

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Alumni Newsletter

WINTER 2011

{ IN THIS ISSUE: Visiting scholars, Grad students make an impact, Faculty adventures, New courses developed }

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Making sense of the weird

The department has initiated a new practice of honoring some of our PhD graduates by bringing them back to campus to give a lecture. This year, the featured speaker was Sarah Pike, PhD'98. Pike, whose book *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* was named a Choice "Outstanding Academic Title," is now professor of religious studies and director of the Humanities Center at California State University, Chico. She was on campus in April to deliver a public lecture and slide presentation on the Burning Man Festival. David Haberman interviewed her while she was here.



The Burning Man Festival

D.H.: What have been the lasting influences of your time at Indiana University?

S.P.: I have an enduring love for Bloomington and southern Indiana that helps me challenge Californians who are always using "Indiana" to make comments on "backwards thinking." I credit my time at IU for shaping and defining my intellectual self. Although the ground was laid at Duke where I did my undergraduate degree in religion, when I arrived at IU I soon realized the difference between my training by professors who had one foot in the Divinity School and a program that focused solely on the academic study of religion. I was forced, at first somewhat hesitatingly, to approach all religious phenomena critically, while at the same time remaining sympathetic to the people whose lives I was studying. And throughout my time at IU, I was pushed relentlessly in religious studies and also in women's studies (my minor) to be aware of my own biases and presuppositions.



SARAH PIKE

I was blessed in IU's Department of Religious Studies with not only permission, but also real encouragement, to pursue my interdisciplinary interests. Being able to take courses in anthropology and in folklore enriched my education, and I continue to draw on what I learned in these courses for my research and teaching. I never felt compelled to be loyal to one perspective or to

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Visiting scholars

This year, life in the department is enlivened by four visiting scholars.

Brandon Bayne is finishing his doctorate in the History of Christianity at Harvard University. His dissertation research centers on discourses of holy death, martyrdom, and suffering in the Jesuit missions of northwestern New Spain (colonial Mexico). In addition to teaching courses on religion in the United States, Bayne has been sharing his expertise as an ethnographer with the new Religious Exploration Club and his enthusiasm for Ultimate with faculty and graduate students who gather every Friday afternoon for a game in Bryan Park.

Sarah Imhoff received her PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 2010. Her current project explores the construction of American Jewish gender roles during the Progressive Era by focusing on religion, race, criminality, and acting. She also studies rabbinic literature with special attention to postmodern theories of literature, discourse, and gender. This year, she will be teaching classes in rabbinic literature and American Judaism in addition to perfecting her new skills in Ultimate.

Joshua Paddison is a visiting professor in religious studies and American studies, joining us as an American Council of Learned Societies New Faculty Fellow. Paddison received his PhD in history from UCLA in 2008, and his book *American Heathens: Religion, Race, and Reconstruction in California* will be published in the University of California Press's Western Histories series. His book examines contestations over the place of Native Americans and Chinese Americans from the Civil War to the 1890s, demonstrating the centrality of religion in racial formation and the importance of the American west in the story of Reconstruction. Among his other talents, Paddison is also an amateur cartoonist.

Like Paddison, **Matthew Suriano** comes to us by way of UCLA, where he received a PhD in Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitics. He brings his interest in archaeology and literary analysis and in combining text and artifacts to the classroom in courses on Hebrew bible and prophecy and death in Israelite religion and early Judaism. When not in the classroom, Suriano has been appreciating the forests and fishing—Monroe County's answer to California beaches.



Joshua Paddison, Matthew Suriano, Sarah Imhoff, and Brandon Bayne

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Graduate students make an impact

Both before and after formally embarking on dissertation research, our current graduate students are doing exciting work. What follows is a brief sampling from just three:

David Maldonado-Rivera, who is currently preparing for his doctoral exams, is interested in strategies of survival and adaptation in late antique Christianity and in using social network theories to explore the communal transformations and the fault lines of orthodoxy and heresy.

Nicole Karapangiotis, a scholar of Hinduism who is on the job market this year, is studying online religion. What does it mean to gaze upon gods and goddesses who are embodied in cyberspace (housed in virtual altars on computer screens)? What does it mean to use the computer to perform devotional ritual? She explores changing notions of purity and embodiment at play when devotees claim that gods and goddesses are embodied in temples, home altars, posters, and on the Internet.

