Welcome Back!

I hope you had a great summer and are ready to be part of what promises to be an exciting year, beginning with a conference on Islam and bioethics on September 19th. We will also be hosting the 10th anniversary conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture in Spring 2016. There are also plans to bring Professors Mark C. Taylor (Columbia University) and Richard Madsen (University of California – San Diego) as part of the annual Delton Scudder lectures. In addition, we are planning to organize an event celebrating the contributions of Emeritus Professor Austin Creel, who passed away this summer. At the end of the bulletin, you will find some remembrances prepared by members of our community who knew him.

We are welcoming a new cohort of students to our graduate program: Jeyoul Choi (Ph.D. – Americas & Asia); Victoria Machado (Ph.D. – Nature); Amanda Nichols (Ph.D. – Nature); Priyanka Ramalakhan (Ph.D. – Americas & Asia); Jep Stockmans (Ph.D. – Global Islam); Richard Batchelor (M.A. – Asia); and Dustin Hall (M.A. – Asia).

In terms of the faculty, we are happy to welcome Dr. Jonathan Edelmann, who received his doctorate at Oxford University and will be teaching courses and conducting research on Sanskrit, classical Hinduism, and Hinduism and science. Moreover, I am happy to announce that David Hackett and Terje Ostebo have been promoted to the ranks of Professor and Associate Professor, respectively.

Best wishes for the new academic year,

Manuel A. Vásquez – Chair

News and Upcoming Events

On September 19, 2015, the Center for Global Islamic Studies will be holding a one-day conference entitled “The Role of Islamic Bioethics & Spirituality in Contemporary Medicine.” The event will take place from 8:30AM to 3PM at Ustler Hall. For more information see: http://globalislam.center.ufl.edu/events/2015/the-role-of-islamic-bioethics-spirituality-in-contemporary-medicine/

“Religion, Science and the Future,” the tenth anniversary conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, will be held January 14-17, 2016 at the University of Florida. The lead UF organizer for this conference is Professor Bron Taylor, who also led the collaboration that founded the ISSRNC in 2006. We expect about 200 participants from around the world, and, as was the case the first time around, many hands will be needed to make the conference a success. Featured speakers will include environmental philosopher, J. Baird
Callicott; political theorist, Daniel Deudney; evolutionary biologist, David Sloan Wilson; Native American scholar/activist, Winona LaDuke; Religion scholar Kocku von Stuckrad; Amazonian indigenous peoples leader, Ailton Krenak; environmental historian, Tim LeCain; Religion scholar, Graham Harvey; Potawatomi philosopher, Kyle Powls Whyte; south Asia scholar, Emma Tomalin; Religion & Science scholar, Lisa Sideris; President-elect of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Jace Weaver; Potawatomi botanist and writer, Robin Wall Kimmerer; ISSRNC founder and JSRNC editor, Bron Taylor; and biologist & religious naturalist, Ursulla Goodenough. If you are able to help, please contact Dr. Taylor at your earliest convenience. The ISSRNC is the foremost scholarly society focusing in an interdisciplinary way on the nexus religion, nature, and culture. We will soon announce one more opportunity to submit proposals, with a deadline of September 10, 2015.

Promotions

Congratulations to Professor David Hackett for being promoted to the rank of Professor and to Professor Terje Ostebo for being promoted to the rank of Associate Professor with tenure!

Presentations

Professor Terje Ostebo co-convened (together with Dr. Emanuele Fantini) the panel Religious Revival, Secularism, and Contested Public Spaces in Contemporary Ethiopia at the 6th European Conference on African Studies, in Paris on July 8-10, 2015. He also presented the paper “Thinking About the Muslim Brothers: The Intellectualist Movement in Ethiopia.”

Professor Terje Ostebo had a briefing for officials at the US Embassy and USAID in Addis Ababa on the religious situation in Ethiopia, on July 14, 2015.

