



**ELON**

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
Religion, Culture and Society



Annual Report 2023-24





# A Challenging Year

**I**t may go without saying that 2023-2024 has been a year unlike any other in the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society. I woke up on the first Saturday of October to find a text message from an alum on a Fulbright grant in Morocco, five time zones ahead of me. It said only “Israel/Palestine” with a broken-heart emoji. I knew immediately that something terrible had happened. As the rest of the weekend unfolded, and the world gained clarity on what was taking place along Israel’s border with Gaza, faculty and staff connected to Elon’s multifaith initiatives also came to understand the grave responsibility we would have to our students, who were coming to terms with an event unprecedented in their lifetimes. We were all keenly aware of the pain that many members of the Elon community would be experiencing. Students, faculty, staff, and their family members who had professional, intellectual, or personal connections to Israel or the Palestinian territories would be significantly affected.

The Truitt Center and other offices engaged all their resources to tend to the community’s emotional and spiritual needs. As they do in times of crisis, Elon faculty sprang into action to organize urgently needed learning opportunities. I am especially grateful to my colleagues Jason Husser, Andrea Sinn, and Carrie Eaves, who worked with me to coordinate the first faculty effort to educate students about the history of this contested region. By privileging the intellectual and emotional needs of a diverse student body, “Contextualizing the Conflict,” a community learning experience that we describe later in this report, would help establish the terms of Elon’s response to the Israel-Hamas war. President Connie Book named the first of these principles when she wrote to the campus on October 11, saying, “From my perspective, the most important thing we can do now is to provide care to those in need in the Elon community.” When she charged the Ad Hoc Conflict in the Middle East Programming Committee that she appointed in November, she would remind us of the university’s other principle responsibility by urging us to “plan campus programming in a way that promotes effective civic engagement.”

This dual focus on student well-being and student learning provided us a set of institutional priorities to guide us as other campuses in the US became embroiled in unproductive internal conflict. While the “Ad Hoc Committee,” as we came to call it, developed programming appropriate to its charge, many other campus groups organized events that gave their interests and constituents voice during a very emotional year. The result was a campus alive with important and civil, if sometimes difficult, discussion.

Over two strategic plans and more than ten years, Elon has built the infrastructure, resources, and expertise in multifaith learning, deliberative dialogue, and civic engagement that prepared us to meet the challenges of the past year. Our planning has served us remarkably well. Our campus has seen plenty of strong disagreement about the war. We have also watched informed student activism develop on all sides; we have hosted speakers with a range of perspectives; and we have engaged in sustained conversation with one another. Whatever our personal commitments and differences, we have also learned that we can trust one another as colleagues to focus on our students and to respect one another as committed professionals even in trying circumstances.

We hope for much less suffering and pain in the Middle East in the coming year, but we enter it confident that we are a strong and resilient intellectual community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian K. Pennington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the last name being more prominent.

**Brian Pennington**

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



## A Year of Programming and Education on the Middle East

Elon received strong national press coverage for its overwhelming response to the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war by Elon faculty and staff, who stepped forward in large numbers to coordinate educational efforts to ensure students had access to the resources they needed. Recognizing the long-term needs the campus would face, shortly after October 7 President Connie Book appointed an Ad Hoc Conflict in the Middle East Programming Committee to develop opportunities for learning and dialogue through the year. Chaired by CSRCS Director Brian Pennington and Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement, Carrie Eaves, the committee coordinated a robust response that included regular lunchtime dialogue events for students, major speakers, and support for events planned by other offices and organizations across campus. Throughout the year, the committee's efforts remained focused on highlighting different perspectives and voices.



### Contextualizing the Conflict: Conversations About the Middle East

On Wednesday, October 18, twenty-five Elon faculty and staff with expertise in a range of disciplines facilitated a set of discussions around the rapidly unfolding situation in the Middle East. Attended by approximately two hundred fifty students, this event was organized as a response to the campus's urgent need for education and dialogue following the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel and the subsequent war between them. Elon faculty hosted individual table discussions intended to help members of our campus community contextualize these troubling events and think critically about media covering them. Each table was dedicated to one topic or question related to a faculty member's area of expertise to promote informed insight into the conflict. Table topics ranged from "International Humanitarian Law and Non-combatants" to "American Christian Zionism" to "Social Media Disinformation." Three twenty-minute sessions allowed students to rotate among topics and hear a range of perspectives. The event was reported by the *Jerusalem Post*, *Town and Country*, and *Religion News Service* to highlight Elon's success in engaging the war substantively and civilly. The event was also cited by the Anti-Defamation League in its decision to award Elon an 'A' on its Campus Antisemitism Report Card.

#### AD HOC CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

**Carrie Eaves (co-chair)**, Associate Professor of Political Science and Faculty Fellow for Civic Engagement

**Brian Pennington (co-chair)**, Director of the CSRCS and Professor of Religious Studies

**Boaz Avraham-Katz**, Jewish Educator

**Kirstin Boswell**, University Chaplain and Dean of Multifaith Engagement

**Waseem bin Kasim**, Assistant Professor of History

**Baris Kesgin**, Associate Professor of Political Science

**Sandy Marshall**, Associate Professor of Geography

**Jonathan McElderry**, Dean of Student Inclusive Excellence

**Andrea Sinn**, Associate Professor of History

**Hillary Zaken**, Interim Assistant Dean of Multifaith Engagement

**Naeemah Clark**, Associate Provost for Academic Inclusive Excellence, Provost Office liaison



# Identity, Trauma, Justice: The War Between Israel and Hamas

**M**ira Sucharov, Professor of Political Science at Carleton University in Ottawa, visited Elon on March 14-15. Dr. Sucharov, a Canadian-Jewish scholar with expertise on Israel-Palestinian relations, participated in an open Q&A with Elon's Baris Kesgin, Associate Professor of Political Science. She and Kesgin, who writes about Israeli leadership, discussed Israeli-Palestinian relations, with the current war, and the competing narratives that circulate about the region. Dr. Sucharov has been a regular contributor to *Canadian Jewish News*, *Ha'aretz*, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*. She was awarded the Rockower Award from the American Jewish Press Association for her work on Holocaust education and Israeli foreign policy.



