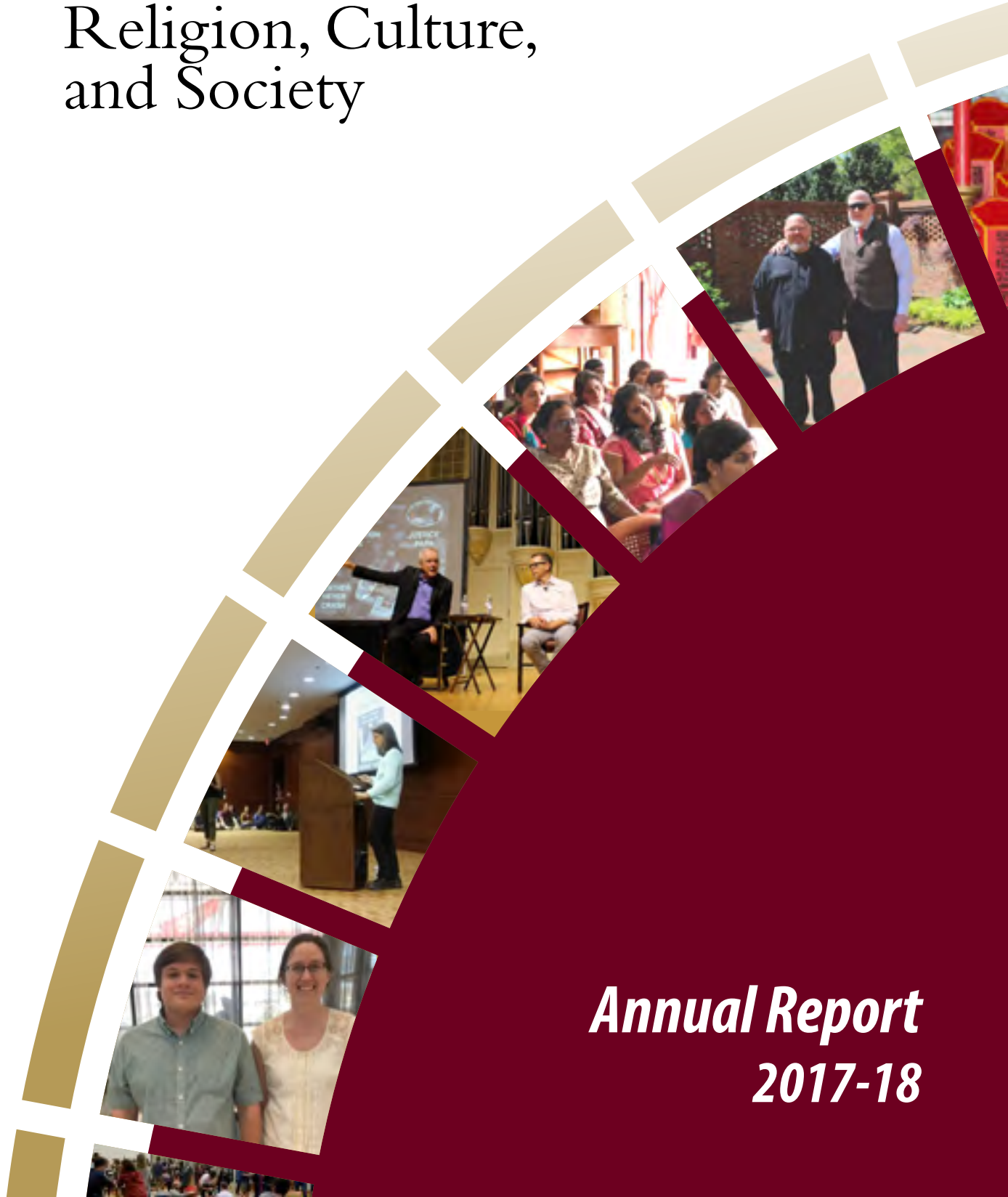




ELON

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF
Religion, Culture,
and Society



Annual Report
2017-18

Religion and Nationalism in Our Times

If 2017-18 underscored one particular theme, it was the deep and abiding relationship between religion and nationalism. The Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA on August 11-12, 2017, was suffused with symbols that evoked a mythologized understanding of our nation's past. In full and unembarrassed display, flags, costumes, and tattoos—all ancient means for igniting emotional attachments to communities and nations—announced the sacred connections between race and territory (“blood and soil” in the marchers’ language). On the airwaves and on the internet battles raged over the divine charter many believe elevates the United States above other nations. The US court system adjudicated the constitutionality of one religious claim after another.

Similar developments were underway elsewhere. In Europe, anti-Semitism was again on the rise, fueled in many cases by a belief in the purity of Europe's Christian heritage. A Hindu nationalist government in India called the patriotism of Muslims and Christians into question and failed to act when they were attacked. And Myanmar's army drove Muslims of the Rohingya community out of the country with the strong, vocal support of Buddhist monks.

In the lectures and films sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, we encountered religious nationalism and nationalistic religion repeatedly. We also saw clearly the way religion and nation frame one another: the complex negotiations Muslim Americans must perform on a daily basis as they navigate social and political

terrain; the surprising bond between Hindu India and Jewish Israel; the implications of the US embassy's move to Jerusalem for Jewish and Arab Israelis. Our undergraduate students investigated these dynamics, pursuing CSRCS-sponsored research in the US and abroad that studied the relationship of Muslim migrants to the Danish state and the ways religious identity affects social service delivery in multi-religious, post-conflict Sri Lanka.

