

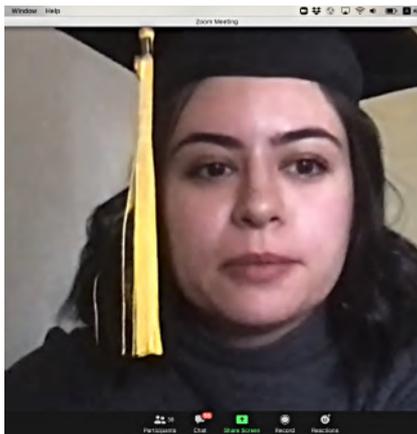
Fall 2020

# UCR DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWSLETTER



## QTSR Conference

2020 UCR Virtual Conference on Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion workshoped more than a dozen papers on Feb 21, 2020. See page 3 for details.



## Graduation 2020

The departmental graduation and awards ceremony for 2020 RLST graduates was held virtually on June 17, 2020. See page 21 for more details.

## Discover what our students have been up to

From new publications to attending conferences and workshops across the country and online, our graduate students had a productive year, despite facing several challenges. Some took their qualifying exams during COVID-19, while some others were busy with research and language study. Turn to page 14 for full updates!

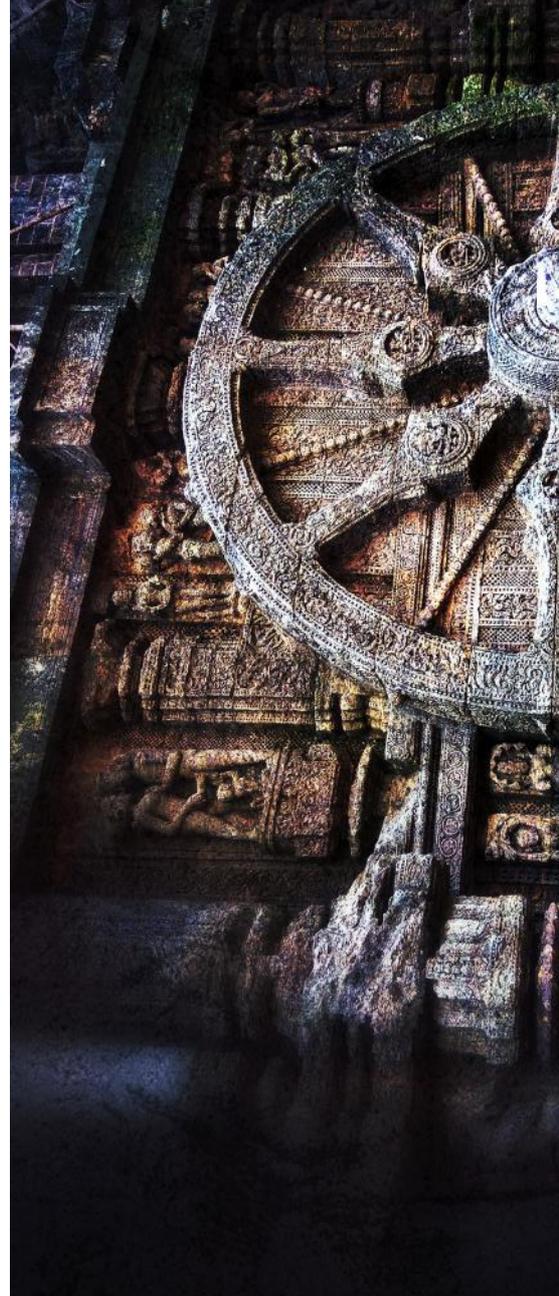


## Solidarity Statement, June 2020

The teaching faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at UCR are collectively grief-stricken and enraged by violence against people and communities of color, from anti-Asian violence related to the geographic origins of the novel coronavirus, to the disproportionate impact of the virus on Native, African American, and Latinx communities, to state violence against Black people and other people of color leading up to and during the current protest movement. As teachers, as allies, and for many of us as members of communities recently or currently subjected to communal and state violence, we stand in solidarity with our students and colleagues of color in this traumatic and historic moment. Rather than choose a monolithic response, we have each vowed to support students in our classes in the ways that best suit individual students and courses. Some of us have cancelled final exams and papers; some have adopted a no-fail policy; others have chosen different equity measures. We urge students for whom our decisions have not offered sufficient relief to approach us individually to seek further recourse. We are committed to the success of all students at all times, but especially now.

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## UCR AT THE AAR

Five UCR graduate students presented at the American Academy of Religion National Conference in November 2019 and several more are slated to present in the upcoming virtual AAR 2020.



# A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

What a year it has become! The Department of Religious Studies shares the grief of all those affected by COVID-19 and the rage of activists who continue to fill the streets to demand justice and true equality for black people in the U.S. and around the world. We were proud to be among the first UCR departments to issue a public statement on racial injustice and its direct impacts on our students in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, now posted on the department's home page, and this fall we will be developing a broader public statement on our departmental commitment to racial justice. Before the quarantine we had an extremely active year, with an excellent colloquium series featuring a wide range of internationally-renowned speakers, growth in our number of majors and minors, and a wonderful incoming graduate cohort who will be the first to benefit from the new courses, concentrations, and professionalization structures in our revamped graduate program. Our graduate applications continue to rise, making our program increasingly competitive and diverse.

When COVID-19 forced the shutdown of campus, Religious Studies faculty (including our courageous lecturers), grad students, and undergrads found creative ways to adapt to the abrupt change in our learning and working environments. We went online to teach, discussed readings over Zoom, took crash courses in new software, and had thought-provoking conversations about pedagogy and values in the midst of a pandemic and an uprising for racial justice. Our RLST 401: Colloquium participants pulled together amazing, relevant, and much-needed webinars that addressed the shutdown and gave us all hope and inspiration in anxiety-ridden times. Many of us guest lectured in others' classes and brought others into our own classrooms - a silver lining of having all courses online. We closed out the year with a powerful and moving online graduation and awards ceremony, our first online and our first-ever departmental graduation.

Among the highlights for me were seeing our fabulous majors and minors in their graduation caps, gowns, stoles, and tassels, some with their families gathered around or joining us from elsewhere; Katie Phillips being hooded by her two daughters, looking like Renaissance cherubs as they lowered the velvet over her head; and Dr. Christine Petzar, wife of our late professor emeritus, Doug Parrott, giving out the first Douglas M. Parrott Graduate Service Award. I remain in awe of the resilience, strength, and commitment of my ladder-rank and contingent colleagues, our alumni, our grad students, and our undergraduates. As we move forward into a new academic year, with the AAR online, campus still largely closed, and a coronavirus vaccine still just a glimmer on the horizon, I wish you all ongoing courage, strength, well-being, and justice.

- Melissa Wilcox



## EVENTS

The Religious Studies department hosted several events this year. Along with celebrating and honoring Associate Professor Ana Bajželj, inaugural Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies, the department hosted a Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion Virtual Conference, several talks, and despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, hosted more than half a dozen colloquium talks.

# Cuir Devotion

Enzo E. Vasquez Toral, Northwestern University

Friday, February 21 – 12:30-2:00 pm  
ARTS 166



## QUEER AND TRANSGENDER STUDIES IN RELIGION VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2020

Enzo E. Vasquez Toral from Northwestern University delivered the keynote address to kick off the 2020 Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion Virtual Conference. UCR students, staff, and faculty hosted six workshops during the day-long conference. Panelists and participants from around the world workshopped a range of papers. A selection of papers below:

Cristo Negra: Queer Afro-Caribbean Creolizations in the devotion of the Black Christ of Portobelo  
Roberto Strongman

Queering the Liminal: Christian Transgender and Non-Binary Rituals  
Kori Pacyniak

Empty Lives: Framing queer/trans suicidality in Buddhist contexts  
Bee Scherer

"Save the Planet - Kill Yourself": The Religious Aesthetics of Trans Shitposting  
Max Thornton

Something to Lose: Queer Movements of Melancholia in Ancient Assemblies  
Joseph A. Marchal



Queering religious ethics in the classroom  
Laurel Blackthorne

Canceling God's Vow: Exodus Rabbah 43 and Gender-Play  
Caryn Tamber-Rosenau

# COLLOQUIUM SERIES 2019-2020



## SERIES 2020-2021

In light of COVID-19, the department has decided to host a fully virtual series for the upcoming academic year.

