

UF RELIGION

NEWSLETTER



NEWS

- Graduate student **Rajani Maharjan** recently received a UFIC grant for field research in Nepal. Refer to *Page 2* for more details.
- **Dr. Yaniv Feller** and **Dr. Rachel Gordan** have received nominations for their latest books. Refer to *Page 3* for more details.
- **Dr. Mario Poceski** recently spoke at a Buddhist conference in Mexico. Refer to *Page 4* for more details.
- **Dr. Bron Taylor** has been invited to give a keynote lecture at Nantes Universite in France April 2026. Refer to *Page 6* for more details.

EVENTS

- On November 12th, visiting lecture **Dr. Aasmundsen** from the University of Stavanger, Norway spoke to faculty and graduate students on the relationship between religion, politics, and nationalism in his talk titled, "*Can Christianity be universal and nationalistic at the same time?*". Refer to *Page 7* for more details.
- On November 17th, in collaboration with the UF Center of Undergraduate Research (CURBS), Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** hosted a workshop on researching religion at the Reitz Union. Refer to *Page 7* for more details.

NEWS

Religion Department–affiliated graduate student **Rajani Maharjan**—now pursuing a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Ecology—has been awarded a Research Abroad for Doctoral Students (RADs) grant from UF’s International Center to support her research in Nepal. She received the full requested amount of \$5,000. Her proposal, titled *“Integration of Traditional and Scientific Ecological Knowledge for Urban Water Management: A Case Study of Kathmandu, Nepal,”* focuses on how Traditional Knowledge Systems and Western scientific approaches can be brought together to address Nepal’s intensifying environmental challenges. A key aspect of her work examines the role of religion within these knowledge systems. Maharjan’s dissertation advisor is **Dr. Bron Taylor**, a member of the Religion faculty and an affiliate of the Interdisciplinary Ecology program.



Rajani Maharjan



Dr. Bron Taylor

NEWS

Professors **Dr. Yaniv Feller** and **Dr. Rachel Gordan** were recently selected as finalists in the 2025 Jordan Schnitzer Book Awards. This year's award recognizes books published in 2023 and 2024, and the finalist distinction includes a \$5,000 honor. Dr. Feller and Dr. Gordan's achievement will be formally acknowledged at the Association for Jewish Studies annual conference in Washington, D.C., this December.

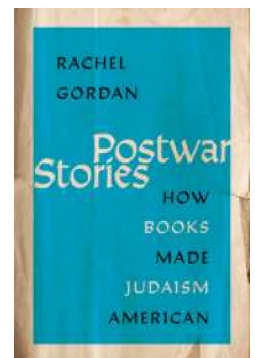


Dr. Yaniv Feller

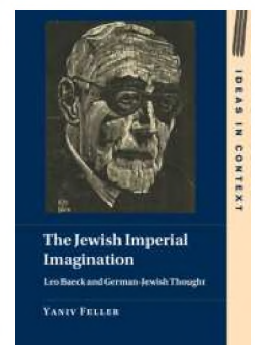


Dr. Rachel Gordan

Dr. Gordan's book *Postwar Stories: How Books Made Judaism American* (Oxford University Press, 2024) was a finalist in the Modern Jewish History & Culture: Africa, Americas, Asia, & Oceania category. *Postwar Stories* delves into how Jewish literature has shaped American-Jewish identity, both post-World War II and the Holocaust.



Dr. Feller's book, *The Jewish Imperial Imagination: Leo Baeck and German-Jewish Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), was a finalist in the Philosophy and Jewish Thought category. *The Jewish Imperial Imagination* explores Leo Baeck's religious thought that was written during the time of the Holocaust, and looks at it through a political lens to help understand Jewish Missionizing and the German-Jewish thoughts on colonization.



PRESENTATIONS

- Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** attended the WCAAS Annual Conference 2025, held at El Colegio de México in Mexico City. He presented a paper titled *"Buddhist and Secular Approaches to Mindfulness Practice"* and also served as a moderator for the "Religion, Spirituality, Philosophy" panel.



*Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies
(WCAAS) Annual Conference 2025*

- During his recent trip to Mexico City, Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** did field research at the Centro Budista de la Ciudad de México (Buddhist Center of Mexico City). Located in the Roma neighborhood, the center is affiliated with the Triratna, a global Buddhist organization founded and headquartered in the UK.



*A Buddhist display at the Centro
Budista de la Ciudad de México.*



*Interior of the Centro Budista de la
Ciudad de México.*

PRESENTATIONS

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) invited Professor **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** back to give a talk to donors, visitors, and members of the Cambodian community after speaking to museum employees in October. These talks are in conjunction with a large exhibit on Cambodian bronzes and moderate a discussion linking the sculptures and a classical Indian dance performance called “Moving Bronzes.” The centerpiece of this exhibit is a large, 11th century bronze Vishnu discovered in a well in West Mebon (near Angkor) in 1936. Dr. Narayanan has been studying reclining Vishnus in India and Cambodia for many years and visited this exhibit earlier this year at the Musée Guimet in Paris.

