

## CLASSIFYING RELIGION: THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT IN THE PALMETTO STATE

by Finbarr Curtis

The Student Handbook of Greenville, South Carolina's Bob Jones University instructs its students that they should avoid any language that violates "scriptural commands regarding abusive, slanderous, complaining, disrespectful, profane, blasphemous, or tale-bearing speech, and content should be biblical and avoid promoting a lifestyle contrary to principles taught in Scripture or at the University." One can imagine, then, that the good folks at Bob Jones were bracing themselves as the University of Alabama's Professor Steven Ramey took the podium crosstown at the Greenville Hyatt Regency to deliver his plenary presidential address to the annual meeting of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) that was held March 15-17.

Fittingly, culture wars were the topic of Ramey's talk, which was entitled "Accidental Favorites: The Implicit in the Study of Religions." He noted that many of the terms and categories used in the study of religion lead scholars to implicitly take sides in the conflicts they purport to analyze. Ramey paid particular attention to the habit of attributing the source of culture wars to deeply held religious beliefs that give rise to special kinds of conflicts existing outside of ordinary political discourse. He pointed out that scholars of religion often unwittingly assign blame for conflict to marginal groups that appear to distort the teachings of some normative religious tradition. As Ramey explained, "too often we act as if we are called to provide better descriptions of the ideal form." Rather than try to provide accurate descriptions of particular religions, he called for critical scrutiny of the way in which people employ classificatory terms and what agendas these serve. Instead of trying to clarify what "Hinduism" or "Islam"

really are, for example, the task for religious studies should be to understand how these labels are used by social actors to legitimate (or marginalize) a variety of positions.

Ramey delivered the address as part of his one-year term of service as President of SECSOR, one of ten regional associations of the American Academy of Religion. The regional meetings provide a smaller and more accessible gathering and are often a venue for the work of younger scholars. In his term as president, Ramey became the first member of the department to serve the AAR in an executive capacity.

Ramey's attention to the language used to describe religious conflict was echoed in papers delivered by his Alabama colleagues Merinda Simmons and Finbarr Curtis. Simmons paper was entitled "On the Limits of Feminist Exegesis" and discussed the intellectual problems with and limitations of identifying "feminist" themes in literature and scholarship in ways that suggest such themes are stable or self-evident. I presented a paper called "The Bishops and the Public

Sphere," which examined recent controversies over the Department of Health and Human Services contraception mandate. Like Ramey, I was concerned to note that classifying a controversy as "religious in nature" removes it from ordinary political discourse and therefore takes sides with those who claim to speak for a normative religious tradition.

In addition to the faculty presence, the Alabama contingent was rounded out by student liaison and resident auteur Andie Alexander. Thanks to Alexander's moviemaking skills, Ramey's address has been immortalized for digital posterity and is available on the department vimeo account: [vimeo.com/uareligiousstudies](http://vimeo.com/uareligiousstudies).



*Prof. Steven Ramey, the 2012-13 President of the Southeastern American Academy of Religion, gives the Presidential Plenary Address at the opening of SECSOR 2013.*

## A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT



Greetings friends, graduates, and members of the Religious Studies Department. This Newsletter contains information about events in our

common life during the last year and the ongoing projects of students, faculty members, and the Department in general.

It has been an eventful year. I am happy to report that we completed the official 8-year review of the Department—an essential exercise required by the accreditation agencies that ensure the ongoing academic viability of the Religious Studies Department and, indeed, of the University itself. Our program was described as a “gem” by the external reviewer. This sentiment was echoed by the internal review committee and several University officials who participated in the final program review meeting on May Day 2013. The review process was protracted and at times intense; but it was also inspiring. We look to the future with confidence, encouraged by the commitments of students, faculty, staff, and the support of the College and the University. Already a revised curriculum is in place for the fall. It marks the beginning of the innovations we hope to advance in the coming years.

It has been a year of transition. With sadness and with appreciation for the inspiring work he accomplished among us, the Department gathered on Honors Day to remember Associate Professor Tim Murphy. Tim went on a medical leave during the fall semester; he died on March 15, 2013, from complications related to his life-long struggle with cystic fibrosis. Letters from students were read at the Honors Day tribute that attested to Tim’s powerful teaching and his enduring legacy.

