



# ELON

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
Religion, Culture and Society

*Annual Report | 2016-17*



# WHAT IS “RELIGIOUS LITERACY”?

**E**lon University has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to educating its students, faculty, staff, and surrounding community about the impact that religious ideas and spiritual practices have on our everyday lives, the currents of our local and national cultures, and the major events of our times. Increasingly it is finding national recognition for its leadership in promoting excellence in scholarship, teaching, and public conversation about what religion is and how it functions. Through the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, the Religious Studies Department, and the work of many faculty across other departments on campus, Elon continues to champion what some people call “religious literacy.”

What constitutes religious literacy, and how would one measure it? I was invited this year to join an initiative spearheaded by the American Academy of Religion and funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation to explore those issues. Our final objective is to publish guidelines for defining what an educated person should know about religion and, therefore, what colleges and universities can be doing to ensure that our citizenry has the ability to make informed decisions about public policy and electoral candidates when questions about those matters involve religious groups, practices, issues, or

ideas. If we can all agree that understanding something about religion is important in a democratic and pluralistic society and that it is the responsibility of our educational institutions to foster that understanding, then what are the concrete learning benchmarks that we would like to see every college graduate meet?

These are some of the questions that the AAR taskforce on “Religious Literacy Collegewide” are asking. Our answers are still preliminary at this point, but among the things that members of our task force—who represent a range of institutional types, from community colleges to large, private universities—are considering are these:

- Distinguish reliable from unreliable information about religious groups
- Describe the internal diversity of at least one religious tradition
- Describe how religion has shaped a the history of a nation or community
- Distinguish confessional statements from within a tradition from descriptive statements about that tradition

It is a cliché to say we live in a polarized era, but I suspect that many reading this report would agree that meaningful and substantive understanding of those who are different than us can go a long distance towards bridging our

divides. Religious literacy should mean more than command of a few stray verses of someone else’s holy book. It would, in my opinion, include a basic appreciation for the history and complexity of any identity and the internally diverse character of any religious group.

I feel fortunate every day that I work at a university where the importance of religious literacy is widely recognized and where investments are regularly made to ensure that our students know something about the history and values of their neighbors in our complicated world. Elon’s Multifaith Strategic Plan, “Engaging Religions/Building Community,” which this report discusses on p. 20, is perhaps the most concrete and detailed expression of its commitment to educating global citizens who can engage with people of different religious convictions or none.

As this report will make clear, the CSRCS has the support of many, many campus partners in its endeavors. We are proud of the work Elon does to promote serious engagement with complex issues in the interests of a better future. I am happy to report about our accomplishments in 2016-17 and excited about the challenges that 2017-18 will present.

**Brian K. Pennington**  
Director of the CSRCS and  
Professor of Religious Studies

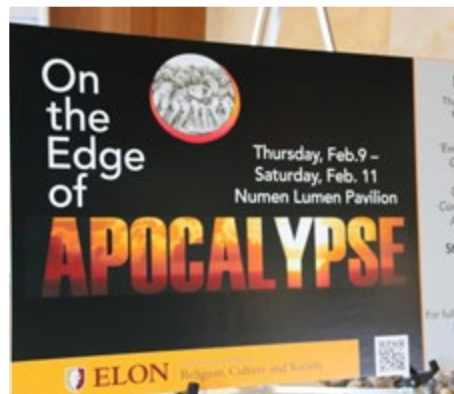
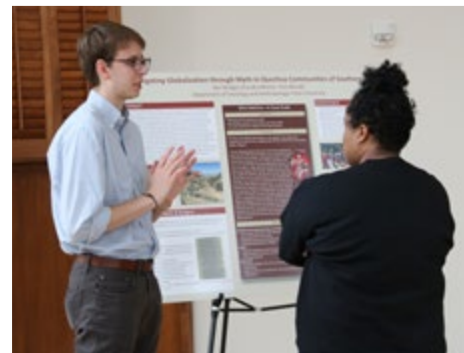
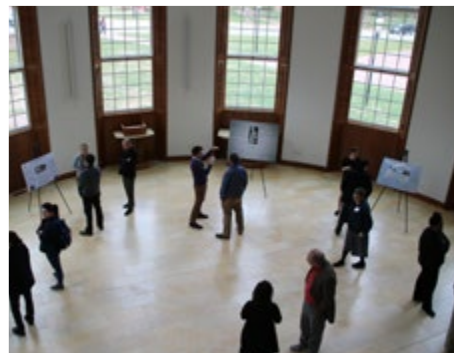


## MISSION STATEMENT

The Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society (CSRCS) highlights and promotes the interdisciplinary study of religion. This faculty-led center draws scholars from disciplines across Elon’s campus together with students, staff, community members, and experts from the region and beyond. Center initiatives foster teaching, scholarship, and exchange that cultivate intellectual community and civic action. Pursuing fulfillment of Elon’s commitment to multifaith education and engagement, the CSRCS convenes and facilitates dialogue that advances our understanding of the role of religion in society with intellectual rigor and academic integrity.



# CSRCS Debuts *Scholarly Symposium*



## “On the Edge” arrives with apocalyptic impact

The Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society crossed a major milestone this past February when it hosted its inaugural scholarly symposium called, “On the Edge: New Directions in the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion.”



