



**ELON**

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF

Religion, Culture and Society

# Annual Report 2020 – 2021



CULTURE,  
RELIGION,  
and  
HOME-MAKING  
in and  
BEYOND  
SOUTH ASIA





# CONTENTS

Director's Letter

From the 2020-2022 CSRCS Scholar

A Year of Programming Innovation

- Course videos

- Religion Trending

- Decentering Whiteness workshops

- Zoom lectures

Research and Scholarship

- On the Edge Symposium: Religion at the Borders

- Publications

- Luce Collaborative on Public Scholarship

- Community-based Participatory Research

Undergraduate Research and the Undergraduate Experience

- Multifaith Scholars

- Undergraduate Research grants

- Conference presentations

- SURF Day

- Course-embedded Undergraduate Research

News

Transitions

CSRCS Team

# EMERGING STRONGER

It will be obvious to all readers that 2020–2021 posed serious challenges to the work of the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society. For the CSRCS team, the questions this historic year posed took shape around the search for new modes of engagement and emerging Elon commitments to addressing our collective sense of national and global emergency: How should a center so closely identified with high-profile, in-person events adapt to pandemic lockdown and isolation? How does it respond when society is, at the same time, in crisis over the accumulated injustices of history? What is our role when its democratic institutions and norms face their gravest threats in over a century? How can we support instructors working to master entirely new modes of course delivery? In his reflections that follow, the CSRCS's first faculty scholar, Sandy Marshall, eloquently addresses such questions. This report will give some indication of our thought processes and decision-making during a year when higher education in general and Elon in particular confronted circumstances that have imperiled institutions and programs across the country. I am confident the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society is emerging stronger than ever and more sure of its mission as a result of grappling with the unprecedented. I am grateful to Amy Allocco, Multifaith Scholars Director, and CSRCS Scholar Marshall—their ingenuity and unflagging dedication to Elon faculty, staff, and students made a successful year possible.



**Brian K. Pennington**

Professor of Religious Studies &  
Director of the Elon Center for the  
Study of Religion, Culture, and Society

# CLOSING THE GAP

To say that the 2020–2021 academic year was challenging would be a colossal understatement. Elon students, faculty, and staff will long remember this year for the anxiety created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulties of social distancing. It was also a year of impassioned activism following months of Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The renewed racial justice movement prompted critical self-reflection, introspection, and difficult discussions on campus. Responses included increased awareness of and activism surrounding the Confederate monument at the Alamance County Courthouse in Graham and calls to memorialize Wyatt Outlaw, the first African-American Commissioner and Constable of Graham, who was lynched where that monument stands. Neo-confederate extremism confronted campus directly when a pro-Trump convoy careened through campus in September and drivers shouted racist and obscene remarks at students and faculty. Indeed, this academic year will also be remembered for the contentious presidential election cycle, culminating in a right-wing insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th, aimed at disrupting the democratic transfer for power.

The pandemic, protests, and insurrection exposed the inequalities and divisions that continue to confront American society. As we begin a hopeful transition to a post-pandemic world, many caution against a rushed return to normal, given how unhealthy the status quo ante proved to be. As we reduce our physical distance from one another, can we maintain a commitment to also reducing social and cultural distance while closing racial, economic, and gender-based gaps in our society? As “we” come together again, we face questions about what, if anything, unites us. What values or vision for the future do we hold in common? This is a question that confronts communities, campuses, and our country as a whole.

At a time when the weakening of traditional bonds of religious affiliation and national identity has resulted in resurgent religious and nationalist extremism on one hand and unmoored social anomie on the other, public scholarship on these questions is vital. Public scholarship and community engagement is at the heart of the CSRCS's mission. For this reason, I am proud to have served as the first CSRCS Scholar, and proud to have dedicated energy toward broader public engagement this year.

As this annual report demonstrates, the challenge of social distancing during the 2020-2021 academic year imposed constraints but also opened possibilities for CSRCS programming. We converted our popular Religion Trending event series into a virtual format. The magic of Zoom allowed us to reach a broader audience and bring in outside speakers, while also archiving a recording of the conversation for future classroom use. Our successful speaker events and book discussion group took on new life. In my own teaching, students used technology to overcome social distance in order to conduct oral history interviews and co-create digital stories with community members, a capacity I plan to further develop in my role as CSRCS Scholar. Finally, after a great deal of uncertainty about the On the Edge symposium "Religion at the Borders," a combination of small virtual sessions, a large remote keynote address, and hybrid physical/digital photography and art exhibit, made for a memorable and meaningful experience for all involved.

Though the creative adaptations we developed this year will no doubt continue to serve us in the future, we look forward to reduced restrictions on in-person gatherings and travel, allowing us to once again directly connect with communities far and near in our teaching, research, and engagement.



