



*In memory of Dr. June O'Connor*



## Letter from the Chair's Desk



The academic year 2016-17 brought mixed feelings for the department. First of all, the sad demise of the former department chair, Professor Emerita June E. O'Connor, was a sudden shock to each one of us. She was a role model in building this department. This issue of our Newsletter celebrates her life by paying a rich tribute to her memory. I particularly mourn her loss because she was the one who hired me in 2005. I cannot forget the day of my job interview, when she diplomatically handled the protesting Sikh community of Southern California bent upon blocking any chance of my success in the search process. As an ethicist she was fully aware of the direness of the circumstances: to yield to any community special interest group would be to risk the research reputation of UCR and to invite academic chastisement, undesirable publicity, and other unpleasant challenges from within the Academy. I salute to her courage to uphold the first principles of a public research university.

Second, during this year our undergraduate program in Religious Studies went through an external review. I am thankful to my colleagues, particularly our Undergraduate Advisor Dr. Amanda Lucia and MDU staff member Victorino Moreira, for helping the review team in this process. We were able to showcase our strengths and to identify the areas where we need more support from the administration. The results will give our department greater recognition in the larger framework of the campus' growth in excellence. In the coming years, we will be able to comply with the action plan to implement the recommendations of the Academic Senate Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) with regard to this review process.

Third, the Jain community of Southern California has signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UCR Foundation to establish the Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies in the Department of Religious Studies. We will be conducting the search in the coming academic year to fill this position by July 1st, 2018.

Fourth, we had a very successful 5th Sikh Studies Conference on May 12-13th, 2017, in which more than twenty-five scholars presented their research papers on "Sikhs and South Asians in the Public Sphere: Precarious Minorities and the Global Politics of Religion."

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 also 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

# The Voice

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### Letter from the Editor

You may notice that the 2016-2017 edition of the Voice is slightly different than in other recent years. The reason for this is the recent passing of the department's own June O'Connor. It was the department's wish that this newsletter focus on her life, her career, and her enduring impact on all of us in the Department of Religious Studies, a department she helped shape and guide into what it is today. We hope you will indulge us in this slight departure.

—Dr. Cori Knight, Editor

## CHASS Obituary for Dr. June O'Connor



*This obituary was written by department chair Dr. Pashaura Singh and distributed to the campus community to announce Dr. O'Connor's passing. This announcement spoke eloquently to not just her academic achievements but also her long-reaching influence on our department and its legacy, as well as the campus and the field as a whole.*

Dear CHASS Community,  
Professor Emerita June E. O'Connor, 75, passed away peacefully on March 13, surrounded by her loving family at Woods Health Services in La Verne, CA.

Dr. O'Connor served with distinction as a longtime faculty member in Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside. She won the admiration of countless students over the years. She was a devoted colleague and widely respected by her peers and staff alike.

Dr. 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 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 nonviolence; women and religion and feminist perspectives on religion; theologies and testimonial writings of the developing world; and methods of ethical analysis and inquiry. She was nationally recognized particularly in her role as chair of the Society for Christian Ethics.

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 in journals such as *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *The Journal of Religions 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*, and 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. Among other classes, Dr. O'Connor regularly taught "Religious Myths and Rituals", "Religion and Violence", "Religion and Human Rights", "Death and Dying" (her most popular course), "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." 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 would eventually become 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).

Dr. O'Connor's exceptional leadership and dedication were central to much of the Department's growth across multiple phases of its development. Dr. O'Connor 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 time beginning in 2004. Through her dedication and skillful leadership, Dr. O'Connor oversaw 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. Dr. O'Connor retired from full time teaching in the department of Religious Studies and took Emerita status at UCR in 2011.

On hearing her passing the Department of Religious Studies held a special meeting in her memory on March 15, 2017, and passed a resolution to establish "**June Elizabeth O'Connor Outstanding Teaching Award**" for a graduate student who is selected for nomination for OTA for the Graduate Division Convocation. This award will carry a certificate and a monetary amount of \$500. The Department will also plan a seminar on "Pulpit and Podium" in her memory in the next academic year.

