FIU Establishes Professorship in Jain Studies

The Jain Education and Research Foundation has chosen the Religious Studies Department of FIU as the recipient of an endowed professorship in Jainism. The gift agreement was signed by the leaders of foundation and representatives of FIU April 16.

This $600,000 gift will establish the Bhagwan Mahavir Professorship in Jain Studies. Dr. Nathan Katz was named the first holder of the professorship during the April event. The gift when complete will be matched by the State of Florida. The foundation said it intends to extend this gift in the future, raising the professorship to an endowed chair, and possibly creating an Institute for Jain Studies at FIU.

For the past two years, two Jain Samanis, Charitra Prajna and Unnata Pragya, have taught undergraduate courses on Jainism, meditation, vegetarianism and Asian religions at FIU. They were the original inspiration for the gift. Sashi Jain, representing the South Florida Jain community, and Dipak Jain, chairman of the Jain Education and Research Foundation and dean emeritus of the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern University, said additional funding from the community will depend on the fruits of this first gift. Ideas for increased levels of funding include additional funding for TAs in Jainism, and possibly in Religion and Non-violence, scholarships for summer student exchanges between the FIU Religious Studies Department and the Jain Institute in India, increased library holdings in Jainism and related themes, an Instructorship for the Samanis who are now adjunct professors in the Department of Religious Studies, and research funding for scholars working in Jainism. The goal is to create first a network of Jain-related programs in the U.S. and abroad.

Since the arrival of the Samanis two years ago, the local Jain community has become involved on FIU’s campus, sponsoring vegetarian dinners, lecture panels and speakers. The Samanis offer very popular annual evening seminars in meditation (as well as classes in meditation every semester), advise a student club in Praksh Meditation, and have been active in educating the FIU population about vegetarianism. Faculty in Religious Studies are very appreciative, certain that the presence of the Samanis has enhanced the profile of the Religious Studies Department and attracted new student majors and minors.

Larson Named Chairman of Religious Studies

Erik Larson will take over as the new chairman of Religious Studies Aug. 17. The term of department chairs has been extended from three to four years.

Larson is a very popular teacher of New Testament, Dead Sea Scrolls, Biblical Archeology, Greek and Hebrew. As chairman, he will have reduced teaching responsibilities, to the dismay of many students waiting to take his classes. He will be announcing new initiatives and appointments during the coming months.

Outgoing chairwoman Christine Gudorf, who is completing two three-year terms, said she is eager to return to “academics instead of administration.” In addition to the research grant in Indonesia she will be directing for the next two years, Gudorf is completing a 4th edition of her co-authored textbook, Christian Ethics: A Casebook Approach (Orbis Books), and has contracts for two monographs, Everyday Ethics (Fortress) and a book on sexual ethics that integrates scientific and social scientific work on sexuality, provisionally called simply Sexual Ethics (Georgetown University Press).

Religious Studies Major Is Now Fully Online!

Beginning in the fall of 2010, all the courses necessary to satisfy the major are now offered online. Students taking the major online should register their major early, and plan their program with the undergraduate director in the department in order to be sure of graduating on time.
Gudorf Awarded Pentecostal Research Grant

On February 16, Dr. Christine Gudorf was notified that the grant application that she and her Co-PI, Zainal Bagir, director of the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia had been awarded $261,000 over two years to study Pentecostal growth in Indonesia.

The grant was awarded by the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Institute at the University of Southern California, which in October selected 100 from the 600 regional center grant applications received, and then in the second round selected 16 from that 100 to fund. The awards are intended to develop research networks throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former Soviet Union, as well as to study global Pentecostalism.

Dr. Gudorf and her Co-PI proposed to study two factors related to growth of Pentecostalism in Indonesia, gender and relations with other social groups. There are somewhere between 1.5 and 4 million Pentecostals in Indonesia, within a Muslim population of about 210 million. Gender is currently contested in Indonesia, as in most of the world, with Muslim debates centering on the question of whether women can lead mixed prayer, and thus be imams. How this Muslim debates impacts Pentecostalism, and how gender roles within the Pentecostal churches are structured will be interesting to discover. The other contextual impact concerns Indonesian laws designed to prevent and manage religious tension (Indonesia is about 10 percent non-Muslim, with significant Christian, Catholic, Hindu and Buddhist minorities, not to mention a number of indigenous religions). These laws allow proselyzation only of those without any religion, regulate the building of houses of worship, and forbid religious organizations from importing funds. All of these impact normal Pentecostal practices.

