

CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter of the Department of Religion at the University of Florida

Fall 2004

FROM THE CHAIR

CONNECTING WITH OUR PAST— MOVING INTO OUR FUTURE

David Hackett

Since beginning my term as Chair this last summer I have been interested in connecting with our past. In July we sent out letters asking graduates of the department to get in touch and tell us how their lives have evolved after their experience as religion majors. What has been striking in the responses we have received is the gratitude that alumni have for the formative influence of the department on their lives. These letters also witness to the variety of ways in which religious practices and concern for others continue to animate our graduates' lives. An overview of these responses can be found elsewhere in this issue (Catching Up with Alumni p.2). We also include brief notes on all who have responded to date (Alumni Notes p. 2).

The responses we have received also make clear that our alumni are equally keen to connect with us. It is my hope that this initial contact will grow into a continuing conversation. To that end we are urging our graduates and all friends of our department community to visit our web site to keep abreast of departmental doings (www.religion.ufl.edu). We are also initiating an alumni list service (Two Ways to Stay in Touch p.4). Through this free service alumni and friends of the department are invited to post and receive email in an ongoing conversation.

Already through conversations with alumni who graduated from the department in the late 1950s, I have learned of the influence of the "Religion in Life" program that was central to campus activities in the early years of the department. Through this program, leading thinkers on religious questions and their relationship to everyday life were invited to campus to deliver major addresses and interact with students and faculty. As the letters from our alumni attest, questions of meaning and life's purpose were central to their passion for the religion major. As a way of highlighting this abiding interest and honoring our continuing connection to our alumni we are now thinking about returning to the animating impulse of the "Religion in Life" program by inaugurating an annual alumni lecture by a distinguished thinker who might address such basic questions as "What is worth doing?" or "What

is the relationship between religion and everyday life?" This lecture would be followed by a reception welcoming back all our alumni and again encouraging a continuing conversation. At this point this is just an idea that will take

While always a transformative place where students came to explore their passionate interests in religion, the department is now as well a place where original thinkers are exploring questions at the further reaches of the religious studies discipline.



Hackett

some support from you to make it a reality. To that end, I invite you to communicate with me via email (dhackett@religion.ufl.edu) and to consider a contribution to the department for this purpose (p. 4).

In recent years the department has built upon this solid history of undergraduate teaching to develop an innovative future-oriented

graduate program led by influential faculty exploring terrain at the leading edges of the religious studies discipline. The pioneering work of Manuel Vasquez (Into New Territory, p. 5) is but one example of advances being made

throughout our faculty (Faculty News, p. 6) that are facilitating the department's rapid rise both within the university and nationally among religious studies programs. We have now admitted two classes of graduate students to our PhD tracks in Religion and Nature, Religion in the Americas, and Religions of Asia (for more on this, visit our web site). We are presently expecting to add a new faculty member in indigenous religions with more hiring to follow. While always a transformative place where students came to explore their passionate interests in religion, the department is now as well a place where original thinkers are exploring questions at the further reaches of the religious studies discipline.

I welcome all of you and invite you to join with us in our continuing adventure.

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CATCHING UP WITH ALUMNI

Todd Best

This past summer we sent out letters to the more than 500 students who have graduated with a B.A. or M.A. from our department since 1970. We wanted to re-connect, find out how they are doing, and how their experience as a religion major has played out in their lives.

To date more than fifty alumni have responded by email and letter, with more on the way. Most everyone, like Lynn Edgar ('96), thought it was "great" to hear from us and one, Rolly Blanchette ('76) even followed up his letter with a visit. While replies varied in length from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages, most saw our letter as an opportunity to reflect on their time in the department and strike up a memory or two.

One or more professors' names appeared in almost every reply. Among the faculty of the 1970s, Sam Hill was frequently mentioned as a professor who genuinely cared for students. One alumnus told of how, when in need of a faculty member to represent him in his struggles with the registrar, a random encounter led to Sam taking up his case and becoming his academic advisor. Gene Thursby's role in the intellectual development of students was noted a number of times, as was the influence of Delton Scudder, Shaya Isenberg, Taylor Scott, Dennis Owen, Barry Mesch, and Richard Hiers – all faculty who played significant roles in students' lives. Several alumni commented that the professors they encountered in the department, along with the actual course work, were the primary catalysts in shaping them for the paths their lives would take.

