



## **CORH CONNECTION:**

### **GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIR!**

I am honored to be completing my 9th year as Chair of the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities. I had big shoes to fill—those of Dr. Joel Zimbelman, who went on to become the Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts (following the path of former Religious Studies Chair and HFA Dean Don Heinz). I will be ably succeeded by Dr. Kate McCarthy, widely recognized as a conscientious advocate for faculty and students and one of our most beloved instructors in Religious Studies. I also would like to acknowledge the help of Dr. Sarah Pike, who served as interim chair during my semester sabbatical in 2014.



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## Jed Wyrick—Department Accomplishments

Our accomplishments as a department during this time are numerous and should be recognized as achievements of all of our faculty and staff. These include the following:

First, we integrated the Humanities major and minors into the department (as recognized in the change of our name from “Religious Studies” to “Comparative Religion and Humanities”). This had the benefit of allowing us to give full support to our Humanities students and also shielding our department from unfair and potentially damaging accusations of having too few majors.

Prior to this, we had changed the structure of the B.A. in Humanities to give the seven departments in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts a clearer role in the choices made by students. Students now choose courses from five of the eight disciplines of the humanities at Chico State; they also have the possibility of specializing in a period (like Classics or Modernity) or in the study of non-Western cultures. Finally, they are required to take at least 2 semesters of a foreign language. We also reconfigured our minors, combining Medieval and Renaissance Studies and adapting to changing (and often decreasing) university-wide coursework in Cinema Studies and Modern Jewish and Israel Studies.

Then, we created a Center for the Public Understanding of Religion. The center is poised to take off as a venue for projects and initiatives that work with the North State region, the CSUC student body, and our colleagues both across the university and across the nation. It is currently searching for private and public support, as well as designated time for our faculty to devote to spearheading its possible work.

Most recently, we changed our Religious Studies major into a 34-unit (down from 37 units) degree completion program that is no longer built upon General Education coursework. The program, which goes into effect in 2016-2017, will ensure that all RELS majors receive advanced instruction in all the major religious traditions and in key



issues like sex and gender, politics and violence, religion and nature, and religion and the professions, while retaining already strong coursework in religion in America and theories and criticisms of religion. It will also give students the option of exploring either religion and the arts or religion and science. It is important to note that we intend in the future to teach distance students who will be able to tune in live to classes online or to watch them archived, with the intention of reaching new populations who are unable to study in Chico and to increase our student base. We have already piloted three of our ten new courses in 2015-2016. We are also set to create a 21-unit certificate in Inter-religious and Intercultural Relations,

an exciting development that is wholly attributable to Dr. McCarthy.

Along the way, we have dealt with significant and ever-increasing requirements of the university in program assessment, program evaluation, General Education redesign, and General Education assessment. We redesigned our web-page (which needs even more of our effort to maintain its currency) and received grants to run conferences on mapping local religions and on Buddhism and the Internet, as well as to fund student trips to museums and cultural events. We received grants to sponsor guest faculty, did outreach to local groups, taught students in a variety of programs inside and outside the university, delivered lectures at home and internationally, and taught and studied abroad. We wrote several, very well-received books and numerous articles, participated in national and international conferences, and received even more grants. We also made contact with our former students and alumni and created a bi-annual newsletter (thanks to Dr. Daniel Veidlinger).

Again, these and many more accomplishments are attributable to our extremely committed lecturers, our administrative support coordinator Stephanie Poldervaart, and our tenured faculty members. I am honored to be one part of that process.

## *A Message from the Incoming Chair— Kate McCarthy*

Even though I've been teaching in the department since 1994—and have the old overhead transparencies to prove it—I still often feel that I'm just getting the feel of this work. So I'm grateful that my colleagues have entrusted me with the role of CORH Department Chair, a position I step into in August. I'm especially grateful to our outgoing chair Jed Wyrick, for his great leadership these past nine years and for his patience with the numerous questions I will no doubt pester him with next fall.

We're also in the midst of another kind of change. Many of us are busy getting rid of old material and making painful decisions about which books to save and which to let go of as we pack up for the move from Trinity to the new Arts and Humanities building this summer. It's a bitter-sweet affair. We have a long history in this strange old building with its drafty windows, bewildering hallways and ramps, and too-few bathrooms. Our central campus location feels like home and we have loved the old scholarly feel of the place—few of us are drawn to the new and shiny. But the new building promises a modern working environment as well as new collaborative spaces for students and faculty, the opportunity to build community with our HFA colleagues, and inspiring teaching, learning and performance spaces. I plan to bring my funky old wicker chair and call it home.

