

CORH Values – Season 4, Episode 4

Season 4 Episode 4: Student Panel on the Importance of Studying Religion

How can studying Religion help you navigate our diverse and complex society? A panel of future, current and former students discuss how learning about the religions of the world helps to understand a wide range of issues in society today. Topics covered include religion and psychology, healthcare, the prison system, sexuality, business and many more. Join Sarah Gagnebin, Alexandra Kriz, Morgana Gorre-Clancy, Esther Stearns and Mike Jimenez as they discuss these important topics. The event was co-hosted by California State University, Chico and American River College.

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Transcript:

Hello, Welcome to the religion and humanities podcast, produced by the Department of Comparative Religion and humanities, California State University, Chico. I'm your host and chair of the departments. Daniel Veidlinger. We have a special episode for you today. We have recorded a panel of former, current, and future students in our online religious studies program who are going to talk about the importance of studying religion. As you know, religion is an extremely important part of human life. Since time immemorial, even back to our distant ancestors. Along the hominid line. Human beings have been practicing some sort of religion forever. In every culture we know of. There's been religion in every time period we know of there has been religion even in the communist countries where they tried to oppress religion, like in Soviet Russia, there were forms of religion that were maintained undergrounds. Not to mention that communism itself came to look kind of like a religion. So you simply can't escape it. And many of us feel that it's a little unfortunate that it does. The study of religion doesn't get the funding that some other fields get. Because in some quarters, There's a sense in which it's more of a luxury to study religion. But if you look at the world around you, if you open a newspaper or read a news website randomly on any day, you will see a huge amount of articles about religion. As you know, in America like these very few months, there's been a lot of debates about pulling back on some of the abortion rights. And of course, much of that is driven by religious views about it. You see discussion about capital punishment or not. Much of that is driven by religious views about it. Of course, this summer the United States just pulled out of Afghanistan and having spent \$2 trillion there. It's back to square one. Many scholars argue that if there had been a deeper understanding of the religion of that region, we might have been able to handle our time. They're a little bit more effectively rather than trying to force certain Western ways on people that, you know, without a more sensitive understanding of how they were going to react to it, they could have been presented in a different framework that might have been more effective. So those are just some examples of, there's many, many more you can go over where religion plays a very strong role. So without further ado, let me introduce Dr. Bill Zangeneh-Lester who's the head of the religious studies and humanities departments at American River College in Sacramento. Thank you so much and thank you for this introduction. Thank you for hosting this event tonight. We're so excited at American River College to partner with Chico State with specifically with your program. That's a very inspiring program. We've had several conversations. I've worked with some of your predecessors, other folks in your department. And I can say with confidence that this is my favorite Religious Studies department at anywhere in California. Thank you, and I will stand by that this recording setup. Very excited, very happy to be here. So this weekend, as some of you may know, this if we had the confluence, very interesting confluence, right? So we have Passover this weekend, we have Easter this weekend, and Ramadan is still occurring this weekend. So we had the overlap, the three, it was also a full moon this weekend. This prompted the comedian Stephen Colbert to make the job that this weekend was a great opportunity for interfaith werewolves. The confidence of the three bus, the full moon. But in all

seriousness, The, There's also Hindu, Bahai and seek holidays being celebrated. All right, now, there hasn't been a confluence of this many holidays since 1991. So it's a very unique kind of moment in time that we're sharing the space together. So in a very timely night to be having this, to be talking about interfaith work. As, as we heard. There's this idea out there. That religion is out of date and that we live in some kind of post religious society. As a religious influences that have shaped the world have somehow disappeared. And as we also heard, you can turn on the news, open any newspaper, and find out that this is still very much relevant. We live, as you may be aware, in among the most religiously diverse democracies in the world. So it is a part of being, participating in public life. If we are among the most religiously diverse, democracy doesn't have some knowledge about navigating religious diversity. I think it is a critical competency, a critical cultural competency for navigating 21st century democracy in any setting story that's impacted me. Was, I was teaching a world religions class. And, you know, class is starting and one of our Muslim students was holding the door open for everyone. And I joked with her and said, Hey, there's my job to welcome everyone to the class. Please allow me to hold the door and she stops me and she says, Professor, do you know why I'm holding the door open for everyone this morning and I said no, why? And she said she's wearing her job and she says because I have