

Global Humanities and Religions

2021 Newsletter

website: chss.wvu.edu/humanities-religions



Note from the Department Chair:

June 2021

Hello students, colleagues, alumni, and many friends of the department!

To say that a lot has happened since we last sent a newsletter would be quite an understatement! I write to you now after more than a year of global pandemic, and my first wish

is that this finds you and yours well and safe after a year of tremendous upheaval and many losses, great and small.

I write to you now just at the close of Spring Quarter 2021 – our fourth consecutive, full quarter teaching remotely (not counting Summer courses or the remote end to Winter 2020!). And I am tremendously proud of my fifteen colleagues who have taught with me through these pandemic quarters, learning how to pivot overnight to remote instruction, and working with astonishing dedication and endurance to continue to bring to their courses our core values of what makes an excellent undergraduate humanities education. At the same time, they have continued a wide variety of fascinating research activities – some of them detailed in this newsletter! And our department manager, Maureen Christman, has also done wonderful work in keeping everything afloat in a complicated year.

This feels like an optimistic moment for us, too, as we look towards plans to be teaching on campus, in person, once more this Fall!

This year, we have been delighted to welcome a new permanent member of the department, Prof. Daniel Picus, a specialist in the ancient Mediterranean world, Religious Studies, and Jewish Studies (more about him on the next page!). And our faculty community has been busy offering a wide range of new courses! This year, these included experimenting with courses on subjects from “Poetry and Spirituality” to “Women and Religion” to “Environmental Humanities” to “The Avant Garde” to “Indigenous Art and Histories of Resistance.” And I could list many more new directions, adding to our long-standing curricular areas, beyond that! You can learn more about our current faculty here: chss.wvu.edu/global-humanities-and-religions/faculty.

And we’ve also had the exciting opportunity to develop a new Minor program in Digital Humanities, collaborating with the Computer Science Department/Center for Internet Studies: catalog.wvu.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&pooid=8912&returnto=4814

If you’re interested, the department’s current courses at a glance (and more!) can be found here... at least until this summer’s much needed web update is completed: chss.wvu.edu/global-humanities-and-religions/courses-booklists

In the pages that follow, we’re also delighted to share information about this

year’s annual distinguished speaker (on Zoom this year!), as well as about current students and 2020 graduates, last year’s senior theses and award winners, plus updates from a few recent alums! (More information about our 2021 student awards in the next newsletter...!)

Thank you for your continued interest in – and support for – the Department of Global Humanities and Religions. And please keep in touch – we are always so delighted to hear updates from all of you! Don’t hesitate, either, to reach out with any comments or questions. Our email remains GHR@wvu.edu, and the department phone 360-650-3031.

With my warmest regards,
Kimberly Lynn

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MAKE WAVES.

The Department Welcomes



Daniel Picus

Daniel was born in Houston, Texas, and is continually amused when new acquaintances don't believe that he's a fifth-generation Texan. He attended Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he graduated with a BA with honors in Classical Languages in 2010. After college, Daniel earned a Masters degree from the University of Oxford, concentrating in Jewish Studies in the Greco-Roman Period. While at Oxford, he began studying Aramaic, in addition to continuing the study of Greek and Hebrew literature, and fell in love with the writings of the earliest Jewish rabbis. From Oxford, he entered the PhD program in Religious Studies at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and earned his degree in May of 2018. Daniel studied ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and Byzantine Greek literature at Brown, as well as Syriac language and literature. From 2014-2015, he lived in Rome as the Graduate Instructor at the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies, the same program he studied at in the fall of 2008. The year spent living and teaching in Rome was crucial to Daniel's

study of ancient religion as a lived experience: the Roman destruction of Jerusalem takes on a different meaning when you teach about it in front of a monument built from Jerusalem's spoils, and trying to think about the religious practices that made up peoples' lives almost becomes an obsession when you can bump into a temple, shrine, altar, church, or synagogue every few yards. His dissertation (and current book project) aimed to bring together his wide-ranging interests in Mediterranean religion together with the study of the earliest Jewish rabbis by asking about the role of reading as a religious practice in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. After graduating from Brown, Daniel held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, and another postdoctoral fellowship, from 2018-2020, as the Robert Oden Postdoctoral Fellow for Innovation in the Humanities and Religion at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. At Western, he's back to teaching some of his favorite topics: Introduction to the Ancient Mediterranean, biblical studies, ancient religion, and theory and method. One of the most exciting things about teaching for Daniel is helping students to see things they've taken for granted, or accepted as natural, in a completely new way: the ancient world (and even the contemporary!) is a wonderfully weird place, and we can learn an awful lot from that. Daniel moved to Bellingham this past summer with his husband Isaac and their cat Cecil, and when he's not teaching, reading, or writing, you can probably find him baking or gardening.





Katie Brian

In courses focused on cultural histories of the Global North, Katie has helped students to contextualize the devastating events of 2020 by drawing on their historical understanding and analytical dexterity. She also spearheaded, with colleagues from across campus, an initiative to establish a Disability

Studies Institute (DSI) at Western. In addition to promoting broad interdisciplinary inquiry into the significance of disability for understanding the human experience, the DSI would offer a new minor in Critical Disability Studies. She continues work on violence, madness, and the epistemology of risk in the modern Anglophone world.