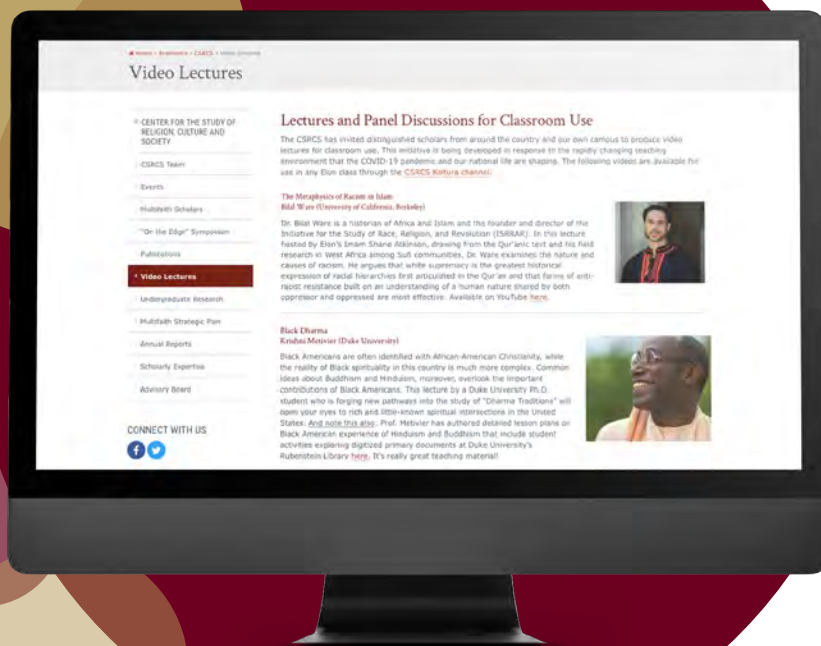
**Sandy Marshall**

Assistant Professor of Geography  
& CSRCS Scholar 2020-2022

# A YEAR OF PROGRAMMING INNOVATION

## COURSE VIDEOS FOR PANDEMIC TEACHING

In the summer of 2020, as the entire campus—from Physical Plant to Media Services—gave itself over to planning and preparing for pandemic instruction, the CSRCS began to commission video lectures for use in an environment that would rely much more on digital content. Scholars and experts from around the country recorded lectures with slide banks and other content for the use of instructors in online and hybrid courses, including 110. The CSRCS website will now maintain [a library of these course videos](#) as well as content from other events this year for use in future years—just one of the ways that Covid innovation and discovery will continue to pay dividends. A current list of course video lectures includes:





### **Keeping it Reel: Muslims Changing Images of Muslims in Film and Television**

Amir Hussain (Loyola Marymount University)

*This lecture examines how Muslims working in the film and television industry today have helped to change the stereotyped images that cartoons, professional wrestling, and action movies once perpetrated.*



### **Black Dharma**

Krishni Metivier (Duke University)

*This lecture forges new pathways into the study of “Dharma Traditions” to open students’ eyes to rich and little-known spiritual intersections in the United States.*

### **The African Roots of Islam in America**

Ustadh Ubaydullah Evans (Scholar-in-Residence, American Learning Institute for Muslims)

*This discussion centers the Muslim influences brought to the Americas by enslaved African peoples. With thanks to Elon’s Imam Shane Atkinson for organizing the talk.*

### **Defend the Sacred: Native American Religious Freedom beyond the First Amendment**

Michael McNally (Carleton College)

*Legal historian McNally discusses how Native peoples, from North Dakota’s Standing Rock encampments to Arizona’s San Francisco Peaks, have repeatedly asserted legal rights to religious freedom to protect their sacred places and practices. Cosponsored with the Joy Phillips Center for Interreligious Studies at the University of St. Thomas.*

### **Religion, Spirituality, and HIV**

Magdalena Szaflarski (University of Alabama, Birmingham)

*Dr. Szaflarski reviews the scientific evidence for the role of religion and spirituality in the lives and treatment of persons living with HIV.*

### **White Too Long: Reckoning with the Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity**

Robert P. Jones (Public Religion Research Institute)

*Providing both a history of racism in US denominations and contemporary polling data, White Too Long delivers a provocative examination of race and American Christianity.*



### **The Metaphysics of Racism in Islam**

Bilal Ware (University of California, Berkeley)

*Dr. Ware draws from the Qur’anic text and his field research in West Africa to closely examine racism. With thanks to the Elon Muslim Society for organizing the talk.*

### **Confederate Monuments as Sacred Objects**

Ryan Newson (Campbell University, Elon Class of 2007)

*Why do Confederate memorials spark such fervent devotion, especially among white southerners?*

### **Pandemic Religion: How Plagues Shaped Christianity from the Past to the Present**

John Penniman (Bucknell University, Elon Class of 2005)

*This lecture explores the consequences of epidemics on religious communities from antiquity to today.*

## Elon 2021 Baccalaureate Address

Valarie Kaur (Revolutionary Love Project)



Interfaith Activist and documentary filmmaker Valarie Kaur was in college when she started her quest to investigate hate violence against Sikhs, Muslims and Arabs. Fueled by the grief she felt in the aftermath of her uncle's death—a fellow Sikh and victim of a hate crime following 9/11—she searched for answers that took her years to understand. Valarie gave an insightful address to students and faculty, drawing from her recently published book, *See No Stranger*.

**“If you choose to see no stranger throughout your life, it will give you the wisdom to show up with courage to remake this world, to reorder this world in such a way that leaves no one behind.”**

**—Valarie Kaur**

**Black Foodways and Liberation:** The Center co-sponsored the 2020–2021 Annual Geography Lecture given on March 26th by **Priscilla McCutcheon**, Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Kentucky. The talk, “Black Liberation: Revolution and Reconciliation in our Food System,” examined the use of Black liberation theology as a framework for understanding the pursuit of freedom through food and agriculture. In this lecture, Dr. McCutcheon discussed key connections between Black liberation, food, and agriculture, paying specific attention to the importance of “revolution” and “reconciliation,” including why attention to Black liberation theology is called for in our present moment. The Geography Lecture was co-sponsored by the CREDE and African and African American Studies at Elon.





# RELIGION TRENDING

Religion Trending is an informal gathering of faculty and staff to discuss religion-related topics that are trending in the news. Organized in an *ad hoc* manner in response to pressing issues of import, these events draw on-campus expertise to help faculty and staff unpack topics that may be the subject of discussion in our classrooms, residence halls, and offices. In previous years these gatherings have taken place at Oak House. Due to Covid-19, the CSRCS unveiled “Religion Trending: Virtual Edition” using Zoom. The online format allowed for a larger audience, facilitated recording and archiving for future use, and enabled outside guest speakers to more easily contribute to the conversation. Religion Trending: Virtual Edition discussions on the following topics were held in the Fall semester, January Term, and Spring semester; all are available on the [CSRCS Kaltura channel](#).



**Hagia Sophia:** In August, **Evan Gatti** (Art History), **Baris Kesgin** (Political Science) and **Sumeyye Pakdil** (Religious Studies) joined in for a discussion of the controversial conversion of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul from a museum into an active Islamic prayer space in 2020. Built as a Byzantine Cathedral and later converted into a mosque during the Ottoman era, the space became a secular museum under Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic.

