

The Religious Studies Voice



2015-2016



Notes from the Chair's Desk

Dr. Pashaura Singh provides a brief report on the department's successes in the past year and major events coming on the horizon.

The academic year 2015-16 has been quite exciting and productive in a number of ways. First, I am delighted to report the establishment of new Maimonides Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies and the appointment of Dr. Michael Scott Alexander as the inaugural Chair. The celebration of this event took place in a colorful function at UCR Alumni & Visitors Center on January 11, 2016, attended by Chancellor

Kim Wilcox, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Paul D'Anieri, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Dean Milagros "Milly" Peña, faculty members and the members of Jewish community. Please read the complete report on this function in this issue.

Second, during this year we were able to recruit successfully a new faculty member to the position of Holstein Chair in Religious Studies. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Melissa Wilcox to our department and look forward to many years of collaboration with her.

Third, we have been notified that the undergraduate program in Religious Studies is scheduled for review during the 2016-17 academic year as part of the Academic Senate Committee on Educational Policy's campus wide program of undergraduate review. I, along with our Undergraduate Advisor Dr. Amanda Lucia and Staff member Victorino Moreira, attended a preliminary meeting on April 6, 2016, with Professor Stephen Wimpenny, Chair of Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), and Committee Analyst Beth Beaty, to prepare for the review. As part of the process the department has already suggested the names of 12 external reviewers to be considered by CEP.

As a matter of fact, this will be our first review in the history of our department. It will be extremely important from an academic perspective because it will give our department new recognition in the campus wide growth in excellence. We will have the opportunity to showcase our strengths and improve the areas where we need more support from the administration.

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 success of our faculty in winning research grants to reflect their productive research trajectory. We are also grateful to our donors for supporting our department.

Pashaura Singh

On the cover: The members of the Religious Studies Undergrads at UCR pose in front of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills, California.

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The Voice: Newsletter for the Department of Religious Studies, UCR

Dr. Pashaura Singh, Department Chair
Cori Knight, Newsletter Editor

New Chair, Familiar Face

This article by Lilledeshan Bose, sourced from the Fall 2015 issue of the UCR Magazine, discusses the significance of the newly-established Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies and the role its inaugural chair, Dr. Michael Alexander, feels he plays in the educational mission of the position and the university.



Dr. Alexander, right, meets with donors and members of the community at the celebration of the newest endowed chair position in the Department of Religious Studies. Photo by Carrie Rosema.

As a student, Michael S. Alexander didn't have an aptitude for accounting. Luckily for UC Riverside, he did have a passion for the study of Judaism, modern Jewish history and American religion. Alexander, an associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies, became the first recipient of UCR's Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies in June. The endowment was a Riverside community effort to ensure that UCR's scholarship encompasses the depth and scope of Jewish history, culture and traditions, said former UCR Foundation Chair Pam Rubin, one of a committed group of donors to the chair.

Alexander, who holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from Yale University and a B.A. in Oriental studies from the University of Pennsylvania, received a National Jewish Book Award for his first book, "Jazz Age Jews" (Princeton University Press, 2001). Currently at work on a new book, "Paths of Joy: Adventures in Religion and Therapy," Alexander talks to UCR Magazine about campus life and what he wants to leave as his legacy.

How did you end up studying Judaism as a career?

The only requirement my father had for my college education was to take accounting — which I took and enjoyed — but I didn't have a real aptitude for it. After that, I looked through the catalogue for interesting classes and found one about the book of Genesis. That really knocked me out. One class followed another, and before I knew it I was the teacher.

So there wasn't a childhood epiphany that led you to the study of Judaism?

Not really. The classroom to me is just an extension of the sandbox. It's fun to learn. And it's edifying too; it doesn't feel empty once the learning is done.

Was there a specific life experience that shaped your life as a professor?

It's definitely been my interaction with books and scriptures. From a very early age I started to read these as though the author was trying to say something directly to me. Each thing I read is like a bottle swept up on shore from hundreds or even thousands of years ago, with a message so important that somehow it has



Dr. Michael Alexander, Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies. Photo by Bettye Miller.

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Fashioning a Larger Conversation

Our own Hassanah El-Yacoubi is more than just a first-year graduate student in the department—she’s also a leading force in discussions of fashion, identity, and culture. Here’s what she has to say as one of *The Huffington Post’s* “top 3 Muslim fashionistas to follow.”



Hassanah El-Yacoubi, fashionista and first-year grad student. Photo courtesy Hassanah El-Yacoubi.

