

# *The Religious Studies Voice*



*2013-2014*



# Letter from the Chair

Dr. Pashaura Singh

Department Chair, Religious Studies

Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair of Sikh  
& Punjabi Studies

At our Annual Religious Studies Retreat on September 23, 2013 the department unanimously approved the idea of reviving the RLST Newsletter. The faculty felt the need to pen down the history of our department. I am delighted to present the progress made in this direction.

It is fascinating to read the article by Professor Douglas M. Parrott (Emeritus), narrating the evolution of the department from its small beginnings during his tenure. Professor Ivan Strenski's brief piece further highlights the transition of our small department to a full-fledged graduate program working under the care of 12 faculty members. However, during the period of budgetary cuts our strength dwindled as we were not able to reinstate faculty positions lost to separation, retirement, and transfer.

During the current academic year our developments have also been mixed. After a gap of four years, we were able to recruit a faculty in Transnational Buddhism who will be joining us on July 1, 2014. I welcome Dr. Matthew King, who will offer our department not only newly conceptualized approaches to Buddhist Studies, but also a strong qualification in method and theory. Winter Quarter 2014, however, saw the retirement of our Holstein Distinguished Professor, Dr. Ivan Strenski. We take some comfort in knowing that Professor Strenski will continue to guide our doctoral students and teach one graduate seminar during Winter 2015 while on recall. This spring, we will also say goodbye to Dr. Sherri F. Johnson, who will be joining Louisiana State University along with her husband Professor Martin Johnson. At the end of this academic year we have gained one new position but lost two positions.

Under the circumstances, we will continue to work hard to meet the curriculum needs of our graduate and undergraduate students in the coming years. We have much to celebrate in terms of the publication of three new books that reflect the research trajectory of our faculty, as well as a very strong colloquium series this year. We are also grateful to our donors for supporting our department.

—Dr. Pashaura Singh

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Front Cover: The 2013 Sikh Studies Conference drew scholars from around the world to participate in North America’s largest conference in the field.

# Snapshots

*The department year in photos*



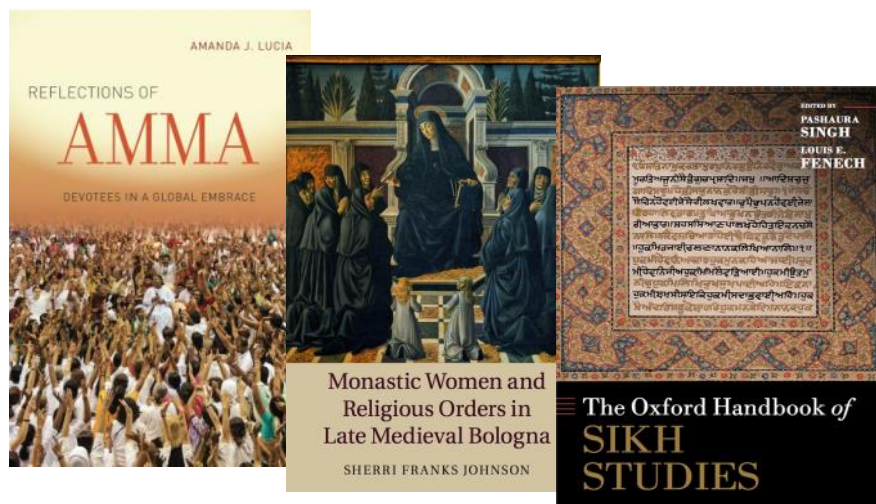
Signing for the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust Student Award. L-R: Dr. Pashaura Singh, Dr. Donald Carpenter, Jr., Dr. June O'Connor, & Dr. Douglas Parrott. See story on page 11.



At the book launch for *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. L-R: Charles Townsend, Dr. Pashaura Singh, Dr. Kamalroop Singh, and Toby Braden Johnson. See story on page 11.



Three RLST grad students present at Comic-Con International—San Diego, July 2013. L-R: Cori Knight, Sean Sagan, & Toby Braden Johnson. Photo courtesy of Jenna Sagan. See story on page 14.



A trio of 2014 faculty book releases. L-R: *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (Dr. Lucia); *Monastic Women and Religious Orders in Late Medieval Bologna* (Dr. Johnson); and *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (ed. Drs. Singh & Fenech). See story on page 11.

## Some Words from the Interim Chancellor...

*We were very fortunate to have UCR's Interim Chancellor speak at the reception for the Sikh Studies Conference, "Dialogues with(in) Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices, and Performances," last spring. Here is an excerpt of her speech.*

"This conference has drawn scholars from all over the world, and it provides both students and faculty with an invaluable opportunity to look at a religion, a culture, a history that actually receives scant attention in American society and in American education. It's important to remind our campus and our community that there are many components to our American family, and the Sikh community is an important one of them.

Our American history and our culture are actually rich in the interplay of many strands of human experience worldwide, and perhaps no other country so well embodies it, despite the fact that this interplay has come with many bumps and problems along the way. But I remain an idealist and ever-hopeful about the American dream.

As a campus that is known for exemplifying and treasuring that cultural richness, we particularly appreciate the contributions of Sikh Studies, [of] Sikh and Punjabi studies, of all of our visitors here today. So thank you for joining us here at Riverside, and certainly from our sister campuses and from around the world and around the country.

Thank you for coming and sharing your work with us.



Interim Chancellor Dr. Jane Close Conoley speaks at the reception for the 2013 Sikh Studies Conference

# Snapshots

*Selections from our awards ceremony*



**Clockwise from top left:** RLST students Jasmine Mayfield and Rebecca Villarreal receive their awards; Dr. Donald F. Carpenter, Jr. presents doctoral candidate Jeremy Guida with the Cordell-Kress award; Dr. Muhamad Ali presents Marina Soliman with her Donner Essay Award; our hardworking MDU staff celebrates with the department; and Dr. Pashaura Singh (left) and Dr. June O'Connor (right) present Dr. Sherri Johnson with a gift as we bid her farewell and wish her luck in her new position!