**Religion and the Capitol Insurrection:** Following the Capitol Insurrection on January 6th, Religious Studies faculty **Lynn Huber** and **Andrew Monteith** led a discussion on religious ideologies, identities, and iconography on display during the attack. The discussion explored the intersections of white supremacy, charismatic Christianity, and neo-pagan identitarianism.

**White Supremacy and Christian Identity:** Seeking to further deepen the discussion on religion and right-wing extremism, **Megan Squire** (Computer Science) and guest speaker **Joan Braune** (Philosophy, Gonzaga University) gave a talk examining the religious (and anti-religious) views of far right extremist groups, ranging from the Christian Identity movement to millenarian accelerationists.

**May the Fourth Be With You—Star Wars and Islam:** Ending the intense academic year on a lighter note, the Center hosted a special Star Wars Day/Ramadan edition of Religion Trending on May the 4th examining the religious themes in Star Wars, including the elements of Islamic spirituality and aesthetics found in the franchise. Elon’s **Imam Shane Atkinson** and Zaytuna College graduate **Aasiya Sellars** led the nerdfest. Popular, it was.



# DECENTERING WHITENESS WORKSHOPS

**Decentering Whiteness in Biblical Studies Classes:** The CSRCS co-sponsored a set of Summer 2021 workshops on anti-racist pedagogies in the teaching of biblical literature and history developed by **Dr. Lynn Huber**, Director of Honors at Elon and Professor of Religious Studies. Conducted by leading scholars of religion, race, and the bible, the series of six, stand-alone workshops addressed the “lack of pedagogical and disciplinary training among biblical scholars for anti-racist teaching on the Bible.” Recognizing that students as well as professors often do not see or acknowledge white supremacy in Western traditions and that many are raised in racially segregated religious traditions, the series offered anti-racist pedagogy training for professors of biblical studies often not available to them in graduate school or through professional development programs. More information about the workshops is available at <https://decenteringwhiteness.blog/>.



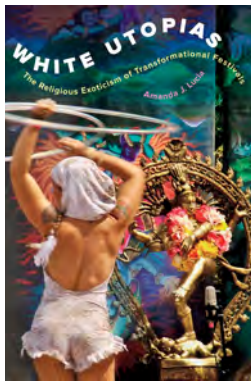
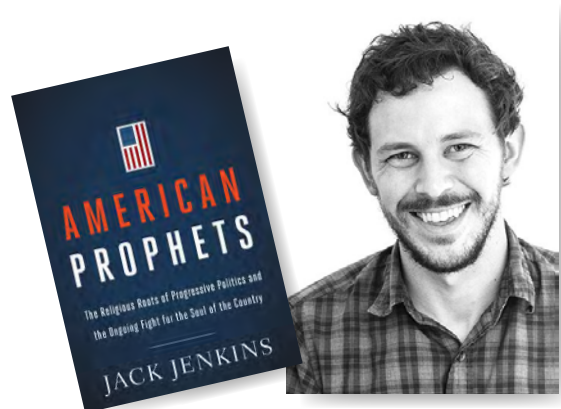
**White Supremacy and US Christianity:** **Robert P. Jones**, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and one of the country's leading pollsters, spoke via Zoom on Oct. 27 about his most recent book, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*. Part memoir of his Southern Baptist youth, part analysis of more than a decade of polling data, the book examines the role of Christianity in sustaining white supremacy in US history. In his talk, Jones emphasized how “a close read of history reveals that we white Christians...haven't been just complacent or complicit ...but have been responsible for perpetuating a project of white supremacy that has framed the entire American story.” A lively discussion with Elon professors **Damion Blake**, **Buffie Longmire-Avital**, and **Toddie Peters** followed. Jones has now spoken at Elon in each of the previous three national election cycles and was one of the first speakers invited to campus by the CSRCS—we are delighted that our long relationship with PRRI continues.



# COURSE GUEST LECTURES

The pandemic provided an unanticipated opportunities for scholars and their audiences across the country to engage with one another via their laptops. In addition to the many virtual lectures noted elsewhere in this report, the CSRCS supported classroom visits by a variety of other Zoom talks by scholars from around the world. A few of those included:

**Jack Jenkins**, reporter and analyst for Religion News Service, visited Anthony Hatcher's Religion and Media course to talk about his own journey into religion reporting and his ongoing work on the religious left in the US. He recently published his book, *American Prophets*, discussing the intersection of religion and progressive politics.



**Amanda Lucia**, scholar of global Hinduism spoke to multiple student audiences about her new book on transformational festival culture in the US, *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational*.

**Sankha Banerjee**, Kolkata artist and graphic novelist, spoke to REL 172: Epic Tales from India about his work on a series of books based on the Mahabharata.





# RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

## 2021 SYMPOSIUM: RELIGION AT THE BORDERS

**On the Edge Symposium:** “On the Edge” is a bi-annual symposium at Elon University that brings together scholars working at the theoretical and methodological boundaries of those fields that have a stake in the critical analysis of religion—law, history, psychology, anthropology, literature/textual studies, philosophy, art history, political science, classics, sociology, geology, folklore, and gender studies, to name a few. “On the Edge” aims to exercise a self-conscious attention to methodological advances that can be made through interdisciplinarity. Its proceedings contribute to a richly contextualized and multi-layered understanding of the role of religion in societies past, present, and future.



