

FACULTY | NEWS

A BUSY YEAR ON MANLY HALL'S 2ND (& 3RD) FLOOR

REL faculty members research, write, publish & win awards

If you've not been to Manly Hall's 2nd floor recently then you may not know to look up to find Profs. Ramey, Simmons, and Bagger on the 3rd floor. Real estate on the 2nd floor can't house the expanding faculty, which numbers 11, so we're creeping onto parts of the 3rd floor as well. But regardless where their offices are, REL professors continue to be busy scholars with national and international reputations of their own.

For example, this year Profs. Altman, Loewen, and Touna sent their own first single-authored books to their publishers—we hope to see them all in print before the end of 2017. Their topics are diverse but all involve rethinking a subject area: early American responses to the so-called “mystic east”; the problem of evil (as philosophers of religion know it) and how we talk about this thing we call the past (exemplified in the case of Greece). And Profs. Ramey and McOutcheon both have edited volumes due out this year (in the same book series).

Yes, Prof. Jacobs had another busy year as well, writing book chapters & delivering invited lectures around the country, and Prof. Ikeuchi, our newest colleague (an Emory grad in Anthropology), was awarded a prestigious summer grant in Germany, to finalize her first book—a study of religion & Brazilian immigrants to Japan (who have Japanese lineages of their own).

If for no other reason than to find a place to shelve all these books, our footprint in Manly Hall has grown. So if you stop by to say hi, look up. Way up.

Studying Religion in Culture

M.A. DEGREE | NEWS

MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGION IN CULTURE

4 YEARS OF PLANNING & NOW A NEW GRAD DEGREE IN THE FALL

In 2013 the Department began discussing the possibility of starting a new Master's degree. Being one of only 3 Departments in all of the College of Arts & Sciences that did not have a grad program was a motivation, yes, but more than that was the hunch that the sort of B.A. program that had developed in REL since our reinvention began (back in 2001) could make for an innovative M.A. For the Department's collective focus on identity studies—what happens when we turn our skills for studying religion to studying how identities are made and contested?—could ground a degree that had applicability far beyond the study of religion. Realizing the long history we already had with using technology and social media in the life of the Department (and recalling the number of past student workers who put their web skills to good use after they left Manly Hall), meant that a dual focus on social theory and public humanities (via digital/online skills) would prepare students for innovative scholarship as well as the ability to communicate their findings widely. No matter what field they went into after they left Manly Hall.

A committee was formed, chaired by Prof. Simmons (who is now appointed as our inaugural Grad Director); a proposal was drafted, circulated, and then rewritten. And rewritten again. And again. Dean Olin agreed. The UA Board of Trustees agreed. Alabama's Commission on Higher Education agreed. And voila: we're now admitting a class of grad students, to begin this Fall.

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#RELS0th | NEWS

FOUNDED IN '66-7, REL CELEBRATES ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

THOUGH COURSES ON RELIGION DATE TO UA'S ORIGINS IN 1831

Although studying religion—and, in many cases, Christianity—dates to the earliest years of UA, it wasn't until the mid-1960s when what we today commonly know as the academic study of religion was established at UA. Prof. Altman, in his lecture at the March 28 faculty event marking the 50th anniversary, examined the different ways in which religion was studied on campus over the years. Introduced by Prof. Simmons and involving Dean Olin, of Arts & Sciences, and Dr. Patrick Green, onetime chair of REL (and who retired in 2000), Prof. Altman's talk on the origins and phases of the field was followed by Prof. Trost's lecture on the more recent history of the Department, outlining the many contributions of those who have worked here over the past 25 years—with Ms. Betty Dickey (who steers the ship from her office in Manly Hall) being a common factor throughout that entire period. Trost even worked in “The Trog Lebowski”!

Described by Dean Olin, in his opening remarks, as among the top 10 Departments in the US (in terms of faculty research and publications), the Department, which now numbers 11 faculty, is the largest it has ever been, with an M.A. program starting soon.