These former students see their academic training in religion as a grounding for careers in other arenas. Some indeed went on to graduate study in religion. Lisa Breglia ('96, MA) is now teaching at Wesleyan University. Darren McClellan ('98) is a Methodist minister in Mobile, Alabama. Many more were like David Stearns ('88), now a divorce lawyer in Boca Raton who credits the department for helping to prepare him for the "pastoral role" of "counseling someone through this difficult passage." Law, counseling, and education appear to have been the chosen fields of those who responded. Yet frequently alumni report, like Charles Cannon ('82), who works with computers, that "My study of religion has helped me to relate to persons of other faiths, and provides me with a framework for the investigation of things beyond my understanding."

Finally, a number replied to a question in our letter about their parents' attitude toward their choice of a religion major. They said that indeed it was a topic around the dinner table, but eventually their parents came around. As Audra Berg ('95) remarked, "My parents thought that I was nuts, but they never gave me a hard time." What seemed to have convinced them was the students' real passion for the field. As Fred Chaiken ('78) put it, "I fell in love with the study of religion."

While the emails and letters continue to arrive, there is a clear pattern of genuine fondness for the department and the role it has played in shaping lives. In addition, everyone said they were glad to receive the letter and happy to hear about developments in the department, both now and in the future. In turn, it is the hope of the department that this initial contact will grow into an on-going conversation. Through events announced on our web site and the new alumni email list service, those who have been with us before are now invited to join with us again in creating what we hope will be an enduring community of friends and supporters of the Department of Religion. If you have not already told us that you want to be on this list service, please see "Two Ways to Stay in Touch" (p. 4) and drop David Hackett a note letting us know what you have been doing (dhackett@religion.ufl.edu).

ALUMNI UPDATES

1973 **Sherry L. Hyman** went on to law school at UF, graduating in 1975. She is now practicing law in Jupiter, Florida.

1976 **Roland Blanchette** received an MA in Anthropology from UF in 1979. In 1980 Rolly took a teaching job at Massasoit Community College in Brockton, Massachusetts, where he has been for 24 years. He is currently chair of their Social Sciences Department and teaches a survey class on the world's religions.

1978 **Fred Chaiken** went on to Emory University Law School in Atlanta, where he continues to practice as a trial lawyer and is the newly elected President of the Greenfield Hebrew Academy, a Jewish day school with approximately 500 students.

Brian Vanlandingham went on to divinity school at Iliff in Denver and then Duke before receiving a degree in information management. Brian is now a systems programmer with a state agency in North Carolina, drawing and painting on the side.

1982 **Charles Cannon** is a computer specialist in Palm Beach County where he also serves as a Deacon in the Episcopal church.

1987 **Matt Cetlinski**, after retiring from coaching, now lives in Gainesville where he is working on building an acupuncture and bodywork practice.

1988 **Matthew Dobbins** completed the Counselor Ed. graduate program at UF and is a school counselor in Marion County.

Steve Prescott, after getting a law degree, practiced law for several years. He now teaches religion courses at Southeastern College in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and is working on a book on Baptist history.

David Stearns is a divorce lawyer and children's advocate in Boca Raton.

1989 **Maribeth Englert** received an MA in theology from Notre Dame, taught religion at LaSalle High School in Portland, Oregon, was an elementary school principal in Washington, and is now raising a family in New Mexico.

1990 **Lynn Valentine Edgar** completed the Counselor Ed. program at UF, and is pursuing a PhD in that area while working as a hospice social worker in Levy, Gilchrist, and Dixie Counties.

1991 **Kimberly Kasow** went on to complete medical school and now works in the Division of Stem Cell Transplants at St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. Kim also serves as Chair for the Youth Commission at Beth Shalom Synagogue.