All events are on Thursdays from 11:00-12:20 unless otherwise noted. While the final lineup is to be decided, do save the following dates on your calendars!

### FALL 2020

October 8, 2020

November 5, 2020

December 3, 2020

### WINTER 2021

January 14, 2021

February 16, 2021

March 4, 2021

### SPRING 2021

April 8, 2021

April 29, 2021

May 20, 2021

### October 3, 2019:

*"Where is Mind in the Atom?: Consciousness and the Logical Problems of Brain Science in the Dialectics of the Tibetan Monk Lozang Gyatso (1928-1997)"* by Matthew King, UC Riverside

### November 7, 2019:

*Graduate Student Panel:* Danielle Dempsey, Jessica Rehman, Kathryn Phillips, Kori Pacyniak, Gurbeer Singh, and Tejpal Singh Baniwal

### December 5, 2019:

*"Crippling the Religious Past? Jessie Sampter, Zionism, and Disability."* by Sarah Imhoff, Indiana University

### January 16, 2019:

*"Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue"* by Sarah MacFarland Taylor, Northwestern University

### March 5, 2020:

*"Seeing through Mindfulness: Bare Attention, Brain States, and the Formation of the Secular Self"* by Erik Braun, University of Virginia

### April 30, 2020:

*Virtual Graduate Student Conference Panel:* Kimberley Diaz, Alina Pokhrel, Tessa Harmon, Alexandr Zamuşinski

### May 21, 2020:

*"Encountering Limitations":* Virtual Roundtable Discussion with Dr. Muhammed Ali, Dr. Matthew King, J Selke, Steven Quach, Elizabeth Miller



## **SPATIAL MEDIA OF SECULARITY: *Thoughts on Buddhist Cosmo-Geographic Space in the 19th Century***

Dr. Adrian Hermann, University of Bonn

UC Riverside's Department of Religious Studies co-sponsored a talk by Dr. Adrian Hermann on Thursday November 21, 2019. Dr. Hermann explored the role that "scientific media of space" played in transformations of the cosmo-geographical imagination in 19th-century Theravada-Buddhist Modernism. Christian missionaries used these instruments and devices - maps, globes, compasses, and astronomical models- in their debates with Buddhists all over the Theravada world and deemed them essential to their challenge to traditional notions of space. Making use of Bruno Latour's concept of the "immutable mobile" Dr. Hermann's talk reflected on the material ways in which the "true facts" of modern geography and astronomy travelled to the Theravada world.

## **THE DREAMER AND THE DREAM: *Afrofuturism and Prophetic Visions of Blackness***

Dr. Roger Sneed, Furman University

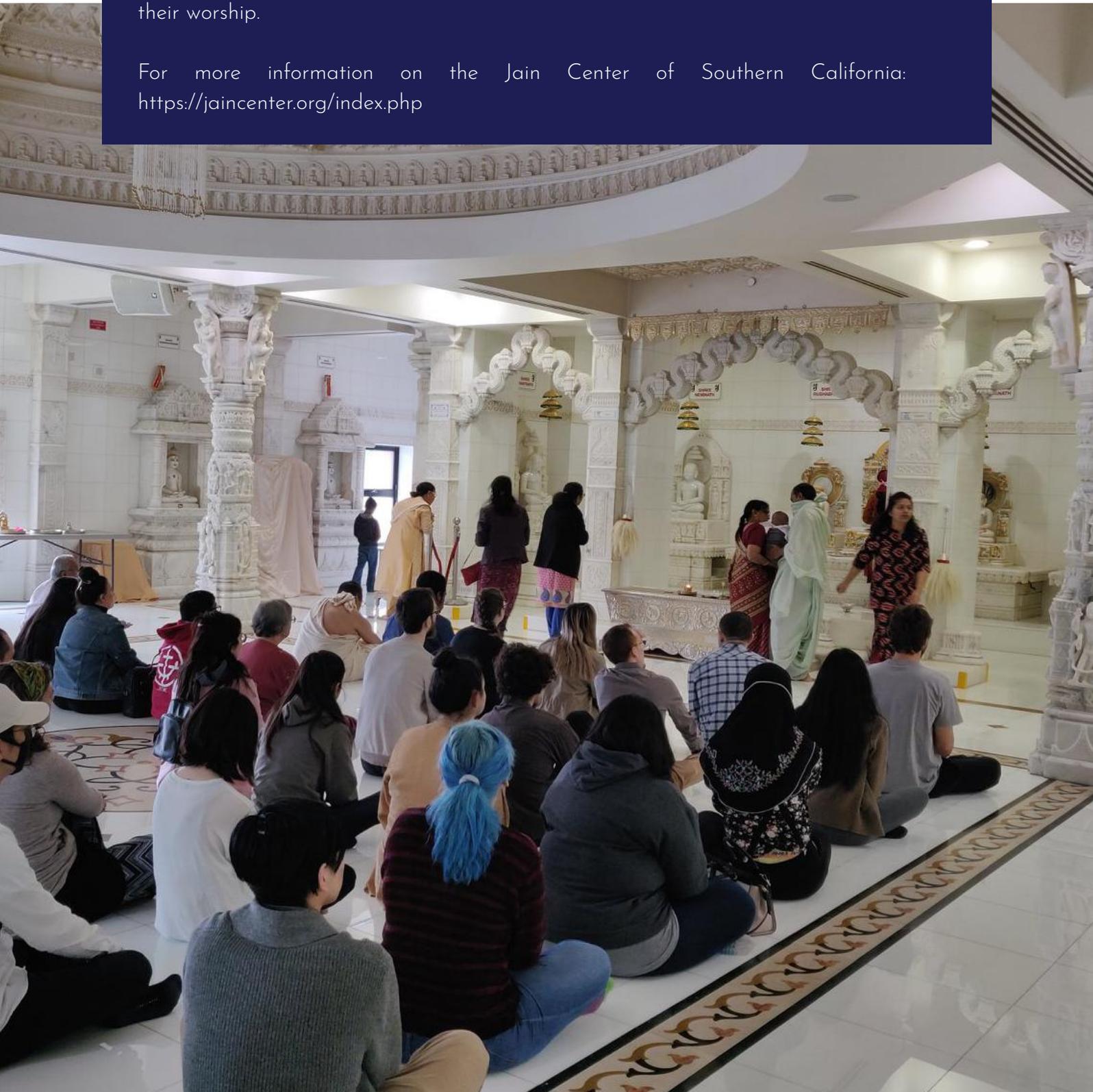


Afrofuturism as a way of Black people expressing their identity through speculative fiction is fairly new, and yet it is not new. We can trace the Black use of speculative fiction to articulate visions of Blackness and critique white supremacy back to W.E.B. DuBois's 1920 short story "The Comet." However, Afrofuturism has made a resurgence, due in part to the phenomenal success of Black Panther, ongoing interest in the work of Octavia Butler, and the rise of the "blerd" (a portmanteau of "black" and "nerd"). Dr. Sneed's talk used an episode of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine as a focal point for investigating the intersections of Afrofuturism and Black Religious Thought.

# ANNUAL VISIT TO THE JAIN CENTER OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A group of our undergraduate RLST students visited the Jain Center of Southern California in Buena Park on March 1, 2020. The students received a guided tour of the center in the morning, followed by a lunch with the Jain community. Organized by Dr. Ana Bajželj, the annual visit has been a wonderful opportunity to learn more about Jainism, meet members of the Jain community, and observe their worship.

