

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

NEWSLETTER

A Note from the Chair

Professor Kevin Trainor



Greetings from 481 Main Street, and welcome to our annual newsletter. Certainly the biggest news of the year concerns our new faculty. This past fall, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, our new scholar of Islam and religion in South Asia, began a new tenure-track appointment, allowing us once again to offer courses on Hinduism and Islam. And in the spring, Todne Thomas Chipumuro, who works on black Atlantic religious movements in the U.S. and the

Caribbean, started her new tenure-track appointment (she taught one course in the department the previous year as a Henderson Fellow). See below for more on our two new colleagues. I am also happy to report that Vicki Brennan was granted tenure and promotion to Associate Professor at the end of this year, and Cuong Mai was promoted to Senior Lecturer.

The department faculty colloquium series continued this year with several speakers including our own faculty members as well as scholars from outside the department. This year the department also sponsored several public lectures. For more information about these events see page 6 below.

The six graduating Religion majors in our Senior Seminar this spring also took on a wide range of ambitious research topics, and three graduating majors successfully defended Honors theses this year: Carrie Kaufman, Simeon Marsalis (whose father, jazz great Wynton Marsalis, gave UVM's commencement address), and Grace Stanford (see below for more on their research). The department continues to explore ways to further the dialogue between current Religion students and our graduates, and we welcome your suggestions for how we might go about this more effectively. In the meantime, we're always happy to hear from our graduates, whether by e-mail or in person, and we encourage any of you who are in the neighborhood of 481 Main to drop by and say hello.

Warmest regards,

Kevin



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Meet Our New Faculty Members

Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst joined our department this past August. She earned her Ph.D. in Religion, with a specialization in Islamic Studies, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2012. Her broad research interests include South Asian Islam, Indo-Persian literature, Mughal Empire history, colonialism in South Asia, postcolonial theory, theories of religion, history of religion, religious identity formation, Sufism, and South Asian religions. Her dissertation project dealt with issues of Muslim and Hindu religious identity, historiography, and the development of definitions of religion in the late Mughal and early colonial periods in South Asia (roughly 17th - 19th centuries). Professor Morgenstein Fuerst taught Introduction to Religion: Comparative as well as Islam and Studies in Hindu Tradition this year. She looks forward to teaching more courses on Muslims, Hindus, and the history of religion in the years to come!



Todne Thomas Chipumuro is a new assistant professor in the department of religion with a joint appointment in the ALANA U.S. Ethnic Studies Program as of January 2013. A graduate of Cornell University and the University of Virginia with degrees in Anthropology and Africana Studies and a native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Professor Chipumuro specializes in the study of the Afro-Caribbean and African American Christianity with a broader emphasis in exploring the many other dynamic religions of the African Diaspora. Her book project *Coming Alongside: Identity and Intimacy in a Black Atlantic Church Network* explores the ways in which the members of a West Indian and African American evangelical church association in Atlanta, Georgia, mobilize ideas, idioms, and practices of spiritual kinship as a critique of the U.S. religious landscape and as method of generating religious solidarity. Her conceptual interest in the intersections of religion and kinship and religious sociality informs a number of her interests including: the history of Protestant institutions and practices of spiritual kinship,

evangelical spiritual kinship claims in the Eddie Long sex abuse case, African American and West Indian theologies of relatedness, and the virtual sociality of online religious networks. She looks forward to teaching and developing religion courses on the Caribbean, the U.S. South, the anthropology of Christianity, religion and the family, religion and migration, and religion, masculinity, and sexuality.