This year has been an exciting one. I was fortunate enough to be able to start it off by publishing an article for The Huffington Post regarding the controversy surrounding Italian luxury fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana’s Hijab (headscarf) and Abaya (outer garment) collection, which was intended for Middle Eastern women. Muslim women were divided on this topic. Some aggravated Western Muslim women rejected the line, accusing it of cultural appropriation, as they felt excluded in the imagery of the models cast. Others heralded its arrival as long overdue.

This new line of clothes has led to a larger global debate surrounding the ways in which identity formation is negotiated for Muslim women, and I was happy to be able to contribute to it. *Cosmopolitan* magazine also interviewed me regarding the controversy surrounding the line.

The Huffington Post then released an article rating my fashion blog as one of the top 3 Muslim fashionistas to follow on Instagram. Shortly after that, NBC News published a piece highlighting my passion for modest fashion as well as my perspective on being a Muslim American woman. It was incredibly humbling and heartwarming to be able to share my journey with the public, especially since this is a narrative that is usually underrepresented and manipulated in the mass media.

On the academic side, this Spring quarter, I started my first Teaching Assistant position, and I am thoroughly enjoying it. I am a teaching assistant for Professor Cunningham’s “Introduction to the Bible” class, where we examine the historical, cultural, and literary methods across the major themes within the Bible.

I was recently invited to speak on campus at the National Society of Leadership and Success (UCR Chapter), which is an organization dedicated to helping students enhance their leadership skills and their ability to fulfill their potential through engagement on campus. I shared useful tips that helped me overcome obstacles and challenges within my career and throughout my path to graduate school.

During the latter part of Spring quarter, I will be presenting at the Islamic Studies Graduate Student Conference at the University of California Santa Barbara. The conference’s theme surrounds identity formation and preservation within diaspora groups. I will be presenting on Muslim women and the plurality of identity constructs.

Update: Hassanah was also featured in a May 12th, 2016 HuffPost Religion article on the diversity of women wearing the hijab and the #HijabToMe campaign.



Presenting to the UCR chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success. Photo courtesy Hassanah El-Yacoubi.

Beyond the University

There's a whole world out there for our emeriti faculty members! Dr. Ivan Strenski shares with us his post-UCR activities in a report from the world of retirement!

In 2015, I was selected to serve on the Editor's Advisory Board of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. In that capacity, as a member of a small select team of American Academy of Religion members, we will assist the Editor-in-Chief in the performance tasks associated with the principal academic journal in the study of religion in North America. I continue to be active professionally in the AAR, the American Society for the Study of Religion (ASSR) and the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR). I delivered an invited paper at the annual meeting of the ASSR at Rice University on the concept of myth, and at the annual meeting of the AAR in Atlanta, participated as an invited panel member, along with UC Berkeley's Saba Mahmood, our Holstein Lecturer (2015), Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and others discussing Winnifred Fallers Sullivan's new anthology, *The Politics of Religious Freedom*. I was also invited to join in the celebration of the career of University of Chicago's distinguished religious studies theorist, Bruce Lincoln.



At the special conference honoring Professor Lincoln, I shall deliver a paper, reflecting Lincoln's career-long work on political myth, entitled, "Moscow, Third Rome, Ressentiment and Rule of Law: An Essay in Myth Criticism." A special issue of the online newsletter, *Library of Social Science*, 30 November 2015, (circulation over 10,000 daily) was devoted to my articles and books on sacrifice. It was flattering indeed to read how generously the editor described my leader essay, "To Live and Die for Iraq? Questions about Sacrifice" -- "this wonderful piece, an excellent model for those working on a Newsletter Essay....Strenski poses significant questions, and puts forth plausible theories – opening space for reflection and dialogue."

Along with these professional activities, I have enjoyed a spirited and engaged run of publications, notably in the award-winning online daily, *Religion Dispatches*. Among the pieces appearing there in 2015 was "Kim Davis Is Not a Person" – referring to the Kentucky county clerk who refused marriage licenses to gay couples. Another article exposed the out-moded ancient Greek philosophical justification for the male clerisy -- "The Surprising Origins of (and Problem with) the Vatican's View of Sex and Gender." Finally, "In Praise of Failure: Is Defining Religion Such a Good Idea?" intervened in a dispute about the definition of religion begun in the *New York Times*. These topical publications tried to bring the expertise we want to develop in the study of religion to illuminate issues in the public square and its discourse. The Politics and Public Discourse area of our 200-level sequence of graduate courses has always been a favorite – as indeed it continues to be. I even reached out onto the international scene in conjunction with the voter approval of same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland. There, I lent my voice to the cause of healing among the Irish by explaining same-sex marriage as an institution that enhances life. "Gay Marriage: The Pro-Life Case" was published in September in the *Irish Times* (Dublin), the Republic's leading newspaper.