Many scholars would say that all nationalisms, based, as they are, on origin stories, powerful symbols, and emotional rituals promoting group identity, are religious. When, however, religious nationalism becomes a weapon for victimizing those who do not meet particular criteria for civic legitimacy, we need to pay attention and speak out. At the CSRCS, we will continue to do just that and to help our students and other community members interpret what is going on around them.

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.

REPORT ON

Strategic Plan for Multifaith Engagement Shows Remarkable Growth in 3 Years

For the past two academic years, Elon University's multifaith initiatives have been guided by a five-year strategic plan to develop rich and varied resources for encouraging spiritual formation and expression, promoting religious literacy and respect for diverse faith traditions and worldviews, examining the role of religion in society, and supporting research and scholarship on religion.

Among leading universities invested in interreligious understanding and dialogue, Elon is distinctive for its commitment to the academic study of religion as a central and necessary complement to the experiential exploration of religion. An [E-Net story updating the campus](#) about progress on the plan reported that "in the years since it was approved, Elon has made significant advances toward those goals in the creation of new programs, events, and resources for members of a broad range of religious faiths. Progress on the plan has included the introduction of new opportunities for members of the

campus community to gather for discussion and has opened up new academic pathways for students to explore these themes." Along with the Religious Studies Department, the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society has provided stewardship and leadership in advancing the academic and scholarly objectives of the plan. "I know of no other university in the US that has developed a plan as comprehensive as



this one," says Brian Pennington, director of the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society, and professor of religious studies. "It has positioned Elon as one of the nation's preeminent institutions for multifaith education, a fact that is clearly evident in the number of visitors we host from other schools who come to study Elon as a model for their own campuses."

Among the highlights of Elon's progress have been:



ESTABLISHMENT Of the Multifaith Scholars Program:

Providing 10 students a year with research and community engagement opportunities for understanding and engaging religious pluralism



CREATION Of the Ripple Conference:

Organized by the Truitt Center and hosted each February by Elon, this student-led event that has become the Southeast's largest regional interfaith conference for college students.



LAUNCH Of the Interreligious Studies Minor:

This distinctive course of study helps prepare global leaders by educating students about the sources pluralism, cooperation, and conflict



CREATION Of new undergraduate research opportunities

Scholarship programs are promoting faculty-mentored undergraduate research that receives national recognition



The full progress report can be [viewed here](#).



2017-18

PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS



Elon panelists share their experiences at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville

Whitley Auditorium was packed on September 5 with students, faculty, and staff who had come to hear the personal stories of four members of the Elon community who were present in Charlottesville, Virginia, on Aug. 12 for the Unite the Right rally that turned violent and sparked national outrage. The panel discussion “Reflections on Charlottesville” was organized to help students returning to campus to develop an informed perspective about the white nationalist protests and

{ Jasmine Turner '15 covered Unite the Right for NBC12 in Richmond }



{ Jeffrey Pugh (far right) participated in blockades by Charlottesville clergy }



counter-demonstrations that happened at the end of the summer by listening to people who actually played active roles in confronting the rally. The panelists came from different sectors of the Elon community, including Jeffrey Pugh, the Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of Religious Studies and a resident of Charlottesville. Pugh, a longtime scholar of the life and work of theologian and anti-Nazi campaigner Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said that his entire scholarly career told him one thing: “When the Nazis come to your town, you’ve got to show up!” An ordained United Methodist minister, Pugh participated in the counterprotests organized by the clergy organization, Congregate Charlottesville. Joining Pugh on the panel was Jasmine Turner ‘15, who works as a reporter for NBC12 in Richmond, Virginia. She went to Charlottesville to cover the Unite the Right rally and spoke of the strong feelings she experienced as a woman of color on professional assignment in that setting. Dr. Tony Crider, Associate Professor of Physics, collected photo and video documentation of the event, capturing many encounters and episodes not reported in the media. His images have appeared hundreds of times in news reports and online media about the rally. Dr. Megan Squire, Professor of Computing Sciences, discussed the direct actions to obstruct protestors in which she participated and the harrowing car attack that killed counter-protestor Heather Heyer. The panel was moderated by Dr. Naeemah Clark, Associate Professor of Communications.



Tony Crider’s photos and videos of the Aug. 12 events have been used in media and news reports around the world.



Race, Faith, and Hip-hop with Brother Ali

Rhymesayers recording artist Brother Ali spent time on Elon's campus in April, speaking to multiple student groups and participating in a dialogue about race, faith, and hip-hop.

As part of his wide-reaching public discussion with Elon campus leaders on April 18, Brother Ali also performed material from recent albums before a packed McKinnon Hall. Three panelists engaged in a discussion with Brother Ali from the stage, Buffie Longmire-Avital, Associate Professor of Psychology and Coordinator of African and African-American Studies, Elon senior Alonzo Cee, and Imam Shane Atkinson, Elon's Muslim Life Coordinator. Stephen-Bloch Schulman, Associate Professor of Philosophy, helped organize the 2 days of events and hosted Brother Ali in his Race and Hip-hop class.

On how he sees the connection between his music and his faith, Brother Ali said, "I have always believed that beauty and truth are connected and that beauty is the splendor of truth. Beauty has a way of communicating truth directly from heart to heart. The right ideology with the wrong heart can actually be really damaging. The bad heart will turn anything into a weapon."

Students who submitted essays for the 2018 Layne Critical Race Consciousness Essay Contest were invited to join a "master class" with Brother Ali earlier in the day during which the artist discussed his life story and answered their questions about the social issues his music highlights. For his essay, "Brother Ali: White Allyship in Hip-Hop,"

student Nathan Jones was named the winner of that contest.