## Is Peace Possible in Palestine/Israel?

International human rights lawyer Jonathan Kuttab came to Elon to deliver the talk, "Is Peace Possible in Palestine/Israel?," on April 8 in the Numen Lumen Pavilion. Kuttab is co-founder of the Palestinian human rights groups Al-Haq and Nonviolence International who practices law in the US, Palestine, and Israel. He serves on the Board of Bethlehem Bible College, as President of the Board of the Holy Land Trust, and as executive director of Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA). Kuttab was the head of the Legal Committee negotiating the Cairo Agreement of 1994 between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. He is also author of *Beyond the Two-State Solution*, a book detailing how best to create a peaceful solution in the region, as well as a personal memoir and numerous articles for various international outlets.

## ❖ 2023.24 EVENTS

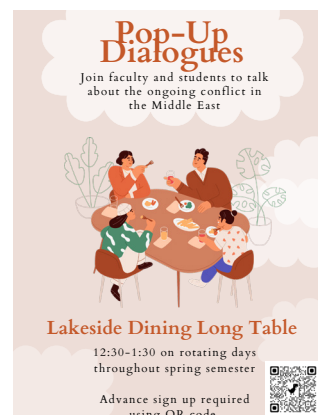


### Walking the Land: Hiking, Environment and National Identity in Israel

Elon was fortunate to host Shay Rabineau of Binghamton University for a lecture titled, “Walking the Land: Hiking, Environment and National Identity in Israel,” on Nov. 7. Rabineau serves as Associate Professor of Israel Studies and Associate Director of the Center for Israel Studies at Binghamton. Rabineau’s talk had been planned well before the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, but his visit provided a timely opportunity to learn about Israeli state formation in the twentieth century and its relationship to events today. His presentation discussed the importance of Israel’s hiking trails and the development of a thriving recreational culture for promoting Israeli national identity. Rabineau’s lecture explored the surprising and profound impact of hiking trails on Zionist thought, Israeli society, and Palestinian national aspirations. The CSRCS is grateful to Drs. **Baris Kesgin** and **Andrea Zinn** for organizing Rabineau’s talk, which was sponsored by the Fund for Excellence in the Arts and Sciences; Jewish Studies; and International and Global Studies.



### Long-table lunches



Starting in November, the Ad Hoc Conflict in the Middle East Programming Committee organized a series of lunch-time learning and dialogue opportunities for students. Two or three times a month over the rest of the academic year, a pair of faculty or staff

members hosted up to a dozen students at the “long table” in the Lakeside Dining Hall. Discussions were based on an advertised theme so that students could sign up for topics that interested them. Among the subjects covered were Refugees and International Humanitarianism, Campus Climate on Israel/Gaza, the Egyptian Border with Gaza, and Political Islam/Hamas. Ground rules shared at the beginning of each session urged students to treat this as an opportunity to learn from one another and to engage in active listening to perspectives they did not share.

### Elon gets high marks from the Anti-Defamation League

Elon University was one of only two schools to receive an “A” from the Anti-Defamation League for its Campus Antisemitism Report Card. The ADL highlighted various initiatives in which the CSRCS has provided leadership and made strong, long-term investments. The report focused on the opportunities Elon provided for students and faculty to learn about the conflict immediately following the Hamas’ attack on Oct. 7, 2023, including the “Contextualizing the Conflict: Conversations about the Middle East” event. The report also cited Elon’s participation in Hillel International’s Campus Climate Initiative in 2021-22, Elon Hillel’s antisemitism awareness training in 2023, and the support that Elon’s 2022-23 Multifaith Strategic Plan provides for education and training on bias, including Islamophobia and antisemitism.

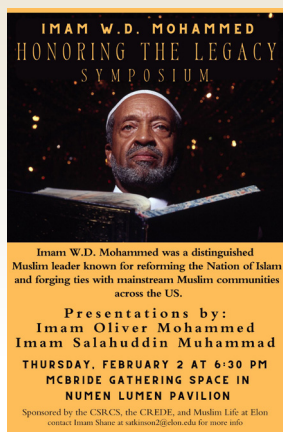


## The Construction of Africa's Most Popular Traditional Religion

Ayodeji Ogunnaike of The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia delivered the 2023 Rex G. and Ina Mae Powell Lecture in Religious Studies on Oct. 31. Based on his forthcoming book from Duke University Press, Ogunnaike's lecture discussed how forms of Orisa worship in Yoruba traditions became reclassified as "religion" in Nigeria and Brazil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