For more information on the Jain Center of Southern California:  
<https://jaincenter.org/index.php>



# FACULTY UPDATES

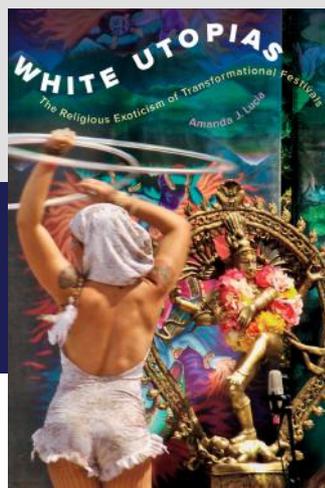
## Amanda Lucia



In 2019-2020, Amanda Lucia formally launched the Religion and Sexual Abuse Project, a collaborative research project, funded in part with \$550K from the Henry Luce Foundation. This project aims to build a body of scholarship addressing this topic in multiple religious traditions. In October 2019, our core team of scholars (Drs. Amanda Lucia, Kent Brintnall, Andrea Jain, Holly Gayley, Ann Gleig, and Amy Langenberg) met at University of Colorado-Boulder for a series of planning meetings. In addition to orchestrating six tradition-specific workshops and two large international conferences, our team will also be producing independent monographs, articles, and pedagogical materials in their research fields. In April 2020, we were pleased to award six additional grants to scholars whose research complements our existing strengths; these projects are led by Drs. Jack Downey and Kathleen Holscher, K. Christine Pae, Nami Kim, and Boyung Lee, Sara Moslener, Juliane Hammer, Nivea Castaneda, and Abimbola Adelakun. More information can be found at our recently launched website: [www.religionandsexualabuseproject.org](http://www.religionandsexualabuseproject.org).

Dr. Lucia was also pleased to speak on this topic at a conference at Loyola Marymount University and at Inform (one of our organizational partners based in London), recordings of which can be found on her new website, [www.amandajeanelucia.com](http://www.amandajeanelucia.com). Aside from the launch of this sizeable project, Dr. Lucia's second book, *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals*, will be published in October 2020. The culmination of nine years of ethnographic research, *White Utopias* supplies a simultaneously critical and empathic investigation into the overwhelming whiteness of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) communities, with direct attention to the appropriative strategies enacted in modern yoga.

**RELIGION  
& SEXUAL ABUSE  
PROJECT**

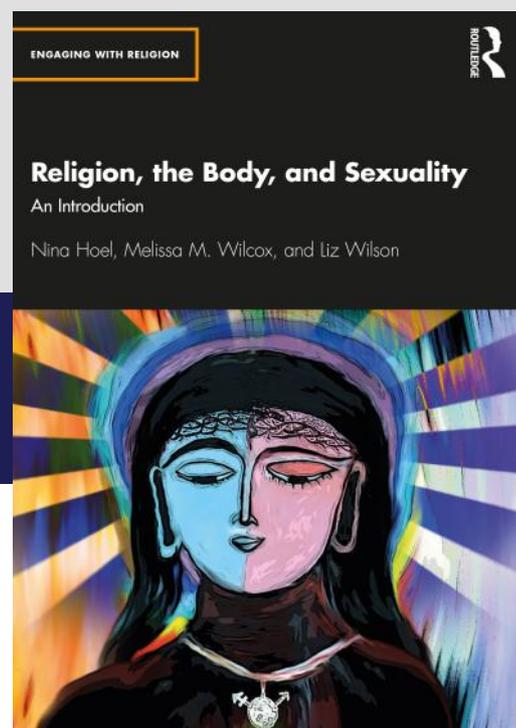
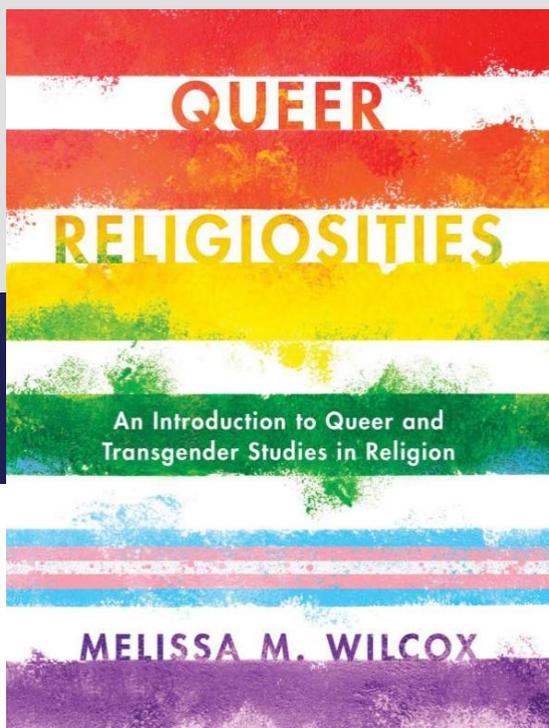


# Melissa Wilcox

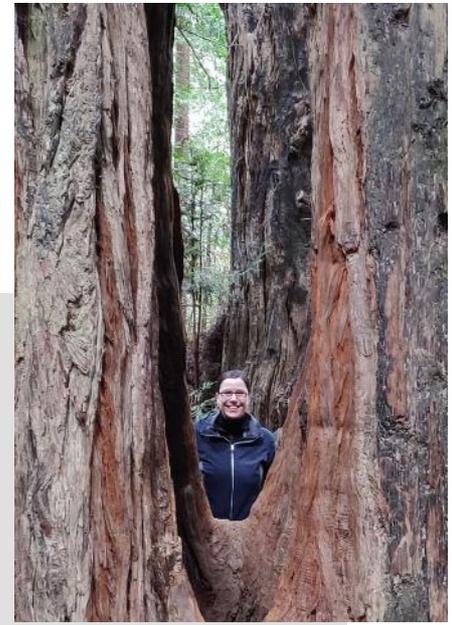


Professor Melissa M. Wilcox began the 2019-2020 academic year with a trip to Åbo Akademi in Turku, Finland to deliver the 2019 Temenos lecture to a joint meeting of the Society of Queer Studies in Finland, the Finnish Society for the Study of Religion, and the International Association for Religion and Gender, at a conference entitled (in English, Finnish, and Swedish) "Queer Shepherds - Pervot Paimenet - Queera Herdar." Presentations at the AAR and in CSU Bakersfield's Philosophy and Religious Studies Colloquium series followed, articulating new theoretical developments stemming from Professor Wilcox's 2018 book, *Queer Nuns*, and new research on spirituality in queer and trans leather and BDSM communities. It was a banner year for the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship, with seven Fellows from across the U.S. and the U.K., and generous, engaged mentors from across the Southland. The first online UCR-QTSR conference took place in February, seemingly prescient given the shutdown that followed a few weeks later.

Professor Wilcox and the Holstein funds also sponsored a visit in early March - on the last day, in fact, that external speakers were allowed on campus - from Professor Roger Sneed of Furman University, who spoke about his research on Black religious thought in Afrofuturism. Also in February, Professor Wilcox's new textbook - the first ever on queer and trans studies in religion - was published. In September, Professor Wilcox's co-authored textbook on religion and sexuality studies will also be in print. Look for both *Queer Religiosities* and *Religion, Sexuality, and the Body* at your favorite independent bookseller!



# Ana Bajželj



In the past academic year, Dr. Ana Bajželj completed her co-authored book *Insistent Life: Jain Principles for Bioethics* that explores the intersection of Jainism and the contemporary discipline of bioethics. She has also been working on several other writing projects on the topics of agency, liberation, causation, and time in Jain philosophy. She also presented her work on causation at the Humboldt State University's Department of Philosophy. This was the first year that Dr. Bajželj served as the director of undergraduate studies at the department. She was especially excited to plan activities for the Religious Studies Undergraduate Club with the club's president Selena Macias. After a wonderful trip to the Jain Centre of Southern California, their other plans were unfortunately hindered by the pandemic.

The Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies held by Dr. Bajželj was officially inaugurated on October 23, 2019, and she was touched to receive such a warm welcome from her UCR colleagues, students, and members of the Jain community of Southern California. This academic year was particularly important for the development of Jain studies at UCR, since the Wadher Family Foundation established fellowships for graduate students at UCR who focus on Jain Studies. Dr. Bajželj is grateful to the Wadher family, Dr. Jasvant Modi, Dr. Melissa Wilcox, and the UCR Development team for making this possible. The first fellowship has been offered to Nicole Lewallen, an incoming graduate student, who was also the past academic year's recipient of the Shrimad Rajchandra Undergraduate Essay Prize.