## 2014 Religious Studies Student Awards

### Edwin S. Gaustad Award

Rebecca A. Villarreal

### Barbara and Donald Donner Essay Award

Marina S. Soliman

### Achievement Award

Chantelle M. Boostrom

### Encouragement Award

Samantha C. Park

### Holstein Chair Award

Jasmine D. Mayfield

### Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award

Shou Jen Kuo

### Cordell-Kress Award

Jeremy Guida

Anna Beck

# Behind the Department

*An ongoing series on the history of UCR's Religious Studies Department*

*As our department continues to look toward its future, it also becomes necessary to take a look at its past. Below is the first in a series of articles on our history, as seen through the eyes of our department chairs.*

HISTORICAL RECOLLECTIONS  
UCR RELIGIOUS STUDIES MID-1960s TO 1985  
By  
PROF. DOUGLAS M. PARROTT, EMERITUS  
CHAIR, 1973 to 1985

## BEGINNINGS:

In two momentous decisions, in 1962 (*Engel vs. Vitale*) and 1963 (*Abington vs. Schempp*), the U.S. Supreme Court banned required prayer and devotional Bible reading in public schools, but at the same time recognized the cultural importance of knowledge about the Bible and religious ideas in general, and therefore encouraged teaching about religion in public education. Taking their cue from that, but without any clear guidelines as to how to proceed, public colleges and universities across the country began almost immediately developing programs and departments for the study of religion. Previously they had been reluctant to do so because of concerns about the First Amendment. In the mid-1960s three professors in the UCR History Department took the lead in the effort to establish a religious studies program at UCR. They were Edwin Gaustad, whose specialty was the history of religion in America, Robert Hine, who focused his research on American communitarian movements, and Jeffrey Russell, a specialist in intellectual history.

To gain support on campus, they arranged for a number of major figures in the field of religion to address campus-wide convocations. Prominent among them was the well-known existentialist theologian Paul Tillich.

The result of their efforts was the establishment of an independent undergraduate Program in Religious Studies in 1968. Three full-time faculty positions were approved. The first hired was Jill Raitt, a former Roman Catholic nun and a recent PhD graduate of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, who began teaching in the fall of 1969. The second, in 1970, was Francis Cook, with a PhD from the University of Wisconsin's prestigious Buddhist Studies program, who had spent several years as an assistant professor at Dartmouth College. Douglas Parrott was the third hired, in 1971. He had earlier been a Presbyterian pastor. He received his PhD from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in Biblical Studies (1970), and, when hired, was a research fellow at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity (established by Claremont Graduate School), helping to prepare the initial publication of the text and translation of the Coptic-Gnostic Nag Hammadi Codices, which were discovered in Egypt in 1945, but only made available to international scholarship in the late 1960s. Parrott had previously earned MDiv and STM degrees at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

## CHAIRS AND STAFF; FACULTY CHANGE

Edwin Gaustad, on loan from History, was the first chair of the Program until 1971. Jeffrey Russell, also on loan, then replaced him for two years. In 1973, Douglas Parrott was asked to become chair, a somewhat unusual move since he was still an assistant professor. He served until he left on an extended sabbatical in 1985 in Germany, at which time June O'Connor became the chair. The one staff person of the Program (half-time) during Parrott's time was the secretary, Joy Cronk, who kept on top of the ever-changing campus regulations, advised students, and took care of correspondence (in the pre-email era), in addition to being the warm and friendly presence in the front office.

Jill Raitt announced her resignation, in Jeffrey Russell's second year as chair, to take a position at Duke University, where she would be able to instruct graduate students as well as undergraduates. During that year, we were able to recruit June O'Connor as her replacement. O'Connor, who had also been a Roman Catholic nun and had previously taught at Mundelein College in Illinois, was at the point of receiving her PhD from Temple University

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in Comparative Ethics. She was hired with the expectation that she would complete her dissertation (on the Indian spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo), which she did in the summer of 1973, before she and her new husband, Harry Hood, arrived in Riverside.

## CONSTRAINTS

It soon became apparent that there would be no additional faculty positions for Religious Studies. There were two reasons for that. First, the campus itself, which had reached the enrollment level of somewhat under 5,000, stopped growing. Since new positions were allocated to campuses based largely on the increase in student numbers, UCR was essentially in the mode of replacing positions that were vacated. Any positions beyond that, when they did become available, were allocated to larger units (i.e., departments) which had both the political influence that came with size, and graduate programs. Second, there was a strong sentiment among some UCR faculty that the study of religion did not belong in a public university, regardless of the Supreme Court. The university was seen as properly devoted to using the tools of reason to discover, investigate, apply and instruct in the areas of science and culture, and religion was seen as somehow outside and antithetical to that. In addition, there was the suspicion that we, in Religious Studies, were using the classroom to evangelize.

Looking back, it seems clear that being a small, independent unit, with no tenured faculty (at least initially), made us particularly vulnerable, and that we would have been better off at the time had we been part of a larger unit, such as the History Department. But, of course, that might have made it more difficult to gain the departmental status and graduate program we desired, and eventually attained—after 1985.

## CHALLENGES

Given our situation in 1973, however, we knew we had to do two things: (1) build as strong and as student-attractive an undergraduate program as possible and (2) make clear to the whole campus that the study of religion, as a widespread and complex human activity, belonged in the university, and, further, that we were not using our classrooms to convert students to our own particular beliefs.

## CURRICULUM

The curriculum we developed had three parts, based on the strengths and interests of the three faculty. We offered three lower division courses, which were required of all majors and which were attractive to non-majors as well: Religious Myth and Ritual (O'Connor), Introduction to Western Religions (Parrott), and Introduction to Asian Religions (Cook). Then each of us established a series of upper division courses in our particular areas, which we offered on a regular basis. The areas were: Christian theology and ethics (O'Connor), Hebrew Bible and New Testament (Parrott) and Asian Religions—with emphasis on Buddhism (Cook). Majors were required to take at least one course in each of the areas, but were expected to concentrate in the area that interested them most. As time went on, we expanded our offerings; examples are: a course on sex, family and marriage in various religious traditions (all three faculty), a very popular course on death and dying (O'Connor), a course on Islam (Parrott), and one on science and religion (Parrott).

One area where we felt inadequate was Jewish studies, and we were fortunate to be able to arrange funding for one or two courses a year in that area. To teach them we regularly hired Zev Garber, on the faculty of Los Angeles Valley Community College, as a lecturer.

In all our courses we attempted to present the material in as objective a manner as possible, recognizing that complete objectivity is beyond reach and may not always be desirable, if one is to arouse students to engage both their thought and their feelings in the course material. We also emphasized the importance of critical thinking and tried to reflect it in our teaching.

## VISITING LECTURERS

To enrich the program further, there were visiting lecturers who in their lives and their thinking were able to illuminate various aspects of religion past and present. Three were Regents Lecturers, who came for several weeks, participated in classes, and gave at least one public lecture. They were: Brother Steindl-Rast, a European Benedictine monk known for his teachings on spirituality; Michael Novak, an influential Roman Catholic lay theologian and ethicist who works in the area of religion and politics; and Jiyu-Kennett Roshi, a prominent woman Zen master, who founded a monastery on Mount Shasta, in northern California.

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# Texts, Practices, and Performances

*A Report on the third Sikh Studies Conference at UCR*



A graduate student panel—"Living Scripture and Secular Text"—at the 3rd Sikh Studies Conference. L-R: Punnu Jaitla, Jeremy Guida, and Cori Knight

## Dialogues with(in) Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices, and Performances: A Conference Report

By Toby Braden Johnson

On May 10 -12, 2013, Dr. Pashaura Singh, the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, and UCR's Department of Religious Studies hosted the third conference focused on the study of Sikh traditions. Over thirty scholars from three continents participated in the conference, titled *Dialogues with(in) Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices, and Performances*. This conference differed from the first two by opening its doors to the Sikh community to engage with the assembled scholars in the field of Sikh Studies not simply as audience members, but as participating members of the conference panels.

Efforts to bring the local Sikh community and the assembled scholars together were led by Drs. Pashaura Singh and Vivian-Lee Nyitray, then-Department Chair. Their work also drew the attention of the University's administration, with both UCR's Interim Chancellor, Jane Close Conoley, and College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Dean, Stephen Cullenberg, attending the conference reception. Dean Cullenberg was also on hand to open the conference proceedings with a welcome statement on Friday morning.

The conference reception was a focal point for bringing the academic side of the field into conversation with the community. Dr. Pashaura Singh used that opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of two great men to the field of Sikh Studies: Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany (Chair of the Sikh Foundation) and Dr. Christopher Shackle (Professor Emeritus, SOAS University of London) were presented with Lifetime Achievement Awards in recognition of their work, which has been so instrumental in fostering the growth of the field.

The scholarly presentations made at the conference itself lived up to the standards set by our honored guests. All eight Sikh Studies chairs from North American universities participated in the conference. Papers focused on a variety of topics to engage the conference themes of texts, practices, and performance and represented a variety of disciplinary approaches to these themes (history, textual studies, musicology, anthropology, philosophy, ethnography, cognitive science, and more).





Photos from the Sikh Studies conference. Top row, L-R: Dr. Michael Hawley presents on the KY/3HO Sikh Community in Calgary; one of our department's own undergrads, Gloria Williams, asks a question of panelists during a Q&A period; and Dr. Christopher Shackel delivers the event's keynote address. Second row, L-R: Dr. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh delivers her presentation on visual phenomenology; Dr. Pashaura Singh, event chair, engages with panelists following their presentations.

*(Continued from page 8)*

These papers prompted discussions that were lively, to say the least. The most lively discussions were in response to presentations considering the Dasam Granth, the use of “Western” academic categories and theories, and the application of scientific modes of examination to Sikh beliefs.

One feature of this conference that stood out was the participation of graduate students from UCR who do not specifically focus their research in the field of Sikh Studies, but who are open to expanding their horizons to engage Sikhism in comparative studies. Three papers were given by my colleagues, graduate students in the Department of Religious Studies, demonstrating their work with Dr. Pashaura Singh. Each paper was well received and drew the attention, questions, and support of attendees. It was a good moment for us as a department; their contributions demonstrated the need for Sikh Studies to expand and move into dialogue with other fields in the academy.

Altogether, the weekend was everything we the organizers hoped for as we worked to plan the conference. Dr. Pashaura Singh's efforts to reach out to the Sikh community were well received and appreciated. The hard work of our organizing committee, as well as that of various university staff members who worked just as hard, paid off. The support of our undergraduate and graduate student volunteers helped things run smoothly each day. I join many others in looking forward to the fourth conference on Sikh Studies here at the University of California, Riverside.

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In addition, there were other important figures in the field who came and gave individual lectures; among them were Robert Brown (a liberal Protestant theologian and writer from Stanford), Hans Jonas (Jewish existential philosopher and ethicist), Frederick Copleston, S.J. (Roman Catholic historian of philosophy), James M. Robinson (an important New Testament scholar, Director of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont Graduate School, where he also organized and led the Coptic-Gnostic Nag Hammadi Project), John C. Bennett (retired President of Union Theological Seminary in New York City and a major figure in religious ethics in the liberal Protestant tradition), and David Noel Freedman (internationally known Hebrew Bible scholar at UC San Diego). Also Robert W. Funk, a top New Testament scholar and founder of the controversial Jesus Seminar, came for a quarter and taught our Introduction to the New Testament course.

## MAJORS

The number of Religious Studies majors was important in the Administration's evaluation of the Program, so we sought ways to hold the majors we had (never more than 30, I believe) and to add new ones. Two strategies used were 1) developing a sense of community among and with the majors, and 2) encouraging interested community college students to transfer to UCR.

Once a quarter, usually, we would have parties with the majors, often in a faculty home, but sometimes in a student apartment. The majors became our representatives to other students, publicizing Religious Studies courses and events, and encouraging their friends, perhaps, to become majors. And at a certain point, a Religious Studies Club was established, made up largely of majors, but including others interested in Religious Studies as well.

The community college we had the most success with was San Bernardino Valley College, where we were able to develop a strong relationship through the leader of their religion program, Roger Schmidt. A number of times we were invited to attend parties to meet interested SBVC students, and Schmidt and other SBVC faculty would encourage students to visit UCR to find out what we had to offer.