Faculty News

Erica Andrus

Professor Andrus continues to pursue her research interests in the relationship between popular culture and religion in America. Her current project focuses on the television show *Battlestar Galactica*. In November 2012 she gave a presentation related to this research entitled "Remembering Laura Roslin: Fictional Death and a Real Bereavement Community Online," at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Chicago. Together with Religion Department alumni Steven Hrotic she organized the conference "75 Years of Science Fiction: An Interdisciplinary Conference" which was held at UVM on April 27, 2013. At the conference she presented a paper about *Battlestar Galactica* and *Firefly*, and how these 21st-century television shows create monsters that reflect our hopes and fears about technology and biology, and our confusion about what it means to be human. Professor Andrus also continues to enhance her teaching through the use of digital media as well as hands-on research opportunities for students. In May 2013 her article "Introducing Religion to Cyberstudents: Adapting the Comparative Introduction to Religion for an Online Summer Class" appeared in *Religious Studies News: Spotlight on Teaching*, an online newsmagazine published by the American Academy of Religion. She is also preparing to restart the project on religion in public schools in Vermont by adding a service learning component to the Fall 2013 "Religion in America" class. Part of this involves reaching out to educators in Chittenden and Addison counties. Professor Andrus also continues to help her husband Erik with his many projects; the most recent concerns their efforts to establish the Vermont Sail Freight Project with the Willowell Foundation to use wind power to bring Champlain Valley products to NYC next fall.

Thomas Borchert

Professor Borchert's research on Buddhist monks in China and Thailand continues to bear fruit in the form of presentations, articles, and grants. He attended the SSRC/National University of

Singapore/University of Hong Kong co-sponsored conference, "Inter-Asia III," in Hong Kong, June 2012, where he gave a paper entitled, "A New Buddhist Cosmopolitanism? Buddhist Pedagogical Networks and Institutions in Contemporary Asia." In September 2012 his article "Scratching the Surface of Religion and 'Religion' in Contemporary China: A Review of Anthologies on Religion in Reform Era People's Republic of China" appeared in the journal *Religious Studies Review*. He also contributed a chapter to a book on *Buddhist Children*, which was edited by Vanessa Sasson and published by Oxford University Press in 2013. His contribution is entitled "Monk and Boy: Becoming a Novice in Contemporary Sipsongpannā." During the 2013-2014 academic year Professor Borchert has received a Fulbright fellowship to do research on religious and political identity among Thai monks, with a project entitled "Monastic Citizens." Professor Borchert's research interests also inform his teaching. In Spring 2013 he developed a new course, entitled "Religion, Law and Discipline," which explored the resonances between religious disciplines and legal structures. The course examined case studies based in a Tibetan monastery in India, the Thai legal system, and the practice of religion in the US penal system. In May 2012 Professor Borchert was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

Vicki Brennan

Professor Brennan has published a number of articles concerning her research on religion, music, and politics in Yoruba churches in Nigeria. In 2012 her essay "'Truly we have a good heritage': Musical Mediations in a Yoruba Christian Diaspora" appeared in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. In the same year she published an article entitled "Take Control: The Labor of Immediacy in Yoruba Christian Music" in the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*. In 2013 she published an article in the interdisciplinary journal *Studies in World Christianity* entitled "'Up Above the River Jordan': Hymns and Historical Consciousness in the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches of Nigeria." Professor Brennan is currently developing a new area of research that explores the relationships between gospel music, new media, and religious publics in

Faculty Research (continued)

Nigeria. In 2012, she was invited to give presentations on this new project at Indiana University, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University. She also gave a presentation entitled, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord: Pentecostal Soundscapes and Public Christianity in Lagos, Nigeria" at the international conference "Pentecostal Politics of Space and Power: A global perspective" held in Padova, Italy in June 2012. During the Spring 2013 semester she taught a new freshman seminar in the Honors College called "Acoustemologies" which explored the relationship between sound, hearing, and knowledge. In May 2013 she was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

Todne Chipumuro

Professor Chipumuro has advanced her research on kinship and religious sociality through the development of several publications and presentations. She presented her research "Black or Brethren Like Me? Religion, Ethnicity, and Subversive Community" at the UVM Henderson Research Symposium. She also was invited to speak at Wheaton College by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and Global Experiential Learning Program, where she gave a talk entitled "Missionizing Relatedness: Caribbean Moral Geographies of the U.S. South." In December 2012 her article appeared in a special issue on Black Fraternal Organizations of the *Journal of African American Studies*. In April 2013 she attended the annual meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion and gave a paper on "Syncretism and its Discontents: Black Evangelicals and the Ambivalence of Institutional Change." Professor Chipumuro was awarded a grant by the Wenner-Gren Foundation to conduct an international research workshop on "The Sacred Social: Spiritual Kinship among the Abrahamic Faiths." Scheduled to be held in March 2014 at the University of Virginia, the workshop will mediate conversations about the comparative study of spiritual kinship formations and culminate in a comprehensive interdisciplinary publication disseminating workshop discussions and