**Pictured:** Elon faculty and speakers gather virtually for the 2021 On the Edge Symposium.

The CSRCS hosted its regular interdisciplinary symposium virtually on February 11-13, 2021. Faculty conveners helping to organize the symposium were **Evan Gatti** (Art History), **Shayna Mehas** (History), **Sandy Marshall** (Geography), and **Amy Allocco** (Religious Studies). This year's theme, “**Religion at the Borders**,” focused on the ways that cultural practice takes shape in the context of borders, whether they were conceived as international demarcations or cultural boundaries. Many papers concerned geographical borders that delineate religious identities; others considered how recitations, practices, and rituals may also define the boundaries of belonging within and for religious communities. Hybridities in borderlands were a major topic of deliberation: borders separate, but they can also be bridges—areas where people, cultures, genders, families, economies, and religious traditions meet and meld. Over the three days of the symposium, twelve scholars from three countries held discussions of their ongoing research into border issues on Zoom. Marshall and Mehas are currently developing a collection of essays from the symposium for publication. Individual presentations included the following:



**Pictured:** Key Note Speaker, Leah Sarat

**Opening Keynote: Leah Sarat** (Arizona State University), “The Terror of ‘Safety’: Christianity, Immigrant Policing, and Detention at the Nation’s Edge”

**Brooke Brassard** (McMaster University), “On the Border of Monogamy: Suppressing and Rewarding Non-Monogamy Among the Latter-day Saints and Kainai Nation in Alberta, 1887-1905”

**Aniket De** (Harvard University), “Divided States, Shared Songs: Gambhira Performances across the India-Bangladesh Border”

**Thomas A. E. Greene** (University of North Georgia) and Evan Gatti (Elon University), “Borders before the Nation-State”

**Justine Howe** (Case Western Reserve University), “Affective Economies and the Transnational Revivalism of Maryam Jameelah”

**Harini Kumar** (University of Chicago), “At the Border of the Sacred: Muslim Shrines as Spaces of Care in Coastal South India”

**Aarti Patel** (Syracuse University), “Boundaries and Thresholds”

**Alexander Rocklin** (Otterbein University), “Becoming Hindu in Panama: Contesting Race and Religion across Borders”

**Ehsan Sheikholharam** (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), “Borders within Borders: Superkilen as the Site of Assimilation”

**Barbara Sostaita** (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), “Weaving the Wall: Care and the Devotional Femme in the Militarized Desert”

**Concluding Response: Banu Gokariksel** (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)



**Lens on the Border:** Seeking to deepen the impact of its symposium and seed conversations on campus about the situation at the US/Mexico border, the CSRCS mounted a multi-sited photography exhibit entitled “Lens on the Border.” Curated by the Borderlands chapter of the Sierra Club, the exhibit features the work of photographers and artists from the United States and Mexico, including indigenous artists. Rich in religious motifs, the artistic and photographic representations of human and non-human life in the borderlands. Previously exhibited in cities from Minneapolis to Mexico City, the exhibit found a home at Elon University in buildings located around the Lambert Academic Village. Including the atmosphere of Numen Lumen Pavilion’s Sacred Space, where photos taken by Elon students who participated in the US/Mexico Borderlands course in January 2019 were displayed. The exhibit’s placement symbolized the importance of bringing multidisciplinary perspectives to bear on the border. The strategic placement of the exhibit in high traffic corridors enabled students, staff, and faculty to take in bits and pieces of the exhibit on their way to class.



**Pictured:**  
The Virgin of Guadalupe watches over water jugs left for migrants in the Sonoran Desert. Photo by Alejandra Platt-Torres.

### **Keynote Address Highlights Conflicting Christian Commitments at the US Mexico Border:**

**Leah Sarat** of Arizona State University delivered 2021 the On The Edge symposium keynote address, “The Terror of ‘Safety:’ Christianity, Immigrant Policing, and Detention at the Nation’s Edge.” In her lecture Sarat highlighted the stories of two Christian leaders whose lives were closely impacted by the private, for-profit immigrant detention industry: an asylum-seeker from El Salvador who emerged as a peer faith healer during four years at Arizona’s Eloy Detention Center, and the former national Director of Chaplaincy for CoreCivic, the company that profited from her time behind bars. These stories provided insight into the commodification of human beings and immigrant policing in borderlands and offered a window onto the intersection of Christianity with broader debates about safety, fear, liberation, healing, and personhood within the U.S. carceral landscape.

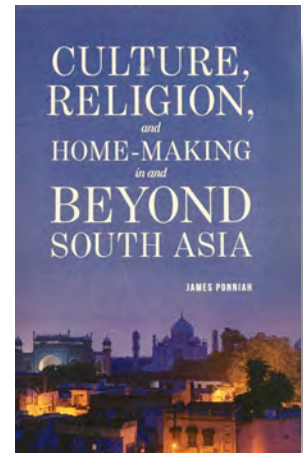
# PUBLICATIONS

Two new major publications supported by the CSRCS appeared in 2021. Center faculty also published several articles and chapters this year.

## ***Culture, Religion and Homemaking in and Beyond South Asia***

Edited by James Ponniah (Fortress Press, 2020)

*Culture, Religion, and Homemaking in and Beyond South Asia* grows out of a 2016 conference co-sponsored by the CSRCS with its international partner and conference host, the University of Madras, in Chennai, India. It explores how rituals, beliefs and social practices repurpose or re-envision home in relation to experiences of modernity, urbanization, conflict, migration and displacement. Authors examine spaces of contestation over the categories of “home” and “religion,” including interfaith families, cities, and sacred places. The book’s forward was written by **Amy Allocco** and **Brian Pennington**. For more information, see [here](#).

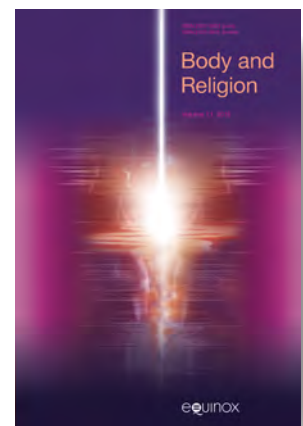


## ***Body and Religion 4/1/2020***

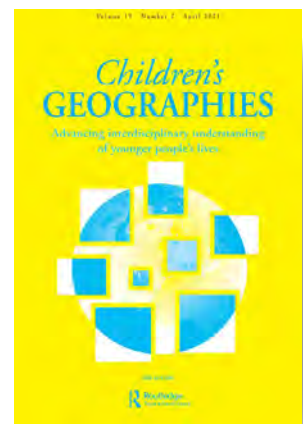
Special Issue: The Religious Body Imagined

Edited by Pamela D. Winfield

This special issue ([here](#)) includes articles and papers from the 2019 On the Edge Symposium hosted by the CSRCS. The two Elon faculty conveners for that symposium, Prof. of Religious Studies **Pamela Winfield** and Assoc. Prof. of Spanish **Mina Garcia-Soormally**, are featured alongside four other authors in the issue guest-edited by Winfield. A book based on the 2019 symposium is also forthcoming from Equinox.