Nicole Willock, who studies Tibetan Buddhism, is currently writing a dissertation about the life and writings of modern Tibet's great savant, Tseten Zhabdrung (1910–1985). Among the questions she explores: Which criteria do Tibetan-Buddhist intellectuals draw upon to articulate Tibetan identity within the People's Republic of China? How did a polymathic monk, a virtuoso in the traditional scholastic curriculum, engage with the project of secularism? This study in Tibetan intellectual and cultural history is an attempt to understand incongruent engagements with modernity in the fields of identity, literature, translation, and religion.



LAURA WALTER

Laura Walter was awarded the Hutton Honors College Burnett/Masters Junior Scholars Award. This merit award

is given for outstanding academic achievement as well as exceptional leadership and contributions to many fields of study at IU.

Undergraduate student has meaningful summer internship experience



NASSER NABHAN

During a summer of travel in 2009, Religious Studies minor Nasser Nabhan (class of 2011) was introduced to the director of the Holy Land Trust, an NGO in Palestine. After completing a summer internship at the NGO in 2010, Nabhan says with complete conviction, "It was the best summer of my life." In fact, if it weren't for student loans, he says, "I would go work for nothing."

Headquartered near Bethlehem, the Holy Land Trust is dedicated to the empowerment of the Palestinian community through non-violent means. Nabhan himself has ties to the area, for much of his family lives in Ramallah, a little more than ten miles away, and he speaks the local Arabic dialect. On the one hand, he says, this helps him to "form a bond" with locals, but it also makes them laugh. "They say I talk like a peasant," he says.

When he speaks of the Trust's activities, Nabhan divides them into several categories. There is the Palestine Summer Encounter Program, in which

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Phi Beta Kappa inductees

Three of our students were recently elected to Phi Beta Kappa: **Stephanie Jolly**, who is also getting a BS in biology; **Benjamin Linder**, who majors in anthropology and religious studies; and **Sarah Wilensky**, who has three majors—religious studies, Jewish studies, and political science and economics.

URSA update

'Tell me about yourself'

URSA got off to a great start this semester by creating a new game for the annual "Welcome Back Party." Dreamed up by **Lynette Anigbo** and **Gina Eastwood** the "Tell me about yourself" activity sent students on a scavenger hunt to match clues with professors. Other plans in the works include a new logo (what do you think?!) and numerous field trips, coordinated with the recently organized Religion Exploration Club.



{The tradition of brown-bag lunches and movie nights continues. A screening of the campy classic, "The Exorcist," drew more than 20 students on Halloween weekend, and **Rick Nance** and **Heather Blair** have both hosted lunch discussions.}

Pike

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one discipline but was encouraged to test a variety of approaches to the study of religion and forge my own way as much as possible. At the time (early 1990s), it was still unusual to incorporate fieldwork into religious studies research, so I felt very much on the cutting edge of the discipline. Thanks to **Bob Orsi**, who taught me how to ask good and hard questions in the field, and to Michael Jackson in anthropology, who helped me to be “radically” reflexive about my own position as a researcher, my work is appreciated by social scientists as well as religious studies scholars.

D.H.: What are some favorite memories of your time with the department?

S.P.: My favorite memories have to do with being part of a small cohort of IU’s first PhDs in the area of religious studies. The small classes and extra hours that faculty devoted to us were very special, although I took their attention for granted at the time. I know now that not all graduate students are so fortunate. The late **Sam Preus’** theory and methods course changed my intellectual life, but **Jo Ann Hackett**, **Rich Miller**, **Steve Stein** and **Bob Orsi** all held classes with us that were small (three to 10 students) and intense. The Marx-Freud reading group organized by Orsi and doctoral student **Jan Tarlin**, was probably my favorite intellectual endeavor because it took place completely on our own time and simply for the love of learning and talking about ideas. Other favorite memories are helping faculty with their research. I vividly remember the hours reading through Orsi’s notes on women’s devotions to St. Jude and trying to decipher Shaker handwriting on microfiche for Stein. These were simply delightful opportunities to watch and learn from scholars at work with their research materials.

D.H.: How do you see the field of religious studies today?

S.P.: The field is still struggling to be respected and understood, especially by our colleagues in other disciplines.

In Chico, I am fortunate to be in a department that, like IU’s, is highly respected across campus and includes professors who win awards for teaching and scholarship so that our colleagues have to at least suspect that we are not here just to train students for seminary! I think that we have to be better scholars than our colleagues in other disciplines; that the status of our field is not something to be taken for granted; and that our work requires constant attention to public relations with our students, our local

the weird.” My recent research interests have taken me to the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert and to a gathering of radical environmentalists deep in the Oregon forests in order to understand how people relate to dead loved ones on the one hand and to trees as spiritual beings on the other—in both cases through ritual practice and bodily experience. My interest in counter-cultural religions probably has its roots in **Jim Hart’s** seminar on communitarian religion when I started to wonder how and why people create

“My recent research interests have taken me to the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert and to a gathering of radical environmentalists deep in the Oregon forests ...”

communities, and the academy at large.