The Department bids farewell to Dr. Finbarr Curtis, who has accepted a position as Assistant Professor at Georgia Southern University. In the coming year we will welcome three new professors into the Department: Dr. Eleanor Finnegan will join us as Assistant Professor with a specialty in Islam; Dr. Michael Altman will be an Instructor with a specialty in Asian Religions in the Americas; and Dr. Sarah Rollens will be an Instructor with a specialty in Christian Origins. In addition,

I will be on sabbatical during the academic year, having completed a four-year term as Department chair. Russell McCutcheon, who served as Department chair from 2001 to 2009, will resume chair responsibilities on an on-going basis beginning this summer.

We cherish our contact with you and hope you will keep in touch—through e-mail, regular post, our website, or our various facebook pages.

Sincerely,  
Theodore Trost, chair

## STUDENT NEWS



**Benjamin Flax**, sophomore Religious Studies major, won first place in the Fine Arts and Humanities Oral Presentation category, Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Conference.



**Brandon Franks** (Spring 2013), New College major and Religious Studies minor, was admitted to the Vanderbilt Divinity School where he will concentrate on apocalyptic-themed video game development.



**Hannah Hicks** (Spring 2013), double major in Religious Studies and Philosophy, was a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship. She will attend the University of Alabama School of Law in the fall.



**Samantha King**, senior and triple major in Religious Studies, Psychology, and Family Studies, won third place in the Fine Arts and Humanities Oral Presentation category, Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Conference.



**Virginia Langley** completed her major in Religious Studies and minor in Judaic Studies in May 2013. She will be moving off to Houston to work for Teach For America in an effort to address this country’s educational inequity. Following her two-year TFA commitment she plans to get her masters in either sociology or social work. Time will tell!



**Susanna Payton** is currently researching the nurse’s role in navigating the dying process, with special attention to patient experience and quality of nursing preparedness and care. She won first place for her research

into these matters in the College of Nursing division of the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Conference. She says, “Religious Studies has provided me with skills that permit critical analysis, reflection, and discussion of complicated and ‘spiritual’ end-of-life issues.” Along with a select few other students who were chosen on the basis of GPA, conduct, and clinical performance, Susanna will intern at Children’s Hospital in Birmingham during the summer of 2013.

## NEW APPOINTMENTS



**Eleanor Finnegan**,  
Assistant Professor

Dr. Eleanor Finnegan has worked for the past two-and-a-half years as a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Coastal Carolina University. She completed her Ph.D. in Religion at the University of Florida in 2011. Her research and teaching focus on how groups of Muslims interpret and embody religious and environmental beliefs and practices, create identities, and craft communities. Her awards include an Alumni Fellowship and several Foreign Language and

Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships for Modern Standard Arabic. Her publications include: “What Traditions are Represented in Religion and Ecology? A Perspective from an American Scholar of Islam” and “Case Study: Images of ‘Land’ among Islamic Farmers in the U.S.,” as well as contributions to several encyclopedias and journals. Her current project focuses on the relationships between belief, practice, and the construction of community as lived on American Muslim farms. Prof. Finnegan’s primary appointment will be in the Department of Religious Studies but she will also teach one course annually in the Department of History.



**Michael Altman,  
Instructor**

Michael J. Altman just completed his Ph.D. in American Religious Cultures at Emory University. His dissertation is entitled “Imagining Hindus: India and Religion in Nineteenth Century America.” He will be joining the REL faculty for the 2013-14 academic year as a full-time Instructor. In the Fall 2013 semester Mike will be teaching sections of REL 105 Honors Introduction to Religious Studies along with an upper-level course on the development of Asian religions in America. Dr. Altman serves as co-chair of the American Academy of Religion’s North American Hinduism group.



**Sarah Rollens,  
Instructor**

Sarah Rollens is a doctoral candidate in Christian Origins at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation is entitled “Framing Social Criticism in the Jesus Movement: The Ideological Project in the Sayings of Q.” She will be joining the REL faculty for the 2013-14 academic year as a full-time Instructor. In the Fall 2013 semester, Sarah will be teaching sections of REL 112 Introduction to the New Testament along with an upper-level course on Violence in Early Christianity.

