Department Greetings and News from the Chair

Greetings from Smith Hall on Mount Oread! The University has been keeping us busy, with the recent stream of changes to KU core curriculum and the administrative infrastructure. Though the financial climate has been difficult, we continue to prosper and enjoy wonderful support from the College. This fall we were joined by our new colleague in South Asian religions, Hamsa Stanton. Hamsa comes to us from Columbia University, where he studied with professors Sheldon Pollock and Jack Hawley, among others. Welcome Hamsa! He is the third full-time faculty appointment that the Department has made within the past three years. Meanwhile, we have been given permission by the University to search for a position in Judaism this year. Review of applications is underway, and we anticipate filling the position by early Spring semester of 2013. The appointment in Judaism will bring our full-time regular faculty up to ten.

With gain, of course, there is also loss. Our longtime Administrative Associate Sr., Aagje Ashe, left the Department for a professional position in Evolution and Environmental Biology. Though she is sorely missed, the new position suits her wonderfully well, given her prior professional training in the biological sciences. We wish her all the best! Recently we completed our search for Aagje’s successor, and we are pleased to welcome Amanda Enneking, a former KU student who has been working in the private sector, as our new fulltime Administrative Associate Sr. Last spring we also redefined Melissa Fisher Isaacs’s position in the MRR. With recent completion of her MLS in Library Science, Melissa is now, officially, the Librarian and Archivist of the Moore Religious Studies Reading Room and our expanding archive for Kansas Religious History. Congratulations, Melissa!

There is one piece of terribly sad news that I must bring to your attention, and that is the recent passing of our cherished colleague and friend, John Macauley. John was the senior member of the department, coming to the old Kansas School of Religion in 1964 and then moving over to the newly created KU Department of Religious Studies in 1977. Like most faculty members in those cash-strapped days, he originally had a joint appointment, in his case in history. Although his principal expertise was in English history, he ended up teaching our Supreme Court course for many years. He was always a superb classroom teacher, demanding and thoroughly in command of his material. His student evaluations were consistently the highest in the department. He was also diligent in service. Among other things, he raised funds for KSR and then the department. Tim Miller recalls that he was responsible for one of the scholarships we now have, the St. John’s scholarship, from an Episcopal church in Wichita, and also for one of the largest bequests we have ever received (also from a Wichita Episcopalian).

Eventually John reduced his load to become rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, where he was quite popular. When his sons went to college, some recall him having said that he could make a much better salary as an Anglican priest than as a faculty member in perennially budget-strained Kansas. He kept teaching part-time, however, until he finally, permanently retired. We were the poorer for not having him any longer.

John was always up for socializing. He continued come to our social events even well after his retirement. He was partial to single-malt Scotch, bottles of which some of us gave him when he retired. He was always a gentleman, not to mention a colleague of rare wit and wry humor. He seemed rather like an Englishman, dressing properly and speaking with a bit of an English accent that one presumes he picked up in his graduate studies at Cambridge (although he was from Wichita).

Requiescat in pace, John. You were instrumental in making us who we are.

Past Events, Spring and Fall of 2012:

On February 29, 2012, Holly Folk (Western Washington University), a cultural historian who works broadly in the areas of 19th and 20th century American religion, joined us for a public talk and discussion of her recent work on 19th century American metaphysical movements. Our annual Department awards ceremony and lecture, sponsored by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies, took place on Monday, April 16, 2012. Our featured FODORS speaker, David Morgan, Duke University, noted scholar in the area of visual and material religion, gave a wonderfully attended lecture on “The Likeness of Jesus.” Faculty and students attended from any number of departments across the university, sparking what we hope will become an ongoing interdisciplinary conversation.
Upcoming Events, Spring 2013

February 27 - March 1, 2013: Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Dr. John Grim, Yale University, leading scholars in the area of religion, ecology, and environmental ethics, and collaborators in the influential film and educational project, Journey of the Universe. Check the department website for details.

Organized by Rachel Myslivy, one of our graduate students, their visit is sponsored by a number of Lawrence organizations, including the KU Religious Studies Department and Environmental Studies Program. Mary Evelyn Tucker holds appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Divinity School, the Department of Religious Studies, and the Center for Bioethics at Yale University. She teaches in the joint MA program in religion and ecology and directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. John holds appointments in the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. He teaches courses in Native American and Indigenous religions and World religions and ecology. http://emergergingearthcommunity.org/mary-evelyn-tucker; http://emergergingearthcommunity.org/john-grim.

March 7-8, 2013:
Dr. Leonard Primiano, Chair and Professor of Religious Studies, Cabrini College. The material and visual life of Ex Votos in vernacular Christianity.