{The 2017 symposium keynote speaker David Cook, of Rice University }

In this first year, faculty conveners Dr. Lynn Huber (Religious Studies) and Dr. Tom Mould (Anthropology) worked to identify and invite a set of scholars whose work could effectively explore the contours of the 2017 theme, “On the Edge of Apocalypse.” Eleven scholars from universities across North America accepted the invitation to present papers that traced the edges of apocalyptic thought and practice. The symposium’s five sessions met February 9-11 and covered such topics as “Apocalypse and Temporal Imaging,” “Apocalypse and Social Cohesion,” “Apocalypse and Gender in Popular Culture,” “Apocalypse as Contemporary Ideology” and “Apocalypse as Queer Unveiling.” The subjects of individual papers ranged widely and included Iranian horror films, Hindu nationalist supporters of Donald Trump, the Holy Land Experience theme park, a 16th-century



{ The 2017 symposium was convened by Elon Professors Tom Mould and Lynn Huber }

Indo-Afghan Islamic sectarian group, and the Netflix original series, “Unbreakable: Kimmy Schmidt.” The keynote by David Cook of Rice University, “Every Time a Horn Goes, Another Replaces It: Cyclicity and Conquest in Muslim Apocalypticism,” drew a standing room only crowd in McKinnon Hall in the Moseley Student Center. The symposium’s sessions attracted many Elon students and faculty as well. Elon students conducting undergraduate research in religion and anthropology had the opportunity to share their research with the visiting presenters during a poster session on Friday



afternoon. This session opened the door for productive conversations for both visitors and students alike.

The next "On the Edge" symposium will be held in 2019 to once again bring together scholars working at the theoretical and methodological boundaries of fields that have a stake in the critical analysis of religion—law, history, psychology, anthropology, literature/textual studies, philosophy, art history, political science, classics, and gender studies. The CSRCS is currently accepting proposals for the February 2019 theme.



You can watch a video short about the 2017 symposium on the apocalypse on our website [here](#).

## On the Edge of Apocalypse Presentations:

### Arun Chaudhuri

(York University)

"Hindu Nationalist Futures and the Perpetual Imagination of the End"

### David Cook

(Rice University)

"'Every Time a Horn Goes, Another Replaces It': Cyclicity and Conquest in Muslim Apocalypticism"

### Bob Royalty

(Wabash College)

"The Glorious Appearance Daily at 4:30 pm: Tensions and Contradictions in Contemporary Christian Apocalypticism"

### Robert Glenn Howard

(University of Wisconsin, Madison)

"Apocalypse Failed?: Vernacular Authority in a New Age Religious Movement"

### Megan Goodwin

(Syracuse University)

"Gendering the End Times: 'Apocalypse, Apocalypse, We Caused It with Our Dumbness'"

### Kristian Petersen

(University of Nebraska Omaha)

"The Shadow of the End: An Islamic Horror Film"

### Matthew Sutton

(Washington State University)

"Billy Graham's End of Days: The Mainstreaming of Fundamentalist Apocalypticism"

### Jonathan Herman

(Georgia State University)

"Meet the New Age, Same As the Old Age: Vanishing Millenarianism in the Western Appropriation of Daoism"

### Lynn Huber

(Elon University)

"Pulling Down the Sky': Queer Interpretation of Revelation and the Apocalypse of Keith Haring and William S. Burroughs"

### Kent Brintnall

(University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

"The Politics of Revelation: Unveiling Negativity in the Work of Lee Edelman and Georges Bataille"

### William Sherman

(Stanford University)

"Apocalypse, Again: Language and Repetition in a Qur'anic Imitation"



{ The six 2017 Multifaitth Scholars alongside Amy Allocco, Religious Studies (front left). }

## First Cohort Of Multifaitth Scholars Named

This spring Elon University named its first class of Multifaitth Scholars, a new program made possible by a 2016 seed grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. The Multifaitth Scholars program will offer a two-year, experientially rich, and academically rigorous educational opportunity for juniors and seniors who show great potential as

intellectually curious and socially engaged multifaitth leaders. Multifaitth Scholars will pursue coursework, mentored undergraduate research, and co-curricular engagement with local communities that will promote multifaitth learning and reflection on multifaitth issues. The fellowship will provide each student \$5,000 annually during their final two years at Elon.

Amy Allocco, associate professor of religious studies, will serve a three-year term as the founding director of the program. Allocco expressed her enthusiasm for the meaningful work with religious communities in the region that the fellowship will make possible for students. "Multifaitth scholars will be involved in crafting and establishing a community-based program dedicated to knowledge and engagement across lines of difference," Allocco said. "I am very excited to be a part of this opportunity for Elon to forge deeper ties with residents and communities of faith in the area."

Students across all majors are eligible to apply. Those selected who complete the Multifaitth Scholars program will possess a

uniquely strong foundation to enter multi-faith work of many kinds—including through employment in higher education, through positions within the expanding network of interfaith organizations in urban centers across the U.S., through coordinating outreach for communities of faith and non-profits, and in a growing number of governmental and non-governmental positions across the globe fostering relationships across religions and cultures.