innovations. She designed a new "Global Religions" course for the department and mentored students in producing digital media research projects in her "Caribbean Religions" class. Professor Chipumuro is excited to attend a Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race Conference this July in Accra, Ghana.

Anne Clark

Professor Clark's research this year has been focusing on two related projects. One project examines how two twelfth-century sources – a sermon by Hildegard of Bingen and an illustrated prayerbook, both of which are associated with women's religious communities – reinterpret a traditional Gospel story to foreground the role of women. She will present a paper on this research at a medieval studies symposium at the Saint Louis University in June. The other project is an extended investigation of the same prayerbook to consider how the book's user would have responded to its interwoven strands of texts and images that seem to be about different subjects. This project poses the question of how such an intellectually challenging juxtaposition of text and image could do the work of generating intense religious emotion, which was an expectation of medieval prayer. This research will be discussed at a day-long symposium in July, when scholars gather at UVM for the mid-summer medieval colloquium. Professor Clark also joined the editorial board of the *Journal of Cognitive Historiography*, a new journal created by Emeritus Professor Luther Martin and his colleagues in the United Kingdom, and she wrote book reviews for *The Journal of Religion* and *The Medieval Review*.

Cuong Mai

Professor Mai will be on sabbatical the upcoming academic year and he plans to finish his book on the history of Buddhist funerary practices and cultures in early medieval China as well as conclude some preliminary research on tales of the Bodhisattva Quan Am (Avalokiteśvara) in Vietnamese Buddhism. He will also be presenting a paper at this year's Pure Land Studies conference in Vancouver, Canada. In May 2013 Professor Mai was promoted to Senior Lecturer.

**Faculty News,
(continued)**

Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

Professor Morgenstein Fuerst presented new research at both the American Academy of Religion national conference and the South Asian Literary Association (a subgroup of the Modern Language Association) this year; the new research deals with Muslim belonging, citizenship, and presumed identity in both contemporary America and British India. She has completed an article about a Sufi Muslim's gloss of the Hindu text *Bhagavadgita* titled "A Muslim *Bhagavadgītā*: 'Abd al-Rahman Chishtī's Interpretative Translation and its Implications." Since joining the department in August 2012, she continues to revise her dissertation manuscript into a book project, which is currently titled "Religions of Empire: Texts, Taxonomies, and the Islamicate Roots of South Asian Definitions of Religion."

Richard Sugarman

Professor Sugarman continues to explore his intellectual interests in the religious philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. In 2012 he published two chapters in volumes on Levinas published as part of the *Series Bibliothéque Philosophique de Louvain*; the first "Messianic Temporality: Preliminary Reflections on Ethical Messianism and the Deformalization of Time in Levinas" appeared in *Recherches Levinassiennes*, while the second "The Breakup of Totality and the Promise of Time in Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Levinas Autrement*. He was also invited to give a talk entitled "Through the Lens of Levinas: On Holiness" at Boston College in March 2012. Professor Sugarman continues to direct the Integrated Humanities Program at UVM, as well as to teach his popular courses on "The Meaning of Life," and "Religious Existentialism." In December 2012 Professor Sugarman was the subject of a feature article that appeared in the weekly independent newspaper *Seven Days*. The article can be read online at the following URL:

<http://www.7dvt.com/2012wondering-jew>

Kevin Trainor

Professor Trainor's research on Buddhism in Sri Lanka has produced several publications and presentations in the past year. His essay "A Textualized Landscape: Divā-Guhāva and the Sri Lankan Tradition of the Sixteen Great Pilgrimage Sites (*Soḷosmāsthāna*)" appeared in *Muditā: Deshabandhu Sirisumana Godage Abhinandana Shastriya Sangrahaya* (Colombo, Sri Lanka). Another essay, entitled "Buddhism in a Nutshell: The Uses of *Dhammapada* 183," was published as a part of the volume *Embedded Religions: Essays in Honor of W. S. Karunatilake*. In 2013 he presented his new research on the Buddha's cave pilgrimage site as his Full Professor Lecture to the UVM College of Arts and Sciences. He also was invited to give a keynote address at a conference on "Beyond Binaries: Toward a Continuum Model of Religious Normativity" held at the University of Texas at Austin in March 23, 2013. His presentation examined "The 'Missing' Cave of the Buddha's Midday Rest: Strategies of Authenticity at a Sri Lankan Pilgrimage Site." In May 2012 he was promoted to Full Professor.

Find us online!



Keep up with all of the news about the Religion Department through our Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/uvmreligion>

You can also follow individual faculty on twitter to learn more about their research and teaching interests.

Professor Brennan:
[@vickibrennan](https://twitter.com/vickibrennan)

Professor Morgenstein Fuerst:
[@ProfIRMF](https://twitter.com/ProfIRMF)

Lectures & Special Events



Department Picnic

Students and faculty mingled at the annual picnic and discussed their plans for the new academic year while enjoying hamburgers, hotdogs and other delicious treats!

Faculty Colloquium Series

Tom Borchert presented on "Race, Ethnicity and Theravāda Buddhism in Singapore and Sipsongpannā."

Bill Paden discussed his recent article in the journal *Religion*, "Tracks and Themes in a Shifting Landscape: Reflections on 50 Years of the Study of Religion."

Adrian Ivakhiv from the Rubenstein School/Environmental Studies Program spoke on "Green" pilgrimages.

Pavel Titz, a visiting Fulbright scholar from Charles University in Prague, gave a talk entitled, "Worshipping Gods in Pre-Roman Pompeii: In Search of the Ancient City's Cults and Rituals."

Public Lectures

Gareth Fisher, a specialist in Chinese Buddhism from Syracuse University, spoke on "(Dis)organized Chaos: Religious Pluralism at a Beijing Buddhist Temple."

Courtney Bender, a Columbia University scholar well known for her research on North American religion, gave a talk entitled, "Spirituality in the American Grain: From Shoveling Fog to Power Spots."

Katrien Pype, a postdoctoral fellow at the Program in Science, Technology and Society at MIT, spoke on cell phone practices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Wendy Doniger Lecture

In March 2012, Wendy Doniger, the Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of History of Religions at the University of Chicago, gave a lecture entitled "The Magic Ring of Memory and Forgetfulness in South Asian and European Folklore." Doniger, a world-class scholar of Hinduism and the author of more than thirty books, gave a talk on a trope common in a variety of folklore traditions in South Asia and Europe. In this trope, a woman is given a ring as a token of affection by a suitor/lover/stranger who happens to be a king who then promptly forgets her for one reason or another. Later, the woman, or perhaps her son, brings the ring out as proof of her tie to the man. A dynamic speaker, Doniger's talk showed the commonality of this trope in a variety of unrelated contexts. Professor Doniger also spoke with the students in Religion 100: Interpretation of Religion about the practice of religious studies.



Student News

This spring students in the Senior Seminar undertook intensive research projects on a number of fascinating topics:

Sonia David, "Slaughter House: A Case Study Comparing Cattle Slaughter Prevention Legislation between the Indian States of Uttar Pradesh 1955 and Karnataka 1964 and 2010."

Avery Howell, "Compassionate Eating: The New Dietary Discourses of North American Jains."

Carrie Kaufman, "Trance and Spirit Possession in Bali."

Madeleine Kemble, "For Want of Better Terms: Assessing the Traditional/Modern Binary Used to Describe the Gay Marriage Debate in Pluralistic Perspective."

Grace Stanford, "Jizō, the Ladies' Number One Compassionate Bodhisattva: Exploring the Impact of Women on the Formation and Transformation of the Bodhisattva Jizō in Japan."