learned in my career as an undergraduate that people have certain opinions about me because I wear my job and I feel obligated to hold the door open for everyone and look them in the eyes to reassure them that I'm not a terrorist. And I feel like it is my responsibility to do that in all my classes. And this, of course, struck a chord with me. Here's a student single-handedly carrying the burden of her entire faith on her shoulders and doing it with a smile. And that was a very powerful reminder that this isn't some abstract thing. Talking about religious diversity isn't an abstract thing. You, in your classes at your job spaces, the DMV, anywhere you go in public, you are encountering religious diversity. We have the largest afghani refugee population in the entire country, is here in Sacramento. The largest seek population in the entire country is in University. Sacramento. And Northern California is a very diverse place. We have a ton of religious diversity that are navigating. So the question is, do you want to wait until you're thrown into a situation where religious diversity is present to, to think about how you want to navigate it. If you're a doctor, do you want to wait until you have among patient who is saying I can't take his medication because it goes against my faith. Do you want to think about it for the very first time in that moment? Or do you want to talk about it ahead of time? And have some critical frameworks so that you can go out there and get whatever job that you want to get or do whatever it is that you want to do with having thought about this ahead of time. And obviously tonight we're here to talk about engaging religious diversity. So we're going to hear ahead of time how people are thinking about the relevance of navigating religious diversity to our lives. So I'm so grateful to be here. And I'm so grateful for all of our presenters who is sharing their very interesting research. I'm so happy and eager to learn from all of you tonight. Thank you for those remarks. Well, so without further ado, let's launch into it. So I will introduce each of our speakers and then they can, they'll speak for a few minutes. And then we will open it up to questions and answers. And probably the best way to watch this if you want, is to click on the View button in the top right and click it onto the speaker so that the speak, the person speaking about moment will be biggest on your screen than everybody else will be a little bit smaller. So we'll start with Esther Stearns. So Esther has worked for many years in corporate America, in the tech and investment industries, and has now gone back to school to get another degree in religious studies, also doing extra work and Greek language and her insights have consistently enriched all the classes that she attempts. And Esther kindly agreed to say some remarks about religion and the world today. So I'd like you to, to invite you to give our first presentation. That's very kind of you. Thank you. Very nice introduction. And yes, as as Dr. Veidlinger said, I spent 30 years in finance and technology and during that whole time dreamed of finding a program like this to attend. So I have to agree too. I think it's the finest one I could find an American and I loved. But, you know, when I started my career, I had a degree in economics and that was a useful degree to have in the financial services industry. I was good with numbers and that was good. But what I found out through 30 years is most of the challenges I faced, most of the skills I needed didn't have to do with numbers. They had to do with people. It was, you know, really what makes most people successful or not in the business world is their ability to interact with a whole bunch of different kinds of people, demonstrate respect for them, earn their trust, and motivate them to do whatever needs to be done for the business. And particularly in the global environment, the complexity

of people you meet. We did some business overseas, I would think not very successfully enlarge part because what I've seen is that often in the United States, we other people spend, other people in other countries spend a lot of time trying to learn who we are. They study, asked, they visit us, they learn about us. They take a lot, weigh more than half the responsibility for understanding and creating the cultural bridge. And what I found is those people I worked with who went the other way, who put as much effort into understanding and bridging cultural differences as people in other countries do with us. They were by far the most esteemed and successful people in the business world globally. And that's where I think gorilla just studies education can be so helpful because religion is so fundamental to the cultures and the people you meet that end. It is so easy to step on toes. It is so easy to assume everybody. I have sat in rooms where people from the United States have made statements like, well, we all believe in separation of church and state. Oh, actually, we don't know what I'm learning. And that there's a complex set of ways people view that. And all of that diversity, all of that understanding people I think is a really important background for the business world. Very specifically also the writing, absorbing of complex topics, critical thinking, your ability to communicate complex ideas, all of these things that I've been learning in this program. I really wish I'd been better at when I worked. And and I think are really good for like if you want to be a customer service, human resources planning and strategy, all those skill sets are going to be useful. Similarly, understanding people and cultural sensitivity for management, for working internationally. For aforementioned, a remote workforce. There's all sorts of jobs out there for people who can work with groups of people in other