

## REPORT FROM TEACHING ABOARD “A SEMESTER AT SEA”

Patrick Green

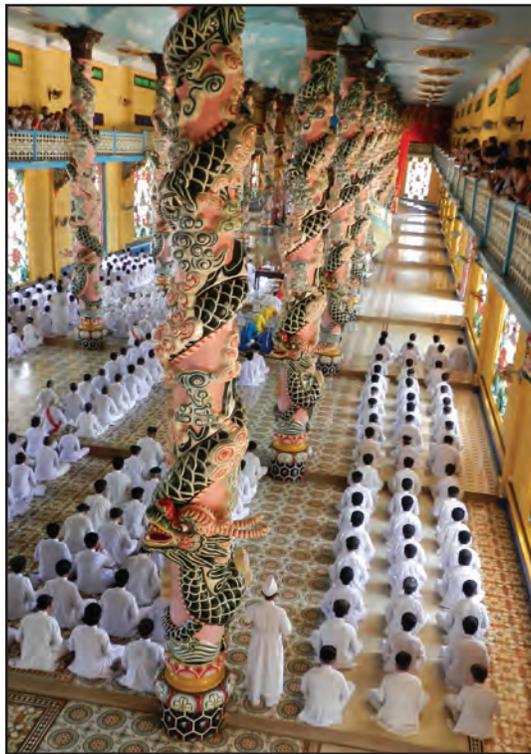
First there’s the ship. Not as large as some cruise liners, but not small either. The MS Explorer is simply a beauty, and it would be our home for the next four months—as it would be for some four hundred and fifty students, thirty-five faculty and a full complement of ship’s crew and staff. Leaving from Montreal we were about to sail around the world, visit fourteen countries, see and do amazing things, and pinch ourselves for being so lucky. Sponsored by the University of Virginia, the academic program offers classes in a variety of subjects—from world literature to emerging markets, from art to economics. I was to teach comparative religions.

Students come from all over the United States and beyond, Mexico, China, Japan, South Africa, etc. They sign up for three regular courses for which they get credit on their home campus. They also take a required course, Global Studies, that introduces them to the culture and the politics of the country they are about to visit. The classes are held only while we’re at sea. In port the emphasis is on field experiences—visiting a Berber village in North Africa, going on Safari in Cape Town, visiting the Taj Mahal and the Ganges in India or the Great Wall in China, living with a family for a few days in Viet Nam or Malaysia. And each port has its share of service projects—Habitat for Humanity, visiting schools and special needs programs, meeting student leaders of the host country.

While our particular experiences were far too many to relate here, one, I think, might appeal especially to students interested in Religious Studies.

One of our excursions in Vietnam was to the Cao Dai Temple, a unique place and the center for a unique religion. Founded in 1926 in Viet Nam by Ngô Văn Chien, Cao Dai (literally, “high dais”) figuratively means “the highest spiritual place where God reigns.” It combines ethical precepts from Confucianism, occult practices from Taoism, theories of karma and rebirth from Buddhism, and a hierarchical organization (including a pope) from Roman Catholicism. Its pantheon of saints includes such diverse figures as Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Mohammad, Julius Caesar, Joan of

Arc, and Victor Hugo (Viet Nam, remember, was a French colony for many years). Chien said that he received a mandate from the Supreme Deity to found a religion that would show all religions to be of one origin. He envisioned a world where we do not discriminate against each other, where we see each other as sisters and brothers, with the ultimate goal of being one with the Supreme Being.



Cao Dai  
Temple in Viet Nam

The temple itself is a Disneyland of colors and styles. In the huge hall there are pillars with dragons draped around them, exquisite tiling, symbols of every known religion. Its palette includes golds, peaches, oranges, and bright day-glo blues—a veritable carnival of hues. And yet, once inside the worship hall, one finds a profound serenity. The adherents, all dressed in white, are arranged in neat rows on the sides of the great hall. The altars loom before them, with gold and silver ornamentation. It’s an impressive sight. We were allowed to enter for part of the noon day service, standing in the balconies around the hall. There was chanting, then singing, but what most impressed us was a deep, calm solemnity.

