

Department of Religious Studies

— *Newsletter 2021-2022*



A Note from the Chair

As I close out my first three-year term as chair and look ahead to my new five-year term, I find myself wondering whether we are at last on the cusp of a real turning point in the COVID-19 pandemic – at least, it must be acknowledged, in relatively privileged communities and countries. Free SARS-CoV 2 vaccines are now available for all ages in the US, for those who are able to access them (and not all are); as I write this, the first cohort of children under 5 in the US has recently completed the full vaccination regimen and is impatiently awaiting the arrival of full immunity. The first updated vaccine was just recently approved, leading to growing speculation about long-term vaccination practices for COVID that parallel those for the flu. Many faculty members and graduate students in our department traveled this summer – for research, for education, to see family, for a vacation – for the first time in three years. We're not out of the woods yet, certainly, either here at UCR or on a global scale. Many of those in our department who traveled this summer also got COVID. UCR has announced that the compassionate caregiving accommodation – which allows those living with immunocompromised individuals or with children under 5 who are not attending in-person daycare or preschool to continue to work fully remotely – will be extended through at least the fall quarter. While mask mandates have been lifted on campus, masks are still strongly encouraged, and they are required for those who are not vaccinated. COVID-19 is not the flu, and the parallels only stretch so far.

The 2021-2022 academic year was rocky, to say the least. UCR moved toward reopening too quickly for some but not fast enough for others – and more slowly than most of the other UC campuses. Public policy changed rapidly and sometimes erratically at the national, state, and local levels, requiring UCR to shift with it while also following the dictates of the UC Office of the President and responding to the specific needs of our students, staff, and faculty.

There were important reasons for these shifts, and UCR responded admirably in many ways to the health, safety, and access concerns of everyone here, but not everyone had equal access to the resources and protections they needed, and the unpredictability introduced by shifting policies – introduced, in turn, by the unpredictability of SARS-CoV 2 – undermined any remaining hope of a triumphant return to in-person work and learning. It was a difficult time for everyone; it was a devastating time to be a teacher.

My first term as the chair of UCR's Department of Religious Studies was dominated by COVID. I took the reins from Professor Singh on July 1, 2019; that fall I moved slowly to begin new initiatives while also learning the specifics of chairing at UCR, since the skills of chairing transfer from one institution to another but the details largely don't. I didn't even make it through my second quarter as chair before the world came apart at the seams, and I have spent the subsequent two and a half years trying to keep our ship upright and everyone on board while the waters swirled around us. My dad was a sailor, and in my mind's eye the last two and a half years have been a bit like trying to guide a small sailboat through the Golden Gate or the mouth of the Columbia River at tide change a few days after a major rainstorm.

So as the waters ahead appear to have become smoother, as I look forward to another five years of chairing this department and wonder what chairing here is like without closed campuses and rapidly changing policies (each of which comes with its own reams of paperwork), I want both to honor the deep and lasting damage that many of us have sustained and to consider what we might have gained from our scrambling to keep going in the midst of a global pandemic. The harm is real, and acknowledging and grieving it is important. Not (necessarily) for "closure" or for "moving on," since all too often such mandates are simply other ways to suppress and silence harm, but instead to honor and create space for all that each of us has been through in the past several years – from COVID, and also from so many other ills and forms of violence that have arced through our societies. We bring all of this to the community we seek to forge in this department, and making space for it makes space for our humanity and also for change.

What we have perhaps gained from our collective struggle through the pandemic is a deeper understanding of the need for access, and an equally deepened understanding of the importance of in-person interaction. We have learned that mandatory attendance policies, for instance, create super-spreader events, and conversely we have learned that in the absence of in-person interaction classes become both silent voids and spaces for boundary-making and hate-filled attacks.

A Note from the Chair (cont.)

We have learned that flexibility, and listening to and accommodating the needs of others, leads more often to justice than to exploitation. We have learned compassion, and we have all been on the receiving end of its absence.

We seek in this department to create a community of scholars, sensitive to the inevitable inequities of institutional and social privilege yet striving also to counteract those inequities in whatever ways we can. As we work to build on the community we have managed – through the strength, resilience, and contributions of each and every student, staff member, and faculty member – to sustain over the past two and a half years, I hope we can continue to listen, to have compassion, and to make space for harm and suffering to be in the room – including for ourselves.

I leave you with a passing comment made by poet and UCI doctoral student Jos Charles during an NPR interview several months ago: “It may not be recovery. It may not be healing, even. It might just be wisdom. But there’s an After.”