- Scott Solkoff** is a lawyer in Boynton Beach where he works with clients facing end-of-life issues.
- Robin Nuzum** received Masters degrees in Divinity and Social Work from Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago, respectively. She is now a PhD student in English at UF and has a private psychotherapy practice.
- 1992 Bob Small**, after leaving UF with a BA in Religion and a BS in Advertising, went in to retail management. He is now Senior Vice President of a sports apparel company that creates inspirational silk neckties.
- 1993 David McArthur**, after serving in the Marine Corps, now works in pharmaceuticals and volunteers in his local church.
- 1994 Sun Chae**, after completing an MA in the department, now teaches Religion and Humanities courses at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College in Asheville, North Carolina.
- Lisa Saponaro** went on to get a Masters in Mental Health Counseling at Nova Southeastern University, followed by a PhD in Counseling Psychology from the University of Memphis. Lisa now works as a therapist for homeless men who are in recovery. She gave birth to her first child, Adell Diana, in June, 2004.
- 1995 Audra P. Berg** worked in Chicago at the Jewish Federation for five years, then with the United Jewish Communities Chicago office for two years. Currently Audra is in New York where she directs a small non-profit organization that operates within the Jewish Federation system to create gender equality in Jewish organizational life. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the UF Hillel Center and has joined our department's Advisory Board.
- Adam Bigbee** teaches special education at Paul VI Catholic High School in Fairfax, Virginia.
- Sam K. Zawahry** practices law in Panama City, Florida.
- 1996 Lisa Breglia** completed an MA in the department, later started a Cultural Studies program at George Mason University, and then completed a PhD in Cultural Anthropology at Rice in 2003. She is now a Visiting Assistant Professor at Wesleyan University, with her first book to be published in 2005.
- Louis Reinstein** went on to Emory University where he earned an MA in Jewish Studies in 1999. For four years he taught middle and high school at a private Jewish day school, and is now in his second year of law school at Nova Southeastern University.
- 1997 Dan L. Edmunds** completed an MA in Religious Studies at the University of Scranton in 1999 where he specialized in Eastern Christian Studies and began working as a therapist with adolescents. Dan is now in a PhD program in pastoral community counseling.
- Phil Schwadel** went on to graduate study in the Sociology of Religion at Penn State University, earning a PhD in 2003. He is now in the second of a two-year post-doc at the University of North Carolina where he works on the National Study of Youth and Religion project.
- Dominic J. Prioli** is a regional administrative manager for Raymond James & Associates in St. Petersburg.
- 1998 Chris Mixer** went to work as an Episcopalian youth minister for five years in Panama City, Florida. He is a youth minister in Birmingham, Alabama and is in first year at Beeson School of Divinity, also in Birmingham.
- Van Fox**, after completing an MA in the department, started a PhD in religion at Florida State University. He recently transferred to a Master's program in social work at FSU.
- Darren McClellan** received a Master of Divinity degree from Emory University and is a Methodist minister in Mobile, Alabama.
- 1999 Michelle Kempker** went to the Florida School of Massage in 2000 and is a massage therapist in Naples, Florida.
- 2000 Bhakti Cohen** recently completed a Master's degree in Education and an Education Specialist degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at UF. She plans on working in private practice as a marriage and family therapist in Gainesville.
- Anne E. Raduns-Owens** is practicing Family Law in Ocala.
- Patti Rausch**, after completing the MA, went on to doctoral work in Marriage and Family Therapy. Patti has taught world religions courses at Daytona Beach Community College and at Stetson University. She is a marriage and family counselor.
- Jennifer Williams** is the registrar at Full Sail Real World Education in Winter Park, Florida.
- 2001 Ted Yeatts** is Program Coordinator for the Salvation Army in Gainesville.
- Paul Norman** graduated from FSU law school and works as an attorney in Boca Raton.
- Sarah McCombs** received her MA from the department and now teaches religion courses at the University of West Florida and Pensacola Junior College.
- 2002 Allen Hamlin** went on to theological studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he is in his third year of a ThM, in an interdisciplinary track in Bible Exposition and Christian Education.
- Todd Best**, since completing an MA in the department, went on to the University of Missouri to begin a PhD program in philosophy. When that did not work out, he returned to Gainesville to work as a media writer and computer liaison for the department. Todd is also Program Administrator at the Christian Study Center of Gainesville.
- 2003 Jay Allbritton** is currently looking into career opportunities in public service, politics, journalism, and publishing.
- Jennifer Breman** is in a Master's program in School Guidance Counseling at UF.
- Kevin Jones** has been working with the National Guard at Camp Blanding in Ocala, Florida.