## GOING TO CHICAGO: A STUDENT TRAVELS TO THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

by M.G. Proaps

Just two weeks before the national conference of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) was about to begin, Daniel Turner and I decided to go. We had some vague notion that various people would be doing scholarly things collectively; as this intrigued us, we made last minute hotel reservations and planned for the 12-hour drive to Chicago. We proceeded to have quite a



*A picture from the NAASR Panel at the National AAR Meeting where our own Prof. Russell McCutcheon was presenting.*

wonderful weekend of constant improvisation and learning. Dan had arranged for us to stay with Sean Beadore and Jaci Gresham, two graduates from the Religious Studies Department, whom I hadn’t met before. They were kind enough to host us for the whole weekend. We had an absolutely wonderful time discussing topics such as Religious Studies at Chicago, grad school, cognition, and on and on. A question that really summed up the weekend was: “Whom do you choose: Marx or Nietzsche?” Jaci and I turned out to be team Nietzsche, while Dan and Sean were team Marx. All was in good fun and we are truly thankful for the absolutely lovely hospitality we received; they made our experience astronomically better.

Everything worked out pretty well. At one point I had to run the length of the conference center—nearly a mile—to catch parts of two panels that I was really excited about. I also had to make agonizing decisions concerning which panels to attend. For instance, there was a panel called *Questioning Liberalism* that featured Anne Pellegrini, a major

social theorist who had come to the University of Alabama last year as the 10th annual Aronov Lecturer. Unfortunately, her lecture conflicted with a music and religion panel presided over by our own Prof. Ted Trost (Chair, REL). With a heavy heart, I decided to forgo Pellegrini’s paper in order to hear a paper called “Tool and the Dionysian Futurity of Music” by Sam Mickey. Now this might sound silly, but I never imagined anyone else ever thinking about those two things together, not to mention writing a paper on them. Another event to highlight was a North American Association of the Study of Religion (NAASR) panel discussing the organization’s relationship to the AAR, with

implications for what constitutes the future of religious studies as a field. I also caught the last 30 minutes of a morning panel featuring our own Prof. Finbarr Curtis.

There are far too many things to say to really grasp my whole experience (whatever that might mean): having my first journey to Chicago, first journey to an annual conference, and first road trip with my friend Dan. I am very fortunate to have made such a journey, to come into contact with such wonderful people, and to have the meaningful conversations that we had. I hope that I can make it to the next national conference. Meanwhile, I am excited to be participating in the many possibilities for inquiry to be pursued within the ridiculous field we just happen to call Religious Studies.



*M.G. graduated in May 2013. He was a Silverstein Scholar, RSSA officer, and research assistant for the Department.*

## SILVERSTEIN SCHOLARS 2013-14

The following students were recognized by the Religious Studies faculty as Silverstein Scholars for the 2013-14 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.

Khara Cole	Samantha King	Khortlan Patterson
Wesley Davidson	Hannah Mancer	Susanna Payton
Ben Flax	Jessica Morgan	M.G. Proaps
Sam Fore	Mark Ortiz	Allie Rash
Hannah Hicks		Evan Stokes

## FACULTY UPDATES



After two years as an Instructor in the Religious Studies department, **Professor Finbarr Curtis** will begin a tenure-track position this Fall in the Department of Literature and Philosophy at Georgia

Southern University. Finbarr edited a July 2012 special issue of the journal *Religion* entitled "The Study of American Religions: Critical Reflections on a Specialization." He also signed a book contract with New York University Press for his monograph, "The Economy of American Religious Freedom." In support of the research for the book, Finbarr recently received a Frederick B. Artz Summer Research Grant to travel to the Oberlin College library where he will do research in the papers of 19th century revivalist extraordinaire, Charles Grandison Finney.



