

The Religious Studies Voice



2014-2015



2014-2015

Special points of interest:

- Dr. June O'Connor's Contributions to the Department
- 4th International Sikh Studies Conference
- Report by Visiting Scholar Eva Lukášová
- RS Major Sierra LaPoint wins Chancellor's Fellowship

Inside this issue:

Notes from the Chair's Desk	2
Past Chair, Dr. June O'Connor	3, 8-10
4th Sikh Studies Conference	4-8
Lectures and Colloquia	12
Faculty & Grad Student Updates	12-14
Eva Lukášová, Visiting Scholar	11
Sierra LaPoint's Chancellor's Fellowship	Back Page

UCR Department of Religious Studies

Page 2

Notes from the Chair's Desk

The academic year 2014-15 has been quite exciting and productive in a number of ways. First of all, let me talk about the accomplishments of our faculty. I am delighted to report that Amanda Lucia received tenure and her book *Reflections of Amma* (2014) won the prestigious Emory Elliot Book Award. Muhamad Ali also received tenure and his book on *Islam and Colonialism* is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press. We are excited that Michael Alexander has been appointed to the new Maimonides Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies.

Second, during this year we were able to recruit a new faculty member in the field of Global Christianity who will be joining us on July 1, 2015. I welcome Paul Chang who will offer our department not only his strong research qualifications in early Christianity, but also his expertise in the dispersion of Christian missions around the world, particularly in China.

Third, our Holstein Distinguished Professor, Ivan Strenski, was able to teach one graduate seminar during Winter 2015 while on recall, and he also organized his final Holstein Annual Event in which Dr. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd delivered a thought-provoking lecture on "US Foreign Policy and Religion." We bid Dr. Strenski farewell and wish him well in his future scholarly and other endeavors.

Fourth, our 4th Sikh Studies conference was remarkably successful and very productive. Our graduate and undergraduate student volunteers—who gave up their weekend to register guests, offer water and directions, clear tables and bring desserts—were uniformly declared wonderful and amazing by our guests, making us the envy of faculty from the other institutions represented. Our students were all bubbling with enthusiasm at the reception and in welcoming the guests. Our staff members, particularly Ryan Mariano, did an amazing job to take care of the logistics of the conference.

Fifth, our department had a very productive meeting with Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Paul D'Anieri on May 13, 2015. He patiently listened to our issues of being a small department and gave us very encouraging advice in the process of rebuilding our strengths.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our commitment to our pedagogical work toward meeting the curricular needs of our graduate and undergraduate students in the coming years. We have much to celebrate in terms of the publication of two new books that reflect the research trajectory of our faculty. We are also grateful to our donors for supporting our department.

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Dr. Pashaura Singh



Dr. Pashaura Singh, Department Chair & Professor of Religious Studies, & Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies

The cover image depicts UCR undergraduate volunteers with Chancellor Kim A. Wilcox and Dean of CHASS Shaun Bowler at the 4th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini conference on Sikh Studies

Dr. June O'Connor's Career and Contributions to Religious Studies at UCR—Part of an ongoing series about the history of the department

As part of a series of pieces in this newsletter on the history of the department of Religious Studies at UCR, we pay tribute here to the career and contributions to the department of Dr. June O'Connor, long-serving Professor (now Emerita) and former Chair of the department.

Dr. June O'Connor completed a Bachelor of Arts in English at Mundelein College in 1964, and Master of Arts degrees in Theology at Marquette University in 1966 and Religion at Temple University in 1972. In 1973, she completed a Ph.D. in Religious Ethics at Temple University, and in the same year Dr. O'Connor joined the faculty of the young Religious Studies Program (not yet a Department) at UCR. Throughout her long, distinguished career of research and teaching, Dr. O'Connor's varied research interests have included: comparative religious ethics; religion, violence and non-violence; women and religion and feminist perspectives on religion; theologies and testimonial writings of the developing world; and methods of ethical analysis and inquiry.



Dr. June O'Connor,
Professor Emerita
and past Chair of the
Religious Studies
Department

Dr. O'Connor authored two scholarly monographs. The first, *The Quest for Political and Spiritual Liberation: A Study in the Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghose* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), was an extension of the research she conducted for her Ph.D. dissertation. The second book was an exploration of the work of Catholic social activist Dorothy Day, titled *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day: A Feminist Perspective* (Crossroad Publishing, 1991). Dr. O'Connor also published 35 articles, including in academic journals such as *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society*, and *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*. Starting in 1996, Dr. O'Connor was a regular ethical advice columnist, authoring the "Dear June" column featured in *Catholic Digest*. She also wrote many articles for other popular press sources, especially on topics related to ethical issues.

Since the Religious Studies Program was relatively new when Dr. O'Connor began her career at UCR, it was she who initially developed and taught many of the courses that are now still core parts of the department's curriculum. (Continued on Page 8).

Religious Studies Ph.D. Students' Comments about Dr. June O'Connor

"June O'Connor's guidance has been extremely important to the department overall, and to my work in particular. Her meticulous editing of the chapters of my dissertation and suggestions regarding the crafting of my dissertation have been invaluable. Moreover, her gentle yet firm directions have made it possible for me to complete my dissertation. I am extremely grateful to her for helping me to accomplish my academic goals."—**Dr. Patrick Emmet**, 2015 alumnus of the Ph.D. program and advisee of Dr. O'Connor

"June O'Connor was Chair of the department when I arrived to complete my M.A./Ph.D. and she warmly and skillfully drew all of us from the first graduate cohort into academic life at UCR. I was her student in multiple excellent classes, worked with her as a Teaching Assistant, and she included me—very early in my academic work—in the planning and execution of a year-long conference series on "Gandhi's Legacy in an Age of Terror". In all of these experiences, June was a serious scholar who motivated students to high standards through her enthusiastic and empathetic approach as a teacher and leader. I owe a lot to her in my academic success."—**Dr. Charles Townsend**, 2015 alumnus of the Ph.D. program

4th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh Studies International Conference, May 8-10 2015—report by Dr. Charles M. Townsend



On May 8-10, 2015, the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies and the Department of Religious Studies at UCR hosted their fourth large international academic conference in the field of Sikh Studies. I co-organized the conference with Dr. Pashaura Singh (Professor and Chair of Religious Studies and holder of the Dr. J.S. Saini Chair at UCR) and Dr. Verne A. Dusenbery (Professor of Anthropology and Chair of Global Studies, Hamline University, St. Paul, MN), and with the help of UCR staff members and graduate and undergraduate students. The conference involved twenty-six presenters—representing universities and Sikh organizations in the US, UK, Canada, India, Norway, Denmark, Italy, and Singapore—as well as UCR administrators, faculty, and staff, and more than twenty UCR student volunteers.

The conference was organized around the title and theme of “Living and Making *Sikhi* in the Diaspora: the Millennial Generation Comes of Age.” The term ‘millennial’ (a.k.a. ‘generation Y’) within the conference title refers to the popularly used identifier for the current generation of people worldwide who were born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. Thus the conference was conceived to bring focus to the generation of young Sikhs that is currently ‘coming of age’ around the world today and panels and events throughout the conference were organized to engage with this theme and topics surrounding it in various ways. (The call for papers, conference program book, and abstracts of the papers can be viewed at: Religiousstudies.ucr.edu/SPS/events). (Continued on Pg. 5).

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
UCRIVERSIDE Department of Religious Studies

4th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh Studies Conference



“Living and Making *Sikhi* in the Diaspora:
The Millennial Generation Comes of Age”
May 8-10, 2015

4th International Sikh Studies Conference (Cont. from Pg. 4)



UCR Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Dr. Paul D'Anieri welcomes conference participants

Panelists and speakers throughout the conference included Sikh activists and educators, and Sikh and non-Sikh academics representing inter-disciplinary perspectives on the Sikh tradition, including: Religious Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Global Studies, Asian Studies, History, Philosophy, Scriptural and Textual Studies, Economics, and other areas of research. Because of the conference's deliberate focus on living Sikhs of the current generation, scholars who utilize interview-based research methods—including some who have been engaged in research within Sikh communities around the world for several decades—were especially represented. Continuing with the purpose of joining 'town and gown' of previous Sikh Studies conferences at UCR, all of the panels included lively discussion involving professors and graduate and undergraduate students from multiple departments at UCR, scholars from outside of Sikh Studies, members of Sikh organizations, and non-academics and members of Sikh communities from California and beyond.

UCR Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Dr. Paul D'Anieri was on hand to offer conference participants a warm greeting to UCR at the opening of the conference. Most of the panel presentations on the first day of the conference centered or touched on the theme of Sikh activism. In fact, I can say that in organizing the papers and presenters into panels, this focus on Sikh activism for the first day arose organically because so many of the original paper abstracts that were submitted in advance of the conference highlighted research on Sikh activists. In my own research within Sikh communities in the U.S., the centrality of



Dr. Charles M. Townsend and a panel of Sikh activists from SALDEF, Sikh Coalition, and Jakara Movement

activism, social duty, and community involvement to Sikhs of the 'millennial' generation in living out their *Sikhi* is readily apparent. The centrality of this dimension of Sikh lives among the current generation around the world was affirmed and discussed through paper presentations focusing on Sikh environmentalism, political and social activism, youth groups, and work-life in Canadian, American, British, and Singaporean contexts.

On the last panel of the first day, I had the pleasure of chairing a panel of young activists representing three of the most active and largest Sikh activist organizations in the U.S. Sapreet Kaur, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition, Navdeep Singh, Policy Director of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), and Ravneet Kaur, Director of Development of Jakara Movement participated in a roundtable discussion. Each of them discussed their work and the work of their organization, connected this with broader themes of the conference, and shared personal stories about their paths to becoming Sikh activists. The latter half of the panel was a lively open discussion with the audience members. Since each of the three Sikh organizations represented have a strong educational focus, the discussion offered a chance for direct engagement between academics and activists who are often engaged on the ground level in educating the broader public about Sikhs. Many conference attendees told me that they felt this panel was one of the highlights of the conference.