## JOINT MA PROGRAM WITH CLAREMONT

The lack of a graduate program was always a problem and we attempted to address it in the early 1980s by establishing a formal relationship with the Religion Department of Claremont Graduate School. In their senior year at UCR, our majors would be able to apply and be accepted into the CGS MA in Religion program, with specified UCR Religious Studies upper division courses counting toward that degree, while the same courses would also help satisfy the UCR BA requirements. Upon graduation from UCR, students would be able to complete the MA program in Claremont. This arrangement required that our Religious Studies faculty be accepted as graduate level faculty at CGS, and that was accomplished. Unfortunately, only one of our students took advantage of the program.

## DANGER

The situation for Religious Studies on campus took a dark turn in the early 1980s when the campus-wide student enrollments, which had been fairly steady through the 1970s, took a downward turn, and UCOP statisticians predicted that the trend would continue. There was much talk on campus of closing smaller and weaker units and transferring resources to units that were seen to be larger, stronger and more important to the mission of the campus as a whole. The Humanities and Social Sciences dean at the time even set up a committee to make some initial recommendations, and there was reason to think that Religious Studies was being considered for elimination. Fortunately, no precipitous action was taken and within a year or so enrollments at UCR and throughout the UC system began to climb.

## SYSTEM-WIDE CONSULTATIONS

Finally, we (Religious Studies faculty) at UCR, were not the only ones in the UC system dealing with the growing pains associated with establishing a new (for UC) discipline. During this period, religious studies was in various stages of development at UC Davis, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Barbara (the earliest and best established unit), UC Irvine and UCLA. Early on, it occurred to us at UCR that it might be beneficial to everyone to be in communication with each other, and to meet together once a year and share new developments, and also give each other whatever help and encouragement we could. Our proposal was met with interest and enthusiasm, and the result was that Religious Studies faculty from most of these campuses arranged to have day-long conferences every year through the 70s and 80s, and into the 90s.

# Cordell-Kress Award

*Connecting alumni, community, & the department*

At the September 23rd, 2013 Annual Faculty Retreat, a memorandum of agreement between the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust, the UC Riverside Foundation, and the University of California, Riverside was signed by Dr. Donald Carpenter Jr., a department alumnus, and Dr. Pashaura Singh, Chair of Religious Studies Department, in order to establish the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust Student Award in Religious Studies.



Faculty members discuss the establishment of the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust Student Award. L-R: Dr. Amanda Lucia, Dr. Muhamad Ali, Ms. Launa K. Wilson, Dr. Pashaura Singh, Dr. Donald Carpenter Jr., Dr. Sherri Johnson, Dr. June O'Connor, Dr. Michael Alexander, and Dr. Douglas Parrott.

Ms. Launa K. Wilson, Senior Director of Development (CHASS) assisted in the formal signing of the agreement, which establishes a competitive award encouraging students to think about the importance of a balance between faith in God and high academic achievement in their personal experience.

Faculty members thanked Dr. Carpenter for his generous offer to approach UC Riverside about the award and apprised him of our policy to respect the conscience of the students. The faculty will establish a criteria for the selection

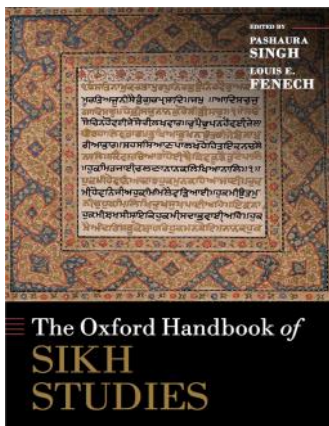
process that simultaneously honors both Mr. Cordell's desire to encourage students to develop academic lives that embrace both faith and knowledge and the department's commitment to respecting students' perspectives. The department Chair and faculty will select the award recipients, based on the merit of their essays, from the pool of eligible applicants.

Walter Cordell was a hard-working first-generation Polish-American born in Detroit, Michigan. He was a man of modest means but saved and invested as hard as he worked. Through discipline and sacrifice, he and his sister Wanda Kress were able to establish the Cordell-Kress Charitable Trust. As a devout Catholic, Mr. Cordell developed a love for the study of sacred scripture, and, as an autodidact, his keen mind also carried his academic interests into the areas of philosophy and psychology. He was concerned that the growing secularization of academia might distort students' relationships with the Divine. Mr. Cordell asked his Trustee, Donald F. Carpenter Jr. ('92 Religious Studies), to help establish a competitive award encouraging students to think about the importance of a balance between faith in God and high academic achievement in their personal experience. This fund is being established to honor Mr. Cordell's desire to encourage students to develop academic lives that embrace both faith and knowledge.

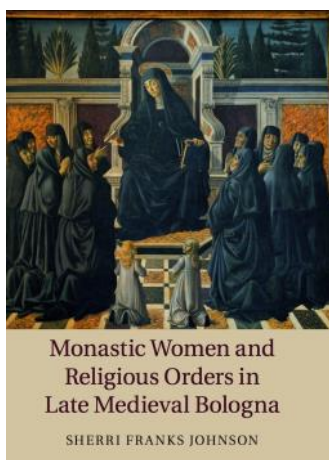
This year's inaugural Cordell-Kress Charitable Award was presented to two graduate students, Jeremy Guida and Anna Beck. The department of Religious Studies extends its heartfelt congratulations to Jeremy and Anna!

# Book Releases

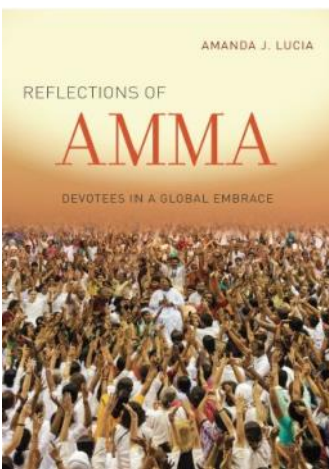
*Publications from our faculty members*



**Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies:** On April 3, the Religious Studies department hosted a colloquium to celebrate the official release of *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Department Chair Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech. The 650 page anthology, which took several years to complete, incorporates chapter contributions from forty five researchers, including many eminent scholars in the growing field of Sikh Studies, as well as two of our own grad students, Toby Braden Johnson and Charles Townsend. Dr. Singh discussed the process of bringing the *Handbook* to fruition and the uniqueness of the anthology, which provides a comprehensive survey of important topics for the academic study of the Sikh tradition and brings together the work of three generations of Sikh Studies scholars and scholar-practitioners.



