Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the first installment of the Concordia College Religion Department’s Newsletter. We’ve always been proud of our department and its accomplishments, so we decided to publish a biannual letter to help keep you better informed about what we are up to.

The Religion Department over the years has sought to find better ways of informing our students and the Concordia community about the role that religion plays in our society for good, and sadly also for ill. Especially since 9/11 the department has adapted course offerings to meet the needs of our students and with the support of the college, developed the Forum on Faith & Life dedicated to Interfaith Dialogue. Likewise, we have added positions in World Christianity and Islam, the latter taught by a Muslim scholar. Also due to the demand from congregations for qualified leadership, we established the Faith and Leadership concentration in Religion to equip students for the real world. This year we continue to add to our ever-developing program by adding a minor in Interfaith Studies. We are not resting on our laurels, but continue to seek to be a department that is at the cutting edge of scholarship in Religious Studies.

In the next few pages you will see some highlights about these programs and also read about what scholarship our faculty has produced recently. Follow us on Facebook at our page, Religion at Concordia, to keep up on our latest news and also interesting articles posted by faculty and students alike.

Roy Hammerling
Interim Chair
New Interfaith Studies Minor is Approved

We are delighted to announce that a new Interfaith Studies Minor has been approved for inclusion in the 2016-2017 catalog and will be housed in the religion department. Interfaith Studies (IFS) is an emerging academic field that has a practical aim of developing professionals who can “responsibly engage the world” as interfaith leaders. In adding this minor, Concordia College will join a prestigious select number of colleges and universities in the U.S. that are leading the nation in developing the field of IFS as a signature area of academic inquiry.

The IFS minor will combine rigorous academic study that promotes interreligious literacy with the cultivation of skills and competencies necessary for living in a pluralistic world. The minor will help foster and empower interfaith leaders to engage the religious diversity of our world to positive ends. The minor is interdisciplinary, acknowledging the intersectionality of identities in the world, wherein differences of race, gender, class, culture, and religion do not exist in isolation, but continuously interact in a variety of combinations.

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the IFS minor requires a minimum of two electives from outside the religion department. Approved courses can be found in the departments of art, business, communication, education, English, environmental studies, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and world languages and cultures. The minor also includes a practicum that will provide hands on experience in interfaith work. If you have questions about this exciting new minor, contact Dr. Bussie or Dr. Cindy Larson-Casselton, co-chairs of the IFS minor.
Religion Department in the News

Anne Mocko Awarded Two-Year Grant

This summer Dr. Anne Mocko was awarded a prestigious two-year grant funded by the Templeton Foundation and coordinated between the University of Chicago and the University of Bochum in Germany. The program, called The Enhancing Life Project invites thirty-five scholars from a variety of disciplines to conduct individual projects around the central theme of Enhancing Life.

Mocko’s project regards merit-making practices in Jainism and Theravada Buddhism and the ways merit-making orients lay practitioners around fundamentally ascetic ideals. As a part of the project, Mocko will travel during the summers and reside in Theravada Buddhist and Jain communities in Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka in order to observe merit-making practices and interview practitioners.

The Enhancing Life Project explores an essential aspiration of human beings that moves persons and communities into the future. The project aims to explore this rich but widely unexamined dimension of human aspiration and social life, and increase knowledge so that life might be enriched.

Jacqueline Bussie and Interfaith Scholars Present at Parliament of World Religions

Two students and one faculty member presented at the Parliament of the World’s Religions held Oct. 15-19 in Salt Lake City. Rachel Crippen ’17 and Robyn Adams ’16, along with faculty mentor Dr. Jacqueline Bussie, were selected from among an international pool of applicants to present on Concordia’s newly proposed interfaith studies minor and the importance of interfaith studies for higher education.

Crippen and Adams are interfaith scholars with Concordia’s Forum on Faith and Life. Bussie is the forum’s director.

The Parliament of the World’s Religions is an international gathering of diverse faith communities and leaders. Since 1893, the parliament has gathered once every five years for global dialogue among the world’s faith and philosophical traditions.

This year’s keynote speakers included Dr. Eboo Patel, Dr. Karen Armstrong and Dr. Jane Goodall.
Learning from Zombies (Religion Enrichment Lecture)

Religion students learned that zombie stories are never simply entertainment. They tell us something about ourselves.

There’s no denying that zombies are a pop culture phenomenon. The movies, television series, video games and merchandise that feed the shambling zombie zeitgeist make up a $5 billion industry. Dr. Kelly J. Baker, author, zombie-scholar and religious studies PhD, visited campus Oct. 30 and explored with Religion 200 students what the proliferation of these creatures in popular culture reveals about American ethical and theological concerns.

Using examples from movies “Night of the Living Dead,” “Zombieland” and “Warm Bodies“ as well as AMC’s popular television series, “The Walking Dead,” students discussed the themes at play behind the genre’s trademark gore and post-apocalyptic settings.

One message was easy to find in all of Baker’s examples. “Monsters are dangerous,” Baker said. “But humans are even more so.”

During the Q&A session following her presentation, Baker finally addressed the question on everyone’s mind.

“If I had to choose a weapon for the zombie apocalypse,” Baker said. “It would have to be a baseball bat. For sure.”

Reprinted from Concordia’s online news story on the event. Nov. 3, 2015
Faculty Scholarship

Recent Publications

< Anne Mocko, Demoting Vishnu: Ritual, Politics, and the Unraveling of Nepal’s Hindu Monarchy (Oxford University Press)

< Roy Hammerling, article, "Martin Luther: The Reformed Augustinian Beggar" in David C. Mengel and Lisa Wolverton, eds., Christianity and Culture in the Middle Ages: Essays to Honor John Van Engen (University of Notre Dame Press)


< Hilda Koster, co-editor, The Gift of Theology: The Contributions of Kathryn Tanner (Fortress Press), and chapter, “Creation as Gift: Tanner’s Theology of God’s Ongoing Gift-Giving as Ecological Theology”

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Forthcoming in 2015


David Creech, article, “The Magdalene Yesterday and Today in the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife,” in Una sposa per il Cristo. Maria Maddalena dal Nuovo Testamento alla New Age
Faculty Scholarship

Presentations and Other Achievements

Jacqueline Bussie
♦ “On the Importance of Curricular Programs in Interfaith Studies,” invited speaker, President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge Conference, Howard University, Washington, DC, September 2015.

David Creech
♦ Elected chair of the Construction of Christian Identities Seminar at the Society of Biblical Literature, November 2015

Hilda Koster
♦ “The Gift of Creation: Greening Kathryn Tanner’s Theology,” presented on a panel at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 2015. Other panelists included Chuck Matthews (University of Virginia) Ian McFarland (Camebridge University); Mary Fulkerson (Duke University); Rosemary Carbine (Whittier College); Paul DeHart (Vanderbilt University). Kathryn Tanner (Yale Divinity School) responded and Serene Jones (President Union Theological Seminary, New York and President Elect AAR) presided.
♦ “Ecological Evil and Sin in the Anthropocene,” presented at an international conference at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, August 2015

Michelle Lelwica

Anne Mocko
♦ “Tolerance in Nepal Mandala: Communal Relations and Royal Religious Patronage in Malla-era Kathmandu,” presented at the University of Otago, New Zealand, August 2015.