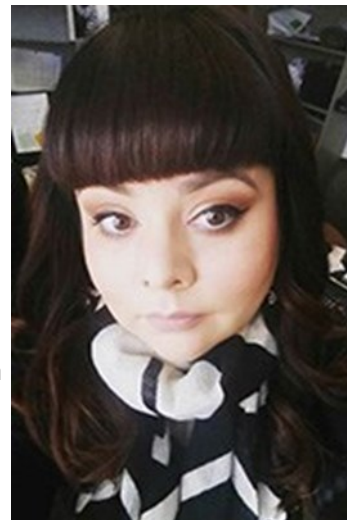
A loving wife, mother, daughter and sister, June was predeceased by her husband of 39 years, Harry J. Hood, and is survived by two sisters, Karen and Shevawn O'Connor (Anchise); her brother, Kevin O'Connor (Rita); her daughter Meagan O'Connor Erwin (Spencer), her grandson, Bodhi, several nieces and nephews, and many friends.



## In Memoriam: Diana Marroquin Remembers June O'Connor

*Diana Marroquin, of our own Multidisciplinary Unit, eloquently expresses June O'Connor's impact on her life and academic and professional successes. Diana's tribute puts beautiful, touching words to how so many of us who knew, worked with, and learned from June are feeling at this loss.*

June was by far one of the most beautiful souls I have ever had the grace of knowing. I will cherish every moment we shared, every conversation we had, every pearl of wisdom she gave me, and all the lessons she taught me. She was one and only and had a gracious way of making you feel like you mattered because you mattered to her. She was one of the most diplomatic, even-tempered, composed, compassionate, humble human beings I have ever had the pleasure of knowing and working alongside. If you ever wanted to get something done, June was your girl! She never took "No" for an answer; she would often say "I will take a slow Yes over a fast No any day," and boy did she mean it! If ever there was a conflict, June made sure all parties involved were heard, voiced their concerns and worked things out in the most ethical and respectful manner possible. She never let you walk away from a conversation or a conflict feeling like your feelings didn't matter; if you had spoken to June about it, I can guarantee you she made you feel that a resolution was always possible, no matter what.



Diana Marroquin, MDU  
Accounting and Payroll Specialist



I had the honor of meeting June in October of 2001; she was on the interview committee that hired me in the department of Religious Studies all those years ago. Having previously worked as a casual/temporary employee for the Registrar's Office and the Sociology department (as an academic advisor) here a UCR, this interview was my shot at becoming a full-time career employee! I will be forever grateful for being offered the position at the tender age of 21 and for being given the opportunity to show them the work I was capable of doing. Under the direction of June (Chair of Religious Studies department at the time) and Diane (MSO), I was given the chance to be mentored by two strong, hardworking women who were a force to be reckoned with! I took so much pride in every project they gave me and always strived to make them proud and ensure them that they had made the right decision in choosing to hire me. I was a full-time student at the time working on my BA and carried a full-time schedule in the RLST department, but hey I was 21, and 21 year olds don't need to sleep, so I very rarely did!

In between my responsibilities at work and school, I would often leave my papers in June's box for her feedback. If it was an "A" paper according to June, I knew I was solid. She always took the time, no matter what her teaching load or how many committees she was serving on, to read my papers and provide her feedback; June always made time for those who'd seek her guidance. That was simply who she was, a true educator, a mentor, a kind soul, and, above all, a friend. I will forever carry with me a little piece of June, because that's what she did: she gave us all a little piece of herself.

June's legacy will forever live on through all of us who had the privilege of knowing her. To know her was to love her and to truly be in the presence of someone special.

## June: A Tribute

*Dr. Douglas Parrott, one of the department's founding faculty members, offers his thoughts on the passing of a friend and colleague so influential in the department's history.*

I was fortunate to have been on the faculty committee that chose June O'Connor to join the young Program in Religious Studies in 1972. She was the second person we interviewed, but her past teaching experience, her focus on religious ethics, with her dissertation work on a major figure in the religious scene of India (Sri Aurobindo) led us to choose her. Also, she was personally charming. She had not finished her dissertation (at Temple University in Philadelphia), but was able to complete it in the summer of 1972. That was a busy time for her, because it was also in that summer that she married Harry Hood and then together they moved to Riverside. June and Harry had both been members of Roman Catholic religious orders and they were both strongly influenced by the "winds of change" that came from Pope John XXIII and Vatican Council II in the mid 1960s.