## Imam W.D. Mohammed Symposium



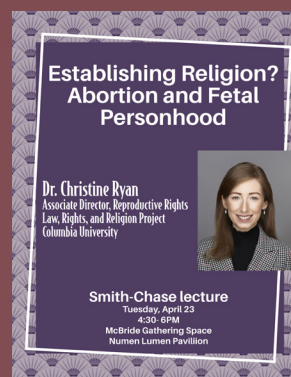
Students, faculty, and staff gathered on Nov. 14 for the annual Imam W. D. Mohammed symposium, which honors the legacy of one of American Islam's most important leaders. In 1975, W.D. Mohammed brought the Nation of Islam into dialogue with the global Muslim community, moving it away from the black nationalist theology preached by his father, Elijah Muhammad. Half a million NOI followers adopted orthodox Sunni Islam under Imam Mohammed's leadership. This year's featured

symposium speaker, Imam Salahuddin A. Muhammad, stressed the common values that American ways of life and Islam share, and he encouraged patriotic participation in politics to effect positive change in American society. To open the event, Associate Chaplain for Muslim Life, Imam Shane Atkinson, spoke about how the Mohammed's teaching informs his antiracist work: "Imam Mohammed named that oppression not only harms the oppressed, but the oppressor as well," Atkinson said. "We lose part of our own humanity when we participate in the oppression of any member of the human family." The event was cosponsored by the CSRCS, Muslim Life at Elon, and the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life.

## 2023 Smith-Chase Lecture

In April the Religious Studies department welcomed Dr. Christine Ryan, Associate Director of the Reproductive Rights, Law, and Religion Project at Columbia Law School, as its 2023 Smith-Chase lecturer. Organized by Toddie Peters, Ryan's talk, "Establishing Religion? Abortion and Fetal Personhood," examined the US Supreme court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision. Ryan characterized the court's majority opinion as a step towards a declaration that a

human fetus has legal standing. Ryan detailed the ways that the opinion has found expression in a growing number of state abortion restrictions asserting that human life begins at conception. To many observers, Ryan said, such measures constitute an endorsement of a particular religious tradition and an obvious violation



of the doctrine of Church-State separation. The lecture concluded with an exploration of whether opponents of the *Dobbs* decision might challenge fetal personhood laws under the First Amendment's establishment clause.





## Durham Civil Rights leader Pauli Murray profiled

In April, incoming CSRCS Scholar Amanda Kleintop organized a screening of *My Name is Pauli Murray*, an award-winning documentary about the iconic activist. Fifteen years before Rosa Parks refused to surrender her bus seat and a full decade before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned separate-but-equal legislation, Pauli Murray was already knee-deep fighting for social justice. A pioneering attorney, activist, Episcopal priest, and dedicated memoirist, Murray shaped landmark litigation—and consciousness—around race and gender equity. As an African American youth raised in the segregated South who was also wrestling with broader notions of gender identity, Pauli understood, intrinsically, what it was to exist outside previously accepted categories and cultural norms. Told largely in Murray's own words, the film offered a candid recounting of her unique and extraordinary journey.

## Wasim bin Kasim discusses African urban history



In October CSRCS Scholar and Assistant Professor of History, Waseem bin Kasim, shared research and insights on slums, housing, and everyday sanitation in the African cities of Accra and Nairobi. During his term as CSRCS Scholar, Kasim has completed work on his book examining the two cities, both

of which served as administrative capitals in British colonial Africa. Rather than simply documenting how British officials sought to impose race-based understandings of public health on the cities, Kasim's research demonstrates how sanitary experiences, initiatives, and discourses impacted city residents under colonialism. The lunchtime discussion covered his important scholarly work as well as his other activities as a CSRCS scholar.





### Amanda Kleintop is named 2024-2026 CSRCS Scholar

In June, Amanda Laury Kleintop, Assistant Professor of History, will assume her two-year role as Scholar for the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society (CSRCS) in June. During her term, Dr. Kleintop will develop digital humanities resources for studying religious communities in Elon town and Elon University history while she pursues new research on Black enlistment and emancipation during the US Civil War and Reconstruction. She will help build CSRCS capacity for student research, internships, and digital humanities experience and foster campuswide engagement with local communities and institutions. Dr. Kleintop is a historian of the US Civil War, Reconstruction, and slavery and emancipation in the Atlantic World.

Kleintop comes to this new role with a strong scholarly and administrative background that prepares her well for the work she will undertake. "As someone fairly new to Elon, I'm enthusiastic to learn more about interdisciplinary, multifaith models at Elon. I look forward to developing opportunities for student research and building relationships with other campus partners and local communities," Kleintop says. CSRCS Director Brian Pennington believes Kleintop is a natural fit for the role: "Dr. Kleintop's work aligns beautifully with Elon's Multifaith Strategic Plan objectives. She will make important contributions to student learning about the role of religious communities in US history and in Elon's history."

Kleintop joins the CSRCS with an impressive record of interdisciplinary collaboration and timely public scholarship. She received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University and her B.A. from the University of Richmond. Before coming to Elon in 2022, she was an Assistant Professor of History and Coordinator of Public History at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.