ALUMNI LECTURE FUND

The Department of Religion hopes to provide students with academic experiences that will offer perspective on religion's role in our everyday lives. We hope that through an Alumni Lecture Series and other activities both students and alumni will gain insights from some of today's most brilliant minds. These occasions will also offer the opportunity for today's classes to connect with those who came before them.

Please consider a gift to the Department of Religion to support the department's critical educational activities for those following in your footsteps. Please complete the form and return to the address below. Thanks for your support!

David Hackett, chair
dhackett@religion.ufl.edu



Yes! I would like to support the Alumni Lecture Series! (Fund #00767)

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RUSSELL LOWELL JABERG AWARD

Since 2001, the Department of Religion has chosen annual recipients of the Russell Lowell Jaberg Award for Academic Excellence. Dr. Russell Lowell Jaberg, retired University of Florida humanities professor, devoted his life to his love of religion and theology. This memorial award was created in his honor.

Award Recipients

2001

Nurjehan Saju
Katie Erin Lutz

2002

Allen Hamlin

2003

Jordan Kempker

2004

Henry Marrion
Matthew Ulrich

TWO WAYS TO STAY IN TOUCH

Next time you're surfing the web, visit the department web site at <http://www.religion.ufl.edu>. It's a great way to keep in touch with what is happening in the department. Also, alumni are encouraged to participate in the Department of Religion alumni list service. Alumni on this list may post and receive email to and from other alumni and the department. This service is free, and you may unsubscribe anytime you wish. Those of you who responded to our "getting in touch" letter sent in July are already on this list. For others, to subscribe either send email to anewman@religion.ufl.edu or subscribe directly by sending email to alumni-religion-request@clas.ufl.edu. In the body of your message, type: subscribe end. We hope you will join us in conversation online!

INTO NEW TERRITORY: VASQUEZ CARRIES FORTH STUDY ON IMMIGRATION AND RELIGION

Todd Best and Gayle Lasater

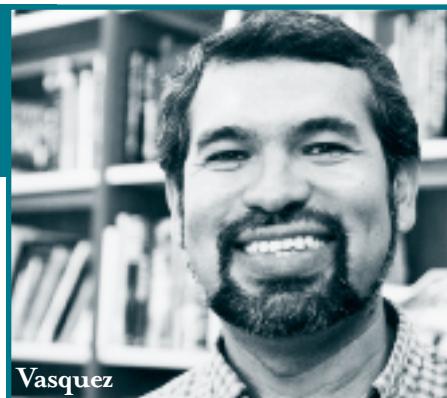
Since its very beginnings, America has been a place where immigrants have sought political refuge and the promise of a better life. But immigration has also brought with it a complex collection of issues and quandaries. Department of Religion Professor Manuel Vasquez is interested in a particular set of questions related to transnationalism, the cultural, economic, and religious exchange that takes place as migrants come to the US, then through a variety of means transfer information, finances, and religious or cultural ideas back to their homeland. Two years ago, Vasquez, along with Anna Peterson (Department of Religion) and Philip Williams (Department of Political Science), published a book called *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas* (Rutgers University Press, 2001) where they explored the role of Christian churches in addressing religious social problems raised by transnationalism and globalization. The book was the culmination of a study funded by Pew Charitable Trusts that

their communities throughout the US. "What is happening in terms of diversity, nationality, country of origin, and also the patterns of settlement that we're seeing in Latino populations," he asserts, "is a metaphor for things to come nationwide." The changes happening here in Florida can be projected on to a national stage. One of these changes is that Latino populations are themselves becoming more diversified, no longer made up mostly of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, but now coming from a wider range of Latin American countries with different social classes, religious affiliations, and patterns of settlement. The study is an attempt to understand how these changes among Latino migration patterns and religious affiliations impact the social, demographic, and religious situation in the state of Florida and beyond.