## The 2017-19 Multifaith Scholars along with their majors and faculty mentors are:

**Samantha Crosier** (*English and Political Science*)  
**Mentor:** Geoffrey Claussen (*Religious Studies*)

**Kannon Hall** (*Strategic Communications and International Studies*)  
**Mentor:** Shereen Elgamal (*Arabic*)

**Kristina Meyer** (*Mathematics and Religious Studies*)  
**Mentor:** Toddie Peters (*Religious Studies*)

**Jocelyn Pietro** (*Public Health and Psychology*)  
**Mentor:** Amanda Tapler (*Public Health*)

**Styrling Rohr** (*Anthropology and Religious Studies*)  
**Mentor:** Amy Allocco (*Religious Studies*)

**Sophie Zinn** (*International Studies and Political Science*)  
**Mentor:** Brian Pennington (*Religious Studies*)

## The six Multi-faith Scholars will pursue projects ranging from:

- **Examining the role** of faith-based values in non-governmental organizations in India, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and the United States
- **Exploring historical attitudes** and contemporary interactions between Jews and Christians in Israel and the United States
- **Analyzing the ways** in which South Asian musical and performance traditions may cross religious boundaries among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians
- **Considering how** justice-oriented interfaith organizations interact with faith communities to promote participation in social justice work for their participants and congregations
- **Investigating religion** and secularism in the public sphere through research on migrant populations from Middle Eastern countries in Europe
- **Researching the training** practices of faith-based organizations in North Carolina and Texas as they prepare employees for interactions with refugees from diverse religious backgrounds.



## CSRCS channel on the web!

**Learning**  
**ON DEMAND** 

Many of the lectures sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society are available for viewing on its web channel, hosted by Elon's "[Learning on Demand](#)" platform.

# CSRCS PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS Middle East, American Culture, & Arts

## Senior negotiator and democracy activist speaks on the current state of the Syrian civil war and prospects for peace

On September 7, the CSRCS was proud to present Najib Ghabbian, a special representative for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces to the United States and the United Nations. Ghabbian helped the Elon community to better understand the current state of the Syrian civil war, the war-torn country's future, and the effect of the crisis in Syria on the rest of the world. Ghabbian is a Syrian pro-democracy activist and academic. He served on the board of the Day After Project, a cooperative movement by members of the Syrian opposition to outline a plan to rebuild the country and end the Syrian conflict once President Bashar al-Assad was



out of power. Ghadbian has been a central figure in the multinational negotiations over the shape of a post-conflict Syria as well as a champion for democracy in the Middle East and a democratic Syria. According to the United Nations, the Syrian crisis continues to be the “biggest humanitarian emergency of our era.” After five years of war and as many as 500,000 dead, nearly five million refugees have fled to other parts of the Middle East or Europe with no end to the conflict in sight. Ghadbian detailed the specific roles and objectives of many of the parties involved in the Syrian conflict and urged the Elon community to learn more about Syria, the region, and the conflict so that they could make informed decisions about how they can support Syrians and Syria’s refugees.



## Holocaust survivor packs LaRose, Encourages compassion & righteousness

**Z**ev Harel remembers arriving at Auschwitz when he was 15: “The sky was so beautiful, the sky was full of stars, but the stench,” he recalls, was horrid. Hundreds of students streamed into the LaRose Theater on May 3 for an opportunity many know will not be available to their generation for much longer—to hear first-hand the memories of a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. Harel, Professor Emeritus of Social Work at Cleveland State University and now a resident of Greensboro, fought for an independent Jewish state after the war. He had been interred at the

Mauthausen and Ebensee concentration camps before he was liberated by the US Army’s 3d Cavalry. Elon Hillel, The History Department, The Jewish Studies program, and The Center for Study of Religion, Culture, and Society came together to host Harel. His talk focused not on the horrors of the Holocaust but on inspiring students, who filled every seat in the auditorium and every available space on the floor, to be mindful of their blessings, to show compassion and understanding to others, and to stand up for righteousness as those who helped hide, protect, and liberate Jews during the Nazi era did.

## Renowned Scholar Amy-Jill Levine Discusses Jewish and Christian Approaches to Scripture

**T**he Truitt Center’s H. Sheldon Smith lecturer this year, Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, is a self-described “Yankee Jewish feminist who teaches in a predominately Christian divinity school in the buckle of the Bible Belt.” Dr. Levine, professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, delivered the lecture, “Agreeing to Disagree: How Jews and Christians Read Scripture Differently.” Levine is a prolific author of numerous books and articles on the Bible and biblical interpretation, including *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* and *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*.

## The Faces of Syria: Refugee Voices

The CSRCS was honored to assist in sponsoring another unique event dedicated to raising awareness about the disaster unfolding in Syria in September, this time by hearing from a Syrian refugee family recently settled in the area.

**T**he panel discussion focused on the family’s experience during the early years of the war and their journey from Syria to the U.S. This event was the latest in a series of campus-wide events and discussions that began in the midst of the Arab Spring protests of 2011 and has continued since. It tied directly to Dr. Ghadbian’s Sept. 7 talk and helped Elon students begin the academic year with a primer on the humanitarian crisis that is gripping the globe. The event was also sponsored by a set of campus partners who have been dedicated to education about events in Syria, including Speak Out for Syria, the International and Global Studies program, the Center for Public Affairs – Department of Political Science, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, PERCS, Peace and Conflict Studies, Department of History and Geography and the Truitt Center.