**Monastic Women and Religious Orders in Late Medieval Bologna:** This year, Dr. Sherri F. Johnson published a book, *Monastic Women and Religious Orders in Late Medieval Bologna*. She examines the lives of religious women from a variety of convents in the changing ecclesiastical and civic structure of late medieval Bologna, including both communities that sought to participate in international religious orders and those that remained independent from them. Previous scholarship has tended to see this period as an era of increasing marginalization of religious women, focusing in particular on the reluctance of monks to accept nuns into their orders. I have tried to move toward a more comprehensive view of women's monasticism that looks at what women in these religious communities wanted for themselves rather than how men in the leadership of religious orders saw them.



**Amma:** Dr. Amanda Lucia's *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* is a rich ethnography investigating religious & cultural exchanges within devotional communities of a popular transnational guru globally known as Amma, meaning "mother." Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi) has developed a massive transnational humanitarian organization based in hugs. She is familiar to millions as the "hugging saint," a moniker that derives from her elaborate darshan programs wherein nearly every day ten thousand people are embraced by the guru one at a time, events that routinely last ten to twenty hours without any rest for her. Lucia's research focuses on communities of Amma's devotees in the United States, showing how they endeavor to mirror their guru's behaviors and transform themselves to emulate the ethos of the movement.

# Conferences & Colloquia

*Speakers, symposia, and book releases*

## Colloquium Series in Review

By Dr. Amanda Lucia

In 2013-2014, the Religious Studies department hosted a vibrant colloquium series that was bolstered both by lectures by several candidates for our new tenure track position in Transnational Buddhism and by three new book release celebrations (Drs. Singh, Lucia, and Johnson). We were also pleased to host scholars in our colloquium series who were jointly supported by the Mellon Workshops through the Center for Ideas and Society, including Dr. Romi Mukherjee (Sciences Po, Paris), Dr. Valentina Nepolitano (University of Toronto), and Dr. Bruce Phillips (Hebrew Union College).

The colloquium series also benefitted from scholars related to the semi-annual Sikh Studies conference, with lectures by Dr. Kamalroop Singh (University of Birmingham) and Dr. Kristina Myrvold (Linneaus University, Sweden), as well as the semi-annual Holstein conference, which brought to the colloquium series a fascinating panel discussion on New Religious Movements with Dr. Eileen Barker (LSE), Dr. Annika Hvithamar (Copenhagen), Dr. Milda Alisauskiene (Vytautas Magnus, Lithuania) and our own Dr. Ivan Strenski.

## 2013-14 Sponsored Speakers

By Dr. Michael Alexander

This year, several renowned scholars were invited to speak on topics related to Jewish Studies.

Dr. Ben Urwand, a Junior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Harvard University, spoke about his book, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact With Hitler*. Urwand displayed an abundance of sources documenting how Hollywood studio executives worked in tandem with Nazi propaganda officials throughout the 1930s to censor anti-German sentiment in American films.

A partnership with the Center for Ideas and Society sponsored a talk from Dr. Bruce Phillips, Professor of Sociology & Jewish Communal Service at the HUC Louchheim School of Judaic Studies at the University of Southern California. "Not Quite White: The Residential Patterns of Los Angeles Jews, 1920-1997" addressed issues of the continuing pattern of the Jewish ethno-burb in Southern California.

Professor Joshua Landis discussed "Syria and the Middle East: What's Next?" Dr. Landis is Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and the author of SyriaComment.org. In his talk, Dr. Landis described the ethnic landscape of Syria, and analyzed the regional and geopolitical pressures which are currently preventing the possibility of a sustainable peace.

## 2014 Holstein Conference in Brief

By Cristina Rosetti

On February 14, the department of Religious Studies hosted the 2014 Holstein Conference, "When New Religious Movements Get Old." This year's conference recognized and celebrated the work of Dr. Eileen Barker, professor emerita of sociology at the London School of Economics. Author of more than 350 publications, Dr. Barker has also founded INFORM, an organization that provides information about new religions to scholars, governments, and community members. Through vivid imagery and engaging dialogue, Dr. Barker encouraged the audience to question what scholars mean when they label specific groups as New Religious Movements.

Other presentations throughout the day included Dr. Jon R. Stone's work on virtual religion, Dr. Chris Chapple's paper on yoga in public space, and Dr. Annika Hvithamar's research on Jehovah's Witnesses as a minority group in Denmark. The conference concluded with a presentation by Dr. Amanda Lucia on the relationship between guru movements and New Religious Movements. Throughout the conference, each presentation offered unique insight into the formation of new religions and how religions are classified.

# Faculty Updates

*Some brief words from and about our esteemed faculty members*

**Dr. Michael Alexander**, professor of Jewish Studies, edited a special issue of the journal *American Jewish History*, "The Soviet Issue," and is currently editing another volume of the same journal, entitled "The Color Issue." He also contributed an article to the museum catalogue for the National Museum of American Jewish History, *Chasing Dreams: Baseball & Becoming American*, "The Black Sox Scandal Revisited." Under his leadership, Jewish Studies sponsored talks from several renowned scholars this year, including Dr. Ben Urwand, Dr. Bruce Phillips, and Dr. Joshua Landis. For more details, see our conference and colloquia coverage on pages 8 and 9.

**Dr. Muhamad Ali** published three book chapters this past year. The first, "Far from Mecca: Modern Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia", in *Islam in the Modern World*, uses Max Weber and other modernization theorists in explaining how and why Muslim movements became modernized in Indonesia and Malaysia. The second, "Islam in Modern Southeast Asian History," in the *Routledge Handbook for Southeast Asian History*, addresses the processes and patterns of Islamization in Southeast Asia from early times to the present day. Another chapter, "Integrating Islam and Ecofeminism: A Monotheistic Approach to Earth Crisis," in *Politics of Mainstreaming Ecofeminism*, deals with the ways in which some contemporary Muslim scholars and activists address ecological crisis as either separate from or connected with discrimination against women, as well as the ways they conduct activities as part of monotheistic approaches to earth crisis and gender injustices.