I look forward to moving into this new After with all of you this year.

~ Melissa



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In Review



The 2021-2022 school year at the University of California, Riverside began with the continuous precarity of COVID-19 restrictions, with faculty, students, and staff alternating between online and in-person classes and activities. However, with spring quarter came a welcome revival of life on campus for students and faculty whose 'new normal' continues to ebb and flow.

Colloquium

Each year, the Department's Colloquium Speaker Series invites scholars on the leading edge of religious studies scholarship to talk with faculty and students about their upcoming or developing research. Curated by both faculty and graduate students within the department, the colloquium is open to all in our UCR community and beyond. The 2021-2022 school year offered a colloquium series rich in perspectives, traditions, and new outlooks on the field.



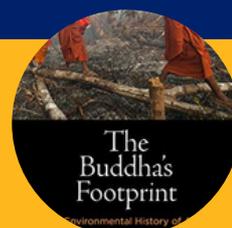
Savage Symbols: Native American Mascots in the U.S. Professor Annie Blazer, William & Mary



How the Hijab Became Brown Professor Kayla Renee Wheeler, Xavier University, Ohio



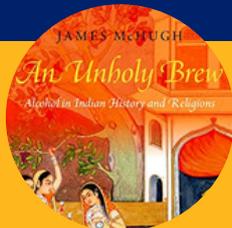
The Exorcist Effect Professor Joseph Laycock, Texas State University



"The Buddha's Footprint" Professor Johan Elverskog, Southern Methodist University



"In Light of Social Media: The Shift from Blind Orthodoxy in North American and British Sikh Youth" Gurbbeer Singh, 4th year PhD student



Churning An Unholy Brew, Professor James McHugh, USC



"Nation Beautiful: Muscular Christianity and the Quest for Perfection" Kimberly Diaz, third year PhD student



"Navigating between Race and Religion" Dr. Yonatan Binyam, UCLA

Workshops and Events

EMERGING SCHOLARS IN JAIN STUDIES



Associate Professor and Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies Ana Bajzelj, in partnership with colleagues at UC Davis, ran and continues to run an Emerging Scholars in Jain Studies lecture series.

NEW RESEARCH IN BUDDHIST STUDIES



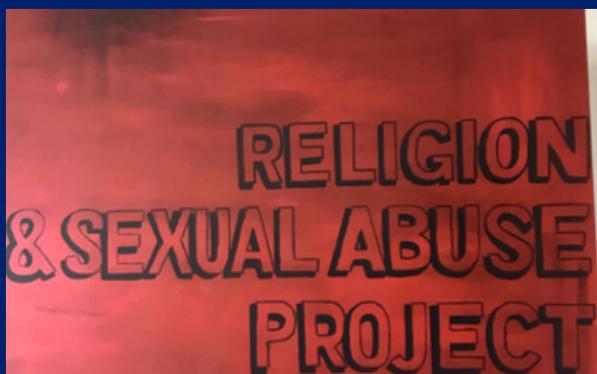
In late April, graduate students from both UCR and UCSB religious studies departments teamed up for a workshop on new research trajectories in Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist studies. From UCR, PhD Candidates Beth Miller and Stephen Quach presented work on their developing dissertations.

PUBLIC RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENT IN INNER ASIA



Professor Matthew King, in conjunction with colleagues from the Department of Asian Studies, the Department of Environment, Sustainability and Health Equity, and the Center for Ideas & Society, hosted a 2021-22 UCR Critical Asian Humanities Speaker Series.

