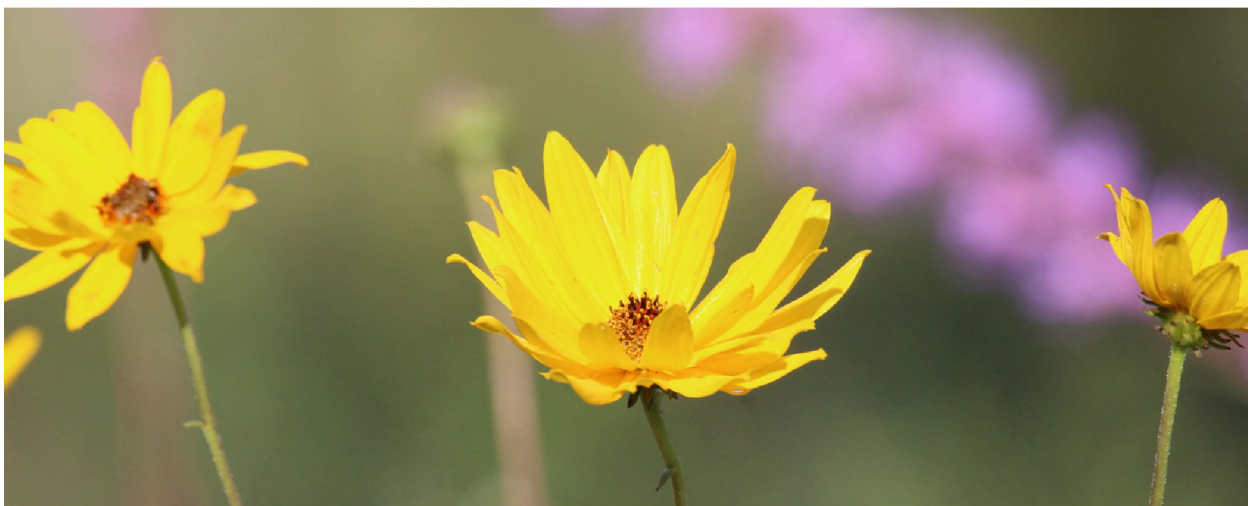


NEWSLETTER

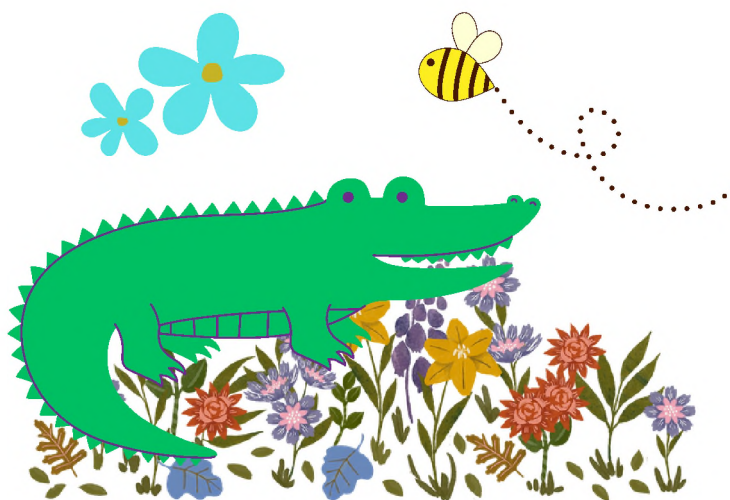


NEWS

- **Dr. Mario Poceski** and **Dr. Anna Peterson** were recently featured in an article by *The Alligator* about changes to the UF social science undergraduate curriculum. See *Page 2* for more details.
- Religion major **Jordan Evans** has received the **2026 CLAS Excellence Award**. See *Page 3* for more details.
- PhD alumnus **Dr. Victoria Machado** recently presented at **The Lynx Bookstore**. See *Page 4* for more details.
- PhD alumnus **Dr. Macodou Fall** recently published in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. See *Page 5* for more details.

EVENTS

- **Spring Break** is from March 14th - March 22nd. Please enjoy a restful week and we look forward to seeing you when you come back!



NEWS

Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** and faculty member **Dr. Anna Peterson** were recently featured in an article published by *The Alligator* titled “*UF adds Western canon-focused courses to general education*,” written by **Cameron Countryman**.

The article addresses the change in UF’s general education curriculum requirements for Humanities and Social Science courses-- which are now required to include Western Canon. Countryman also wrote about the new course additions from the UF Hamilton School to the general education curriculum.

Dr. Anna Peterson commented that students do not have space in their class schedule for religion courses. She explains how humanities courses that do not include the Western canon are now being excluded from the humanities and international designation, according to UF’s general education catalog and the state-wide updates to the curriculum.

Chair Dr. Mario Poceski described changes in the Religion department to accommodate the state’s decision, such as his inclusion of Western literature to talk about a religion mainly practiced in Asia. He said faculty should make these course alterations with their students’ best interests in mind, doing their best to deliver a well-rounded education.

the independent florida alligator



Dr. Mario Poceski



Dr. Anna Peterson

NEWS

Religion major **Jordan Evans** has been nominated by chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** for the **2026 UF CLAS Excellence Award**. She will formally receive the award at the upcoming Spring 2026 graduation ceremony and along with Jordan, the department is thrilled to have one of its students recognized with such a high honor. The UF CLAS Excellence Award is awarded to University Scholars Program (USP) undergraduates who are paired with faculty to work on research projects. In addition to the nomination, Jordan was recently awarded a Cooke College Scholarship (from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation) of \$150,000 for graduate studies over four years.