countries via Zoom. Zoom could actually be a skill set that there's all sorts of jobs for people who can coordinate with teams of people doing work in other countries and who can build trust, confidence, friendship with those people and, and help bring the whole thing together. So I think you may find that after you get your Religious Studies degree, you have to do some work to create understanding on the part of a potential employer as to what you bring to the table. But I have absolutely no doubt that your skills are going to be much more in demand than people may say, What do you study in religious studies floor, you won't get a job that way. I can pretty much guarantee you there are thousands of jobs out there for P, for people who can really work with a diverse group of people. And, and, and I would just, I would specifically also, if you have an interest like fashion or food or finance, research where that in the world that industry does business and focus some of your studies. Make sure you've taken the course that really emerged as if Sri Lanka is an important provider to your industry. Make sure you take the course where you're going to learn about Sri Lanka and who's there and how they think and how they have and, and be very purposeful like that. So I guess that's digest really wanted to make a pitch for humanities majors and Religious Studies majors very specifically to aspire to the business world because I can assure you you are needed to sell me. Thank you. Wonderful. Thank I love I love hearing things like that because I've always felt this way that it doesn't have to be this directly something connected to religion. But there are, there's such diversity in the world, especially in California. You're guaranteed to be working next to people of different religions if you're in an office anywhere. And the more you know, the better, the better it is. So we'll talk more about that after Let's give that the next panelists a chance to talk to you. I'd like to invite Alexandra Kriz to say a few words. She graduated from our program in 2021. Focused her work when she was a student on in theologian use in world religions and their effects on human consciousness should tell us what theologians are for those of you that don't know. And she has served in the army. She's run a dog grooming salon and is now building up an amazing spiritual and mental wellness center called Phoenix Nest. Their mission is, is to create a community of healing and prosperity in and around Chico to help people deal with disaster and trauma in their lives. So Alex, would you like to say a few words? This Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm so excited to see all of my former classmates and my former professors. So like I, I've literally had nights of Tears where I've missed this program. I'm not even joking. I went into a graduate program and I was so grossly disappointed after what I experienced in this program that I actually exited the program because I'm already doing what I want because of the degree that I got through Chico State and figured I don't need those letters behind my name because I'm doing it anyway and I'm doing it very well. And I'm, as it turns out, this program that we've started has been very well received and our communities. So upon graduation, I founded a program called Phoenix Nest Community Project. Hi everybody. And we use a multi-disciplinary approach to mental wellness, including the use of a substance called ketamine. So when used and it's used as an

anesthetic, but when you use it in sub anesthetic doses, it evokes a psychedelic experience. And through that experience, we are able to help people work through their trauma. It carries a 70% success rate in treating PTSD. Treatment resistant depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, OCD, bipolar depression, so on and so forth. I've worked with people ages 15 to 73. And up from actually, I think even a little bit older. It's been remarkable. And through this process, our approach is a little bit different. So in some of the clinics they go and they just put you in a room and they give you the medicine and they call it macaroni. What we take three hours with our clients and We, we use a ceremonial approach. And by learning world religion, we were able to create a set and setting that appeals to, it's not specifically a single religion, it's just the complicity of setting an intention, lighting a candle, using oils that are, were recreated. That they, the recipes are inscribed inside the temple of Osiris and Egypt. And so it's the smells you've never smelled before. We use AI covers and music and then we put you into your experience. So we're altering your senses and all these different ways. But doing it in such a way that you are going inward and experiencing the essence of yourself and being able to cross through potentially some of your trauma if it, if it does arise through a different lens and it's working really well. And it's amazing what I'm seeing. In fact, I'm a little bit tired right now. I just returned from Baltimore. I was flown out by one of our community members to assist him at the hospital. He was at Johns Hopkins and he was having some mental health issues and they were doing they were handling it from the medical model but he was not receiving therapy. And when I arrived I was told it was he was going to be there for another week and a half to two weeks. And what we ended up doing is I brought all of the things that we use in our ceremonial approach prior to administering ketamine. And what we found is that by, by recreating the process where we did the oils we've covered. This has eyes and we play the same music that we use during our experiences at our center. He was able to calm himself despite suffering from horrific anxiety. So the use of ritual in association