Conferences

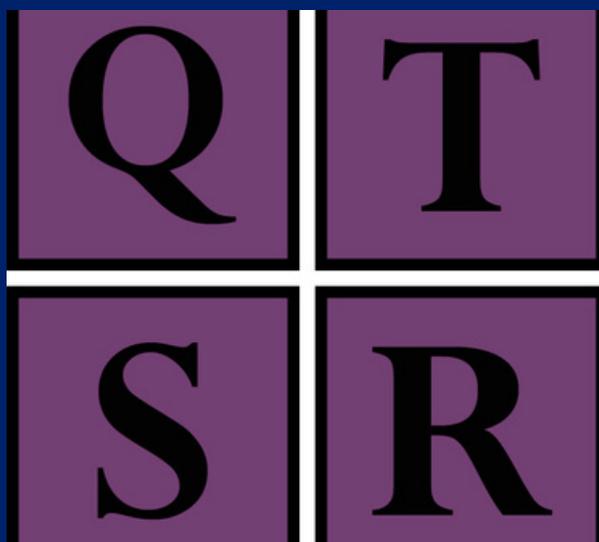


R&SAP

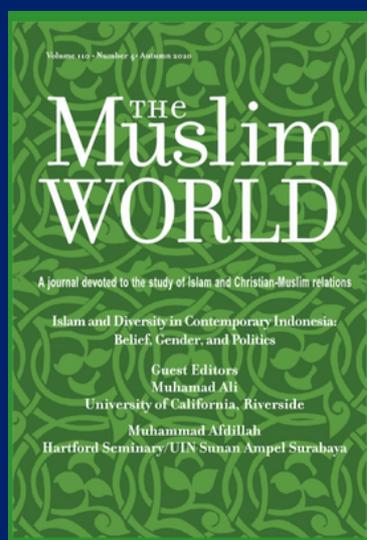
Professor Amanda Lucia led the first Religion and Sexual Abuse Project conference this past spring. The R&SAP is a collaboration between scholars of religion with a range of geographic and tradition expertise for understanding the dynamics of sexual abuse and misconduct in religious communities. This project aims to support fruitful conversations between different stakeholders in a range of domains including academia, faith-based community, media, and advocacy. You can read more about the project [here](#).

UCR-QTSR IV

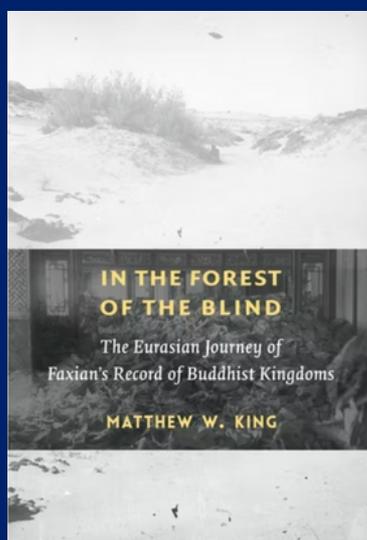
Dr. Wilcox headed up the fourth annual UCR Conference on Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion, where scholars from around the world came to present new work and works in progress on everything from racialized satanic priests to queer fungal rituals. See [here](#) for information on UCR-QTSR V



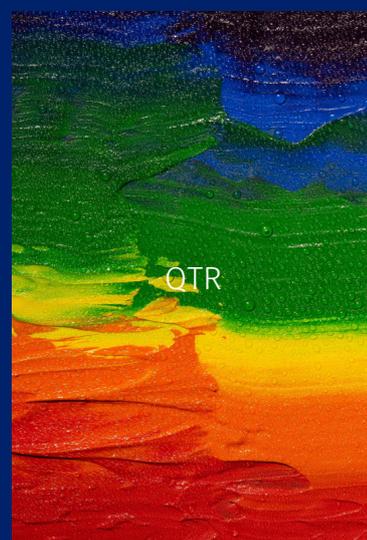
Publications



Professor Muhamad Ali co-edited a special issue on Islam and Diversity in Contemporary Indonesia in the Journal *The Muslim World* and contributed an article "Between Faith and Social Relations: The Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama's Fatwas and Ideas on Non-Muslims and Interreligious Relations."



Professor Matthew King's latest monograph, *In the Forest of the Blind: The Eurasian Journey of Faxian's Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* was published by Columbia University Press.



Professor Melissa Wilcox, in collaboration with Ball State Professor Joseph Marchal, is in the process of founding *QTR: A Journal of Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*. The first issue should appear in 2023. You can read more about the project [here](#).



Faculty and Student Updates

FROM OUR FACULTY



Michael Scott Alexander

Professor & Maimonides Endowed Chairholder

Professor Alexander has been supporting his recent book *Making Peace with the Universe: Personal Crisis and Spiritual Healing* with talks and interviews. Inspired by this last book regarding spirituality and therapy, he has begun research on his next project, a medical history of depression care over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, culminating in recent advances in psychiatric surgery. As the Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies, Prof. Alexander initiated two new annual talks last year: (1) The Mark & Pamela Rubin Lecture in Hate, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing; and (2) Israel & Palestine, Possible Futures, co-chaired with Prof. Muhamad Ali. A third annual talk will be inaugurated this academic year, the Robert & Cheryl Fey Lecture in Jewry and Innovation.



Muhammad Ali

Associate Professor

In addition to his teaching, Dr. Ali is currently working on a monograph on Islam and religious pluralism in modern Indonesia. Recently, Dr. Ali co-edited a special issue on Islam and Diversity in Contemporary Indonesia in the Journal *The Muslim World* and contributed an article "Between Faith and Social Relations: The Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama's Fatwas and Ideas on Non-Muslims and Interreligious Relations." He also co-edited another book in Indonesian, entitled *Karsa Untuk Bangsa* (The Will for the Nation): 66 Tahun Azyumardi Azra, CBE (Kompas). Beyond publications, Dr. Ali spoke at multiple conferences over the past year, mostly hosted by Indonesian universities and organizations, concerning a wide variety of issues, including Islamophobia, Palestine between Ideal and Reality; pandemics in Islamic history and civilization, and more. Notably, he presented on virtualizing ritual at the Association of Asian Studies Annual Conferences. Dr. Ali also was a panelist on the idea of afterlife in Islam with Religious Studies colleagues. Dr. Ali is also an associate editor of *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life*. He continues research on the monograph on religious pluralism by visiting sites in different cities in Indonesia.

FROM OUR FACULTY



Ana Bajželj

Associate Professor & Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies

In the past academic year, Dr. Ana Bajželj worked on a revised edition of *The A to Z of Jainism*, a popular dictionary of the Jain tradition, with her co-authors Kristi Wiley and Steven Vose. The rest of her research focused on Jain philosophy, primarily metaphysics and philosophy of mind. She gave a virtual presentation on the Jain understanding of liberated beings at the 49th Annual Conference on South Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and presented her work on the Jain understanding of causation at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (panel on non-one-sidedness, or *anekāntavāda*). She also delivered a paper on the Jain concept of intention at the 18th Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions. Additionally, she has been participating in a public-facing project on the global critical philosophy of religion, led by Nathan Loewen (University of Alabama), where she has been exploring the Jain conceptions of the self. With her Jain Studies colleague Lynna Dhanani (UC Davis), Dr. Bajželj established a virtual lecture series, “Emerging Scholars in Jain Studies.” Dr. Julie Hanlon (University of Chicago) and Dr. Tine Vekemans (Ghent University) delivered the first two lectures. Many scholars and Jain community members from all over the world attended the events. Dr. Bajželj also organized the Third Annual Shrimad Rajchandra Lecture, which was given by Dr. Julia Hegewald (University of Bonn).



Paul Chang

Assistant Professor

Professor Chang has been intensely focused on finishing his manuscript on the life of Watchman Nee, a Chinese pastor. He is wrapping up the final chapter and looking forward to completing a project that has been the result of years of research and writing. He has begun preliminary talks with a publisher with regard to his manuscript.

FROM OUR FACULTY



Amanda Lucia

Professor

During 2022-2023 while on sabbatical from UCR, Dr. Lucia will be a Visiting Fellow at King's College London, hosted by the [Religion & Sexual Abuse Project's](#) organizational partner [Inform](#). During that time, Lucia will be conducting research and writing for her next book project, which focuses on the social authority of celebrity gurus in modernity with particular attention to how they are represented and regulated through secular law (in civil and criminal court cases). This past year, Dr. Lucia was honored to serve as a keynote speaker at the Yoga Darśana Yoga Sādhana Conference in Krakow, Poland (May 2022), as a participant in a workshop on New Religious Movements in Erfurt, Germany (June 2022), and as a respondent for the [Yoga in Latin America Project](#) symposium at El Colegio de Mexico in Mexico City (September 2022). While in London, Dr. Lucia looks forward to speaking at Ghent University (Belgium), University of Bergen (Norway), University of Vienna (Austria), and EHESS (Paris, France), and also at AAR (Denver, Colorado) on an exciting panel on neoliberalism and spirituality with Andrea Jain and Susannah Crockford. In addition to completing many chapters, articles, and an edited volume that are currently "in press," in 2022, Dr. Lucia published a reprint of "Guru Sex: Charisma, Proxemic Desire, and the Haptic Logics of the Guru-Disciple Relationship" in the volume *Religious Authority in South Asia: Generating the Guru*, edited by István Keul and Srilata Raman (2022), an overview of the guru field, "The Contemporary Guru Field" in *Religion Compass* (2022), and "Gurus and Healing: Amma (Mata Amritanandamayi) at the Intersection of Miracles and Medicine," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Medicine, and Health*, edited by Dorothea Lüddeckens, Philipp Hetmanczyk, Pamela E. Klassen, and Justin B. Stein (2022).