On July 23, 2015, Professor Anna Peterson gave a keynote lecture titled "Euthanasia, Human and Other," at a conference on "The Human Difference" at the Ian Ramsey Centre for Religion and Science at the University of Oxford.

Ph.D. student Bhakti Mantora (Asia) presented a paper on "Conceptions of Devotion in Contemporary Sanskrit Writings" at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference on June 28 - July 2, 2015, in Bangkok, Thailand.

On June 23, 2015, Professor Manuel Vásquez gave a paper entitled “Healing a Karmic Country: The Case of a Brazilian New Religious Movement in the United States” as part of the conference “Politics of Entanglement in the Americas,” at Bielefeld University in Germany. He also offered two workshops to faculty and graduate students on religious transnationalism and on theoretical and methodological aspects in the study of religion.

Publications

Professor Mario Poceski’s new book, The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature, was published by Oxford University Press. More information about the book is


Professor Terje Ostebo has published an article entitled “African Salafism: Religious Purity and the Politicization of Purity” in the journal Islamic Africa (Brill) - Vol. 6, no. 1-2. This was a special issue on Salafism in Africa, for which Ostebo was the guest-editor.

Ph.D. student Ken Chitwood (Americas) published an essay with Sojourners magazine entitled, “A ‘Radical’ Response to Islamophobia.” You can access a preview of the article HERE. He also has a review of Islam and the Americas (ed. Aishha Khan, 2015) being published with the journal Religious Studies Review.

Springer Major Reference Works is in the midst of producing a new, and first of its kind, Encyclopaedia of Latin American Religions. This encyclopaedia provides an overview of the main religions of Latin America and the Caribbean, both its centralized transnational expressions and its local variants and schisms. This includes both Islam and Judaism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Ken Chitwood, the section editor for the Islam and Judaism section, is looking for proposals for entries in the encyclopaedia. There are some terms already prepared and available (contact for more details), but the section editor wishes to include other entries outside his purview as well. Please contact Ken Chitwood at kchitwood@ufl.edu to submit your ideas, sign-up for a topic, or for further inquiries. The deadline for submissions is September 15, 2015.

News

Ph.D. candidate Sarah Werner (Nature) successfully defended her dissertation entitled “Caring for the Land: An Analysis of North American Mennonite Environmental Initiatives” on July 7, 2015. Her committee members were Professor Anna Peterson (Chair), and members Professor Whitney Sanford, Professor David Hackett, and Professor Jaime Ahlberg (Philosophy). Congratulations, Sarah!

Alumni News

Other News

We are very sad to report that Dr. Austin Creel, former chair of our department, passed away after a short illness.

A REMEMBRANCE OF AUSTIN BOWMAN CREEL

Austin Bowman Creel was born in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1929. After graduating from high school in 1946, he went to Northwestern University. He started his graduate work at the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, and then went to Yale to do his doctoral work. He received his PhD from Yale in 1959. In 1957, Delton Scudder, the founder and then chair of the Religion department, hired Austin Creel to teach “Comparative Religion.” Professor Creel also taught courses in the New Testament, Religions of Asia, and Religions of India. He was the chair of our department from 1977 to 1990. Dr. Creel was one of the early scholars who had worked on Indian religious traditions and was widely known for his publications on Hindu Ethics. He is the author of *Dharma in Hindu Ethics* (1977), co-editor of *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions* (1990), and several well-known articles.

Dr. Creel and Dr. Vasudha Narayanan organized two conferences on Monasticism and Asceticism in 1985 and 1987. In 1985, NEH also funded them ($169,000.00) to have the first Summer Institute for High School Teachers to teach Hinduism and Judaism over 4 weeks in summer. This was followed by several other Summer Institutes over the next few years.

Professor David Hackett writes in his account of our department’s history: “It is to Austin that we owe the far-sighted creation of the Department’s Advisory Board long before other departments began to move in this direction. And it is to Austin we owe not only the solid foundations for the Department’s Asian curricular offerings, but too the founding in 1973 of the College’s Asian Studies Program. Finally, Austin put us on the road to computerization. A development we welcomed with appropriate rituals and blessings.”