with something that brings this relief in the sense of joy. It was just enough to be able to trigger him to the point that he was denying the advantage. So it was released on Saturday instead of a week and a half or two weeks later. And and that was pretty miraculous and it's not perfect by any means. But it was something and it's worth exploring further. There's also a lot of people that come in. I see that Professor Lennon's in here. So working with people who have trauma around their sexuality because of their religious upbringings. That is like a huge portion of the population that we work with. I've worked with women that didn't know they were going to menstruate. I mean, so being able to reintegrate women into their femininity, being able to talk to men about their sexuality and their expectations that had been formed through their religious upbringings. Work that we do is so rooted in religion and the understanding of that, that there is no way that I would be doing what I was doing if it was not for this program. I can say that honestly, we have we we treat psychiatrists, we're treating therapists. We have people referring us client's hand over fist because the medical model and the Western approach doesn't work. But what is working is adding meaning to someone's life through a little bit of ceremony and a little bit of ritual in a way that does not offend anyone because of their religious background. We pray with people if it's appropriate. And having that understanding. Of what is okay and what is not okay, allows us to be far more effective than we would be without this, this particular approach. So that's what I do. And again, it would not be happening. We have literally save lives and it is 100% because of this program that we're able to do this work as effectively as we do. Thank you. Fantastic. And again, thanks for all the great work you do. And I've been to the Phoenix Center. It looks great. It's really beautifully laid out. They have a very nice, relaxing and welcoming atmosphere there. And I'm sure there are lots of people who are going to experience spiritual renewal through your Services. And just Alexandra, what is entheogen exactly? And entheogen is a substance usually of plant origin. The one thing about ketamine is it's the one Psychedelic that does not have a plant relative. So even like LSD is related to ergot. So we don't have that with the ketamine, but when it works through some different receptors and everything, but basically in at the agenda is something that alters your state of consciousness, usually of plant origin. But I use that term usually in they're not, doesn't have to. But yeah, it's a psychedelic. It's, it's when, it's the word that we use when we're trying not to terrify conservatives. Okay, gosh, I've put a link to the website of the Phoenix nest in the chat. Okay, Thank you. Well, next I'd like to introduce Sarah Gagnebin who graduated from our very own Chico State Religion Program in 2007. And then she went on to do a masters of divinity at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, where she focused on pastoral

care. And after she graduated, she worked for many years, the Chaplain around north northern California. And then she came back to us to teach and our Religious Studies program here at Chico State. She went full circle. I'd like to welcome her to say a few words. Thank you, Daniel. I appreciate the introduction and I'm a little kind of overwhelmed right now because I was just lucky enough to grow up and Chico and know Chico State and kind of stumble into the Religious Studies Program. And I always knew it was amazing. But now getting to hear how it's amazing to other folks kinda mix Nikhil extra lucky that I was able to participate. So, yeah, hello, my name is Sarah Gagnebin, and I did indeed get a Religious Studies degree from Chico State. And I also got a humanities degree. And so I cannot recommend either more heartily, they're really in cahoots with each other. When I was here, I did not know what I would do with that kind of degree. I was just deeply and endlessly fascinated by religion and by people and how those two things interact. So I was just continually taking those religious studies classes. By the time I graduated, I really wanted to learn with people who were believers. It's really interesting to do comparative religions and learn as sort of an outsider. And so I was interested to go to seminary. So that's where I got my Masters of Divinity, which sounds amazing. And MA also, that was sort of the first time I think that the reality of what I had just done at Chico State hit me because I was not sure what I was doing exactly when I got to grad school, which was a seminary, I found that a couple of things that happened. One, my background in world religions from Chico State meant that as I went to seminary to grad school, I knew more about world religions than some of my professors. That gave me pause. And it also gave me a little bit of a heads up, I think because I was able to understand concepts like theology and concepts like ritual in a much broader sense and a lot more background information about how those things function in people's lives. So it was the first time they understood that because I was in one religious context, a Christian context. How much it benefited me to understand, be on that context. Grad school then was still awakening a high, I have something really good here. The other thing it helped in grad school, of course this that I knew a lot more about Christianity than many of my peers. So just a heads up there. I, I got better grades. More than that. I get better placement. You go into any kind of post grad degree. If you're looking at what you're going to do in life, you will likely get something like a placement. And those are hard to come by. I got mine more easily because