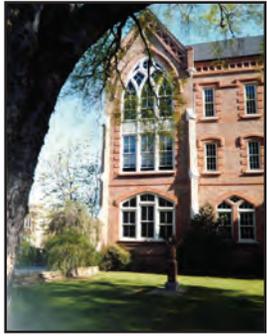
There are, of course, many more stories to tell. To get some sense of what you might find on such a journey, google “Semester at Sea” and follow the website for information on upcoming voyages, tuition, scholarships, itinerary, etc. Who knows? It might well change your life.

*Patrick Green, who retired in 2000, is a former professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies. He is also an adjunct Professor Emeritus with the Honors College at the University of Alabama.*



*Patrick Green pictured here with his wife, Jane.*

## A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT



Greetings to Students, Alumni, Colleagues, and Friends of the Religious Studies Department! We are pleased to present to you this edition of the Religious Studies Newsletter. Here you will read

about the activities of our students and faculty members, our ties to the past, and our plans for the future.

We honor two members of our community who died in the last year. Leon Weinberger was professor of Jewish Studies in this department from 1964 until his retirement in 1999. A memorial tribute to him was written by Professor Emeritus William Doty, who retired from this department in 2001. In addition, Associate Professor Tim Murphy writes in remembrance of Zachary Day, a Silverstein Scholar and graduate of this program.

This year we welcomed Spyros Piperakis to the department as visiting instructor from Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. Mr. Piperakis participated in the classrooms of Professors Simmons and McCutcheon where he also lectured on occasion. He offers in this Newsletter a report on his attendance at the regional gathering of the American Academy of Religion. Spyros returned to Greece in May with a dissertation manuscript completed during his sojourn among us in part on account of the excellent library resources made available to him here at the University of Alabama. The account of another traveller also appears in these pages. This year Emeritus Professor Patrick Green spent a semester at sea, teaching courses on comparative religions to a variety of students assembled on the ship MS Explorer under the academic auspices of the University of Virginia.

We particularly appreciate remaining in touch with graduates of our program. This Newsletter contains a report from alumni Ben Simmons, who reflects upon the importance of his religious studies training for his current professional life. It also offers stories about current and future departmental activities such as

those sponsored by the Religious Studies Student Association and the various lectures that the department organizes throughout the year. We have planned a series of lectures in the coming year on the relevance of a liberal arts education in the 21st century. Steven Ramey's article in this Newsletter introduces our lecturers. We take this opportunity to invite all our alumni to any (and to all!) of these events.

Please come see us anytime you are on campus. And keep in touch!

Theodore Trost, chair

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### THE RELEVANCE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: 2012-2013 LECTURE SERIES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

STEVEN RAMEY

Tight budgets in many institutions and concerns about the marketability of a university degree have raised repeated questions about the relevance of the Liberal Arts and the rationale for continuing public funding for/investment in them. While one route to answer such concerns is to illustrate all of the careers that our graduates have pursued and the ways that an REL major prepared them, a broader question remains concerning the value of education (that is, is it only job preparation?) and the significance of research carried out in the Humanities and Social Sciences—the traditional home for much of the Liberal Arts.

To address those broader questions, the REL faculty decided to focus next year's various public lectures on the topic "The Relevance of the Liberal Arts in the Twenty-first Century." We will bring to campus four scholars who work in the Humanities and Social Sciences to lecture about their understanding of the contributions (past, present and future) that the Humanities and Social Sciences provide in both educational and research contexts. Pay attention to upcoming announcements about the details of these public lectures and related events and, if you are in the area, come join the conversations. Our lecturers and tentative dates for their visits are listed below.

**Gregg Lambert**, the founding Director of the Humanities Center at Syracuse University and professor of English, will visit UA on 23-25 September. In addition to his publications on literary criticism and theory, he has continued to work on the issues surrounding the Humanities and the university environment more generally, including authoring the *Report to the Academy* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2003).

**Greg Johnson** is an Associate Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His research has largely focused on practices in indigenous communities and legal disputes over repatriation and other rights related to the heritage and practices of those communities. His experience as a Department chair and his research that has direct relevance on contemporary legal issues will inform his reflections on the relevance of the Liberal Arts. He will visit UA on 5-7 November 2012.