# Muhamad Ali



Dr. Muhamad Ali serves as the director of the Middle East and Islamic Studies Program, and has published journal articles, including the conception of sharia and citizenship in Indonesia and Malaysia (*Journal of Asian Social Science Research*), and two reference entries Harun Nasution (an Indonesian public scholar) and the Indonesian Department of Religion (*Oxford Islamic Studies Online*). Another article "Indonesian Muslims views of other religions" is forthcoming (*the Muslim World*). Dr. Ali's book *Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya* (Edinburgh University Press) has been reviewed in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, the *American Academy of Religion's Reading Religion* and the *Journal of Asian Studies*.

His current book project is on Islam and other religious in modern Indonesia. Dr. Ali spoke in conferences held online on a variety of topics including the history of Muslim literature on the pandemic; Muslims' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic; mitigating research; Islamic education in the New Normal Era; Muslims views of politics; cooperation with American higher education; how to study Islam; why have humans become religious; racism in America, as well as served as a moderator of the talk on Oil, Middle East and Covid-19, and natural and scientific responses to Covid-19. On a personal life, Dr. Ali had a new addition to the family: Atqa Zayden Ali.

Below, Dr. Ali is seen at Adam Tyson's oral qualifying exams on ZOOM.



# Pashaura Singh



Although Dr. Pashaura Singh was on Sabbatical Leave during Fall and Winter quarters of the past academic year, he was creatively engaged in delivering keynote speeches / presenting papers at five international conferences at Wolverhampton University (UK), McGill University (Canada), Hofstra University (NY), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (USA) and Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh (India). He was honored with 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for his contributions in the field of Sikh Studies by the Sikh community of Montreal at Guru Nanak's 550th Birth Anniversary celebration at McGill University, Montreal.

During his stay in India Dr. Singh visited a number of historical places and did archival research at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and other places in Ludhiana, Patiala, Ambala and New Delhi. His article "Speaking Truth to Power: Exploring Guru Nanak's Bābar-vāṇī in Light of the Baburnama" was published in Open Access journal Religions. In the Spring quarter (2020), Dr. Singh participated in three Qualifying Exams (Written and Oral) of his three doctoral students, Ali Samji, Tejpal Singh Bainiwal and Adam Tyson. Finally, Dr. Singh was pleasantly surprised by the good news of his Advancement to Distinguished Professor, Above Scale, effective July 1, 2020.



# Michael Alexander

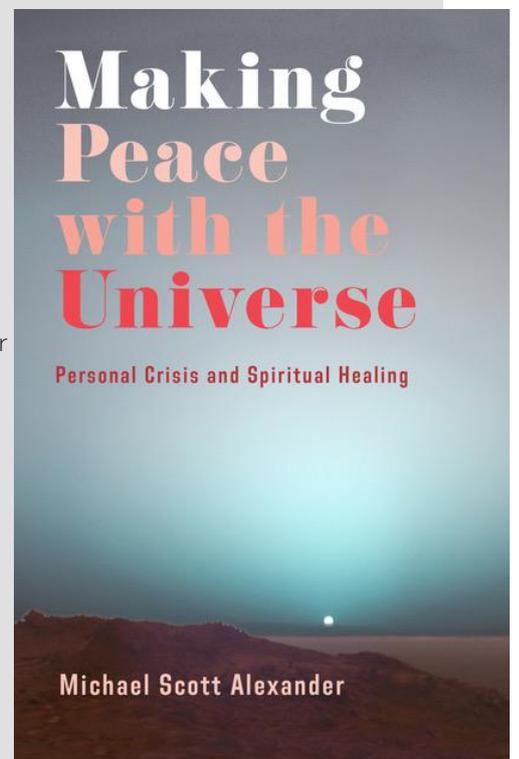
Dr. Alexander is glad to announce the publication date of his new book *Making Peace with the Universe: Personal Crisis and Spiritual Healing* (Columbia University Press) – November 3rd, Election Day! The press is betting we may need some spiritual healing this holiday season!

The book considers human spirituality as the original form of therapy. Mixing scholarly learning with episodes from his own skeptical quest, Dr. Alexander recasts classic spiritual confessions as psychological case histories, showing how they remain radical and deeply meaningful even in an age of scientific psychology. These classic spiritual confessions offer a model of therapy through spiritual adventure.

As holder of the Maimonides Chair in Jewish studies, Dr. Alexander was honored to host several events for the UCR community, even during COVID. One special event was a Zoom lecture delivered by Professor Joshua Landis of the University of Oklahoma about “Oil, COVID, and the New Middle East.” That talk involved partnership with Religious Studies faculty Dr. Muhamad Ali and UCR’s program in Middle East & Islamic Studies.

Another Jewish Studies event, a lecture and jazz guitar recital with Professor Peter Curtis of Riverside City College, resulted in the production of a spectacular jazz album “Christmas With Your Jewish Boyfriend.” The album and lecture are based on Curtis’s own guitar arrangements of Christmas music written by Jewish people. It turns out that there are many of these! Dr. Alexander hopes to have Peter back and swinging with us this holiday season.

The Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies was also glad to support several graduate student research projects regarding racism, genocide, anti-Semitism, and episodes of ethnic cleansing, all of them unfortunately still timely topics. Remy Ilona of the Religious Studies department used Genocide Studies grants to research the historical connections between the Nazi propaganda campaigns and episodes of sub-Saharan anti-Semitism. Benjamin Fields of the department of Sociology received funds to study Jewish identity in the wake of the Poway Synagogue shooting outside of San Diego.



# Matthew King



Matthew has been on research fellowship leave this past academic year; first as a senior research fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Leipzig, Germany and then as a Mellon Foundation fellow at CIS. In addition to participating in some interesting panels at the AAR and elsewhere focused on topics such as decolonizing Buddhist/Tibetan Studies, Matthew has been widely introducing his 2019 book *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire* to audiences in Europe, Canada, and the US, including a fun little book tour that included stops at Columbia, UVA, and IU.

Matthew has published several pieces this year in forums such as *JAAR*, *Asiatische Studien*, and *The Journal of Chinese Religions*, as well as several chapters in a landmark volume entitled *Sources of Mongolian Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2020). In 2020-21, Matthew's primary work has been to complete a new book manuscript entitled *Faxian and the Return of the Repressed in the Humanities*. This book follows the first study of Buddhist Asia in Europe (Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat's 1836 *Relations des Royaumes Bouddhiques*, a study and translation of Faxian's fifth century *Foguo ji* 佛國記), as it was received, translated, and radically reinterpreted in Mongolian and Tibetan monastic contexts during the violent upheavals of the 1850s-1960s. Matthew is excited to share this story, which contains and exceeds the purificatory gestures of the human sciences and, thus, the political and epistemic sovereignty of "the West" and contiguous knowledge traditions from late imperial Inner Asia.



# GRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES

## Steven Quach



Steven Quach is a PhD candidate in Transnational Buddhism. This year, Steven will be focusing on his dissertation this year. His dissertation titled, "Digitally-mediated Buddhist epistemologies of the mind beyond the secular" is an interrogation of both traditional "Western" presentations of the secular and the decentering genealogies of its critics. It examines the current scholarly discourse on secularism, especially secular ways of knowing the mind, and locates its field sites in the active production of contemplative pedagogies at the ethnographic intersection of Buddhism, therapeutic health care, and neoliberal technologies. In addition to concluding the capstone for his designated emphasis in Medical and Health Humanities, he is also writing a piece on "Beat Buddhism," which will be published on the University of British Columbia's Database of Religious History website. Steven is also preparing a paper titled, "Mindfulness as Healing and Resistance: Buddhist Recovery in an Age of COVID Crisis" that will be presented at AAR's 2020 unit on Religions, Medicines, and Healing.

