

UF RELIGION

NEWSLETTER



NEWS

- Professor **Bron Taylor** has been invited to serve as a Fellow of the **Centre for Advanced Studies** at the University of Hamburg Germany in 2027. See *Page 2* for more details.
- **Dr. Yaniv Feller** recently lectured at the **Ludwig Maximilian-University**. See *Page 3* for more details.
- **Dr. Jeyoul Choi** recently published a peer-reviewed article in the **Journal of Ecumenical Studies**. See *Page 5* for more details.

EVENTS

- Religion majors **Jordan Evans**, **Caden Kendzior**, **John Mark Vondruska**, and **Isabel Martinez** graduated this past weekend on May 2. *Congrats Grads!* See *Page 9* for graduation photos.
- **Dr. Carol Roriguez** graduated with her PhD in Religion this past weekend. The title of her dissertation was "*Community, Religion and Food: Exploring Jain Identity in the Diaspora*" which focused on Jainism and gender/women studies. *Congrats Carol!* See *Page 9* for graduation photos.



NEWS

- Professor **Bron Taylor** has been invited to serve as a Fellow of the **Centre for Advanced Studies** at the University of Hamburg, Germany in 2027. In this role, he will contribute to the Centre's German Research Foundation-funded project, Futures of Sustainability. Scholars there are particularly interested in his research on the affective, ethical, and spiritual dimensions that shape global sustainability movements.



Dr. Bron Taylor

- Professor **Bron Taylor** has been invited to serve—and has accepted an appointment—on the scientific committee of *La Critica Sociologica*, a leading Italian scholarly journal. *La Critica Sociologica*, founded in 1967 by **Franco Ferrarotti**, is a quarterly journal that combines political engagement with scientific rigor. Grounded in the idea that sociology should critically engage with contemporary social realities, it seeks to uncover the deeper meaning of empirical data within broader social contexts. The journal publishes work by established and emerging scholars across sociology and related disciplines, addressing topics such as power structures, social organization, migration, multiculturalism, and economic models.

- The Department of Religion congratulates **Rajani Maharjan** on successfully defending her qualifying examinations and dissertation proposal on May 5th, 2026, and on advancing to candidacy. She will soon depart for fieldwork in Nepal as she begins work on her dissertation, provisionally titled "*Integration of Traditional and Scientific Ecological Knowledge for Urban Water Management: A Case Study of Kathmandu, Nepal.*"



Rajani Maharjan

Ms. Maharjan began in the Religion and Nature program before transitioning to the School of Natural Resources and the Environment. She is advised by Professor **Bron Taylor** (Religion), with a dissertation committee comprising Professor **Sabine Grunwald** (Soil, Water, and Ecosystem Sciences, UF/IFAS), Professor **Catherine May Tucker** (Anthropology), and **Dr. Nargiza Ludgate** (Epidemiology), all at the University of Florida.

PRESENTATIONS

- On May 5th, 2026, **Dr. Yaniv Feller** lectured at the **Ludwig-Maximilian-University** on how Jewish museums in the United States and Israel present suffering and violence. The lecture, “Leiden und Widerstand: Darstellungen von Gewalt und Trauma in jüdischen Museen” (Translation: “Suffering and Resistance: Depictions of Violence and Trauma in Jewish Museums”) was attended by faculty, students, and members of the public.



Dr. Feller giving his lecture at Ludwig-Maximilian-University in front of an audience. Photo credits: Rachel Gordan

“*To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric,*” a line written by Theodor W. Adorno in 1949, sparked a far-reaching debate, taken up by many thinkers, about the possibility—and limits—of representing the Shoah. More than eighty years after the end of the Second World War, Jewish museums continue to grapple with these questions. Is there, or should there be, a particular moral responsibility in representing such histories? How can violence be depicted without being aestheticized or glorified?

In his lecture, Professor Yaniv Feller developed a comparative perspective that offered new insight into these enduring and pressing questions.

PRESENTATIONS

- On May 7th, 2026, Chair **Dr. Mario Poceski** gave a presentation at **Sophia University** in Tokyo, Japan titled “Rethinking Buddha’s Life and Legacy”. The talk was based on his new book, ***The Buddha: Life, Legend and Legacy*** which examines the life, legend, and lasting legacy of the historical Buddha, a figure revered by hundreds of millions worldwide. Poceski situates the Buddha’s spiritual vision and teachings on the dharma within social, cultural, and religious contexts, while also tracing how later generations of monastic and lay Buddhists reshaped his image and influence.



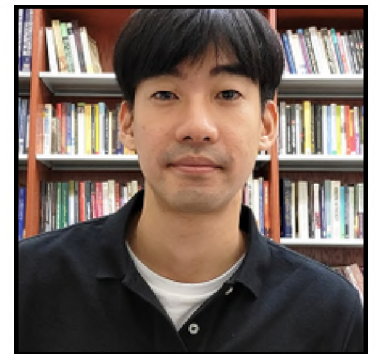
Top Left and Right Images: Chair Mario Poceski lecturing at Sophia University.

Bottom Left Image: A lecture hall listens intently to Mario Poceski's lecture.

Bottom Right Image: Chair Mario Poceski lecturing at Sophia University.

PUBLICATIONS

- On May 1st, 2026, **Dr. Jeyoul Choi** published a peer-reviewed article, “*Intricate Modernity: The South Korean Protestant Experience*,” in the **Journal of Ecumenical Studies** 61.1 (2006): 27–54 (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press).



Dr. Jeyoul Choi

This article reexamines the South Korean Protestant experience of modernity by challenging the prevailing view that Protestantism constituted a decisive rupture with traditional society and religious culture. Instead, it argues that Protestant modernity in Korea emerged as an entangled and negotiated process, shaped by ongoing tensions between established traditions and new religious identities. Migration—particularly to the United States—has played a significant role in this process, serving as a pathway through which many South Korean Protestants pursue both religious fulfillment and social mobility. These lived experiences illustrate how Western modernity is reinterpreted and localized within Korean religious life, offering a more nuanced account of religious change in a global context.



The cover of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (left) and the introduction page for Dr. Choi's article (right).

PUBLICATIONS

- Professor **Dr. Rachel Gordan**'s podcast, *Writing It! The Podcast About Academics & Writing*, released eight new episodes this semester, including conversations with religion professor **Max Mueller** and Yale University Press senior editor **Adina Popescu**.

Dr. Gordan has long been a fan of writing and book podcasts, but she often wished there were one that spoke directly to the specific questions and challenges academic writers face. That desire deepened about three years ago, when the idea for *Writing It!* first began to take shape—just as her own first book was approaching publication after a process marked by delays, detours, and uncertainty. Experiencing firsthand how opaque and difficult academic publishing can be made her realize how little this essential knowledge is shared among scholars. In short, she set out to create the podcast she wished she'd had: a space for candid conversations with editors, literary agents, and academics doing meaningful work and navigating the real challenges of writing and publication—conversations others could learn from as well.



Dr. Rachel Gordan



*Logo for the podcast
"Writing It!"*

- Professor **Bron Taylor** has launched a **Substack**—an online platform for writers and a venue for more public-facing scholarly reflection—with an inaugural essay titled "*Viva Ted Turner*", reflecting on his encounter with the late Ted Turner and exploring Turner's bison-centered conservation legacy. Going forward, Professor Taylor will use this platform for more public-facing reflections drawn from his research, engaging current events and emerging trends in an eclectic and accessible way.



Dr. Bron Taylor



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Julianne Do



Julianne Do

Julianne Do, also known as Julie, was a dedicated Student-Assistant at the Department of Religion, who recently graduated in this past weekend on May 2nd with her Bachelor's Degree in Biology with a minor in Philosophy. We got a chance to catch up with her before she received her diploma and here is what she had to say:

Why Biology and Philosophy? I chose to study Biology because I love morphology, which stems from my strong belief in divine design. I pursued a minor in Philosophy to keep my writing muscle from atrophying alongside my STEM major coursework.

Favorite Memory? When I first started working in Summer 2023, the interior of Anderson Hall reminded me of one of my favorite movies, *Good Will Hunting* (1997).

Future Plans? I plan on becoming a podiatrist and open a podiatry clinic in Okinawa, Japan. I decided I would like to live there in the future after participating in a UF Microbiology study abroad program last summer.

Any comments on your experience working in the department? Reflecting on my time here, I realize that the countless interactions with faculty, staff, and students instilled in me an unquenchable sense of curiosity. I have met so many interesting people and created golden memories I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I am incredibly grateful for such an intimate look into academic life in the humanities as well. I found Anderson Hall to be one of the most beautiful places I could spend my early 20's in.

It has truly been a pleasure working at UF Religion.

Thanks for everything,

Julianne Do



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Sophia Wang



Student Assistant **Sophia Wang** graduated this past Saturday, May 2nd, 2026, earning a B.A. in Sociology with minors in Economics and Classical Studies on the pre-law track.

She is currently preparing for the LSAT and plans to spend a few gap years gaining additional work experience while getting ready for law school. She hopes to pursue a legal education in the future, with particular interests in international law and creative intellectual property.



Sophia Wang

"I've loved working at the Religion Department; I began in March of 2025 and have gained valuable work experience. My favorite memory of working at the department was this year's Jaberg Award Ceremony and Reception where I got to interact and converse with Religion faculty and students that I don't often get the opportunity to do otherwise. It was a great moment of celebration and community. I'm grateful for my time working at the Department of Religion and for my time at the University of Florida!"



A Note From the Office Manager

I've had the pleasure of working closely with both Sophia and Julianne, and they are truly wonderful people. While I'm incredibly proud of them both for graduating, I'm also genuinely sad that I won't be seeing them around the office anymore. They were such an integral part of the office's day-to-day functioning and worked tirelessly to support everyone—myself included. I'll miss our conversations, especially our chats about the latest student gossip. They both have such bright futures ahead, and I couldn't be more proud of them. - Ashley Tisher

Spring 2026 Graduation Photos



Top Left Image: Dr. Choi (left) and Caden Kendzior (right). Top Right Image: Jordan Evans (center) with her family. Middle Left Image: Carol Rodriguez (left) and Vasudha Narayanan (right). Middle Image: Carol Rodriguez (middle) with her parents (left) and Vasudha Narayanan (right). Middle Right Image: Chair Mario Poceski (left), Jordan Evans (right), and Jordan's daughter (middle). Bottom Left Image: Mario Poceski (right), Gillian Lord, Jordan Evans, Dean Ingersent (left), and Jordan's daughter (middle). Bottom Right Image: John Mark Vondruska (left), Isabel Martinez, Caden Kendzior, and Ali Mian (right).

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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!