**Naomi Goldenberg** is a Professor in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa whose research draws on psychoanalysis and feminist theory. She has a keen interest in applying these bodies of theory to politics and popular culture. During her visit to UA in the week of 12 February 2013, she will talk about what she thinks she ought to be doing as a writer and teacher in Religious Studies.



**Cary Nelson** will be our eleventh **Aronov Lecturer** and will serve as the capstone for this series. He is a nationally-known Professor of English at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), and he currently

serves as the President of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). In addition to his work in poetry and literary theory, he has been a consistent advocate for the Humanities, including his recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* "Keep Your Hands Off the 'Fierce Humanities'" in August 2011. He will be our guest on April 8, 2013, for a public lecture and various other events on campus.

## DEPARTMENTAL LECTURES 2011-12

A particular concern of this year's **Religion in Culture Lecture Series** was to introduce our faculty and students to faculty members on campus who share research interests in the field of "religion." On November 9, 2011, Rekha Nath, of the Philosophy Department, delivered a lecture to over 100 people. Ellen Spears of New College responded.

A similarly large assembly convened on January 26, 2012, to hear a lecture by Jennifer Shoaff of the Gender and Race Studies Department.

The respondent to her lecture was Merinda Simmons. Also lecturing this season was J. Aaron Simmons, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Furman University. Tim Murphy responded to Dr. Simmons's lecture. This year's **Aaron Aronov Lecture** was delivered by Ann Pellegrini, the Director of the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexual-



*J. Aaron Simmons*

ity and Professor of Performance Studies and Religious Studies at New York University.



*Ann Pellegrini*

In addition to our own lecture series, the Religious Studies Department provided support for a variety of campus events this academic year, including:

- The 3rd Annual "Recovering Black Women's Voices and Live Symposium," sponsored by the Department of Gender and Race
- The Tibetan Religious History Luncheon, sponsored by the Department of History and featuring Kurtis Schaeffer, professor of Tibetan Religion and Culture at the University of Virginia, who taught in our department for five years
- The Islam and American Literature and Film Panel, sponsored by the Department of English



*Kurtis Schaeffer and Prof. Ramey*

- The Symposium on Holocaust and Genocide Studies, sponsored by New College
- The Alabama Lectures on Life's Evolution series, sponsored by the Department of Anthropology

We welcome these collaborations with colleagues in a variety of disciplines from across the campus.



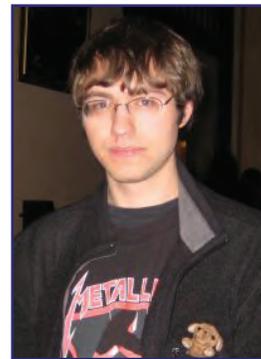
*Profs. Jacobs and Simmons with REL major Ben Flax at the tenth annual Aronov Lecture.*

## HONORS DAY

Following the Arts & Sciences Honors Convocation on April 6, 2012, the Department hosted an Honors Day ceremony to recognize REL majors for their hard work and dedication to their studies in Religious Studies. We had a marvelous turn-out of scholars' friends and family who attended to show their support and to congratulate them on their accomplishments. Along with a monetary reward, each of the scholars received a book signed by each of the faculty members. The Department also recognized Prof. Steven Ramey for receiving tenure and being promoted to Associate Professor (see below). All in all, it was a successful and exciting day on the 2nd floor of Manly Hall. Congratulations, again, to the Silverstein Scholars of 2012-13!

## A STUDENT REMEMBERED

Tim Murphy



We are sad to report that the Department of Religious Studies has lost a member of its extended family. Former Religious Studies major, Zach Day, passed away quite suddenly last July. Zach attended The

University of Alabama from 2003 to 2008, graduating with degrees in Religious Studies and Anthropology. He was awarded the Silverstein Scholarship from the Religious Studies Department. Zach was a wonderful student, passionate, funny, enraged at the injustice of things, and an ardent fan of "theory." As one of his close friends and co-majors said of him, "he worked as hard at the critical study of religion as people work in coal mines." Zach was also an aspiring artist and music producer. He was working on an original graphic novel series and was interested in the application of theory to all facets of popular culture. Above all, as many of his friends have said on his Facebook page, he was a truly unique individual determined to live life on his own terms and not end up "workin' for the man," as he used to say. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing him and working with him are deeply grateful for the opportunity, for the time we had with him. Even so, he will be missed for a long, long time. He was twenty-six years old.