To take it a step further, Vasquez wants the study to acknowledge the tensions that these changes create. The different cultural patterns among immigrants bring with them different understandings of religion, gender, and family life, and these will undoubtedly collide in different ways with the American mainstream. This leads to one of the unique components of the study: that it will cultivate public dialogue. About this, Vasquez says, "Part of the idea of the study is to see where those points of tension might emerge and look for ways in

which tension can be resolved. The way we think it can be resolved is not by segregating or rejecting the immigrants but rather by bringing the immigrants into the civic conversation in such a way that they become engaged, involved partners in the building of America as we go into the 21st century."

The project serves as a model of what public intellectuals might do to turn scholarship in the academy into something that serves society in direct ways. On one hand, there is a strong academic component which will produce articles and books, including ethnographic and ethnostatistical studies of the communities' religious practices and affiliations. On the other hand, the project



Vasquez

will create a conversation and thereby actually involve those immigrant communities in resolving the tensions they face.

How this conversation can be created will take some effort. Vasquez says that first the Latinos must be welcomed and accepted as "legitimate partners in the construction of America." To enhance visibility of the hitherto marginalized communities, the project will organize workshops that will bring together scholars, community leaders, media representatives who work on public policy, and local and state government workers. These immigrant communities are here to stay and, says Vasquez, "they are also contributing, paying taxes, sending their kids to school, buying businesses, buying homes, and revitalizing economies that were often basically decimated by industrialization and other socio-economic problems."

As the project comes to a close in the next couple of years (this is the last year of research), Vasquez already has ideas of pushing the study to the next level. This will entail going back to the communities of origin of these immigrants to see how the homeland communities have been effected by immigration to the US through financial transfers or cultural ideas that move back and forth. Ultimately, this would move the focus of the study back to Latin America, which the research team sees as instrumental in understanding the US.

Wherever Vasquez's project ends, it serves as a model of what it might look like to do interdisciplinary research across national and cultural boundaries, drawing upon academic resources from the various locales, and actually involving those people studied in a public conversation to resolve possible tensions illuminated in the study. By bringing together "multiple disciplines in the social sciences and humanities," Vasquez hopes that this project will begin "to break down borders so that we don't claim that any country is exceptional to another."

looked at Christianity's changing face among Peruvians and Salvadorans.

Vasquez's current project builds upon this earlier study but now takes a closer look at the "everyday lived religion of the immigrants." Funded by the Ford Foundation, the new study considers the realities of immigration and its effects upon the ways that migrants "experience religion, both inside and outside of institutions." Specifically, Vasquez and company are looking at Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Brazilians in Florida.

What this study seeks to illuminate is the various changes that are taking place among the immigrants and their impact beyond

FACULTY NEWS

Nina Caputo (University of California, Berkeley, 1999) joined our department in the fall of 2003. A student of Iberian Jewry in the High Middle Ages, she holds a joint appointment in History and Religion. Dr. Caputo is completing a book manuscript entitled, "On the Threshold of Redemption: Time, Community, and History in Nahmanides."

Richard Foltz (Harvard, 1996) continues to pursue his interests in Islam, Ecology, and Animals. Following the publication of his *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions* (OneWorld Publications, 2004), his edited volume on *Environmentalism in the Muslim World* (Nova Science) will be published this spring. Dr. Foltz's path-breaking work on religion and animals has led to his course on this topic being nominated by the Humane Society of America for their annual Animals and Society Award and to his current book manuscript "They Are Communities Like You: Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Culture," to be published by Columbia University Press.

David Hackett's (Emory, 1986) article on "Religion and Class in American History" is forthcoming in the winter issue of *Religion and America Culture*.

Richard Hiers (Yale, 1961) has been appointed a "Distinguished Fellow" at the Eckerd College Center for Spiritual Life. He recently published "Institutional Academic Freedom: A Constitutional Misconception" in the *Journal of College and University Law*.

Leah Hochman (Boston University, 2000) will spend this spring as a Skirball Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University, where she will be completing her book on conceptions of the ugly in 19th-century religion and aesthetics. Her paper "Approaches to Jewish Studies: Teaching a Methods Course" will appear in *Teaching Theology and Religion* in spring 2005.

Shaya Isenberg (Harvard, 1968) is on research leave after six productive years as chair of the department. He continues as a guiding force behind the Center for Spirituality and Health.