Dr. Pashaura Singh Delivers his keynote address

On the first night, conference participants and visitors attended an awards dinner and keynote speech on the UCR campus. UCR Chancellor Dr. Kim A. Wilcox and Dean of UCR's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Shaun Bowler were in attendance to give special welcoming remarks to the attendees. Before the dinner, the more than twenty UCR students who had spent the day volunteering to help conference attendees and facilitate the conference events had time to chat with the Chancellor and Dean—a happy opportunity for connection for me to see (on our campus of 21,000 students!). Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon, an orthopedic surgeon from Riverside who is a longtime Trustee of the UC Riverside Foundation and chaired the Campaign for Sikh Studies at UCR, delivered a further welcoming address. Dr. Pashaura Singh delivered the keynote speech, reflecting broadly on multiple ways that the current generation of Sikhs in North America are active in living *Sikhi* in new contexts. (Continued on Pg. 6).

4th International Sikh Studies Conference (Cont. from Pg. 5)

It was a personal honor for me to introduce the two scholars who were chosen as honorees of the conference because their work has been such an enduring influence on my own research on Sikh Americans. Dr. Bruce La Brack and Dr. Karen Isaksen Leonard were honored for their contributions to the study of Sikhs and Punjabis in North America. Dr. La Brack is a cultural anthropologist and Professor Emeritus at the University of the Pacific (CA, USA) who has conducted over forty years of research on Sikhs and South Asians in the worldwide diaspora, and his ethnographic study, *The Sikhs of Northern California: 1904-1975* is a foundational work on Sikhs in the U.S. Dr. Leonard is an historian and anthropologist and Professor Emerita at UC Irvine (CA, USA). She has conducted extensive ethnographic research on Punjabi and other South Asian American communities, and, in particular, her book *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* is a rich portrait of the families formed by early Punjabi immigrants to California and their marriages with Mexican women.

Panel presentations on the second day of the conference followed multiple focal points—music, the internet, martial arts, literature, and more—but most were unified by their investigation into the transmission of Sikh ways of being and knowing to new generations and how the current generation of Sikhs are living and making *Sikhi* anew in diverse ways within differing global contexts. Geographically, paper presenters on the second day of the conference discussed the transmission of the Sikh tradition in the UK, US, Norway, and Italy.

The morning of the third day of the conference was given to a final round table discussion involving all of the conference participants in analyzing the points of resonance and difference between their work that had been touched on throughout the conference. A closing event of the conference was a screening of the film *Waking in Oak Creek*. I led a discussion of how the film might be used as a powerful educational tool for professors to discuss with students the incidents surrounding the massacre at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, the realities of racism, religious bias, and xenophobia, and the rays of hope displayed in the actions following the tragedy by members of the Oak Creek Gurdwara community and the broader communities of supporters surrounding them. (Continued on Pg. 8).



Dr. Bruce La Brack (top) and Karen Leonard (bottom right) are honored



Conference Participants During Dr. Toby Braden Johnson's presentation

The Religious Studies Voice

4th International Sikh Studies Conference (Cont. from Pg. 6)



(L to R) Conference co-organizers Drs. Verne Dusenbery and Pashaura Singh with Dr. Michael Hawley, and Honoree Dr. Bruce LaBrack; (right hand photo) Dr. Pashaura Singh with staff member Ryan Mariano, who coordinated logistics and budget for the conference



(Top Left) Community members during a panel discussion on the first day; and (right hand photo) Conference Participants on the second day

UCR Chancellor
Dr. Kim Wilcox
greet attendees at
the conference



Faezeh Fathizadeh

Religious Studies Club President Faezeh Fathizadeh Comments on her work organizing student volunteers for the conference

This May, I had the honor of organizing undergraduate volunteers for UCR's 4th biennial Sikh Studies Conference where world-renowned scholars were in attendance. Over the weeks leading up to the conference, many students contacted me, enthusiastic to volunteer. As an undergraduate myself intent on furthering my knowledge in the field of Religious Studies, I was thrilled to attend such an international conference of well-known scholars. Students had the chance to speak with scholars and activists who were well-established in their respective fields. It was remarkable to see many of the undergraduates, especially students from our Religious Studies Undergraduate Club, engage the audience and speakers with their own input, questions, and observations. The conference was a huge success and, as undergrads, we are proud of our faculty and staff for their hard work and also grateful for giving us the opportunity to contribute.

4th International Sikh Studies Conference (Cont. from Pg. 6)



Dr. Singh with student leaders of UCR's Sikh Student Association at the reception dinner

I have the perspective of having participated in all four Sikh Studies conferences organized at UCR by Dr. Pashaura Singh under the auspices of the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair, and I noted that there were a couple of familiar 'veterans' of the four conferences in attendance, but each of the conferences has been different, and there were many young scholars and new voices this time. I was thankful once again to be involved in an interconnected and supportive field of scholars, to see three days of positive, open and collegial interaction between scholars and community members, and to see the enthusiastic support and involvement of members of the Sikh community and of UCR administrators, staff, and especially of our students. (Photos in this section by www.carrirosemaphotography.com, UCR undergraduate Rutdow Jiraprapasuke, and Dr. Charles M. Townsend).

Dr. June O'Connor's Contributions to the Department (Continued. from Pg. 3).

Among other classes, Dr. O'Connor regularly taught "Religious Myths and Rituals", "Religion and Violence", "Religion and Human Rights", "Death", "Women and Religion", and "Contemporary Christian Theologies," as well as graduate seminars and independent studies courses, particularly on topics surrounding Ethics. Dr. O'Connor's classes were popular with students, and she was recognized for her excellent teaching with multiple campus-wide awards. In 1979, she received the UCR-wide Distinguished Teaching Award, the same year in which she earned tenure and was promoted to the position of Associate Professor. In 1991, Dr. O'Connor was promoted to full Professor, and in 2001, she was named Professor of the Year by UCR's University Honors Program.