## Tejpaal Bainiwal



Tejpaal Singh Bainiwal passed his qualifying exams and advanced to candidacy, receiving his MA along the way. He joined the Steering Committee for the AAR Sikh Studies Unit and became the Chair of the Religions of Asia Unit for the AAR Western Region. Throughout the academic year, Tejpaal presented at several conferences including the AAR, AAR Western Region, and Dismantle Preservation Virtual Unconference. In March, he succeeded in designating San Joaquin Gurdwara as a Fresno County Historical Landmark - making it only the third Sikh American site in America to be recognized as a landmark. Currently, Tejpaal is working with educators from Stockton Unified School District to incorporate Sikh American narratives into the curriculum and is working with UCSC to develop curriculum for a UC-wide online Punjabi course. Finally, Tejpaal's articles were published in an edited volume: "Religious Violence Today: Faith and Conflict in the Modern World."

# Remy Ilona



Remy Ilona completed his second year at UCR. He really enjoyed taking RLST 202 in Spring 2020, a theory course with Professor Michael Alexander that explored the intersections of religion and science! After engagement with many of the readings that interrogate relationships between religion and the brain, intelligence, genes, neuro pathways, etc., Remy is of the opinion that science will not be able to eviscerate religion. And as religion will remain part of us, it is critical that scientists and religious studies scholars find avenues to work together. These two methods of understanding and managing the world and our affairs need not be seen as opposed to one another but as partners in progress. Taking synchronously held graduate seminars together in Spring helped Remy survive the lockdown!

# J Selke



J is elated to have completed their first year as a PhD student at UCR. While there are many impactful courses to choose from, their favorite course was Queer and Trans Studies in Religion, a course that reminded them of the need for imaginative and expansive theoretical frameworks around gender and sexuality within Religious Studies. Their scholarly interests in Trans Theory and embodiment were fortified through taking this course.

During Spring quarter, J published their first book review in the Gender and Sexuality section of Religious Studies Review. J also had their first experience TA'ing this summer for Introduction to the Bible. The undergraduate students who participated in this course created a space of expansive and critical thinking surrounding the Bible as a historical and literary document, reminding J of the importance of empathetic dialogue within the classroom, a practice that they will continue to foster within future classrooms.

# Kori Pacyniak

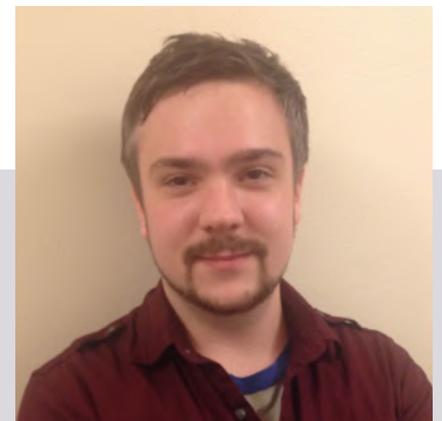
This past year, Kori presented their paper "From Deadpool Jesus to Disneybounding: Cosplay, Religion, and the Subversion of Gender Norms" at the 2019 annual meeting of AAR/SBL in full cosplay, examining the ways in which cosplay can be examined through a lens of gender and religion.



In February, they presented "Breaking through the Binary: Broadening Transgender Christian Rituals" at the UCR Conference on Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion. Kori was awarded the Lucille M. Durkin Scholarship from the Women's Ordination Conference for the 2019-2020 year. In addition to adapting to coursework and TA-ing during a pandemic, Kori adopted a new kitten who showed up in their front yard on Pride.

# Adam Tyson

During Spring Quarter 2020, Adam passed his doctoral exams under Dr. Ali's expert chairmanship and with the indispensable guidance of committee members Dr. Pashaura Singh and Dr. Ana Bajželj, as well as the History Department's Dr. Fariba Zarinebaf (Ottoman Empire) and Art History's Dr. Fatima Qureshi (Mughal Art and Architecture).



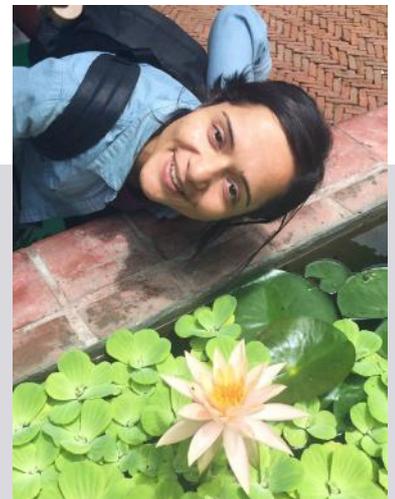
Adam is currently crafting the prospectus for his dissertation regarding the pantheistic philosophy of "Unity of Being" (Wahdat al-Wujud) and the debates it sparked among early modern Sufi authors. Adam finished an intensive language course in second-year Persian over the Summer and is looking forward to presenting his research on the Ottoman Sufi şeyh and revolutionary, Bedreddin (d.1421 c.e.) at AAR's Annual Conference this coming Winter on the panel "Theoretical Sufism and the Lived Human Experience".

# Danielle Dempsey



This year, Dani participated in the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship, which selects a cohort of PhD candidates from around and outside the country who do research in Queer and Trans Studies in Religion. She delivered a paper, together with her colleague Jess Rehman, entitled “On Ideological Colonization: Exploring the Relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and Colonial Constructions of ‘Gender Theory’” at the national American Academy of Religion meetings. Along with Jess and their colleague Katie Phillips, Dani began working as a co-area editor in gender and sexuality studies for the Religious Studies Review. She received the Holstein Graduate Prize in Religion and Social Justice for her dissertation chapter entitled “Queer, Sex, and Catholicism: Modernity and its Effects on Social Justice and Moral Theology.” She is pleased to announce that she successfully defended her dissertation in May and graduated in spring!

# Alina Pokhrel



Alina Pokhrel completed her last year of coursework and will be studying for her qualifying exams during the upcoming year. She was elated to be a recipient of the Khyentse Foundation Buddhist Studies Scholarship to continue with her Pāli studies this year. She is also incredibly grateful to Venerable Upali Sraman and Professor Ana Bajželj for their support and mentorship with her Pāli studies. She was also a part of Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies's Pāli Advanced Reading Course in August 2020 and greatly enjoyed translating portions of the Visuddhimagga with peers from across the world. In the Fall, she will continue to hone her skills in Pāli, and start French, which she is very excited about!

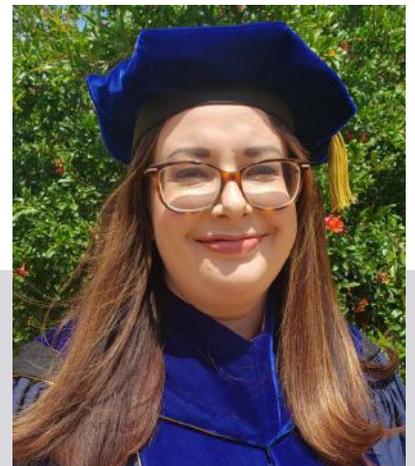
# Annie Trenkle

Annie is a retired aerospace engineering senior manager with a lifelong interest in philosophy, religions, personality, and the formation of belief. She is particularly interested in Self-Determination Theory and is researching an application to current religious trends. She has completed graduate courses in mathematics, philosophy, literature, ethics and religions. Annie is fluent in English, Turkish, Spanish and German (in-work). She retired August of 2019 to pursue an academic sabbatical in residence here at UCR. Annie is enjoying her grad school experience with the amazing staff and students and looking forward to a full return to in-classroom activities when it is safe to do so.



# Kathryn Phillips

Katie Phillips is set to defend her dissertation and graduate this summer in the beginning of September. She presented "The Disguised Saint: A Transgender Studies Approach to Matrona's Gender Presentation as a Eunuch," a section of her dissertation, at the national meeting of AAR. This year Katie was chosen as one of the fellows of the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship. Katie also became a co-editor with Dani Dempsey and Jessica Rehman under the area of gender and sexuality for Religious Studies Review. Katie, Dani, and Jess have prepared their section for several issues over the academic year, and Katie has contributed and published multiple book reviews for it.