of my background in world religions and my placement was as a chaplain. When I was a chaplain, I was working at San Francisco General Hospital which is the areas, I guess most mature, Yes. Trauma one hospital. It's also in the Mission District in San Francisco and answers probably the greatest, widest population of people. So then was the first time when I had an opportunity to see how powerful the background and religious studies could be. At this point, I was working with people who were taking their last breaths. And because it was a trauma one, a lot of times these moments were pretty intense and there was not a lot of time to daily, daily. And a lot of the people that I was working with, again, we're in a really stressful and imminent positions. So the background meant that if somebody was a Hindu man and he was taking his last breaths, I could prevent a nurse from actually cutting a sacred thread off of his body. Which I had to do that as a real story. Another time we realized that one of our patients through a struggling, especially because she was a Muslim patient and she was not used to being alone in a room with a grown man who was not horizontally. And the nurses kept sending in a man. So just to be able to understand why those people were uncomfortable, that was a big deal. And then every single day I met people of no faith tradition or a varying faith traditions in any state of life. Because I had this background and world traditions, I was able to serve them more effectively. To be clear, it meant that a lot of times I kept the hospital from getting sued. Also, it meant that I might be able to uphold some of families most sacred and precious traditions, and their last moment of life. Those things felt deeply important to me. And I do not think that I would have had the success at all to do those things. And I may have hurt more people than I hoped. Hi, not have the background. That's my work, but a small plug I realized also in my work. But hospitality industries and hospital and healthcare industries hire most successfully from people with comparative religions degrees. Again, mostly because hotels, hospitality industry served many people and they do not want to get sued. And hospitals also serve many people and they rely on the people that work for them to make sure that they're adhering to really delicate processes and non-religious institutions and religious people. Thank you. Certainly, as I've been saying, I think that there's so many spaces for people with a deep knowledge of religion and culture to work in today's America. And they can contribute really powerful things to the

environments. So I'm glad that you, you endorse that idea. Sarah, Next, I'd like to introduce Mike Jimenez is who is graduating students at American River College. And he'll be joining us soon in the religion program here at Chico State. He worked for many years in the field of criminal justice and eventually became the president of the Correctional Peace Officers Association, which is one of the largest prison workers unions in the entire country. We're really excited to have Mike coming into our program. And let's hear what Mike has to say about his thoughts on these issues. Good evening, everyone. My name is Mike Jimenez and as Dr. Veidlinger told you, I am currently a student at American River College. I am studying under Dr. Bill Zangeneh-Lester, And I just want to say real quickly that you saw the enthusiasm with which he represented this program. That's part of the reason that I am so excited and interested in going to this program. So I need to give him props for, for hitting me down this path. I'm also I've been applied and I had been admitted to Chico State to start studying in the fall. And I'm really looking forward to that. I want to tell you that I'm honored and I'm very humbled to be on this panel of such remarkable people. This is a great opportunity for me. I'm here tonight to talk to you about how religious studies intersect with the criminal justice system. And as Dr. Veidlinger mentioned, I was a correctional officer for 28 years now and I was also for 12 years of that time, I was president of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association. The story I'm going to talk about today, my narrative has to do with Ramadan. And because this event is occurring during Ramadan, I think it has particular relevance and salience to what is going on presently. In order to set the stage, I need to let you know, I grew up in a little town in Kansas and northwestern corner. It's a little farming town of about 3500 people. My religious diversity, I thought we were religiously diverse community. I, myself, I grew up in a Protestant household, but in my hometown of 3500 people, there was indeed a Lutheran Church and Baptist Church, Methodist church, and even a Catholic church. So I thought I was pretty well rounded, are in touch with the world of religion. To say the least. None of this prepared me for what I was about to experience or the experiences that I would undertake as a correctional officer working in the most diverse state in the nation. I had never had occasion to interact with other religions other than those Christian faith. As a matter of fact, I never even a tin that one of the churches, the other churches in my community, as that just wasn't practiced in my hometown. This story is about Ramadan when I still wore uniform. So I want you to know it's a little bit dated, but I think the information is still very applicable today. At that time, Ramadan was occurring during the month of August. And so you do your math, you can find out how long ago that was. But during the month of August when it was also the anniversary of the one of the most violent insurrections within the California Department of Corrections. So throughout history and that anniversary