After being on numerous search committees at Chico, I have come to realize how unusual IU’s department was in its balance of breadth and depth. We were expected to be current on the history of the discipline and its major debates and to know our own field better than anyone else. I also realized in reading countless applicants’ files that IU was somewhat unusual in the extent of our training as teachers. We were associate instructors who watched and learned from outstanding teachers like **Mary Jo Weaver** and **Rich Miller** what it meant to capture the attention of our students and to inspire them. Even better, we were given opportunities to design and teach our own courses. By the time I was applying for jobs, I had been an A.I. in three different large undergraduate survey courses and had taught at least four of my own courses in religious studies and women’s studies. Not only did this make me attractive to future employers, but it also gave me a leg up on class preparation when I landed my first job.

D.H.: What is your current academic passion? How is this passion connected to your training at IU?

S.P.: My passion continues to be what one of my colleagues in the history department here calls “making sense of

alternative communities that challenge what they see as mainstream society. I was also influenced by **Steve Stein’s** research on the Shakers, which modeled for me the kind of critical yet sympathetic approach that is necessary to explain strange and unusual beliefs and practices to our students, colleagues, and the general public. I continually answer queries from the news media about new religious movements in a voice that was shaped by my teachers at IU. My ethnographic research on contemporary Pagans has allowed me to write about and consult on legal cases regarding religious freedom, most recently concerning the status of contemporary Pagans and Wiccans in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the California State Prison System. I credit IU and my professors, especially Orsi and Stein, with inculcating in me a lasting sympathy and desire to understand those who are marginalized or written out of history and public discourse.

Every single professor I encountered as a graduate student modeled the kind of intellectual life I desired and the passion for learning that is at the heart of that life. They were, for me, the quintessential scholar-teachers who cared deeply for their students but didn’t cut them any slack and who conveyed their excitement and erudition in the classroom as well as in their scholarly writing.

Faculty adventures

In case you wondered what the true perks of a religious studies major are, behold the wonderful adventures our faculty have in the course of their demanding jobs.

Lisa Sideris recently spent six months in Munich at the Rachel Carson Center. Given Munich's proximity to a variety of countries and the cheap fares resulting from the global economic collapse, she took a few memorable excursions, including trips to the Milan Cathedral and Verona, where she declined to visit the house where Juliet was not wooed by Romeo, as well as the tomb where Juliet is not buried. She visited Greece in November, where she hoped to show her son the street reportedly named after her grandmother's family (on the island of Chios) and to get a more definitive answer to the frequently asked question of whether she is related to David Sedaris.

David Brakke was in Europe last fall, working on his edition and translation of works by the Coptic monastic leader Shenoute of Atripe (died 465 at the age of 118 —really!). He was based in Muenster at the university's Institute for Egyptology and Coptology, but also made trips to Paris and London to collate medieval manuscripts. He also went to Egypt to visit Shenoute's monastery, the White Monastery near Sohag in southern Egypt.

Candy Brown travels the airwaves as she becomes an in-demand scholar on the hot topic of religion and healing. She spoke about "proximal intercessory prayer" in more than 150 English-language and 50 foreign interviews and stories on TV, radio, newspaper, and magazines including NBC TV, *Los Angeles Times*, CBS News, *Bloomington Herald-Times*, WFIU radio, *Indianapolis Star*, and WIBC radio.



DAVID HABERMAN

David Haberman was in northern India in January preparing a conference with faculty from Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies on the Yamuna River to be sponsored by the Forum on Religion and Ecology.

Richard Nance made a trip to Buryatia last year on an expedition organized by the Russian Academy of Sciences, as part of an ongoing project to catalog some of the Tibetan and Mongolian texts currently held by families in rural Buryatia (Russian Federation). He also spent a few weeks in Mongolia and Nepal, visiting Buddhist sites in both locations.

Charting courses

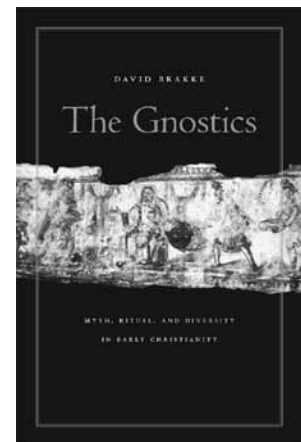
Faculty members have also been busy revising or creating new courses, and teaching both within and beyond IU.