Brother Ali began rapping before he was 8. By the time he was a teenager, he was writing his own songs and attracting the attention of local clubs in Minneapolis. Brother Ali's immersion in hip-hop culture introduced him to Islam as he began tracing out its references to important Muslim figures and concepts. He converted to Islam at the age of 15 after reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. He was sent to study Islam in Indonesia by Warith Deen Muhammad, one of the most important leaders of US Islam in the 20th century who was, at the time, trying to move the Nation of Islam away from black nationalism to a more global, orthodox Islam. Brother Ali's personal history and the themes in his music, which range from hard-hitting political critique of race relations in the US to celebrations of his Muslim faith to the domestic bliss of



To watch a video short about his events at Elon, visit the [CSRCS Facebook page](#).

fatherhood—have given him one of the most distinctive voices in hip-hop today.

Brother Ali has recorded for 18 years with the Twin Cities's independent hip-hop collective, Rhymesayers. Since 2000 he has released 10 studio albums and EPs, including *The Undisputed Truth* (2007), *Us* (2009), *Mourning in America* and *Dreaming in Color* (2012), and his most recent release, *All the Beauty in this Whole Life* (2017), all of which reached the top 10 on Billboard's Independent Album chart.

Brother Ali's visit was sponsored by the Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, and the Philosophy Department.



In Celebration of Dr. Jeffrey Pugh

Elon bid farewell this year to Dr. Jeffrey C. Pugh, Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of Religious Studies and Distinguished University Professor. Pugh retired at the end of the 2017-18 academic year after a 32-year career at Elon. His influence on the university has been vast, and his scholarly work on Christian theologians Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and on the relationship between religion and science have made a significant impact in the study of religion. To commemorate his career, on March 15 the CSRCS invited a panel of scholars with intimate knowledge of Pugh's career to reflect on his work and influence. Two of those panelists were Elon alums whom Pugh had taught as undergrads and who are now publishing scholars of religion themselves, John Penniman '05 of Bucknell University and Ryan Newson '07 of Campbell University. Also joining the panel were Dr. Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law, one of the foremost Christian thinkers of his era who was named "America's Best Theologian" by *Time* magazine in 2001, and Dr. Lori Brandt Hale, Associate Professor of Religion at Augsburg College and the Secretary of the Board of Directors of the International Bonhoeffer Society. Penniman and Campbell remembered Pugh fondly for his



challenging teaching and his scholarly example. Hauerwas applauded Pugh's principled theological stances, and Hale spoke with admiration of Pugh's anti-racist activism (see story on Charlottesville, p. 5). The Isabella Cannon room was filled with colleagues and former students who had returned to celebrate their mentor and friend.



Short clips of the panel and Pugh's responses may be viewed on the [CSRCS Facebook page](#).

Documentary film highlights the life and work of Elon's Imam Shane Atkinson

Students filled Turner Theater on Thursday, February 15, for a film screening and panel discussion that offered insights into Atkinson's experience as a white man from Mississippi who converted to Islam when he was young. "Redneck Muslim," a film directed by award-winning director Jennifer Maytorena Taylor, explores Atkinson's life as a chaplain at UNC Medical Center, before he came to Elon.

The film depicts Atkinson's struggle to harmonize his southern heritage with Islam. When the film was made, Atkinson had founded a Facebook group called "Redneck Muslims." In the film, he travels to a national Islamic conference in New Jersey to ask other Muslims from various ethnic and racial backgrounds what they think about his organization and its name. Since filming was completed, he has renamed his group the "Southern Hospitality Islamic Center."

In a panel discussion followed the film screening, Assistant Professors



{ "Redneck Muslim" has been featured in numerous film festivals nationally since it was released in the fall and it has been selected for the 2018 PBS Online Film Festival. To see video clips from the discussion, visit our [Facebook page](#)! }

Ahmed Fadaam and Sana Haq of the School of Communications talked with Atkinson in detail about things not shown in the 16-minute film, including the tensions his conversion caused in his conservative family and how becoming Muslim has helped him to stay connected with them despite their differences. "If I wasn't Muslim, I probably wouldn't

talk to my parents. That's part of Islam: to try and reconcile with family, to keep family ties," Atkinson said. Atkinson also talked about the challenges his multiracial family faces. His Indonesian wife, who wears a hijab, and children, one of whom has darker skin, cannot always escape the prejudice religious that minorities face.

Coen Brothers' Films Get Serious Treatment

Dr. Elijah Siegler of the College of Charleston spoke about two filmmakers that many contemporary critics consider among the best in U. S. cinematic history on Thursday, October 26th. His lecture, "Myth, Meaning, and Morality in the Films of the Coen Brothers" was sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society. Siegler is a professor of religious studies and editor of the book, *Coen: Framing Religion in Amoral Order* (Baylor University Press, 2016). Examining the Coen's use of comedy and thematic strategies that evoke religion in some of their "blink and you miss it" moments, Siegler argued that the Coen Brothers engage with spirituality and morality in ways that are serious and subtle. His talk featured illustrative clips from various Coen Brothers films, such as "The Hudsucker Proxy," "A Serious Man," and "The Big Lebowski." Often considered a cult-classic, "The Big Lebowski" illustrates Siegler's contention that film can be religion itself, inspiring the emergence of Dudeism, the self-described "slowest-growing religion in the world" based on the film's main character.



Author, Scholar, and Activist Shana Sippy Examines the Relationship between Israel and India

Assistant Professor of Religion at Centre College, Shana Sippy, spent 3 days on Elon's campus in March, speaking to various audiences about the connections that link India, Israel, Hinduism, Judaism, feminism, and nationalism. Her public lecture on March 27, "Together Forever?: Strange and Storied Alliances among Hindus and Jews, India and Israel" emerged from research she conducted as a scholarly response to the eruptions of physical and rhetorical violence that surrounded the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai. The talk examined the politics of solidarity and the (re)shaping of sensibilities that foster on-going alliances between Hindus and Jews. Analyzing the interfaith memorial services and solidarity gatherings that occurred after Mumbai alongside on-going diplomatic engagements between India and Israel, Sippy discussed the development of Hindu-Jewish and India-Israel coalitions, interfaith endeavors, and scholarship over the past twenty years. She pointed to parallel discourses of victimization in those countries, the cultivation of personal relationships between their leaders, and the two nations' desire for multi-national defense contracts and bilateral trade partnerships.



Sippy gave three other talks on campus, including an analysis of "strategic citizenship" enacted by a Hindu community outside Minneapolis following the violent desecration of their temple in 2006 for an Interreligious Encounters class and a discussion of Jewish activism at the Women's March in Washington DC in 2017 with Elon Hillel. Students and faculty alike appreciated Sippy's intellectual range and her ability to engage students. We will definitely have her back!

Support for Periclean Scholars Traveling to Sri Lanka



CSRCS staff members Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco, along with Neil Devotta, professor of political science at Wake Forest University, spent an evening briefing the Periclean Scholars class of 2019 on conditions in Sri Lanka and the dynamics of interreligious conflict there. Invited by the director of Elon's Project Pericles, Mat Gendle (Psychology), the speakers provided an overview of conflict in Sri Lanka, still recovering from a 26-year long civil war that ended in 2009, and prospects for improving relations between the Sinhalese majority and the island nation's Tamil minority. The 2019 Periclean Scholars class has been conducting a long-term study of Sri Lanka while undertaking social service there through the community-based development organization, Sarvodaya.



Detention and Deportation Author speaks at Elon

Tucson author and journalist Margaret Regan explored the topics of her two prize-winning books, *Detained and Deported: Immigrants Under Fire* and *The Death of Josseline*, in a talk co-sponsored by the CSRCS on February 21.

Regan's reporting on detention centers, US/Mexico border towns, and her accompaniment of US Border Patrol agents on search and rescue missions has shed light on the lives and fate of undocumented immigrants in the United States. *Detained and Deported*, her most recent book, is used as the Common Reading for the first-year students at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. Her talk was co-sponsored by Peace and Conflict Studies.





Religion Trending: Jerusalem



Faculty and staff came to the Oak House on February 28 for an informal discussion

with Assistant Professor of Geography, Sandy Marshall, about the contested city of Jerusalem. Marshall's talk was organized after the Trump administration announced its recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the US Embassy's move to that city, thrusting the city into the headlines and into the center of debate at the UN. Lively discussion followed his summary of events and their implications, and many people stayed around for quite a while afterwards to further engage Marshall, who conducts research among migrant and refugee children in the Palestinian territories.

CSRCS Makes Connections

MOU with Indian University Bears Fruit



The relationship between Elon's Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society and the Department of Christian Studies at the University of Madras in South India was strengthened in 2017-18 after a Memorandum of Understanding between the two universities was signed last year. Following the visit of Madras's Dr. James Ponniah to Elon in April 2017, during which he met with Elon faculty and administration and addressed the Periclean Scholars class of 2019 about the post-war situation in Sri Lanka (see story on p. 10), several opportunities for Elon students and other joint efforts have opened up. Amy L. Allocco, an associate professor of religious studies and the director of the Multifaith Scholars program at Elon University, was invited to lecture at the University of Madras this January. Her presentation titled "Dead Women as Family Gods in Tamil Nadu: An Ethnographic Approach to Tamil Rituals" was attended by 60 graduate students and faculty members from across the university and sparked lively exchange about the gendered dimensions of these rituals. This lecture followed the successful [CSRCS co-sponsored international conference](#), "To Take Place: Culture, Religion, and Home-making in and beyond South Asia" that Allocco co-organized with Ponniah at the University of Madras in 2016. While at the University in January Allocco met with Bharathi Harishankar, the newly appointed director of the International Center of the University of Madras, who expressed her enthusiastic support for the memorandum of understanding and proposed ways that the two universities might imagine additional, future collaborations under its auspices. Dr. Ponniah helped to mentor and facilitate the research conducted by Lumen Scholar Anya Fredsell '18 when she came to Chennai in January 2018. In January 2019 Ponniah will help teach portions of the Elon



Winter term course, "India's Identities: Religion, Caste and Gender in Contemporary South India."

The University of Madras was founded in 1857. Its original buildings are among the finest examples of Indo-Saracenic architecture in the world, and its iconic campus buildings stand across the street from the bustling public beachfront and the Bay of Bengal. It has 73 academic departments and offers several different degrees in the study of religion.



Pennington Delivers Lectures at National Universities in India

Director of the Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, Brian Pennington, was invited to deliver two lectures at national universities in India in January. On Jan. 23 he gave a talk titled "Ethnography in Historical Method" at Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University in Srinagar in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. On Jan. 25 he was honored at the Shri Jai Narain Post Graduate College of Lucknow University, where he gave the lecture, "Religion, Heritage, and Memory in a Developing State." Both presentations dealt with aspects of his ongoing research in the pilgrimage city of Uttarkashi in the Indian Himalayas. Pennington, Professor of Religious Studies at Elon, was in India to observe the Magh Mela festival in Uttarkashi for the third time. The annual event celebrates the return of the sun as it begins its travel northward following the winter solstice. An ancient Hindu festival, in recent years it has also provided a platform for regional heritage revival movements and folk performances that Pennington is documenting for a book he is writing on Uttarkashi. His work attracted considerable press attention locally, and he gave multiple newspaper and television interviews, including one to India's largest circulating newspaper, *Dainik Jagaran*, a Hindi-language daily.

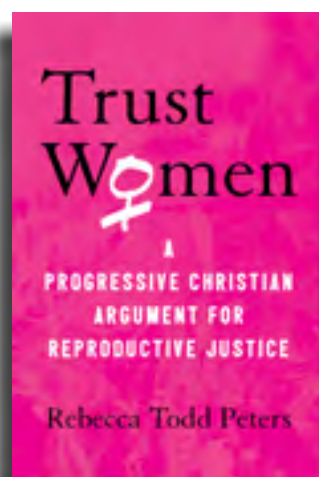


CSRCS Co-sponsors Philosophy Conference at University of Dayton

Assistant Professor of Philosophy Ryan Johnson was the co-organizer of a 2-day conference, "Once More with Feeling: Affect and the God of the Philosophers," at the University of Dayton, Feb. 24-25. Featuring twenty speakers, including renowned philosophers Amy Hollywood (Harvard University) and Eliot Wolfson (UC Santa Barbara), who gave the keynote addresses, the conference examined how philosophers—from the ancient world to the present—have characterized and talked about 'God' by examining the question through the lens of affect and emotion. The CSRCS was happy to offer financial support to help make this important discussion possible.

A REMARKABLE YEAR FOR FACULTY RESEARCH ON *RELIGION*

Peters Offers Ethicist's View of Reproduction and Abortion Debates



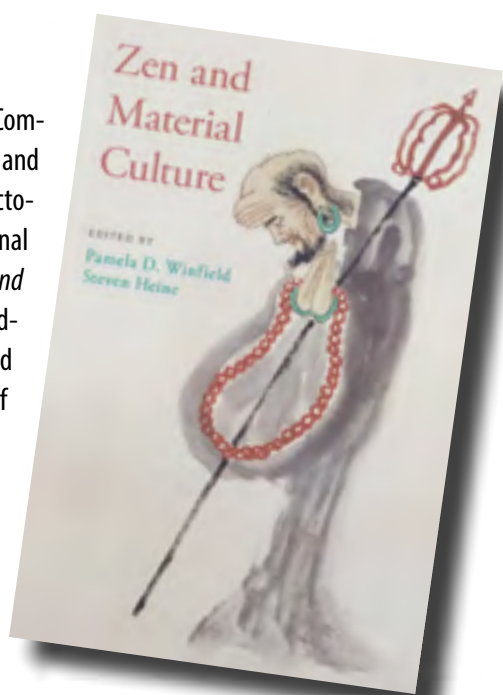
In her 2018 book *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice* (Beacon Press), Elon Christian ethicist Rebecca Todd Peters argues that “the problem that we face in this country is our failure to trust women to act as rational, capable, responsible moral agents” when it comes to their decisions about pregnancy and abortion. The book is being widely reviewed, and the CSRCS will sponsor a panel discussion about it with Dr. Peters in Fall 2018. Calling it “theologically astute and social justice-minded,” *Publishers’*

Weekly says “Peters’s book is dense with the history of women’s rights, as well as analysis of patriarchal oppression and the ways the church, legislators, and businesses have tried to control and govern women’s bodies.” Peters is also currently mentoring two undergraduate research students on projects related to reproductive justice with CSRCS support. Louisa Sholar is an honors fellow who is researching the Reproductive Justice approach to reproductive health care in Guyana, and Lucy Jones is an Elon College Fellow who is researching the work of the Religious Coalition of Reproductive Choice (RCRC) and the response of various faith communities to the issue of abortion over the 45-year history of RCRC.

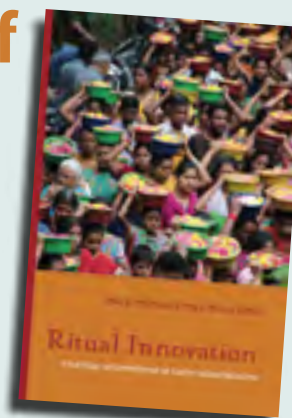
The Japan Society features Winfield’s books at New York gathering



Associate Professor of Religious Studies and CSRCS Advisory Committee member Pamela D. Winfield participated in a lecture and book-signing event at The Japan Society in New York on October 18, 2017 with her co-editor Steven Heine of Florida International University. The occasion celebrated the release of their book, *Zen and Material Culture*, by Oxford University Press. The evening event, “Finding Zen: Uncovering Meaning in Art and Artifacts,” was moderated by award-winning novelist, filmmaker and Zen priest Ruth Ozeki of Smith College. Held in the newly renovated Lila Acheson Wallace auditorium of the prestigious 110-year old cultural institution, the event drew approximately 200 ticket-holding audience members. Winfield spoke on her first monograph, *Icons and Iconoclasm in Japanese Buddhism: Kūkai and Dōgen on the Art of Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press 2013), awarded the AAS-SEC Book Prize in 2015. Her talk deconstructed Zen’s reputation for wholesale iconoclasm by examining the iconic images associated with the 13th-century Zen master Dōgen.



Scholars of Hinduism Publish Book on Religion and Innovation



CSRCS Director Brian Pennington and Multifaith Scholars Director Amy Allocco published *Ritual Innovation: Strategic Interventions in South Asian Religion* with SUNY Press this spring. The book explores how rituals of the the Indian subcontinent and its diasporas provide a lively platform for social change and innovation. It features 13 chapters written by renowned scholars of religion in South Asia. In addition to spearheading the collaboration, curating the essays, and editing the collection, Pennington and Allocco co-wrote the theoretical introduction and each contributed individual chapters based on their original research in India. Pennington’s piece studies a widow in the Himalayan pilgrimage city of Uttarkashi who developed a healing practice that helped her circumvent social limitations she faced. Allocco’s contribution focuses on the class, caste, and gender dynamics of the innovative “flower-shower festival” that was imported into the ritual repertoire of a popular South Indian goddess temple in a deliberate attempt to appeal to a more upwardly mobile class of devotees. Other chapters deal with creative uses of ritual in a variety of circumstances: young Jain women who fast to leverage power in their own marital negotiations, middle-class Hindu housewives in Canada who devise rituals for a non-Indian context, and a priest who revised wedding ceremonies to accommodate same-sex and polyamorous unions.

Claussen Makes His Sabbatical Count

Incoming Religious Studies Chair and longtime CSRCS Advisor, Geoffrey Claussen, remained very busy during his 2017-18 sabbatical leave, publishing several articles and a translation while also working on his book on Jewish ethics.



The Lori and Eric Sklut Scholar in Jewish Studies and associate professor of religious studies published the paper “Angels, Humans, and the Struggle for Moral Excellence in the Writings of Meir Simhah of Dvinsk and Simhah Zissel of Kelm” in the volume *Jewish Religious and Philosophical Ethics*, edited by Curtis Hutt, Halla Kim, and Berel Dov Lerner (Routledge, 2018). In this paper, Claussen contrasts the moral psychology of two prominent Lithuanian rabbis who sought to influence Orthodox Judaism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: Rabbi Meir Simhah of Dvinsk (1843-1926) and Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv of Kelm (1824-1898). He also published an article titled “Repairing Character Traits and Repairing the Jews: The Talmud Torahs of Kelm and Grobin in the Nineteenth Century” in a special issue of the journal *Polin* dedicated to Jewish Education in Eastern Europe. Claussen’s article analyzes the unique characteristics of the Talmud Torah yeshivas of Kelm (in modern-day Lithuania) and Grobin (in modern-day Latvia), institutions associated with the moral-character-focused Musar movement in the late 19th century. In addition, Claussen translated selections of the 1861-62 piece, “Light of Israel” for *Jewish Legal Theories: Writings on State, Religion, and Morality*, edited by Leora Batnitzky and Yonatan Brafman for Brandeis University Press. And if that weren’t enough, he produced a book manuscript, *Modern Musar: Contested Virtues in Jewish Thought*, forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press. Well done, Dr. Claussen!



Also of Note

- Assistant Professor of Geography, David (Sandy) Marshall, in his first year at Elon, published the article "Building Peaceful Citizens? Nation-building in Divided Societies" with co-author Daniel Hammett in the journal, *Space and Polity* 21/2 (2017): 129-43.
- Truitt Center staff members Joel Harter, Maggie Castor, Carolina P. Seigler & Diana Abrahams published research conducted on multifaith initiatives at Elon, "Navigating Identity and Privilege in Multifaith Engagement on a College Campus." *Journal of College and Character*, 19:1 (2018), 4-17.



Gatti Named President of Episcopus



Evan Gatti, Associate Professor of Art History, was named to a three-year term as president of Episcopus, the Society for the Study of Bishops and Secular Clergy in the Middle Ages. Established in 2004, EPISCOPUS is an interdisciplinary, scholarly society devoted to fostering the exchange of information and research about the medieval episcopate and secular clergy. We look forward to seeing how Dr. Gatti's work unfolds!

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 three 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 them 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 to 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.



2017-18 Scholar Development Grant Recipient:

Lucy Jones (Political Science and Philosophy)

"Examining the Intersections between Reproduction, Religion and Culture," (Toddie Peters, Religious Studies, faculty mentor)

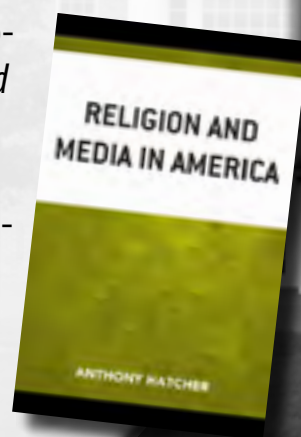
CSRCS SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

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.



AS WE GO TO PRESS

News has just broken that Anthony Hatcher, Associate Professor of Communications, has just published *Religion and Media in America* with Lexington Books! Congratulations to Dr. Hatcher. For more info, check E-net!



CSRCS SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWS:



Kristina Meyer *(Religious Studies)*
“Interfaith Worker Justice: A Case Study for Effective Social Justice Interfaith Organizing,”
(Toddie Peters, Religious Studies, faculty mentor)

Jocelyn Pietro *(Public Health)*
“Sarvodaya Shramadana (The Awakening of All) Movement: Analyzing the Working Relationships Between Faith, Service, and Public Health in Sri Lanka,” (Amy Allocco, Religious Studies, faculty mentor)



SURF Symposium

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

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, India, and the USA.