Dr. O'Connor led a career deeply dedicated to service to the University, the Religious Studies Department, and the broader community. In fact, when she was presented with the UCR-wide Campus Service Award, the report of her recommendation stated, "Professor O'Connor has served UCR so extensively, that listing the sum of her contributions would be nearly impossible" (http://senate.ucr.edu/agenda/060530/_DISTINGUISHED_SERVICE_AWARD_1_2006_J_E_O_CONNOR.pdf). Dr. O'Connor's efforts and collaborations not only led to the strength and growth of Religious Studies at UCR, she also chaired the committee on Women's Studies from 1980 to 1981, which led to the eventual founding of a department (now the Gender and Sexuality Studies Department), and she was instrumental in developing the Peace and Conflict Studies minor at UCR. Among her other important service activities for the University, Dr. O'Connor at one time chaired the Senate Committee on Academic Personnel and served as the Director of the University Honors Program. Dr. O'Connor performed many other service activities and served on numerous campus committees, including serving as the Representative to the Assembly of the UC System-wide Academic Senate (1997-1998), as the Chair of the Undergraduate Council (1985-1986 and 1998-1999), and as the Chair of the Committee on Distinguished Teaching (1995-1996). Throughout her years at UCR, Dr. O'Connor organized and raised funds to bring numerous guest speakers to campus and also organized and co-organized multiple conference series, including a series of programs called "Days of Respect" in 1994 after the attempted assassination on campus of Khalid Mohammed (former Nation of Islam and New Black Panther Party leader), a conference on the theme of "Religion and Ethnic Conflict" on April 28-30, 1995, the annual Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies themed Forrest Moston lectures, and a year-long series of programs titled "Gandhi's Legacy in an Age of Terror" in 2007-2008.

Dr. O'Connor's exceptional leadership and dedication were central to much of the Department's strength and growth across multiple phases of its development. She began her first tenure as Chair of the then Program in Religious Studies in 1985. It was under her leadership that Religious Studies moved from a Program to a full Department in 1993. Also in 1993, Dr. O'Connor initiated and successfully raised funds for the Holstein Family and Community Chair in Religious Studies. The Holstein Chair was the first endowed Chair within the College of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences at UCR. Throughout her career, she also employed her fundraising abilities to establish merit-based scholarships for Religious Studies students and to bring guest speakers to campus. Dr. O'Connor was appointed and served as Chair of the Department for a second term beginning in 2004. In 2004-2005, Dr. O'Connor chaired the search committee for the Endowed Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh Studies, a task that required all of her diplomatic skills to defend academic freedom in the hiring process and calm misunderstandings with some local Sikh community members (see Dr. Nyitray's story about this on page 9). During her tenures as Chair of the department, Dr. O'Connor also originated and edited the department's newsletter for many years, a tradition which the department is still carrying on with this Religious Studies Voice newsletter. (Cont. on Pg. 9).

Dr. June O'Connor's Contributions to the Department (Continued. from Pg. 8).

Through her work and skillful leadership, Dr. O'Connor oversaw as department Chair multiple periods of growth of the Religious Studies Department's undergraduate program and also the inauguration, in 2006, of an M.A. and Ph.D. granting graduate program. Throughout her years of teaching and service to the department, Dr. O'Connor tirelessly advocated for the importance of continuing to develop the academic study of religion to those within and outside of the University. One of her contributions in this regard was a document in which she used the imagery of "Pulpit" and "Podium" to delineate the work of theology and "internal" religious perspectives from the "detached" academic perspectives of scholars of Religious Studies (this document and metaphor have come to represent something of a 'classic' used by professors in the department to illuminate the differences in these approaches for students taking their first class in Religious Studies). (Continued on Pg. 10).

Dr. June O'Connor Defends Sikh Studies at UCR, by Dr. Vivian-Lee Nyitray, Past Department Chair and Professor Emerita

During Dr. O'Connor's tenure as Chair, the department gained approval to launch a search to fill its second endowed position, the Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies. The search and its aftermath proved to be a prolonged and often unpleasant test of UCR's commitment to academic freedom and of Dr. O'Connor's professional courage and personal integrity. From the outset, certain groups within the Sikh faith community made known their desire to hire a scholar whose vision of the tradition coincided with their own. As short-listed candidates came to campus and presented their scholarly work in public lectures, the unusually large audiences included off-campus individuals from the Sikh community who attempted to redirect discussion toward their own doctrinal interpretations. Dr. O'Connor recognized their concerns but patiently reminded all attendees of UC hiring policies and procedures. However, when (then) candidate Dr. Pashaura Singh arrived on campus redirection moved to disruption during his lecture, and the extreme volatility of the situation was apparent. It was no surprise, therefore, when the department's decision to recommend hiring of Dr. Singh triggered not only protests but also threats of funding withdrawal for the endowment and plans to disrupt campus activities in the event that Dr. Singh's hiring received administrative approval.

At issue was Dr. Singh's scholarship on Sikh scripture, which the department deemed impeccable but which the Sikh community did not welcome uniformly or uncritically. I remember Dr. O'Connor steadfastly resisting pressure to declare a failed search, to select another candidate, or to retreat from the department's unanimous decision. As Chair of the department, Dr. O'Connor devoted enormous time and energy to educating detractors about the nature of the academic hiring process and academic freedom, and to quashing rumors and misperceptions about Dr. Singh and his academic credentials. But even her patience could break: in one highly charged meeting with a group of



Sikh students, Dr. O'Connor rebutted their complaints against Dr. Singh as "grounded in ignorance." She then suggested to the students that they consider whether they might not be unwitting puppets whose complaints were recited at the behest of community elders. She reminded them that, as students of the University of California, they were expected to inquire and think for themselves and "not just repeat what you've been told to say." Instructing them on principles of free inquiry and academic integrity, she faced down their hostility and turned it toward humility and understanding. Having attended this meeting (at the time, as Chair of the Asian Studies program), I recall this firm and focused interaction with the students as June's finest hour as Chair of the department.

Dr. June O'Connor welcomes participants at the 2nd Sikh Studies Conference at UCR in 2011

Dr. June O'Connor's contributions to the Department (Continued from Pg. 9)

In a 1998 response article published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* ("The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual: Expanding Critical Intelligence"), Dr. O'Connor skillfully outlined the role(s) of scholars of Religious Studies as public intellectuals and the various ways that they might approach the academic study of religion that contribute to public knowledge and the missions of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Elsewhere, discussing the benefits of studying Religious Studies in the academy, Dr. O'Connor stated that "educated persons informed by the many religious worldviews that constitute our global village are well-positioned to initiate conversations about religion that encourage people to discover". In discussing her teaching, Dr. O'Connor expressed her passion for "enabling [students] to discover alternative ways of seeing things and discovering useful strategies for discerning and deciding ethical dilemmas" (<http://chass.ucr.edu/news/2006/july/07-11-06.html>).

Dr. O'Connor retired from full-time teaching in the department of Religious Studies and took Emerita status at UCR in 2011.

(Written by Dr. Charles M. Townsend, largely by consulting past UCR publications and reports and archival material composed by and about Dr. O'Connor that is housed both in the *June O'Connor Papers* collection at UCR's Rivera Library Special Collections and in the office of the current Chair of the department).



Religious Studies Department Faculty, Emeriti, and family members with Dr. June O'Connor in 2015



A Letter from Dr. Ivan Strenski, Professor Emeritus and first Holstein Endowed Chair in Religious Studies

I have had a remarkably active year, despite recurrent problems with my left knee. Repeated infections, two major "revisions," which is to say removals of the artificial knee, followed by two replacements, IV for twelve weeks or so, nasty things they stick in your arm called PIC lines, so they don't have to keep poking you with hypodermics. Actually I write this from my bed at St Vincent's in the Pico Union district of LA, also known as Little Central America, which when the breezes run the right way carry a distinctly Kim Chi scent. So, there's some context.

Is there a lesson? Maybe. If you plan to age, have been athletic and managed to have chosen parents with the wrong genes, be sure to be close to a major medical center, such as in LA. Here I learned again that even a profession like medicine (listen up, over there across campus!) remains very much an art, and far less a science than it is made out to be. Character, judgment, the virtues rule here. (Continued on Pg. 11).

A Letter from Dr. Ivan Strenski (Continued from Pg. 10)

I cannot tell you how grateful I have been for the humanity of the medical staff—from Surgeons to Nursing Assistants. Yes, knowledge of the mechanics of the body is essential, but that know-what in the hands of someone with bad judgment could kill you. Believe it.

But at the same time, we in the Humanities need to know more science. If you care about the planet, about climate change, for instance, then you need to sharpen up on the sciences. How will we be good citizens if we cannot understand and interpret the findings of climatologists in public argument—say when your school board wants to purge Darwin from the curriculum? That's why I challenged the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in a piece in *Religion Dispatches* to encourage greater knowledge of science in the Religious Studies curriculum. We need to know more about the interrelations between religion and science, such as the roots of biblical literalism—indeed, comparatively for Quranic or Vedic literalists—in the face of the sciences. So, we should boldly engage the field of religions and science, not just some idealized “religion.”

So, here's where I pitch the Humanities (you saw that coming). Here's where we learn about the many ways there are of being human—across cultures, across vast expanses of time. Studying religion is simply one of the best ways for the world to get to know itself, and to do so with a tough mind and big heart.

This may seem like an odd warm-up for writing about my intellectual activities of the past year, but seeing life from the perspective of seeing it at risk wonderfully concentrates the mind. What matters? Well, to me, comity among peoples matter. So, last May, in the midst of Putin's adventures in Ukraine and elsewhere, I had been slated to do my last lectures there that I had begun in 2010 as part of the Open Society Institute's program for training young Russian Religious Studies scholars. Should I put myself in danger in what might well have been a war zone, with talk of nukes and economic sanctions in the air? Or, should I go precisely to show the wonderful Russian young scholars I met over the years that we would not abandon them? Well, I didn't stay home. And, it was the right thing to do, even if I was thirteen time zones out of whack, with twenty hours in airplanes to boot!

The Humanities call us to knit the world together in this, and other ways, even when darkness seems to gather. Your Russian counterparts want to be part of the world in the most heartfelt of ways. And, they will. What we must do is get ready to welcome them and all the 'Others', too. One way we get ready to do that is by getting out of our comfort zones, and bringing the others in, as indeed, we go out to meet them.

As for teaching and publishing this year, I have tried to do that in my ongoing work in religion and politics. As you will read from her contribution to our newsletter (page 15), Eva Lukášová visited us from the Czech Republic this Winter to work on her dissertation about the Rohingyas, who have lately been in the news. We also worked together in my “Politics and Religion” graduate seminar. There, I not only worked through the religious formation of our political systems but also engaged issues like religious freedom, and the Israel Arab conflict. Part of my contribution to the seminar sprang from a review published this year of Ari Shavit's account of what Israel means for him. This review appeared in the journal, *Terrorism and Political Violence*. In it I tried to come to terms as honestly as I could with this vexed conflict. Given the heat this conflict generates in our country, I would argue that Religious Studies students, especially, need to be prepared to enter the public domain. We need to bring the candor and wisdom to this conflict that our broad and cross-cultural discipline promises it can do.

My hopes for the department are that it continues to work across the diverse disciplines that are shaping our world—politics, science, and religion across cultures. If we do only that, we will guarantee our continued presence in the university.

Dr. Ivan Strenski, June 3, 2015

Department Lectures and Colloquia in Academic Year 2014-2015

The Religious Studies department hosted another very full year of events, speakers, and colloquia throughout the 2014-2015 academic year.

On November 22nd, **Dr. Vivian-Lee Nyitray**, Professor Emerita and past Chair of the Religious Studies department held a Professional Skills Workshop for the Graduate Students.

The months of January and February were busy with research presentations by candidates for the Religious Studies department's advertised tenure-track faculty position in Global Christianity, which **Dr. Paul Chang** will take up in academic year 2015-2016.

On February 3rd, **Dr. Amanda Lucia** presented a book talk on the occasion of her book *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (UC Press, 2014) being awarded the "Emory Elliot Book Award" by UC Riverside's Center for Ideas and Society. The award is given once yearly to a faculty member in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences.

This year's annual Holstein Family Community Lecture in Religious Studies was delivered by **Dr. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd** (Associate Professor of Political Science with courtesy appointment in Religious Studies at Northwestern University) a scholar of the politics of religious diversity, international relations, and religion. Dr. Hurd spoke on the topic of "Religious Freedom and US Foreign-Policy," on Feb. 24th.

On March 12th **Dr. Vesna Wallace**, Professor of Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara gave a lecture on the topic of "Envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist Identity Through Chinggis Khan".

On April 23rd, **Dr. Michael Alexander** gave a research presentation exploring the question "Is There an American Jewish History?" through an examination of contemporary Jewish historiographical writing, including academic non-fiction historiography and the historiography utilized in recent fiction.

Also, throughout the 2014-2015 academic year, the Jewish Studies Lecture Series hosted three talks: "Abraham's Children: Race, Identity, and the DNA of the Chosen People," by **Jon Entine**; "Jewtopia, Live!" by the director of the film *Jewtopia*, **Bryan Fogel**; and "Perfect Storm: Syria, Iraq & the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon" by **Dr. Matthew Levitt**.



Dr. Amanda Lucia receives the Emory Elliot Book Award



Dr. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

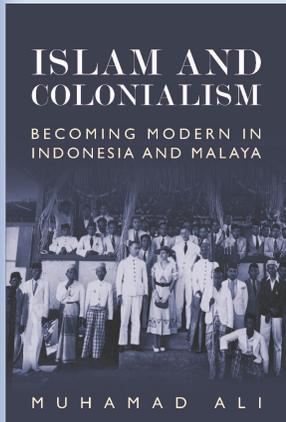


Paul Chang

Faculty Updates

Paul Chang to Join the Religious Studies Faculty in 2015-2016

In academic year 2015-2016, **Paul Chang** will join the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, taking up the position in Global Christianity advertised this year. He is currently completing a dissertation at the University of Chicago Divinity School titled *Christ and the Church: Watchman Nee, Witness Lee, and a Contribution to the Christian Tradition from Modern China*. Paul will bring strong research and teaching qualifications in the history of Christianity, particularly global Christian missions, to the department.



Dr. Muhamad Ali's
Forthcoming Book

Faculty Updates (Continued from Pg. 12)

Dr. Michael Alexander was unanimously recommended by the department and subsequently appointed as the new Maimonides Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies. He will begin this new Chairship in the 2015-2016 academic year. He is currently working on his book *Paths of Joy: Adventures in Spirit and Therapy*.

Dr. Muhamad Ali received tenure and was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor in Spring 2015. He has a forthcoming book *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya* (Edinburgh University Press) and a forthcoming book chapter "Malaysia's Islam Hadhari and International Relations" in an edited volume, *Islam's Contributions to IR Theory and Practice: Islamic Approaches to International Affairs* (Palgrave Macmillan). His current project is on religious freedom and pluralism in Indonesia. In addition to the classes he regularly teaches, next year he will be teaching a graduate seminar on "Southeast Asian Religions" and the undergraduate courses "Introduction to Comparative Scripture" and "Islam".



Religious Studies Faculty Drs. Matthew King, Muhamad Ali, and Michael Alexander at the Sikh Studies Conference

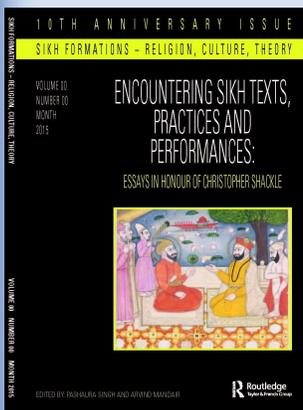
In his first year at UCR, **Dr. Matthew King** presented new and ongoing research at UCSB (on his current book project), the national meeting of the AAR (on capitalism and Buddhism in revolutionary Inner Asia), at l'École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (on secularism and the Ling Gesar epic), and at Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary (on an often overlooked genre of Tibetan life-writing known as *gsan yig*, "record of teachings received"). He also published articles in *History and Anthropology* (on 19th century lama-missionary encounters in east Tibet, co-authored with Pamela Klassen), *Mongol Studies* (on late revolutionary surveys of monasteries in Siberia and Mongolia), *Himalaya* (on monastic precedents for secular science in revolutionary Inner Asia), and a chapter in a new Oxford volume on Mongolian Buddhism (on Buddhist attacks on

science), an Oxford Bibliographies article on "Central Asian Buddhism", and an Oxford Handbook chapter on "Buddhist Economics".

Dr. Amanda Lucia received tenure and was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor in Spring 2015. Her monograph *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (University of California Press, 2014), received UCR's Center for Ideas and Society's Emory Elliott Book Award (news about the award can be viewed at: <http://chass.ucr.edu/news/2015/march/20150309-3.html>).

Drs. Lucia and King were part of a jointly awarded Mellon Seminar Fellowship through UCR's Center for Ideas and Society for the study of Immigration and Religion in Southern California. The seminar took place in Spring 2015 and involved two other faculty members, four graduate students (including Religious Studies Ph.D. Candidates Sonia Crasnow and Shou Kuo), and four undergraduates.

Dr. Pashaura Singh organized the 4th Sikh Studies conference at UCR on the theme of *Living and Making Sikhi in the Diaspora: the Millennial Generation Comes of Age*. He also completed a co-edited volume with Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, titled *Encountering Sikh Texts, Practices, and Performances* (forthcoming, Routledge, 2015). He continued in his capacities as a Member of the Editorial Collective of the University of California Press and as Co-Chair of the Sikh Studies Group of the AAR, and gave presentations and invited lectures at Mount Royal University, Calgary; Carleton University, Ottawa; UC Santa Cruz; UC Riverside; Stanford University; and a session of the AAR in San Diego.



Dr. Pashaura Singh's
Co-edited Volume

Graduate Student Updates

Sonia Crasnow presented research at the Association for the Sociology of Religion conference, attended a Harvard Divinity School Seminar on Religion and Sexuality, received a UCR Department of Religious Studies Professional Support Grant, and is currently participating in the Mellon Advancing Intercultural Studies Seminar with the Center for Ideas and Society at UCR. Sonia is currently writing a dissertation with the working title of *From the Gay Synagogue to the Queer Shtetl: Assimilation, Resistance, and Utopian Imagining in the Religious Lives of LGBTQ Jews*.

Dr. Patrick Emmett has been teaching in the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at CSU Bakersfield for the last year and successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation in August 2015.

In the Fall quarter, **Dr. Toby Braden Johnson** defended and filed his Ph.D. dissertation titled *Living and Learning with Guru Nanak: Participation and Pedagogy in the Janam-sakhi Narratives*.

Dr. Daniel Azim Pschaida presented a paper titled "American Muslim Student Associations on Campus: Ethics of Inclusion & Pluralism" at the fifth annual Islamic Studies Graduate Student Conference at UC Santa Barbara on May 9th. He taught "Introduction to Islam" online for Northern Arizona University. He published a book review of Shabana Mir's *Muslim American Women on Campus* in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. He successfully defended and filed his Ph.D. dissertation in June 2015.

Jessica Rehman was awarded the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust Award by the department for an essay reflecting on the relationship between the academic study of religion and issues of personal faith.

In summer 2015, **Justin Rose** will study Modern Greek and conduct fieldwork in medieval Byzantine churches and monasteries in Greece and Macedonia

Cristina Rosetti presented her paper "Visions of Deseret: Territory Building and Mormonism's Success as a Communal Utopia" at the western regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR).

In the Winter quarter, **Dr. Allison Solso** defended and filed her Ph.D. dissertation titled *Beyond Momento Mori: Understanding American Religious Commemoration through Roadside Shrines*. She has also been teaching in the department of Humanities and Religious Studies at Sacramento State University.

Dr. Charles M. Townsend defended and filed his Ph.D. dissertation, *Music in the Gurus' View: Sikh Religious Music, Memory, and the Performance of Sikhism in America* in March, 2015. He edited a special issue of the journal *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* (Routledge, Dec. 2014) on the topic of "Sikh Texts, Practices, and Performances" (which included articles by himself, and UCR Religious Studies Ph.D. Candidates **Jeremy Guida** and **Sean Sagan**). He co-organized the 4th Sikh Studies conference at UCR with Dr. Pashaura Singh and continued with his duties as a member of the Steering Committee of the Sikh Studies Group of the AAR and Co-chair of the Religions of Asia section of the western region of the AAR.