The research team from CRCS will include seven field researchers, graduates of the MA program at CRCS, as well as the two PIs. The researchers will conduct member surveys and pastor interviews in Jakarta, the capital city; Yogyakarta, an educational center on Java; Medan, an urban center on Sumatra; Surabaya, another city on Java, and Manado, a city on Sulawesi with the largest Christian concentration in Indonesia. They will attempt to interview the pastors of all the Pentecostal churches in each of these cities, and to survey as much of each church’s membership as possible.

Dr. Gudorf will be in charge of creating the initial surveys and interview questions, and of analyzing the results, and will have a major role in training the researchers. Dr. Bagir will be in charge of the budget and disbursements, and of arrangements for the three conferences to be held during the award period, and a final international conference announcing the findings and placing them in the Asian context. Marthen Tuhan has been hired to supervise the field researchers, visiting all of them on a bi-monthly basis, conveying taped interviews and survey forms back to CRCS for translation and tallying for transmission to Gudorf, who expects to spend about 4 months of the next two years in Indonesia.
Students Summer in India, Israel

Undergraduate Religious Studies major Davis Garcia was selected as the finalist in the competition for a fully paid trip to the three week summer session at the Jain Vishva Bharati Institute in Ladnun India.

He will live at the Institute and attend classes for three weeks, and travel for some weeks in India before and after. He is getting travel advice from Liz Perez, last year’s winner, and Molly Thieman, who also attended last year. Davis hopes to take a friend with him for traveling.

Michael Bender received a $2,000 research award from FIU’s Program in the Study of Spirituality and a $1,000 Israel Program Scholarship from the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. Bender will undertake summer research in India and Israel during a ten week journey. His thesis is going to deal with the historic meetings that took over the last three years between Hindu and Jewish leaders of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Relatively nothing has been published about these historical, first-time meetings between these two ancient traditions; by personally interviewing those directly involved, Bender will do original research for his MA thesis. His research in India and Israel will provide him with the necessary means to adequately explore and write this subject at a much deeper level than otherwise would have ever been possible without this award. He hopes to build on this research throughout his academic career.

Faculty Plan Professional Summer

Dr. Andrea Seidel will spend five weeks in Honduras as recipient of a Fulbright Senior Scholar Specialist grant. Her activities will include teaching and consulting at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), the largest public university in Honduras, and the National School of Dance in Tegucigalpa, and conducting research into the religious ritual and dances of the Maya in western Honduras. Additionally, Dr. Seidel will assist in the development of a dance degree program at the National University in collaboration with the National Dance School.

Dr. Whitney Bauman will be giving a series of lectures June 15 through Aug. 1 in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, while he teaches a course “Religion and Nature at the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies” at Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia. Travel to lecture series is supported by the Templeton Prize for Theological Promise.

Christine Gudorf will also be in Indonesia June 15-30, giving a series of lectures at universities in Java and Sulawesi, while she meets with her Co-PI to plan the next steps in their recently funded research on Pentecostalism in Indonesia.

Dr. Albert Wuaku participated in one of the International Faculty Development Seminars organized by the Council on International Educational Exchange. This 11-day seminar began Gaborone, Botswana and ended in Johannesburg, South Africa. The seminar focused attention on contemporary regional Issues in Botswana and South Africa. In keeping with Wuaku’s research interest, he also visited a number of Hindu temple communities in Johannesburg, where the Hindu religion has the strongest presence in Africa.

Andrea Mantell-Seidel Promoted to Full Professor

Dr. Andrea Mantell-Seidel, formerly of the Department of Dance at FIU and now of the Department of Religious Studies, recently was promoted to full professor in the Department of Dance.