Nancy Levene and **Rich Nance** co-taught the first version of a new gateway course, Introduction to Religion, which will now be offered every semester.

Constance Furey paired up with a colleague in the English department to co-teach a graduate course on neighbor love. Her undergraduate Hutton Honors College course, Body, Bible, and Religious Reform, has been venturing outside the classroom to take advantage

BOOKSHELF

We're very happy to announce the publication of two exciting new books by our faculty. **David Brakke's** *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* was published by Harvard University Press, and **Richard Miller's** *Terror, Religion, and Liberal Thought* appears in the series on Religion and Politics at Columbia University Press.



by Brakke



by Miller

Faculty news

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of the amazing resources on campus: the class ended a unit on iconoclasm



CONSTANCE
FUREY

with a trip to the IU Art Museum for a curator's tour of medieval and Reformation-era art. They'll also be at the Lilly Library this semester to look at the gory illustrations in a 16th century

edition of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. She also taught a course on "Controversial Calvin" at the summer 2010 Mini-University.

In recent semesters, **Bert Harrill** has developed a doctoral colloquium on Ancient Magic, a 400-level seminar on the Religions of Ancient Rome and an innovative version of "Paul and His Influence in Early Christianity" for the Hutton Honors College.

Candy Brown taught a summer 2010 Mini-University course, Can Religion Be Good or Bad for Your Health?

David Haberman taught a new graduate course this fall, Worshipful Interaction with Embodied Forms of Divinity, which

examines embodiment in theories of religion in general and its specific place in representations of Hinduism.

Sylvester Johnson led a workshop on Race & Religion in Antebellum America at a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for High School Teachers at the IUPUI Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture in Indianapolis.

David Brakke will teach the colloquium on ancient religions in the spring on the theme of "mysticism," a theme that comes from his recent work on gnosticism.

Richard Miller taught a new graduate level course, Religion and Social Criticism, an intellectual history of religion as a target or a source of social criticism, ranging from the conquest of the Americas to the early 20th century.



REBECCA
MANRING

Rebecca Manring, director of India Studies as well as associate professor of religious studies, will be teaching a new course, B420 The Indian Epic in Comparative Perspective. Students will study India's great epic the *Mahabharata* alongside a selection of recent literature

as they explore how and why the epic continues to exert such a strong hold over South Asian culture and expression.

Lisa Sideris offered a new 200-level course on Religion and Animals in spring 2010. She is also developing a new graduate seminar on Darwin and Religion that picks up on themes of Darwinism as a disenchanting and re-enchanted worldview.

Richard Nance is developing a new course on Buddhist art and its ritual uses, focused primarily on the Himalayan region.

Aaron Stalnaker has been working on the early Daoist text *Zhuangzi*. He taught a course last spring using three dueling translations of the text at once, reading small chunks of pages per session, to provoke students to think about translation and interpretation more carefully.



AARON
STAINAKER

Stephen Stein taught a graduate course on American Religious History in the Lay Deacons Program on weekends in June, July, and August at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

Summer internship

(continued from page 3)

foreigners do home-stays with refugees, visit Israeli settlements, and talk with both Israeli and Palestinian reporters. The goal, says Nabhan, is for participants to "become ambassadors" for peace and justice in the Middle East. The Trust works in education and leadership training and also gathers information,



which it uses to respond to local situations and to influence international policy.

This is where Nabhan's work as a field researcher came in. After researching and documenting Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes, for example, he wrote a brief paper summarizing recent events and the issues at stake. His supervisor then passed it on to the Norwegian foreign minister.

In another project, Nabhan assessed medical facilities in the village of Husan near Bethlehem. The Israeli government plans to enclose the village by building a wall around its perimeter and limit access to the hours of 8 am to 8 pm. After finding only one medical clinic with a physician who was only available twice a week, Nabhan wrote a report based on local residents' long list of medical necessities. The Trust then used the report to solicit donations for the needed medical supplies.

Nabhan sees his work at Holy Land Trust as a way to resist and remedy injustice in a non-violent fashion. He says it is about "bearing witness," and standing together with Palestinians and is convinced that standing with those who suffer and struggle is an end in itself. Does it make a difference? "It does," he says, "I know it does." Asked if he will go back, Nabhan responds unequivocally, "Oh yeah. This is my heart. This is my passion."

