



Department for the
Study of Religion

2023-2024 NEWSLETTER



Beginning of the Year Department Dinner

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A Note From the Chair...

What a delight it is, as the person who had newly taken over the role of department chair when the covid pandemic hit, to see our vibrant culture returning in full from the Zoom rooms to which it fled in 2020. You will find in these pages impressive stories about graduate student and faculty accomplishments, updates from our wonderfully talented – and hopefully all long-term at last – staff colleagues, and public events galore. Plus, pictures! I am deeply grateful for the involvement of our staff colleagues; our students, undergraduate as well as graduate; our teachers, Senate, non-Senate, Associate Instructors, and TAs; our amazing group of affiliated faculty; and all of the passionate and enthusiastic alums, community members, donors, and partners who together keep this department a thriving, warm, and supportive space as well as an international leader in our field.

As an international leader with strong community ties, our department has also faced challenges this year – not least among them the powerful impact of the October 7 attacks in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza. Like many departments in our field, as tensions have risen on all sides we have stood for the protections of academic freedom and of the First Amendment, and the necessity of education for better comprehending and addressing even the most devastating of international conflicts. As the communities around us – and, indeed, within UCR – became increasingly polarized, Professors Michael Alexander and Muhamad Ali continued teaching, co-presenting, and co-facilitating in classrooms and in communities – sometimes at significant personal cost – in order to help people approach the war with a deeper comprehension of the painful and complex histories underlying it. This, folks, is religious studies in action. This is why this work matters.

A Note from the Chair (cont.)

Yet it's only one example. Our students and faculty are engaged scholars, offering keen insights not only as leading established and emerging voices in their fields but also as members or supporters of communities far beyond UCR. Graduate students and faculty members studied, conducted research, and presented their work across the globe this past year. Some have been, or have continued to be, deeply engaged in public-facing work through their presentations, writings, creative practices, and community engagement. Some (and these groups overlap!) have contributed field-defining articles, books, and translations. Many have powerfully and positively impacted the lives of students, communities, and even research participants. An impressive number have been awarded major fellowships and grants in recognition of their important contributions. One student who received his PhD this year even published a book in Panjabi while writing his dissertation in order to make his research as widely accessible as possible.

When I came to UCR in early 2016 for a job interview, I walked around the campus to clear my head before my research presentation. A second-generation UC graduate and potentially a third-generation UC employee (my grandmother was a department secretary at UC Berkeley), I looked across the tree-lined lawns at the clock tower and the hills beyond and thought, "I could stay here for the rest of my career." Once I arrived to join the department, I soon realized that it was not just UCR's campus and my passionate belief in our student body that would keep me here, but our extraordinary department. I am proud to be starting my ninth year here and my sixth year as chair.

I hope you enjoy perusing this newsletter – and please take the time to join me in thanking Kori Pacyniak for designing and producing both this and last year's newsletters.

~ Melissa



OUR FACULTY

OUR FACULTY



Sahin Acikgoz

Assistant Professor of Islam, Gender, and Sexuality

Michael Scott Alexander

Professor & Maimonides Endowed Chairholder



In his role as Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies, Michael Alexander continued to support students through The Fey Endowment for Jewry and Innovation and The Rubin Initiative for the Study of Hate, Genocide, and Ethnic Cleansing. The chair supported several lectures, one of which included PhD Candidate Remy Ilona discussing his dissertation findings in "The Holocaust of Biafra: Antisemitism and Genocide in Sub-Saharan Africa." It also supported a lecture by Dr. Rami Zwick, Associate Dean for Graduate Programs & Professor of Marketing at the UCR School of Business, on the subject of "Behavioral Game Theory and Rabbinical Wisdom." Professor Alexander's own current research in the medical humanities follows a team based at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York that is leading initiatives in circuit therapeutics and psychiatric surgery for depression. The study follows Alexander's research linking the history of religion to that of therapy in his recent book *Making Peace with the Universe: Personal Crisis and Spiritual Healing* (Columbia 2020).

OUR FACULTY



Muhammad Ali
Associate Professor

Professor Muhamad Ali published book chapters “Religious Pluralism and Freedom in Islam”, in Freedom of Religion and Religious Pluralism (Brill 2023); “Integration of Islam into Malay and Bugis-Makassar Kingdoms” in Southeast Asian Islam: Integration and Indigenisation (Routledge 2024); and “Islam, Modesty, and Dignity in Malaysia”, in Shame, Modesty, and Honor in Islam (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024); and an entry “Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama), Indonesia in Oxford Research Encyclopedias of Religion (2023). Dr. Ali received a resident fellowship at the Center for Ideas and Society and the Committee on Research Travel Grant, to work on his manuscript *Imagining Kafir in Contemporary Indonesia*. In June and July 2024, Dr Ali presented 35 talks on a variety of topics of Islamic studies and the study of religion to various audiences in Islamic schools and universities, religious studies departments and conferences, held in different parts of Indonesia. His talk topics range from historical and anthropological studies of Islam in Indonesia to contemporary issues including religious authority, education, interfaith dialogue, religious moderation, ethics of the other, the impact of artificial intelligence in Muslim society, peace building in Palestine, and a post-Orientalist study of Islam. As part of his university service, Prof Ali continued serving as the director of Middle East and Islamic Studies and served as the main advisor for thirteen visiting Indonesian PhD scholars working on their dissertations related to the study of the Qur’an.



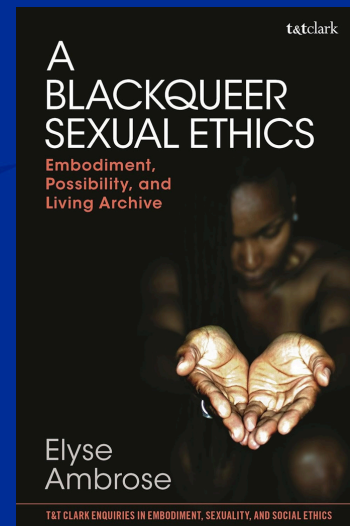
OUR FACULTY

El/yse Ambrose

Assistant Professor of the Study of Religion and Black Studies



This year, Dr. El/yse Ambrose was pleased to release their first book, [A Blackqueer Sexual Ethics: Embodiment, Possibility, and Living Archive](#) (London: T&T Clark, 2024), and to share it in venues for public scholarship, such as the New Books Network. As a scholar-artist, they were honored to contribute to the Cane: A New Critical Edition Oracular Card Deck, alongside scholars such as Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Christina Sharpe, and to show their cinematographic work, "a ritual for handwashing" (2020), at the Outfest Fusion QTBIPOC Film Festival. In addition to participating in a conference at the Huntington Library honoring the work of Octavia Butler, helping to plan another amazing Conference on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion, presenting at the Oxford Symposia (St. Anne's College, University of Oxford, UK) and other national and international conferences, and participating in fellowships through the Sacred Writes Extended Public Scholarship on Religion Program, the Mellon Humanities Quarterly Fellowship, and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning, El earned an Engaging Humanities Grant through the UC Humanities Research Institute to fund their Black Trans Ethical Worlding Lab. This summer, El will continue their research at Schlesinger Library on Pauli Murray and in Chicago on Arthur Jafa.



Ana Bajželj

Associate Professor & Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies

OUR FACULTY

Paul Chang

Assistant Professor

Paul had an exciting year, finally finishing his book manuscript and finding a publisher for his work. The family is healthy and happy, and we moved to a larger property and started raising chickens and sheep.



Dr. Chang's Sheep

Matthew King

Professor of Buddhist Studies and Director of Asian Studies

Matt had a busy last year transitioning into some new large projects alongside grant and development work here at UCR. With Prof. Stephan Licha at the University of Chicago, Matt organized and hosted an international workshop at UCR this spring called Undisciplining Asia, the first of a two-part UCR-University of Chicago conference series on the critical Asian humanities and Buddhist Studies (the larger conference will be held in Chicago next May).



OUR FACULTY

Additionally, with Profs. Carla Mazzio and Fuson Wang, his UCR Co-PIs on the "Abolition Medicine and Disability Justice" UC President's Multicampus Grant, Matt helped to host several speakers, founded the UCR Health Humanities and Disability Studies Lab, and awarded and supervised about 30-40 graduate student fellowships. Alongside his regular teaching, Matt also had the pleasure of running two classical Tibetan courses and reading groups: one for four undergraduate students at UCR, and the other a graduate level group for students at UCR, UCLA, Vienna, and Chicago. While mostly focusing on developing new book projects, Matt gave several invited talks this academic year, including nearby at UCLA and Pomona, and further afield at Columbia, Toronto, Michigan, Cambridge, Paris, and (the most fun of all) Waseda University in Tokyo. Matt also had the chance to give some public facing talks, including at two events at the Tibetan-Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto: the first, to a nerve-wracking 7000 in-person attendees at the Sakya Mönlam, was to announce the publication of his new book The Amazing Treasury (forthcoming in fall 2024, with Khenpo Kunga Sherab) and present a copy to the living representative of the exiled Sakya Buddhist tradition. The second, on the very politically sensitive topic of Tibetan Buddhism during the Mongol Empire in celebration of the anniversary of the Tibetan luminary Sakya Paṇḍita, was given alongside Dr. Thupten Jinpa to a large in-house audience and then several thousand online, including many illegally from within the PRC. Matt also had the pleasure to present alongside Prof. Amanda Lucia on critiques and alternative histories of wellness culture at UCR's Palm Desert campus, hosted by our very own Prof. Michael Alexander! Additionally, during this past academic year Matt had the chance to publish articles in *The Journal of Global Buddhism*, *The Journal of Religion*, and *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie*, book chapters in *Buddhism & Healing in Modern Asia*, *Global Secularity in Premodern Asia*, and *Buddhist Minds and Bodies: Essays in Honor of José Ignacio Cabezón*, and long review essays in *The Journal of Asian Studies* and *The Journal of Chinese Religions*. This summer he is finishing a book for Brill's series in Tibetan Buddhist Studies on radical 19th century readings of the Cakrasaṃvara-tantra corpus. He is also trying hard to make substantive progress in a new book in critical body studies based in Tibetan Buddhist critiques of the brain sciences; work which is supported in part by a UCR undergrad summer research team (which includes two majors from our program) who are, among other things, transcribing hundreds of hours of video archives from the early Mind & Life meetings.

OUR FACULTY

Amanda Lucia Professor



Dr. Amanda Lucia continues to work on her book manuscript, [Above the Law: Gurus in Prison \(1770-present\)](#), which engages some of the most famous trials of gurus in modernity. The book questions how gurus became subordinated to secular courts and laws and traces the stereotype of “the criminal guru” globally. She gave research talks at Harvard University, UCR-Palm Desert, CSUB, CSUN, Skidmore College, and University of Montreal – and at the Madison South Asia and American Academy of Religions Annual Conferences.

Some of her publications this year include an edited volume, [A Cultural History of Hinduism in the Age of Independence, Volume 6 \(1-6\)](#), and articles “Flooding the Web: Absence-Presence and the Media Strategies of Nithyananda’s Digital Empire,” in *Gurus and Media*, “Economies of Wonder: The Production of Spectacle at the Kumbh Melā,” in *Wonder in South Asia*, “Persistent Fictions: Race and the Global Gurus of the Long Twentieth Century,” in *Hindu Diasporas*,” and “Marking Sacred Space: Altars and Yoga Mats in Transformative Events” in the *Journal of Festive Studies*. As PI of the Religion & Sexual Abuse Project, this year she also hosted 2-day writing workshops on *Sexuality in the Archive, Survivor-Centered Approaches in Religious Studies*, and the *Catholic Abuse Crisis*.



OUR FACULTY

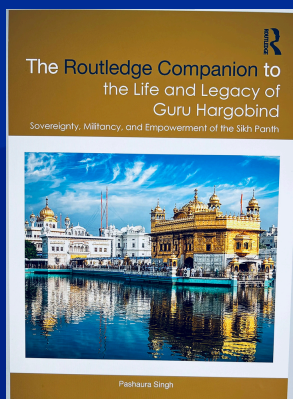


Pashaura Singh

Professor and Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair

Dr. Pashaura Singh remained creatively busy during the academic year 2023-24. His major article on “Reverberation of the Sacred Gurbani’s Vibrations at the Darbar Sahib: The Issue of its Television Broadcasting” was published in online journal *Religions* 2024, 15 (4), 395. The second article on “Religious Pluralism and the Bhagat Bānī in the Gurū Granth Sāhib was accepted for publication in the volume on Provincializing Pluralism: Theorizing Plurality in South Asian Traditions, edited by Brian Black and James Madio for the Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. in London and New York. The third article on “Sikhs in North America: Remembering Key Historical Events, Challenges, and Responses”, co-edited by Pashaura Singh and Tejpaal Singh Baniwal was published in *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (July 2024). The fourth major article on ‘Growing pains in the field of Sikh studies in the Western Academy’ published online in *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* (July 2023). Finally, the chapter on “Sikhism, Tourism and Holy Places in India” is accepted for publication in the volume Religious Heritage and Tourism in South Asia, to be coedited by Dallen J. Timothy and Kiran Shinde for Routledge Press in London and New York.

The most significant contribution of Dr. Singh was the publication of his fifth monograph The Routledge Companion to the Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind: Sovereignty, Militancy and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth by Routledge Press in London and New York in 2024. Its South Asian edition is also being published simultaneously in India. As a Distinguished Professor Dr. Singh received advancement ‘Within Above Scale’. Finally, his doctoral student Tejpaal Singh Baniwal defended his dissertation with distinction on May 29, 2024. The title of dissertation was: “Exploring the Stockton Gurdwara Archives: Connecting People, Politics, and Power to Historical Community Archives (1912-1965).”



OUR FACULTY

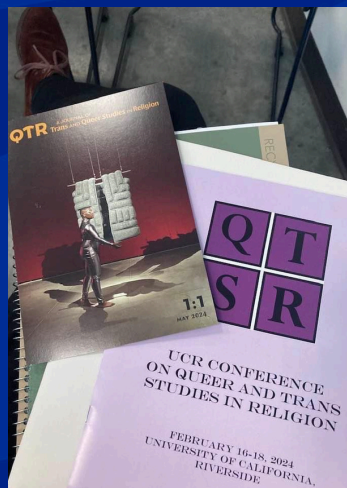
Melissa Wilcox

Professor and Holstein Chair; Department Chair



It's been a busy year! I've had several trips to Germany, including giving a lecture in Marburg (where Joachim Wach worked before heading to Chicago, and where Rudolf Otto started his museum of religion). Other journeys included a lecture at the Danforth Center ("Dodging the Sisters, or Why Queer Nuns Keep Going Viral" can be accessed [here](#)), an exploratory visit to an autoethnography workshop, and several trips for archival and interview research as my new book project has finally begun to crystallize around themes of embodied healing and spirituality in queer, trans, and/or BIPOC kink communities.

I volunteered to return as chair of the AAR's Committee on the Status of LGBTIQ+ People in the Professions, in order to pull it out of a slump from the lateral violences of the pandemic. My work proceeds apace with Hauntings (an NYU Press book series), the new journal QTR: A Journal of Trans and Queer Studies in Religion, efforts to start a center for queer and trans studies/activism/art/organizing at UCR, and the signature Holstein Chair projects: the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship and the UCR Conference on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion. I look forward to the new developments of the coming year.





A photograph of a tree-lined campus walkway. The path is paved and leads into the distance, flanked by large, mature trees with green and yellowing leaves. Several students are walking along the path, some carrying backpacks. The scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the ground.

Our Graduate Students

STUDENT UPDATES



Fadime Apaydin, PhD Student

Fadime Apaydin has just completed her course work and is prepared to take qualifying exams next year. She co-authored the book chapter entitled "Participation of Faith-Based Organizations in Disaster Response and Relief Efforts in a Secular System: A Case Study of the United States" (which was published in 2023). Fadime is currently co-authoring three book chapters: "Faith-Based Diplomacy in Climate Change Negotiations," "The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and the Church as a Mediating Force in the Integration of Refugees," and "Shades of Belief under a Secular Lens: Minority Religions in the Turkish Media Landscape." Also, she is working on a co-edited volume titled Sustainability and Religion. Throughout the academic year, Fadime presented at several conferences organized by the AAR Western Region, Concordia University (Canada), University of Gdańsk (Poland), and Tutu Centre (UK). Her work titled "Facing the Hate: A Comprehensive Overview of Religious and Racially Motivated Hate Crimes in the United States" has been accepted to the AAR 2024 Annual Meeting (Religion and Migration Unit). Since January 2024, Fadime has served as co-chair of the Religions of Asia Unit in the AAR Western Region. In addition, she was awarded the Dr. J.S. Saini Award for Leadership and Collaboration and the Holstein Graduate Prize in Religion and Social Justice from the Department for the Study of Religion. Finally, Fadime served as a TA for the courses "Introduction to Comparative Scripture," "Religious Myths and Rituals," and "Islam and Feminism."

Samantha Griggs, PhD Student

Samantha Griggs (she/they) completed their first year of coursework for the PhD program in the Study of Religion. She especially enjoyed the advanced seminar on North American Religion in the fall, and TA'ing for Dr. Elyse Ambrose in the winter and Dr. Jessica Rehman in the department of Gender Studies this spring. Professional highlights included publishing a book review in Race and Yoga and being accepted to present at the 2024 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting and the 2024 National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference in November. This year Samantha also took class at UCSB and assisted with the 3rd International Academic Conference: Yoga Darśana, Yoga Sādhana: Introspection, Inspiration, Institutionalisation at Universität Hamburg in Germany. She is spending the summer in Riverside and looking forward to taking classes in Feminist Studies and Political Science this fall.



STUDENT UPDATES



Remy Illona, PhD

It makes sense to me to write about my accomplishments, by first mentioning my dissertation which is titled 'The Holocaust of Biafra: Anti-Semitism and Genocide in sub-Saharan Africa.' It is also important for me to say that this work came to life with the profound guidance and immeasurable support of Professor Michael Alexander. I think that this is a good time for me to also say what is on my mind as I am on the verge of graduating and becoming less visible in the department and university which have been my home for these past six years. Studying with the faculty of the Department for the Study of Religion, two of whom - Professor Paul Chang and Professor Ana Bajzelj - kindly agreed to serve in my Dissertation Committee alongside Professor Alexander, I also gained an understanding of religion in ways I consider to be very important. From my viewpoint religion still largely influences almost everything in the world and more-so in those parts which are mischaracterized as less developed, which as we know, are among the areas my work focuses on.

I presented a summary of my Dissertation at the Rubin Lecture in Hate, Genocide, and Ethnic Cleansing on March 6, 2024. I have had a good run with the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA). In addition to having been awarded a grant to conduct research how antisemitism inspired genocide altered the worldview of the womenfolk of the Igbos, I have presented papers at their conferences. I will not fail to mention that I would not have been able to accomplish what I did, without the assistance of the non-academic staff members in the Department for the Study of religion, and other University of California, Riverside faculty, and non-academic staff.



STUDENT UPDATES

Kori Pacyniak, PhD Candidate

Kori spent the 2023-2024 academic year conducting ethnographic research with transgender Catholics across the United States for their dissertation. They were interviewed by regional radio stations and national newspapers in response to Vatican declarations about LGBTQ Catholics. A Holstein Dissertation Fellow for the 2023-2024 year, Kori presented research at the North American Academy of Ecumenists, the American Academy of Religion, the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, and the London Critical Thought Conference, as well as at a conference on “The Church and “Gender Theory”: Theory, Rhetoric and Practice” hosted by the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge and the London Jesuit Centre. They taught courses in both the department for the study of religion and the gender studies department at UCR and in the LGBT Studies program at San Diego State University. They were awarded the department’s Graduate Award in the Public Understanding of Religion. Kori was named a Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellow for the 2024-2025 year and looks forward to devoting time to finishing the dissertation!



J Selke, PhD Candidate

Over the course of this past year, J has continued writing their dissertation, focusing research and writing on trans-exclusion during trans and satanic moral panics in the contemporary United States. J presented ongoing doctoral research at three conferences this year; the annual meeting of the National Women’s Studies Association in October 2023, the Devil Conference in May 2024, and the Religion Beyond Binary conference in July 2024. J also presented two invited lectures, a classroom lecture at Defiance College in Ohio on Sexual Agency and Satanism and the other a classroom lecture at Lawrence University in Wisconsin on Trans Studies, Religious Studies, and Satanism. J participated in an invited podcast roundtable on Queer Studies and Media with the En-Gender Conversations podcast. J spent much of their time teaching this year, as an instructor of record for UCR’s Death course in the summer, as a visiting instructor for their History of the Devil course at Occidental College in the Fall, and as the Coordinator of the University Teaching Certificate Program for UCR Graduate Division all year. Outside of classroom spaces, J co-organized the Queer and Trans Studies in Religion Hybrid Conference.



STUDENT UPDATES

Alba Rodriguez Juan, PhD Student

This has been my 3rd year, and it has gone fast! My main focus has been a reading marathon for the qualifying exams. But I've also TAed 3 different courses: "Introduction to Asian Religions" with Jess, "Religious Myths and Rituals" with Michael, and "Religion and Science" with Matt. The last of these courses was new to me, so there were a lot of learnings, and now I feel a bit more acquainted to engage in discussions with fellow academics from both health and natural sciences. Working with professors and TAs from our department has definitely been a great learning experience. I feel very grateful for that. Regarding research, the highlight is that my first book chapter is forthcoming in an edited volume on Engaged Jainism. The theme is the cultivation of friendship, joy for others, compassion and equanimity in Jain texts. I presented on this writing in three different conferences, which allowed me to reconnect with colleagues, learn about current research, and get inspiration. Also Ana and I organized a book club to discuss "Freedom Inside? Yoga and Meditation in the Carceral State" by Farah Godrej. Funding from the Health Humanities and Disability Justice (HHDJ) Lab and the UCR Center for Ideas and Society supported some of these initiatives. Finally, let's acknowledge that there were some challenges as well, so thanks to everyone who has been there to make it through!



Adam Tyson, PhD

Adam Tyson successfully defended his dissertation with distinction in Winter Quarter, earning his Ph.D. with a Designated Emphasis in Middle East and Islamic Studies. His dissertation titled, "The Debate over Mystical Monism in the 17th Century: the 'Unity of Existence' and Non-Muslims in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires," examines Islamic intellectual networks in the 17th century Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, and specifically, the debates surrounding the Sufi philosophy of the "Unity of Existence" (waḥdat al-wujūd) and the contrasting attitudes toward non-Muslim communities (Christians, Jews, Sikhs and Hindus) held by proponents and detractors of this philosophy. Adam is extremely grateful to committee members Dr. Muhamad Ali and Dr. Pashaura Singh of the Department for the Study of Religion and the History Department's Dr. Fariba Zarinebaf for their assistance and tutelage these past seven years. Adam is now entering the job market and applying for postdoc fellowships and teaching positions at the college level.

STUDENT UPDATES

Alexander Zamuşinski, PhD Candidate

This year, Alex, as co-editor alongside Dr. Phil Zuckerman, signed a contract with Oxford University Press for the upcoming 2026 volume of The Oxford Handbook of Apostasy and Religious Deconversion. He also submitted three articles to separate academic journals, all of which have been accepted and are currently under review. One of these papers, which earned the Holstein Graduate Prize in Religion and Social Justice from the UCR Department for the Study of Religion, was presented in April at the 29th Annual Graduate Interdisciplinary Conference at Concordia University. Additionally, Alex will present another paper at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion conference in Pittsburgh this October.



Furthermore, Alex offered a new course at UCR titled History of Atheism (RLST 125), which was highly successful and led to the development of a series of video presentations on his YouTube channel. Alex’s YouTube channel on religious studies continues to grow, attracting new subscribers. As of August 2024, it has approximately 7,000 subscribers and 250,000 views, while his similar YouTube channel in Russian has over 60,000 subscribers and more than 5 million views.





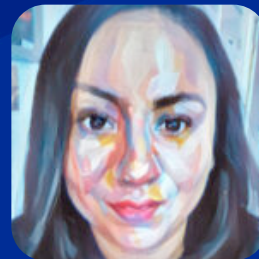
OUR STAFF

OUR STAFF



Geneva Marie Amador

Event Coordinator and Administrative Assistant III for the Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies.



Josie Ayala

Financial Analyst



Kasondra Lopez

Budget Analyst II

I've been part of the UCR community for just over a year, serving as a Budget Analyst II for both The Study of Religion and Ethnic Studies. This year has been a time of self-reflection, major life changes, and extensive learning. As someone new to higher education, I've been truly impressed by the behind-the-scenes efforts that keep things running smoothly and have developed a deep appreciation for our dedicated staff, faculty, and students.

I've just completed my first semester pursuing a Master's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Management. This experience has been both exciting and enriching, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of the student experience.



Mariella Valdivia

Graduate Student Affairs Officer

I have worked for UCR for the last fifteen years and have been in this role since September 2023. I received my bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a minor in Human Development from California Baptist University. Originally, I intended to pursue a career as a Special Education teacher. Though, that changed when I started working at UCR. I immediately fell in love with higher education and helping students who are first generation college students. In 2016 I went on to receive my Masters in Higher Education & Leadership from California Baptist University.

I have been married for 9 years and have three little ones Mila (6) and Emma (4) and a Labradoodle Gracie (7) who keep me on my feet. We love to travel as a family. I've been known to plan our next family trip while still on our current trip.



Graduates & Awards

ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

The 2023-2024 academic year wrapped up with a department banquet to recognize the accomplishments of our students and share our gratitude for our staff. Students, faculty, staff, and their families gathered together to celebrate accomplishments of our graduating students and award honorees. Our staff put together an incredible evening complete with a photo wall and props for all to take advantage of. A special thank you goes out to Prof. Muhamad Ali for documenting the evening with some excellent photographs of our award recipients.



GRADUATES

UNDERGRADUATE:

MAJORS:

- Jacquelyn Connoly
- Brian Hornor
- Winny Magana
- Israel Ponce

MINORS:

- Mariam Hanna
- Kenly Reyes
- Madelyn Houser

HONORS IN JAIN STUDIES:

- Brook La



GRADUATE:

C. PHIL:

- Christopher Valencia

PHD:

- Dr. Tejpal Singh Baniwal
- Dr. Richard Howick
- Dr. Remy Illona
- Dr. Adam Tyson



AWARDS

Achievement Award - Nick Lavis

Awarded to an undergraduate student who has demonstrated meritorious achievement

Barbara and Donald Donner Essay Award – Nick Lavis For the paper: The Torchbearer's Procession: The Radical Eschatological and Soteriological Evolutions in Esoteric Greek Mystery Cults

Encouragement Award – Israel Ponce

Awarded to an undergraduate student whose achievements demonstrate promise and potential

Edwin S. Gaustad Award – Jacqueline Connely

Awarded to an undergraduate student who has demonstrated interest in attending graduate school

Holstein Chair Undergraduate Award - Levi Ninio

Awarded to an undergraduate student who has demonstrated commitment to the connections between religion and social justice

Shrimad Rajchandra Essay Award – Oceana Alessandro

For the paper: From Ahimsa to Independence: tracing Jain Philosophy's Impact on India's Freedom Struggle

June O'Connor Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award – Danya Mohammed

Douglas M. Parrott Graduate Service Award – J Selke & Kimberly Diaz

Dr. J.S. Saini Graduate Award for Leadership and Collaboration – Fadime Apaydin

Graduate Award in the Public Understanding of Religion - Kori Pacyniak & Tejpal Baniwal

Holstein Graduate Prize - Alexandr Zamuşinski; Holstein Honorable Mention - Fadime Apaydin

ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET





Department Events

COLLOQUIA

October 19 – Melissa Wilcox (UCR)

Title: Ecstatic Method: Notes Toward the Sexy Study of Religion

November 9 – grad student pre-AAR presentations

(David St. John and Alba Rodríguez)

Title (Alba Rodríguez): A Jain Reinterpretation of the Yoga Sūtra by Yaśovijaya

Title (David St. John): Shifting Scriptures: Impacts of External Forces upon Jain Scripture

December 7 – Steven M. Vose (University of Colorado, Denver)

Title: Making a Transnational Jain Community: Theorizing the Social Media Strategy of the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission of Dharampur (SRMD)

January 22 – Benjamin Schonthal (University of Otago)

Title: What is Buddhist Law (in Colonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka)?

February 15 – Krystal Ghisyawan (Georgia Gwinnett College)

Title: Besharam: Growing Up “Queer” in Rural Hindu Spaces in Trinidad

March 14 – Muneza Rizvi (UC Berkeley)

Title: ‘Strange’ Affinities: Iṣlāḥ and British Muslim Volunteers in the Syrian War

April 18 – Mohamad M. Jarada (UC Davis)

Title: Counterinsurgent Force and Its Presence in Islamic Life



2023-2024 BOOK CLUBS

December 2023

Book club and workshop with the author Steven M. Vose (University of Colorado, Denver). Forthcoming book: Reimagining Jainism in Islamic India: Jain Intellectual Culture in the Delhi Sultanate. Sponsored by the Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies. Organized by Ana Bajželj.