Ethan Bushelle

While 2020 was not the year he expected to have, Ethan was able to work productively on both his teaching and scholarship. In addition to re-designing his 300-level course, Religion and Society in Japan, and designing a new course for the Honors program (Colloquium in Religious Studies), Ethan was able to

find time to finish one major project—a nearly 20,000-word article for a special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* on esoteric Buddhism in Japan (published in early 2021)—and make significant headway on a second—a new annotated translation of, with an extensive introduction to, the 984 collection of Buddhist tales *The Three Jewels*. An essay he wrote back in 2017 was also finally published last November in a new volume, *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature* (SUNY Press). On a more personal note, his second child, Phaedra Minori, was born on August 19th. With the new addition to his family, both he and his wife Emi, along with his eldest son, Theo, are looking forward to what 2021 may bring.



Holly Folk

Holly Folk contributed a chapter to the newly released *Handbook of UFO Religions* (Brill, 2020). Her article, “Raymond W. Bernard, Hollow Earth, and UFOs,” is a biographical study of Walter Siegmester, a health-foods advocate and famous esoteric writer, who published under several pseudonyms. As Raymond Bernard,

Siegmester became one of the leading proponents of “Hollow Earth theory,” and he was responsible for the

merger of “inner earth” ideas with the UFO movement. A significant part of Folk’s research agenda is charting the intellectual history of alternative spirituality. Folk enjoyed this opportunity to research a figurative (and literal!) rabbit hole, and to raise questions about the sociology of belief. This past fall, the article was part of a new course unit on “Flat Earth” and “Hollow Earth” theories in REL 265: Science and Religion in American Culture.



Andrea Gogröf

During 2020, Andrea Gogröf learned how to teach online for the first time in her career. It has been a roller coaster learning process and she intends to keep perfecting this newly acquired skill for the benefit of our valiant students. She is participating in the expansion of GHR’s curriculum by offering a new course, prepared

during this online academic year, taught for the first time this Spring 2021: HUMA 390 entitled *Avant-Garde: Builders, Influencers and Icons of Modernity*. Andrea has been granted a quarter professional leave during which she will advance her book manuscript on the French author Michel Houellebecq.



Kimberly Lynn

Over the past year, Kimberly Lynn finished writing a chapter on an important sixteenth-century Franciscan preacher, teacher, and intellectual that is slated to appear this year in a volume on *Rethinking Catholicism in Renaissance Spain*. When wearing her administrative hat, she continues to spend much of her

time planning ways to introduce Global Humanities and Religions to new student audiences. In this pandemic year, her remote classes made her more aware than ever of the power of the experience of reading in a community. And in Fall 2020 she taught her course on autobiographies for the first time in six years. This time, she reconceptualized it as a senior seminar (instead of a first-year course) and focused it on early modern European material; in essence, it is a course that explores why and how early modern people told the stories of their own lives.

Jonathan Miran

Jonathan Miran was awarded a research grant from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung in Germany allowing him to take partial leave in Winter and all of Spring quarter this year to pursue his book project on the social and cultural history of the Red Sea. Since this past summer, Jonathan completed

Faculty Updates



an extensive article on the Red Sea slave trade for the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* and a book chapter that draws on his research to reflect on the value of Islamic legal documents in Arabic as a source for the social histories of Muslims in Ethiopia and Eritrea. On the teaching front, in the Fall he was delighted about student engagement

in his course HUMA 362/HIST 390: Islam in the Indian Ocean World.



Tom Moore

As for Tom, he has risen to the occasion and is no longer completely incompetent as a Zoom instructor. Adding to that, he finished a cedar playhouse for his granddaughter (Charlie) last August and finds it, when unoccupied, a fine but chilly place to meditate. This past October Tom successfully herded eighteen

Fulbright candidates through the process, being steadfastly amazed at the accomplishments of these Western students. He is now recruiting for three nationally competitive STEM scholarships, so if you know of any possible candidates, please send them his way.



Seán Murphy

In 2019-20, Dr. Seán Murphy was promoted to the rank of Professor, which is the ultimate milestone on the academic course that starts in kindergarten. With that course now finished, there's a newfound freedom to wander at will through the thickets of medieval European culture. The untold history of "occidentalism" in

medieval (and modern) Europe is emerging as one of his major preoccupations. And, separately, he is beginning to fill notebooks with the intriguing talk of trees, groves, and forests preserved in ancient Roman and medieval European sources. This latter path of investigation has been inspired in part by the comparative, final-exam essay on "woods" that he has several times included in his course on "The Epic in Ancient Roman Culture," a course, by the way, which became a permanent fixture of the GHR curriculum last year. As for the living world of lovely trees, and other plants, that breathe and breed and reach for the light, he returns home to the State of Maine just as often as he can to work long hours in his family's spruce-fir forests and blueberry fields.



