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IUPUI Religious Studies’ 2020-2021 Newsletter

In this edition’s Newsletter, we will meet the winners of the Rowland A. Sherrill Religious Studies prizes, get to up to date with the Arab Indianapolis project being conducted by Dr. Edward Curtis and IUPUI students, learn the backstory about the COVID CV App that Dr. Rachel Wheeler is developing, get caught up with Religious Studies Alumnae, and discover Dr. Andrea Jain’s new book Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality.

FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA!
ROWLAND A. SHERRILL RELIGIOUS STUDIES OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD:

HEATHER STURGILL

I have had the pleasure of knowing Heather since their freshman year at IUPUI when they participated in the Transcending Perceptions themed learning community. From the first, Heather stood out for their curiosity, good humor, and zest for life. One of the things that has most impressed me about Heather is the way that they embrace complexity, whether in the form of classroom discussions or in everyday life. Heather's presence and incisive leadership of the RSSA have enriched the intellectual life of the department over the last four years while gently challenging us all to reexamine the complexities of gender.

-Dr. Kelly Hayes

ROWLAND A. SHERRILL RELIGIOUS STUDIES ESSAY CONTEST:

JAY ALBAUGH

In their award-winning essay, Jay Albaugh unpacks Milton's Paradise Lost in terms of its gendered queerness. With deft linguistic awareness, Mr. Albaugh challenges the reader to confront and reexamine embodied but ossified conventions of the sacred and monstrous.

-Dr. Matthew Condon
JOIN THE ARAB INDIANAPOLIS STUDENT RESEARCH TEAM!

Did you know that the historic home of Arab Americans in Indianapolis is now buried under Lucas Oil Stadium? Would you like to get paid to unearth more hidden stories like this?

Religious Studies faculty member Edward Curtis is inviting IUPUI students to join his team of student researchers who are recovering the lost history of Arab Hoosiers. Your research might be used in making films, writing blogs on ArabIndianapolis.Com, creating K-12 lesson plans, or giving community presentations.

CHECK OUT THIS EXAMPLE ON YOUTUBE:
HTTPS://YOUTUBE/YH9KQJJOQ20

Prof. Curtis will teach you how to become a history detective. You will scour sources like Indianapolis city directories, Sanborn insurance maps, the Indianapolis Star, U.S. Census records, ship manifests, military records, birth and death certificates, and marriage licenses.

Among the topics we will research: the Arab roots of Indianapolis Colts quarterback Jeff George, the history of Arab restaurants in Indianapolis, the flowering of Masonic and women’s clubs among Arab Hoosiers, the waves of immigration to our city, the role of Arab Americans in health care, St. George Church and the Islamic Society of North America, and the arrival of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in central Indiana.
Meet an Alumna

Anneka Scott

B.A. IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES
WITH A MINOR IN RELIGIOUS
STUDIES AND SPANISH

Upon graduating in the 2020 pandemic, Anneka began her career in higher education as a coordinator for IUPUI LSAMP. She also is currently completing a 200 Hour Yoga Teacher Training with her Vinyasa Practice. Anneka plans to continue studying yoga and ayurvedic practices and is thankful to Dr. Hayes for introducing her to TCM and Ayurveda.

WHAT DOES YOUR ACADEMIC BACKGROUND LOOK LIKE?

I came into IUPUI as a direct admit in the School of Science. However, I didn’t feel supported, so at orientation I opted for Liberal Arts and loved it. Liberal Arts provided support from peers, advisors, and instructors. My instructors became a very integral part of my graduation. As a first-generation college student, it was imperative that I had guidance and relationships that encouraged intellectual growth.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN YOUR TIME MAJORING/MINORING IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

In my time as a religious studies scholar, I have learned that important perspectives on history have yet to be told and may never be told. My focus was mainly on the marginalized and misunderstood religions. I contemplated how and why we learn about religion the way we do, whose stories were left out, and how we still practice these stories today.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE COURSE AND WHY?

My favorite course was “Religions of the African Diaspora” taught by the eloquent Dr. Kelly Hayes. As a Black-American womxn, I found this course was the most informative course on the black religious experience. We consistently discussed the importance of heritage and tradition while honoring the ancestors and the darkest time in black history.

FAVORITE ANECDOTE FROM A RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE OR PROFESSOR:

Dr. Kelly Hayes gave me the opportunity to explore marginalized religions that academia usually avoids discussing. I have had the honor of taking three of her courses and each one of them provided a new lens and perspective on the way we are influenced by religion. I am forever grateful to her for the many opportunities she has crafted to encourage us scholars to think a little deeper. There were many times in my religious studies that I have cried (Comparative Rel. Ethics) and felt very heavy on my identities (Rel of African Diaspora) and Dr. Hayes helped to guide me through these times while allowing me to express my own way of thinking through these issues.

FAVORITE BOOK /TOPIC FROM A RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE:

In Comparative Religious Ethics with Dr. David Craig, we explored the book “On Job” by Gustavo Gutierrez. This book explores the many interpretations and the human experience of suffering. This book became the catalyst for many interesting discussions in class from which I learned a lot about individuality and human decisions.

HOW HAS RELIGIOUS STUDIES HELPED YOU AFTER COLLEGE?