Leonard Primiano is an elected member of the Executive Board of the American Folklore Society, co-chair of the Folk Belief and Religious Folklore chapter of the American Folklore Society, and co-chair of the Space, Place, and Religious Meaning Consultation of the American Academy of Religion. He specializes in the history of Christianity, vernacular religion, religious folklore, contemporary moral problems, and contemporary American religion. He co-produced The Father Divine Project, a multimedia documentary and video podcast about Father Divine, Mother Divine, and the Peace Mission Movement (http://scalarm.usc.edu/neh-/vectors/luers-primiano). During his visit to KU Dr. Primiano will speak on the material and visual life of Ex Votos in vernacular Christianity. The event is sponsored by Humanities and Western Civilizations, the Department of Religious Studies, and the Indigenous Studies Program. http://www.cabrini.edu/Academics/Academic-Departments/Religious-Studies-Department/Faculty/Leonard-Norman-Primiano/

Monday April 22, 2013. Annual Religious Studies Reception and Lecture:

Awards Reception, 5:30-7:00 P.M., Mallott Room, Kansas Union (please RSVP to Amanda Enneking, aennekin@ku.edu, if you plan to attend).


Activities of Department Faculty and Staff

Jacqueline Brinton (Assistant Professor, Islam) completed her book manuscript, entitled, "Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority in Modern Egypt," which has recently been accepted for review by The University of California Press. The book explores the vital role that television and social media have played in helping the traditional religious scholars in Egypt maintain their authority among the people. Jackie is currently developing a grant proposal that will allow/enable her to undertake extensive fieldwork on religious developments in the "new Egypt," with focus on the relationship between the traditional religious scholars and the Muslim Brotherhood. She was scheduled to participate in a conference in Copenhagen, entitled, "New Roles of the Friday Khutba," but had to cancel due to the prolonged illness and eventual death of a close family member. In addition to her departmental duties, Jackie is serving as the coordinator for Middle East Studies at KU, a new program that is administratively housed in the Center for Global and International Studies. Efforts are underway to organize panels and speakers on campus, implement a Middle East Studies minor, and involve KU in a new consortium comprised of Western/Midwestern universities that have Middle East Studies programs.

Bill Lindsey (Associate Professor, Japanese religions) enjoyed a first-time visit to Austria in February, visiting Vienna and Graz as part of his participation in the "Community(ing) Bodies Conference," where he delivered a paper on the interplay between the religious imaginative and practices of bodily wellbeing performed on young children in forms of early twentieth-century Japanese childcare. He was accompanied by Jamie Gunderson, a department graduate student and co-participant in the conference. Bill also authored a chapter on Shinto that will appear in the forthcoming book, A Physician's Spiritual PDR, a reference to help medical professionals understand different religious perspectives on the body, health, and palliative care in a country increasingly marked by diverse religious communities. The vision of this book is the late Dr. Steven L. Jeffers of Kansas City, and it is a joy to see it finally near completion through the hard work of many.
Tim Miller (Professor, new religious movements and religion in America) has had a busy year. In 2012 he published three book chapters and one short journal article, one of which, “Building an American Utopia: Greensburg Rises from the Rubble,” featured the rebuilding of Greensburg. Other titles include “California Communes: A Venerable Tradition” and “Community: Greatly Needed but Hard to Achieve.” In addition, Tim presented papers at two conferences, that of the Utopian Studies Society in Tarragona, Spain, and that of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago. He continues actively to serve as a reviewer of book manuscripts and articles submitted to academic publishers and professional journals, such as Nova Religio. He is very close to wrapping up work on two books, The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities and an edited volume, Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World, and will start work on another book while on sabbatical leave in Spring of 2013.

Paul Mirecki (Associate Professor, ancient Near Eastern studies) received a CLAS travel grant to edit ancient papyrus manuscripts in the collection of the Egyptian Museum, Berlin, Germany. He published the chapter “Manichaism, Scribal Magic and Papyrus Kellis 35” in the book Gnostica et Manichaica (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2012). He read three papers at national conferences: “In the Margins of the First Edition of the Geneva Bible of 1560: Paratexts and Politics” (European Studies Conference, University of Nebraska); and “Marketing of Esoteric Secrets as Intangible Commodities in the Greek Magical Papyri and Apuleius, Metamorphoses XI” (Association for the Study of Esotericism, UC-Davis); and “Sumerian Proverbs from Nippur: Questions of Genre, Function and the Old Babylonian Scribal Curriculum” (American Schools of Oriental Research, St. Louis). He directed two MA theses, delivered five lectures in other departments, chaired the ad hoc committee for the “Coptic Textiles Exhibit” at KU’s Spencer Museum of Art, was added to KU’s Jewish Studies Faculty, and served the department as chair of the Faculty Development Committee.