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Faculty Updates

Our faculty members travel the world; write, publish, and present widely; and win grants and fellowships. Here's a brief recap of what they've been up to in the 2015-2016 year.

Dr. Pashaura Singh

Dr. Singh continued in his capacities as a member of the Editorial Committee of the University of California Press and as Co-Chair of the Sikh Studies Group of the AAR. This year, he gave presentations and invited lectures at University of California, Santa Barbara; at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles; and at a session of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, Georgia. The paperback edition of his co-edited volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) was published in March 2016.

Dr. Matthew King

This past year, Dr. King had several publications and presented at a major conferences in his field. His publications include new work on Central Asian Buddhism in *The Oxford Encyclopedias Series*, on Buddhist Economics in *The Oxford Handbooks in Religion*, on political biography in 19th century Chahar monasteries in a volume dedicated to Aurel Stein and Gesar Studies, on political violence in Inner Asia in *Marginalia*, and on strategic Soviet memories of Buddhist scholasticism in a special issue on secularism in *Himalaya: The Journal for the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies*.

He spoke at the opening of the Center for Mongolian Studies at UC Berkeley in September and at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, as well as being a faculty respondent at the annual UC-Stanford Buddhist Studies meeting.

In February, Dr. King traveled to Mongolia during Tsagaan Sar, the lunar new year, where he interviewed several senior monks and historians at the National University in order to finish some research for his first book project. In March, he was awarded a \$37,500 Social Science Research Council InterAsia Junior Faculty Fellowship, an award that will support the research phase of a second major project in several sites in China, Mongolia, and Siberia, as well as support new language acquisition in Russian at UCLA. As an SSRC Fellow, Dr. King shared preliminary research with other fellows and senior faculty advisors at Duke and UNC Chapel Hill in late March.



Dr. King poses with Tusheet Lam on his recent trip to Mongolia. Photo courtesy Dr. Matthew King.

Professor Paul Chang

Professor Chang arrived in Riverside from Chicago in late July 2015 to take the position of Acting Assistant Professor of Global Christianity. He is pleased to be working among generous faculty colleagues, brilliant students, and competent administrative staff.

This first school year has been a delightful challenge for him, and interacting with the graduate students and undergraduates has been a highlight thus far. He has found a real thirst for knowledge among the student body and an appreciation of the unique opportunities and perspectives provided by the Religious Studies department, and they give him hope for a future of religiously literate, thoughtful, educated citizens!

He has also enjoyed working for almost a year with Cristina Rosetti and Nathan Womack on their qualifying exams, which they passed with (from his perspective) real aplomb and characteristic diligence.

His main task for this year has been finishing his dissertation, and he plans to turn in the completed draft this summer. He has also presented at conferences in the field, including a presentation entitled "The Wind Blows Where It Wills": The Intellectual Religious Contributions of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and Their Implications for States and Societies" at the annual conference for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious

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Photo Flashback: RLST Faculty in 1973

The Department of Religious Studies began with just three full-time faculty members, pictured here. From left to right: Dr. Douglas Parrott, hired in 1971; Dr. Jill Raitt, hired in 1969; and Dr. Francis Cook, hired in 1970. These faculty members, along with professors on loan from UCR's History Department, started the department on the road to where it is today.

For the next chapter in our series on the department's history, along with extra tidbits about our department and its people, go to our website at www.religiousstudies.ucr.edu!



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2015 also saw more publications in the area of method and theory. Notable at the top of the list is the appearance of the revised and expanded edition of my textbook, *Understanding Theories of Religion* (Wiley). Featured there are new chapters on post-modernism, race, sex/gender and post-colonial theory. Two long theoretical articles laying out the method and necessity of comparative study for religious studies also follow the same line of my interests in theory. These are an elaborated demonstration of the various methods of comparative study of religion promoted and undertaken by University of Chicago's Jonathan Z. Smith. "The Magic in J. Z. Smith's Theory and Practice of Comparison" appeared in the *Festschrift* for Tim Jensen, M. Rothstein, ed. (Copenhagen). The other, "Comparing Myths: Why You Can Actually Compare Apples to Oranges," appears as a chapter in Sarah Iles Johnston and Jeff Kripal's edition of the *Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks, Religion: Narrating Religion*.