Gwynn Kessler's (Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001) article, "Let's Cross that Body When We Get to It: Gender and Ethnicity in Rabbinic Literature" will be published this spring in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. She is completing her book, "Reconceiving Israel: The Fetus in Rabbinic Narrative."

Jim Mueller (Duke, 1986) currently serves as Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Vasudha Narayanan (Bombay, 1978) has completed her administrative service to the American Academy of Religion, where she was President in 2001-2002, and is now diving headlong into a new project on Hinduism in Cambodia with the assistance of an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship.

Jason Neelis (Washington, 2001) received a German Academic Exchange award to travel to Germany on research this past summer. His article "Hunza-Haldeikish Revisited: Epigraphical Evidence for Transregional History" is forthcoming in *Karakoram in Transition - The Hunza Valley* edited by Hermann Kreutzmann (Oxford University Press).

Anna Peterson's (Chicago, 1991) exploration of the ways that religious ethics are embodied, articulated, and transformed in agrarian communities in Latin America and the United States, *Seeds of the Kingdom: Utopian Communities in the Americas*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Mario Poceski (UCLA, 2000) will be spending this academic year as a Research Fellow in Chinese Studies at Stanford. His book manuscript, "The Hongzhou

School and the Formation of Chan Orthodoxy," has been submitted for publication to the University of Hawaii Press.

Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons (Temple, 2002) traveled this summer to Morocco for Arabic studies and to research new developments in Moroccan Islamic family law. A veteran of the civil rights movements and a scholar of Islam, Dr. Simmons is at work on a book on the "Impact of Islamic Law on Women."

Bron Taylor (University of Southern California, 1998) has recently published "A Green Future for Religion?" in *Futures Journal* and "Threat Assessments and Radical Environmentalism" in *Terrorism and Political Violence*. His path-breaking *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (Continuum) will be published in the spring.

Gene Thursby (Duke, 1972) is on research leave this year. He recently co-edited with Sushil Mittal *The Hindu World* (Routledge, 2004).

Manuel Vasquez (Temple, 1994) has co-edited *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Altamira, 2004). He also recently signed a contract to produce a book on *Religion and Contemporary Social Theory* for Oxford University Press.

LEAH HOCHMAN AWARDED FELLOWSHIP AT OXFORD

Professor Leah Hochman will spend the Spring 2005 semester as a participant in the Skirball Fellows Program at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University. The program annually invites 5-7 visiting scholars to do research in community at the Centre. Scholars, who are international in their make-up, live on the grounds of the Yarnton Manor where OCHJS is located. With access to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, they pursue areas of research in a broad range of Jewish studies. Hochman's research will focus on the 18th century pseudo-science of physiognomy, which purported to identify relationships between physical appearance and moral behavior.

DICK HIERS RETIRES: FORTY-TWO YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, 1961-2003

Gene Thursby

At a retirement party that took place last year in the Friends of Music Room, Professor Richard H. Hiers was honored by former students, friends, and colleagues for his many years of distinguished service to the University of Florida and the Gainesville community. His significant contributions to the work of two international professional societies, the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature; to two of the oldest honor societies in the United States, Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi; to the American Association of University Professors, and to other groups that seek to improve professional relations in academic institutions were acknowledged, too. Dr. Hiers served as a local and regional officer in several of these organizations.

Tributes were offered by Linda Wells on behalf of the department's Advisory Committee, by Fahaa Baden-Roberts on behalf of former students of Dr. Hiers, by Chemistry Professor Gardiner Myers on behalf of Phi Beta Kappa, and by former President Robert A. Bryan on behalf of several generations of members of the university community who have appreciated the efforts of Dr. Hiers to contribute toward collegial governance.

Richard Hiers holds a PhD degree from Yale University and a JD degree from the University of Florida. He has published extensively in the field of Biblical studies, including widely appreciated work on the quest for the historical Jesus and Biblical ethics. Among his several authored books, the first is *Jesus and Ethics: Four Interpretations*



Shaya Isenberg offers a tribute to Jane and Richard Hiers.

(1968) and the most recent is the highly praised *The Trinity Guide to the Bible* (2001). He has been a pioneering participant in newly developing areas of research in modern law, social ethics, and Bible. In addition to articles published in the area of Biblical studies, his several contributions to law journals have been mainly in the areas of employment discrimination, public employee free speech, and academic freedom.