SYMPOSIUM:
South Asia in Motion; South Asia in Transition
(Moderator: Jocelyn Pietro)

Amy Mullan (Dr. Mussa Idris, faculty mentor), “Newcomers and Nursing: Infant Feeding Beliefs and Practices of Resettled Refugees”

Surya Shahi (Dr. Mussa Idris, faculty mentor), “Sociocultural Factors in Access to Quality Education in the Region of Humla, Nepal”

James Burnham (Dr. Jason Kirk, faculty mentor), “Mr. Modi’s Ocean View: Indian Foreign Policy in the Indian Ocean Region”

Anya Fredsell (Dr. Amy Allocco), “Poses, Pujas, and Prayers: Intersections between Yoga and Religion”

2 Elon Students Receive Fulbright Study Research Grants to Continue Work on Religion in India

Brianna Birchett (‘17) and Anya Fredsell (‘18) received competitive Fulbright grants from the US State Department. Both scholars began their research in India as Elon College Fellows and Lumen scholars with ongoing support from the CSRCS and the South Asia Research Group at Elon (SARGE).

Birchett, originally from Asheville, N.C., graduated in 2017 as an international studies major. Her research focuses on the effects of 20th century political reformists on modern conceptions of devadasis, who are hereditary female dancers and courtesans in Hindu temples. Her Lumen Prize mentor was Brian Pennington, professor of religious studies and director of the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society. Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, Fredsell was an Elon College Fellow and a recipient of the Elon Presidential Scholarship, Rawls Endowed Research Grant, the Center for Research on Global Engagement Grant, the Graves Family and Johnson Family religious studies endowed grants, as well as the

Lumen Prize, Elon’s most prestigious research award. Fredsell has already spent significant time conducting fieldwork and research in India focused on South Asian religions, modern transnational yoga traditions, global Hinduism and women’s religious practices. Her Lumen Prize research under the mentorship of Amy Allocco, associate professor of religious studies and director of the CSRCS’s Multifaith Scholars program, centered on exploring yoga’s changing role in global society through an ethnographic study of yoga communities. 2017-18 was a record-breaking year for Elon Fulbright awards overall, with 4 students receiving Study Research grants and 7 English teaching awards through Fulbright.



Brianna Birchett (‘17)



Anya Fredsell (‘18)



{ SURF Symposium }

Following individual presentations, students engaged in a dialogue about the challenges of doing research in transnational contexts and then fielded questions from the audience.



Elon students present undergraduate research at religious studies conference

Six of the students presented undergraduate research mentored by professors from the Department of Religious Studies, while the other seven observed the conference in preparation for presenting in future years themselves.

In the past decade, student travel to SECSOR to observe and present research has become a valued tradition in the department, motivating students to engage in the academic study of religion and equipping them for further scholarship.

Four of the student presenters were mentored by Amy Allocco, associate professor of religious studies. **Kimberly Byrne** presented research on hybridization and ritual practice dealing with spirits,

possession, and the presence of ghosts among Thai and Chinese ethnic groups in Thailand. **Daniela Ceron's** research paper explored the relationship between power and possession, in both the Hindu and Islamic traditions, as they are mediated through ritual specialists during the performance of ritual possession in the Western and Central Himalayas. **Katira Dobbins's** research examined religious and cultural pluralism in South India, as demonstrated through the relationships and overlaps that can be seen in Hindu and Indian Catholic ritual practices. **Anya Fredsell** offered a research paper examining the intersections of religion and modern yoga in the United States and India.

Having worked with research mentor

With the generous support of the Office of Undergraduate Research, the Department of Religious Studies, the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society, and Theta Alpha Kappa, the Religious Studies Honor Society, thirteen Elon students traveled to Atlanta, Georgia, March 2-4 for the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) conference, the annual regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature.

Assistant Professor Ariela Marcus-Sells, **Joel Green** presented research on the evolution of the thought of Malcolm X regarding the social construction of race and possible solutions to the problems of racial injustice.

Finally, **Alexandra McCorkle's** work with research mentor Lynn Huber, professor of religious studies, delineated the religious and cultural parallels between CrossFit and Muscular Christianity. During the conference, students were also able to learn about research conducted by professors and graduate students as well as undergraduate students at other colleges and universities throughout the Southeast.

MULTIFAITH SCHOLARS

Elon names second class of Multifaith Scholars

Five rising juniors have been named members of the second class of Multifaith Scholars. Selected in a competitive application and interview process, students in this interdisciplinary cohort will pursue academic coursework, undertake faculty-mentored undergraduate research projects, and participate in community engagement partnerships with local religious communities during their junior and senior years. Each Multifaith scholar is awarded \$5,000 annually to support creative and engaged research and global study in topics connected with religious diversity and multifaith encounter. Amy Allocco, the program's director and an associate professor of religious studies, will work with all of the students and their faculty mentors as they develop their projects and pursue their research, which will focus on sites of encounter, both domestic and international. "I am incredibly excited about the strength of this new cohort," Allocco said. "Their research projects are diverse and compelling, and they have proposed interesting, public-facing outcomes that will make their work and their findings accessible to broad audiences at Elon and beyond. It will be a privilege to work with them over the next two years," she said.



The 2018-2020 Multifaith Scholars are:

Marjorie Anne Foster
Major: Journalism
Minors: Environmental Studies and Interreligious Studies
Faculty Mentors: Glenn Scott and Amy Allocco
Foster will research the ways that college-age Muslims in North Carolina reflect on their status as members of a U.S. minority religion as well as how they position themselves vis-à-vis other religious groups.

Hannah Thorpe
Majors: Religious Studies and Psychology
Minors: Political Science and Classical Studies
Faculty Mentor: Geoffrey Claussen
Thorpe will research Jewish responses to Neo-Nazi movements in the United States, focusing on how these responses inform Jewish communities and identities.

Kathryn Gerry
Majors: International & Global Studies (Middle East) and Political Science
Minors: Interreligious Studies and Asian Studies
Faculty Mentor: Amy Allocco
Gerry will research the implications of worker migration from South India to the Gulf states, focusing on how the flow of ideas, practices, and cash remittances from the Gulf shape interreligious relationships in India.

Sonya Walker
Majors: Journalism and Religious Studies
Minor: Middle Eastern Studies
Mentors: Ariela Marcus-Sells and Colin Donohue
Walker will research the role and manifestations of Islamophobia within the American airline industry, with attention to the representation of multiple religious traditions.

Katie Hooker
Major: Strategic Communications
Minor: Interreligious Studies
Faculty Mentors: Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco
Hooker will study the intersections of Christianity and the indigenous religions of Haiti, such as Vodou, through a study of a boys' orphanage in the city of Fauche that was founded by her late aunt following the 2010 earthquake.



These students join the program's first cohort of Multifaith Scholars, who have spent this academic year engaged in undergraduate research and study abroad in diverse contexts.

Among those scholars, Sophie Zinn is leveraging her semester in Copenhagen to research the experiences of Muslim migrant populations in Denmark. Two other members of the inaugural cohort will pursue fieldwork and research under the auspices of a Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society Summer Research Fellowship this summer: Jocelyn Pietro will work with a non-governmental organization in Sri Lanka, while Kristina Meyer will study the Interfaith Worker Justice movement at several United States locations. Styrling Rohr will dedicate her summer to conducting ethnographic interviews and producing a documentary film in collaboration with the community at the Sikh Gurudwara of North Carolina in Durham.

Established with a 2016 seed grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, the Multifaith Scholars program is a two-year, closely mentored, experientially rich, and academically rigorous educational opportunity for juniors and seniors who show great potential as intellectually curious and socially engaged multifaith leaders. The program is administered by the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society.

More information can be found on the [Center's website](#).

CSRCS 2017-18 SPONSORED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

SPEAKERS SOLE OR PRIMARY SPONSOR

- Sept. 5** **“Notes from the Ground: Reflections on Charlottesville,”** Tony Crider (Physics), Jeffrey Pugh (Religious Studies), Megan Squire (Computing Sciences) and Jasmine Turner’15 (WWBT Richmond, VA)
- Sept. 28** **“Comparative Satire: A Tale of Two Scandals,”** Paul B. Courtright (Emory University)
- Oct. 26** **“Myth, Meaning, and Morality in the Films of the Coen Brothers,”** Elijah Siegler (College of Charleston)
- Feb. 15** **Filmscreening: “Redneck Muslim,”** panel discussion with Shane Atkinson (Coordinator of Muslim Life), Ahmed Fadam (Communications), and Sana Haq (Communications)
- Feb. 19** **“Knowledge in Ifa: An Intellectual African Tradition,”** Oludamini Ogunnaike (College of William and Mary)
- Feb. 28** **“Religion Trending: Jerusalem,”** Sandy Marshall (Geography)
- Mar. 15** **“Panel Discussion Honoring the Career of Dr. Jeffrey Pugh,”** Stanley Hauerwas (Duke University), Lori Hale (Augsburg College), John Penniman’05 (Bucknell University), and Ryan Newson’07 (Campbell University)
- Mar. 27** **“Together Forever? Strange and Storied Alliances Among Hindus and Jews, India and Israel,”** Shana Sippy (Centre College)
- Apr. 18** **“Brother Ali: Race, Faith, and Hip-hop,”** panel discussion and performance with Brother Ali, Dr. Buffie Longmire-Avital (Psychology), Imam Shane Atkinson (Coordinator of Muslim Life), and Alonzo Cee’18

SPEAKERS CO- OR SECONDARY SPONSOR

- Feb. 21** **“Detention, Deportation, and Death: Immigrants Under Fire in the U.S.,”** Margaret Regan (journalist), with Peace and Conflict Studies, History/Geography, and others
- Mar. 27** **“Navigating Jewish Belonging and Activism after the Women’s March,”** (Shana Sippy, Centre College), with Hillel
- Mar. 29** **Sri Lanka Panel,** Amy Allocco (Religious Studies), Brian Pennington (Religious Studies), Neil Devotta (Wake Forest University), with Periclean Scholars
- Apr. 12** **“Memories of Early Childhood under the Nazi Regime,”** Film screening and discussion with Holocaust survivors Shelly Weiner & Rachel Kizhnerman
- May 1** **“The Meaning of Work,”** Students in COR 360, with Department of Philosophy, Core Curriculum



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



Amy Allocco
Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Director of Multifaith Scholars



Joel Harter
Associate University Chaplain / Director of the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life



Sandy Marshall
Assistant Professor of Geography



Hal Vincent
Lecturer in Communications and Faculty Director of Live Oak



Mina Garcia-Soormaly
Associate Professor of Spanish in the Department of World Languages and Cultures



Jeffrey Pugh
Professor of Religious Studies



Pamela Winfield
Associate Professor of Religious Studies



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

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{ The CSRCS deepens ties with the University of Madras in Chennai, India (below), through scholarly collaboration and the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding. }