Robert Shelton (Associate Professor, religious ethics, peace and conflict studies), now in his third year of Phased Retirement, continues to serve .75 time in the department. He was recognized in the University’s “35 Year Celebration of the University Ombudsman Office,” the position he served for 18 years. His research travel has included a week in New York City, where he met with staff of the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, and interviewed Paola Piscitelli, one of the founders and a continuing participant in Sant’Egidio, a world outreach non-violent organization. He also visited the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and spent a week at Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York, where he met with lecturers and study groups on issues related to his religious social services research. He continues to teach core courses and guide graduate student research in KU’s Peace and Conflict Studies Program, as well as departmental courses and M.A. work in Religious Ethics. Bob continues his work in the Lawrence community, with the Lawrence Memorial Hospital Ethics Committee, as Facilitator with the Community Advisory Panel of two Lawrence chemical product companies, and several local church educational activities.

Hamsa Stainton (Assistant Professor, religions of India and South Asia) would like to thank everyone in the department, as well as the friends of the department, for welcoming him and his wife, Danika, so warmly since they arrived in Lawrence this summer. In October he inaugurated the new “Global Food for Thought” lecture series at KU with a talk entitled “The Mahabharata Today: Insights from the Great War of Ancient India.” He’s also working closely with other faculty to develop South Asian Studies at KU more broadly. In November he attended the American Academy of Religion annual conference in Chicago. Recently his proposal to teach a special seminar for first-year students on “Death and Dying among the World’s Religions” was accepted for fall 2013. He’s currently editing a volume on Hindu Tantra in India, and his ongoing research focuses on Sanskrit devotional poetry from medieval Kashmir.

Dan Stevenson (Professor and Chair, Chinese religions, Buddhism) has renewed for a second term as Department Chair. He gave an invited lecture at Stanford University in January of 2012, and in early June he served as the keynote discussant and a panel respondent for a Buddhist Studies conference at Taiwan National University (Taipei). Later that month he traveled to the Chinese Hong Kong University to take part in a combined conference and workshop, the papers for which are designed for a volume on “Religion and Ritual in Early Modern China (edited by John Lagerwey, College de France and CHKU). In fall of 2012 Dan scheduled to lecture at Florida State University, present invited papers at two conferences in Tokyo (Rissho University) and Mumbai, India (the Somaiya Institute for Buddhist Studies), and serve as discussant for a second publication conference at the Chinese Hong Kong University. He regretfully had to cancel these plans for personal and administrative reasons. Dan is currently completing a book on Buddhists in Song China, the manuscript of which is due for publication review by Columbia University Press this coming spring.

Molly Zahn (Assistant Professor, Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism) saw the publication of two journal articles in June, one in Journal of Biblical Literature and one in Dead Sea Discoveries. She also presented a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in November in Chicago. Her current project is a book on various ways in which early Jewish scribes rewrote their sacred texts to incorporate new interpretations or new perspectives. This year’s community engagements for Molly included presentations at Ecumenical Campus Ministries, the KU Identities Symposium, and the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City.

Michael J. Zagry (Associate Professor, American religion and Native American religions), after serving as Acting Director of the Indigenous Studies Program at KU during the Fall 2011 semester, was appointed Director of ISP in January 2012. He published “Good Neighbors Are Hard to Find: Play,
Sport, Ritual, and Conceptual Impasse,” in Philippe Boret and Maya Burger, eds., Religions in Play: Games, Rituals, and Virtual Worlds, (Zürich: Pano, 2012), 221-245. This was a revision and expansion of a paper given at a 2010 international symposium in Lausanne, Switzerland to which he was invited. He continues to serve as a co-chair of the national Steering Committee, Native Traditions in the Americas program unit, American Academy of Religion. He was the respondent for one of the unit’s sessions at the AAR in 2012. Zogr was appointed as a member of the inaugural University of Kansas / Haskell Indian Nations University inter-institutional Advisory Committee, is a member of the University of Kansas Diversity Leadership Council, and is the Faculty Advisor for the Native Faculty and Staff Council. Zogr has been awarded a sabbatical in Spring 2013 to work on his book about how James Naismith’s religious beliefs influenced his invention of basketball and the commemoration of his legacy. His research was the subject of a KU News release: “KU professor researching Naismith, religion and basketball,” March 13, 2012. http://www.news.ku.edu/2012/march/13/naismith.shtml. He also was interviewed by local television and radio stations, and a feature article on Zogr’s Naismith research was published in The Topeka Capital-Journal, March 17, 2012: “Basketball: To some, it’s a Religion,” Jan Biles, http://mcjonline.com/news/2012-03-17/basketball-some-its-religion.

Graduate Student Activities

Our graduate students were well represented at the annual Graduate Research Competition and the Mid-America Humanities Conference, which were both held internally at KU during Spring of 2012. Jaimie Gunderson, Stephanie Peterson, and Emily Stratton presented at the Graduate Research Competition; Andy Blakemore, Tashia Dare, Jaimie Gunderson, and Emily Stratton all presented papers at the competitive Mid-America Humanities Conference, earning major praise from the organizers and attending faculty. Four of our students—Emily Stratton, Hilary Hauber, Jaimie Gunderson, and Torang Asadi—additionally had papers accepted for presentation at regional meetings of the American Academy of Religion or Society for Biblical Literature. Jaimie Gunderson received the Graduate Student Research and Presentation Award at the Central States Regional SBL/SOR Conference, for her paper, “Beneath the Brimstone and Fire: Interpreting the Jewish Presence at Pompeii through Epigraphic Data”; Torang Asadi received the 1st Place Graduate Student Paper Award at the Western Regional Conference of the AAR for her paper, “Syncretism as Authenticity.”

Stephanie Petersen participated in the Symposium on the History of Women and Gender at the University of Illinois, and Hilary Hauber in the Annual graduate Symposium at the University of Toronto. Jaimie Gunderson was selected to present at the peer-refereed “Communicating Bodies: A Conference on Body and Religion” held in Graz, Austria; Torang Asadi was selected to participate in the Brown University Religious Studies Biennial Graduate Student Conference, as well as the Columbia University summer Hertog Global Strategy Initiative concerning “The History and Future of Religious Violence and Apocalyptic Movements.”

Rachel Myslivy received two external grants in 2012, one from the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, to conduct an oral history project documenting the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph Concordia, KS; the other from the Elizabeth Schultz Foundation, for a community educational outreach project, in collaboration with the Ecumenical Campus Ministries, that is centered on the Journey of the Universe Film and educational materials. Emily Stratton received FLAS awards for intensive summer study of the West African language, Twi, and year-long study of Ki-Swahili. Tashia Dare was awarded a second round of year-long FLAS funding to continue her study of Arabic, 2012-2013. Tashia Dare, in collaboration with professors Paul Mirecki and John Younger (Classics) and the Spencer Museum Curator, Susan Earle, also took part in the organization of an exhibit on “Coptic Textile Fragments in the Spencer Museum Collection,” at the Spencer Museum of Art, November, 2012.


Religion in Kansas: An ongoing student and faculty research project

Professor Tim Miller continues to offer regularly his course on Religion in Kansas as the first step in a long-term project to preserve and study all manner of documents, memorabilia, oral lore and information concerning the wide spectrum of religious traditions and communities that have been active in the state, past and present. The course has a sizeable fieldwork component which is designed to train students in oral historiography and archival research by sending them out into the state to gather documents and conduct interviews with persons who have had long-term involvement with religious communities in Kansas. Materials gathered and processed by participants in the course are made available to the public in digital form on the KU website, www.religiousstudies.ku.edu or web.ku.edu/~ksreligion.

Our long-range objective is to create a comprehensive information center on religion in Kansas, past and present, that
will be administered by the Moore Religious Studies Reading Room in Smith Hall, with digital access through the Religious Studies website (above). We invite our friends and supporters to join us in the project. We depend heavily on public collaboration. Our documentation of Kansas religious history is only as rich as the knowledge and insight that persons who are heirs to this living history are willing to provide us. If you know of materials that should be preserved for posterity, or of persons with long involvement in one or more of the many religious organizations in the state who would be willing to be interviewed, please get in touch with Tim Miller at tkansas@ku.edu or 785-864-7263. All suggestions are welcome, and we will follow up to the extent that our limited resources permit.

Additions to the Moore Reading Room Collection

In addition to our regular purchase of books and materials through funds from the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies, the collection housed in the Moore Religious Studies Reading Room benefits regularly from public donations of books. It contains a truly remarkable spectrum of materials, which range in date from the nineteenth century to the present and make available, under one roof, virtually all of the major works that have been formative to the field of Religious Studies. The collection is open to the public, and we welcome your visit!