*Prof. Trost with REL minor Khara Cole at the Dept.'s Spring 2012 Advising Event.*

## SEEING THE LOCAL THROUGH NEW EYES

Spyros Piperakis



On March 2-4, 2012, the South-eastern regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) was held in Marriot Atlanta Century Center, Atlanta, GA. As a Ph.D. candidate

coming from Greece, the conference was a great opportunity to meet with various scholars specialized in different areas and discuss with them the different ways of approaching religion. Those people were a valuable resource for me to see different ways in which religion is taught and studied in U.S. universities.

In Greece, given the fact that there are only two Departments of Religious Studies (one in the National-Kapodistrian University of Athens and the other in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), we often miss the opportunity to attend or to participate in such large-scale conferences. Of course, there are some exceptions, such as when a Department may organize an international symposium, or when some meetings and workshops are taking place, but in most of

the cases they lack the multiplicity of sessions, attendants and participants. The fact that US universities have independent Departments of Religious Studies, each housing different theoretical frameworks in the study of religion, has really helped the progress in the field, thanks to the dialogue and the exchange of opinions, which are taking place in meetings like the one in Atlanta. It is important to point out that the science of religion in Greece is cultivated exclusively in the Faculties of Theology, with the only exception the efforts made by some other faculties to approach religion from anthropological and sociological perspectives. Consequently, taking into account the small amount of scholars training and working in the field, and the absence of scientific co-operation between the various faculties, we often miss the chance for constructive inter-disciplinary dialogue.

The multiple sessions of the regional meeting, all taking place at the same time, gave the opportunity to each attendant to choose from a large variety of different subjects. Having a BA in Theology and a MA in Religious Studies, I was familiar with many of these topics, but there were also sessions that were totally new to me, such as religion in America or religion and Black cultures. Nevertheless, behind the new information, I could observe the same underlying theoretical controversies which arise when using different or contradictory theories and methods in the area of research (e.g., debates

on descriptive vs. normative approaches). Additionally, the diversity of the various branches of religion discussed at the conference in Atlanta, such as Christianity, Judaism, religions of Asia and African-American religions, gave the specialist the opportunity not only to keep up with the work of other colleagues with different interests, but also to study the way theories and methods are applied and used in different areas of study.

Universities in the US are the centers for many important research programs. Conferences in the country, such as the one described above, give the opportunity for leading scholars to share and discuss their original and innovative work. One interesting session took place in Atlanta concerning a small town of prehistoric



*M.G. Proaps presents his paper at for the Undergraduate Research Panel at the regional meeting for the American Academy of Religion.*

Iron Age period, Karak, situated in modern Jordan. Scholars were given the opportunity to communicate and share with other colleagues their latest archaeological discoveries as well as their up-to-date research. These findings might have taken time to get known to the interested colleagues abroad, who would have to wait (patiently) for possible future publications of the conference's proceedings.

Last but not least, I would like to underline the importance of the session held by undergraduate students in the conference, where they presented their work in front of academic scholars. Undergraduate students were given, in that way, the opportunity to show their work, gain academic experience and learn throughout the whole procedure.

*Spyros is the second Greek doctoral student who, through the generosity of the College of Arts & Sciences, has been hired for a semester in the Department of Religious Studies, to gain experience in a US university and to enrich the educational experiences of our own students. He is nearing completion of his Ph.D. at Aristotle University, under the direction of Dr. Panayotis Pachis.*

## SILVERSTEIN SCHOLARS 2012-13

The following students were recognized by the Religious Studies Faculty as Silverstein Scholars for the 2012-13 academic year. Silverstein Scholars receive a financial award and their names join those of previous recipients on a plaque that is displayed in the student lounge.