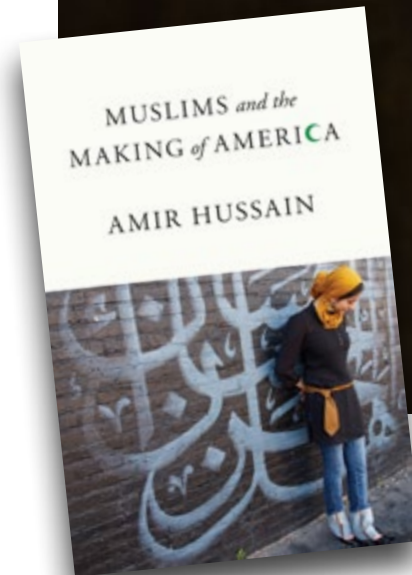
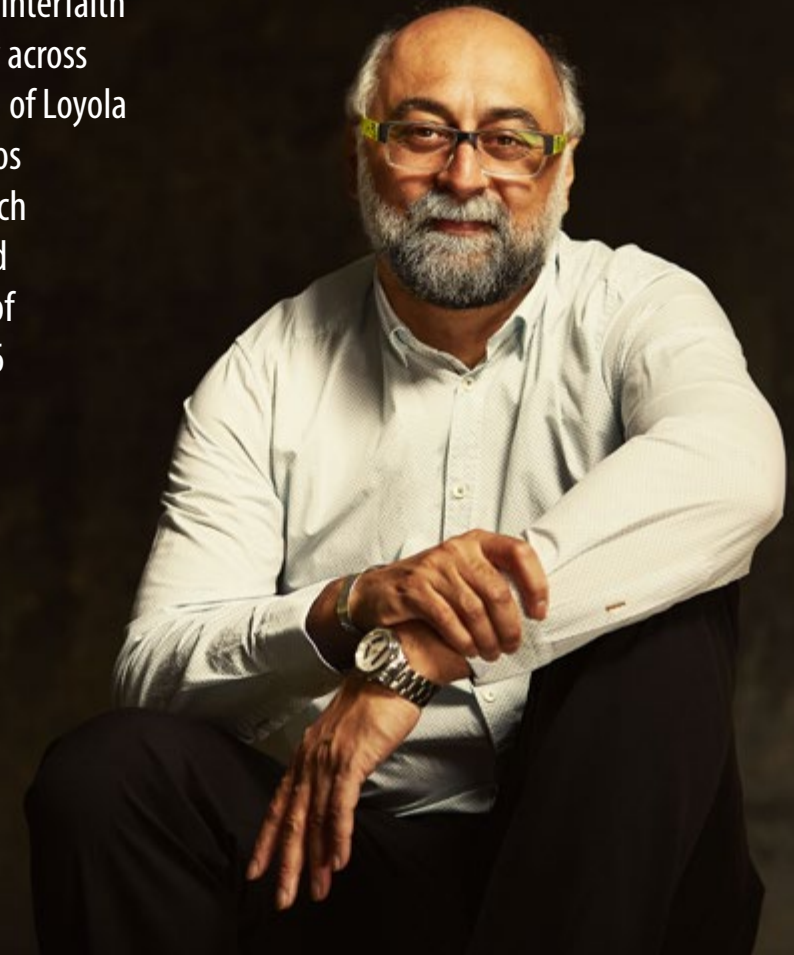
# ROOTS OF PEACE: Israeli-Palestinian dialogue

Israeli-Palestinian peace activists Ali Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger visited Elon's campus on October 7 with other members of their peacemaking organization, Roots. Awwad, a Palestinian activist for nonviolence and Schlesinger, an Israeli settler and advocate for coexistence, presented their vision of dignity, trust, mutual recognition, and respect between Israelis and Palestinians. Roots, which describes itself as "a

local Palestinian-Israeli initiative for understanding, nonviolence, and transformation," carries out ground-breaking grassroots projects and hosts dialogue groups. The event was co-sponsored by Elon Hillel, the Truitt Center, Jewish Studies, Middle East Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, Jewish Life, and the International and Global Studies program. Further details about the initiatives that Roots sponsors can be found at [www.friendsofroots.net](http://www.friendsofroots.net).



Longstanding advocate for interfaith work and theological study across traditions, Dr. Amir Hussain of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles visited Elon in March to present a lecture entitled "Muslims and the Making of America" based on his 2016 book of the same name.



## Popular author and interfaith activist highlights Muslim contributions to American culture

Recent US citizen, Hussain was born in Pakistan, grew up in Canada, and received his bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Toronto. He has been the co-editor of several textbooks including the fourth editions of *World Religions: Western Traditions* and *World Religions: Eastern Traditions* from Oxford University Press. Hussain spoke about the role that notable Muslim Americans have played in sports, music, art and politics. He

highlighted the diverse contributions of famous Muslims in the US including boxing legend Mohammed Ali, the founder of Atlantic Records, Ahmet Etegun, basketball star and Newsweek columnist, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and US Congressperson, Keith Ellison. He also challenged many of the stereotypes surrounding Islam that are common in post-9/11 America, pointing to many of the ways in which Islam has been instrumental in the formation of American identity and culture. Hussain argues

that America would not exist as it does today without the essential contributions made by its Muslim citizens. In his book, Hussain writes, "Islam is viewed in a three-fold way: as new to America; as foreign to America; and as comprised of adherents who are violent, 'un-American,' and a threat to our nation. The reality is that Muslims have helped us to be more American, to be better Americans."