Matthew King

Associate Professor

Dr. King will be on sabbatical for the 2022-2023 school year, attending speaking engagements about his recently published book, *In the Forest of the Blind*. Beyond presentations, Dr. King is also pursuing a new book project as a Research Scholar in the Weatherhead East Asia Institute at Columbia University in New York. This new book is a methodological experiment in combining the environmental humanities with intellectual history, focused on the making of history out of the material affordances of the Gobi Desert (18-20th centuries) in Buddhist, scientific, Manchu, and missionary writing. In winter and spring of 2023, Dr. King hopes to do archival work in Europe and Mongolia. Additionally, Dr. King hopes to complete an annotated English translation of a very large 17th century Tibetan history called the Sa skya'i gdan rabs, a remarkable (but complicated!) work about the religious history of India, Renaissance Period Tibet (11-13th centuries), and the New Translation schools. This project is funded by a grant from the Sachen Foundation and is being undertaken with Dr. King's co-author, Khenpo Kunga Sherab.

FROM OUR FACULTY



Pashaura Singh

Professor & Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair

Dr. Pashaura Singh remained creatively busy in delivering online presidential address / keynote speeches / discussions at eight international webinars on Guru Tegh Bahadur's Teachings and Sacrifice to mark his 400th Birth Anniversary. His major article on "Fearlessness and Human Justice: Exploring Guru Tegh Bahadur's Teachings and Sacrifice from a Fresh Perspective" was published in *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2021). Another article on "Construction of Authority within the Sikh Panth and its Challenges" was accepted for publication in the volume *Global Sikhs: Histories, Practices and Identities*, edited by Opinderjit Kaur Takhar and Doris Jakobsh for the Routledge Press in London and New York. Dr. Singh, along with his team of graduate students, organized a very successful online conference on November 13, 2021, to celebrate Guru Tegh Bahadur's 400th birth anniversary. The manuscript of his co-edited volume, *The Sikh World*, was finally delivered to Routledge Press in the UK for publication. His doctoral student, Gurbeer Singh, passed his Doctoral Qualifying Exam in Spring 2022.



Melissa M. Wilcox

Professor and Holstein Chair; Department Chair

Professor Melissa M. Wilcox has spent the majority of the past year steering the department through the choppy waters of ever-shifting COVID policies. Professor Wilcox found time in the fall, though, for a few online presentations, including an international workshop for graduate students working on gender and religion, a keynote address at an autumn school for scholars of lived religion in Norway, a contribution to a lecture series on religious studies theory & methods co-sponsored by the universities of Hamburg and Heidelberg, and a panel response at a conference on religion and the postsecular at the University of Vienna. Professor Wilcox has also been working with Professor Tammy Ho of UCR's Gender and Sexuality Studies department and Professor Ashon T. Crawley to develop the Hauntings book series with NYU Press, working with Professor Joseph A. Marchal at Ball State University to launch the first-ever journal for queer and trans studies in religion, and working with an impressive slate of prominent and emerging scholars from around the world to produce the first-ever research handbook on queer and trans studies in religion. Professor Wilcox looks forward to sleeping in about five years, and more imminently to restarting a long-stalled research project on religion and spirituality in trans and queer leather, BDSM, and kink spaces. Look for Professor Wilcox's most recent creative work in the forthcoming *Machines in Between* project at machinesinbetween.com.

Student Updates



Stephen Quach, PhD Candidate

This fall, Stephen enters his final quarter as a PhD candidate. Having written major portions of his dissertation—including chapters on the biomedical, psycho-medical, and socio-medical territories of the secular mind in peer-led Buddhist therapeutics—he aims to produce a publishable manuscript in the coming months. In the last year, Quach has taken a post as the East Asian book review editor for Taylor&Francis. Over the summer, he spoke about his experience as an Asian American, first-generation college student on a mentorship panel at the Asian Pacific American Religions Research Initiative. He was also recently invited by Professor Tammy Ho at UCR to contribute to the Transformative Hope project which offers a video series on religious responses of Asian American elders to racism. His role in this project to address the surge of anti-Asian racism will be to host screenings of these videos at religious places in his hometown of San Diego and to collect interviews from elders as part of a public archive of local Asian-American experiences during the COVID pandemic.