Scott Pearce

In this past year, Scott received a contract from Oxford University Press for the volume he has completed on East Asia's Northern Wei regime (386-534), finished his share of the work on a sources textbook with Cognella (still awaiting completion by his partner in this endeavor, Peter Lorge of Vanderbilt), and wrote an essay

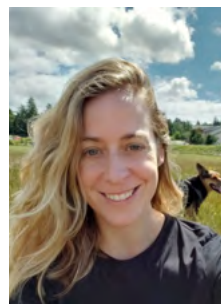
on the fifth-century Ihnur tombs of Inner Mongolia for the catalog for a forthcoming exhibit at NYU's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. Though living (like everyone else) in strange times, he has learned how to meet with his students on Zoom, while beginning work on a history of the sixth-century successors of Northern Wei.



Michael Slouber

The biggest milestone for Michael Slouber this past year was the publication of his edited anthology of narratives, *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses*, with the University of California Press. A project five years in the making, it is the first of its kind and he hopes it will impact on how goddess traditions in Asia are

researched and taught, in addition to making some exciting stories accessible. Copies are available online and at Village Books! This past Fall and Winter, Michael began his first period of professional research leave, renewing his work with manuscripts in a new project on spirit possession guides from early-medieval India.



Megan Ward

Megan Ward joined the Global Humanities and Religions Department at WWU in the fall of 2020 as an adjunct lecturer. Currently at the University of Washington as a PhD candidate, she is completing her dissertation on defense expertise, religious profiling, and law enforcement culture in North

America and its borders. In the spring she published "Walls and Cows: Social Media, Vigilante Vantage, and Political Discourse" with *Social Media + Society*, which discusses the affective rhetoric social media platforms provide ideologically driven vigilante groups. Among her many projects she researches the relationship between evangelical Christianity, gender, and online conspiracy communities in the United States and is excited to push forward with the project after her graduation in Spring 2021. Alongside research at the University of Washington,

her teaching at Western Washington endeavors to inspire students to find their own research passions within the diverse field of religious studies.

News From Emeritus Faculty



David Curley

After a very productive 2019, and after a brief trip to India in late January and early February, I had a much less eventful 2020. I arrived home just before the official outbreak of COVID in Whatcom County, glad to be back, and slow to recognize how much and how long our lives would be changed by the virus, and how

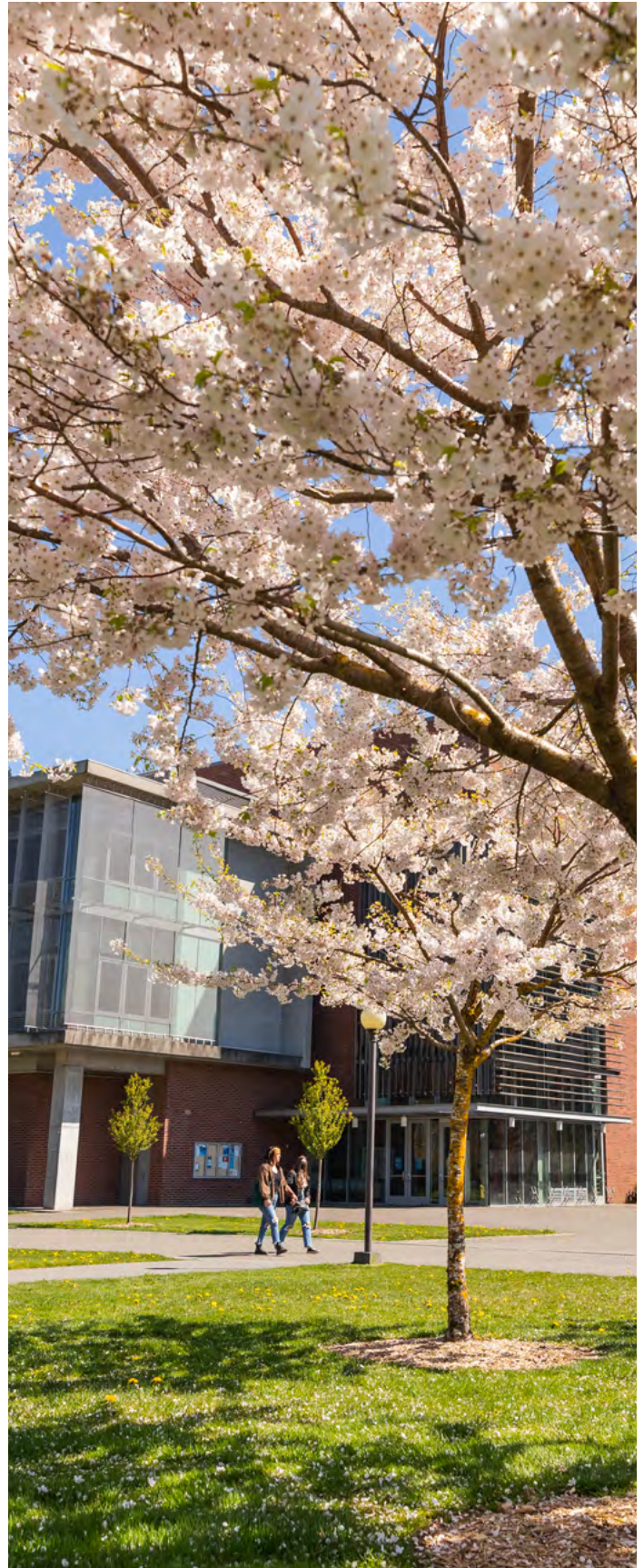
many would suffer and die. The latter, unfortunately include several elderly and one not so elderly colleagues from India and Bangladesh. I have joined the adventure of zoom family get-togethers and business meetings, like everyone else. In August I gave a zoom lecture sponsored by the Bengali Cultural Society in Vancouver B.C. One big problem was that I couldn't tell whether my attempts at humor were successful or not. Also I could not hear familiar signs that people were or were not paying attention. Indeed, as soon as I did a document share of artwork to illustrate my stories, I couldn't even see any faces in the audience. Still, every cloud. The immediate audience spanned the border, and Canada east to west, and since there is a world diaspora of Bengalis interested in cultural history, for a few days afterward a few dozen people from all over the world checked me out on CEDAR at the WWU Library site. Masked, socially distanced, and not entirely muted, and with best wishes to all, David Curley.