1980s

James E. Lindgren, BA'81, is an editor at the Carmel, Ind.-based market research company, Strategic Marketing & Research Inc. He lives in Indianapolis.

Caroline Dowd Higgins, BM'89, MM'95, has just published *This is Not the Career I Ordered: Empowering Strategies from Women who Recharged, Reignited, and Reinvented their Careers*. News about the book can be found at her website: www.carolinedowdhiggins.com.

Lanny K. Hollis, MA'89, writes that he received his PhD in urban education from Cleveland State University in 2009. He is assistant principal for student life at Cleveland Central Catholic High School in Cleveland. Hollis lives in Brooklyn, Ohio.

Lisa H. Sideris, BA'89, MA'97, PhD'00, is an associate professor in the IU Department of Religious Studies, having received tenure in 2009. She spent July–December 2010, on a fellowship in Munich, Germany, at the Rachel Carson Center for Environmental Studies where she was working on a new book project. The Center is a joint initiative of Ludwig Maximilians University and the Deutsches Museum of Science and Technology. In May 2008 SUNY Press published *Rachel Carson: Legacy and Challenge*, co-edited by Sideris. The book incorporates a range of perspectives on Carson, whose work inspired the environmental movement. Sideris lives in Bloomington.

1990s

Marcy Flickinger Ball, BA'96, and her husband, Jeremy, BA'95, JD'98, of Boise, Idaho, recently celebrated their 14th wedding anniversary. Jeremy is an associate professor of criminal justice at Boise State University. Marcy is a full-time homemaker and part-time nursery director for Bridgepoint Church in Boise. She writes, “We are the proud parents of Jackson – hopefully, a future Hoosier!”

Sonja E. Spear, MA'99, PhD'05, writes that she has published her dissertation as a monograph. The book, *Jesus the Jew: Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic Constructions of Jesus*

Drive around the world?

In July, **Ross M. Lewicki**, BA'07, and his Detroit-area friend, Todd Callaghan, left the U.S. to participate in the seventh annual Mongol Rally. Driving a used Chevy van, with only the aid of a compass and paper maps, the two negotiated a 10,000-mile trek from London to Ulan Bator, Mongolia. The route took Lewicki and Callaghan across three deserts, five mountain ranges, and a third of the planet to arrive at the Mongolian capital in just under five weeks. The pair raised more than \$1,500 for charities that benefit underprivileged families in Mongolia. As well as navigating some unforgiving terrain, the journey included the kind of challenges most tourists are not subject to — such as dealing with bribes and tariffs levied by shady border guards. To make matters worse, Lewicki's Chevy van — which had fewer than 10,000 miles on the odometer when purchased in Detroit — broke down as the pair entered Mongolia. Undaunted, Lewicki decided that having already come 9,000 miles, they were not going to miss out on the last 1,000. So they finished the journey by taxi. Despite numerous obstacles along the way, the pair finished 113th out of around 200 teams that completed the course. Lewicki is now back in Detroit and readjusting to life working in his family's auto parts business. You can read about his trip to Mongolia online at griswoldsmongolrally.com.

in an Age of Anti-Semitism, 1890-1940, was published in 2009 by VDM Verlag and is available on Amazon. Until recently, Spear taught introduction to religion and introduction to Judaism courses in the Department of Religious Studies at IUPUI. Her research and teaching interests embrace religion and nationalism, interfaith relations, and passion plays. She has relocated to Iowa City, Iowa, where her husband has taken a new position.

2000s

Nathan G. Alley, BAJ'01, is a staff attorney with the Environmental Defense Center in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Stephen C. Taysom, MA'03, PhD'06, is the author of *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries*, published in November by Indiana University Press. The book analyzes two of America's newer religious movements, the Shakers and the Mormons, which came to

be thought of as separate and distinct from mainstream Protestantism. Using archives and historical materials from the 19th century, Taysom shows how these groups actively maintained boundaries and created their own thriving, but insular communities. Taysom teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Cleveland State University. He lives in Beachwood, Ohio.

Jacqueline L. Walker, BAJ'06, is a marketing and communications writer and editor at the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. She writes, “Aside from my job at AAPM&R, I am also a freelance writer. I have written for Religion News Service, *Publishers Weekly*, *Relate* magazine, Relevant Media Group, Guideposts Publications, and others. I also maintain a religious news blog at www.ReligionTranscends.com.” Walker's blog is devoted to providing news about world religions without prejudice. She adds, “Information on the site provides education about various world religions in order to transcend the present state of affairs and come to a more coexistent, peaceful understanding” Walker lives in Oak Park, Ill.

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