## HOPE, PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND LOVE: *The Messages of Marc Chagall in his Artwork and Literature*



In mid-November, the CSRCS had the privilege of partnering with the Art and Art History Department and the Residential Campus Initiative to host acclaimed speaker on artist Marc Chagall, Vivian R. Jacobson. Jacobson worked with Chagall on major international projects during the last eleven years of his life, some of his most productive years. Her lecture detailed the interreligious themes that are threaded through not only Chagall's visual art but also his writing, a lesser known element of Chagall's career. Jacobson accompanied her presentation with images from Chagall's prolific career that inspired his writings.

For more information about Jacobson and her work, you may visit her website [here](#).



## THE GOD WHO SAVES AND THE GOD WHO KILLS –

*A Passover Discussion  
With Dr. Emily Filler*



Just in time for the Passover season, the CSRCS was excited to partner with Jewish Studies, Jewish Life and Religious Studies to host Dr. Emily Filler of Earlham College for her lecture titled, “The God Who Saves and the God Who Kills” on Thursday, April 13. Dr. Filler’s lecture was centered on the biblical narrative of the Exodus as a story of both violence and salvation. The Israelites’ exodus from Egypt in the Hebrew Bible is frequently invoked as a profound and enduring example of liberation – especially during the seasons of Passover and Easter. Dr. Filler urged the audience to consider who precisely was liberated in the Exodus and how the event may look different from the perspectives of the text’s “others,” particularly those whose lives and lands were impacted by the migration of the Israelites.

## Élan and Camerata concerts spotlight Gospel traditions

On April 27 and 29, the CSRCS was proud to help sponsor both the Élan spring concert, Jubilation!, and the Chorale and Camerata Spring Choral Showcase. Elon’s vocal jazz and a cappella ensemble, presented a selection of music highlighting the history and tradition of the gospel jubilee quartet featuring selections and arrangements from groups including the Jubilee Four and the Golden Gate Quartet. Both groups were honored to host special guest artist, Dr. Kevin Johnson, son of the late Willie T. Johnson (founding member of the Gates). Dr. Johnson is an associate professor of music at Spelman College and is a renowned musician, composer

and active clinician. He currently serves as the Minister of Music for Lyke House Catholic Student Center in the Atlanta University Consortium. His works have resulted in performances for the Archdiocese of Atlanta and Catholic Archdiocese nationwide and international performances with the Spelman Glee Club. In March 2016, Dr. Johnson led the Spelman College Glee Club in song at the White House. The Spelman Glee Club also joined Dr. Johnson on his visit to Elon and presented their own selections during the Chorale and Camerata concert, “Lift Every Voice and Sing!” Dr. Johnson’s appearance was supported in part by the Elon Fund for Excellence.



## Diversity education for the campus: Targeting anti-Muslim rhetoric

The CSRCS continues to try and do its part to counter widespread ignorance and fear of Islam with programming and events that promote balanced, historically informed, and evidence-based education about Islam and Muslim Americans. CSRCS Director Brian Pennington serves on the Steering Committee for the Consortium of Diversity and Inclusion Content Experts (CDICE) and has delivered a set of talks on the history of US Islamophobia and the network of funders and self-appointed “experts” who spread misinformation and suspicion of Islam. He made presentations to a series of Core Curriculum 110 students as part of the Diversity Roundtables sponsored by the Office of Inclusive Community every semester and to the innovative “Refusing to Wait” course on democracy that Elon faculty and staff, led by Professors Tom Mould and Toddie Peters, developed after the 2016 US Presidential Election.

## CSRCS Co-Sponsors International Conference with Historic University of Madras in South India



The Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society (CSRCS) hosted a conference in collaboration with the University of Madras in Chennai, India, on July 28–29, 2016. The conference attracted more than 50 attendees and 16 presenters from all over India and six additional countries. With the theme “To Take Place: Culture, Religion, and Home-making in and beyond South Asia,” speakers addressed the means and practices by which migrants, displaced persons, and various other sub-communities in South Asia establish physical, conceptual and emotional spaces that put them at home or give rise to conflict with other groups. The keynote address, “Making a Himalayan Abode: Conflict, Aspiration and Power at a Garhwal Shrine” was delivered by CSRCS Director, Brian Pennington. The conference was organized by Amy Allocco, associate professor of Religious Studies at Elon and James Ponniah, assistant professor in the Department of Christian Studies at University of Madras. The conference reflects deepening ties between the Elon CSRCS and the University of Madras in Chennai, where Allocco has collaborated with various faculty members and research scholars there while she conducted her sabbatical research in Chennai in 2015–16.





# Fostering EXCELLENCE In Undergraduate Research

One of the CSRCS's chief commitments is to develop resources and cultivate opportunities for students from any discipline to pursue research projects related to understanding religion. In 2016-2017, the center awarded five grants through two different programs that will provide students the chance to undertake extended research projects in collaboration with individual faculty mentors who will train them in the research process appropriate to their academic discipline. These CSRCS programs target students at two tiers: those who are new to the research process and those at more advanced levels.