Complementing theoretical work is more writing on political matters, especially where I believe expertise in religion can improve and advance our understanding. For example, a review essay in the journal, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, works through the historical and moral dilemmas of the Palestine/Israel conflict, especially as involving anti-Semitism and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, as developed in Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*. The article appeared in volume 27, pp. 359-67 as "Ari Shavit Broods over Israel's Sins and Celebrates its Virtues." This piece marked the beginning of a series of related essays on Islam and the West, in particular attempting to grapple with Islamophobia, occasioned in part by the San Bernardino killings this past year. A short book is in the works – *The Doris Dialogues about Islamophobia* -- and near completion, in the form of a dialogue with a Islamophobic neighbor, my 85-year-old neighbor, "Doris." Chapter titles will give readers some idea of the unusual flavor of this – for me – new kind of writing, half dialogue, half polemic, part fiction, part not, sometimes familiar, at other times, edgy– "The Second Doris Dialogue: Islam May Be a Religion of Peace, but Not a Religion of Pacifists" or "The Third Doris Dialogue: If ISIL's Not 'Islamic,' Is It 'Islamish'?" Watch this space for news of how this all works out.

Finally, I had the distinct pleasure of indulging my old passion for the acting in the theater. In early February 2016, I "starred"(ahem...) in the lead role of Professor Leopold Nettles in a short play, "Largo Desolato" at the UCLA Faculty Center. Written by the Presidential Medal of Freedom winner, leading anti-Soviet dissident, and then president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel. Making everything even more of an event, the Consul General of the Czech Republic decided to drop in to catch the performance. (No pressure. Right?!) Anyway, aside from the real-life drama that the Ambassador's presence added to our little show, the play itself explored some real enough crises of conscience and moral dilemmas facing citizen-intellectuals in totalitarian states. Nettles was a most reluctant hero, more oppressed by his having the expectations of others thrust upon him than he was a real hero of dissent.

But what really mattered to me in doing the play was my experience of undergoing some sort of spiritual immersion (or, therapy!) in acting my part. Some of this should be familiar to all of us who have done any serious teaching. All teachers know deep down inside that teaching a class, giving lecture, skates pretty close to acting on stage. We have to get inside the people or ideas that we seek to "stage" for our students. We have to act enthusiastic and interested in material we may have taught for years, if not decades! We have to act patiently with students who ask so-called "dumb" questions, say like questions answered at length in the last class, or in the reading assigned for that day – but which the questioning student has not even bothered to read! We have to act as if we liked and or cared for every one of our students equally, with no favorites, even when we really don't, and so on. Teachers have to be good actors.

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made its way through time and space just to get to me.

How will the Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies help your scholarship?

In a very concrete sense, the purpose of a university is simply to create opportunities for diverse and knowledgeable people to get to know one another. In that regard, the establishment of this chair is a really great thing. It means that UCR has made a long-term commitment to include Jewry and Judaism as part of the conversation.

My own academic expertise has been American Jewry, and the roads between Los Angeles and Las Vegas have held an awful lot of that story, including right here in the Inland Empire and desert area. I'm anxious to get into the community to learn more about that history, and also to invite those folks onto our campus for them to see firsthand in our students what the future of California looks like.

I want to help link our campus with the community, and vice versa, so that the learning and conversations can move in both directions. I hope to offer public lectures and student research scholarships, do oral histories ... anything to get the conversations

going. And insofar as Jewry is transnational, I intend to widen the conversation considerably beyond our own immediate region by bringing international scholars here and sending our students out into the world.

What do you like best about working at UCR?

I have a very high regard for the students. Every year my Holocaust class and my class on the State of Israel fill up completely. These don't fulfill any kind of requirement; the students are simply interested. I have some students with family connections to these topics but most are just there to learn something completely new to them. Every time I walk into the classroom I imagine that the next Ralph Bunche might be seated out there. He was a UCLA graduate who won the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the 1949 Armistice between Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. He was the first person of color to be awarded the prize. So when I see the students file in on the first day of class, I think maybe the next Ralph Bunche is out there.

What do you hope to leave as your legacy?

To have helped along the next Ralph Bunche, of course!



From left are Chancellor Kim Wilcox, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Dean Milagros "Milly" Peña, Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies Michael Alexander, and donors Pam and Mark Rubin and Cheryl and Robert Fey. Photo by Carrie Rosema.

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Research Association (SSSR/RRA) in October and a presentation entitled "There is No Authority Except from God': Witness Lee and the Local Church Movement between Asceticism and Authority" during a quad session sponsored by the Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society Group; Law, Religion, and Culture Group; North American Hinduism Group; and Religion and Migration Group at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in November.