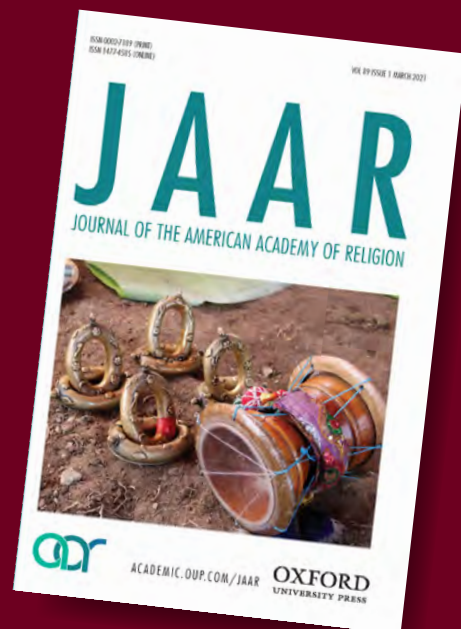
CSRCS Scholar **Sandy Marshall** published the article, “Intergenerational Place-based digital storytelling” with co-authors D. Smaira, and L. Staeheli in the journal, *Children’s Geographies*. Marshall was also awarded a Palestinian American Research Center Research Fellowship for the project, “Sacred Space/Contested Place: Intergenerational Memory and The Shifting Meanings of Joseph’s Tomb.” The fellowship is funded by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs through an agreement with the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.



MFS Director **Amy Allocco** had several publications appear this year. She was the guest editor with Jennifer D. Ortegren of Middlebury College for a special double issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* titled “Shifting Sites, Shifting Selves: The Intersections of Home and the Field in the Ethnography of India.” In the issue she also authored “Contextualizing Homes and Fields in the Ethnography of India” (with Ortegren) and “Shifting Technologies of Reflection: Intergenerational Relationships and the Entanglements of Field and Home.” Allocco also published two major research articles based on her Domesticating the Dead project:

“Vernacular Practice, Gendered Tensions, and Interpretive Ambivalence in Hindu Death, Deification, and Domestication Narratives.” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 13 (2): 144-71.

“Bringing the Dead Home: Hindu Invitation Rituals in Tamil South India.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89 (1): 103-42.



CSRCS Director **Brian Pennington** wrote the chapter, “(Neo)-liberal Challenges” for the new volume, *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, edited by Hans Gustafson (Beacon Press 2020), the most recent contribution of CSRCS faculty to the development of the emerging field of interreligious studies. The book brings together thirty-six scholars from four continents who offer “dispatches” on the current state of this burgeoning field. Pennington also served as guest editor of a special roundtable for *Modern Asian Studies* and authored “The Haunt of Authenticity: Viswanath, the Pariah Problem, and the Production of Modern Hinduism” for the issue.

## LUCE COLLABORATIVE ON PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

Three Elon faculty members were members of a research team funded by the Henry Luce Foundation to envision a publicly-directed future for teaching and scholarship at non-sectarian religious studies programs. **Andrew Monteith**, **Pamela Winfield**, and **Brian Pennington** worked on the project overseen by Sandie Gravett of Appalachian State University to understand the relationship of religious studies to issues of public concern and to formulate strategies for orienting research and teaching toward more public audiences. These Elon faculty members along with Anandi Silva-Knuppel of Lawrence University mapped the current landscape of public religion scholarship, documenting the character of 34 publishing outlets including websites, podcasts, and video channels. The full ten-member team reported preliminary results of their work at two sessions at the November 2020 AAR/SBL meeting and are now developing publications to report their findings and extend the conversation about the need for non-theologically driven, publicly focused work by scholars in religious studies.





# COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR, for short) is a mode of inquiry into social problems and issues that embraces ethical principles for ensuring that the interests and well-being of communities remain central to research that involves them. CBPR approaches encourage scholars to work alongside community partners as full participants in the research process, from the generation of research questions to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings. Students and faculty doing research supported by the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society have increasingly adopted CBPR approaches. The work that CSRCS Scholar **Sandy Marshall** has done in collaboration as part of the [Power and Place Collective's efforts](#) to collect oral histories of Alamance County is one example. Many Multifaith Scholars are also adopting CBPR-inspired methods as they develop their undergraduate research projects. In 2020-2021, CSRCS Director Brian Pennington was able to participate in training offered by Public Health Studies Associate Professor **Stephanie Baker** and **Anne Meletzke**, Director of Healthy Alamance, a local non-profit, in CBPR principles. We are grateful to Drs. Baker and Meletzke for providing this opportunity for training in CBPR as it assumes greater importance in the center.



**Pictured:** Stephanie Baker, Public Health Studies Associate Professor.

# UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

## MULTIFAITH SCHOLARS



The demands for social distance and curtailed movement did not dampen the spirit of the Multifaith Scholars this year, as they remained as active as ever. Scholars' research naturally took new directions, as many opted for virtual interviews or survey research, but the spring saw the seniors delivering academic presentations at multiple conferences and many of them developing manuscripts for publication. Program director **Amy Allocco** continued to work with each scholar individually to strategize about pandemic protocols and ensure each scholar had the support and resources they needed. Students continued their work with the youth of the Burlington Masjid through online Game Nights, and all of MFS helped to rehab and plant the community garden at the mosque. We are very grateful for the campus leadership shown by the graduating seniors Sirja Dutta, Madison Gray, Sarah Jane McDonald, and Kylee Smith, who now go on to graduate programs and exciting careers ahead.