Andie Alexander	Samuel Fore	Dorie Kogut	M.G. Proaps
John Bigham	Hannah Hicks	Virginia Langley	Heather Thomas
Hannah Etchison	Mary Kate Hinton	Susanna Payton	Daniel Turner
Ben Flax			



*Silverstein Scholars (from left to right): Dan Turner, M.G. Proaps, Andie Alexander, John Bigham, Sam Fore, Virginia Langley, Hannah Hicks, Ben Flax*

## WHAT'S HAPPENIN'?

Andie Alexander

I won't be the first to tell you that the Religious Studies Student Association (RSSA), the student organization affiliated with the Department of Religious Studies, has been quite busy this year. Though we typically kick off events each semester with Get on Board Day, the RSSA has been in full swing since the end of last semester. The aftermath of the April 27, 2011, tornado left many students and residents of Tuscaloosa in quite a disarray. Capable and willing to stay in Tuscaloosa, a few RSSA folks got together to gather supplies and to help clean up the damage. Though we weren't

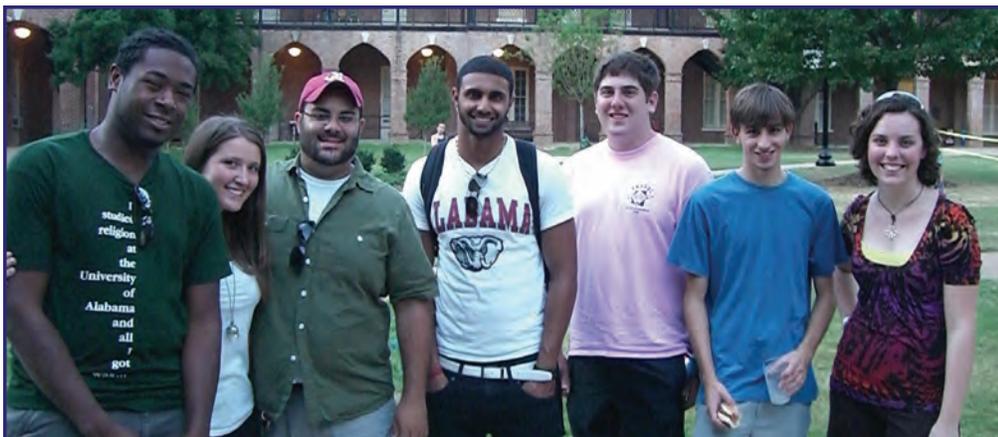


*Prof. Simmons, the RSSA Faculty Advisor, and REL minor Samantha King recruiting new faces at the Fall 2011 GOBD.*

affiliated with any particular organization, we walked through Alberta City helping families clear the damage and debris from their property. It helped the students deal with the



trauma, come together more as a group, and assist other people in the community. With the students returning to campus in August, the RSSA decided to start off the semester by volunteering at the residences for Move-In, during the two weekends before school started. Not only did this give the students a great opportunity to help work with the University, but also to help, meet, and get to know the incoming



*(Pictured left to right) Markus Harris, Chesley Peed, Angel Narvaez-Lugo, A.J. Mada, Jonathan Hair, Chris Kent, and Samantha King at the Dept. Cookout.*

students and their families. As it turned out, several of the new students we got to know ended up attending a few events throughout the year.

When Get on Board Day came around, the RSSA made quite a splash on Woods Quad with our "I'm on a Boat" themed table. The students got together the night before to help construct what would become the "boat" for the next day. Ready and armed with plenty of booty—e.g., new t-shirts, key chains, frisbees, coffee mugs, etc.—the Department and the RSSA were able to recruit several new faces to our annual Cookout that took place the following evening. Having quite the turnout at the Cookout, we, the RSSA, were ready to commence our bi-monthly dinners.