During the 2012-13 academic year, **Professor Steve Jacobs** published a number of book reviews in the following journals: *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, and online in *Genocide Prevention Now* and *H-Net Reviews in the Humanities & Social Sciences*. He also published "Two takes on Christianity: Furthering the Dialogue" in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and "The Elephant in the Room" on US Anti-Semitic foreign policy in the Middle East in the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*. In October 2012, he gave

a paper at the 25th Annual Klutznick-Harris Symposium "Who Is A Jew?" Creighton University, Omaha, NE, entitled "German-Jewish Identity: Problematic Then; Problematic Now" which will be published later this year, as well as two invited lectures: "Raphael Lemkin and the Armenian Genocide" at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, Belmont, MA; and "Whither Jewish-Christian (and Muslim) Relations in the 21st Century?" at the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies, Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, FL. Finally, he participated in the UA Symposium "Teaching Holocaust and Genocide Studies" in honor of his good friend and colleague Professor Jerome Rosenberg, Psychology and New College, on the occasion of his retirement. "Jerry" taught the first course in the Holocaust at UA more than thirty years ago, and a number of his former students joined for the day-long event and celebratory dinner.



**Professor Russell McCutcheon** was on sabbatical for the Spring 2013 semester, during which time he assembled a new collection of essays and prepared lectures for the University of Utah

and Texas State University. He visited the University of Alberta, presented a paper at a national conference in Chicago, and published an anthology on religious experience (co-edited with Craig Martin), an edited collection of essays (co-edited with Willi Braun and Bill Arnal), and a book (co-authored with Bill Arnal) entitled *The Sacred is the Profane* (Oxford University Press).



**Professor Steven Ramey** was on sabbatical during Fall 2012. He worked on a new book that considers the implications of historical and theoretical analyses of the categories "religion" and individual "religions" for how

scholars analyze and present data. Back on campus for Spring 2013, he employed some of the ideas he refined on sabbatical in teaching a new course in the department, Introduction to Religions of the World. He has also published in three different blogs this past year: the department's *Religion in Culture Lectures* blog, the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* blog, and most recently the *Huffington Post*. He has also become the editor of a new book series with Equinox Publishers entitled *Culture on the Edge: Studies in Identity Formation*, which developed out of the REL department-sponsored collaborative research group "Culture on the Edge."



This year, **Professor Merinda Simmons** incorporated several collaborative projects into her research agenda. She has recently completed a book proposal for "Troubling Post-Blackness," a

volume co-edited with Houston A. Baker, Jr. (Vanderbilt). She is also working with the collaborative research group "Culture on the Edge," which has recently contracted a book series with Equinox. The volume *Race and Displacement*, which Dr. Simmons co-edited with Dr. Maha Marouan, is forthcoming from The University of Alabama Press. She is currently working on her volume "Studying Religion: A Reader," contracted with Acumen Press, and she is completing the archival research on "slave religion" that has been funded by UA's Research Grants Committee. Her own single-authored monograph, "Changing the Subject: Writing Women across the African Diaspora," was recently accepted for publication by Ohio State University Press. She participated in the American Academy of Religion's annual November meeting as an invited workshop presenter, and her presentation, "On the Limits of Feminist Exegesis," was included in the conference of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion in March.



**Professor Trost's** chapter "Devil's on the Loose": Creedence Clearwater Revival and the Religious Imagination" was published this year in the volume *Finding Fogerty: Interdisciplinary Readings of John Fogerty and Creedence Clearwater Revival* (2013), edited by Thomas M. Kitts. He presented the paper "Sound Theology: The Place of POP in the U2 Canon" at the national gathering of the Popular Culture Association in Washington, D.C. A second paper, "Transgressing Theology: Locating Jesus in a '[Messed-] Up World,'" was presented at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during the conference "U2: The Hype and the Feedback." Dr. Trost continues to collaborate 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. He will be on sabbatical leave during the coming academic year and will serve as a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Philosophy, Religion, and History of Science at the University of Leeds, England.

## WHAT'S THE RSSA BEEN UP TO?

The Religious Studies Student Association has been quite busy this year! While keeping with a tradition of bi-monthly dinners, we added bi-monthly movie nights and specialty events—like an excursion to the Pie Lab in Greensboro (hosted by former REL student Melanie Williams), Pi Day, Potluck dinners, ice-skating, and a picnic by the Black Warrior River. We had many new members who have big ideas about next year, so be sure to keep an eye out for future events!



REL Majors Hannah Etchison, M.G. Proaps, and Zach Price at the Pi Day event.



