissertation promises to establish welcome links with other disciplines already well represented in the department (among them, History, Ethics and Politics, Philosophy, and Rhetoric), and promises to enable new linkages between our department and several related programs both here and at Emory University.

Mr. Barzegar also 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 also 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.



### Study Abroad Course: Pilgrimage Sites in Europe

The Department of Religious Studies will be offering its first study abroad program this May! Dr. David Bell will be teaching *Pilgrimage* (RELS 4290/6290, 3 hours credit, Maymester dates) on location at two pilgrimage sites in Europe: Lourdes in southern France and the island of Iona in north-western Scotland. Limited to 20 students, the course will begin with two days of class sessions at Georgia State University in Atlanta on May 11, fly to Paris and travel to Lourdes from May 13-21, then fly to Edinburgh and travel to the remote island of Iona from May 22-29, and returning to Atlanta on May 30. Students will engage in the theories and methods of the field of religious studies through direct observation of the religious practice. Specifically, students will learn about the central role of pilgrimage in the religious lives of the pilgrims, the cultural contexts of the two pilgrimage sites, and how to study a religious practice using interdisciplinary methods.

## Letter from the Chair



As we move into Spring 2010, there's lots of excitement in the Department of Religious Studies. We continue to see a huge demand for our core course, "Introduction to World Religions." We've been fortunate to have very capable, dedicated, and good-humored graduate students teaching sections of this course throughout this past year. Despite some growing pains, the course is a resounding success, and we look forward to introducing hundreds of GSU undergraduates to the Department of Religious Studies through this course in the years to come.

Faculty members have been active this spring. Dr. Weiner and Dr. Bell participated in the annual SECSOR (regional AAR) conference, and Dr. Renick continues his Teagle Foundation research. In addition, our new colleagues, Molly Bassett and Isaac Weiner, have added new courses to the curriculum that reflect their research expertise, courses such as "Idols, Icons and Amulets: The Materials of Religion" and "Religion and American Law." Dr. Vincent Lloyd has been awarded a James Weldon Johnson Institute Visiting Scholars Fellowship for 2010-11. This fellowship, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, targets young scholars who have already demonstrated exceptional research promise, and provides them with time and resources to produce a monograph or another substantial research publication.

We take great pride in our students' accomplishments as well. Several current students (Ashley Gnat, Christa Lasher, Sherry Morton, Kenny Smith, and John Sullivan) presented papers at SECSOR on their academic research. In addition, other students have been admitted to prestigious programs in the fall. Matthew Lyons has been admitted to Harvard University's graduate program in the Fall with a Presidential Scholarship. Kenny Smith has been admitted to Emory University's doctoral program in the Graduate Division of Religion with a full stipend.

We hope you will join us for the highlight event of every spring, our annual Student Symposium, set for April 15<sup>th</sup> at 4 p.m. in the Troy Moore Library. As we did last year, we will pause halfway through the symposium to recognize graduating undergraduate and masters students, so we encourage family and friends to attend and celebrate with us. We will also present the annual student awards. Great food, stimulating conversation, and recognition of deserving graduates – what more could you ask for?

Despite a difficult economy, the Department of Religious Studies has been able to flourish this year, and we look forward to an even more exciting Summer and Fall 2010! Obviously, this newsletter can't hope to describe everything happening in the Department, so be sure to check out our website on a regular basis for up-to-date information on our program ([www.gsu.edu/religion](http://www.gsu.edu/religion)).

***Kathryn McClymond, Ph.D.***

Chair, Department of Religious Studies

### ***Religious Studies Faculty***

**Molly Bassett**

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**Jonathan Herman**

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**Tim Renick**

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**David Bell**

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**Vincent Lloyd**

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**Louis Ruprecht, Jr.**

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**Kathryn McClymond**

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**Isaac Weiner**

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## SPRING 2010 GRADUATES

### Undergraduate

Clara Armstrong  
Margaret Benefield  
Tyler Brock  
Zachary Cagle  
Jocelyn Crawley  
Deon Draper  
Patricia Garrett  
Sarah Golden  
Matthew Lyons

Joseph Magnus  
Ryam Eros  
Jason Peterson  
Christina Pritchard  
Daniell Stankiewicz  
Sarah Turner  
Travis Webb  
Broamme Wesolowski  
Brittani Wilson

### M.A. Students

Christa Lasher  
Joshua Lupo  
Sherry Morton  
Ndola Owuo-Hagood  
Zachary Ross  
Kenny Smith

## Students Recognized for Outstanding Work

Each year the Department selects three students from among all of its impressive undergraduate majors and Masters students for special recognition. This year we are pleased to announce that Kenneth Smith, Matthew Lyons, and Audra Esker will be receiving our 2010 student awards. Kenny Smith, who is completing his Masters degree this spring, will be receiving the Dr. Timothy Renick Graduate Award in Religious Studies. Kenny has been a part of the Religious Studies family for many years now, and we are thrilled to announce that he has been accepted (with a full stipend) to the doctoral program at Emory University in the Graduate Division of Religious Studies. Graduating senior Matthew Lyons will be receiving the Dr. Robert Arrington Undergraduate Award in Religious Studies. Matt is completing undergraduate majors in Philosophy and Religious Studies this spring, and he has been accepted to the M.T.S. program at Harvard University with a Presidential Scholarship. Finally, Masters student Audra Esker will be receiving the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award. Audra did her undergraduate work at Georgia State University, and she has been a particularly effective classroom instructor for Rels 2001, our new core course. Please join us at 4 p.m. on April 15th for the Student Symposium where we will honor these three students, along with all our graduating majors and Masters students.



## ALUMNI NEWS

Former Masters student **Kencho Tenzin**, accepted a full-time position as an Instructor at Georgia Highlands College Fall 2009. Kencho had been teaching there part-time for a year, and they were so impressed with his work that they offered him a full-time position!

**Claire Murata Kooy**, who earned her M.A. in 2004, has recently published a chapter entitled "Grieving Tradition in a New Land: Hindu Death and Dying Rituals in America" in vol. 3 of the Religion, Death, and Dying series published by ABC-CLIO and edited by Lucy Bregman. This particular volume in the series focuses on Bereavement and Death Rituals. Claire's masters thesis focused on Hindu death rituals and traditions in the United States, so this publication builds on her previous research.

## Faculty Updates

**Dr. Jonathan Herman** had his article, "The Mysterious Mr. Wang: The Search for Martin Buber's Confucian Ghostwriter," accepted for publication in the Journal of Chinese Religions. His presentation at the Symposium on the Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Who Cares if the Qur'an is the Word of God?" is expected to appear in a subsequent conference volume. Dr. Herman recently began a term as a member of the AAR Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion.

**Dr. Tim Renick's** proposal for an additional phase of research in the Religious Studies Majors Project has been selected for a second round of funding from the Teagle Foundation. The American Academy of Religion project (with Dr. Renick as principal investigator) was one of only three proposals to receive funding from the Teagle Foundation for the second phase of their research. This is a ground-breaking project for the American Academy of Religion and for the discipline as a whole.

# 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) or mail to Felicia Thomas, Department of Religious Studies  
Georgia State University, P.O. Box 4089, Atlanta, GA 30302-4089

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\*Email \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Year graduated \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

News item to share \_\_\_\_\_

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*\*Email is the preferred method of contact.*

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