Although courses on religion date far back at UA, the faculty decided that the hiring of Ph.D.s trained in studying religion (rather than relying on campus chaplains) and establishing a major was the current Department's starting point. Hence '66-67.

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STUDENTS | NEWS

REL STUDENTS LOSE TO FACULTY IN MANLY CUP BADMINTON MATCH

NAIVELY THINK THEY'LL DO BETTER IN DODGEBALL



In a heartbreaking loss, the 2015-16 Manly Cup went to the faculty after they resoundingly defeated the students in a series of stunning early evening matches on Woods Quad. “Perhaps cardio-loading on pizza beforehand wasn't the best idea,” said graduating senior Jared Powell, as he tried to console his classmate Anna Davis, slowly regaining her composure. “That birdie was out, I tell ya!” she hollered, across the quad, to the group of faculty, oblivious to her pain, who were cheerfully carrying the Manly Cup away. Caitie Stewart, who—unlike Powell and Davis—would return for the 2016-7 season, admitted later that Davis bringing her own rackets and net may have seemed “overly confident,” and might have inspired the play of Finnegan, Altman, Touna, Bagger, & Ramey (and the professional badminton ringers they were accused of smuggling into their ranks).

“Dodgeball next year!” was later chanted by Liz Long, Maddie Lewis, and Maggie Patterson. Sorry kids: it's Wikipedia races. (You won at that last time—convincingly!)

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PUBLIC HUMANITIES | NEWS

REACHING BEYOND THE 2ND FLOOR BALCONY

REL BLOGS, FILMS AND NOW RECORDS PODCASTS

Looking back to the early 2000s, our website was the place where updates hit right after an event (such as our annual Honors Day reception). But then along came social media and now we find REL on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Vimeo—providing a link to Manly Hall for students and grads, as well as a way for people at other schools, in the US or abroad, to get a taste of what we regularly do in our classes.

The latest addition to our effort to ensure that our successes reinventing the study of religion are shared widely is a new podcast, begun this semester by Prof. Altman. Two episodes are already posted (available on SoundCloud and iTunes) and two more are in



various stages of production: one features our 15th annual Aronov Lecturer (Laura Levitz, of Temple University) and two students (Parker Evans & Sierra Lawson) who attended our regional conference and the other includes a roundtable of grads who returned for #RELS0th celebrations.

In part an extension of the Department blog, the podcast goes even further in our effort to make our work available both in terms of access and understanding—values that also drive our new M.A.

So go find us online, give it a listen, follow us and give us a rating. You'll learn all about turkey ritual and how our Honors Day celebrations started on the balcony.

Studying Religion in Culture

SERVICE | NEWS

FAMILIAR FACES BUT PLAYING NEW ROLES

DEPTS NEED MORE THAN JUST RESEARCH & TEACHING

There's been changes in the roles among the faculty—what we call their service. From a student's point of view the most apparent change is that Prof. Trost has taken over as Undergrad Advisor—a role we're now calling Undergrad Director. So the baton has been passed to him from Prof. Jacobs, who played this role for the past three years—handing out career advice and Department mugs to a lot of new students. So you'll be seeing Prof. Trost now with B.A. enrollment and career issues. But that's not the only new role: with a new M.A. program comes Prof. Simmons's role as Grad Director, chairing the Grad Committee (with Profs. Ramey and Altman)—this committee wrote the M.A. proposal, is now the acceptance committee, and oversees new course development.

And after two years as our liaison with the student association, Prof. Touna, will be planning our public events (e.g., Grad Tales & the Day and Aronov Lectures) and Prof. Ikeuchi, armed with experience from our “but-on events,” will now be working with the student association. Prof. Jacobs will be working behind the scenes—again, at least from our student's viewpoint—as REL's new Assessment Coordinator (to help the Department report its accomplishments).

Profs. Ramey, Altman, Loewen, and Bagger all continue in their usual service roles but, after four years, we're saying goodbye to Prof. Finnegan, who is returning east to pursue her career. Having the study of Islam in REL was important & we hope to continue it in the future, good luck, Eleanor.

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