“ It has been almost two years since my promotion file from the College of Architecture and the Arts traveled a long and winding way, through FIU’s bureaucracy, impeded by the challenge of a Dance Department that was soon to be terminated,” Mantell-Seidel said. “I express my gratitude to all my Religious Studies colleagues, deans and directors in the College of Architecture and the Arts, the College of Arts & Sciences, and numerous colleagues at FIU and nationwide who have supported me wholeheartedly in this challenging process.“
Students Honored at Awards Ceremonies in April

At the College of Arts & Sciences Awards Ceremony April 25, Elizabeth Perez received the award for outstanding undergraduate academic achievement in Religious Studies. The graduate award for outstanding academic achievement went to Jonathan Kocheski, and the Graduate Teaching Award went to Comfort Max-wirth. Stephen Nesvacil, a Religious Studies honors major within Liberal Studies, was also honored.

At a ceremony on April 11 in the FIU Law School, three Religious Studies students who graduated in December were inducted into the prestigious honor society Phi Beta Kappa. Those students were Religious Studies majors Saeha Paulovkin and Samantha Savarick, and Liberal Studies student/Religious Studies honors major Stephan Nesvacil. Saeha Paulovkin is now a student in the Religious Studies MA program at FIU.

The Religious Studies faculty could not be prouder of the students who are accumulating these honors for themselves and the department, and look to hear amazing achievements from them in the future.

Maria Murriel Reflects on Winning Elaine Gordon Scholarship

I doubt there can be something more gratifying than being recognized for that which you are passionate. That is why when I spoke with Liebe and Seth Gadinsky, founders of the Elaine Gordon Scholarship in the Women's Studies department, I was delighted and awestruck. They said my application was an easy win among the candidates and their words were honest and inspiring.

As a Religious Studies Major and Women's Studies Certificate earner, I participate in classes that deal with the political, social and overall cultural impact religion has on the world's societies. Specifically, I am interested in learning about the influence of religious beliefs on politics and legislation, and how this affects those not in power. As a Journalism minor, I am preparing myself to work in a world where people are mostly misinformed about their social surroundings. I plan to do my part to bring them justice.

I am delighted to take the position of treasurer in Theta Alpha Kappa for the upcoming year, as I believe it is important to be involved in the communities one wishes to influence and learn from.
Graduate Notes

Current Students

Elena Amato presented “Jesus, the Yogi” at the Southeast Regional American Academy of Religion/SECSOR conference in Atlanta, GA, March 5-7.

Ivanessa Arostegui presented “Women and a Liberating Islam in Sufism” at the AAR regional conference in Atlanta, March 5-7 and has had her paper, “Las Musas Latinas: Retrieving Theological Voices from the Convents of Las Americas,” accepted for a panel at the 2010 national meeting of the AAR. In the fall 2009 semester, she attended the conference on “Inter-Civilizational Dialogue: Insight from Azerbaijan” in Azerbaijan with Professor Aisha Musa.

Adam Gorelick presented a paper, “Bombadil and the Bodhi Tree: The Case for a Buddhist Influence on Tolkien's Literature” at the AAR regional conference in Atlanta March 5-7.

Jonathan Koscheski’s paper, “The Earliest Christian War: Second and Third Century Martyrdom and the Creation of a Warrior Elite” was accepted for publication in the Journal of Religious Ethics. A short version of the paper was also accepted for presentation at the Oct. 30-Nov. 1 national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta. The Religious Studies faculty voted Jonathan the Graduate Academic Achievement Award for 2009-2010.

Curtis Lanoue’s paper proposal on “The Use of Text in Musical Memorials to the Holocaust” was accepted for presentation at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta this fall.

Comfort Max-Wirth successfully defended her thesis on Pentecostalism and Politics in Ghana and was awarded with Honors. Comfort received the Graduate Student Teaching Award at the CAS Awards ceremony April 25.

Valeria Schindler was awarded a $2,800 Tinker Field Research Grant (offered by LACC) to cover traveling expenses for her thesis research on Latin American Women Rabbis in The Conservative Movement.

Yulianti presented a paper, “Buddhism and Business in Indonesia: The Role of Buddhist Virtues in Sustainable Business,” at AAR regional conference in Atlanta, March 5-7, and has had her paper, “Buddhism and Politics: An Example from the Sacred Golden Land, Burma,” accepted for an annual Buddhist conference hosted by the International Council of the United Nations Day of Vesak (ICUNDV) in Thailand, May 23-25. Next year, while applying to Ph.D. programs, she will be teaching at Kertarajasa Buddhist College in Batu, East Java, Indonesia.