J Selke, PhD Candidate

Over the course of this past year, J completed their reading year, culminating with Qualifying Exams which were passed with distinction. J also completed their Master's Thesis on the co-constitution of religion and sexuality for Gay Satanists on Twitter in June of this year, and presented their Master's Thesis research in the Gay Men and Religion Unit of The American Academy of Religion at the November 2021 Annual Meeting. Other research from this project will be presented at the November 2022 Annual Meeting in the Popular Culture and Religion Unit. J also presented two invited classroom lectures at San Diego State University and Defiance College, covering topics surrounding Satanism, Sexuality, and Transgender Identity. J is currently working on their dissertation proposal on the areas of queer theory, transgender theory, popular culture, horror, and representations of the devil. Their research investigates contemporary and historical popular manifestations of the Satanic figure in Satanism, Occultism, and Witchcraft through a queer, transgender, and feminist lens. Outside of classroom spaces, J serves as a Mental Health Taskforce member for the "Engaging the Academy to Address Underrepresented Graduate Students' Mental Health Needs" capacity-building project and mentors fellow graduate students within and outside of the Religious Studies department through the Graduate Student Mentorship Program.



Christopher Valencia, PhD Student



Chris's research focuses on 20th and 21st century Christianity, Latin American Christianity, and religion in marginalized communities. His first year at UCR was spent completing coursework and TAing, which provided him a unique opportunity to gain teaching experience during the pandemic. After completing his first year at UCR, he participated in the Hispanic Theological Initiative's Virtual Professional Development Conference where he was selected to join a small cohort of students to take professionalization courses. The HTI supports PhD students during their program and beyond. He also completed a course entitled: "Religion & Cities: Racial Inequities and Justice Oriented Work," with UCR Alumni, Dr. Harold Morales, which allowed us to have some great conversations about how religion and cities engage and influence one another. At its completion, Valencia wrote a research paper discussing marginalized religious groups in the Los Angeles area attempting to reframe overarching narratives about these communities by specifically highlighting the religious communities, artwork, and themes represented and expressed on the city's streets. Valencia hopes to continue building on this kind of work in his own studies.

Student Updates



Brigid Boll, PhD Student

Brigid began her time at UCR last September after completing her MA at the University of Chicago's Divinity school. She spent her first year at UCR completing coursework and working as a TA in the Religious Studies Department. In addition to her coursework and teaching, Brigid acts as the communications assistant for the Religious Studies Department and is the co-founder and president of the Religious Studies GSA. This summer, she spent 2 months in Mysore, Karnataka, India, on the American Institute of Indian Studies Kannada summer language intensive. She also began preliminary dissertation research into the Ashtanga yoga community. Her first book review on Kristen Bloomer's *Possessed by the Virgin*, is set for publication in the next edition of Rice University's *Religious Studies Review*.

Tejpaul Singh Bainiwal, PhD Candidate

For the past year, I've been collecting data through oral histories and exploring Stockton Gurdwara's archive. Given that this is the first scholarly project to look at the archive, there's so much to unpack. These archives cover several different aspects of the Sikh community from 1911 to the present, including meeting minutes of the management committee in which current events and the evolution of Sikhi in the United States is discussed over the years. With so much information, I've been struggling to figure out how to organize my dissertation, but I think I finally got it! Now I just need to learn how to not get so excited and sidetracked by everything I'm reading from the Stockton Gurdwara archive. I hope to have my Introduction complete within the next month. Additionally, this past year, three of my articles were published: "The Pen, the Keyboard, and Resistance: Role of Social Media in the Farmers' Protest." In *The Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies*, Global Institute for Sikh Studies, 2022., "Historicizing and preserving the present: The role of music during the Farmers' Protest." In *Sikh Formations*, Taylor and Francis, 2022., "Model minority privilege and brown silence: Sikh Americans and the Black Lives Matter movement." In *Sikh Formations*, Taylor and Francis, 2022.



Danya Mohammad, PhD Student

Mohammad is a fourth year PhD student, whose research is on Islamic Studies and shared spaced spaces. More specifically, Mohammad's work is examining the chronology of Islamic Jerusalem over a time span of about 1400 years. Mohammad recently published a book review on Shakira Hussein's book, *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim Women Since 9/11*.

Kimberly Diaz, PhD Candidate

This summer, Kim presented, "Nearing God's Reality: Muscular Christian Healthy-Mindedness as a Negotiation Between Jamesian, Hegelian, and Marxist Theory" at the Critical Approaches to the Study of Religion Conference held at Queen's University Belfast. She also has a book review in preparation for the journal, *Latin American Perspectives*, that examines recent scholarly works on Latin American religions and liberation theology/philosophy.