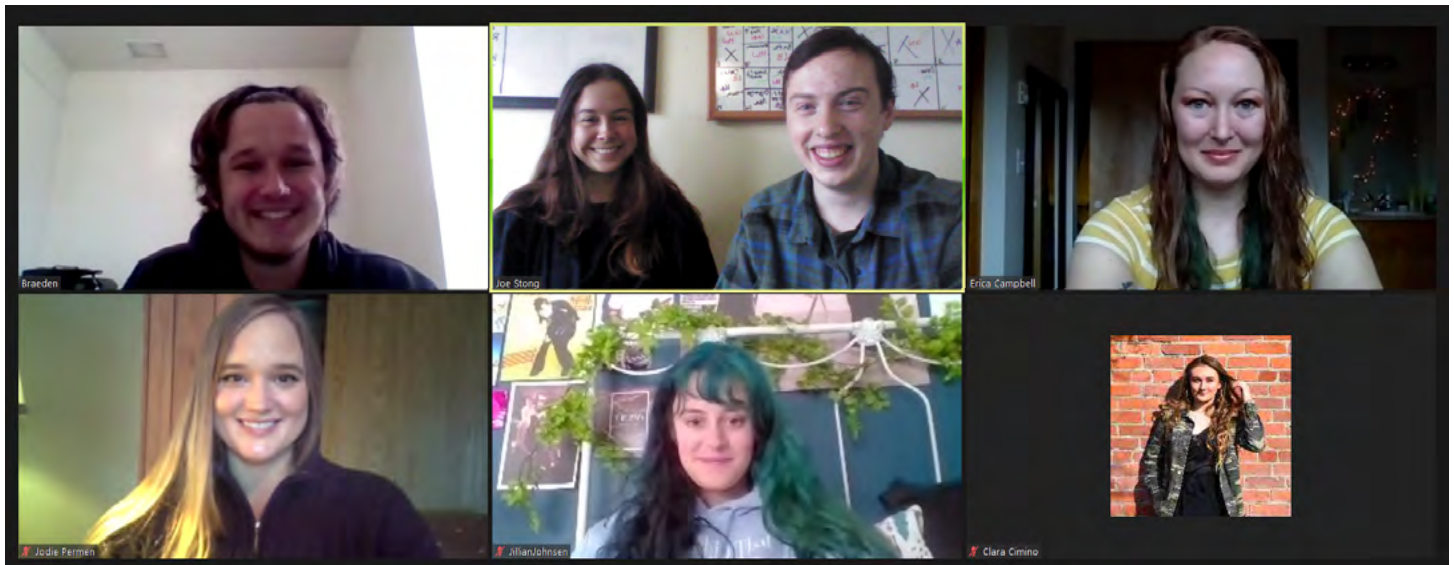
Rob Stoops

Over the past year I have updated entries on *Acts of Peter* and *Acts of Paul* for the *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (online). I have also produced a rather more substantial (11,000 words) chapter on the *Acts of Peter* for the *Early New Testament Apocrypha* volume in the new reference series, *Ancient Literature*

for *New Testament Studies*, which should appear soon. Like many others, I have been frustrated by the inability to travel this year, but I have entertained myself with some stone carving. I have also been enjoying an online "Groove" class taught by department alumna Dana Carr.



Meet The 2020-21 Leadership Team



Top Screen Left to Right: Braeden Kinerk, Lena Blissell, Joe Stong, Erica Campbell, Bottom Screen Left to Right: Jodie Permen, Jillian Johnsen, Clara Cimino

The 2020-21 Leadership Team Answers, “Why Humanities?”

Lena Blissell—I chose the religion and culture major because it allows me to explore ideas that stretch my mind on a daily basis. I get to be incredibly creative in my research and meet with like-minded peers that inspire me to learn more. I get to apply my minors in sociology and anthropology in a constructive way that builds on my skills and pushes me towards a career I am interested in. The community and support I have found in the department have been just as valuable as the research and writing skills I have acquired during my time at Western.

Erica Campbell—I decided to major in Global Humanities because I love learning about other people and cultures that are different from mine. I plan on getting my Master’s degree in Library Science, since I enjoy reading books and helping educate others, and a degree in Humanities seemed like a perfect match because of how well-rounded it is. I can take so many classes that discuss people and places from different time periods, which is super interesting and insightful. If you like learning about history and cultures, then a Humanities degree is a good choice!