## Scholar Development Grants

Most Elon students study religion at some point in their first or second years, often through a Core Curriculum 110 class that introduces them to the liberal arts or through popular Religious Studies courses that satisfy a Core requirement. Even the students who are most enthusiastic about these courses often do not recognize the many opportunities that undergraduate research can provide for further engaging their interests in religion. Scholar Development Grants are intended to help

first- and second-year students design a research project under the guidance of a faculty mentor and prepare them to write competitive proposals for Elon's signature undergraduate research programs like the Lumen Prize and the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE). The grants provide money to the student and the faculty mentor for research expenses and conference travel that will help them in the early stages of a research project, and they also provide funds for the faculty member's own research needs.

2016-17  
**Scholar Development Grant Recipients:**

**Mason Enloe** (*Religious Studies*)  
"Religion and Nationalism in Europe"  
Faculty Mentor: **Ariela Marcus-Sells** (*Religious Studies*)

**Megan Hernandez-Greene** (*Religious Studies*)  
"Religion and Migration in Japan: Integration of Japanese Spirits into the Japanese-Brazilian Pantheon"  
Faculty Mentor: **Pamela D. Winfield** (*Religious Studies*)

**Katherine Moritz** (*History*)  
"The Power of Color: Comparative Study of Buddhism in China and Japan"  
Faculty Mentor: **Xiaolin Duan** (*History*)

## CSRCS Summer Research Fellowships

### 2017 CSRCS Summer Research Fellows:

CSRCS Summer Research Fellowships grants are available to all students with a developed interest in studying religion from the perspective of any academic discipline. Students work one-on-one with an Elon faculty mentor for 8 weeks in June and July and they are supported by a generous stipend that helps replace the important income from summer employment. CSRCS Summer Research Fellows participate fully in Elon's Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) program, which administers these grants through an agreement with the CSRCS.

**Styrling Rohr** (*Anthropology and Religious Studies*) "Ritual Musicians and Expressive Culture in South Asian Religious Traditions"  
Amy Allocco, mentor (*Religious Studies*)

**Abigail Williams** (*Human Service Studies*) "Saints Don't Cry': Clergy's Attitudes towards Mental Health Services and Experiences of Burnout"  
Judy Esposito, mentor (*Human Service Studies*)



The CSRCS was proud to support another SURF Symposium this year thanks to Elon's Office of Undergraduate Research. SURF Symposium grants bring a group of students and their mentors together to develop a session around a single theme during the Student Undergraduate Research Forum (aka SURF Day) that happens on the last Tuesday of every April. In 2017 the CSRCS worked with students and faculty who are part of the fledgling South Asia Research Group at Elon (SARGE). Six students made presentations about their long-term research projects that they had been conducting in Nepal or India.

**Brianna Birchett** (Dr. Brian Pennington, faculty mentor), "The South Indian 'Wife of God' after Criminalization: Patriarchy, Liberalism, and Devadāsīs"

**Justin Brown** (Dr. Amy Allocco, faculty mentor), "A Third Gender: Examining Authority, Legitimacy, and Modernity in India's Hijra Community"

**Emily McHugh** (Drs. Amy Allocco and Jason Kirk, faculty mentors), "India's Endangered Parsis: Population Policy and State Secularism in Comparative Perspective"

**Leena Dahal** (Dr. Mussa Idris, faculty mentor), "Let's Do Something, Saathi': The Role of Social Media in Shaping Youth Agency in Post-Disaster Nepal"

**Anya E. Fredsell** (Dr. Amy Allocco, faculty mentor), "Constructing and Performing Authority in Yoga Traditions: An Ethnographic Approach"

**Audrey A. Griffith** (Dr. Amy Allocco, faculty mentor), "Intersections: Women's Resistance in Law, Religion, and Activism in Contemporary South India"

## ELON Students Receive Widespread Recognition for their Undergraduate Research on Religion

Here are just a handful of the highlights of a tremendous year for research into religion by Elon undergrads:



If anyone had any doubt that Elon students are doing the best undergraduate research in the country, the awards and recognition they received from multiple quarters in 2016-17 should make a pretty convincing case.



Four Elon Students—**Brianna Birchett '17**, **Iliana Brodsky '17**, **Emily McHugh '17**, and **Daniella Sostaita '17** were selected from a very large and competitive pool to present in a small number of undergraduate slots at the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) annual meeting in Raleigh, NC in March.

**Brianna Birchett** was awarded the **Best Undergraduate Paper prize** at the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) annual meeting for her paper, "The South Indian 'Wife of God' after Criminalization: Patriarchy, Liberalism, and Devadāsīs," based on research conducted in India over two years as a Lumen Scholar. Her project studied the lives and practices of devadāsīs, a class

## SURF Symposium

### From the Field: Religion, Development, and Public Policy in South Asia



of women who served as respected temple dancers and courtesans in South India from the twelfth century. Their institutions and initiation rituals have been under attack by reformers who have associated them with prostitution since the nineteenth century.

**Justin Brown '17** was awarded a Graduate Fellowship from the national honor society for Religious Studies, Theta Alpha Kappa, in recognition of his Honors Research on transgender communities in India. The award will help support his pursuit of a masters degree at Indiana University, Bloomington.