Dr. Amanda Lucia

In December 2015, the RIDAGA (Religion and Diaspora and Global Affairs) two-year, \$75,000 grant closed with a conference entitled "The Returns of Religion" sponsored by UCHRI, Collège d'études Mondiales, FMSH, and EHESS, which was held Paris in the wake of the November attacks. There, Lucia gave a presentation "Resituating



Paris for the closing of the RIDAGA grant. From left to right: S. Romi Mukherjee (Sciences Po), Jennifer Hughes (UCR), Jim Lee (UCI), and Amanda Lucia (UCR). Photo courtesy Dr. Amanda Lucia.

Ethnicity in Contemporary Discourses on Islam." As part of the RIDAGA grant, Dr. Lucia is also editing a special journal issue on the Hindu festival of colors, Holi, including an introduction and an article "Mormons Playing Holi at the Hare Krishna Temple: Cultural Representation, Proselytization, and the Productive Spaces of Festival."

As the result of an invited conference at Yale University, her article on sex scandals within the guru-disciple relationship, entitled "Haptic Logics: The Transmission of Affect in the Guru-Disciple Relationship," will appear in a forthcoming edited volume *Generating the Guru: Genealogies of Religious Authority in South Asia*, edited by István Keul and Srilata Raman.

Dr. Lucia and Michael Alexander have co-authored an article entitled, "The Jew in the Aum: Jews, Gurus, and Religious Hybridity in the United States," which will be published in *Religion, Politics and Culture* in Los Angeles, edited by Richard Flory and Diane Winston, as the culmination of a two-year initiative on religion in Los Angeles, sponsored by the University of Southern California.

Additionally, she is working on her second book, *Spiritual Nomads: Creating Yogic Selves and Spirituality in Festival Spaces*, portions of which she has presented at the American Academy of Religions conference and at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore, under the titles "Postethnic Authenticities: Postural Yoga and American Multiculturalism" and "Saving Yogis: Missionizing Discourses and the Transnational Dissemination of Modern Postural Yoga."

Dr. Muhamad Ali

On his sabbatical during Fall quarter 2015, Professor Ali conducted research on religious freedom and pluralism in Indonesia. He published a book chapter on Malaysia's modern Islam and international relations. His book *Islam and Colonialism* is being translated into Indonesian and will be published by a publisher in Indonesia.

He also gave forty-five academic and community talks about a variety of topics, including religious freedom and pluralism in the U.S and Indonesia, Indonesian Islam, Islamic studies in the West, Islamic higher education, and Islam and Colonialism in Southeast Asia. In the Winter and Spring quarters, Professor Ali spoke on panels about Islamophobia; expressions of adab (ethics) in Southeast Asia; Islam and multiple modernities; and Islam, Indonesia, and Israel.



RLST Undergrads at UCR— A Year in Brief

Gabby Perez, President of the Religious Studies Undergrads at UCR, provides a brief update on the club's adventures on campus and off!

For the Religious Studies Undergrads, this year has been an interesting one. We started the fall quarter slowly with a fruitful screening of episode one of "Marco Polo," accompanied by a response by Dr. Matthew King, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies.

In winter quarter, the Religious Studies Undergrads took a field trip to Saint Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside and the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills. As the year comes to a close, there are still a few more places to visit, including Agape International Spiritual Center in Los Angeles and Wat Suddhavasa Buddhist Meditation Center.

It's been a busy year, but it's been highly encouraging. The undergraduate community in Religious Studies is small, but it is also an encouraging group. We hope to continue to strengthen the department and the academic study of religion!



Re-seating the Holstein Chair

The retirement of Dr. Ivan Strenski left the Holstein Family and Community Endowed Chair empty. Until now...



Upon the retirement of Dr. Ivan Strenski, Holstein Family and Community Endowed Chair, in 2015, the chair position became vacant, and the department and its supporters waited anxiously for news of the committee's selection of the new chair.

After months of wading through applications, creating lists (and lists, and lists, and lists...), and bringing candidates to campus for a final round of interviewing and presenting, the Department of Religious Studies is pleased to announce our new Holstein Chair!

The newest member of the Religious Studies faculty, **Professor Melissa M. Wilcox**, specializes in queer studies in religion, primarily in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. "Looking back over my career to date," she explains, "I can see that I've always been interested in sacrilege. At first, I was asking questions about what it means to be declared sacrilegious by one's religious tradition, and how people respond to that experience. Based on those questions, I published my first two books on queer Christians [Coming Out in Christianity, 2003] and on spirituality among queer women [Queer Women and Religious Individualism, 2009]. But I've become increasingly interested in the intentional mobilization of sacrilege, often by people who don't themselves consider their actions sacrilegious but who see some value in co-opting or directly challenging the terms of sacrilege."

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Life in the Department...

Our Religious Studies graduate students provide updates on their activities inside the department and out.

Jeremy Guida is currently working on his dissertation exploring the effects that counter-cultural underground newspapers have had on metaphysical religious practice. His research interests have included religion in film, a topic on which he has presented, taught, and published.

This year, **Kathryn (Katie) Phillips** attended two conferences, the interdisciplinary "Forging Faith(s) in the Borderlands" Conference hosted by UC Santa Barbara, where she presented her paper "Christian or Roman: Performance and Identity Formation," and the AAR Western Region Conference, where she presented her paper "The Performance of Early Christian Resistance and Submission."

Cristina Rosetti passed her qualifying exams and advanced to candidacy, and she is currently working on her prospectus. She presented a paper titled, "In the Storehouse of the Lord: A Social History and Legacy of the United Order" at the AAR Western Region Conference and will present a paper titled, "The Glory of God is Intelligence: The Centrality of the Church Education System in Mormon Identity Formation" at the Mormon History Association's annual meeting in June. She is looking forward to archive work and ethnographic fieldwork in Provo and Salt Lake City, Utah during the summer.

Nathan Womack has also finished qualifying exams and is currently working on his prospectus. He presented a paper entitled, "Economic Evangelism: An Analysis of Microfinancial Approaches of Poverty Alleviation as a Means to Evangelize," at AARWR this year and will be presenting a paper titled, "Loving God

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...And Beyond!

A few of our alumni provide us with updates on what's happened since graduation.

Dr. Patrick Emmett (2015): Patrick received his PhD in September. He now works as a lecturer in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at CSU Bakersfield in Bakersfield, California.

Jayne Bittner, MA (2013): Jayne completed her Master's Degree in Religious Studies here at UCR and went on to UC Davis to continue her studies in the PhD program in the Study of Religion. Her area of research is religions in the United States, and she focuses particularly on traditions with prominent metaphysical and/or faith healing practices. She also serves as a teaching assistant in the Religious Studies department.

Dr. Daniel Azim Pschaida (2015): After graduating from UCR, Daniel was hired in 2015 on an emergency contract to teach full time at Northern Arizona University where he had been teaching online. He has been teaching large sections of World Religions and Humanities in Global Diversity. He has also continued to teaching Introduction to Islam and Introduction to Native American Religions online. He recently presented at AAR West a paper based on a section of his dissertation called, "Muslimas (Muslim Women) in Charge: Praxis of Leadership in Muslim Student Associations on the West Coast."

James (Jamie) Edmonds, MA (2012): Since finishing his Master's Degree in Religious Studies at UCR, Jamie has gone on to the PhD in the Anthropology of Religion track at Arizona State University. He is currently working on Contemporary Indonesian Islamic movements with particular attention to the way individual practices relates to global discourses. He is finishing up coursework and preparing for further fieldwork. He has received numerous grants, including a Ford Fellowship and a Fulbright-Hays Grant.

You may think you know the Multidisciplinary Financial, Administrative, and Student Unit (MDU). They support the teaching, researching and advising for four departments and the approximately 20 Interdisciplinary Programs majors and minors offered through CHASS. They provide the administrative know-how that makes student affairs, finances, event planning, and so much more happen for students, faculty members, and administrative personnel. And they do it all enthusiastically and cheerfully.

But there's so much more to the MDU than just business—these staffers believe in supporting their campus and community! Here's what they have to say:

Giving Back

The MDU Staff goes beyond the campus to give back to the community. Over the years, children and families receiving county mental health services continues to increase. During the past holiday season, we decided to “pay it forward” by providing food to families in need through the Riverside County Department of Mental Health – Children’s Services/ Parent Support Division. It was a huge success, as we were able to provide a large variety of food items. We also participated in donating to “Toys for Tots” to deliver a message of hope to one of our nation’s most valuable resources – our children.

Healthy Living

We have stepped up efforts to engage staff in living a healthy and active lifestyle. Staff member Kristine Specht volunteered to be a UCR Wellness Ambassador, providing us with enthusiasm, strategies, and motivation in promoting a healthy work environment. Kristine also created an MDU Wellness Board that shares information about nutrition, exercise, and other health topics. Additionally, all of the MDU staff participated in and completed this year’s UCR “Mission: Possible 3,” an 8-week team wellness challenge, earning awards and certificates of completion.

University Engagement

We are also becoming more proactive in emergency preparedness, attending RAIN (Respond-Assess-Isolate-Notify) crisis training and participating in emergency drills.