Clara Cimino—My name is Clara Cimino and I am a senior at Western Washington University. I chose the Humanities: History of Culture major because it combined my love

for history and my love for reading perfectly. The major offered so many classes and experiences that helped me truly pinpoint what I was passionate about learning and pursuing as a humanities major. On top of that, so many of the professors within the major are people who I genuinely wanted to learn from and get to know.

Jillian Johnsen—I chose to study the humanities because I love to read, and also love learning about different cultures and historical events. The humanities to me also seemed to have a more narrow focus than English, which I had also considered majoring in, and I liked the idea that I would be able to make connections between what I learned in various classes and get a better understanding of the world as a whole. It seemed like I would be able to learn about culture, religion, and history all at once, which was very appealing to me.

Braeden Kinerk—Hello, my name is Braeden Kinerk and I am a member of the Department of Global Humanities and Religions Leadership Team. I chose to join this department for a variety of reasons. Mainly, I am really interested in other people’s cultures and religions, as they give context to just about every event in human history. Understanding the motivations, desires, and influences of humanity helps me garner some comprehension as to what it means to be a living, breathing, and active human being. As I am still trying to figure out who I am, this scholarship offers many different approaches and potential solutions to solving this question of self-identity.

Jodie Permen—I chose to major in The History of Culture, with Thesis, because the broad range of courses offered throughout The Department of Global Humanities and Religions meant that I could learn about different times and places throughout human history, all while building a diverse set of research skills through an interdisciplinary approach. Through this process, I found exciting, new academic interests— such as divine corporeality and issues of the physical body in early medieval texts—which I got to explore at greater length through the choice of an undergraduate thesis.

Joe Stong—I choose to pursue a Religion and Culture major for two reasons. The first is it gives me soft skills that can be applied to a variety of career paths. The skills include communication, research, adaptability, and attention to detail. Each of these skills applies to all the career paths that I am looking at pursuing. The second reason I chose this major is that the information the major is centered on benefits my understanding of cultures worldwide. This understanding of the world's cultures and communities is highly valuable in our growing pluralistic world and will serve any of the paths that I wish to follow and improves me as a citizen of the world.



Congratulations to our 2019-20 and 2020-21 department graduates!



GHR Video Commemoration 2021

Find our video at <https://vimeo.com/564420681/a5400ebe49>

2020 Annual Department Highlights

2019-20 Outstanding Graduate Award Recipient:

Elizabeth Moorhead

5th Annual (2020-21) Meagan Elizabeth Smith Memorial Scholarship for Excellence in the Humanities Recipient:

Jodie Permen

2020-21 Humanities Scholarship Recipients:

Lena Blissell, Jillian Johnsen, Ben Nasman

2019-20 Graduates with Departmental Honors:

Jonathan Davidson, Rhianon Everwood, Caitlin Hanson, Hope Harmon, Elizabeth Moorhead

2019-2020 Senior Thesis Topics

Kayla Clarke, “Archaic Shinto and its relationship to Japanese society in 300-600” (Advisor: Ethan Bushelle)

Rhianon Everwood, “Recovering Enchantment: How Yanagita Kunio Reinvigorated Japan’s Soul in the Wake of Meiji Modernization” (Advisor: Ethan Bushelle)

Caitlin Hanson, “Baudelaire and Camus; Laughter and Heroes of Modernity” (Advisor: Andrea Gogröf)

Hope Harmon, “The Transformations of the figure of the witch in American Film and Literature through the lens of feminist theories” (Advisor: Andrea Gogröf)

Elizabeth Moorhead, “A cultural history of the 1918-19 influenza in German-speaking central Europe” (Advisor: Kimberly Lynn)



Caitlin Hanson (2019-20 Meagan Elizabeth Smith Excellence in the Humanities Awardee, Fall 2019 Graduate—Humanities: History of Culture with Thesis Major)

I feel very fortunate to have graduated from the Global Humanities and Religions Department December of 2019, as it was the last ceremony held in person

pre-Covid. Immediately upon graduation, I returned to bartending at a local brewery for just over a month until I transitioned into full-time employment at the newly opened NEKO: A Cat Cafe. I had envisioned myself returning to campus to work with students in the advising office and was pleasantly surprised at the turn my life took during those first few weeks at NEKO. Fast forward six months through quarantine and I'm now working as the General MEOWnager for NEKO, bouncing between Seattle and Bellingham and caring for forty cats. Although unexpected, I use the skills I learned in our department at my work and in my life every day. Interviewing candidates for adoption and finding that exactly right household for our cats is tedious work, but it's also tremendously rewarding. It reminds me that every individual has a story to tell and a connection to make, which always felt to be at the heart of the humanities. Once I'm finally settled into my new job, I'm planning to return to school for a graduate program in the Humanities with the goal of teaching high school or college students. As much as I love being surrounded by cats all the time, my heart is in education.



Riley Jessett (2016-17 Outstanding Graduate and Meagan Elizabeth Smith Excellence in the Humanities Scholarship Awardee, Spring 2017 Graduate—Humanities: History of Culture with Thesis Major)

My name is Riley Jessett, and I was the Outstanding Graduate of the department of Global Humanities and Religions (then called Liberal

Studies) in 2017, as well as the inaugural recipient of the Meagan E. Smith Memorial Scholarship in 2016. I was also chosen to be the student speaker at the Spring graduation ceremony in 2017. Since graduating from Western, I've moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I started a career in education. In 2019, I received my MA in Urban Early Childhood Education from Cardinal Stritch University, and as of 2020, I am the director of the Primary Science Lab at Carson Academy of Science, a Milwaukee public school. In the lab, I engage students ages 4-10 with hands-on, culturally relevant science experiences. But at Western, I

mostly studied literature, cinema, and psychoanalysis. My thesis, written with Dr. Gogröf, was a critical look at the biographies of Czech writer Franz Kafka. In other words, my undergraduate education has very little to do with the work I'm doing now, the post-grad studies I did, or even necessarily my daily life.

However, that is not to say that it wasn't an excellent education. When I think back on my time at Western, I'm often struck with what an incredible humanities department Global Humanities and Religions is. During my first few years at Western, I was able to take classes in the department that exposed me to a variety of disciplines and methods for learning humanities. But as I progressed in education and narrowed my focus, the department provided me with a number of unique, invaluable experiences that I feel are so rare for undergrads. For example, the department's faculty helped me to apply for and present at a national conference, twice! The department even helped pay for airfare. I was able to join the leadership team, where students collaborated with faculty to create departmental events.

By the time I was a senior, most of my classes were in the small, cozy seminar room with a very small number of students and professors that I knew well. Or maybe I would be writing my thesis, preparing to meet with Dr. Gogröf in her office. I didn't appreciate it fully at the time, but reflecting back now, these small class sizes and close relationships with professors more closely resemble a graduate program than they do an undergraduate one. While I did not choose to go to graduate school in the humanities, I feel that the department prepared me excellently to do so, and even that the option is still open to me. I did, however, have to develop strong reading and writing skills to be successful as an undergraduate, and as I've moved on to other disciplines (e.g. science, education), I've realized what an immense advantage humanities students will always have in other fields. We learn how to read and write, carefully. We learn how to listen, how to recognize and respect difference, and most of all, to be critical of everything. For that, I will always be thankful to this department in particular!

Adelyn Westerholm (Spring 2018 Graduate—Humanities: History of Culture with Thesis Major) Adelyn is currently an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program in Hokkaidō. She's in her third year on the program.

Rhianon Everwood (formerly, Blake, Spring 2020 Graduate—Humanities: History of Culture with Thesis Major) Rhianon is beginning her first year in the master's program in library science at the Information School at University of Washington.

Spencer Pennington (Spring 2017 Graduate—Study of Religion Minor) Hello to everyone at WWU’s Global Humanities and Religions Department! My name is Spencer Pennington and, for those unaware, I graduated from Western in June 2017, having majored in History and minored in Religious Studies. (This is back when the department held the title of “Liberal Studies,” by the way.) I’m currently writing to you from Los Angeles, where I am just on the cusp of starting a doctoral program in History at UCLA. After a series of correspondences with a couple of my old professors, I felt compelled to reach out and provide both an update and a brief look at what my trajectory has been in the past three years (and what it will be going forward). I can safely say that, were it not for the classes I took at WWU, I would not be where I am now.

Prior to attending WWU, I earned my A.A. from Edmonds Community College in August 2015. While I majored in History during my time at Western, the courses I took for my minor in Religious Studies were equally important, and the courses offered by both departments gelled together very nicely. Dr. Jonathan Miran, the Global Humanities and Religions Department’s resident scholar of both Islamic and East African Studies, was my advisor for my minor and his courses “Islam and Muslims in the Indian Ocean World” and “Sufism” played a major part in my current academic trajectory. I had long had an interest in religious and cultural history, particularly of an Islamic nature, but I had never before been encouraged to examine such histories or religious traditions in the context of oceanic and/or maritime spaces. Dr. Miran’s course offerings were complimented extremely well by the courses that I took with Dr. Michael Slouber, whose specialization in South Asia allowed me to situate myself in the Indian subcontinent as I indulged my growing fascination with the Indian Ocean World.

The two seminar courses that I took with Dr. Slouber, “Humanities of India” and “Fierce Goddesses of India” were critical in helping me peer into South Asian dimensions of Islamic mysticism as well as Islam’s interaction with religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism throughout South Asia. Dr. Slouber’s course material on *Bhakti* devotionalism in particular has stayed with me. Additionally, Dr. Slouber spent two quarters teaching me Introductory Hindi and encouraged me to apply to the South Asia Summer Language Institute (SASLI) Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which I attended for the study of Urdu in the summer of 2017. (I would also be remiss if I didn’t mention the importance of Dr. Tom Moore’s “Mysticism” course, which I took in the summer of 2016.)

From September 2017 through June 2019, I attended the University of Washington’s Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, from which I earned my M.A. in South Asian Studies, with a focus on religious and cultural history.



Alumni Spotlight



The first (top, page 9) was taken at a popular and very famous Shi'a shrine in Lucknow, where I was living, called the Bara Imambara; the second (page 9) was taken in the abandoned Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri, near present-day Agra, which was founded by the emperor Muhammad Akbar; the third (top) was taken in New Delhi at the Gandhi Smriti, specifically at the site of Gandhi's assassination (hence the footsteps on the ground) on January 30th, 1948; the fourth (above) was taken by a friend with whom I was travelling when we visited the city of Rishikesh, on the banks of the sacred River Ganges.

During my time at UW, I took courses and engaged in research that allowed me to further hone my focus: I began seeing and positioning myself as a historian of religion in the Indian Ocean World of the colonial era with a particular interest in mystical dimensions of religion, such as Sufism within Islam and *Bhakti* devotionalism within Hinduism. I visited and presented talks on such subjects at the South Asia Conference of the Pacific Northwest (SACPAN) in both 2018 and 2019; additionally (and perhaps most important of all), I continued my work on my primary research language, Urdu, and took up a second, Persian. As a part of my language acquisition, I spent the summer of 2018 at the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS)'s language center in the city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. It was my first time traveling to India, and I would return the following year.

I completed my M.A. program by writing two graduate papers: One was "The Imam with a Thousand Faces," which focused on Shi'a Islamic devotional literature in South Asia and the broader Indian Ocean World, while the other was "From Alexandria to Aceh," which was a historiography of the religious, cultural, and commercial networks that dominated the Indian Ocean World from the time of Alexander the Great through to the early twentieth century. Upon returning to India in June 2019, I threw myself once again into intensive language coursework and began the process of applying to doctoral programs for the coming academic year. (I was also able to present on my research at Lucknow University, thanks to a conference set up by AIIS that August.) Just as news of COVID-19 was starting to break around the world, I received news that I had been hoping to hear for months: I had been accepted into UCLA's doctoral program for History and I would be working with Dr. Nile Green, a professor whose work I had first been exposed to in my courses with Dr. Miran four years previously.

Since returning to the U.S. from India in late March (my program ended six weeks early due to concerns surrounding COVID-19), I have been fortunate enough to work for UCLA's History Department as a research assistant, which I was able to do remotely while back home with family in Seattle. As I said at the beginning of this piece, I have since relocated to Southern California and my courses (all being taught via Zoom) began in October. Dr. Green has been extremely supportive of my interests going forward (especially my interest in religious history), and I am extremely eager to see where the road ahead leads me. Many seeds were planted during my time at Western Washington University and it's an exciting thing, even in the chaotic world of 2020, to watch them blossom and grow. WWU's Global Humanities and Religions Department and all of its instructors have my deepest gratitude.

Conquering Evil and Peace of Mind: Negotiating Salvation in Esoteric Buddhism in Meiji Japan

Eric Haruki Swanson, Speaker, is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University. He received his M.A. from Koyasan University in Japan and Ph.D. from Harvard University. A cultural historian, he is interested in the study of religious traditions through the examination of liturgical texts, literature, visual material, ritual practices, and performance arts. His current book project is a study of scholar-monk Jien (1155-1225) and his establishment of exoteric-esoteric Buddhist ritual programs for the pacification of vengeful spirits and the restoration of order in the medieval capital of Japan.

The Meiji period (1868-1912) in Japan was an era of major political and social transformation that marked the departure from feudalism and enacted swift reforms to modernize the nation based on Western models. In light of the calls for modernization and reform, Buddhist intellectuals in newly established modern universities emphasized a return to a romanticized form of Buddhism that resembled Protestant values while rejecting the “evil customs” of magic and superstition.

A Buddhist school that came under renewed scrutiny during these years was the Shingon school, a branch of esoteric Buddhism that had long established itself as a protector of the state and its patrons through the performance of rituals aimed at worldly goals. In response to these developments, the Shingon school published works that re-framed its own teachings as addressing the goal of achieving “peace of mind” (anjin). These works asserted its continued relevance as it proclaimed to reveal

the most profound secrets of the mind as a method of salvation for the individual. I argue that this emphasis on the “peace of mind” seen in these publications illustrates a negotiation of salvation within the esoteric Buddhist tradition as Shingon Buddhist priests reimagined the significance of their teachings within the rapidly changing social landscape of Meiji Japan.



Eric Haruki Swanson

This lecture is part of an annual distinguished speaker series in the Department of Global Humanities and Religions (past speakers can be found here). The department emphasizes interdisciplinary humanities, cultural history, and the study of religion, ancient to modern, and around the globe, with attention to cross-cultural interaction.



Find video here:

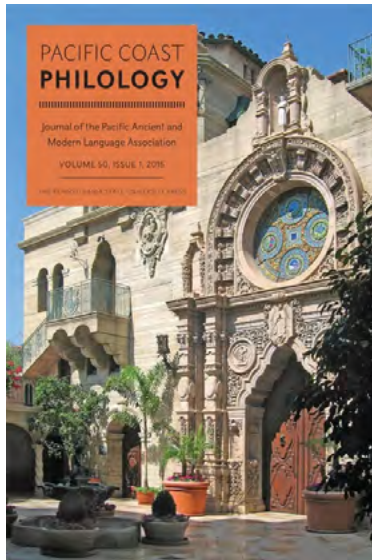
alumni.wvu.edu/event/conquering-evil-and-peace-mind