The first official dinner took place at Igwana Grill where we had just as many new faces as we did old. And when the RSSA gathers, it is a guarantee that there will be good food, great people, and excellent conversation! Through



the semester we had several students graduate, but thankfully we had already recruited several new students to help us carry on the tradition of RSSA Dinners. At the end of the Fall semester, the RSSA, instead of meeting for dinner,



*Profs. Trost and Murphy talking with REL major Daniel Turner at the Department Cookout.*

provided dinner at Manly Hall for the "Pre-Cram Exam Jam" that included not only dinner, but also board games, a movie, and "Catch Phrase!"—which was quite a hit.

With the year winding down the RSSA hosted the 4th Annual Manly Cup on Woods Quad. This year it was a competition between faculty and students to see who is most worthy of the honor known as the Manly Cup Champion.

Though there have been many changes since last year, the avid student association is much closer and incredibly active. We look forward to what next year has to offer!

*Andie Alexander, a graduating senior entering her final semester this Fall 2012, was the 2011-12 President of the RSSA and has worked as a Silverstein Fellow in the Department office for two years.*

## LEON JUDAH WEINBERGER (1926-2011)

William Doty



After the Second World War, there were many inquiries into religious traditions that American soldiers experienced in the trenches: Catholics met Jews, Buddhists, and practitioners of a wide range of religious practices and beliefs.

Alabama was impacted by a Danforth Foundation program that led across the nation to introduction of non-seminary/non-theological religious studies within state university curricula. In 1964, this resulted in the establishment in the College of Arts & Sciences of what is still the only Department of Religious Studies in the state system. Drs. Patrick Green and Leon Weinberger were the original faculty hired here. Pat is still (in retirement) active, but Professor Weinberger retired in 1999, and died, at 85, in September 2011. His memorial service, led by Rabbi Steven Jacobs at Temple Emanu-El, was attended by a number of faculty and staff, members of the Temple, and many in Tuscaloosa who had known Leon in many community events and contexts.

In addition to teaching in Religious Studies, Weinberger served as Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El for some twenty-five years. He published twelve books, and served as general editor for the Judaic Studies Series at the University of Alabama Press for 38 volumes. His many scholarly publications (in Hebrew and English) included several studies in Jewish liturgical poetry and hymnography. He received research grants from the University of Alabama, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Academy for Jewish Research. Recognized internationally in listings of important academics, at Alabama he was the recipient of the Burnam Distinguished Faculty Award as well as the Algernon Sydney Award.

Dr. Weinberger was active in Tuscaloosa, as for instance serving as one of the members of the first committee for interracial civil rights since Reconstruction. His interests in law and philosophy (he taught a seminar in the law school) were reflected in his leadership in developing a student appeals system, which would later include a faculty appeals structure at the University.

*William Doty, who retired in 2001, is a former professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies. He is also an adjunct Professor Emeritus with the Honors College.*

## FACULTY UPDATES



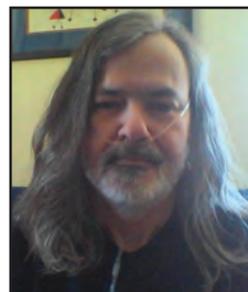
Having settled into his first year of teaching at the University of Alabama, **Dr. Finbarr Curtis** will return to the Department for the 2012-2013 academic year and will continue to teach the introductory courses to Religious Studies and American Religious History. In addition to writing essays this past year on "Intelligent Design" for the *Hedgehog Review* and on one-time presidential candidate Al Smith's secular politics for the *Journal of Religion*, he has been editing a special issue on the study of American religion that is scheduled to appear as the September 2012 issue of the journal *Religion*. He traveled to give public lectures on the Scopes Trial at the University of West Florida and the College of Charleston; he also delivered a paper on Charles Grandison Finney in May at his alma mater, the University of California, Santa Barbara. He plans to include this essay, along with others on Louisa May Alcott, the Oneida community, William Jennings Bryan, D. W. Griffith, Al Smith, Horace Kallen, Malcolm X, and current debates about religious liberty within a book project tentatively entitled "The Economy of American Religious Freedom."