Michael Zolondek has been accepted to the University of Edinburgh’s Ph.D. program and presented a paper, “And They Threw Him Out of the Vineyard: An Analysis of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants” at the Southeastern Regional AAR conference in Atlanta March 5-7.

Master’s Alumni

Karyna DoMonte (2009) presented a paper at the Ninth Annual Women’s Studies Student Conference on March 23. Her paper will be published in Making Waves: The Journal for Women’s Studies Journal at Florida International University. She has recently been accepted at Boston University’s doctoral program in Religion and awarded both scholarship and a teaching assistantship.

Willis Ekowati (2007) presented a paper, “Are We Socially Engaged: A Preliminary Study on the Modes of Teachings and Practices of the Theravadins in Indonesia,” at the 2nd bi-annual conference of the Association of Theravada Buddhist Universities, March 3-4, 2009 in Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Sagaing, Myanmar. She is now a doctoral candidate in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Saeha Paulovkin graduated summa cum laude (GPA of 3.9) from the Religious Studies undergraduate program in December 2009. She was also inducted into Phi Beta Kappa honor society. She has begun the MA in Religious Studies at FIU.
Graduate Notes

Master’s Alumni (continued)

Barry Mowell (2006) has published an edited book this year, *Sub-Saharan Africa in the Classroom*, released by the National Council for Geographic Education.

Siti Sarah Muwahidah (2007) has been awarded a Fulbright doctoral fellowship and accepted into the Emory University Graduate School in Religious Studies to begin January 2011.

Genevieve Nrenzah (2008) published a paper in the FIU Women’s Studies Journal, *Making Waves*, “Indigenous Religious Belief and Practice in Ghanaian Pentecostalism: The Mame Wata Healing Churches of Half Assini.” She has been accepted in doctoral programs in Religious Studies at the University of Edinburgh, Birmingham University (UK), and the University of Ghana.

Sandra Rios Oyola (2009) has been accepted to a doctoral program in Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen, UK, and will deliver her paper on religion, healing and violence in Colombia at the Latin American Religious Studies Association meeting in Spain in July.

Erin Weston (1999) has been traveling the world, working as a private educational consultant. In 2009, she traveled to: France, Turkey, Thailand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Monaco, and Mexico. She also teaches an online course in the Religious Studies Department every semester.

Don’t see your news listed here. Drop us a line and we’ll include your news in the next issue.

From Pakistan to FIU: Sai Paulovkin Shares Her Journey of Higher Education

By Sai Paulovkin

In the fall of 2007 I came to Florida International University full of excitement and expectation. This was my first opportunity to pursue the kind of higher education my mother always dreamed for me; an education of my own choosing. As a young girl growing up in the Islamic nation of Pakistan, my educational and career options were admittedly limited. Whereas in America views on women in the workplace have progressed rapidly forward within the last century, traditionalist views on the subordinate roles of women still dominate society in the third-world. Most women are discouraged (if not prevented) to strive beyond established “gender boundaries”. As a result, my mother did all she could while she was alive to help me immigrate to America for a better life.

Fortunately, I was able to come to America, and after some time I secured admission into FIU’s undergraduate program. During my first few semesters I became fascinated with the courses offered by the Religious Studies Department. Though these courses were often the most challenging, they were also the most rewarding. Through an interdisciplinary approach (historical, anthropological, feminist, comparative, exegetical, literary, etc), I had the opportunity to study sacred languages and learn about the phenomena of religion (ancient and modern) around the world. My exposure to the academic study of other religions broadened and enriched my own worldview in profound ways.

Over time, I developed meaningful relationships with Religious Studies professors and fellow students. During my senior year in Religious Studies, I was accepted into the Accelerated Bachelors/Masters program (also known as 4+1) and also invited to join two academic honor societies: Theta Alpha Kappa and Phi Beta Kappa. In Fall 2009 I graduated *summa cum laude* with my BA in Religious Studies and received a Pre-Modern Cultures Certificate. As I continue pursuing my education in the Master’s program, I am constantly reminded of the blessing to have loving support from family and friends, and to attend an institution that places such a high priority on academic freedom and expression.
Katz Serves as Kauffman Professor

Nathan Katz, professor of religious studies, served as Kauffman Professor of Global Entrepreneurship during the current academic year. The competitive, $15,000 award is administered by the FIU’s Pino Center for Global Entrepreneurship in the College of Business Administration.