Next year will also see the rollout of our redesigned Religious Studies major, which has been thoroughly updated both to meet the demands of a changing discipline and to offer students more opportunities for small, majors-only classes. Beyond the classroom, I'll have an eye on expanding the scope of our Center for the Pub-

lic Understanding Religion (CPUR), starting with a partnership with the NEH-sponsored California Pluralism Project. Watch for great new resources—including the winners of this year's "My California Religion Experience" video contest—on the CPUR website next fall.

In my role as chair I also hope to sustain the wonderful work of CORH faculty this year in organizing a multi-class field trip to San Francisco museums as well as local trips to ballet, opera, and theatre performances. Our location is no barrier to world class arts experiences, and we will continue to find ways to provide them to our students.

Meanwhile, world news and national politics are reminding us of the importance of our work—the real value of multi-religious literacy and informed civil discourse about religion becomes starkly evident in their absence. In addition to our outstanding existing programs, I'm very excited that we are developing a new interdisciplinary course sequence—a Certificate in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations—that will equip students in many majors to work

effectively with religious diversity in a range of professional settings. Senior Religious Studies major Molly Sullivan and I traveled to Los Angeles over spring break to attend a conference on this growing field of interreligious studies, and it was great to share our work and exchange ideas and resources with colleagues from around the country. If all goes well, look for the certificate program to launch in Fall 2017.

The boxes should be mostly unpacked when next semester begins—come find us on the third floor of the new building and say hello. The digs are new, but the spirit remains the same.



## *Daniel Veidlinger—Journey to the East*

In January 2016, I was invited to deliver a series of lectures in India about my current research on Buddhism and communication. The book I am working on is divided into two parts. The first part examines the effects of changing communication environments in India during the time of the Buddha, and the second part looks at how modern digital communication has affected the growth and intellectual development of Buddhism. I gave a talk at Benares Hindu University and at Gautama Buddha University about Buddhism in ancient India, and a talk at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi about Buddhism and conceptions of selfhood in cyberspace. I was very happy to see that the talks were well attended and both faculty and students at the institutions where I spoke were very engaged as well as welcoming and helpful during my stay. I received a lot of useful comments from the surprising amount of scholars there who were researching topics that were quite relevant to my own course of study. A number of scholars and students came up to me after the talks to request more information about CSU Chico, and I proudly told them about our programs here.



[Benares Hindu University]



[Gautam Buddha University]

## Continued...

As a professor of Indian religion, it is an overwhelming experience to travel to India and witness on the ground the very practices and places that one studies and teaches. The people are in general very happy to discuss the details of their religions, especially with someone who already knows so much about it. I went to Sarnath,

“As a professor of Indian religion, it is an overwhelming experience to travel to India and witness on the ground the very practices and places that one studies and teaches.”

where the Buddha gave his first sermon, and there is a beautiful park there that reverberates with the memories of a glorious ancient empire that must have greatly venerated the Buddha and his teachings, judging by the impressive size of the *stupa* that marks the spot. One can still see the orderly rows of ruins of the monastery buildings that must have been thriving in earlier times. To be at the *ghats* leading into the Ganges, to stand at the very spot where Buddhism began, to enter the great gates of the main mosque built by the Moghul Emperors, to see devotees pouring milk li-

bations on Shiva lingams, to see a female dancer whipped into an ecstatic dance by the chanting and clapping of devotees to the goddess Kali, these are experiences that reminded me how important it is to travel abroad in order to expand your mind and to witness the impact of the ideas that we study in class every day. Religion plays such an important part of the world, that it is incumbent upon us to note as often as we can how deeply intertwined it is with the daily life and built environment of the vast majority of people on this planet. It gives us a better sense of mission, a sense of the importance of what we teach in the face of the continual creep of business and managerial thinking into society today that sees only the economic utility of any discipline. Just don't drink the water.

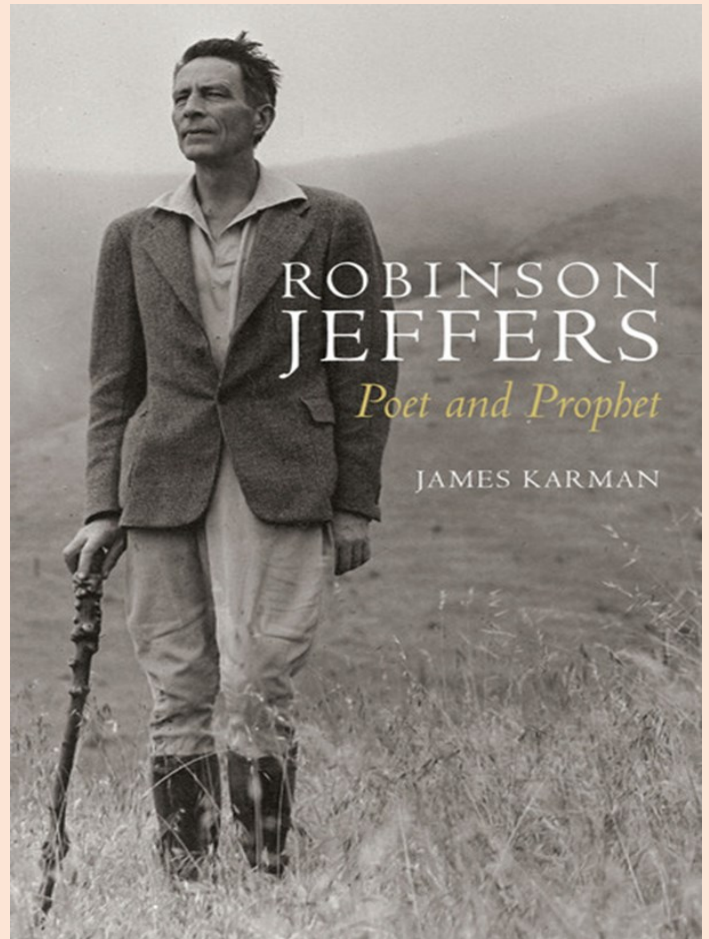


## *James Karman—The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers*

In an essay titled “Poetry, Góngorism, and a Thousand Years” (first published in the January 18, 1948 issue of the *New York Times*), Robinson Jeffers describes poetry as “a beautiful work of nature, like an eagle or a high sunrise. You owe it no duty. If you like it, listen to it; if not, let it alone.” Jeffers wrote some of the most powerful and visionary poetry of the twentieth century—poetry that I not only liked, but could not leave alone. To

“Jeffers wrote some of the most powerful and visionary poetry of the twentieth century...”

deepen my understanding of his achievement, and to provide a resource for other scholars, I undertook a project that required more than a decade of continuous, concentrated labor: *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers, with Selected Letters of Una Jeffers*, published in three volumes (2009, 2011, and 2015) by Stanford University Press. Along with this edition, Stanford also released a revised version of my biographical introduction to Volume 1, retitled *Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet* (2015). I was drawn to Jeffers’ poetry many years ago by its artistic beauty and spiritual depth—and by its wide range of essential concerns, such as the place of humans in nature, the pervasiveness of violence and war, and the one true path to enlightenment. Here is a brief statement about the latter, from “The Answer”:



**Integrity is wholeness,  
the greatest beauty is**

**Organic wholeness, the wholeness of  
life and things, the divine beauty of the uni-  
verse. Love that, not man**

**Apart from that, or else you will  
share man’s pitiful confusions, or drown in  
despair when his days darken.**

## *Tova Love—Death Café*

Two months ago Chico State held its first Death Café, which will now be a monthly event that is sponsored by the Religious Diversity Association. In an effort to make Death a more comfortable dinner table topic, students, faculty and community members are coming together to discuss this often ‘hushed’ topic.

RDA president, Tova Love, who was also recently elected as a student academic senator, and CSU Death, Dying and Afterlife professor, Sarah Gagnebin will be hosting Death Café on campus twice each month; beginning with a short presentation on a topic related to death, followed by a ‘circle-style’ conversation. We will discuss many different topics surrounding death, and hopefully make this often taboo topic easier to discuss in our daily lives.

Death Café is not just something that was thought up for a campus event. Death Café is an international movement that began in the United Kingdom and spread from country to country with the goal of increasing awareness of death in order to help people escape the FEAR that is associated with the “unknown.” In our culture, death is often considered morbid or scary, mostly because we are not taught that it is a normal part of life that EVERYONE has to experience.

One of the benefits of talking about death is actually LIVING our lives more fully and without the fear of how and when it will end.

The next Death Café will be held on May 4 & 5 from noon to 2pm in Trinity 126. Students, faculty and community members are encouraged to bring their lunch and join us for what will always be a ‘lively’

conversation. Cookies, cakes, donuts and hot tea will be provided.

Death Café is a FREE event and is open to the public.

For more information, contact Tova at [taustin5@mail.csuchico.edu](mailto:taustin5@mail.csuchico.edu), or call 530-332-0036. Sponsored by the Religious Diversity Association.”



## *An Interview with Recent Graduate Marie Rasitera*

We asked Marie, who graduated in 2014 with a minor in Religious Studies and a major in International Relations, to answer some questions about how her religion degree has helped in her current graduate studies. She was born in Madagascar and lived there until she was 5 years old. Then she moved to Europe and Canada before her family finally settled in the United States. She has also studied French and Spanish along the way.

### **What program are you currently in? What degree do you hope to get?**

I am currently in the Master of Arts in Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS). I hope to be awarded that degree this May. My international background influenced my interest in international issues and desire to examine problems from multiple points of views for example Western vs non-Western and American vs non-American.

### **How do you feel studying religion at Chico helped prepare you for what you are studying now?**

I believe that studying religion at Chico prepared me well for my major. My concentration at MIIS is terrorism and many radical and terrorist groups base their ideology on one religion or borrow from those they like. Having at least a basic understanding of various religions is essential to beginning to understand the motivations and ideology of these groups.

I should also say that my language study has helped a lot. I have used Spanish sources in my research projects and it has been useful in gathering more complete and richer information on region specific topics. Language is important and I definitely believe that if you only speak one language you run the risk of not getting the complete picture or entire story.

### **What would you like to do with your degree once you graduate?**

I am interested in counterterrorism and security in almost any capacity. I've interned at a think tank and I've enjoyed it. I'm interested in Anti Money Laundering (AML), but I'm also interested in nonproliferation and arms control. Right now I'm keeping my options open.

### **Do you feel that religion still plays an important role in world affairs?**

Religion absolutely plays an important role in world affairs. Many radical and terrorist groups base their ideology on a religion or are motivated by their interpretation of a religion. Groups with different religious beliefs are still at odds with each other. Religion is still a large part of many people's identities and so I think it will keep playing an important role in world affairs.

### **Do you have any advice for current students at Chico who are trying to think about what to do next with their BA?**

I think it's a good idea to search for real job posts you are interested in to find out what skills and degrees they require. Whether you want to continue on to graduate school or enter the workforce it's important to know how to prepare yourself for the career you want.





## *Laura Nice—Trip to San Francisco*

Early on Saturday, March 26, more than 50 students and CORH faculty boarded two charter buses and drove to San Francisco for a full day of art and discussion at the Legion of Honor and Asian Art Museum. Our first stop was the spectacularly located Legion of Honor, a museum with a world-class collection of ancient and European art that spans 4,000 years. Docents led small groups through the highlights of the collection, which includes works by Rodin, El Greco and Monet. Next, the buses wound their way to the City Hall area, for lunch and docent tours of the Asian Art Museum, which houses one of the most significant collections of Asian art in the world. Representing a 6,000 year period, the museum offers a “panorama of

Asian arts and culture” with works of immense importance such as “gilded bronze Buddha image dated 338—the oldest known dated Chinese Buddha in the world.” Humanities major Samantha Nickel summed up the feelings of many when she explained “the field trip to SF provided a unique perspective to my studies on art and art history because it was an experience outside of the classroom and apart from the minor hindrance of observing art in a book or on a screen. Visiting the Legion of Honor and Asian Art Museum provoked a feeling of active participation through a physical observation of historical works of art...and who doesn’t love visiting San Francisco!”



*CORH Honorable Mentions*

Jed Wyrick has been elected as At-Large Senator

Dr. Sarah Pike will be a featured speaker at the conference “Wonder and the Natural World” (June 20-23), sponsored by the Consortium for the Study of Religion, Ethics and Society at Indiana University

Greg Cootsona has been awarded a \$2 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation as director of a three-year project entitled Science and Theology for Emerging Adult Ministries (or STEAM)

Student Tova Love has been elected as Student Academic Senator for the college of Humanities and Fine Arts



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come visit us on the 3rd  
floor in our new Humanities  
and Fine Arts building!**

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