June came with teaching experience at Mundelein College (in the Chicago area) and proved to be a consummate teacher at UCR. When she came, she was involved in a small business teaching new methods and techniques to groups of teachers in Roman Catholic schools. (It was a time, when many teachers in the Church's schools wanted to break from the old ways that emphasized passive acceptance by students of official views). At UCR June encouraged students in her classes to raise questions, to think independently and share their thoughts with each other. She was also willing to introduce new and (for many) challenging ideas. I remember teaching a course with her and our other colleague at the time, Buddhist scholar Francis Cook, on religious perspectives on "Sex, Love and Marriage." At a certain point June proposed (and we agreed) that we invite an older Religious Studies major, who was in a homosexual relationship, to address the class on his experience. (That was in the late 1970s, when American society as a whole was just beginning to come to terms with the gay lifestyle).

When I finished my term as chair of Religious Studies in 1985 and June became chair, she wrote a handout for anyone visiting the Religious Studies office that emphasized the distinction she saw between the pulpit and the podium; that is the difference between what might be appropriate for a class in a religious context ("pulpit") and what would be appropriate in a University classroom ("podium"). At the heart of it was the distinction between persuading and enlightening.

June richly deserved UCR's distinguished teaching award, which she received in 1979, and being named Professor of the Year in 2001 by the UCR Honors Program.

Perhaps my most prominent recollection of June at UCR was her speed. I first noticed it when we would go to lunch with several other faculty at what was then the UCR Faculty Club. Although we would start off together, it was not long before June would be five or ten steps ahead of us (going up-hill!). And she would usually finish her lunch before the rest of us. And then students would tell me that she talked fast in class. And clearly, in view of the many things she was able to accomplish, she thought fast too, yet always with the strong ethical and moral insights that guided her teaching and writing. I count myself fortunate to have known her as a colleague and a friend and been able to work with her as long as I did.

Prof. Douglas M. Parrott, Emeritus

## Small Words, Tremendous Impact

*When it comes to June O'Connor, there is always more to say, as this assortment of short but poignant tributes demonstrates.*

### A Graduate's Tribute: Dr. SJ Crasnow

Regrettably, I never really got the chance to know Professor O'Connor, yet her impact on the department meant that her intellectual contributions made their way into my experience as a graduate student and shaped how I teach on religion. In every course I've ever taught on religion, I begin with a discussion of the conceptual distinction between the "pulpit" and the "podium" formulated by Professor O'Connor (and taught to me by other professors in the department), and I know I'm not the only one! Professor O'Connor will be missed, but she will certainly continue to be remembered. When I start my courses with this discussion now, it will serve as a small memorial to her and to all she contributed. May her memory be a blessing.



### A Colleague's Tribute—Dr. Michael Alexander

June and I talked mostly about her time at Temple University as a doctoral student in search of ethical lessons from the life of Dorothy Day. Although many years had passed since those initial investigations, these basic questions continued to inspire June in her mature years as a scholar, teacher, and builder of faculty. Ethics kept feeding the fire of her intellect. I'll never forget that.

### A Colleague's Tribute—Dr. Ivan Strenski



Our department would simply not exist were it not for the efforts of June O'Connor. All of us are greatly in her debt, and I, especially, as the first holder of the Holstein Chair, of which June was the prime mover. She succeeded by winning the respect of powerful administrators as a hardworking, loyal citizen of unquestioned integrity. Few faculty were trusted as much by campus leadership as our June. She also succeeded because she was revered by many for her religiously-inflected social conscience. Some colleagues across campus, however, found June's style moralistic by the standards of their supposedly 'value-free' secular liberalism. But, this discomfort may have had more to do with their blindness to religion (and deep suspicion of a department of *religious studies* at a public university) than with June's ethically-articulated manner of defending her views in an academic setting. June was adept, it could be said, for artfully hiding her political maneuvers behind this screen of ethical rectitude to very good effect -- especially for our department. Few of June's adversaries, you see, knew of her origins in the Chicago of broad Irish shoulders and hard-ball politics.