The large bronze Vishnu, on loan from the National Museum in Phnom Penh and restored in France before being displayed at the Musée Guimet in May 2025, will travel next year from Minneapolis to the Smithsonian, and then to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, before returning to its home in Phnom Penh.



Dr. Narayanan and the 14-foot reclining Vishnu.



Dr. Narayanan and the author of “In the Shadow of the Banyan”, Vaddey Ratner.



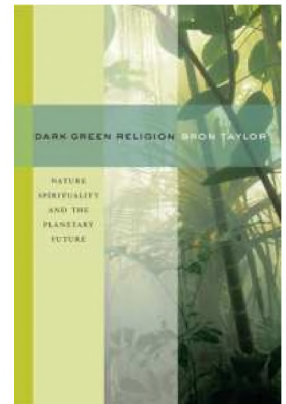
Dr. Narayanan speaking to donors, visitors, and members of the Cambodian community .

PRESENTATIONS

- Université d'Angers, the Institut d'Études Avancées (IEA), and Nantes Université, as part of their Sea More Blue Research Initiative, has invited Professor **Dr. Bron Taylor** to present a keynote lecture on *Coastal Blue Imaginaries and Spiritualities*, at Nantes Université in France, which will take place in early April 2026. During his two week residency in Nantes, Dr. Taylor will be featured in a series of additional engagements, including a podcast interview, a roundtable conversation, and collaborative research excursions in the region.



- **Dr. Bron Taylor** recently gave a public keynote presentation at the Dark Green Religion in Europe Conference which took place at the Natural History Museum Mainz in Mainz, Germany. The conference focused on Dr. Taylor's influential book, *Dark Green Religion* (2009). The lecture is now available to watch online at the following link: https://youtu.be/wHzHP5eB_Rw or by searching "Bron Taylor - Dark Green Religion - Mainz, Germany".

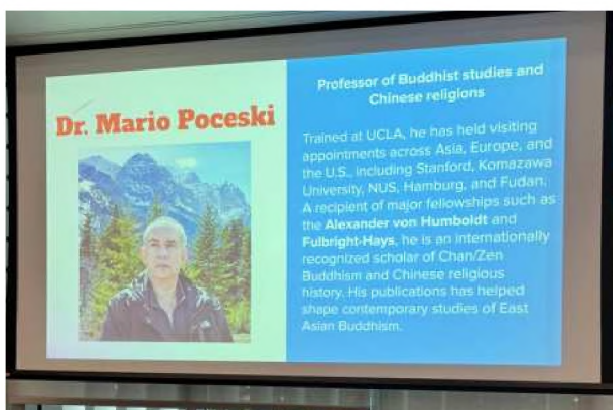


- **Dr. Bron Taylor** is one of seven international scholars invited to participate in a conference on "Our Planetary Health: Religiosities, Ecologies, and Environmentalisms," to be held at Renmin University in Beijing, China, from June 18–20, 2026. The event is co-organized by anthropologist Professor Mayfair Yang (University of California, Santa Barbara) and Professor Dedong Wei (Department of Philosophy, Renmin University) and will bring together leading Chinese and international scholars for interdisciplinary dialogue.



EVENTS

- Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** was invited by the UF Center of Undergraduate Research (CURBS) to host a Religions Research Workshop. During the event, Dr. Poceski discussed his research on Chinese Buddhism and how he uses interdisciplinary methods such as textual, doctrinal, and institutional perspectives to uncover how Buddhist traditions evolved through literature, practice, and cultural exchange. The event was aimed at students interested in religion, history, philosophy, or Asian studies, seeking to explore connections between ancient texts and contemporary understandings of faith, culture, and practice.



CURBS introduction slide for Dr. Mario Poceski.



Religion major Jordan Evans discussing her undergraduate research alongside mentor Dr. Mario Poceski.

- Assistant Professor **Dr. Hans Geir Asmundsen**, from the **University of Stavanger**, Norway recently gave a lecture to the Religion Department's faculty and graduate students. Dr. Asmundsen received his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Södertörn University and continues his research on religion's contexts and relationships between culture, globalization, and more. His lecture covered Christianity's relationship with politics and nationalism across the world, along with how different Christian denominations and traditions have aligned themselves with various political movements and values.



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If you have any information that you would like featured in the newsletter, please email **Ashley Tisher** (a.tisher@ufl.edu).

We look forward to hearing from you!