Katz, who is also director of the Program in the Study of Spirituality and serves on the Academic Advisory Board of FIU’s new Center for Leadership, proposed to the Pino Center’s peer jury to develop a new undergraduate course relating spirituality to global entrepreneurship. As part of developing this new course, he organized a series of three lectures, each reflecting the perspectives of different religious and cultural traditions.

The first lecture was by Professor Steven Heine, FIU professor of religious studies and history and a former Kauffman Professor himself, on “Spirituality and Entrepreneurship: East Asian Perspectives,” held on October 3, 2009. The lecture was based on his book, “White Collar Zen” (which is being translated into Chinese), as well as on the course he developed as part of his Kauffman Professorship, “Asian Values in Business.” Professor Dipak C. Jain, Dean emeritus of the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, spoke on “Spirituality and Entrepreneurship: South Asian Perspectives,” on January 20, 2010.

Popular motivational speaker Patricia Aburdene’s talk, “Spirituality and Entrepreneurship: Contemporary Western Perspectives,” was held on February 24, 2010. Ms. Aburdene, author of Megatrends 2010 and leading advocate of “conscious capitalism,” speaks and runs leadership workshops for executives and university leaders around the world.

Katz has been developing a new course, “Contemporary Global Spirituality,” to explore the applications of spirituality to such secular domains as entrepreneurship and leadership, the health sciences, fine and performing arts, psychology, education, and other fields. He submitted a new course proposal to the College of Arts and Sciences, and the course will be offered as soon as it is approved. Katz hopes that adjunct faculty interested in the topic will join in the teaching rotation.

New Samani: Goodbye Charitra, Welcome Chaitany

The Faculty and students of the Department of Religious Studies bade farewell to both Samani Charitra Prajna and Samani Unnata Pragya at the end of April.

While Unnata will return to FIU in August, Charitra will not be teaching in the fall. Instead she will be replaced by Samani Chaitany Pragya, who will teach one or two courses each semester, and will be part of the faculty team teaching the spring Seminar in Sacred Sources to graduate students. Welcome Samani Chaitany!

Samani Charitra will come back to the United States working in various Jain communities in North America. Part of her work will be promoting the Jain Endowment to the Religious Studies Department of FIU. She will be missed, but promises to visit occasionally and check up on how we are doing. The Samanis have become a part of the FIU community through their work in promoting meditation, vegetarianism, organic gardening, and non-violence. Their long white hooded figures have become frequent sights on campus and crossing 107th Avenue to their home. They are already missed.
Faculty Notes

Oren Stier (Associate Professor, Graduate Program Director, and Director, Judaic Studies Program) taught his “Holocaust Memorials” course as a Liberal Studies Colloquium for the first time this fall to record numbers. He also received an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/Wolfsonian–FIU Infusion Grant in the fall to enhance his spring 2010 teaching of REL 3194: The Holocaust with materials on Nazi visual culture. Also in the fall, the University of Massachusetts Press issued a paperback edition of Stier’s Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust (2003). Stier lectured this spring at Lehigh University and has a long article, “Torah and Taboo: Containing Jewish Relics and Jewish Identity at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” forthcoming in a special issue of Numen: International Review for the History of Religions 57, nos. 3/4 (2010), Relics in Comparative Perspective, edited by Kevin Trainor. As Director of the Judaic Studies Program in the School of International and Public Affairs, he hosted a major lecture in November by Dr. Efraim Zuroff, Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, preceded by a Presidential Reception at Reagan House. Next year, Stier will be actively involved in developing the Posen Foundation Education Program Southeast Regional Teacher Seminar with colleagues from UM.

Ana Maria Bidegain published a new book, Participation y Protagonismo de las mujeres en la historia del catolismo latinoamericano (Buenos Aires, 2010), co-edited a new book, Una mujer con osjos de fuego,” (Montevideo: OBSUR, 2010)and co-authored with Maria Clara Bingemer an article in Concilio 2009, “Latin American Matristics: Beginnings of Recognition” which was published in six languages. She also published a chapter, “Le Martyre des religieuses en Amerique Late au 20e siècle,” in Caroline Sappia, ed. A l’image d’Oscar Romero (Louvain: La Nueve, 2009). She will be one of the two Colombian historians at the CELAM meeting of Latin American Catholic bishops at their summer meeting.