**Melina Oliverio '16** continues to receive national recognition for the research she did while an Elon student under Dr. Amy Allocco. This year she was named First Runner Up for the Albert T. Clark Undergraduate Paper Award given by the *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* and she received Honorable Mention for the Mariana McJimsey Undergraduate Paper Award given by ASIANetwork.

**HuffPo Takeover!**  
Three students, Audrey Griffith '17, Justin Brown '17, and Emily McHugh '17, had pieces based on their research published in the Huffington Post.

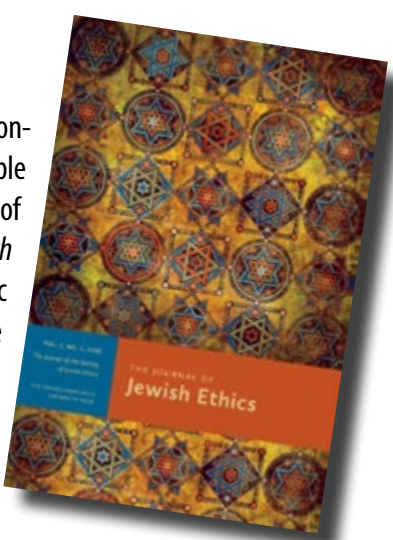


*Be sure to read them here!:*  
[India's Third Gender: Rejected Or Embraced \(Or Both\)?](#)  
[India's Endangered Parsis: How One Minority Group Is Combatting Extinction In The Midst Of Overpopulation](#)  
[Stop "Saving" Women: A Transnational Feminist Approach](#)

## Promoting Faculty Scholarship *First Publication!*



In a year of many firsts, the CSRCS celebrated the first publication of scholarship conducted under its sponsorship. The *Journal of Jewish Ethics* published the roundtable of essays, "Virtue Ethics and the Musar Movement" (3/1 (2017): 118-177), a set of responses to the 2015 book, *Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar* (SUNY Press) by Assistant Professor, Geoffrey D. Claussen, Elon's Lori and Eric Sklut Emerging Scholar in Jewish Studies. The CSRCS had sponsored the roundtable in March 2016 in celebration of the release of Claussen's first book about Ziv, a nineteenth-century leader of the Musar movement that promoted the path of virtue among Eastern Europe's Jews. The roundtable features the contributions of Drs. Andrea Dara-Cooper of UNC Chapel Hill, Christian B. Miller of Wake Forest University, and Elon's own Toddie Peters and Jeffrey Pugh.



# Homebrewed Christianity

## *Guide to the End Times: Theology After You've Been Left Behind*

— Dr. Jeffrey Pugh

Elon students and faculty alike were excited to celebrate the release of *Guide to the End Times, Theology After You've Been Left Behind*, the latest book by Elon's Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of Religious Studies, Dr. Jeffrey Pugh during a happy hour discussion at the Oak House on October 4. Sprinkled with tales of his youthful experimentation with apocalypticism, Dr. Pugh's book offers an extensive account of apocalyptic interpretations of the Bible through history, the role that "rapture culture" has played within the church, and the evolution of groups that interpret modern events through the lens of sacred Christian texts to predict the return of Jesus Christ. Moderated by one of the country's most respected scholar's of the Book of Revelation, Elon's own Dr. Lynn Huber, Professor and Chair of the Religious Studies Department, the conversation was filled with laughter as she and Pugh traded ideas about the nature and uses of apocalyptic ideas. *Guide to the End Times* is published by Fortress Press as part of the Homebrewed Christianity series. To mark the accomplishment, the CSRCS presented Pugh with a case of Homebrewed Rapture by Mebane's Red Monster Brewing. We believe *Guide to the Endtimes* may be the first theology book to ever have its own signature beer—cheers, Dr. Pugh!



## Pennington the Keynote Speaker at Conference on Interreligious Education and High-Impact Educational Practices



CSRCS Director Brian Pennington delivered a keynote address at the College of Charleston in March for a conference on "High Impact Learning and Interreligious Encounter" sponsored by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. His address titled, "Interreligious Education and the Interfaith Movement: The Promise and Perils of a Complicated Partnership," detailed Elon's own path towards a robust program that combines multifaith commitments with academic research and scholarship. Brianna Birchett '17 was invited to accompany Pennington and present her own research and speak about the challenges of doing research in India as an undergraduate. A contingent of Elon students and Dr. Amy Allocco were also invited to attend to share their experiences and ideas with their peers at the College of College.



## Interreligious Studies Minor Graduates First Student!

**B**en Lutz '17 was one of the more decorated students at Elon's Commencement in May. Among his many impressive accomplishments during his four years as a Phoenix, Lutz can now count this: he is the first graduating student to have completed the requirements for Elon's new Interreligious Studies Minor. A passionate advocate for interreligious peacemaking, Lutz has studied abroad in Morocco and is currently studying in Oman under the Critical Languages Scholarship program sponsored by the US State Department.