# Kimberly Diaz

Kimberly recently TA'd for the "Jesus" (RLST 006) course over summer 2020 and found the experience very worthwhile and rewarding. She is currently working on a presentation for the Latinx Political Economy and Critical Thought Collective symposium and publication for a journal. With her free time, Kimberly is training for a local powerlifting competition.



L to R: Alina Pokhrel (right) at a meditation center in Bodhgaya and Tejpaul Baniwal distributing food in his neighborhood during the COVID-19 lockdown in April.

# MULTI-DISCIPLINARY UNIT UPDATES



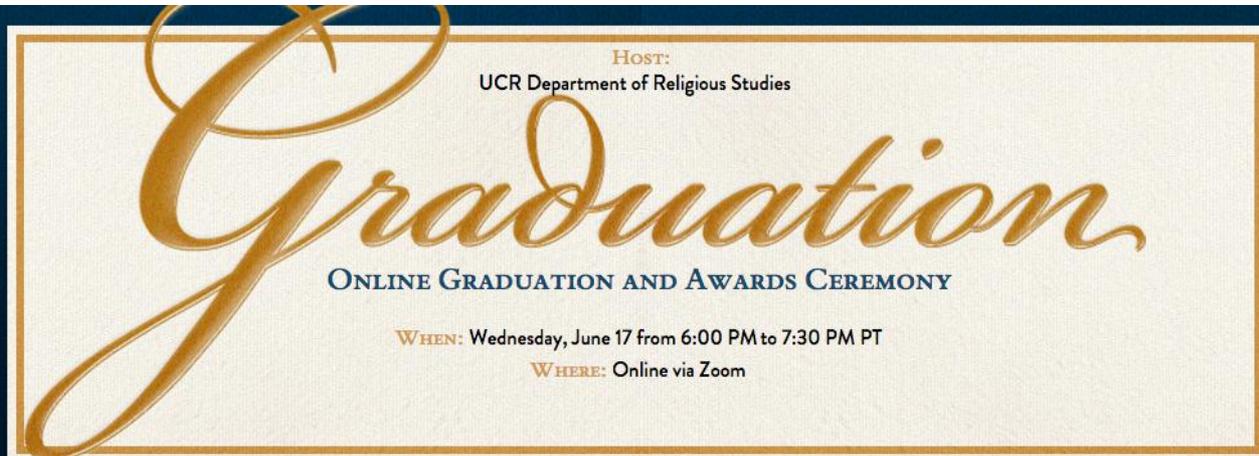
Diana Monroe-Shaw, FAO   Diana Marroquin, Analyst   Josie Ayala, Analyst   Alica Kofford, Analyst



Dawn Viebach, AP Assistant   Odie Jasso, Graduate SAO   Francesca Moreira,   Geneva Amador,  
Academic Personnel   Student Affairs Officer   Events Coordinator/  
Administrative Assistant   Events Coordinator/  
Administrative Assistant

The MDU gained a new staff member in 2020-2021. Alica Kofford joined the MDU team in March of 2020, she previously worked for the CHASS Dean's office and the department of Art History. In addition to overseeing Bibliographic Studies, the YOK center (Young Oak Kim) and CCNN (California Center for Native Nations) as of September 1st, she is now overseeing all Interdisciplinary Programs (previously under the direction of Diana Marroquin and Josie Ayala in the MDU). Alica has been a wonderful addition to the unit and we are all very excited that she has joined the MDU staff team. Diana Marroquin is still the Analyst for Religious Studies and the Media and Cultural Studies departments and Josie Ayala is still the Analyst for the Gender and Sexuality Studies and Ethnic Studies departments.

The MDU staff have been adapting to working remotely from home due to COVID-19 campus closures since March 16, 2020. Luckily, we are all able to perform our duties remotely and continue to support our departments and programs while physically not being in the MDU office. We meet regularly via MS Teams and Zoom meetings with each other and with faculty and students to provide assistance as needed. We look forward to being able to return to campus as soon as it is safe to do so.



## GRADUATION CEREMONY 2020

UCR's Department of Religious Studies hosted the first-ever online graduation and awards ceremony for 2020 graduates on June 17! We ceremonially graduated our majors, minors, and graduate students who finished school in fall 2019 or winter 2020, and those who have applied to graduate in the spring and summer quarters of 2020. Department awards and achievements were also announced.

We congratulate all the graduates and award recipients and wish them our best in all their future endeavors!

### **Degrees Awarded:**

#### Bachelor's Degree - RLST Majors

Marcos Aceves  
Valerie Dominguez  
Margaret Gardner  
Mina Hanna  
Guadalupe Palos

#### Bachelor's Degree - RLST Minors

Nazareth Baltodano  
Nicole Lewallen  
Jessica Rivera-Lopez  
Gabrielle Saldana  
Sarah West

#### Master's Degree & C.Phil.

Tejpaul Baniwal  
Steven Quach

#### Ph.D.

Danielle Dempsey  
Kathryn Phillips  
Jessica Rehman

#### C.Phil.

Adam Tyson  
Ali Samji

# DEPARTMENTAL AWARDS AND HONORS



We're delighted to share that we honored and supported many of our students through our awards and grants this year. These awards are our way of showing respect to (and encouraging) hard work that our students continue to put in their studies. Join us in expressing this gesture of honor, encouragement, and gratitude to our 2019-2020 award recipients!

## **2019-2020 Award Recipients:**

**EDWIN S. GAUSTAD AWARD** (For a student who has demonstrated interest in attending graduate school): Valerie Dominguez

**ACHIEVEMENT AWARD** (For a student who has demonstrated meritorious achievement): Claus Lucas Lopez

**HOLSTEIN CHAIR UNDERGRADUATE AWARD** (For demonstrated commitment to the connections between religion and social justice): Mina Hanna

**ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD** (For a student whose achievements demonstrate promise and potential): Adrian Sagrero

**BARBARA AND DONALD DONNER ESSAY AWARD:** Selena Macias; honorable mention to Tamara Mustafa

**SHRIMAD RAJCHANDRA ESSAY AWARD:** June O'Connor

**OUTSTANDING TEACHING ASSISTANT AWARD:** Hassanah El-Yacoubi

**DOUGLAS M. PARROTT GRADUATE SERVICE AWARD:** Tejpaul Baniwal

**HOLSTEIN GRADUATE PRIZE:** Danielle Dempsey; honorable mention to Misha Choudhry (English department), Tessa Harmon, Kori Pacyniak, and Kathryn Phillips

## **2019 Fellowship Recipients:**

**EUGENE COTA ROBLES AWARD (ECRA):** J Selke

**DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP STIPEND:** Alexandr Zamusinski

**DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP STIPEND:** Danya Mohammad

**DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP STIPEND:** Kimberly Diaz

## **2019-2020 GERA Grant Recipients:**

Kathryn Phillips, Dani Dempsey, Kim Diaz, Alina Pokhrel  
Steven Quach, Tejpaul Baniwal, Tessa Harmon