## ❖ NUMEN LUMEN PAVILION'S TENTH ANNIVERSARY



## Event Honors Donors' Vision

2023-24 saw the tenth anniversary of Elon's Numen Lumen Pavilion, dedicated in 2013 as the home to the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life and the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society. An October celebration was filled with stories about how this unique facility has promoted understanding, scholarship and community. The pavilion draws its name from the university's motto—Numen Lumen—using the Latin words to invoke the intellectual and spiritual light that are central to Elon's mission. The event honored the philanthropy of the late Edna and Doug



Noiles, who made a \$1 million gift in 2003 to endow the Vera Richardson Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life in honor of Edna's mother. University Chaplain Emeritus Richard McBride recounted at the gathering in October the direction he received from Edna Noiles following her gift to support the creation of the Truitt Center: "I want students to learn more about their own and other faiths, and I want them to live lives of reconciliation," McBride said Noiles told him. That mission has been central to the activities that animate the Numen Lumen Pavilion through the work and programming of the Truitt Center and the CSRCS.

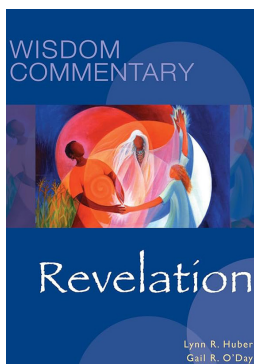
The Numen Lumen Pavilion had been included as a priority under the Elon Commitment, the university's 2010-2020 strategic plan, as was the establishment of the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society. CSRCS Director Brian Pennington shared at the October gathering that the spaces within the Numen Lumen Pavilion have facilitated the academic pursuits and personal connections that are part of Elon's growing effort to expand multifaith understanding: "This role in this space has given me the opportunity to quietly make the case through programs and campus partnerships that academic success, intellectual discovery and critical thinking are by no means antithetical to spiritual growth," Pennington said. "They are themselves a kind of spiritual growth."





## Distinguished Panel Celebrates Lynn Huber's Latest Book

On February 8, the CSRCS celebrated the publication of *The Wisdom Commentary: Revelation*, by **Lynn R. Huber**, Maude Sharpe Powell Professor of Religious Studies, and the late Gail R. O'Day, former dean of Wake Forest Divinity School. Biblical scholars Jennifer Wright Knust (Duke University), Anatheia Portier-Young (Duke Divinity School), and Katherine A. Shaner (Wake Forest School of Divinity) came to Elon to offer their reflections on the significance of this new commentary on one of the most complex books of the Christian New Testament. Huber worked on the project for over a decade, at first with her Ph.D. mentor and friend, O'Day, who passed away in 2018. The panelists praised Huber for the commentary's profundity, accessibility, and humor. Their remarks, along with Huber's response, were published in the online, peer-reviewed journal, *Ancient Jew Review*, in May. Thanks are due to Elon alum **John Penniman '05** (Bucknell University), Associate Editor of the journal, for facilitating their publication.



## More Huber news

It was a big year for Lynn Huber! In addition to the publication of her commentary on Revelation, she was elected to the Society for New Testament Studies, an honor reserved for scholars who have made significant contributions to the field. Prospective members are required to undergo a nomination process with endorsements from scholarly peers prior to an election by the entire membership. Additionally, Huber was awarded Elon's full-year, full-pay sabbatical for 2024-2025 to study work on a manuscript provisionally titled "Revelation and Whiteness."



## On the Edge Symposium News

The CSRCS has announced its 2025 On the Edge Symposium. Convened by Elon faculty members **Geoffrey Claussen**

(Religious Studies), **Baris**

**Kesgin** (Political Science), and **Sandy Marshall** (Geography), "Teaching Israel/Palestine in Turbulent Times" will take place February 9-11 and host up to twelve scholars from around the world. Participants will lay the groundwork for a major publication on strategies and techniques for teaching effectively about the conflict to diverse student audiences. A keynote speaker will deliver a lecture open to the campus. A full schedule will be announced in the late fall.

Articles from the 2023 symposium, "Civil Religion and Race in the United States," edited by **Andrew Monteith** (Religious Studies) and **Jessica Carew** (Political Science), are due to be published in a special election-year issue of the peer-reviewed, online journal *American Religion* in early fall 2024.





## ElonNext to Offer Nation's First Online Training Course in Religious Literacy for the Workplace

The CSRCS and the **Office of Professional and Continuing Studies** have produced what may be the country's first DEI training course in religious diversity. Written and hosted by **Helen Orr**, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, "Multifaith Literacy for Professional Environments" will be released on the ElonNext platform in Fall 2024. Intended for organizations and Human Resources professionals, the online course will help employees and managers effectively engage with and leverage religious diversity in the workplace. ElonNext is the university's program for providing the public with innovative and flexible programming to meet the educational needs of the future of work and society at-large.

## CSRCS partners with Nursing faculty



In 2023-2024, the CSRCS continued to build its partnership with the Nursing program to promote interreligious and intercultural

literacy for future healthcare professionals. Throughout the year, CSRCS Director **Brian Pennington** and CSRCS Scholar **Waseem bin Kasim** joined Nursing classes to work with students. Core 1100 sections for B.S.N. students taught by **Jacqueline Debrew** and sections of NSA 2500 Health Assessments for both B.S.N. and Accelerated B.S.N. students, taught by **Jeanmarie Koonts** and **Cyra Kussman**, all welcomed CSRCS guest teachers.



## Marshall develops new partnerships and projects in Palestine

**Marshall** continued to develop teaching and scholarship projects that he initiated during his time as a CSRCS Scholar. In Fall 2023 Marshall published his article, "Sacred Space/Contested Place: Intergenerational and Interreligious Memories of Joseph's Tomb" in *Jerusalem Quarterly*, a leading Palestine-studies journal. This research,

funded by the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC), draws upon oral history interviews to examine shifting Palestinian perspectives on Joseph's shrine, a contested, multi-religious holy site in the West Bank.