during the month of August, all of this gave us tension. And the fact that Ramadan was occurring during that month only gave us a reason to have heightened suspicion and more distrust and more suspicion about what was going on. Unfortunately, that was the approach that we were allowed to have. It was out of ignorance and I speak on behalf of myself, it was out of ignorance that I approached Ramadan with an air of suspicion and distrust, naive approach. People that we'll practice in lab. And it was largely because I didn't understand it or know what was going on. And it was also because there was cause for larger congregations of inmates to get together, especially wants to fast was broken. And that always made correctional staff nurse. And I want to tell you that the issue of suspicion and distrust as an element of a larger narrative that are neither have time nor space to talk about this evening. But it is fundamental in the relationship between those incarcerated and those who are charged with incarcerating those individuals. So hopefully I'll get to talk about that at some point in time. But my ignorance, a very steep slope ports in difference and also intolerance. When I say it was an accommodated, that was what it was was accommodated. We allowed we provided for different dietary needs, we provided for different programmatic changes and that was it was they were accommodated. Nobody ever reached out to make a better understanding or establish a better relationship or, or to try to make a connection about what was going on. In my ignorance and in deference. Indeed, I did what EB Tylor, what I've written his book, acts of faith, describe as I betrayed my own face by treating people other differently than I would like to be treated myself. And, you know, as I sit here today, I'm a little bit embarrassed about that. But what I learned in the process and open your Samson clearly through my religious studies program is Ramadan was never going to bend, been feared from the very start. It was, like I said, out of ignorance. I, and I wish that I had known about Ramadan being a peacefully, that Muhammad on being a respectful about Ramadan being an eventful

recalibration of an individual for the next for the upcoming year. And I wish I had and so much more about it. If I had done that, if I can, if I can take a minute to talk to my self as that young man, I would, I would tell myself to take a minute and try to understand somebody else's belief system, somebody else's values and make that connection. When you take time to learn about what somebody else commits to what they believe in, it makes a connection and a much different level of human being. Then what you can do by just having a conversation. I tell myself to take time to build bridges instead of bunkers. In doing so, I would have made myself a better employee, a better officer, and a better person. I had the opportunity and I'm taking advantage of that opportunity now to have a better impact on my community. The community and serving now I should've done it at that time and that a better had a better impact on the community. I was trying to serve them. But now I'm able to, and I wish I could have then by certainly able to have a more positive impact on my own humanity at this point in time. And it's a pleasure to be on board in this program. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mike. I really appreciate your words and your sensitivity towards the religions of others and your desire to learn more about them in order to improve the prison systems here. And I really am happy to hear that you were the head of the union of the peace officers because he seemed like a really great guy and somebody that I would love to see in a position like that. Making sure that everybody sensitivity towards those who are having difficult times in life to say the least. So thank you. All right. Our final panelist is Morgana Gorre Clancy, and she is a current student in our program, studying religion along with multicultural and Gender Studies. She has a very full schedule. She's the treasurer of the comparative religion and humanities students Society, which is a society that we have for the students in our program to meet in a casual way, talk about interesting things on their own time. They sometimes have dinners together, movie nights, trivia nights, outings. It's a great way to. They'll get in touch with your other students and learn a little bit about religion and humanities as you do it in a fun and relaxing environment. And she's also the program coordinator for the gender and sexuality Equity Coalition. So I'd like to invite more gal at, say a few words. I work on a very crampy and I am in my final semester here at Chico State, I started minoring in comparative religion my sophomore year after taking women in religion for my major in Hadoop, me and to the world of all the different spirituality than religion. It will do something super interesting to me at the time. And I think, like I said earlier, I haven't really had like a solid plan for what I was going to do with my degree. But throughout all of my studies with everything out tickets so many intersections of it through our magnetic study. So like political files, I was going to major in that as well, but I am a very dv. I only took a few classes, but I did write a whole essay. And the NX actually, the Bible within our laws and all of that, especially with abortion rights. I had worked for quality california in the past where I got the chance to work on some, build our bigger in to sienna for human rights within our laws in a lot of that, like I said, WE religion as well. I guess when people ask me why study comparative religion, my first son, my buddy answer is just that I could have well educated comebacks for like homophobic insect, that's great, but Facebook, but