Alumni Corner



Dr. Cristina Rosetti

Assistant Professor of Humanities, Utah Tech University

Cristina Rosetti graduated in 2019. Her research focuses on the history and lived experience of Mormon fundamentalism in the Intermountain West. Her dissertation, “Spirits in Zion,” examined the history of spirit communication among minority Mormon groups. In 2022, she accepted an Assistant Professor of Humanities position at Utah Tech University in St. George, UT.

Her first book, *Saint Joseph White Musser: A Mormon Prophet*, is a forthcoming intellectual biography on the father of the Mormon fundamentalist movement published by the University of Illinois Press.

In addition, she received a contract from Signature Books to publish *Saint: The Journals and Correspondences of Saint Joseph White Musser, 1897–1954*, a documentary history of Musser’s diaries and correspondences. She is currently annotating his diaries with her colleague, Bryan Buchanan.

Along with her book projects, Cristina has published a number of articles in various academic journals. She is on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Mormon History*, the Editorial Advisory Board of *Mormon Studies Review*, and the Non-Fiction Review Editor for *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.

In addition to academic research, Cristina has appeared on numerous podcasts and news programs. She is a frequent guest on The Sunstone History Podcast and the Year of Polygamy Podcast, and a contributor at the Juvenile Instructor, Religion Dispatches, and other popular religion outlets. Cristina is an outspoken advocate for the decriminalization of polygamy, as heard in her 2020 legislative testimonies for SB102, Utah’s bigamy amendment. In 2021 she served as an awareness campaign director for Cherish Families, Utah’s NGO for polygamous communities.

Alumni Corner



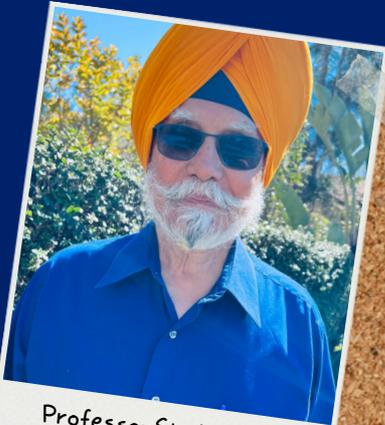
Dr. Kathryn Phillips

Krieger Visiting Scholar in Religious Studies, Defiance College

Katie Phillips is currently serving as the Krieger Visiting Scholar in Religious Studies at Defiance College in Northwest Ohio. This position includes creating programming in addition to teaching courses in Religious Studies. This programming has mostly been special events on campus, such as guest lecturers or film showings. Most recently Sarah Imhoff from Indiana University spoke on campus about constructions of Jewish masculinities. Katie is also acting as the advisor of DC Pride, a new student organization for LGBTQ+ students and allies.

Next year, Katie will continue at Defiance College in her new position as Schaffler Chair and Assistant Professor of Religious Studies. She is continuing her research from her dissertation on transmasculine saints in Christian late antiquity and hopes to have a book manuscript ready in the near future. Katie and her family are adjusting to life in the Midwest, particularly the weather and lack of diverse food options. She misses the carne asada fries almost as much as her friends in California.

Field Notes



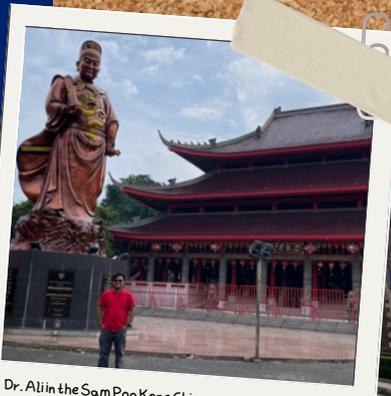
Professor Singh enjoys the summer sun!



Ph.D Student Kim Diaz stands in front of Queen's University Belfast, where she presented work over the summer



PhD Student Alba Rodriguez presents a paper at SASLI's summer language program



Dr. Alin at the Sam Poo Kong Chinese temple in the city of Semarang, believed to be originally founded by the Chinese Muslim explorer Zheng He, now shared by Indonesians of multiple religious denominations.



Dr. Bajželj walking the Kerry Way in Ireland, June 2022.



PhD Student Brigid Boll stands atop a mountain in Melkote, Karnataka, July 2022.



Amanda Lucia sits with organizers and participants at Yoga in Latin America Symposium, Mexico City, September 2022



Looking Ahead

Meet our New Faculty!