**Meet the New Class of Multifaith Scholars:** In March, five members of the Class of 2023 were named members of the fifth cohort of Multifaith Scholars. Directed by Amy Allocco, this two-year fellows program selects students to participate in specialized coursework, faculty-mentored undergraduate research, campus leadership, and community engagement in multifaith contexts. Students in the program are awarded \$5,000 annually to support research and study in global contexts connected with religious diversity, pluralism, and conflict. The newest members were selected based on their potential as academically curious and socially engaged multifaith leaders committed to their development and the enhancement of their local and global communities. The 2023 cohort brings new faculty mentors and new disciplines into the program. Students in this class are majoring in **Creative Writing, Literature, International and Global Studies, Environmental and Ecological Studies, and Religious Studies**. Every student in the program either majors in Religious Studies or minors in Interreligious Studies, and most have second majors in other diverse departments, bringing a broad range of talents, skills, and experiences to the program.





## 2021–2023 Multifaith Scholars

### Darsev Kaur

**Major:** Religious Studies

**Minors:** Asian Studies, Leadership Studies

**Mentor:** Associate Professor Amy Allocco, Religious Studies

**Project Title:** “Analyzing Devotional Sikh Worship and Everyday Religiosity in Keshgarh Sahib Gurudwara”

**Proposed research:** Kaur’s research focuses on everyday Sikh religiosity and will analyze the significance of devotional practices performed during congregational worship at the Keshgarh Sahib Gurudwara and related sites in Punjab, India.



### Aidan Melinson

**Majors:** English: Creative Writing, Religious Studies

**Minor:** History

**Mentor:** Associate Professor Drew Perry, English

**Project Title:** “Crossing with Crows: Reconciling Christianity with Neopaganism in the Shadow of Grief”

**Proposed research:** Melinson’s project will combine creative writing and interreligious studies to produce a collection of creative pieces that reflect on Irish-Catholic culture, pre-Christian Ireland, and his own identities against the backdrop of personal loss.



### Peyton Rohlf

**Majors:** Literature, Religious Studies

**Minor:** Criminal Justice Studies

**Mentor:** Assistant Professor Dinidu Karunanayake, English

**Project Title:** “Crossroads of Nationalism and Religious Identity: Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism and Cultural Memory in the Sri Lankan American Diasporic Community in Staten Island”

**Proposed research:** Rohlf’s research will examine the formation of Buddhist cultural memory as it intersects with religious identity and nationalism within the Sri Lankan diaspora community in Staten Island, New York’s “Little Sri Lanka.”



## Madelyn Starr

**Majors:** International and Global Studies: Middle East Concentration, Religious Studies

**Minors:** Political Science, Middle East Studies

**Mentor:** Associate Professor Amy Allocco, Religious Studies

**Project Title:** “Creating Narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Through Everyday Materiality in Religious Contexts”

**Proposed research:** Starr will conduct ethnographic fieldwork in Jerusalem and record the “material memories” that Israelis and Palestinians attach to everyday objects in order to understand their experiences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



## Emerson Wells

**Major:** Environmental & Ecological Studies

**Minor:** Interreligious Studies

**Mentor:** Assistant Professor Robert Perdue, Sociology and Anthropology

**Project Title:** “Examining Mountain Identity in Appalachia and Bhutan”

**Proposed research:** Wells will utilize environmental sociology to examine the relationship between mountain identity and religious traditions in the southern Appalachian mountains and Bhutan.



# UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH GRANTS

**2021 Scholar Development Grants:** Scholar Development Grants 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.

Darsev Kaur (Religious Studies), "**Analyzing Devotional Sikh Worship and Everyday Religiosity in Keshgarh Sahib Gurudwara,**" (Mentor: Amy Allocco, Religious Studies,)

Faith Minor (Middle Grades Education), "**Exploring the Intersection of Trans and Jewish Thought and Tradition,**" (Mentor: Geoffrey Claussen, Religious Studies)

Daniel Scheff (Political Science), "**Devotion and Impact of Kotai-Andal in Contemporary Hindu Traditions,**" (Mentor: Amy Allocco, Religious Studies)



**CSRCS 2021 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. 2021 CSRCS Summer Research Fellows:

Emily Wilbourne (Arts Administration), "**The Influence of Japanese Imperialism on Buddhist Seungmu Dance in Korea,**" (Co-Mentors: Casey Avaunt, Dance, Pamela Winfield, Religious Studies)

Molly Morrison (Religious Studies), "**Roman Appropriations: Parthenogenetic Goddesses and Power Enforcement under the Roman Empire,**" (Mentor: Lynn Huber, Religious Studies)



# CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

**AAR/SBL SE Conference:** Once again this spring, the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society and its Religious Studies Department sponsored a delegation of students to the Southeastern regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL SE) to present research and learn the skills of networking in a professional setting. Although academic meetings all around the world were moved to online formats this year, during the weekend of March 12, Elon Department of Religious Studies faculty members **Brian Pennington** and **Amy Allocco** arranged a virtual conference experience for students from a variety of majors so they could have some opportunity for the professionalization that conference attendance can entail.

Six Elon seniors presented the results of long-term, faculty mentored research in the Undergraduate Research sessions of the meeting, sponsored by Florida State University. Eight other students attended the conference to support the seniors and to learn conference culture in hopes of presenting there in a future year.

In a typical year, students would attend the conference's opening reception and mingle with scholars in attendance. This year, masked and socially distanced, they dressed up, attended the conference's opening session in McEwen's screening room, and then took over Snow Atrium for a pandemic-inflected reception experience. Although there was no Elon van ride to a different state together, no shared hotel accommodations, and little chance to meet their peers from other universities, Elon's student attendees nonetheless demonstrated the outstanding work they can do under the guidance of Elon faculty.