In my current Yoga Teacher Training, I am reading a lot of the same texts I previously analyzed as a student. By understanding the context of these texts, I have a better understanding of how these things all work together.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS INTERESTED IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

I’ve heard many students are afraid to take religious studies courses because they don’t want to compromise their faiths, but by learning about different religions you begin to untangle yourself from the web of oppression and bias. You do not have to “convert” to a different religion to learn what may be possible in our ever-changing world. Religion is the beauty of humanity and encourages each of us to have faith in something larger than ourselves during hard times.
Making the Invisible Visible

By Dr. Rachel Wheeler

A CV, or *curriculum vitae*, literally means “the course of life” and is used by faculty in job and grant applications, promotion and tenure, and annual reviews. Standard CVs typically don’t include information about faculty members’ lives outside of work. Yet, during COVID, it has become clear just how much life beyond the office and classroom impacts our work. The pandemic necessitated a labor-intensive, rapid pivot to online teaching. At the same time, many faculty lost countless hours of work time due to school and daycare closures. Research grounded to a halt as labs and archives closed and writing time evaporated.

When it comes time for faculty annual reviews next year, many CVs will reflect the profound impact of COVID, yet they will not provide any clarifying context. The unequal impacts of the pandemic on faculty, which has hit women and faculty of color particularly hard, could set individuals back years in their careers, and reverse hard won gains in diversifying faculty ranks in higher education.

How did a professor of Religious Studies become an app developer?

The inspiration came to Dr. Wheeler several years ago at the height of the #MeToo movement when she reflected on the impact that an early experience of sexual harassment had on her CV. It created years of stress and a move across country, which slowed the addition of new publication lines on her CV, affecting her career’s progress. Watching the hearings for Supreme Court justice nominee Brett Kavanaugh, she began to think about how many women’s CVs had been affected by experiences of sexual harassment.

She started adding new lines to her own CV in different colored fonts to represent all of the life experiences that made up the larger context of her scholarship and teaching. Having found the experience therapeutic, she wrote up the idea in an essay, “My RealCV,” but then forgot about it.

When the pandemic hit and the problem of external forces leaving an invisible mark on faculty CVs became a widely acknowledged problem in academia, she created the COVID CV with an interdisciplinary team.

The team will soon be analyzing the data from the beta test phase to see how well the app works in creating a COVID CV that has a positive mental health benefit for faculty users, even in the face of ongoing challenges and frustrations. The team hopes that insights from this research will help bring greater awareness to the disparate impacts of the pandemic, and potentially help inform how institutions of higher education evaluate standard CVs as they proceed with hiring and reviews in a (hopefully) post-pandemic world.

Engaging with the growing popular and academic interest in the “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR), Andrea R. Jain explores the connections between practices of global spirituality and neoliberal capitalism in *Peace Love Yoga*. “Personal growth,” “self-care,” and “transformation” are all tropes in the narrative of the spiritual identity Jain is concerned with. This “spirituality” is usually depicted as firmly countercultural: the term "alternative" (alternative health, alternative medicine, alternative spiritualities) is omnipresent. To the contrary, Jain argues, spiritual commodities, entrepreneurs, and consumers are quite mainstream and sometimes even conservative and nationalistic.

The heart of the book includes sophisticated analyses of two politically divergent but equally entrepreneurial and global-capitalist yoga gurus: "athleisure apparel" corporations, such as lululemon, that successfully market consumer goods as a purchased commitment to social justice; and therapeutically-focused applications of spirituality that concentrate on healing the broken person rather than undermining the system that broke that person in the first place.

Many spiritual commodities, corporations, and entrepreneurs, Jain suggests, do acknowledge the problems of neoliberal capitalism and in fact subvert them, but they subvert them through mere gestures. From provocative taglines printed across t-shirts or packaging to calls for "conscious capitalism," commodification serves as a strategy through which subversion itself is colonized.

Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality

Dr. Andrea Jain
I have always been a Sociology major. I decided on my minors after my first year in college, when I began to develop interest in the subjects. I completed all four years of college at IUPUI.

WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

I took Religious Studies my freshman year and it quickly became a subject that grasped my attention. I wanted more coverage of each religion we overviewed in the intro course, so I continued with higher level classes.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN YOUR TIME MAJORING/MINORING IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

Religion is such an integral part of studying how the social world has developed over time. Religious Studies, and even Sociology, have helped me understand why people do things and how cultures have grown. Having knowledge about the foundation of social development can be key in finding solutions to social injustice and human rights battles that the world is faced with.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE COURSE AND WHY?

One of my favorite courses was the “Women in Religion” course that I took under the instruction of Dr. Kelly Hayes. It was wonderful to explore the important roles that women have played in world religions—roles that are often forgotten or intentionally written out of historical texts.

FAVORITE ANECDOTE FROM A RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE OR PROFESSOR:

I enjoyed many occasions with Professor Amira Mashhour, both in Arabic language and religion/culture. We often visited local religious sites and were able to speak with the religious leaders and learn more about their communities. I appreciate that she always went the extra mile to make sure we had lively experiences within our class’s religious context.

FAVORITE BOOK/TOPIC FROM A RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE:

I enjoyed studying Islam a lot because it was a religion I did not know anything about. Yet it is the world’s second largest!

HOW HAS RELIGIOUS STUDIES HELPED YOU AFTER COLLEGE?

Religious Studies has been vital to my understanding of others. My dream is to work with refugee populations and help with resettlement and cultural adjustment. I believe that having a background in religious studies can add to my skill set when working with those populations!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS INTERESTED IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES?

Take the course! You can only benefit from broadening your knowledge about the world!