This research has led to a fruitful, interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues at An-Najah National University in Nablus, Palestine. Marshall has co-authored a series of papers with An-Najah colleagues Amer Al-Qobbaj (History) and Luay Abu Alsaud (Archaeology) on other religious sites and sacred landscapes in Palestine. These include

"Sacred Monuments and Stone Circles in Palestine: A Historical, Ethnographic, and Mythological Inquiry" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, "Between Blessings and Madness: Dwelling and Healing with Spirits and Jinn in the Haunted Landscapes of Palestinian Popular Folklore" in *cultural geographies*, and "Demons, Spirits, and Haunted Landmarks in Palestinian Heritage" in *Journal of Historical Geography*.

In addition to conducting research with colleagues in Palestine, Marshall has also initiated Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects with English faculty at an-Najah University.

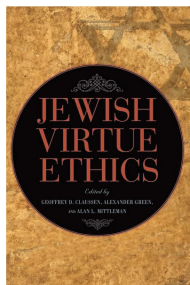


## Geoffrey Claussen co-edits volume on Jewish ethics



*Jewish Virtue Ethics*, co-edited by **Geoffrey Claussen**, Professor of Religious Studies and Lori and Eric Sklut Professor in Jewish Studies, has

been published by SUNY Press. Claussen edited the volume along with Alan Mittleman, Aaron Rabinowitz and Simon H. Rifkind Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Alexander Green, Visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Jewish Thought at the University at Buffalo. Beginning with the Bible and culminating with twenty-first-century feminism and environmentalism, the book explores thirty-five influential Jewish approaches to character and virtue. The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York hosted a conference to commemorate the book's release in June.

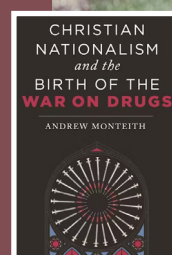


## Amy Allocco awarded research fellowship to study Hindu musicians and ritual specialists

**P**rofessor of Religious Studies and Multifaith Scholars Directory **Amy Allocco** spent 2023-24 conducting ethnographic research in South India thanks to a Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellowship through the U.S. Department of State. Allocco spent nearly nine months in Tamil Nadu studying three generations of Hindu drummer-priests, called pampaikkārar, who lead important religious and cultural rituals, including family rites, domestic ceremonies, and temple festivals. Allocco's book about the family will explore the creation, transmission, and refashioning of their musical, storytelling, and ritual repertoires with attention to what these dynamic processes reveal about shifting religious sentiments, aesthetic preferences, and socioeconomic conditions in India.

## Monteith's book wins major award

*Christian Nationalism and the Birth of the War on Drugs* (NYU Press 2023) by Associate Professor of Religious Studies, **Andrew Monteith**, was awarded the 2024 Arthur Miller Institute Best First Book Prize by the



British Association of American Studies. Calling it an "extremely original work" the judges praised the book's "entirely new periodization of the war on drugs." Monteith is currently editing a collection of essays from the 2023 CSRCs Civil Religion and Race symposium for publication in the peer-reviewed, online journal, *American Religion* and writing a textbook on religious studies for Routledge Press. Congratulations, Dr. Monteith!



## SUPPORT FOR ELON FACULTY



## CSRCS Builds Partnerships with Indian University

Since 2017, the CSRCS has maintained a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Madras in Chennai, South India. As one realization of this partnership, in 2023-2024, Elon's Amy Allocco conducted collaborative ethnographic field research with Dr. James Ponniah, Head of the Christian Studies Department at Madras. Their joint project focuses on death practices and commemoration rituals at the intersection of Hinduism and Christianity in multireligious families in Chennai's low-income neighborhoods. The pair expect to present preliminary findings at the International Association of the History of Religion in Kraków, Poland in August 2025. Additionally, Ponniah and CSRCS Director Brian Pennington are planning a co-sponsored conference on Religion in Cities in spring 2025, and the University of Madras will host Elon students on the India's Identities course in January 2025.



## Pennington completes board service for the American Academy of Religion



Brian Pennington concluded his service on the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Religion in 2023. This was the third time in Pennington's career that he was elected or appointed to the governing body of the world's largest organization for the study of religion. In 2020, he joined the board as the AAR's Regions Director, overseeing the governance of the AAR's ten regions in North America in addition to participating in board deliberations and strategic decision-making. Since 2020, the board has helped to navigate the AAR through pandemic recovery, a range of political attacks on academia, and the Israel-Hamas war.



## Multifaith Scholars New Class

**F**ive rising juniors have been named members of the eighth class of Multifaith Scholars, a two-year CSRCs fellows program that offers students interested in multifaith issues a closely mentored, experientially rich, and intellectually rigorous educational opportunity. After a highly selective application and interview process, students are awarded \$5,000 annually to support research and study in global contexts connected with religious diversity and multi-religious societies.

Sandy Marshall, Associate Professor of Geography and former CSRCs Scholar, served as Interim MFS Director this year and oversaw the selection process while Dr. Amy Allocco has been on a Fulbright-funded research sabbatical in India. Marshall expressed excitement about the diversity of backgrounds and research interests represented in this new cohort, whose topics span a range of time periods and regions, including Africa, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America: "We are excited to work with these students and their mentors over the next two years to facilitate their scholarly development and personal growth."