Our Award-Winning Students

Department Graduate Teaching Assistants for 2012-2013:
Jamie Gunderson (REL 107) Jennifer Welch (REL 104)
Stephanie Peterson (REL 124) Rachel Voorhies (REL 106)
Torang Asadi (REL 171)

Graduate Student serving as Graduate Teaching Assistant in KU’s Western Civilization program:
Emily Stratton (Spring 2013)

Recipients of Friends of the Department of Religious Studies, Zelma McIlvain, Starrett-Clark, and St. John’s Episcopal Scholarships 2012-2013:
Andy Blakemore
Rachel Myslivy

Mabel Jensen Memorial Fund to Support Student Research and Professional Activity:
Torang Asadi Jamie Gunderson
Emily Stratton

Lewis Ethics Essay Awards, 2011-2012:
Monica Roy Chowdhury, “Religious Ethics and Hinduism.”
Aaron Pendergrass, “Darryl Hunt and Works toward Justice.”
Ruth Zinabu, “Understandings of Human Conflict, Peace and Nonviolence.”

Department of Religious Studies Prizes for Student Research, 2011-2012:
Graduate:
Torang Asadi, “Repristination': The Exegetical Ingenuity of the Twelve Tribes Community.”
Andrew Blakemore, “Interpretation of Nicholas of Cusa’s Theological Geometry.”
Jamie Gunderson, “Creatio ex Nihilo?: Philo’s Enigmatic Exegesis of Creation in Genesis I”
Rachel Myslivy, “Green Sisters in Rural Kansas.”

Undergraduate:
Kathryn Presley, “Mystic Crystal Revelations from the Iron Age to the Age of Aquarius.”

Recipient of the Lynn Taylor Award, 2012-2013:
Cody Jackson

Let's Keep in Touch

It is always a pleasure to have our friends and former students of the Department stop by Smith Hall for a visit when they are on campus. Should you be further afield, please don't hesitate to drop us a letter or email with your latest news. We will gladly pass it along. We are also pleased to include you on our mailing list for lectures and special programs. Just let us know how to reach you. Thanks for the many things you do to advance the cause of the academic study of religion. We look forward to hearing from you. For regular updates on Religious Studies courses and activities at KU, please see our website, www.religiousstudies.ku.edu.

Our popular canvas tote bags, which display the name of the department and a wonderful reproduction of the stained glass window in Smith Hall, make great gifts and are a perfect way to make a small contribution to the department. They may be purchased from the Department for $10, plus postage and handling.

“Have Interest, Will Travel”: Faculty Lecture/Workshop Opportunities

Our faculty members like to share their research and interests with groups in Kansas and nearby areas. In most cases a speaker gives an individual lecture or slide show, but specific arrangements are flexible. Each faculty member already has a full-time load of teaching, research, and service at KU, so we cannot promise to fill all requests. In some cases well-qualified graduate students are also available for presentations. Travel expenses are subsidized, where necessary, by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies. For contact information and details regarding faculty expertise, please consult our website (www.religiousstudies.ku.edu) or the department office:

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December 10, 2012

Dear Friend of Religious Studies in Kansas:

The Friends of the Department of Religious Studies at KU is very appreciative of the generous support of benefactors. Private donations are crucial for supporting ongoing educational and community service activities of the Department of Religious Studies and for encouraging innovation and excellence. Public support through the state is not sufficient for all of these activities. This year, our private supporters (including those of past years, whose endowments continue to provide resources) provided $57,000 for departmental programs. As always, student scholarships were our largest budget item, at $24,500, and support for the departmental reading room (including acquisitions and student salaries) was second, at $14,000. Lesser amounts supported faculty research, conferences and lectures, faculty outreach, our annual banquet, and many more things.

Outstanding graduate students continue to seek us out, and we welcome them, of course—but we always have trouble providing them with as much support as we would like. Solid support for students is important for recruitment, retention, and recognition of excellence. As the percentage of state support within the university’s budget continues to decline, we need to offset these differences through the private sector.

Please help support the academic study of religion with a gift in the enclosed envelope. If you prefer, you can contribute directly to the KU Endowment Association. Please indicate clearly that you want to earmark your donation for the Department of Religious Studies. Thank you for your support in the past and the future. We welcome you to attend our Religious Studies Annual Awards Reception and Public Lecture scheduled for Monday, April 22, 2013, as described in this newsletter. Otherwise, please feel free to stop by the department anytime you are on the KU campus. Attendance at our annual banquet comes free to those who make a donation to the Department of Religious Studies.

Sincerely,

Edward R. Canda, Ph.D.
President, Friends of the Department of Religious Studies