Spencer Tubbs, "Science and Scientism: An Analysis of the Role of Science as Arbiter of Legitimacy in the Secular Public Sphere."

Congratulations to the Class of 2013!



*Spring 2013 Graduates (l-r): Front: Madeleine Kemble, Carrie Kaufman, Avery Howell, Grace Stanford.
Back: Simeon Marsalis, Sonia David, Derek McDonald, Spencer Tubbs.*

Outstanding Senior Major Award

This year the Outstanding Senior Major Award was presented to Madeleine Kemble. Madeleine graduated in May 2013 with a double major in Religion and English. She made the following statement about her experience in the Religion department at UVM:

"After being in the Integrated Humanities Program as a first year here at UVM, and being fascinated by the Religion and Ethics programs required at my prep school, Groton, I wanted to use my college experience to absorb and reflect on as much of the best of the humanities as I could get my hands on. As William James once said, 'The best claim that a college education can possibly make on your respect, the best thing it can aspire to accomplish for you, is this: that it should help you to know a good man when you see him.' I certainly took these words more seriously than someone with a more definite career path would have. I was constantly straddling a desire to study political theory, philosophy, ethnography, history and literature; basically those vague and problematic discourses that I see influencing the world around me in really tangible ways but that I felt need to be viewed more critically. A lot of people see growth in their time at University, and I wanted to cultivate my education as something that was self conscious and dedicated to a better understanding of the 'other' because those are values that I think are often glossed over in other academic pursuits. The Religion Department at UVM offered me these things in ample loads, fulfilling my urge to let my mind wander between vast subject matters and providing me with some of the most interesting and engaging professors that I could have asked for to help me see the intricate interconnections. After graduation I hope to find a way to combine a couple of percolating passions I have for media transparency and education reform. Hopefully, I will find an institution or group of individuals as flexible and supportive as the Religion Department to guide me going forward."



Honors Research

In 2013 three Religion students wrote Honors Thesis projects and received College Honors through their efforts.

Carrie Kaufman, "The Church in the Dirt: Sound, Space, and Community at Music Festivals in the United States" (Advisor: Professor Vicki Brennan)

Simeon Marsalis, "Institutionalizing Transcendence: Charismatic Authority and American Identity at Jazz at Lincoln Center" (Advisor: Professor Vicki Brennan)

Grace Stanford, "Savior, Guardian, Gentle Face: Tracing the Transformations of the Bodhisattva Jizō in Japanese Culture" (Advisor: Professor Tom Borchert)

Religion Club

Religion club continues to bring together students interested in broadening their exposure to religion in the world, and engaging in discussion with students who share that same curiosity. Our activities this year have remained humble yet satisfying, with discussions about the importance of the pursuit of knowledge of religion, as well as the dissection of various current events. Professor Morgenstein Fuerst headed a discussion about Hindu love poetry, and over the course of the year we viewed and discussed a variety of documentaries that included "Roots of Love: On Sikh Hair and Turban," "New Muslim Cool," and episodes from the documentary "Around the World in 80 Faiths." In the fall it heads into a new year with enthusiasm and students who genuinely love discussing and learning about religion.

Stay Up to Date!

Wondering about upcoming lectures and events? Want to see what new courses are being offered in the Department of Religion? Find out the latest news about the Department of Religion at the University of Vermont by checking out our new website:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~religion/>

Support Undergraduate Research!

The Department invites donations in honor of William E. Paden in support of undergraduate research in Religion at the University of Vermont. Donations to this fund will be used to help students attend conferences and to defray costs associated with student presentations. If you are interested in making a contribution please write a check to the University of Vermont Department of Religion. Checks should be mailed to:

UVM Development Office
411 Main St.
Burlington, VT 05405

Keep in Touch!

Now it's your turn! We want to hear from you. Please get in touch, by phone, mail, or email, and tell us about you and your family, your latest successes, career changes, and travels. We look forward to publishing alumni updates in future issues. Submit your news via email to religion@uvm.edu or by regular mail to Department of Religion, University of Vermont, 481 Main Street, Burlington, VT.

Name:

Email:

Class of:

Current Address:

News:

I want to know more about: