

What's New in Religious Studies?

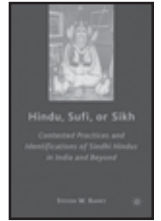
FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



Apart from co-editing and publishing a volume honoring the career of **Jonathan Z. Smith** (who delivered our Aronov lecture in 2003), **Russell McCutcheon** also worked this past year on a guest edited issue of the journal, *Method & Theory in the study of Religion*. He published his own work in book chapters and scholarly journals and presented a paper at the Society for Biblical Literature's annual meeting in Boston. And, after a successful study abroad trip to Greece last May with four REL majors, he is returning for 16 days in May 2009 with three REL majors, all of whom will once again be hosted by Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.



Professor **Steven Ramey** published his first book, *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond* (published by Palgrave Macmillan), in October 2008. His book is a multi-sited ethnography that considers the impact of contested definitions on the experiences and representations of Sindhi Hindus. The book analyzes how the dominant definitions of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism challenge communities who defy such understandings and recognizes the ways Sindhi Hindus have established their unconventional practices and heritage in the context of their diaspora. As the newly appointed Director of Asian Studies, he has also led the development of a revived Asian Studies program with a minor that will be open for student enrollment in the Fall 2009.



Theodore Trost published an article about a major Protestant denomination's television ad campaign and a review of a book on the development of the Christian film industry. He participated in the "Religious Institutions Consultation" sponsored by the Louisville Institute, Kentucky; he also presided at the panel "Race and Religion in the Race for the White House" during the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion. He presented two papers: "Pampered Tourists and Tasty Meats: Ironies of Resilience in Tuscan Eco-tourism" with **Catherine Roach** at the Association for the Study of Food and Society and "'I Give You a Testimonial!': Religious Rhetoric in Representations of the Detroit Rock Group The MC-5" at the national conference of the Popular Culture Association. Starting in August, Dr. Trost will succeed Russell McCutcheon as chair of the Religious Studies Department.



Professor **Tim Murphy** spent much of the 2008-09 academic year working on the final draft of his forthcoming book, *The Politics of Spirit: Phenomenology, Genealogy, Religion* (to be published by State University of New York Press). He also worked on two articles on the implications of postmodernism for the study of religion as well as a book-length project on that same topic. Professor Murphy taught five different courses, including "Native American Religions" and "Religion, Religious Studies and Colonialism." He also served on the Faculty Senate as well as several other University and Department committees.



This has been a particularly busy year for Professor **Steven Jacobs** after returning from his sabbatical. He has one book already out, *Maven in Blue Jeans: Festschrift in Honor of Zev Garber* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009); one in production, *Confronting Genocide: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); and has recently signed a contract with Augsburg Fortress for *The Jewish Experience: An Introduction to Jewish History and Jewish Life*, scheduled for publication Spring, 2010. He is also the Conference Chair for the International Association of Genocide Scholars meeting at George Mason University, Alexandria, VA in June 2009. Dr. Jacobs is the first Vice President of the IAGS.



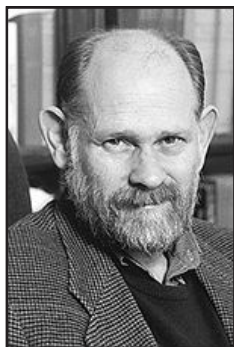
Dr **Maha Marouan** recently returned from the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago where she gave a talk on the representation of women's spirituality in Francophone Caribbean literature. She is currently teaching while also working on her book manuscript entitled "Divine Interventions." Dr Marouan spent the summer of 2008 as a Visiting Scholar at Howard University in Washington DC.



Dr. **Merinda Simmons**'s article entitled "Beyond Authenticity: Migration and the Epistemology of Voice in Mary Prince's *History of Mary Prince* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba*," was accepted by *College Literature* and is slated for publication in July 2009. Along with giving a talk for the Religion in Culture lunch series, she has organized two panels and written several papers for various upcoming conferences. She is currently at work on an article about the study of religion within feminist philosophy, as well as one about the relationship between religion and racial otherness in representations of the South in pop culture and film. In addition to her teaching and working on her manuscript project "After Mary Prince," she is co-organizing with Dr. **Maha Marouan** a symposium on "Race and Displacement" to be held at UA Oct. 1-3.