Faculty Spotlight & Published Works

Andrea Gogröf

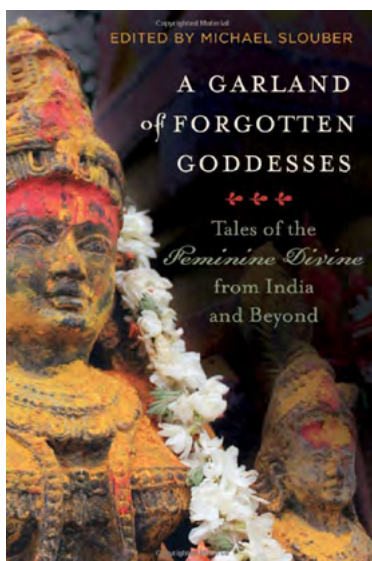
Andrea Gogröf edited a special volume of *Pacific Coast Philology* entitled *Ways of Seeing: Visuality, Visibility and Vision*. This volume includes her article entitled “Visibility is a Trap?” *Dimensions of Surveillance and its Effects on Culture today*, which synthesizes her most recent research on surveillance as an unavoidable and paradoxical dimension of modern life. *Pacific Coast Philology* is the academic journal affiliated with the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, and it is published by Penn State University Press, featuring peer-reviewed essays of interest to scholars in the classical and modern languages, literatures, and cultures.

<https://www.pamla.org/pacific-coast-philology>



Michael Slouber

Imagining the divine as female is rare—even controversial—in most religions. Hinduism, by contrast, preserves a rich and continuous tradition of goddess worship. *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses* conveys the diversity of this tradition by bringing together a fresh array of captivating and largely overlooked Hindu goddess tales from different regions. As the first such anthology of goddess narratives in translation, this collection highlights a range of sources from ancient myths to modern lore. The goddesses featured here battle demons, perform miracles, and grant rare Tantric visions to their devotees. Each translation is paired with a short essay that explains the goddess’s historical and social context, elucidating the ways religion. [Purchase link.](#)

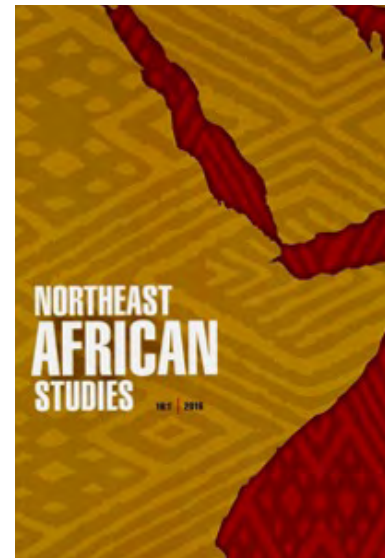


University of California Press, Dec. 2020

Jonathan Miran

Professor Miran continues to serve as Editor of the journal *Northeast African Studies* (NEAS) <https://msupress.org/journals/northeast-african-studies/>. Founded in 1979 and published by Michigan State University Press, *Northeast African Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal that focuses on northeast Africa – including the Horn, the Nile Valley, and the Red Sea region. NEAS publishes scholarly contributions from a range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and reaches a broad audience of readers in the United States, Europe and Africa. In addition to general article issues, NEAS publishes special issues on particular themes. Recent issue topics include “Ethiopia and Nubia in Islamic Egypt: Connected Histories of Northeastern Africa” (2019), and “From Subjecthood to Citizenship in the Horn of Africa” (2020).

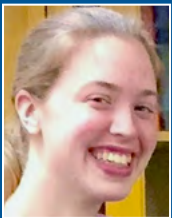
Miran’s editorial vision for the coming years privileges contributions whose conceptual frameworks and approaches – be they comparative, interdisciplinary, transnational/transregional – help foster new *encounters* and *conversations* between Northeast Africa, on the one hand, and other world regions and their scholarly fields and literatures, on the other. The journal aspires to take a leading role in expanding the region’s scholarly horizons and bring new actors working in other parts of the world into its field of vision.



Meagan Elizabeth Smith Memorial Scholarship for Excellence in the Humanities

*The department suffered a heartbreaking tragedy six years ago, with the loss of our major and member of the 2014-15 Liberal Studies Leadership Team, **Meagan Smith**. We're honoring her memory with a scholarship.*

Meagan Elizabeth Smith Memorial Scholarship for Excellence in the Humanities



This scholarship honors the legacy of Meagan Elizabeth Smith (1993 - 2015). An outstanding student, Meagan was scheduled to graduate with departmental honors in December 2015, with a Humanities major, a concentration in Religion and Culture, and a German minor. She had developed a particular interest in non-Western societies, and especially in Nepal, which inspired the senior thesis she was researching on "Making Sense of Fierce Deities in Indian Religions." Meagan was a member of the first Liberal Studies Leadership Team, a musician, and an athlete, dedicated to serving the many communities of which she was a cherished part. This is the first named scholarship in the more than forty-year history of the Global Humanities and Religions Department, designed to recognize academic excellence in the humanities.

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The 2014-15 Leadership Team was asked, "Why HUMANITIES?" Meagan's Answer—

"Discussing religions and traditions from around the globe as well as from different time periods has helped to expand my cultural understanding of the world immensely. Joining this major has given me opportunities to study a variety of subjects, as well as embarking on a study of Nepal this upcoming summer. The Liberal Studies department has opened my mind to the cornucopia of traditions existing in our world today and the impact we each have on one another."

Contact Us



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