**Annabelle Baker:** "The Role of Bollywood in Cultivating Cultural Connection with Indian Diaspora" (Mentor: Brian Pennington)

**Srija Dutta:** "South Asian College-Aged Women and the Influence of Religion and Cultural Factors on Sexual Decision Making" (Mentor: Amanda Tapler)

**Madison Gray:** "Cambodian American Religion in Contemporary American Diaspora" (Mentor: Brian Pennington)

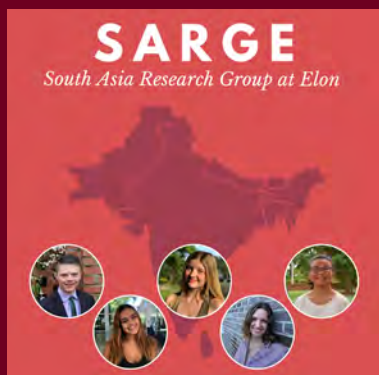
**Sarah Jane McDonald:** "'The Church is a Piece of Home:' Religious Experiences of East and Central African Refugees" (Mentor: Mussa Idris)

**Kylee Smith:** "Practices, Beliefs, and Identities: Muslim Immigrants' Acculturation to the United States" (Mentor: Sandy Marshall)

**Kaitlin Theall:** "Promoting Sufism as a Counter-Extremism Strategy in the Moroccan Press" (Mentor: Ariela Marcus-Sells)

# SURF SYMPOSIUM

**Symposium: “South Asia and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century:”** As it has for the last seven year, the CSRCS supported the development of a student research symposium featuring the South Asia Research Group at Elon (SARGE) for Elon’s annual Student Undergraduate Research Forum (SURF Day). This year’s symposium examined how South Asian cultural traditions are challenged, adapted, and extended as they meet the demands of the twenty-first century. The five student projects that this symposium drew from represented a range of South Asian topics—village health knowledge among adolescent girls, Indian-American film-viewing habits, the survivals of Cambodia’s religious practices among multiple generations of refugees, sexual decision making in US teens of South Asian descent, and urban development. They also represented methodologies employed in a variety of disciplines—Public Health, Political Science, Film and Television Arts, and Religious Studies.



## COURSE-EMBEDDED UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Elon has long been recognized for the quality of its undergraduate research programs and the high participation in research by its students. Under the **Boldly Elon** strategic plan, access to research opportunities will be further expanded and establish Elon as an unquestioned national leader in undergraduate research. To this point, the university has typically understood high-quality student research to take place outside of normal coursework, usually through faculty-mentored 498 or 499 research hours. Students, of course, also acquire valuable research experience in courses. How should course-based research be seen in the broader range of Elon experiences? What standards might the university adopt to ensure that more students graduate with a firm grasp of disciplinary research methods? How can we ensure that all students have access to and support for research? This year, a working group chaired by **Drs. Jen Hamel** (Biology) and **Steve DeLoach** (Economics) developed a set of guidelines for what the scholarly literature on teaching and learning calls “CERs”—Course-embedded Research experiences. Given the significant investment that the CSRCS has in high-quality undergraduate research, Director Brian Pennington joined the group and helped write the standards. We expect many hundreds of Elon students will benefit from these new opportunities for scholarship and professionalization.





# NEWS

## NEW MULTIFAITH STRATEGIC PLANNING GROUP & 5-YEAR PLAN

Provost **Aswani Volety** and Vice President for Student Life **Jon Dooley** will be convening a working group of faculty, staff, and students to develop a new five-year plan for further deepening and expanding Elon's multifaith initiatives. The committee will develop strategies for meeting objectives of the Boldly Elon strategic plan related to multifaith education, religious diversity, and intercultural competence. Stay tuned to see what new ideas emerge from these conversations!

## FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY LUNCH

In cooperation with the **Kernodle Center for Civic Life** and the **Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life**, the CSRCS convened a faith-based community engagement luncheon at the Burlington Masjid in June, 2021. Originally planned as a virtual meeting earlier in the Spring, warmer weather and improved Covid conditions allowed for an in-person gathering. As Elon's commitment to community engagement and multifaith diversity continues to deepen and mature, this informal gathering sought to strengthen relations with Elon's faith-based community partners. In the spirit of open dialogue and reciprocity, the lunch was an opportunity to



listen to and learn from community partners about how Elon University can strengthen relations with diverse faith communities. Participants discussed the unique opportunities and challenges of community-based learning with faith organizations and the mutually beneficial collaborations in our future. The conversation laid the groundwork for renewed campus/community engagement with faith-based partners ahead of the arrival of new University Chaplain **Kirstin Boswell** to Elon next year.

## REPLOGLE FAMILY GIFT LAUNCHES NEW COURSE



**REL 172: Epic Tales from India** was the first team-taught course made possible by the Elizabeth "Tate" Replogle Endowment for Team Teaching in Religious Studies. John and Kristin Replogle P'18 of Raleigh made the generous gift to establish the endowment in honor of their daughter, who graduated from Elon in 2018 with a degree in religious studies. The Replogles's gift will support one course in the Department of Religious Studies each year that will be co-taught by two faculty members. Amy Allocco and CSRCS Director Brian Pennington, both specialists in the religions of South Asia, came up with the idea to teach a 100-level course on the two great epics of India. It was a lively semester full of epic battles, impassioned romance, and soaring moral philosophy that made for a rewarding learning opportunity for students and their professors alike.

# TRANSITIONS

## FAREWELL TO REVEREND JAN FULLER, WELCOME TO REVEREND KIRSTIN BOSWELL!

The CSRCS is delighted to welcome Elon's new University Chaplain, **Rev. Kirstin Boswell**. Rev. Boswell comes to Elon from Brown University, where she had been serving as an associate dean. Boswell is ordained in the American Baptist tradition. She has a Master of Divinity degree from the University of Chicago Divinity School, where she is currently completing her doctorate in anthropology and sociology of religion. Boswell has worked in parish ministry and served in chaplaincy positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Brown. She has been a contributing member to the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab and is on the Board of Advisors for the Spiritual Care Providers Network. Among her first undertakings at Elon will be co-chairing the new **Multifaith Strategic Planning Committee** and helping to craft a new five-year plan for multifaith programming, education, and community engagement at Elon. We are very excited to begin our work with her!



As we welcome Rev. Boswell, we also say farewell to retiring Elon Chaplain **Rev. Jan Fuller**, a close partner in our multifaith efforts since the founding of the CSRCS.