GUEST SPEAKERS

7th Annual Aronov Lecture



On Thursday, October 23, 2008, Prof. **Bruce Lincoln**, an internationally recognized scholar from the University of Chicago, visited the Department to deliver the annual **Aronov Lecture**. As part of his visit, Prof. Lincoln was hosted at a

lunchtime discussion with majors and minors in the Department and, that evening, delivered a public lecture in Amelia Gorgas Library entitled "In Praise of Things Chaotic: Politics in Creation Mythology." His lecture drew from a wealth of research on the role of the notion of "chaos" in several ancient creation stories (e.g., Greek, Persian and Scandinavian). His visit to campus was co-sponsored by the Department of Anthropology and University Libraries.

Religion in Culture Lecture



The Department of Religious Studies was honored to host **Hayden White** for a series of events in April. Professor White is a scholar of truly international repute.

His work in the areas of historiography and narrative theory has had significant influence on the disciplines of History, Literature, Political Theory, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Retired now, he was for a long time the Chair of the vaunted History of Consciousness Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He presented a public lecture on "The Practical Past" and held several events with Religious Studies students.

News & Notes from the STUDENTS



Tsy Yusef presented his research on Islamism in Nigeria at the **McNair Scholars' Conference** in Berkeley and at the UA McNair Scholars Conference.

Current Senior **Benjamin Simmons** has conducted research this year with Prof. **Steven Ramey** on the portrayal of the Monkey King, a legendary figure in Chinese traditions, in contemporary fiction in America. Ben will present at the UA Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Conference in April. This is the second year in a row that REL has had a student present at the Conference (**Joe Kimbrough** presented last year).



Jaci Gresham (pictured above) attended the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion that took place March 13-15. Her panel's section was "Method and Theory of Religion," and its theme was "The Future of the New Method and Theory Section: A Roundtable Discussion." She presented a paper on "Theses on Theory." Kudos to Jaci.

A "LIMINAL" MOMENT

On August 15, 2009, **Russell McCutcheon** will set aside his responsibilities as chair of the Religious Studies Department to pursue teaching and research in the Department and new service obligations in the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. McCutcheon assumed the role of chair in the summer of 2001. At that time, the Department listed fewer than ten students as Religious Studies majors; currently there are over forty majors in the Department. During Russ's term of office, five faculty members were granted tenure: Professors **Theodore Trost**, **Catherine Roach** (now in the New College at the University of Alabama), **Steven Jacobs**, **Kurtis Schaeffer** (now at the University of Virginia), and **Tim Murphy**. Professors **Maha Marouan** and **Steven Ramey** joined the faculty during this period, as did Instructors **Merinda Simmons**, **Robert Stevens**, **Gabriele Fassbeck**, and **James Apple**. Office Associate **Donna Martin** and Administrative Secretary **Betty Dickey** have served the Department nobly during the McCutcheon years. Under Russ's direction, the Religious Studies Department has accomplished a great deal. Among other things, we are thankful to Russ for the renovation of the Department's classrooms and office spaces; the development of the Department's website; the establishment of the "Religion in Culture" lecture series; the institutionalization of the Silverstein Fellows and Fellowship programs for outstanding Religious Studies students; and the creation of the "Religious Studies Goes to Greece" program.

Faculty, staff, and students all wish you well, Russ, as you pursue new endeavors. And we thank you for your leadership!

Professor Ted Trost

2009 SILVERSTEIN RECIPIENTS



Honors Day 2009 was once again a chance for the Department to recognize some of its outstanding students by awarding them **Silverstein Scholarships** (valued between \$250 or \$1,000).

Sean Beadore
Geoffrey Davidson
Jacqueline Gresham
John Lyles
Teri Phillips
Chris Scott
James Woodington

Honor's Day Banquet



The Religious Studies Honor's Day Banquet was held on the 2nd floor balcony of Manly Hall. Pictured above, John Lyles and Sean Beadore, two of our Silverstein Recipients, along with Prof. Maha Marouan and various guests.

Manly Cup

This year the Religious Studies honors society, **Theta Alpha Kappa** and the Religious Studies Student Association had a contest for the "**Manly Cup**" (named for the building in which Religious Studies resides). TAK took the award with their "Mandarin Orange Delight." According to local lore, the saga goes thusly: As tribes of the Religious Studies Department, Theta Alpha Kappa and the Religious Studies Student Association, tensions arose again, and the Manly Cup was reborn out of fire and ice. A bake-off of titanic proportions was held, and the TAK came out the victor with their "Mandarin Orange Delight" cake, the recipe of which is rumored to have been stolen from the great Zen Master Seung Sahn. Nevertheless, the battles rages on, and the Manly Cup is waiting for its next champion. . . .



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