Dr. Mario Poceski

Q&A with Jordan Evans



How were you nominated for this award? What is your area of study?

I was nominated for the award by Mario Poceski. My undergraduate studies largely focused on coursework and research exploring the intersections of spirituality, social change, and horticulture.

What particular work have you been apart of or spearheaded that led to your achievement?

Under Dr. Poceski's mentorship, I completed an honors thesis that examined the spiritual dimensions of therapeutic horticulture for people experiencing homelessness in a case study at Grace Grows. I designed and facilitated the therapeutic horticulture program in collaboration with Grace Grows director Abigail Perret-Gentil and Professor Leah Diehl at Wilmot Botanical Gardens. Through the University Scholars Program, I also received research training and funding, prepared my thesis for publication in the Journal of Undergraduate Research, and will present my work at the University of Florida's Undergraduate Spring Research Symposium.

What advice/lessons from the department or chair helped you in your academic journey?

Dr. Poceski has encouraged me through this process to pursue intellectually curious questions while developing clear, rigorous, and accessible research. One of the lessons I learned through Dr. Poceski's mentorship was the positive impact that connections with department faculty can have on students' educational goals and outcomes.

PRESENTATIONS

- On March 8th, PhD alumnus **Dr. Victoria Machado** gave a talk about their experiences teaching and learning in prison at the **The Lynx Books** bookstore in Gainesville, FL. She talked about the societal benefits of prison education, such as: offering college-level courses to those who are incarcerated; developing curricular support; and supporting research on prison education, recidivism, and mass incarceration.



Poster for the Lynx Books event, "Teaching and Learning in Prison"

- On March 9th, **Dr. Anna Peterson** gave a talk at the **Florida Free Speech Forum**, "Teaching in Florida, 2026". During her speech, Dr. Peterson discussed the trends and changes in higher education policies and its impact on students, instructors, and programs at UF.

The Florida Free Speech Forum (FFSF), active since 1980, is an independent lecture series that promotes open and constructive dialogue through the rational examination of public issues. It encourages public participation and seeks to enhance life and freedom by fostering free speech and thoughtful discussion of ideas.



Logo for Florida Free Speech Forum

- On March 9th, Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** recently gave a 70-minute lecture and Q&A at the **Oak Hammock at the University of Florida**. He gave a lecture on the topic of "The Long Arc of Chinese Civilization and Its Wide Cultural Influence". During the presentation, Dr. Poceski gave an overview of Chinese history with a focus on the importance of China's past in order to understand its present.

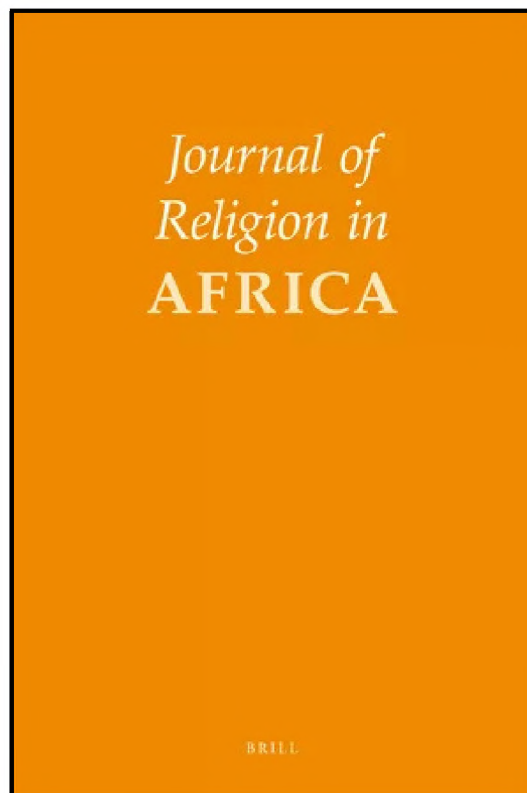


Oak Hammock is a retirement home community for persons aged 55 and older in Gainesville, FL.

PUBLICATIONS

PhD alumnus **Dr. Macodou Fall** published an article titled, "*Embodied Religiosity: Religious Practices among the Baye Fall*" in the Journal of Religion in Africa.

This paper explores the religious practices of the Baye Fall, a branch of the Mouride Sufi order founded by Ibra Fall, a prominent disciple of Ahmadou Bamba. Drawing on ethnographic research, it highlights practices such as allegiance to spiritual leaders, acts of service, devotional remembrance of God, communal Ramadan meals, and distinctive forms of dress. The study introduces the concept of integrated embodied religiosity to explain how these practices function together as lived expressions of faith. It also addresses common criticisms that portray the Baye Fall as religiously excessive or heterodox. Overall, the paper argues that Baye Fall traditions reflect a diverse and dynamic expression of Islamic practice.



Cover for the Journal of Religion in Africa.

EVENTS

The Department of Religion has been dilligently promoting **Fall 2026 course registration** at the Library West breezeway.

Faculty members **Dr. Jeyoul Choi** and **Dr. Terje Ostebo** spoke to students this past week about new course offerings, and how a religion course can benefit students' academic and professional goals. The display table showcased religious artifacts and promoted easy access to the departments social media pages and the newsletter sign up page.



Pictured: Religion tabling display complete with course flyers and department materials.

STAY CONNECTED!

Follow Us On Social Media!



@ufreligion



University of Florida
Religion Department



@ufreligion



University of Florida
Religion



@ufreligion

Want To Contribute to the Newsletter?

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!