Christine Gudorf delivered a paper at the Society of Christian Ethics meeting in San Jose, CA in January on water privatization in Islam and Christianity, participated in the annual Samuel Ott Lecture (“The New Shape to Anti-Gay Bigotry”) at Dartmouth College in February, gave a Phyllis A. Trible lecture on “Feminism and the Body in Sickness and Health” at Emory University in March, and the Shannon Lecture on “Technology and the Intrinsic Value of Life” at Nazareth College, Rochester, NY in April. While in Rochester she also gave a lecture on “Body Sex and Pleasure: Revisiting Sexual Ethics.” Gudorf’s paper on water privatization was accepted for publication in the Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics. Her article published in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, “The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism: Challenge to the Churches” is being republished in Ellison and Douglas, eds., Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection (Westminster, 2010). Gudorf will give a series of lectures at Indonesian universities in June. In July she will give a paper on “The Vatican, Strategic Essentialism and Sexual Complementarity” at the International Catholic Ethicists conference in Trento, Italy. Finally, in August she begins a research leave for the Fall semester. She will teach only online from a distance for the Spring semester, while she attempts to complete two new books. She will return in Fall 2011, but will continue to work with thesis students while she is away.

Whitney Bauman was elected co-chair of the Religion and Ecology Group at the AAR during the 2009 annual meeting. He also received a Wabash Summer Fellowship to work on two articles during the first part of the summer 2010. From June 15, 2010 until August 1, 2010, he will be teaching a course on “Religion and Nature” at the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. During that time, he will also give lectures in Kuala Lampur, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. He has several forthcoming publications for 2010, including: “Emergence, Energy, and Openness: A Viable Agnostic Theology,” in Theology and Energy, Donna Bowman and Clayton Crockett, eds. (Forthcoming 2010); “Christianity and Nature” in The Routledge Companion for Religion and Science, Gregory Peterson, Michael Spezio, and James Haag, eds. (Forthcoming 2010); “Christianity and Nature” in The Routledge Companion for Religion and Science, Gregory Peterson, Michael Spezio, and James Haag, eds. (Forthcoming 2010); and with James Haag “Disbanding Dualisms: The Emergence of Religious Bodies,” in Human Bodies and the Religious Human: The Significance of the Human Body in Modern Science and Culture, Thomas Indinopulos and Rebecca Norris, eds. (Brill, Forthcoming 2010).
Faculty Notes (continued)

Steven Heine, Professor of Religious Studies and History and Director of Asian Studies, is publishing a new co-edited book (with Dale S. Wright) on Zen Masters, the fifth in a series of volumes on the history and thought of Zen Buddhism published by Oxford University Press. His recent monograph, Zen Skin, Zen Marrow: Will the Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up? was the subject of an AAR panel in fall 2009 and was reviewed in Choice and the Journal of Japanese Studies, which said, “For the scholarly community, Heine’s work contributes to the possibility of healing within the field of Zen studies in at least three ways. First, he openly discusses the rift that has long been tacitly recognized. Second, he provides an example of excellent scholarship that seeks to bridge the extremes where that is possible, showing due respect to all viewpoints. Finally, where he understands that scholarship alone may fail, he invites scholars to practice self-reflection and to consider repentance. Only a scholar of Heine’s stature in the field could offer such an invitation.” In addition, Heine organized the annual meeting of the Southern Japan Seminar held at FIU and continues to edit the Japan Studies Review.