Professors Hal Stahmer, Dick Hiers, Gene Thursby, and Shaya Isenberg also worked closely with him. In addition, several current faculty were hired when Dr. Creel was the chair. Austin Creel is survived by his daughter, Kathryn Creel Suarez, her husband Carlos Suarez-Quian, and two grandchildren, Harrison Creel Suarez and Benjamin Creel Suarez. His wife, Patricia Ann Harrison Creel, died in 1985, and his son, Stephen, passed away in 2010 in Gainesville.

Vasudha Narayanan (Distinguished Professor - Religion)

In the mid-1960s, Dr. Creel was one of the faculty advisors for a group called "the Student Group for Equal Rights." This group worked for racial equality, including picketing local Gainesville restaurants that refused to serve Negroes and also picketing one or two movie theaters that admitted only Whites. He, along with other members of this group, was arrested by police in Ocala for participating in a peaceful inter-racial demonstration at the downtown courthouse square.
He was an active member and also, I believe, served as president of the inter-disciplinary faculty group called the American Civilization Seminar that met on campus once a month. In this, and many other ways, he was a citizen of the University, not just of the department and the college. Both before and during his term as chairman of the Religion Department, he played a major role in recruiting and finding lines for several new faculty appointments. Among these: Professors Gene Thursby, Taylor Scott, Thaxton Springfield, Michael Eldridge, Harold Stahmer, Samuel Hill, Deidre Crumbly, Theodor Gaster, Vasudha Narayanan, Russell Jaberg, David Hackett, Patout Burns, and James Mueller. He also took part in bringing distinguished faculty on temporary appointments, including Hajime Nakamura, Giles Gunn and his wife, Deborah, and Nahum Glatzer.

During the many years when Austin was faculty advisor for the University Religious Association, he arranged for inviting a number of outstanding scholars and prominent figures in many fields to the campus during the annual Religion-in-Life week, and on other occasions. Among these: the psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl; Bishop James Pike; biologist George Wald; economist Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson); Rabbi (and professor) Sylvan Schwartzman; Liston Pope (dean at Yale Divinity School); William Sloan Coffin, Jr.; and Professors Waldo Beach (Duke), Harmon Holcomb (Rochester), and James Gustafson (Yale and Chicago).

Professor Creel was a regular participant in the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion, and for several years, chaired the AAR section on teaching religion in public colleges and universities.

Richard Hiers (Professor Emeritus – Religion)

I attended UF from 1957-1961. I no longer remember my first encounter with Austin Creel; it may have been when I first attended Bill Lillycrop’s Student Episcopal center; it may have been when I first found out about Religion-in-Life week and wandered into the Department of Religion offices to find out more. There I met Dr. Delton Scudder and Austin Creel, the former large and overwhelming, the latter smallish and sweet. Likely that was during my sophomore year. Those two men WERE the Department of Religion.

Somehow Austin and I connected, and I found myself committed to be the key student organizer [I think “Executive Secretary”] for the upcoming Religion-in-Life week. During my junior year, I devoted many MANY hours, many in the not-fancy DOR offices, to organizing that week. It was a huge undertaking, bringing in speakers from around America and around the world. Austin was the genius behind selecting the personages we invited to speak at RIL week, most of whom accepted. I didn’t realize at the time, but understand now, that Austin’s superb reputation in the academic religion community accounted in large part for their willingness to come to Gainesville. After I graduated, Austin and I stayed in touch, through too-early deaths of beloved wife Pat and dear friend Bill Lillycrop, tough days with son Stephen, and formation of the Advisory Committee to the Department of Religion [not in that order]. That formation began with a typically unassuming call from Austin, asking me if I could meet for lunch [I think in Orlando]. Of course I was delighted to meet Austin, and at lunch he explained that academic departments had been told they needed to form advisory committees, and he would appreciate it if I would chair and help form such a committee for the Department of Religion. I said I would, and
subsequently, he and I [primarily he] did form an Advisory Committee. The people we asked were willing to answer a “call” from Austin, and the committee has continued up until now, through various changes at the College, the Department, and the University.