It, therefore, does June great injustice to rank her among the angels -- unless that be among Archangel Michael's Mighty Host of well-armed troops. June could be very tough, all the while projecting a visage of stunning and optimistic radiance. I mourn her passing, and shall always see its method as nothing short of a kind of cruel cosmic immorality. But, I doubt June would agree.



## From a Department Alumna: A Letter from Ambika

*In the spirit of not waiting until it is too late to say what is on one's heart and mind, this letter from a recent graduate expresses deep gratitude for what she has learned and gained in her time here at UCR.*

To the Religious Studies Department Faculty:

It's important for me to state that you've changed the world with the different ways you've showed us how to see it. For that, we are incredibly grateful. I speak on behalf of my fellow undergraduates when I say that this Department has one of the best collections of Professors around, and that our experiences in this Religious Studies education have helped us not only become better students, but also better contributors to society.

From a personal perspective, I am especially grateful for this experience. I regret not having been able to take classes from all of you, but for the few I have had the opportunity to learn from, thank you. Dr. Chang and Dr. Wilcox—I only met you in my last quarter, and it will be one of my biggest regrets that I never had the chance to take any of your classes. Dr. Lucia, thank you for empowering me to learn more about my culture and faith. It was indirectly through your teachings in Yoga Philosophy, Saints and Gurus, and Religion, Gender and Sexuality, that I grew a spark inside me to learn more about who I am. Dr. King, it was through your classes on the Silk Road, Religion and Science, and the Problem of Religion that taught me how to question everything and always look for a deeper understanding of the information I'm presented with. Dr. Ali, your teachings on Islam helped me gain a perspective into a Religion and culture I had completely misunderstood before—I grew up believing the news as my source for education, and you taught me the importance of finding answers myself and trusting the source instead of the media. Dr. Singh, thank you for your patience with my incessant questions about Sikhism in your 8 am lecture—your leadership role in this department has inspired me to one day represent myself in the same way. Dr. Alexander, your Israel: the Jewish State class taught me the importance of looking at both sides of issues, and that the study of Religion is so beautiful because I could learn about history, politics, geography, and sociology. Closing out my undergraduate education in your Senior Seminar has been one of the most enlightening experiences of my college career. Cristina, Katie, Shou, and Corinne— your intellect and kindness have inspired me to never stop learning about what the field of Religious Studies has to offer the world. I only had enough room to thank a few of you, but please know that I am entirely grateful to all my professors in the RLST Department.

It's been an honor serving as the President this past year for RLST Undergrads. Thank you especially to Juan Chavez and Maryam Baig for their efforts leading our meetings, and to everyone else who's played a role— either as an officer or as a member. Thank you Ryan, for always making sure we had a room for our meetings, and for helping us with spreading the word about our events. Thank you, Maha, for always coming to our meetings and events, and for being a great volunteer at our department events. Thank you Reese for your incredible energy and support for our club. We had some amazing experiences at our site visits this year— from sharing tea and conversation with a Buddhist Nun at Hsi Lai to exploring the temple grounds at BAPS Swaminarayan temple, our members have had the opportunity to grow and view the applications of our studies. As we approach the next academic year, I hope to see that our club is continuing a pursuit to share how great our department is with UCR's students.

I've thought a lot about ending this piece with a William James quote, or with something I picked up from one of the many great lectures I heard— but I don't think there's anything I could choose that would sum up how incredible grateful I am to have received an education from you all. Whether it be in the classroom listening to your lectures, in your office hours bouncing ideas, or in the hallways after class— every bit of knowledge I've received from you all has been immeasurable. With my deepest gratitude, thank you.

Best,  
Ambika Rajyagor

# The Fifth International Sikh Studies Conference at the University of California, Riverside

*Written by Dr. Charles M. Townsend, edited by Dr. Pashaura Singh*

On May 12-13, 2017, the Department of Religious Studies at UCR and the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies hosted an international conference in Sikh Studies and South Asian Religions. This was the fifth major academic conference on Sikh Studies convened by Dr. Pashaura Singh, who has held the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini endowed Chair since 2008. I co-organized the conference with Dr. Singh and Dr. Arvind-pal S. Mandair, S.B.S.C. Associate Professor of Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan. The work and success of the conference was made possible by the dedicated efforts of UCR administrative staff, especially Event Assistant Ryan Mariano, as well as the volunteer efforts of UCR graduate and undergraduate students.



Dr. Townsend, Dr. Singh, and RLST undergraduate students welcome participants to the conference.



Provost and EVC Cynthia Larive greets attendees.

approaches, including Religious Studies, Humanities, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, Musicology/Ethnomusicology, Anthropology, Sociology, Modern Languages, Women's and Gender Studies, South Asian Studies, and more. A unique feature of the conference this year was to invite respondents to begin discussion of the papers from each panel, most of whom were graduate students from various universities, including the UC campuses of Riverside, Irvine, Merced, and Santa Barbara, as well as the University of Michigan and other universities.

The papers given by conference participants reflected a broad range of themes, with most touching on issues surrounding Sikhs and other South Asian communities in the public sphere and relations with state power and the broader public within different national and political settings around the world. The conference incorporated four Keynote Speakers, each highly distinguished

This year, the conference coalesced around the theme of Sikhs and South Asians in the Public Sphere: Precarious Minorities and the New Global Politics of Religion. Conference presenters came from universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and India to share papers over the course of two days within eight panels organized on various topics connected to the overall conference theme. There were several familiar faces of scholars who have presented at previous Sikh Studies conferences at UCR, but this fifth conference included mostly new voices by inclusion in the call and theme of South Asian communities beyond Sikhs. Scholars on the panels represented a wide range of interdisciplinary backgrounds and



Dean Milagros Peña helps open the Fifth Sikh Studies Conference.

*(continued on p. 12)*



Recognizing these outstanding scholars and supporters of the field was one of the highlights of the conference.



Thank you to everyone who participated for a great conference! We hope to see you at the next one!

Event photos courtesy of [carrierosemaphotography.com](http://carrierosemaphotography.com) and Dr. Charles M. Townsend. The conference program book can currently be viewed on the department's website, [religiousstudies.ucr.edu](http://religiousstudies.ucr.edu).



Community participant Baljeet Toor asks a question of conference panelists.

(continued from p. 10) scholars whose presentations anchored the themes of the conference: Dr. Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa), Dr. Timothy Fitzgerald (University of Stirling, UK), Dr. Ivan Strenski (Professor Emeritus and first Holstein Distinguished Chair of Religious Studies at UCR), and Dr. Pal Ahluwalia (University of Portsmouth, UK).

On the first night of the conference, conference participants and members of the broader local Sikh and UC Riverside communities shared a celebratory dinner and awards ceremony at the UCR Alumni Center. All were warmly greeted and congratulated by Dr. Cindy Larive, Interim Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of UCR, and Dr. Milagros Peña, Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at UCR, who had also greeted conference attendees in the morning. Dr. Verne (Van) A. Dusenbery (Professor of Anthropology and founding Chair of Global Studies at Hamline University) and Dr. Darshan

Singh Tatla (Fellow in the Department of Punjab Historical

Studies at Punjabi University, Patiala, India) were both presented with lifetime achievement honors for their individual and collaborative contributions to the study of the worldwide Sikh Diaspora. Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon and his wife Mrs. Deepta Dhillon were also honored as longtime supporters of Sikh Studies and the J.S. Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UCR, and for their recent establishment of an Endowed Research Award to fund graduate student research in the field of Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UCR. Dr. Ivan Strenski, Professor Emeritus from



Performers from the play *Kultar's Mime*

UCR's Department of Religious Studies, was both presented with a lifetime achievement honor for his broad and distinguished contributions to the academic study of religion, and treated dinner attendees to a keynote speech reflecting on the conference theme titled "Rumblings from the Belly of Leviathan: How Digestible are the Religions?"



*Kultar's Mime* often relied on close interactions with the audience.

The main conference events came to a close in a different way than previous conferences by drawing conference participants into a live theatrical performance of the play *Kultar's Mime*. The play, based on a poem written by Sarbpreet Singh (who I had previously known as the director of the Gurmat Sangeet Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Sikh music) and directed by his daughter J. Mehr Kaur, dramatized events surrounding the 1984 pogroms and massacres of Sikhs in India following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. After the emotional experience of viewing *Kultar's Mime*, Sarbpreet Singh and the actors in the play drew the audience, made up of conference participants and members of local Sikh communities, into a powerful discussion of the true events that inspired the poem and play and audience members' own memories of the events of 1984. As the final gathering of the conference, all

conference participants and the performers of *Kultar's Mime* were invited to share a meal and rich discussions at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon in Riverside.

## Faculty Updates

*Teaching, writing, researching, mentoring—our faculty members never seem to stop! Here are some brief updates on our faculty accomplishments over the past year.*

### Dr. Wilcox

**Professor Melissa M. Wilcox** has enjoyed getting to know UCR during her first year on campus. Her major accomplishment during the fall quarter consisted of getting her office furnished and finally rescuing her books from the boxes where they'd been languishing since May. In between those efforts, she traveled to Oslo, Norway and Melbourne, Australia to give keynote talks. While in Oslo she met with her co-authors to plan a forthcoming textbook on sexuality and religion, and in Melbourne she was able to spend many exciting hours with archival materials from the Australian order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. A good time was had by all, especially the archival materials. Meanwhile, back at the UCR ranch, Professor Wilcox completed the final draft of her book on the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, which is now undergoing copyediting at NYU Press. Look for *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* to be on the shelves of your favorite bookstore (support the independents!) by the end of 2017 or the beginning of 2018. If you don't like books, you should still read it for the pictures—they're going to be nearly fabulous enough to do justice to the Sisters.

### Dr. Chang

**Paul Chang** completed his doctorate from the University of Chicago in the spring of 2017. In June, he was in Chicago for the hooding ceremony along with his family and in-laws. He is relieved to have finally finished what has been an eleven year(!) journey through graduate school, and is looking forward to the next chapters of life.

In the fall of 2016, Paul published a short piece for the *Journal of Asian/North American Theological Educators* unearthing the legacy of Witness Lee as the founder of one of the largest post-graduate theological schools in the United States.

Also in the fall of 2016, Paul and his wife Laura were pleased to welcome a new addition to the family. Anna has brought a lot of commotion and fun to the home, instantly becoming her siblings' favorite new toy.

Finally, Paul was pleased to participate in the qualifying examinations for Chris Hayes and Dani Dempsey during the 2016-2017 academic school year. Both students were impressively prepared and delightful to work with. Paul is very much looking forward to reading the exciting results of their research in the coming years.

### Dr. King

This past academic year, **Matthew King** has been finishing a book manuscript and embarking on new, SSRC-funded research exploring the circulation of empiricism into Inner Asia between the 17th and mid-twentieth centuries. This year he has given talks at several professional meetings, such as the AAR and AAS, and by invitation at a few institutions spread all over, including the Yale MacMillan Center, the University of Warsaw, Eotvos Lorand University in Hungary, and the Convention of Asian Scholars in Chiang Mai.

This summer, Matthew King will be pursuing new research in Mongolia and possibly Buryatia. He is looking forward to hosting an ACLS-funded workshop series here at UCR next winter with a dozen Tibetologists from all around the world on the topic of genealogies of knowledge in gsan yig/thog yig literature from the Qing period.

## Dr. Lucia

**Dr. Amanda Lucia** spent the year finishing the fieldwork for her current book project, which deconstructs the popular category of “spirituality” by investigating its construction and performance in yoga and transformational festivals. She traveled for extended periods of ethnographic research at Burning Man (Black Rock City, Nevada), Wanderlust (Sunshine Coast, Australia), and Wanderlust (Great Lake Taupo, New Zealand). She has presented portions of the forthcoming book at University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand and Middlebury College in Vermont, with the respective titles, “Illusions of Freedom: Escapism, Exoticism and the Neoliberal Yogi” and “Romanticizing the Premodern: Charting Indices of Indigenous and Asian Religions in Contemporary American Spirituality.”

She also presented a plenary lecture at La Sierra University, entitled “American Multiculturalism: Promises and Actualities,” and gave a conference paper entitled “Transnational Yoga: Translation, Domestication, and Appropriation,” at the American Academy of Religions. Dr. Lucia is looking forward to the summer to continue her work on her book manuscript and to spend time in India, conducting ethnographic research for her forthcoming article, “Constructing Toilets/Deconstructing Caste: Purity, Pollution, and the Governing Guru.”



Congratulations, Dr. Chang, on your graduation!

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## Graduate Student Updates

*Our graduate students continue to accomplish amazing things! Here are a selection of achievements for the 2016-2017 academic year.*

This year, **SJ Crasnow** completed a dissertation entitled *From the Gay Synagogue to the Queer Shtetl: Normativity, Innovation, and Utopian Imagining in the Lived Religion of Queer and Transgender Jews* with the plan to adapt this project as a book for publication. SJ is grateful to the Religious Studies department for supporting the conclusion of this work through a Holstein grant and a Jewish innovation research grant. SJ also has an article forthcoming in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, and presented a paper at the national AAR. For the past six months SJ has been working at USC's Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research and has enjoyed the opportunity to work with scholars internationally, introducing them to the Visual History Archive - a library of 55,000 video testimonies documenting the life histories of witnesses of genocide. SJ has accepted a tenure-track assistant professor position in Religious Studies at Rockhurst University, a small liberal arts college in Kansas City, Missouri. At Rockhurst SJ will teach on Judaism; Islam; World Religions; and religion, gender, and sexuality. Before beginning this position SJ will spend the month of July in Minnesota at an NEH seminar focused on the challenges of teaching world religions.

Also in 2016-17, **Cristina Rosetti** was awarded the Mormon Studies Graduate Research Fellowship at the University of Utah's Tanner Humanities Center. During her fellowship, she will continue her archival and ethnographic research on spirit communication within Mormonism. She was also awarded a Graduate Research Mentorship Program fellowship from UC Riverside's Graduate Division. Over the course of the year, Cristina presented her research at the American Academy of Religion's regional meeting and the Mormon History Association's national conference. Her book review for *Mormonism for Beginners* was published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and her article on spirit communication and prophetic authority was recently accepted for publication by the *Journal of Mormon History*. Over the summer, she looks forward to participating in a panel discussion on alternative Mormon practices among women at the annual Sunstone Symposium.



Hassanah El-Yacoubi (first row, left) at one of her speaking engagements.

It has been another great year for **Hassanah El-Yacoubi**, who is very thankful for all the growth, experiences, and speaking engagements she was able to participate in. She was fortunate to be chosen to speak at the Diverse Issues Affecting Women Symposium hosted by the GSA/Women's Resource Center discussing how Muslim women create new forms of subjectivity through mediated corporeal practices. She was also happy to be able to speak on the Immigration Ban Colloquium with fellow UCR faculty and colleagues discussing how to combat Islamophobia in the age of Trump. Her most memorable experience was presenting at the Faith & Fashion: Community and Commerce Conference at Princeton University, where she was able to connect with colleagues, meet prominent scholars in her field, and engage in rich dialogue regarding the commodification of religious identity and the multidimensional elements of that performance. However, the highlight of the year was receiving the Andrew Mellon Advancing Intercultural Studies fellowship for Spring of 2018, which focuses on the cultivation of religious identity through diversity and harmony.

This year, **Danielle Dempsey** completed her Master of Art in Religious Studies, and advanced to doctoral candidacy. Her areas of examination included history of Christianity, American religious history, and religious studies and queer studies theory and methodology. She has also started work on her dissertation prospectus. Her forthcoming research addresses institutional Roman Catholic responses to recent social movement, and aims to investigate why the Roman Catholic Church has maintained its position up until the 21st century on the subordination of women and a negative view of gender variant and queer folks.

**Katie Phillips** has finished course work and is preparing to take exams next year. She was an invited respondent for a panel at the Sikh Studies Conference and has received word of upcoming publication of her paper "Christian or Roman: Performance and Identity Formation."

This year, **Nathan Womack** presented a paper titled, "Healing the Land: A Examination of Evangelical Responses to Racial Violence in the United States" at the AAR Western Region conference in March. He also presented a paper, "Disrupting Suburban Religion: The Great Recession and Evangelical Religiosity," as part of the RLST colloquium series in June.

**Cori Knight** finished her dissertation, "The Good Guys Might Not Wear White Hats: Positing a Shift in the American Monomyth," during Summer 2017. In 2017-18, she will enter her final year as a Michael K. Schoenecke Leadership Institute Fellow through the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association. She will also begin teaching this fall for UCR's University Writing Program and School of Business Administration. In addition to teaching, Cori will continue on as band manager for the UCR Pipe Band. She is thrilled to have played the bagpipes at her own Commencement ceremony and looks forward to playing at future UCR events as well.



Cori Knight and Dr. Ali (left) navigate the hooding process (carefully avoiding the bagpipes!). Photo courtesy of Dr. Liz Gumm



## Staff Updates

*We would never be able to accomplish what we do without the support of our wonderful Multidisciplinary Unit staff members. Diane Shaw provides a brief update on the team this academic year.*

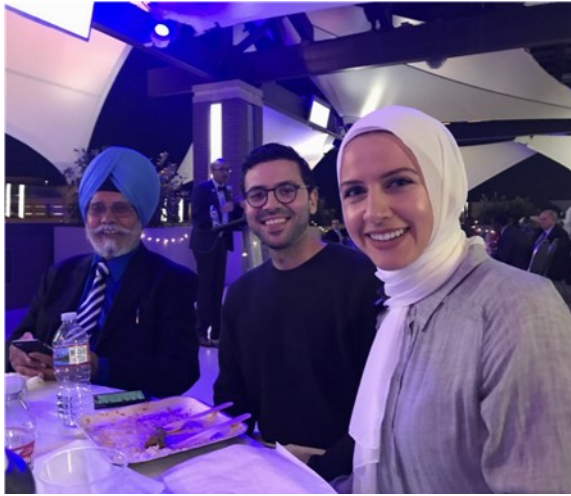
As the academic year draws to a close, the tremendous effort that each and every staff employee has extended is obvious. Due to the hard work of all, they have persevered together to overcome obstacles and meet difficult deadlines. In addition to the essential work, they continue to give back in numerous ways such as supporting the community, serving on various UCR committees, participating in college events, health/wellness activities, and obtaining personal achievements. Their hard work is greatly appreciated. ---Diane Shaw



## Photos from Around the Department



## Photos from Around the Department



## Awards and Honors for 2016-2017

Edwin S. Gaustad Award  
Barbara and Donald Donner Essay Award  
Achievement Award  
Encouragement Award  
Holstein Chair Award  
June O'Connor Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award  
Graduate Research Mentoring Program Award  
Honors Convocation Awardee  
Tomás Rivera Awardee  
Academic Excellence Award in Religious Studies/Art History  
The Religious Studies Service Award

Ambika Rajyagor  
Ustina Ibrahim  
Emma Sherwood  
Beverly Arevalo  
Patrice Ford  
Kathryn Phillips  
Cristina Rosetti  
Maryam Baig  
Aldo Martinez  
Sierra Lapoint  
Juan Pablo Chavez  
Maha Shbaita  
Corinne Knight

Congratulations to all of our awardees and graduates!

## 2016-2017 Religious Studies Graduates

### Majors

Ayala, Alfonso  
Baig, Maryam  
Chavez, Danielle  
Chavez, Juan  
Fields, Aniella  
Ford, Patrice  
Martinez, Aldo  
Mohammad, Danya  
Nunez, Abraham  
Rajyagor, Ambika  
Van Heumen, Adrienne

### Masters

Dempsey, Dani

### PhD Candidacy

Dempsey, Dani

### PhD

Crasnow, SJ  
Guida, Jeremy  
Knight, Corinne  
Sagan, Sean