always it's really important to me because I want to know exactly what I'm saying and what I'm standing up for something. If someone is saying, well, my religion says this, and it's rooted in some kind of hatred. It's really important for me to kinda look at where that's coming from and working on that because they're not, you can't just generalize the one who had religions, so their religion and especially within America today. So with my leader of gender and sexuality, I am really focus within those aspects within my study. Really combating harmful stereotype somewhere maybe eroded and religion, like I had mentioned. And just also gender and religion is so huge. And just to look up, It's really interesting to me about the auto last things and religion and growing up with their identity, even how their spirituality and religion actually forms. There are identity of one cell. We talked about like purity ball, bag or menstrual purity. And also like, just, like Sarah said earlier, childbirth, just your knowledge of Berlin and really important, helped create a space for people to annex day. I didn't feel like that they could be open with you about their needs and what? Because your spirituality is really a huge part of your identity. So yeah, I am studying all of this and my favorite class, women and religion. I love talking about. Here means tail. When it comes to the law class, I took it with Lucky my freshman year and yeah, I went through the whole entire Holy Bible and the book and I wrote that essay that till they are so proud of, you know, four years ago. And so I just love talking about religion and now that I'm applying for jobs and looking for different areas to work in, like the Rape Crisis Center on domestic violence

services, any other advocacy. It's really helpful to have that background and to be there for everybody else. Okay, thank you very much, Fergana. And again, that is yet another field in which religion plays a really important role in gender and sexuality issues. So many people's attitudes towards these are shaped in some way by religion. So even outside of one's overtly religious life, there are still many religious ideas percolate into people don't think of themselves as religious, just underlie their attitudes towards these issues in today's society. So learning about it in detail and understanding the history of the different views of these issues and the different religions gives you incredible power in today's society to really explain your own views about it more clearly to people who might be opposed to your ways of thinking or whatever. So I'm really glad you brought up this topic, right. Religion applies to the work world, of course, to the spiritual world, offers a world of sexuality and identity to the world of prisons, of psychology. All of these fields are deeply impacted by religion. And I hope that our presenters have helped you guys appreciate that studying religion does not necessarily mean that you're going to go on to be a priest. You know, people say, Well, I don't want to be a priest or a rabbi, so I'm not going, I mean, of course you can. That's another possibility. It's just that, that's only one of many, many, many possibilities that you can do with the degree. And of course, I do want to point out that we are state funded university. So of course, our department is not teaching the religions from the point of view of faith. We are teaching them as objectively as we can in a scholarly manner. Of course, you are free to believe whatever you want and you're free to go on. If you are a deeply religious person, you're free to go on to become a religious leader in your own tradition if you want. But that's not the main focus of our department. We focus on studying religions from an academic, an objective standpoint again, in as much as one can be objective about these things, why don't we open up the floor to some of our guests to come in and would like to ask the questions. So you can either just open your mic and ask it, or if you don't have to make the word squarely, or if you would rather type it into the chat. So go ahead and type into the chat or ask a question on your mike. If we have. I mean, I've got plenty of questions in a way, but I'll give you guys a minute to think of questions before I ask them on your behalf. I'll just while folks are thinking of something, I'll just share a thought and a question. So I particularly appreciate it. I will obviously everyone's contributions. This is such a wonderful speakers tonight. Thank you all for your important contributions. All the beautiful thing is that your ways that you're applying this work so meaningfully in your lives. It's really rewarding to here and really inspiring to hear how you're putting in your knowledge to use. And I have still kind of laughing. I particularly appreciate it more Ghana when you said that, part of the reason why I like having this knowledge is so that you can have snappy comebacks for family members and others. I don't want to walk by that one. That's an important one. Because we live in such a strange time with the advent of the Internet and platforms like Twitter and everything that we see online. You know, there's, there's a platform for folks who, you know, for good and for better and worse who haven't had platforms before. We have a lot of opinions out there. A lot more opinions. Some of them are informed, many of them are not, right. And so in a world where you have to navigate Twitter and you have to navigate Instagram and you have to navigate all these kinds of nonsense that people will say without having research anything. The ability to have a come back for that is not to be walked by. It's actually very important. If you're someone who's concerned with meaningful dialogue, someone who's concerned with authentic relationships, whatever that