Jan has been a leader in multifaith development at Elon. She helped establish the Multifaith Center in Numen Lumen, develop a program to celebrate eight annual religious and cultural festivals, and create an annual interfaith student conference. Jan is also likely one of the longest serving chaplains in the country, having served for nearly 40 years on the campuses of Yale, Hollins, and Elon.

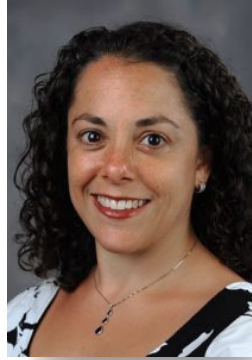
With gratitude for her transformational work at Elon, we wish her happiness and adventure in the years ahead. *Photo by Today @ Elon.*

# FACES OF THE CSRCS

## LEADERSHIP



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



**Amy L. Allocco**  
Director of Multifaith  
Scholars, Associate Professor  
of Religious Studies



**David J. Sandy Marshall**  
CSRCS Scholar, Assistant  
Professor of Geography

## ADVISORY BOARD & MORE



**Casey Avaunt**  
Assistant Professor  
of Dance



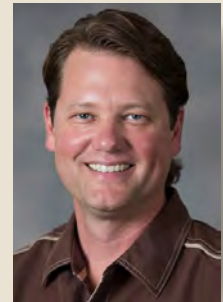
**Geoffrey Claussen**  
Associate Professor of  
Religious Studies



**Evan Gatti**  
Associate Professor of  
Art History



**Joel Harter**  
Associate University  
Chaplain



**Robert Perdue**  
Assistant Professor of  
Sociology



**Hal Vincent**  
Lecturer in Strategic  
Communications



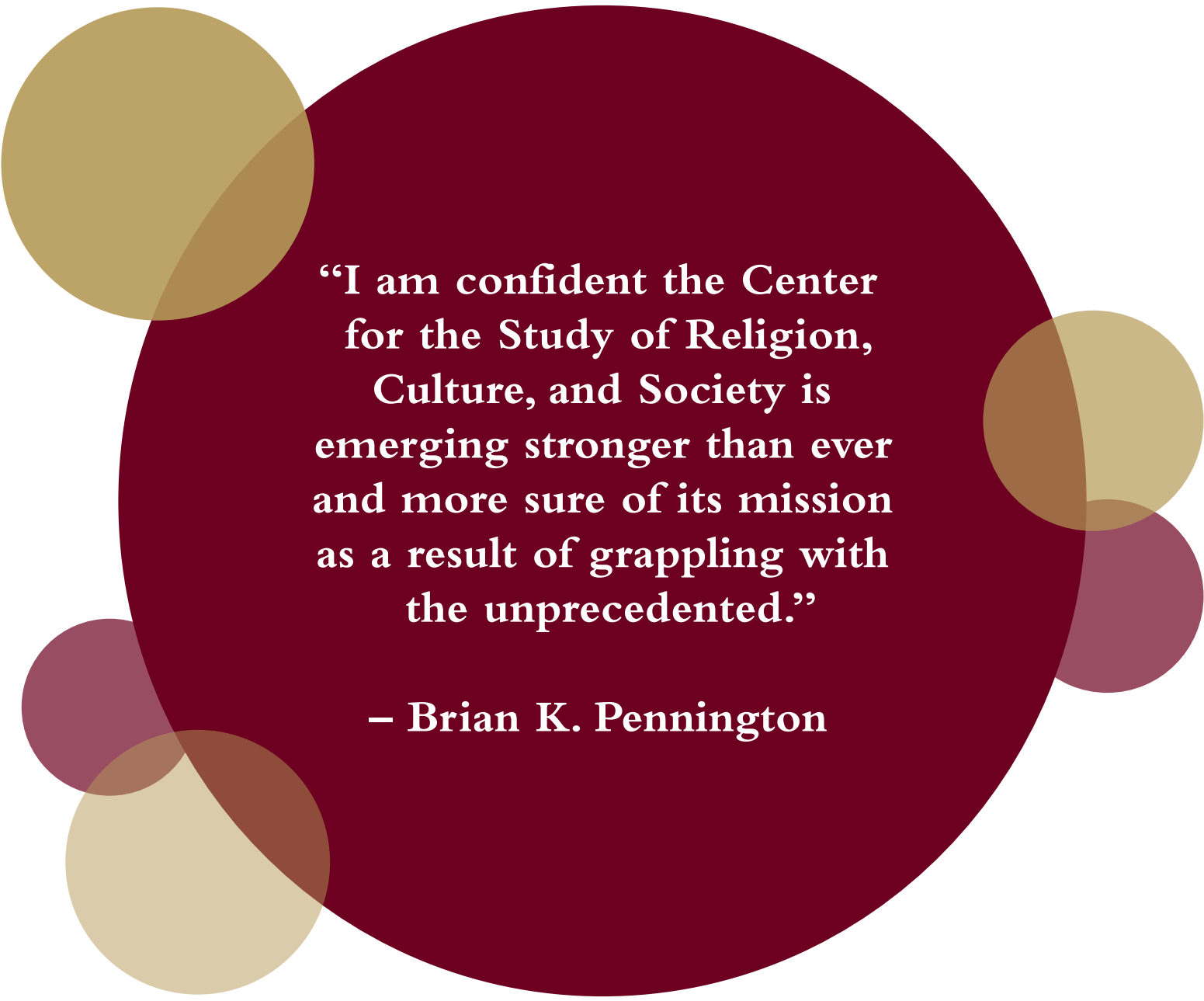
**Pamela Winfield**  
Professor of Religious  
Studies



**Morgan Baker**  
Program Assistant



**Katie Dalrymple**  
Communications Intern



**“I am confident the Center  
for the Study of Religion,  
Culture, and Society is  
emerging stronger than ever  
and more sure of its mission  
as a result of grappling with  
the unprecedented.”**

**– Brian K. Pennington**





Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, & Society  
2960 Campus Box  
Elon, NC 27244



*Follow Elon's CSRCS on Facebook  
and Twitter @ElonReligion*