Erik Larson presented his paper “4Q521 and the Messiah” at the December 2009 annual conference of the Association of Jewish Studies in Los Angeles. 4Q521 is a manuscript of the Dead Sea Scrolls that is noteworthy for its clear reference to a Messiah who raises the dead and preaches good news to the poor. This text has clear connections Matt. 11:5 and Lik. 7:22 which relate that Jesus likewise performed both actions as part of his mission. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls texts are earlier than the New Testament, it is clear that 4Q521 does not refer to Jesus. But questions have been raised about the precise identity of the mysterious messianic figure mentioned in it. In 1994 John Collins published an important study that attempted to demonstrate the messianic figure was actually a prophet. His view has become dominant in recent scholarship. Larson’s paper takes another look at the question. He explores connections both to the Bible and to other Dead Sea Scrolls that indicate 4Q521 may refer to an angelic anointed one. In addition, in March 2010 Larson traveled to Gainesville to participate in a conference at the University of Florida funded by the Posen Foundation. The conference brought together faculty of the Judaic Studies program at UF along with select colleagues from around the country to engage in roundtable discussions with famed Biblical translator Robert Alter. Alter’s book The Art of Biblical Narrative was published in 1981 and served as a major catalyst in the literary study of the Bible. The theoretical framework he established by this publication was given concrete expression through Alter’s subsequent translations of various books in the Hebrew Bible. At the seminar, participants read selected passages in prose and poetry and then in dialogue evaluated Alter’s work while explaining their own perspectives as to the best rendering of the texts.
A highlight of International Women’s Week was the “Women Healing Women” events celebrated at FIU, held March 12 and 13 for the more than sixty attendees. The Rev. Dr. Linnea Pearson, Inter-Faith Minister and Adjunct Professor in Religious Studies, organized and orchestrated this third annual gathering. Co-sponsors of the event were: FIU’s Religious Studies Department; the Religious Studies Honor Society, Theta Alpha Kappa (Ms. Liz Perez, President), and the Women’s Studies Center (Dr. Laurie Shrage, Director).

Following a welcome by Dr. Laurie Shrage and Dr. Linnea Pearson on Friday evening, a distinguished panel made up of The Rev. Lori Cardona, founder of LMC Inter-Faith Ministries; Queen Mother Yeyefini Efenebolade, founding director of the International Institute of Afrikan Studies and Knowledge, an ordained Ofa priest; Lisa Van Ostrand, founder of the Three Treasures Healing Temple; Dr. Ozlem Pala, MD, University of Miami School of Medicine and Anatolia Cultural Center; Sister Charitra Prajna, Jain nun and founder of the FIU Preksha Mediation Center; and Master Chufei Tsai, founder of Zen Village was introduced. This year’s presentation was entitled “Honoring the Feminine Divine and Confronting Religious Misogyny.” The evening concluded with an informal meeting of the audience with the panelists, and a healing-drumming dance led by Yeyefini Efenebolade.

“Connecting Women Globally and Healing Locally,” the Saturday morning session, began with a tranquilizing Tibetan prayer chanted by Lama Karma Chotso, of the Kagyu Shedrup Buddhist Center. Dr. Pearson welcomed the audience and spoke about the importance of healing from the divine feminine and the importance of offering protection to all women. She introduced the distinguished panelists who presented information regarding marginalized women worldwide. They discussed their organizations, all of which promote education, gender equality, and efforts to free all women from violence and abuse. Because mothers are nearly always the “first responders,” protecting their self-worth and dignity is of utmost importance in today’s world. Panel members included Dr. Sorah Dubitsky, FUI Adjunct Professor, Psychology; Sister Kimberly Fayth, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University-United Nations; Ronnie Neuman, Director of Research and Health Promotion of the International Art of Living Foundation; Mary Lou Pfeiffer, Fellow, the Honors College FIU and Adjunct Instructor, Religious Studies; and Maria E. Santamarina, JD, Diversity Officer at Florida Atlantic University and Vice-President of the East Florida Chapter of UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women). The third annual “Women Healing Women” program concluded with four healing workshops offered by Yeyefini Efunebolade, Ronnie Newman, Lisa Van Ostrand, and the Rev. Monica Perez and a final closing circle of healing and blessings.

To join the Millionth Circle project, linking together Women’s Healing Circles locally and globally, email womenhealingtheworld@gmail.com.
The Pursuit of Honors

By Stephan W. Nesvacil

In the spring of 2009, and halfway through the semester, I was hurriedly making my way through the Graham Center when I spotted Dr. Erik Larson, undergraduate advisor in the department of Religious Studies, also negotiating the snarling GC traffic patterns. An astute walker, he traversed the breadth of the chaotic scene without much as a sidestep. As I caught up to him, my aim was to ask him about how one goes about taking an independent study course for credit in religious studies, something I had been considering. Naturally, I greeted him and asked him how he was doing? And naturally, my greeting was met with a standard response, which is kept at the ready by teachers when approached by a student in a common area, that is, when caught outside of the preferred grounds of engagement—the sanctified faculty offices. Hurriedly, he said that he was heading for a quick bite on his way to a faculty meeting, which was, of course, going to start momentarily. Right, I thought, as I brushed aside this customary rejoinder. Instead, I pressed on with my inquiry as the good professor headed for the sushi café, evidently he was intending to keep up this ruse of a swift repast. Indeed, when it comes to a meal, there is nothing speedier over the tongue than a sliver of fish on a rice ball.