Nathan Womack presented a paper titled, "Silicon and the Sacred," at the University of Nevada, Reno for their College of Liberal Arts Graduate Symposium in February. He also presented a paper titled, "The Adapting Suburban Church," at the Western Regional Meeting of the AAR in March.



Religious Studies (and other UCR) Graduate Students in Dr. Singh's graduate seminars "From Text to Scripture" and "Historiography of Sikh Hermeneutics".



My Quarter in UCR's Department of Religious Studies—by **Eva Lukášová**, Visiting Scholar from Masaryk University, Czech Republic

I would like to share some feelings and impressions as a foreigner who got an opportunity to visit the Department of Religious Studies at UCR. I come from the Czech Republic, a small country in Central Europe. I am a third year Ph.D. student at the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University in Brno. My dissertation focuses on the topic of religion and politics in Burma. When I was thinking about issues within my dissertation, the research of Dr. Ivan Strenski ended up in my hands. I was impressed by the way Dr. Strenski thought about the relations between religion and politics, and so I decided to ask him if he would be willing to discuss my dissertation with me. I was really happy to read a positive email response from him. This is how my journey to UCR began.

My first impression of Riverside was great. I came in January from the Czech Republic, which was covered in snow, to sunny California. A 'campus' like UCR's is something that universities in my country do not have—since, in Europe, universities evolved slowly through centuries, buildings are often located at different places in the city. So the UCR campus was something new for me, and I have to admit that I really like it. The concentration of students in one place is motivating. My impression of the university community is much stronger than in the Czech Republic, where students are spread throughout the city. Also, because UCR is a pretty young university, the buildings are modern and better suited to their purposes. I also appreciated the fact that you can actually meet coyotes passing through the campus, pick the oranges from the trees, or sit on a bench and watch hummingbirds.

The second thing which struck me was the multiculturalism of UCR. Students here are from such varied backgrounds. In my home of Masaryk University, we do have a significant amount of foreign students, but most of us are white Europeans. However, in Riverside, you can meet people from different ethnicities and races. That, in a way, is an education by itself. I think that if we would have this kind of environment in the Czech universities, we could learn a lot about prejudices and tolerance.

During my first week at UCR, I met with Professor Strenski who was really helpful for me during my whole stay. He allowed me to join his graduate seminar on "Religion and Politics". This seminar was a great experience for me not just because the topic corresponded in general with issues I deal with in my dissertation, but also because the way of teaching was different than what I am used to from my Professors back in the Czech Republic. The amount of reading was pretty significant, but it was rewarded by our deep discussions during the seminar meetings. Particularly, I really appreciated that even though we were reading Machiavelli, Locke, or Hobbes, we did not stick only with historical events, but we were able to comment in a more sophisticated way on current issues, such as the Charlie Hebdo case, or the current situation in Israel.

I also had the opportunity to attend a lecture by Dr. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd who came to UCR. Again, this was truly interesting for me. Her reflections on US foreign policy and religious freedom were food for thought in many senses. Beyond the seminar, I had a chance to discuss my dissertation research with Dr. Strenski. He pointed out issues which were problematic in my dissertation project and made me think about them. Also, he brought me to the idea of a different methodological approach to my data, which seems to fit much better to my attitude. For all this I am very grateful to him.

Since my main task here was to work on my dissertation I spent most of my time in the Rivera Library. I had access to books which I could not find in the Czech Republic. I found much useful information from these readings (even though I could spend much more time there and still have great texts to read).

Overall I am really glad that I had an opportunity to stay for one quarter at UCR, to meet with Professor Strenski and his students, to learn how American universities work, and to see how life in the USA looks. It has been a life-learning opportunity for me, not just because my dissertation project was certainly improved, but also because I have met interesting people and I am bringing home an unforgettable experience. For all this I thank the Department of Religious Studies at UCR and Dr. Strenski.

Religious Studies Major Awarded UCR Chancellor's Research Fellowship

Sierra LaPoint, a third-year undergraduate student double majoring in the combined Art History/Religious Studies major and Philosophy, has recently been awarded the UCR Chancellor's Research Fellowship to support her independent research in Religious Studies. A highly competitive award, the Chancellor's Research Fellowship supports thirteen students annually as they pursue faculty mentored research or creative projects. Those selected receive up to \$5,000 to fund expenses related to their research.

Sierra's project focuses on the Tibetan Buddhist initiation rite known as the *Kālacakra*. One of the most esoteric ritual traditions in the Buddhist world, this tantric practice involves the creation and destruction of a highly complex artistic structure known as a sand *mandala* (a pictorial representation of the universe). With the funds from the fellowship, Sierra will attend a performance of the *Kālacakra* at the Dalai Lama's North American monastery. Her work will consider the agency of the *mandala* as a conduit for embodiment, and the way changes in the performance and materiality of the *Kālacakra* provide unique insight into the changing face of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary America.

Sierra was also awarded the (undergraduate) Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust Award this year by the department for an essay reflecting on the relationship between the academic study of religion and issues of personal faith.



Undergraduate Major Sierra LaPoint, recipient of a UCR Chancellor's Research Fellowship

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Founded in 1968, the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside offers degree programs at the undergraduate, Masters, and Doctoral levels. The department frequently hosts guest speakers, colloquia, and conferences and is home to cutting edge research in Religious Studies and related fields.

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