This past academic year **Dr. Steve Jacobs** published four articles, presented at two conferences, and prepared two manuscripts for publication this year: *Lenkin on Genocide* (Lexington Books 2012) and *Current Religions* (University Press of America 2012). He is also a member of the Genocide Database Advisory Board for ABC-CLIO Publishers (Santa Barbara, CA) with an online launch December 2012, focusing specifically on the genocide of the Hereros (a Bantu-speaking group in southern Africa) at the beginning of the twentieth century and the genocide of the Kurds under Saddam Hussein. Presently he is writing a chapter on American anti-Semitism through the lens of religion and theology, for a book to be published by Brill Academic Publishers in the Netherlands and he will also be presenting a paper on the demographics of the infamous "Wansee Protocols" (January 1942) at the "Annual Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Christian Churches" in May.



After working for the College of Arts & Sciences for the 2010-11 academic year, **Dr. Russell McCutcheon** returned this year to Religious Studies, teaching courses on theories of myth, theories of sacrifice, and the work of Jonathan Z. Smith (our 2003-4 Aronov Lecturer). At the start of 2012 he was appointed for the year as one of the interim editors for the journal *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, while a new editor was found, and he continues writing and speaking at conferences as well as at other universities—including Western Michigan University and Auburn University. Along with William Arnal (University of Regina, Canada), he has a co-written book due out in late 2012, *The Sacred is the Profane: On the Political Nature of "Religion."* Finally, in May of 2012 he accompanied Dean Robert Olin, of the College of Arts & Sciences, and Associate Dean Luoheng Han, to Thessaloniki, Greece, where Dean Olin investigated developing a formal, long term relationship with Aristotle University (the school from which REL has so far hired two doctoral students—Vaia Touna and Spyros Piperakis—to work in the Department for a semester).



During the 2011-2012 academic year, **Dr. Tim Murphy** worked on the manuscript for his projected book, "By this Sign You Shall Conquer": Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion." The term "semiotics" is defined as "the study of the life of signs in society"; it combines elements of sociology and linguistics. This study is among the first to apply semiotics to the theoretical analysis of religion as a whole. Dr. Murphy's book, *The Politics of Spirit: Phenomenology, Genealogy, Religion*, was published by State University of New York Press in December of 2010. In collaboration with a colleague at Case Western Reserve University, Dr. Murphy is developing an online, virtual institute, the *Institute for the Semiotic Study of Religion* (ISSR), to promote the use of semiotic theory to study religion. This project will be housed at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Murphy also presented a paper at the regional AAR meeting in Atlanta in March on "Oppression,

Anxiety, and Otherness: Elements of a Theory of Apocalyptic Religious Ideation.” During the fall semester 2011, Dr. Murphy taught a significantly revamped version of REL 100 “Introduction to the Study of Religion.” The new version introduced students to the role of colonialism in the history of the study of religion and prepares them for higher-level course work in a variety of disciplines. He also devised two new courses: “The Gods, God and the State,” offered Spring term 2012, and “Sacred Violence,” to be offered Fall 2012.



His sacrificial offerings were apparently effective, as **Dr. Steven Ramey** was awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor, effective at the start of the Fall 2011 semester. He has continued to

publish his research, including an article in the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* in Fall 2011, and he has several chapters in edited volumes coming out soon. His ongoing work includes participating in the “Culture on the Edge” research collaborative (with Merinda Simmons and Russell McCutcheon, along with 5 others from outside the Department). He is also preparing to go on research leave/sabbatical for the Fall 2012 semester, during which he will work on a monograph challenging the standard application of the labels of individual religions. In addition to his research and teaching, he continues to organize the department’s events and to direct the Asian Studies Program. He also currently serves as the President of the Southeast Region of the American Academy of Religion.



This year, **Dr. Merinda Simmons** began new research, with the help of a grant from the Research Grants Committee, which is taking her to a handful

of archives in Southern port cities to look at how the category “slave religion” might be complicated and reconceived. She presented some of the early stages of this work this year at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Modern Language Association, and she is currently completing the first article to come out of this research. She also traveled to Canada

in February to give a couple of invited talks at the University of Alberta. Other presentations have included a response to one of the speakers in the Department’s Religion in Culture lecture series and participation at this year’s Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion conference. Her book manuscript on women’s migration narratives and rhetorics of authenticity is under review with a publisher, as well as an article on how some scholars see the relationship between criticism and activism. Some of her recent work was invited for inclusion in the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, and her co-edited volume *Race and Displacement* is under review with The University of Alabama Press. Her anthology for the introductory course, *Studying Religion: A Reader* is under contract with Equinox Publishers in the UK. This coming Fall, Dr. Simmons will be teaching African Diaspora Religions, as well as a new seminar on Religion and Literature.