Jane Gale Hiers is the wife of Dr. Hiers and mother of Peter and Becky. She was honored along with him for her invaluable presence in the community and her invisible but essential support of his work. Mrs. Hiers is a respected activist in local social, civic, and political concerns who has made a noteworthy difference in conditions in day care and criminal justice. At the state level, she served on Governor Bob Graham's task force on sex offenders and victims. In addition, she has been an investigator and innovator in complementary healing modalities.

With characteristic generosity, Jane and Richard Hiers enthusiastically joined others attending the retirement party in acknowledging the achievements of our undergraduate student, Jordan Kempker, who was presented with the Russell Lowell Jaberg Award for academic excellence.

RICHARD FOLTZ'S BOOK ILLUMINATES IRAN'S PLACE IN WORLD RELIGIONS

Associate Professor Richard C. Foltz recently published *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions* (Oneworld Publications, 2004). Here, Foltz applies an historical analysis to demonstrate the variety of ways the culture of Iran has influenced the world's spectrum of religions. In so doing, he traces the Iranian influence from the origin of Iran itself down to present day religious movements.

VASUDHA NARAYANAN RECIPIENT OF ACLS AWARD

Professor Vasudha Narayanan has received an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship for the 2004-05 academic year. Co-sponsored by the Social Science Research Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the ACLS awarded only 20 fellowships to full professors from an applicant pool of over 1200. Her research project, "Churning the Ocean of Story: Retelling Narratives of Hinduism in Cambodia and India," compares the structures, styles, and motifs of temples in south India with those in Cambodia. Dr. Narayanan is past president of the American Academy of Religion.

MARIO POCESKI RECEIVES STANFORD FELLOWSHIP

Assistant Professor Mario Poceski has been awarded a Center for East Asian Studies Fellowship in Chinese Studies at Stanford University for 2004-05. He will be working on a book that explores the attitudes toward morality and monasticism within the Chan school of late medieval Chinese Buddhism.

BRON TAYLOR'S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION AND NATURE TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE SPRING

Professor Bron Taylor's magisterial two-volume work consists of over 1,000 entries from over 500 contributors that together map the terrain for the study of religion and the natural world. As one reviewer, remarked, "it is a breathtakingly valuable, truly multicultural reference work, indispensable for libraries, religious institutions, and environmental organizations." As a moving force behind the department's Religion and Nature doctoral track, Dr. Taylor's scholarship is leading the way in this emerging field.

BRIDGE OF UNDERSTANDING EXPLORES JEWISH-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP

A few years ago, while on a humanities fellowship, Professor Leah Hochman was invited to participate in a unique educational and cultural exchange in Germany called *Bridge of Understanding*. Now, under Professor Hochman's leadership, University of Florida students have a similar opportunity to participate in *Bridge of Understanding* as a summer study abroad program. The program, offered for three hours of credit, examines developments in the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in contemporary Germany, and involves a three-week intensive study that begins with a week of intensive classroom discussion in Gainesville then expands to Germany for a ten-day tour. In Germany students interact with various government and religious hosts, dignitaries, and leaders as they take in significant cultural attractions, all in order to show the progress as well as the problems in Germany's engagement with its past.

Bridge of Understanding is co-sponsored and coordinated locally by the Center for Jewish Studies, the Department of Religion, and the Department of History, though it is organized and initiated under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry of Economic Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany. While other US universities participate in the program as a cultural travel opportunity, only UF offers *Bridge of Understanding* for course credit. Under Professor Hochman's direction, the program will be offered for the third time in the summer of 2005. Coursework involves advance reading, several days of classroom discussion, the tour through Germany, keeping an intellectual journal and culminates with a research paper. For more information, email Professor Hochman at hochman@religion.ufl.edu or visit www.ufic.ufl.edu.



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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

On Thursday evening January 13th 2005, Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago, will deliver a public lecture on campus.

Dr. Doniger's research and teaching interests revolve around two basic areas, Hinduism and mythology. Her publications include: *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* and, most recently, *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was*. Professor Doniger is past president of the American Academy of Religion and of the Association for Asian Studies.

Please check our web site or contact the Department for more details.

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