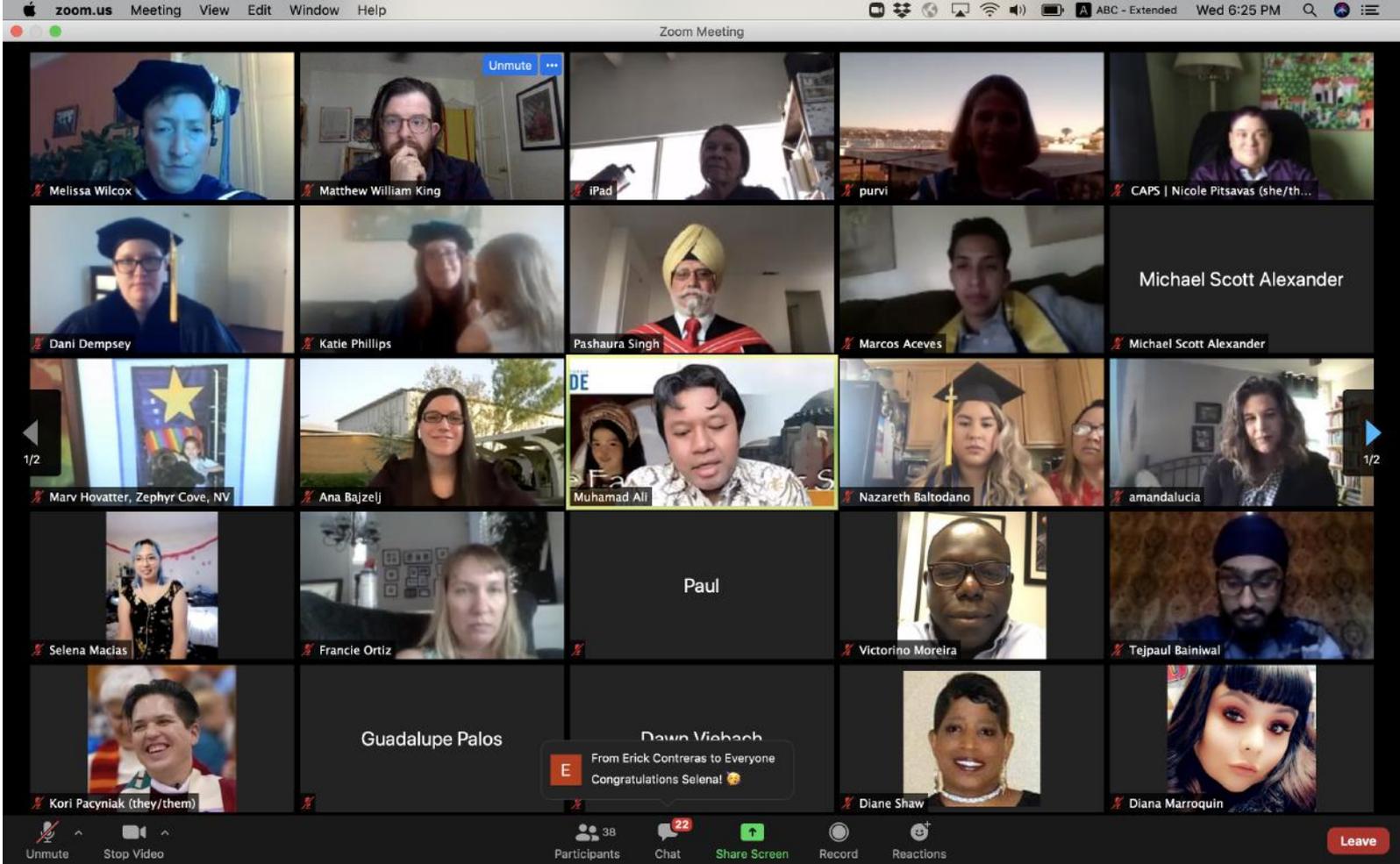
# PHOTO GALLERY



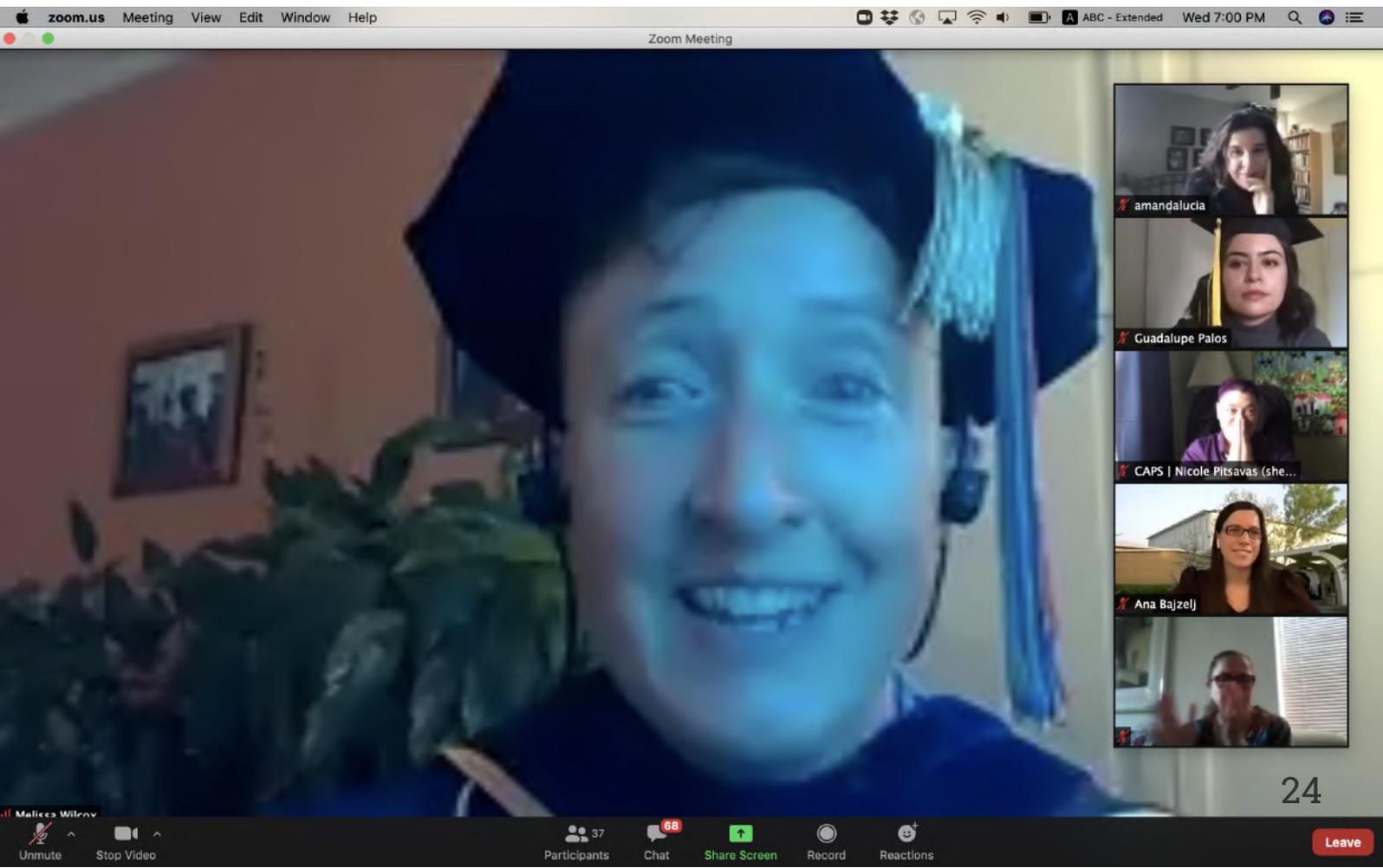
UCR Students (L to R) Danielle Demsey, Jess Rehman, Katie Phillips, Kori Pacyniak, Gurbeer Singh, and Tejpaul Baniwal presented at the AAR 2020.