In addition to preparing to respond to crisis situations, the MDU works hard at supporting students on campus, even before they arrive at UCR. Our Academic Advisors happily participate in campus outreach programs, such as UCR Discover Day, Highlander Day, and Community College Days. Staff members also volunteer for Commencement activities, Pride Prom, and Diversity Enhancement Programs.

But it's not all serious business: we also proudly participate in CHASS College Staff activities. The MDU won awards at this year’s CHASS Staff Chili Cook-off, the fall Costume Competition, and the Pumpkin Carving contest. We look forward to continuing our winning streak!



Meet the MDU

Here are some updates from the staff members who make all we do in Religious Studies possible!



(Article content provided by Diane Monroe-Shaw)

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Through Loving People: An Ethnographic Analysis of Local Church Outreach," in April at the University of Toronto.

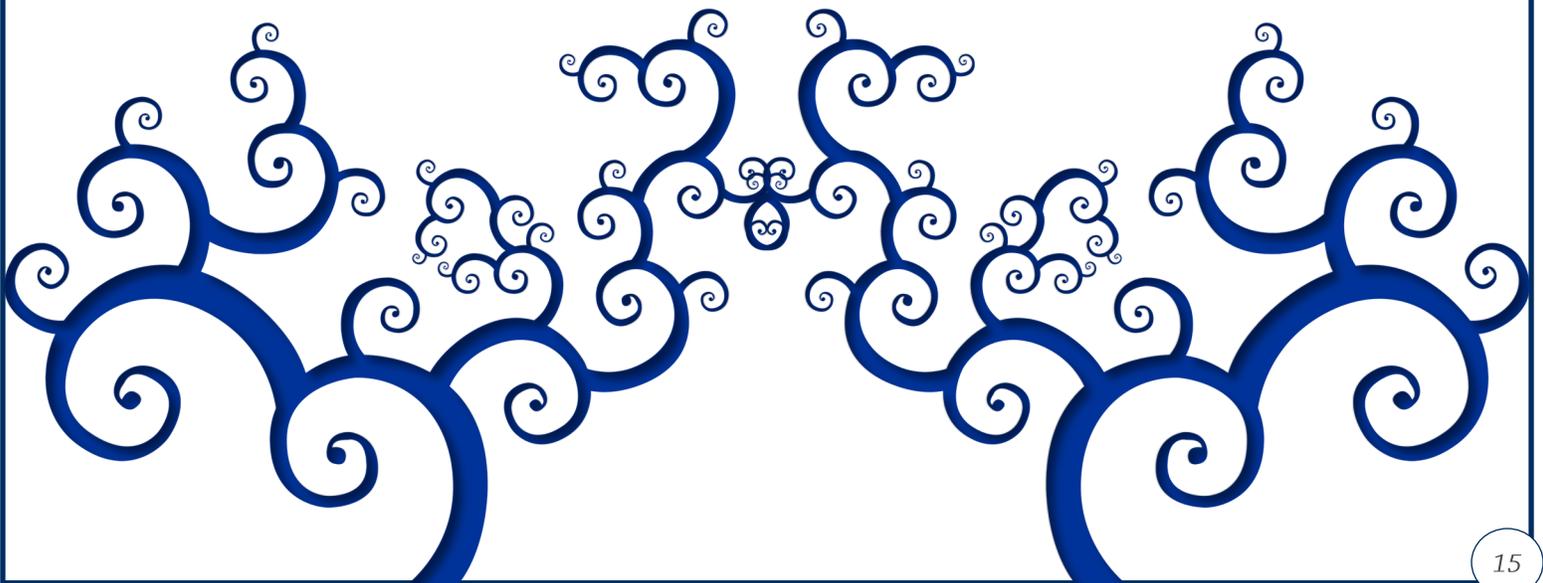
Sonia Crasnow is currently writing her dissertation and working on an article on transgender ritual innovation within Judaism. She was a finalist for two fellowships - one focused on the study of sexuality and the other on Judaic Studies. In the past year, she presented a paper at the National AAR on LGBTQ innovated rituals which especially addressed the use of mikvehs (Jewish ritual baths) to mark gender transition for transgender Jews.

This year, **Danielle (Dani) Dempsey** will complete her coursework and begin preparing for exams. In addition, this academic year she presented a paper entitled "Queer Expression and Human Dignity: A Framework for Reimagining Catholic Sexual Ethics in Light of Religious and Cultural Pluralism" at the American Academy of Religion Western Regional Meeting at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Jessica Rehman advanced to candidacy on June 9, 2015; that same year, she also won the Cordel-Kress Fellowship in 2015, which allowed her to conduct research in Cambodia on the construction of Khmer masculinities post-genocide. She was interviewed for a Turkish Hizmet television program titled *Atlas of Thoughts* to speak about Islamophobia and Muslim identities in diaspora, and a presentation turned paper, "The Violence of Identity Formation and the Case of Hizmet Exceptionalism" is being published as a chapter in the forthcoming book *The Hizmet Movement and Peacebuilding: Global Cases*. Additionally, she served as the graduate student representative on the Faculty Search Committee for the new Holstein Chair.