**Amanda Lucia** has recently published her first book *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* with the University of California Press. Two articles are now in press with *History of Religions* and the *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. In 2013-2014, Dr. Lucia received an Academic Senate Omnibus Travel Award, a Regents Faculty Fellowship, and the Hellman Fellowship for her second book project on cultural representation in yoga festival cultures in the United States. In partnership with ISIR (Institute for the Study of Immigrant Religion), she also received research grants through RIDAGA (Religion in Diaspora and Global Affairs), sponsored by UCHRI, by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and by CIS (Center for Ideas & Society). In the past year, she presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, UW Madison South Asia Conference, Claremont Graduate University, UCR's Palm Desert Campus, Cal Poly Pomona, and University of Allahabad, India.

**Vivian-Lee Nyitray**, Patricia McSweeney McCauley Professor of Teaching Excellence (Emerita), retired from UCR to assume a new role in China as founding dean of two new colleges engaged in revolutionizing higher education. At both Prospect College in Chongqing and Taigu College in Shanxi Province, she is working to establish curricula that feature small classes with interactive teaching, the infusion of global content, and spurs to students' creative thinking. In December, she was an invited member of the Oxford Women's Leadership Symposium; 2014 will see her addressing the opening convocation of the University of Alaska, Anchorage's Ethics Center (with a talk on Confucian ethics in her decanal position) and NAFSA: Association of International Educators in San Diego. Her manuscript, *Chinese Women and Religion: Persuasion and Power*, has been accepted for the series, *Women and Religion* for NYU Press.

*We also officially welcome the newest addition to the Department of Religious Studies, Dr. Matthew King!*

**Dr. King** finished his PhD. in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. His dissertation examined Buddhist monastic responses to the "crisis" of the Qing imperial collapse and the growth of nationalism, science, and state socialism in revolutionary Mongolia. His research interests at the moment include theories of Buddhist economy in modern Inner Asia and Euro-American convert communities, medical and historiographic traditions associated with the Gesar of Ling epic, and Tibeto-Mongolian monastic mediations of the humanities and physical sciences.



# Reflections on the Department

By Dr. Ivan Strenski



When I arrived at UCR in 1995 as the first holder of the Holstein chair, the department consisted of approximately 2 1/2 - 3 full-time faculty members. Our largest classes enrolled barely 100 undergraduates. We had no MA nor a doctoral program. Partly under pressure from the Dean of CHASS, I was pressed into the role of being chair of the department in 1996. I quickly concluded that some radical changes were necessary in order to raise the morale and visibility of the department. It was likewise clear to me that there was tremendous interest in the study of religion that was not being sufficiently exploited to our benefit. My first act was to open enrollments in Religious Studies 12 so that we could show the great unfulfilled appetite for religious studies on the campus. The success of this move nearly cost me a nervous breakdown because I soon found myself with an enrollment of 300 or so students in Religious Studies 12—but with no TAs to back me up!

The traffic through my office hours is resembled rush-hour on the 215-91-60 freeways. So I immediately appealed to the dean to scrape together 3 or 4 TA ships to get me through the quarter. It was a close call, but I made it, damages and all.

The crisis created, however, left an indelible mark on the dean of our college. Even in a time of retrenchment and very tight budgets, we gained instant visibility and rushed to the head of the charts in terms of number of students enrolled per faculty. In a sense, we had arrived. From then on, the question was simply how fast and furiously to exploit our situation by appealing to our manifest strength. In a few years time, this move had netted us several new faculty members, as well as a planned doctoral program for fall 2006, during Dr. June O'Connor's time as chair. I think shortly after that we attained our maximum historical strength of about 12 faculty members.

But by 2002 or 2003, I was exhausted, and cheerfully relinquished the reins of the departmental leadership. Since that time I have tried to recover from those hectic years as chair and to devote myself fully to the commission of the Holstein chair to produce first-rate and cutting-edge working religious studies. I think I've been able to do that, given the 14 to 15 books I've published, as well as over 50 to 75 articles and chapters in books. I was also awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Lausanne in 2005. During the past four years, I've been teaching short courses during the summer for the Open Society Institute in Russia. Although I am officially retiring from the department, I shall continue to contribute to the study of religion because I believe it is essential to the commission of the humanities. Especially at a university such as UCR, so strong in the scientific and medical faculties, the humanities need to be constantly refreshed and restored and given new vitality.

We need especially to be bold and original and not just follow the trends set by the larger, trendier, departments in humanities. We have a very distinctive and powerful voice in being comparative, multicultural, and multidisciplinary. The biggest mistake we could make would be to think small or try to be a second-rate version of some other department. We are unique, and we should shout about it.

*This spring, we will bid farewell to Dr. Sherri F. Johnson as she moves on to Louisiana State University. Although we will miss her, we all wish her well in her new position!*

*From Dr. Johnson:* "I have accepted a position at Louisiana State University, and so will move to Baton Rouge over the summer. While this move will allow me to be close to my family, I am sad to leave my friends at UC Riverside. I have enjoyed teaching and learning from undergraduate and graduate students in the Religious Studies Department, and have been grateful for the support of my colleagues and the insights I have gained from them over the years."



# Meet the MDU

*A little bit about the people who make our department run smoothly*

You know our faculty members and our students, but what's the MDU? Simply put, the MDU is the nerve center of our department (and many others like us). They manage the money, coordinate our events, advise our students, and so much more!

From the MDU website: "The Multidisciplinary Financial and Administrative Unit (MDU) was created to provide expertise in the areas of business, financial, administrative, human resources, and student affairs. The MDU combines the functions previously performed separately in departmental business offices. Our goal with this consolidation is to provide an enhanced level of service and expertise in core administrative services and deliver consistent applications of UC Riverside's policies and procedures. Our focus is also on providing quality service and superior resource stewardship in support of the University's strategic goals."

So let's meet the MDU!



**"Diane Shaw** is the Financial and Administrative Officer (FAO) for the Multidisciplinary Administrative Unit and provides oversight and coordination of the financial and administrative support functions of the Ethnic Studies, Media & Cultural Studies, Religious Studies, and Women's Studies academic departments, as well as Interdisciplinary Programs. She has primary responsibility for providing management, coordination, and oversight of the daily operations of the departments including financial, human resources, academic support, contracts and grants, facilities management, and other operational matters."

**Damian Lee Gomez** "[p]rovides professional support in the areas of financial/budget analysis, fiscal management, contracts and grants, and administrative matters. [He] serves as the primary advisor to the FAO regarding all funding sources; performs complex budget analysis; makes recommendations for expenditures; designs and creates meaningful financial reports; [and] provides comprehensive budget information to facilitate financial strategic short- and long-range planning of resources... [Damian] serves as the primary liaison between UCR central offices, including the Dean's Office, Office of Research, Accounting, Purchasing, and the various funding agencies."



**Kristine Specht** "[a]dministers the recruitment process for ladder-faculty and non-senate faculty, including Lecturers, Visiting appointees, Associate Ins, Researchers, and other non-senate titles [and] coordinates with search committees, departmental Chairs, and the FAO in the process of faculty hiring, from creation of the recruitment plan through the completion of the appointment file. Kristine prepares documents and ensures compliance with the Hiring Toolkit, Affirmative Action Guidelines, the APM, and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)."





**Diana Marroquin** first joined the Religious Studies department in 2001 after having been employed with UCR with the Registrar's office and with the Sociology department and had an extensive background in undergraduate academic affairs and administrative office work. During her time with Religious Studies, she received her BA in Sociology from CSU San Bernardino, got married, and had a son. While she was hired as the Undergraduate Student Affairs Advisor/Administrative Assistant for Religious Studies in 2001, when she left in 2010 she was working as the department's Graduate Student Affairs Advisor and was there for the 2006 launch of the RLST MA and Ph.D. programs. In 2010, she relocated to Washington for two years but returned to California in 2012 and was hired back as the Payroll and Accounting Specialist for the Multidisciplinary Financial and Administrative Unit. She loves what she does and that she has shifted into different positions over the years. She notes that she has had amazing opportunities for professional growth and development and to work with amazing professors, students, and staff.

In her spare time Diana enjoys traveling, reading, and spending time with family. She is also a freelance makeup artist. She loves working in a field that allows her to help people, whether it is in an academic setting or helping them feel better about themselves and their outward appearance. She greatly enjoys working in "helping professions" and sees herself doing this type of work for life.

**Trina Elerts** grew up in Riverside, and since both of her parents were grad students at UCR in the 1970s, she spent lots of time at UCR – roller skating around campus, attending concerts on the Bell Tower lawn and in the "Pub" (which was replaced by the Commons and is now the HUB). Trina attended UCR as an undergraduate student and earned a BA in English (1992), as well as a multiple subject teaching credential from the UCR School of Education (1993). She began her professional career at UCR in 1994 with the UCR Alumni Association. She has worked in the Student Business Services office and the Graduate Division, and she spent the last 10 years coordinating the UC Washington Academic Internship Program and the UC Center Sacramento Scholar Intern Program, as well as the faculty instruction evaluation system (iEval). She now works as the MDU's Grad Student Affairs Officer. Trina lives in Riverside with her husband, Adam, and their children, Sarah (16) and Nathan (12).

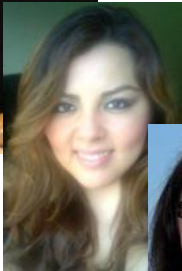


**Ryan Mariano** graduated from the University of California, Riverside in 2012 with a BA in Women's Studies. Before he started working for the MDU, he volunteered at the Women's Studies Department, where he managed the Women's Studies Facebook page, held events for students, did administrative work, and created a Feminist photography project. Ryan now works part-time for the Multidisciplinary Unit, where he helps and support faculty with their events. He is also the safety coordinator, and he also does administrative work and a little bit of everything. Ryan is thrilled to be working with such wonderful faculty and staff. He is excited to be helping out and supporting the Religious Studies faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in this year's Sikh Conference and Holstein Lecture.

## Congratulations to our STARS!



This year, our undergraduate advisers (top left to bottom right) **Cassee Barba**, **Deisy Escobedo**, and **Brenda Aragón**, along with FAO **Diane Shaw**, received the Staff Appreciation & Recognition (STAR) Award for their contributions to the University.



From the award letter: "Warmest thanks for all that you do and your outstanding teamwork as a staff member of the Multidisciplinary Financial & Administrative Unit (MDU)."



Diane Shaw noted, "We were selected... as a thank you for our hard work, dedication and contribution to the College. Our performance and accomplishments have been a significant part of the success of our Unit and the College at large. This also helps show that the Unit, College, and University recognize the challenges and demands of our positions."

# Student Updates

*Some brief words about our graduate and undergraduate students*

*This year saw many of our students presenting at conferences, including the AAR national and regional conferences, Popular Culture Association conferences, and Comic-Con International—San Diego.*

## Conferencing Beyond Religious Studies

—Toby Braden Johnson

Scholars know that it is important to be in conversation with others in our field. We commonly gather at conferences like the American Academy of Religion or even host events like the Sikh Studies Conferences here at UCR. But sometimes our research interests stretch bit further than the scope these forums offer. Religion obviously engages many diverse facets of people's lives, and so too will our research on it. So why then, when we study religion, are we generally limited to conversations with only other scholars of religion? A few of the graduate students have looked to engage scholarly forums beyond traditional venues.

My own dissertation work engaged the field of narrative studies, and I have made presentations to the International Society for the Study of Narrative, and even one about the presentation of religion in science fiction to UCR's own Eaton Science Fiction Conference. But there are fields of study that attract much wider audiences.

## SWPCA Conference

—Jasmine Mayfield

As an undergraduate of the Religious Studies department, it was truly an honor to attend and present at my first conference for the Southwest Pop Culture Association (SWPCA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The panel I presented in was a catch-all panel, ranging from cereal and the Amish to Bob Dylan and Christian rock, so it was a little out of place for me to end the panel with religious symbolism and the art of interpretation in the critically acclaimed game series, *Assassin's Creed*.

Regardless, it was a great opportunity and would not be possible without the support I received. The best part was the learning experience from various sources. Preparing for the conference taught me different skills that would certainly come in handy in the future, such as PowerPoint and presentation tips from Toby, additional material ideas from Jeremy, everything else in between thanks to Cori, among others. The support from the entire department was a big help and greatly appreciated. Only a small department like this would be successful in raising an undergraduate like me to achieving big milestones like this! Here's to attending next year's conference!

Cori Knight and Sean Sagan, fellow graduate students, first ventured to make a presentation at the Comic Arts Conference, which is part of Comic-Con International in San Diego.

Their initiative convinced me to explore a long-simmering project for which I did not have the right venue. I own a piece of original art from a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Adventures* comic that told an interesting story about the Turtles saving the Black Stone of the Ka'bah from their nemesis, the Shredder. In the comic, there is a brief telling of the history Islam and the Ka'bah by the Turtles' mentor, Master Splinter. That page includes a depiction of the Prophet Muhammad! I had long been planning how to approach the many problems this story presented: not only the depiction of the Prophet, but also the desecration of the Ka'bah and the violation of the holy precincts by unclean animals—the Turtles! In the process of writing the paper, I was able to contact the comics' artist (Chris Allan) and discuss these issues with him. It was quite an interesting conversation about the role of art and its use to inform, as well as its potential for abuse when presenting religiously sensitive material.

I put the paper together and found three very different venues in which to present it. The first was the Pop Culture Association/ American Culture Association's

*(Continued on page 19)*

*Here are some updates on a few of our graduate students and their accomplishments!*

**Jayne Bittner**, a Master's student, will be graduating from the program in June and continuing her studies as a PhD student at UC Davis in the Study of Religion program. Jayne developed an interest in American Religious History during the course of her studies here and will further pursue the topic at Davis with a focus in American Religious Cultures. "I'm really excited to start my work at UC Davis, and I think UC Riverside's Religious Studies program helped give me the foundation I need to advance in the field. I've had a great experience in Riverside and though I'm happy to move forward, I'm going to miss it here!"

In 2013-2014, **Sonia Crasnow** received a UCR Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship, which helped to fund research on LGBTQ Jews and their communities in Boston and Los Angeles. She has also participated in the AAR's mentoring program for LGBTQ scholars. More recently, she presented at the Association for Jewish Studies Conference in Boston, as well as at UCR's Disjunctions Conference. She also received a Humanities Graduate Student Research Grant from UCR's Center for Ideas and Society and is thrilled to have been invited to participate in Harvard Divinity School's Seminar on Religion and Sexuality in Cambridge this summer.

**Jeremy Guida** was awarded a fellowship with the Immortality Project for the 2014-2015 school year to explore the ways in which Jodorowsky's and Emerson's understandings of immortality have been perpetuated outside of traditional religious institutions. The Immortality Project is funded by the Templeton Foundation and is an interdisciplinary exploration of questions about immortality. This fellowship will further his progress toward completing a dissertation on spiritualities and midnight movies.

This year, **Toby Braden Johnson** welcomed the arrival of his second child, Kabir, and is set to defend his dissertation this fall.

**Daniel Azim Pschaida** is the recipient of a UCR Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship for 2014-2015. He has been working on his dissertation on Muslim American young adults, issues of religious identity, and negotiating multiple forms of diversity. He plans to take advantage of this generous award to write and edit the remaining chapters of his dissertation.

**Charles Townsend** spent most of the past summer in northern California conducting field research and completing an intensive Punjabi language class through CSU Sacramento. During the past year, he was elected to be a steering committee member of the Sikh Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and was re-elected co-chair of the Religions of Asia Section of the AAR Western Region. He also gave invited lectures on transnational Sikhism and "Mantra in Asian Religions." He is currently completing the last chapters of his dissertation.

*(Continued from page 18)*

Religion and Culture section. The audience picked up on the themes of the story's impact on potential audiences and its legacy as a production of that era of the early 1990s and its (generally uninformed) presentation of Islam. I made the next presentation at UCR's Eaton Science Fiction Conference, now held in conjunction with the Science Fiction Research Association. This audience was more attuned to issues relating to the production of these stories and how to address such concerns. Finally, I presented alongside Cori and Sean on a panel at the Comic Arts Conference this past summer. I was able to discuss my paper with comic creators and publishers who now had to contend with issues I identified as they looked to reprint these comics. It was a very different experience from more traditional academic conferences.

These conferences represent ways for us, as scholars of religion, to engage new audiences and demonstrate the relevance of our work to fields beyond our own. We have begun to open new channels of dialogue with those who produce and consume the media we scrutinize. These research avenues cannot flourish in traditional venues, but they blossom in the forums I have described. Religious Studies is already a hybridized field, constructed from the best parts of many disciplines. A few of us have sought to add a few new pieces to that mix, and it has certainly paid off in our research.

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The Religious  
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2013-2014

Dept. Chair:  
Dr. Pashaura Singh

Editor:  
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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 extend our heartfelt congratulations to all of our graduates for academic year 2013-2014!*

**Bachelors**

Samuel Cervantes Anaya, Jr.  
Chelsea Florance Barnes  
Chantelle Marie Boostrom  
Nathaniel Eugene Castruita  
Kirsten Nicole Cox  
Marie Kazya Estrada  
Antony Rafik Estrada  
Alisa Grace Goodly  
Alexander Kyungkuk Kim

Jasmine Deshe Mayfield  
Eddie Chong Pak  
Samantha Caitlin Park  
Villarreal, Rebecca Aleida  
Robert Edward Wheeler, Jr.

**Masters**

Anna Beck  
Jayne Bittner

Jeremy Guida  
Cori Knight  
Justin R. Rose  
Sean Sagan  
Ryan J. Smith

**Doctorate**

Toby B. Johnson  
Charles Townsend