An independent study course is pursued, how, I implored once again? It was hereabouts that Dr. Larson veered off course and threw me for a loop; honestly, I didn’t see it coming. Looking me straight in the eye, he kindly offered that an independent study course would be an ideal application for me in the pursuit of learning; moreover, he proffered, I should just as well extend the focus of the study to include a 50-60 page bachelor thesis, written under the guidance of a faculty advisor, who would direct the course of inquiry. I mentally stammered the word, th-th-th-the-si-s-s-s, and knew that he had me on the ropes. Sensing my inner turmoil, he pressed on. Sure, Stephan, he went on, you would need to write up the results of your study and then defend it to a group of professors from the department. They will have prepared a series of questions by having already read your thesis in advance of your defense (he said this so easily, the words thesis and defense trickling off his tongue like so much learned effervescence), which will probe you as to the merits of the research.

Now they had me—all of them—all of my past professors who had ever given me a passing mark. Now I would have to defend myself, and those earlier grades by staking down three of those previous professors in a grueling match of wits. How could this be, I wondered, I was almost done with this school—or so I thought. So, a few more tricky questions presented directly, face-to-face, and not through the safe interface of a written test. They must have known all along that it would come down to this and were just biding their time, knowing full well that I would have to encounter them for one last showdown before I would be done with Florida International University.

I was feeling queasy; the ground was spinning; and the knees were starting to buckle—I thought I might collapse right there in front of the fish stand. And I would have, had not Larson said the magic words that made it all better. By the way, he offhandedly remarked, upon the successful conclusion of this academic ordeal, Honors in Religious Studies will be conferred, which will be permanently recorded in your transcripts. Ahh, so it’s a right of passage is it, why didn’t you say so up front? My head cleared instantly, and the roiling in my gut eased considerably. Honors, you say. Well, now you’re talking!

With that my thoughts were ablaze; I was well on my way as I visualized myself strolling the campus as a robed scholar pondering the mysterious universe. I just needed to ask one of my professors to guide me, I thought, but whom would I ask, who would be a soft sell? At the time, I was in the midst of the hardest class that I had ever taken, which was Analysis of Religion with Dr. Gudorf, who also happened to be the head of the department, and the hardest teacher I had ever encountered; moreover, she wouldn’t suffer my foolishness lightly. Certainly, I wouldn’t be asking her, I mused. Meanwhile, Dr. Larson, expertly pinching a well-crafted maguro in his chopsticks, which he deftly dipped into a small puddle of wasabi and shoyu, was way ahead of me; he seemed to sense my inner thoughts as if he were reading them on my forehead. After the morsel disappeared into his mouth chased by a splash of chilled green tea, he asked me point blank with a levelness that seemed well practiced, why don’t you approach Dr. Gudorf; she would be an excellent advisor to your research process? I felt the bottom fall out of my stomach, and knew that I’d been had—hook, line, and sinker.

Now I could see it all so clearly. Dr. Larson’s dodge of a quick meal, the faculty meeting, all of it, was a slick maneuver, and I had been caught in some kind of a devious scholastic trap. So this is how students get sucked into the machinery of academia, I thought. It is all a great big dance of diversion and seduction, a head fake here a juke there and maneuver, and I had been caught up in it. Considerably. Honors, you say. Well, now you’re talking!

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FIU Department of Religious Studies Newsletter

In this issue

Jain Community Endows Professorship; New Department Chairman Named; Gudorf Awarded Pentecostal Research Grant; Students Summer in India and Israel; Faculty Plan Professional Summer; Mantell-Seidel Promoted to Full Professor; Students Honored at Awards Ceremonies; New Samanis Headed to FIU; and much more.

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