Prof. Merinda Simmons, Ashton Sims, Melanie Williams (REL alum), M.G. Proaps, and Virginia Langley at Pie Lab in Greensboro.



The gang at Sitar for one of the bi-monthly dinners.

## IN REMEMBRANCE: TIM MURPHY (1956-2013)



On the Ides of March (March 15, 2013), Dr. Tim Murphy died from complications related to cystic fibrosis in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Professor Murphy came to the University of Alabama in August of 2002, after holding a Mellon Post Doctoral Fellowship at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He had received the MA and PhD degrees in the "History of Consciousness Program" at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he worked with Hayden White, Donna Haraway, Gary Lease, and Norman O. Brown, among others.

"Dr. Tim" gained from Jim Morrison and Arthur Rimbaud a profound distrust of "The Man." Perhaps he took to heart that quip by Marx (Groucho) about not wanting to belong to any club that would accept him as a member. Thus a certain irony pervaded his status as a tenured Associate Professor in a major American research institution. Tim seemed both suspicious and proud of his position as agent (and critic) of "The Establishment." He taught from this "liminal" space, embracing his own existential circumstance as the ground upon which to examine works by scholars and artists such as Camus, Judith Butler, Herman Hesse, Edward Said, and, of course, Nietzsche.

In his writing, Dr. Murphy combined current theoretical perspectives with a reread-

ing of the history of the discipline through the lens of both post-structuralism and post-colonialism. He drew upon data from throughout the world (not just a single tradition or type of tradition) to produce a constructive (not merely a critical) and comprehensive theory of religion. In addition to several essays, Dr. Murphy authored three books: *Nietzsche, Metaphor, Religion* (2001); *Representing Religion: Essays in History, Theory, and Crisis* (2007); and *The Politics of Spirit: Phenomenology, Genealogy, Religion* (2011).

As part of this year's Honors Day proceedings, students, family members, faculty colleagues, and friends gathered together in Manly Hall room 207 for a brief ceremony to remember Tim Murphy's life and work.

## THE RELEVANCE OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES 2012-2013 LECTURE SERIES

by Steven Ramey

Native Hawaiian claims on sites that they identify as sacred. A museum exhibit promoting tolerance. A court case involving the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. These topics provide examples of the relevance of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the theme of the department's series of lectures this year. This year, the Religious Studies Department in collaboration with other academic units in the College, brought five distinguished scholars to the University of Alabama. The lecturers approached the theme of the lecture series in two basic ways. Two guest lecturers, Gregg Lambert (Syracuse University) and the Aronov Lecturer Cary Nelson (University of Illinois), have written extensively on the Humanities. They presented critiques of the commodification of education and defenses of the "fierce Humanities," as Nelson described it.



*REL majors with Prof. Naomi Goldenberg after her public lecture.*

Our other three lecturers, Greg Johnson (University of Colorado, Boulder), Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa), and David Watt (Temple University), presented elements of their ongoing research to illustrate the relevance of research in Religious Studies to contemporary social questions and legal concerns. The series concluded with an interdisciplinary roundtable discussion that included faculty from five departments in the College as well as the Law School. The discussion period provided an opportunity for students to apply the critical thinking skills that they have honed over the years, sometimes in feisty dialogue with the assembled panelists.

If you missed the series of lectures, full video of three lectures are available on the department vimeo site and reflections on the issues have been posted on the department's Religion in Culture blog at [www.as.ua.edu/rel/blog](http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/blog).



*REL majors (from left) Hannah Hicks, M.G. Proaps, Hannah Etchison, and Virginia Langley at Gregg Lambert's public lecture.*

## THE DAY LECTURE

In the 2012-13 academic year, the family of Zachary Daniel Day established an annual lectureship in the Department of Religious Studies to honor his memory. Zach was a Religious Studies major and Anthropology minor, a Silvertstein Scholar (2007), and graduate of the University of Alabama (in 2008), who died unexpectedly on July 21, 2011, at the age of 26. In Zach's memory, through the kindness of his father and his stepmother, Charles Day and Nancy Campbell, and the generosity of his friends and family, the Department is pleased to be the home for the Zachary Daniel Day Memorial Support Fund, which makes possible this annual lecture.