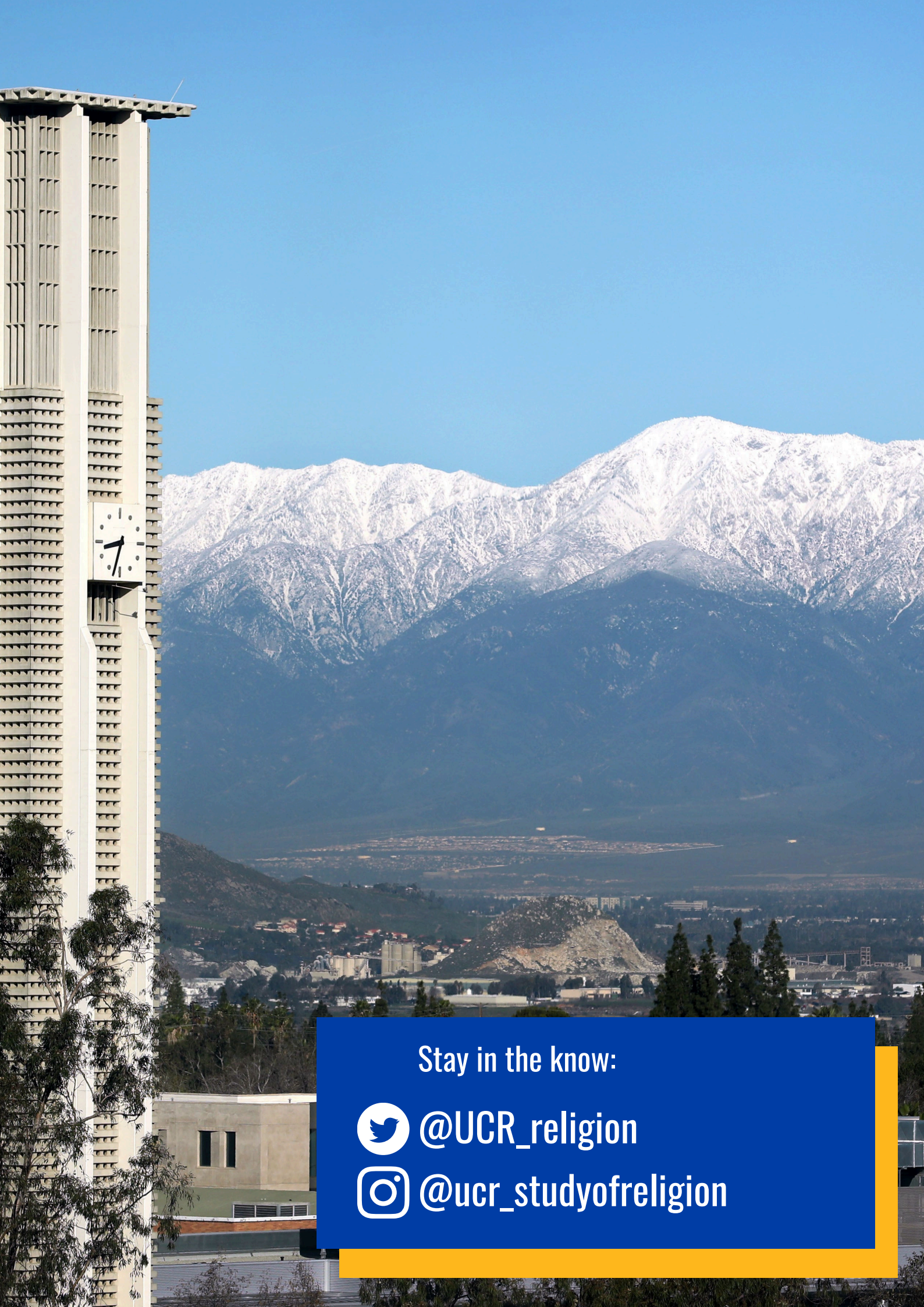
January 2024

Book club and workshop with the author Benjamin Schonthal (University of Otago). Book: Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law: The Pyrrhic Constitutionalism of Sri Lanka. Co-sponsored by the Asian Studies Program, the Department for the Study of Religion, and the Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies. Co-organized by Ana Bajželj and Amanda Lucia (UCR).

January–February 2024

Book club and workshop with the author Farah Godrej (University of California, Riverside). Book: Freedom Inside? Yoga and Meditation in the Carceral State. Co-sponsored by the UCR Center for Ideas and Society and the Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies. Co-organized by Ana Bajželj and Alba Rodríguez





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