Dr. Elyse Ambrose, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Black Study

Ambrose is a blackqueer ethicist, creative, and educator whose research, art, and community praxes lie at the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and spirituality. Ambrose's forthcoming book, *A Living Archive: Embodying a Black Queer Ethics* (T&T Clark, Enquiries in Embodiment, Sexuality, and Social Ethics series) centers blackqueerness in constructing a communal-based ethics of sexuality. Their most recent photo-sonic exhibition, "Spirit in the Dark Body: Black Queer Expressions of the Im/material," premiered in November 2019 during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion at the L Street Fine Arts Gallery (San Diego, CA) and has shown at the House of Mark West (Bronx, NY) — one of the few black queer-owned galleries in the country. Ambrose's research has been supported by the Yale University Sarah Pettit Fund, the Forum for Theological Exploration, the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion, Columbia University's Center on African American Religion, Sexual Politics, and Social Justice, the Henry Luce Foundation, Auburn Seminary and CrossCurrents Journal.

Ambrose's work and commentary have been featured in the Huffington Post, Medium, ForHarriet.com, Vice, CBC Radio One's Tapestry, and Contemplating Now Podcast.



Dr. Sahin Acikgoz, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

Sahin Acikgoz is an Assistant Professor of Islam, Gender, and Sexuality in the Department of Religious Studies and a member of the executive committee of the Middle East and Islamic Studies Program. They were a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside from 2020 to 2022. They received their Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and LGBTQ Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where they cofounded the Transnational Gender and Sexuality Studies Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop and were the Mary Fair Croushore Graduate Fellow at the Institute for the Humanities. They were also the recipient of the 2019 Sarah Pettit Doctoral Fellowship in LGBT Studies at Yale University and the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship in Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion at UC Riverside. Their research areas are Queer and Trans Studies in Islam, Slavery, Gender and Sexuality in Islamicate Societies, Trans of Color Critique, Global South, Transnational Feminisms, and Gender Politics in the Middle East.

New Students

Noha Khalil, 1st year PhD Student

Hi, my name is Noha, I moved from Egypt to the US after the Arab Uprisings in 2011 and the subsequent military reign. My previous work was mainly in the Political Science field. I did my BA and Masters in the politics and the conflicts in the Middle East region. I was a research fellow at UCI in the Center for Ethic and Morality. In my PhD I seek to focus on women in Islam mainly in the early Islamic era.

Fadime Apaydin, 1st year PhD Student

Fadime Apaydin is excited to begin her first year as a Ph.D. student at UCR. In 2012, she received her B.A. in Religious Culture and Moral Education from Ankara University. She has been working as a religious education teacher at various levels of public schools in Turkey since 2012. Fadime earned her M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of South Florida in 2022, with a thesis titled "Interpreting 9/11: Religious or Political Event?" that examines some scholars' perspectives on the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She intends to conduct comparative research on the interplay of religion, politics, and cultural change at the intersection of global immigration and generational replacement, with a focus on Muslim immigrants.



Archa, 1st year PhD Student



My name is Archa which means one who's respected or worshipped. It's a pseudonym for Goddess Durga. I'm from Bengal - the ancient and diverse land located in the eastern part of my country India. I pursued my undergraduate degree in Journalism and Mass Communication (Honors) and my postgraduate degree in Women's Studies. You can also call me Luna Lilith OceanNyx.)O(As a multi-disciplinary researcher, I'm highly interested in Queer/Trans Studies in Religion, Pagan Studies, (Auto)ethnography, Queer/Trans Studies/Feminisms, Queer Feminist Media, Genders & Sexualities, etc. I'm a queer multitasking artist, activist, and academic. Singing before I learned how to speak, I'm trained in Hindustani Classical Vocals & Western Contemporary Vocals. I wrote my first poem when I was in Kindergarten and I was 12 when I wrote my first sapphic song. I'm also into abstract art and eco-art. I love creative writing which spans from quotes to novels. I enjoy playing musical instruments. I also know quite a few languages. My soul's happy when I'm creating, exploring, learning, performing, and traveling! I feel like I was born to bring positivity and peace to our world through my words and works. :)

Deoin Cleveland, 1st year PhD Student

I am a Southern California native, a first generation college student, and I did my undergraduate in Religious Studies at Cal State Long Beach while working in I.T. full time. My PhD research interests are in Contemporary Paganism and Western Esotericism with a particular focus on the changing landscape of Pagan identities and on contemporary esoteric traditions. Outside of UCR I am also studying for my MDiv. As for fun facts about me: I live in downtown Riverside with my partner, our five cats, and our old golden retriever. On the weekends I play D&D (among other games) and paint miniatures, and in the spring I perform as a face character at the Renaissance Faire in Irwindale.





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