Sean Sagan is in the writing phase of his dissertation project and anticipates defending in the Winter or Spring of the 2016-2017 academic year. His project focuses on the practice of distributing gospel tracts and the construction of identity borders and ritual spaces. This past winter, he presented a chapter at the Southwest/Texas Pop and American Culture Conference; this presentation, entitled "Employed by God: Labor, Capital and Brand Representation in Living Waters Gospel Tracts," was met with positive response and feedback.

This year, **Corinne (Cori) Knight** was named a Michael K. Schoenecke Leadership Institute Fellow through the Southwest Popular and American Culture Association. She also presented a paper, "Flux, Faulkner, and Something Positive: Parallels in Responses to Religious Change in America," at the SWPACA's annual conference in February 2016. She also recently received an Outstanding Teaching Assistant award for her work in the University Writing Program. In addition to continuing to work on her dissertation, Cori is also currently serving as Band Manager for the UCR Pipe Band.



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From these interests have come her current book project, entitled *Serious Parody: Religion, Queer Activism, and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence* (expected 2017), which focuses on a religiously-unaffiliated, international order of self-described “queer nuns,” and her nascent next project on the use of religious roles and imagery in queer erotica, pornography, and BDSM. “The idea for the new project started with the *Orthodox Calendar*,” she says, referring not to the liturgical calendar of the Eastern Orthodox churches but to an erotic calendar created by Orthodox Christians to draw attention to the challenges faced by LGBTIQ people in Eastern Orthodox countries.

As the new holder of the Holstein Family and Community Chair in Religious Studies, Professor Wilcox is looking forward to implementing the department’s vision that the chair’s work should focus on religion and social justice, in line not only with UCR’s current priorities but also with the passions and life work of Robert and Loretta Holstein. Professor Wilcox envisions holding annual gatherings, provisionally entitled “Holstein Conversations in Community,” that bring together activists, artists, academics, and other community leaders to discuss the complex roles of religion in social justice issues. Each year’s Conversation in Community will focus on a specific topic. For instance, plans are in the works for an event in either winter or spring quarter of 2017 that will bring people together to share ideas on religion and social justice under President-elect Trump. Most likely, Wilcox says, the event will focus on justice for immigrants and refugees, and the roles of religion in such concerns, ranging from religion creating a need for asylum (such as with oppressed religious minorities) to religion making certain immigrants into targets of the state (e.g., the threats made against Muslims during the presidential campaign, and the likelihood that these will once again lead to violence against Sikhs as well) to providing resources for activism both in support of and against immigrants and refugees.

Please join all of us in welcoming Dr. Melissa Wilcox!

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But, still in all, in teaching, we are still more or less playing ourselves. But, what I found out when I had to play Havel’s neurotic, immobilized dissident philosopher was something of another order than I had known in my “acting” career as a college professor of 40 years running. I had to be another person altogether -- somebody else, with another history, present and future. And, who was this strange being? I had to find out from the way Havel wrote “me” up. All I can say was that it was high emotional adventure – and one I recommend to anyone. Last but hardly least, our wicked director decided to cast my wife of over 50 years opposite me as my mistress, no less (!) I felt a little out of sorts about this at first. For one thing, I didn’t know quite what to expect. The pleasant surprise, however, was that in acting our fictitious roles, the strangest thing happened: I saw my wife of half a century anew. It was as if we were meeting for the first time. Sublime, and a blessing. I don’t know how long this feeling’s going to last, but I am going to enjoy it while it does.



---Ivan Strenski

Founded in 1968, the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California Riverside includes degree programs at the undergraduate, MA, and PhD levels. The department frequently hosts guest speakers, colloquia, and conferences and is home to cutting-edge research in Religious Studies and cognate fields.

We would like to offer our heartfelt congratulations to all of our graduates for academic year 2015-2016!

Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

Annette Bryant	Rutdow Jiraprapasuke
Krystal Nishimoto	Jonathan Park
Gabriela Perez	Anjali Iyer
George Awad	Ariel Sakatos Garcia
Deborah Song	Mary Ishak

Minor in Religious Studies

Michael Figlioli