I experienced Austin as a gifted academic, a devoted family man, a man of unparalleled integrity, a person of great inner strength, coupled with an endearing modesty. [In my experience, those who have much to be modest about are rarely modest; Austin exemplifies the modest strong.] Under Austin’s leadership, the Department of Religion grew larger and stronger and more and more respected within and outside of the University. Subsequent chairs and faculty prove the wisdom of Austin’s leadership of the Department.

Our world is lessened by Austin’s absence, but how lucky we are to have shared our planet with this graceful man. Farewell, Austin, and thank you.

Linda Wells (Chair of the Dept. of Religion Advisory Board)

Austin Creel was a highly valued mentor, a learned professor who taught me well and, most of all, my extraordinary friend.

I met Austin in January 1962 as I was beginning the second semester of my freshman year at the University of Florida when I volunteered to work on the Religion-in-Life Week committee. Thereafter, I worked with Religion-in-Life the rest of my years at Florida, serving as chair for the last two years. We brought terrific scholars to the campus during that period, primarily because Austin knew and invited them (and perhaps a little because they were glad to come to Florida for a few days in the dead of winter!): Liston Pope, dean of the Yale Divinity School; George Buttrick, Harvard's chaplain; Lyndon Johnson's favorite economist during the War on Poverty, Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson); Viktor Frankl, the concentration camp survivor and acclaimed author of "Man's Search for Meaning;" Austin's close friend and fellow India scholar, John Carman from Harvard; and William Sloane Coffin, the University chaplain at Yale (several years before he strolled onto the world stage as a leading voice against the Vietnam War); among many others. It was an abundance of riches, and Austin's leadership gave this to us.

For a couple of years I worked as a student assistant in the Department of Religion when Austin, Delt Scudder, and Dick Hiers were the faculty in whole. They were hard-working and deeply committed, but they also made the office a merry and caring place.

During these years I saw Austin go to jail in Ocala for standing up for civil rights and perhaps, in those perilous days, laying his job on the line. He was braver than I could ever hope to be and an inspiration in ways I suspect he only ever partly knew.

It was Austin's interest and experience in India that led me to choose India as my "country of choice" when I applied to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. Fortunately, I got my choice (and in that experience met Jill Ryan who some years later became my wife--so credit Austin!). My time in the Peace Corps overlapped Austin's sabbatical in Poona (now Pune) in India, and it was fun to meet Austin, Pat, Steve, and Kathryn in Delhi as their stay was ending. (As might well be
expected of Austin, he then promptly, unbidden, sent a letter to my parents to assure them their son in India was indeed alive and in good health.)

Following my Peace Corps years, I went to the Law School at the University of Virginia, and I am quite sure that it was Austin's thoughtful and detailed letter of recommendation, explaining away my several academic short-comings, which gained me admission.

In all the years that have followed, I have grieved with him at Pat's untimely death and over Steve's long illness and death; rejoiced at Kathryn and Carlos's wedding and in their successful careers and their two remarkable sons, Harrison and Ben, Austin's beloved grandsons; celebrated with him the terrific achievements of the UF Department of Religion and its esteemed faculty; and enjoyed long walks and rich conversation at the "Mill Place" in Albemarle County, Virginia, and many visits with him in Gainesville and later Bethesda.

He had such a grand sense of humor; loved jokes, especially jokes on himself; contributed generously to so many right causes; knitted more baby blankets and sweaters than could be counted; and was a genuine friend and supporter to people he met in all walks of life. His was a life of unfailing integrity. He greatly enriched my life and that of my family, and I miss him.

Vernon Swartsel (Member of the Dept. of Religion Advisory Board)

**Deadlines**

Here is our Fall 2015 schedule: [http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/soc/201508/all/religion.htm](http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/soc/201508/all/religion.htm)