In April 2011, **Dr. Theodore Trost** presented “The Call’s Theo-political Songcraft,” at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association (PCA) in San Antonio.

This paper examines punk rock group The Call’s use of theological rhetoric to critique Reagan-era politics and policies. This April he presented a related project at the PCA conference in Boston, entitled “‘Devil’s on the Loose’: Creedence Clearwater Revival and Religious Imagination in 1960s America.” With Phil Stoltzfus (Saint Thomas University in Minnesota), Dr. Trost serves as co-chair of the American Academy of Religion’s Music and Religion Consultation. His review of *The Gospel According to Bob Dylan*, by Michael Gilmour, will appear in the September issue of the journal *Church History*. He has also submitted for publication an article entitled “The Pan Am Quipper as Site of Anxiety; or, Negotiating Identity in an Era of Corporate Decline.” Dr. Trost, who continues to serve as Chair of the Department, is also currently collaborating with David Bains (Samford University) as co-editor of volume three in the Mercersburg Theology Series: *Principles of Church History: Selected Writings of Philip Schaff*, to be published by Wipf and Stock.

## WHO NEEDS THE BUSINESS SCHOOL!

Ben Simmons

I came to the University of Alabama in the fall of 2007 with an eye toward a degree in History because I enjoyed it, without considering how useful that degree would be out in the “real world.” So, I signed up for other classes that I thought would be “easy A’s.” One of these classes was Introduction to Religious Studies taught by Professor Russell McCutcheon, and if you know anything about that man, then you will know that he saw right through me from day one. Raised the son of an evangelical pastor in Southern Alabama, I figured I would do well with minimal effort. That is the way my religious classes had always been. In the end, I did do well, but not without being challenged by the academic study of religions.

About half-way through the semester, I gathered up my courage to ask him a question after class, a question I had been pondering for some time. He didn’t give me an answer, but instead invited me to a luncheon discussion at the Department later that day. The discussion had nothing to do with my question, but the issues it raised encompassed the next few years of my life and shaped it for the better. The people at the luncheon discussed what it meant to study religion from an academic perspective and how to discourse about something that was passionate to billions of people without being biased. This intrigued me as it went against every notion that I had previously held about the idea of religion, but in the end, I saw the value of the academic study of religion, not only for discussing religion but for the everyday practice of life.

I graduated in May of 2009 with a double major in Religious Studies and History, and my time spent in Manly Hall taught me so much more than I expected. Not only did I learn to “try” to approach things objectively (and I say “try” because I also learned that it is nigh impossible for any person to really accomplish this), but I also learned how to research properly and how to look for the agenda behind actions or words. In my life, these lessons have been invaluable, not only in my personal relationships but also in the professional world. I started an online media retailing and wholesaling business that sells across more than 30 websites and fulfills orders internationally. And I could not have even come up with my business plan without the skills I learned in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama. In fact, writing that 30 page business plan was nothing compared to one of Dr. Ramey’s papers! I cringe at the thought of seeing all that red on those pages if he were to ever get his hands on it.

*Ben Simmons, an REL major, graduated in 2009. Since then he has started his own online business.*

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## AMY LYNN PETERSEN ENDOWED SUPPORT FUND

Amy Lynn Petersen, a Religious Studies minor, died quite unexpectedly in October 2003. In 2007, her family established a book scholarship for the Department in her memory. Each Spring the students in our Capstone course, REL 490, receive from this fund a crucial text selected by the course's professor.

This year all students were given a copy of Jonathan Z. Smith's *Relating Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2004) — a collection of essays in which Smith's 2003-4 Aronov lecture appears as the final chapter. The Religious Studies Department and its graduating seniors are grateful for this fitting tribute to the memory of our colleague, Amy Lynn Peterson.