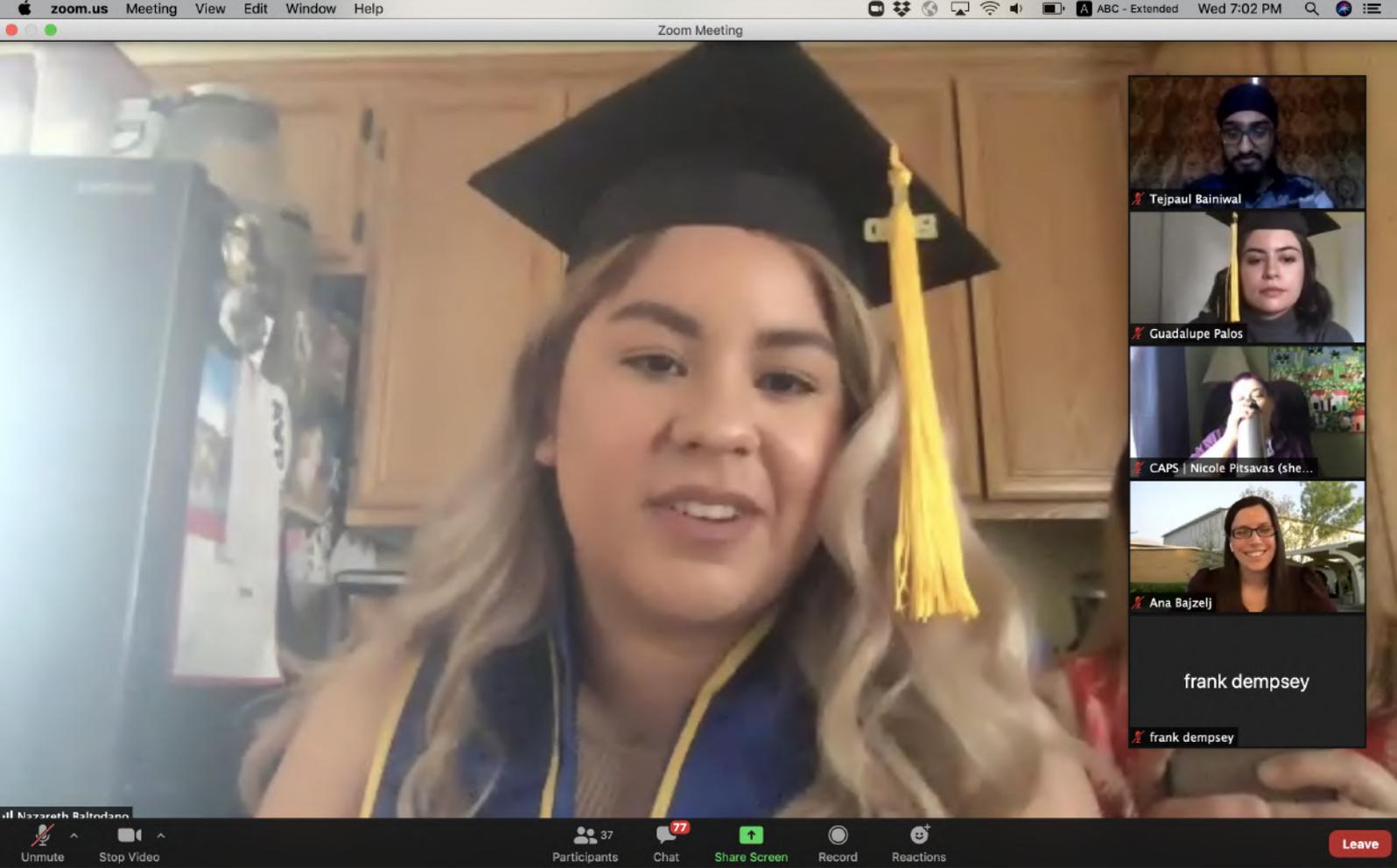


UCR Religious Studies undergraduate students at the Jain Center of Southern California

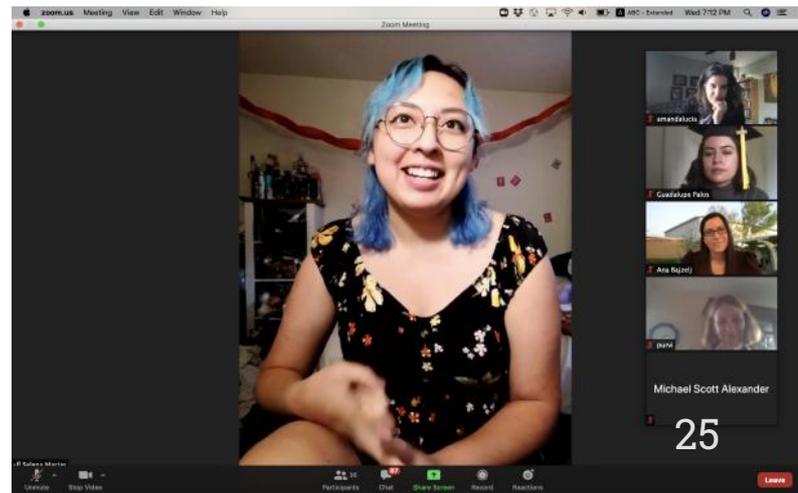
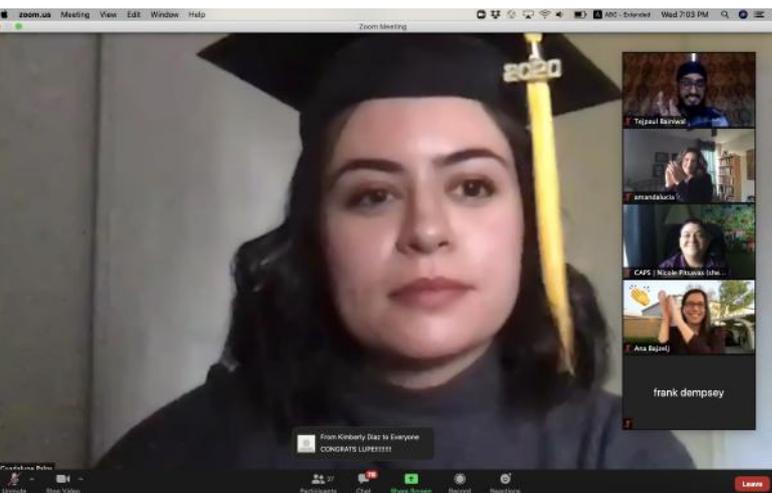
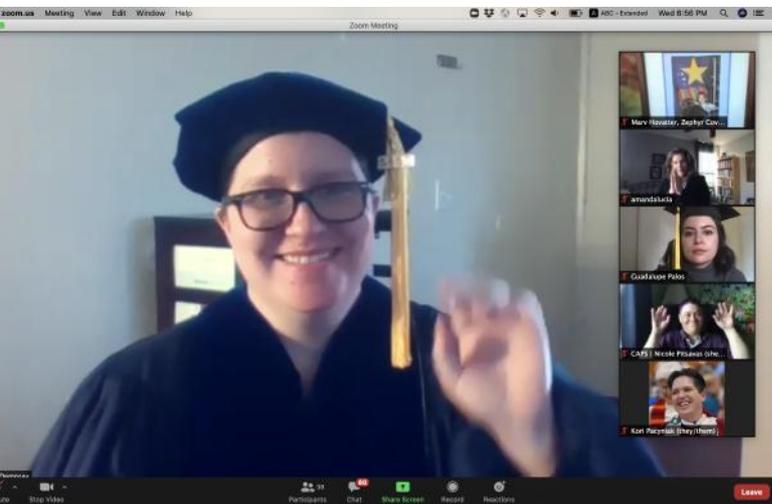


Photos from our virtual graduation and awards ceremony:  
Attendees pictured above and Dr. Wilcox greeting everyone with a smile!





Recent graduates don their caps and gowns for the virtual graduation ceremony!





RLST Students (L to R) Alexandr Zamusinski, Gurbeer Singh, Kimberly Diaz, Annie Trenkle, Kori Pacyniak, and J Selke with Dr. Muhamad Ali (center) on the last day of Winter quarter.

## ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Religious Studies began with just three full-time faculty members, Dr. Douglas Parrott, Dr. Jill Raitt, and Dr. Francis Cook. These faculty members, along with professors on loan from UCR's History Department, started the department on the road to where it is today. The Department of Religious Studies offers a wide range of courses covering all of the major religions of the world and exposing students to a wide variety of methodological and theoretical approaches to the academic study of religion. The Department offers undergraduate Majors and Minors in Religious Studies, and Master of Arts and Ph.D. degrees in Religious Studies. Students at all levels have the opportunity to explore in depth the diverse social, intellectual, ethical, and theoretical issues that arise when studying the manifestations and impacts of religion today and throughout human history.

Throughout the year, the Department hosts an active calendar of lectures, conferences, and other events centered on the interdisciplinary academic study of religion. The Department also hosts large, biennial international academic conferences on Sikh Studies and South Asian Religions sponsored by the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies and on queer and transgender studies in religion sponsored by the Holstein Family and Community Chair in Religious Studies.

For more information, please visit: <https://religiousstudies.ucr.edu/>



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Compiled by:  
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PhD Student

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