### Senior Celebration

At its annual Senior Celebration, the Multifaith Scholars program bid farewell to its six



graduating seniors. Families, friends, and community partners were in attendance as scholars shared the fruits of their research and the highlights of their personal journeys over two years in the program. From Poland's troubled borders to the archives of Washington DC to the dance floors of America's largest music festivals, this class of seniors studied religion and its many manifestations in a range of diverse settings.

### 2024-2026 MULTIFAITH SCHOLARS



**Alyssa Carney**

**Majors:** *International and Global Studies / History*

**Project Title:** *Echoes of Al-Andalus: Islamophobia and Migration in Spain*

**Mentor:** *Sandy Marshall (Geography)*



**Owen Hayes**

**Major:** *History*

**Project Title:** *Catholic Missionaries and Indigenous Peoples of Australia*

**Mentor:** *Brian Pennington (Religious Studies)*



**Hasan Khan**

**Major:** *Computer Science*

**Project Title:** *Exploring Multifaith Engagement through Video Game Representation*

**Mentor:** *Pratheep Paranthaman (Computer Science)*

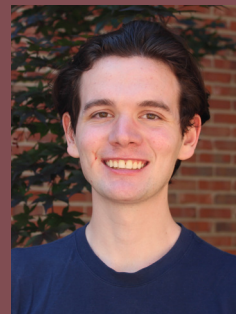


**Olivia Novak**

**Majors:** *Theatrical Design / Religious Studies*

**Project Title:** *Abortion in Context: Historical Influences on 21st Century Abortion Discourse*

**Mentor:** *Toddie Peters (Religious Studies)*



**Jesse White**

**Major:** *Religious Studies / International and Global Studies*

**Project Title:** *Mahdism and Memory: An Islamic Movement in North America's Diasporic Sudanese Communities*

**Mentors:** *Waseem Kasim (History) and Mussa Idris (Anthropology)*

### WARMEST WISHES TO THE MFS CLASS OF 2024!

Ashley Burnett • Bethany Marzella • Jasper Serenity Myers  
Claire Przybocki • Daniel Scheff • Andy Walter





## MFS Senior Daniel Scheff commissions Indian classical dance performance

As a culminating product of his two-year MFS research project, senior Daniel Scheff commissioned the choreography of an entirely new Bharatanatyam performance. Under Dr. Amy Allocco, Scheff had been exploring the contemporary relevance of the medieval poet-saint Andal to the lives of contemporary South Indian women. In April, acclaimed dancer Malini Srinivasan along with four musicians traveled to Elon from New York to perform “Garlands for Krishna,” for the first time for the Elon community. It was a fabulous conclusion to an amazing two-year journey that took Daniel to South Asia twice and deep into the scholarly literature on gender and devotion in India.



## Students and faculty make impressive showing at American Academy of Religion’s regional meeting

The American Academy of Religion held its Southeastern regional meeting March 1-3 at the College of Charleston with many Elon faculty and students participating. Elon Professor Rebecca Todd Peters presented “Beyond the Abortion Imaginary;” Ariela Marcus-Sells presented “A New Vision” for Teaching Islam; and Assistant Professor Andrew Monteith presented “Eugenics, Religion, and Biological Theories of Morality.” Five Elon students, who are also members of the Multifaith Scholars program, made presentations drawing from their undergraduate research, including Ashley Burnett, Claire Przybocki, Bethany Marzella, and Daniel Scheff. Additionally, Jasper Serenity Myers, double-major in Religious Studies and Classical Studies, received the Outstanding Undergraduate Research Paper award for her paper on Sappho’s poetry, which included original translations. Myers also presented with Professor Lynn R. Huber at the annual Queer and Trans Studies in Religion Conference at the University of California, Riverside.



## CSRCS 2023 Alums Land Two Big National “Firsts” for Elon Fellowships

For the first time, Elon graduates were selected for two prestigious and highly competitive national fellowships to pursue graduate study and professional development. **Maddy Starr** and **Natalie Triche**, both mentored through the CSRCS during their time at Elon, were awarded the Charles B. Rangel Graduate Fellowship and the James C. Gaither Junior Fellowship at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace respectively.



Triche, who was one of only sixteen fellows chosen out of two-hundred-fifty-nine applicants, will work for one year as a research assistant to Carnegie’s senior scholars. She applied for the program while a Fulbright Research Scholar in Morocco, where she was conducting research on women’s lives under the 2011 Moroccan constitution and studying advanced Arabic under a Fulbright Critical

Languages Enhancement Award (CLEA). At Elon, she was a Lumen Scholar, conducting research on Egyptian forms of secularism under CSRCS Director Brian Pennington.

Along with Heeba Chergui ’22, Starr will join the Rangel program, which prepares individuals for policy-making careers in the Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State. With funding from the fellowship, she will pursue a Master of Science in Foreign Service degree at Georgetown University and undertake paid summer internships on Capitol Hill and at a U.S. Embassy overseas. Upon completion of the program, she will enter five years of contractual employment with the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer. At Elon, Starr was a Multifaith Scholar studying material memories of the Israel/Palestine conflict under Amy Allocco. She and Triche both also participated in the SURE 2022 research “pod” organized by the CSRCS and undertook a travel study excursion in Jerusalem and the West Bank with Pennington, Allocco, and Associate Professor of Geography, Sandy Marshall.

We’re terribly proud of them both and eager to see the change they will work to make in the world!