Given Zach's own interest in the intersection of religion with music, art, videos, gaming, and literature, this annual lecture will be devoted to the study of religion and popular culture.



*Zach Day with his father, Charles Day (pictured left), at the 2006 Honors Day Ceremony.*



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## LECTURES FOR 2013-14 ANNOUNCED

The Department of Religious Studies is the home for two endowed lecture series. This Fall we will inaugurate the Zachary Day Lecture Series with its emphasis on religion and popular culture. Details about this lecture appear elsewhere in the Newsletter. Our



first Day lecturer will be Dr. Monica Miller, from the Department of Religious Studies and the Department of Africana Studies at Lehigh University. Dr. Miller's research focuses on the study of religion,

popular culture, youth subcultures, and various dimensions of material culture. She is currently working on a large-scale survey project, "Youth Culture and the Remaking of Religion in Portland, Oregon." Dr. Miller recently published her first book, *Religion and Hip Hop*, a consideration of how scholars have approached the topic of religion when studying Hip Hop culture, in general, and, in particular, music.

Alumni, students, members of the community, and friends of the department are invited to this lecture. It will take place on October 1, 2013 at 7:00pm in the Gorgas Library, Room 205.

This Spring will mark the 12th annual Aaron Aronov Lecture. Our featured lecturer will be Dr. Richard King, Professor of Buddhist and Asian Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent, England. Dr. King is currently editing a large collaborative volume on



theories of religion for Columbia University Press; he is also developing a research project that explores the complex interactions between global capitalism and contemporary interpretations of classic Buddhist teachings. He is the author of several books, including *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. The date for the Aronov Lecture will be announced on our website in the near future.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



**Markus Harris** (2011) completed his undergraduate courses at UA in May of 2011 with a major in African American Studies and a minor in Religious Studies. Currently, he is working as a Hall Director at

the University of North Texas at Denton. His plan is to complete a degree in Higher Education focusing on Social Justice and Inclusion. Ultimately, Markus intends to complete a doctoral program in Sociology or Psychology exploring "Possible Selves" theory, then work as a Vice-President of Student Affairs for a university.



**Jess James** (2012) is currently teaching at St. Margaret's School in Tappahannock, Virginia. She teaches New Testament, World Religion, and is the Intern for School Life. She is getting married in August of 2013 and planning a move to Richmond, Virginia.



**Quint Langstaff** (2011), after venturing to Colorado for some time, has returned to his hometown of Florence, Alabama, where he works at Alabama Chanin, an internationally recognized fashion designer who

focuses on sustainable handmade goods crafted by talented local artisans. While he does a lot of work airbrushing everything from garments, to journals, to the shipping boxes, he also dabbles in photography and web work.



**Chris Scott** (2011) completed his M.A. in the Arab Studies program at Georgetown University. After spending a second summer working with the Kuwait-America Foundation, he will be looking for opportunities to promote educational development and exchange, either in the Middle East and North Africa region or in Washington.



**David Woodington** (2011) was graduated from Florida State University in May 2013 with an M.A. in Religions of Western Antiquity. This summer he will move to South Bend, Indiana, in order to commence PhD studies at Notre Dame in the area of Christianity and Judaism in Late Antiquity.



## AMY LYNN PETERSEN ENDOWED SUPPORT FUND

In the summer of 2007, the Amy Lynn Petersen Endowed Support Fund was established in the memory of Amy Petersen, a New College student minoring in Religious Studies, who died in October of 2003. The Amy Lynn Petersen Fund is dedicated to providing a book for each REL 490 student—the Capstone course required of all majors and minors and offered every Spring semester. This is the fifth year the fund has made this gift available to our students and the eighth year the Department has given some of its seniors the graduation gift of a book. This year, students in the Capstone course were exploring together the topic of canon, asking how societies establish and maintain canonical texts, and, as an entrée into that larger question, considering their own individual canonical collections. One of the assignments in the class was to identify a potentially key text that has remained unread up to this point. The Amy Lynn Petersen Endowment purchased that text for each student; each student then read her or his book and reported back to the seminar, critically reflecting upon the canonical status of the just-read book. This picture shows members of the class with their chosen books.