Lutz wrote this about what being an Interreligious Studies Minor has meant to him:

*"The Interreligious Studies Minor has been the best way to concretely center my academic interests. I aim to have a career in Middle Eastern Peace Diplomacy where interreligious dialogue will be monumental in creating sustainable and long-term change. The Middle East is a region where religious identity supersedes all others, and thus interfaith exchange has the possibility to lead to peaceful coexistence. I plan to be a part of that transformation by permanently moving to the region to enact on-the-ground diplomacy centered on interreligious means. As a Jewish student, all of my life has been some form of interfaith exchange as I am usually the religious minority in most activities I have done. Studying abroad in the Middle East five times throughout my years*

*at Elon University has shown me that my experiences as a religious minority in the US have advanced my understanding of the power of interfaith exchange. I was able to connect with Muslims and Christians living in the Middle East through our shared religious experiences that stem from the high value that our cultures place on religious identity. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share many tenets of belief which led to the phenomenal conversations and friendships that developed around our similar and separate beliefs. Having the opportunity to study the relationships between religions directly parallels with my experiences in the US and abroad, which is why I am so honored and excited to be the first Interreligious Studies Student at Elon University."*

## 2016-17: ENGAGING RELIGIONS/BUILDING COMMUNITY

*Elon's Strategic Plan for Multi-Faith Engagement Approaches Its Halfway Point*

**I**n the fall of 2015, Elon embarked on implementation of the recommendations made in the Multifaith Strategic Plan, "Engaging Religions/Building Community." This important blueprint lays out specific steps for enhancing global engagement, fostering interfaith dialogue, and promoting multi-faith education at the university. The full plan with its projected outcomes is available on the CSRCS website [here](#).



*Plan proposes four major objectives:*



*In 2016-17 the CSRCS helped to advance the plan's goals on many fronts but particularly with the launch of three major projects described elsewhere in this report:*

- "On the Edge," a scholarly symposium for the interdisciplinary study of religion, was **successfully inaugurated in February 9-11, 2017**
- The Interreligious Studies Minor was available for students for the first time and **saw its first graduate**
- The Multifaith Scholars Program welcomed its first class of **six rising juniors**

## 2016-17 CSRCS SPONSORED & CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

- Sept. 9** Najib Ghabbian (Special Representative for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces to the United States and United Nations), "The Face of the Syrian War and No End in Sight"
- Sept. 13** Baris Kesgin, Safia Swimlar, Haya Ajjan (Elon University) and locally resettled refugees, "Refugee Voices from Syria"
- Sept. 29** Amy-Jill Levine (Vanderbilt University), "Agreeing to Disagree: How Jews and Christians Read Scripture Differently"
- Oct. 4** Jeffrey Pugh and Lynn Huber (Elon University), public discussion of *Guide to the Endtimes: Theology for When You've Been Left Behind*
- Oct. 7** Ali Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, "Roots of Peace: Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue"
- Oct. 13** Lisbeth Melendez (Independent filmmaker), "Before God, We Are All Family," film screening and discussion
- Oct. 25** Shellen Wu (University of Tennessee, Knoxville and 2016-2017 National Humanities Center Fellow), "The Endless Frontiers of Science in Twentieth Century China."
- Nov. 15** Vivian Johnson, "Hope, Peace, Reconciliation and Love: The Messages of Marc Chagall in His Artwork and Literature"
- Nov. 16** Andrew Mbuvi (Shaw Divinity School) "Minoritized Scholars and the Re-Shaping of Western Disciplines: A View from an African in Biblical Studies"
- Feb. 9-11** "On the Edge of Apocalypse." Scholarly Symposium
- Feb. 19** Film: "May Allah Bless France," with discussion by Ariela Marcus-Sells (Elon University)
- Mar. 8** Amir Hussain (Loyola Marymount University), "Muslims and the Making of America"
- Apr. 13** Emily Filler (Earlham College), "The God Who Saves and the God Who Kills"
- Apr. 25** James Ponniah (University of Madras, India), "Christian, Hindu, and Muslim in Sri Lanka"
- Apr. 27** Kevin Johnson (Spelman College), "Jubilant!: Celebrating the Gospel Jubilee Tradition"
- Apr. 29** Spelman College Glee Club, "Lift Every Voice and Sing!"
- May 3** Zev Harel (Cleveland State University), "A Conversation with A Holocaust Survivor"



## CSRCS Advisory Committee



**Clyde Ellis**  
Professor of History



**Evan A. Gatti**  
Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Core Curriculum



**Jan Fuller**  
University Chaplain, Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life



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**Jeffrey Pugh**  
Professor of Religious Studies



**Ariela Marcus-Sells**  
Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Distinguished Emerging Scholar



**Rissa Trachman**  
Associate Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology



**BEST WISHES & MANY THANKS, ELIZABETH!**

We were overcome with mixed feelings as we bade farewell and good luck to our Communications Intern, Elizabeth Zimmerman. Elizabeth had worked for two years on various communications and research projects for the center, including graphic design, social media, event publicity, and news writing. She helped establish many of the ongoing strategies and practices of the CSRCS, and we are very grateful for her many contributions. We would not be the same without her. We wish Elizabeth all the best as she takes up her first post-college job: Communications Specialist with the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium—how cool!



**Elizabeth Zimmerman**  
Student Communications Intern

# ELON UNIVERSITY

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{ The Chagall Dreams painting by Elena Kotliarker, whose contemporary Judaica artwork incorporates embedded Kabbalah symbols and icons }