## SURE Pod catalyzes student research success

For the second year in a row, the CSRCS sponsored a summer program in 2023 to cohort Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) students and mentors working on projects with global, intercultural, or religious themes. For two weeks at the beginning of SURE, seven students and their mentors participated in training sessions on research methods, research ethics, and practical research skills and fieldwork strategies such as participant observation, writing fieldnotes, navigating gender dynamics, and interview techniques. Students then went on to engage in summer data collection before reconvening at the end of SURE to prepare for the concluding poster session. Drs. Sandy Marshall, Waseem bin Kasim, Andrew Monteith, Amy Allocco, and Brian Pennington led the pod, whose members conducted archival and ethnographic research across the US and in Poland, India, and the UK. Based on the research skills they developed and the successful projects they completed, many of those now-graduated students are preparing to join prestigious graduate programs or assume exciting job opportunities.



## Art History student Madeleine Hollenbeck '24 transforms Numen Lumen Pavilion exhibit space

In preparation for the 10th Anniversary of the Numen Lumen Pavilion, Interim Dean of Multifaith Engagement Hillary Zaken knew that the building's major display cases on the first floor needed a makeover. The resulting collaboration she helped to forge between the Truitt Center, Art History, and the CSRCs provided senior Madeleine Hollenbeck with a valuable professional development opportunity to curate a new exhibit representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, West African and Buddhist traditions. With support from her dedicated Elon College Fellow mentor, Evan Gatti, and input from CSRCs Director Brian Pennington, Hollenbeck developed an interactive exhibit that showcases not static objects but the ritual lives and material culture of many religious traditions. The exhibit features pages from medieval missals, a shofar and menorah, a Qur'an, prayer beads, and figures of deities from Hindu and African religions. Her experience is now providing an opportunity to develop a credit-bearing internship for an Art History or Museum Studies student to gain curating skills on an annual basis.



## SURF Symposium

For the tenth year in row, the CSRCs received a SURF Symposium Grant from the Office of Undergraduate Research to support students in developing a topical session for the April Summer Undergraduate Research Forum (SURF). "Identity, Politics, Place in a Globalizing World" was the theme selected for this 2024 symposium, which explored migration and cultural change and the human dimensions of major global shifts in state and society in five distinct global settings. Drawing from projects focused on US festival culture, intra-Islamic relations in Iraq, Muslim migrants under a Catholic nationalist government in Poland, contemporary devotion to a medieval South Indian saint, and the lives of Afghan refugees in North Carolina, the four senior researchers presenting at the symposium centered the lives and experiences of people navigating social and cultural change in contested contexts. Employing ethnographic methods the students came from a cross section of majors, including economics, religious studies, international/global studies, and political science. Congratulations to Rachel Curtis, Bethany Marzella, Claire Przybocki, and Daniel Scheff.



## Scholar Development Grants

**D**esigned for first- and second-year students just embarking on projects related to the role of religion in society, Scholar Development Grants introduce students to the research process in their individual disciplines, help them conceive a research topic, and prepare them to write research proposals for Elon's signature research programs, to pursue external funding, or simply to do the groundwork for research to be conducted under regular 4998/4999 research hours. Students from any major whose projects intersect with religion and related topics are eligible to apply.

### IN 2023-2024, GRANTS WERE AWARDED TO:

**Kenna Dubraski** (faculty mentor: Dinidu Karunanayake), *"Spirituality, Mental Illness, and Masculinity in Post-War Japan: A Literary Psychoanalysis of Murakami and Mishima's Fiction"*

**Mallory Fahrlander** (faculty mentor: Toddie Peters), *"The Crossroads of Faith and Politics: The Influence of Christianity on Abortion Policy"*

**Jasper Serenity Myers** (faculty mentor: Lynn Huber), *"Greek and Roman Perceptions of Female Same-sex Erotic Encounters"*

**Olivia Novak** (faculty mentor: Toddie Peters), *"Abortion in Context: Historical Influences on 21st Century Abortion Discourse"*

**Jesse White** (faculty mentors: Waseem bin Kasim and Mussa Idris), *"Sudan and the Mahdi: An Islamic Movement and Memory in North America's Diasporic Sudanese Communities"*





## Elon Faculty Selected for Interfaith America's Faith and Health Initiative

**E**lon University professors **Jeanmarie Koonts** (Nursing), **Helen Orr** (Religious Studies), and **Brian Pennington** (Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society) have been selected as 2024-2025 Faith and Health Fellows

by Interfaith America. The highly competitive program supports fellows in conceiving and implementing academic initiatives aimed at advancing awareness and understanding of the impact of religious identity and practice in healthcare settings.



The grant will support the trio's development of a micro-credential badging program focused on caretaker religious literacy and interreligious competence. Tailored for students in Nursing, Physician Assistant, and Physical Therapy programs, the badge will require students to participate in sessions exploring the influence of religion on healthcare decision-making, health outcomes, and healthcare equity. Students who earn the badge will carry a heightened religious consciousness into their varied clinical placements, contributing to an enriched, client-centered care approach. Koonts and Pennington have worked together to build modules on religious literacy and intercultural awareness for several years. Orr has recently completed work on an upcoming ElonNext course on Religious Literacy for the Workplace. The team looks to pilot modules later this academic year.

## Sandra Reid selected for Council of Independent Colleges/Interfaith America seminar



In Summer 2024, Senior Lecturer in Human Service Studies **Sandra Reid**, will participate in the multidisciplinary seminar, "Teaching Interfaith Understanding," co-sponsored by the Council of Independent Colleges and Interfaith America.

