



Study Religion & Find Out

Department News from 2018-19

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Kicking Off the New Year

It was another busy year in REL, and it started off with a new welcome back event on Woods Quad; organized by A&S, Departments each staffed a table and first year students roamed the quad, learning about majors and minors. Pictured above, at left, is Prof. **Mike Altman**, our Undergrad Director, with **Emma Gibson** and **Savannah Finver**, M.A. students who helped field questions.



The Alum Liaison Committee



Pictured are (left to right): **Justin Nelson**, **Jennifer Alfano Nelson**, **Khara Cole**, and **Kim Davis**, the members of our inaugural Alum Liaison Committee. Formed in the summer of 2018, these grads—whose time in REL ranges from the very

early 2000s to just a few years ago—came together to help plan and host events in the Department. They've already proved themselves to be essential to the Department and one of the forces behind our inaugural (and now annual) Homecoming Event on the balcony. We're hoping to soon see their role enlarge, helping us to remain in touch with grads and, possibly, helping to pair grads with current students when their career interests and experiences overlap.

Grad Tales Returns



Begun in 2013, we continued our Grad Tales series, in which we've now hosted 16 alums, to help current students think about the wider relevance of the liberal arts. Organized by Prof. **Vaia Touna** and hosted by our **Alum**

Liaison Committee, the series invited back **Jennifer Alfano Nelson** (BA 2007) in the Fall and **Chris Hurt** (BA 2008) in the Spring, with **Kim Davis** and **Justin Nelson**, respectively, serving as hosts.

The Day & Aronov Lectures

The 6th annual Day Lecture, on religion & popular culture, took place in the Fall semester, delivered by the Finnish scholar, Dr. **Teemu Taira**, addressing what a scholar of religion might have to say about the Bond film series. And in the Spring semester Dr. **Tim Jensen** visited campus, coming from Denmark, to offer the 17th annual Aronov Lecture. Both lecturers visited classes while on campus as well as holding meetings with faculty, to discuss the state of the international field. And our Day Lecturer event got to experience an American Halloween!



Another Faculty Book Event

In case you didn't know, the faculty do much more than teach and supervise students, for they each also have active research agendas. This year marked our second annual book event, held at **Ernest & Hadley Booksellers**, in downtown Tuscaloosa; hosted by our newest colleague, Prof. **Richard Newton**, it featured the work of Profs. **Steven Ramey** and **Nathan Loewen**. Attended by students and members of the public, it was a great evening with some readings, some Q&A, and yes, even a little wine and cheese. Look forward to the third annual this coming Fall.



Cream & Sugar...?



Grads will be happy to learn that the Department lounge is as popular as ever, with the students continuing the tradition of sponsoring regular coffee (or tea) breaks—and yes, there's always doughnuts.

Undergrad Research in REL



In late February we held our 6th annual undergraduate research symposium in Gorgas Library, at which six REL students presented their original work, with MA students moderating the panels. Mentored by faculty, the students spoke on a wide range of topics, though it

was interesting how frequently Asian culture was the topic they addressed—in part the result of Prof. **Steven Ramey's** influence, as Director of Asian Studies at UA...?

MA Accepts Its Third Cohort

The new MA in REL is about to award degrees to its second and third graduates (**Emma Gibson** and **Sierra Lawson**—the former going to Architecture School and the latter to a Ph.D. program in the study of religion), with four full time students and one part-time student continuing. And we've admitted six new students for the Fall, only one of whom is our own BA major—so the word is getting out that you can do some interesting (even unexpected) things in the study of religion at UA. Our Grad Director, Prof. **Merinda Simmons**, does everything from hosting visits for prospective students to ensuring everyone makes steady progress on their degrees.



RSSA Events

Working with Prof. **Richard Newton**, the student association's exec (**Ellie Cochran**, **Kyle Ashley**, and **Morgan Sadie Frick**) kept us all busy with meals, buttons events (promoting REL when students register for the next semester's classes), a game night, as well as a little trick or treating, an annual career workshop, and the annual Manly Cup.



Got Peanuts?

The Woods Quad squirrels are in charge now as much as ever; we fear itemizing how many jars of (yes, unsalted, coz we're all about being health-conscious) peanuts they go through in a week. Let's just say that they're well fed but always hungry.

What's New?

If you're following our blog then you've likely read some of the stories that **Morgan Frick** has written for us (pictured here with our librarian, **James Gilbreath**, at a our research symposium), covering events in REL that might otherwise fly beneath the radar. If not, then go take a look.



REL Hosts New Workshop

Organized by Prof. **Altman**, and led also by Profs. **Ramey** and **Touna**, REL hosted six early career scholars in March for a weekend workshop on using case studies from US (whether modern or historical) to exemplify wider trends in the study of religion. Prof. Altman also led the Department's submission, in February, of a grant proposal aiming to enlarge this annual workshop and continue it for the next

4 years, bringing 10 new people to campus three times each year for more in-depth workshops on research, teaching, and digital skills.



But Wait, There's More...



We were also pleased to be joined this year by **Emily Crews**, our new full time Instructor, near done her own Ph.D. at the University of Chicago—you may have seen her on Twitter, where pics of her Honors intro students, knee-deep in a cool assignment that Emily thought up, sometimes appear.

Get a Book Bag?

Grads: let us know what you're doing & we'll send an REL book bag; just visit us online at <https://religion.ua.edu/stay-in-touch/> to give us a little info. (We're indebted to a very kind donor who has helped to make these bags possible.)



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