Reid was selected after a competitive process to join the June seminar in Chicago, intended to "broaden faculty members' knowledge and perspective to help them strengthen the teaching of interfaith understanding, develop new courses and other resources, and expand the network of faculty members committed to teaching this subject." The seminar is led by Interfaith America founder and President, Eboo Patel, and Laurie Patton, President of Middlebury College.

## Interfaith America Tackles the Place of Religion in an Altered DEI Landscape

One of the driving principles of Elon's Multifaith strategic planning process has been the conviction that issues such as religion, worldview, values, and spirituality must have an important place in any institution's pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion. CSRCS Director Brian Pennington participated in an invitation-only consultation on "DEI and Religion in Higher Education" sponsored by Interfaith America and hosted by Johns Hopkins University in March. The two-day meeting reviewed recent controversies

in which the religious beliefs of a student or faculty member spurred conflict at US universities and drew national interest. The gathering was an opportunity for participants, including DEI professionals, university administrators, and scholars of interreligious relations, to consult with one another during a year when higher education's DEI initiatives were under heightened scrutiny in the press and in political circles. Further conversations are planned for the near future.

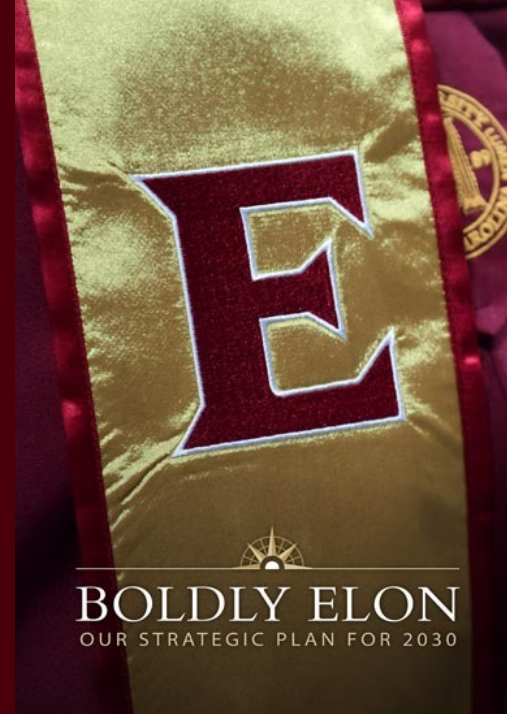


## ❖ ELON'S MULTIFAITH STRATEGIC PLAN: UPDATE

**"Create structures and learning opportunities that engage all students, faculty and staff in advancing their intercultural and multifaith learning and competencies."**

**"Expand and diversify admissions footprint and reputation internationally and across the United States, recruiting students from a wider range of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds and developing pathways for enrollment from non-traditional students."**

**"Advance social and emotional well-being and ethical and purposeful reflection."**



**D**eveloped to support Boldly Elon's ambitious goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion, intercultural learning, and multifaith engagement, the 2022-2030 Multifaith Strategic Plan is overseen by a team representing the plan's principle stakeholders and custodians: **Randy Williams**, Vice President for Inclusive Excellence, University Chaplain and Dean of Multifaith Engagement **Kirstin Boswell**, **Lynn Huber**, Interim Chair of the Religious Studies department, and **Brian Pennington**, Director of the CSRCS. In 2023-2024, those units were heavily invested in developing the campus's response to the Israel-Hamas war and supporting students and student groups impacted by the war. The immediate and robust response for which Elon has received strong positive national attention was made possible by the prior planning faculty and staff had conducted under two multifaith strategic plans.

**Additionally, in 2023-2024, the CSRCS can report significant progress on academic initiatives named in the plan:**

- Three courses that introduce new modes for student learning about religion and race in the United States have now been successfully launched under the Core Curriculum's Advancing Equity Requirement (AER): **REL 1120 Religion and Power** (Dr. Andrew Monteith); **REL 1280 Religion, Race & Resistance** (Dr. Shiela Otieno); **REL 3110 Beyond Conflict and Tolerance: Interreligious Encounters** (Dr. Helen Orr)

- Durable partnerships with the School of Health Sciences have been established through the Nursing program, with new opportunities in development under Interfaith America's Faith and Health Grant

- "Multifaith Literacy for Professional Environments," a signature opportunity for employees, alumni, and professional learners to develop religious literacy competencies, will soon be released on the ElonNext platform

- New multifaith internships for students are in development in partnership with the Truitt Center, the Committee on History and Memory, and with global partners in the Middle East and West Africa

In 2024-2025, the CSRCS will be giving particular attention to these areas named in the Multifaith Strategic Plan: partnerships with the Residential Campus, student opportunities through the Leadership Experiential Learning Requirement, assessment of Elon's signature degree programs for multifaith education (e.g., Religious Studies, Interreligious Studies, Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies), and connections to the Elon History and Memory project, HealthEU, the Mentoring in Meaningful Relationships initiative, the School of Communications, and the Core Curriculum.

## CSRCS ADVISORY COMMITTEE



**Casey Avaunt**

*Assistant Professor of Dance*



**Kirstin Boswell**

*University Chaplain  
and Dean of Multifaith  
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**Evan Gatti**

*Professor of Art History*



**Lynn Huber**

*Maude Sharpe Powell  
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**Waseem bin Kasim**

*Assistant Professor of  
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**Sandy Marshall**

*Interim Director of  
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*With warmest thanks to talented and  
dedicated support team!:*



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