means to you. So I just wanted to say that that was that was an important point, but I wanted to unpack it because they think that having, not, when someone says, You know, all Muslims, all Jews, all Christians are x, right? And then insert stereotype. That's a problem. That's a big problem. And if you are someone there, if you are someone who has the knowledge to see through that, you can do something about it. I shared about the student who's holding the door open for all these other folks so that she can reassure them she's not a terrorist. She had been doing by her entire undergraduate career. And how many people walked by it, not knowing that she was doing. How many other professors didn't know either student was holding the door and US by a doctor village or an I or we serve the public. There were only one set of public servants. As we've heard. We have folks work in healthcare and in psychology, and in criminal justice. And so there's infinite, infinite, infinite ways that you're applying this knowledge. So wanted to share that, but a question I really appreciated, Sarah, when you're saying that you had to stop a nurse from cutting a, a sacred thread at someone's last moments. I'm wondering if you could tell us just a little bit more about that experience. What happened? How did that go down? That's that's that

sounded very important. I know we have a lot of folks going into health care. Would you mind elaborating on that? A little? Certainly. Yeah. I would think you're returning to work on this point. I did see that there was a chat question related to that. So I'll just pin that as well. Sure. So just a bit of elaboration and right. Because chaplains in the hospital do often get hold when someone is imminent. Perhaps they might not make it through the day. In this case, in Sacramento is may well know there's a pretty thriving Hindu population. She's really great. Yeah. However, not everybody is really well-versed in what some Hindu ritual might mean. So this means that for some adult men, they receive after a kind of a spiritual ritual for them something very important that they receive a thread that they'll wear often under their shirt, kinda forever. It might fall off after time and that's okay. But you're not meant to cut it because it can be for some people and really spiritually important thread that they wear like a sash. So because this man had come in and his family had come in and he was experiencing cardiac issues. That was the nurses main reaction was to be able to take off his shirt, take off anything hindering them, and perhaps try to render life-saving aide. But I was able to notice that the nurse coming in, of course, she was doing her job perfectly, came in with scissors. And as she was coming at the man with scissors, I heard his family Yelp screen. And it became really clear that they didn't want that to happen and the nurse was just an autopilot. So I jumped in and I just asked her if she could please find any way at all around cutting that even if it meant removing it. And then very quickly asked, is he going to make it through the day? And if he's not coming, make sure he dies with that on. And not really, it took what, thirty-seconds and people were still able to do what they needed to. But knowing that that thread should not be cut and seeing the distress it would've caused the family. Means I was really happy to be there and be able to think very quickly about how we might mitigate that situation. And allow this person to have those last moments wearing something that's really deeply meaningful to him and his family. Wow, thank you. Thank you. Keeps so you've got a lot of questions here on the chat, so I'll start going through some of that. So one person wanted to ask more Ghana if she could think of a more specific example of a situation in which there was some social situation when her actual knowledge gained about sexuality and religion from the program came into play, maybe somebody said something and you counted them with some actual knowledge. Can you think of an example? I actually have so many. A lot of them are just like one-on-one, but I am a certified facilitator. I went in circles program on campus. I've been doing, I think my freshman year as well after taking it as a student. But basically, we're sort of like We're not a therapy group, but we're more of like we focus on are being our most well as the web and anyone who identifies a little while then, a lot of those times we do have different students from different backgrounds. And a lot of the times we have people who express past. I Gothic sexual violence. I have to do with religion. And it's really hard when you are also a student sitting, then someone is telling you their story. And then there's somebody else who are also like, it's not like they don't feel bad about it. But in their mind they feel like their religion and what saves them. And then this other person feel like religion. And what hurt though. So we have that issue will rise. And it was something where other facility or I forget how to step in and be like low, like we need to separate them. Lesson, I really didn't mean that you need to give them advice that maybe will help you. But with them and they know how. But yeah, just other facility here I had to step in and just kind of lay ground roles between what religion, spirituality is within each other. And it doesn't necessarily have to be an organized religion or spirituality. That is what is connecting you if that makes guides. And like other ways, she was my job as the program coordinator. We have a lot of people who come up and ask for help with advocacy in several different, very violent that the fave and some people are quick to blame it on. They can't go for help because of their religion, of holding them back. They feel like the blame it on them. And I a lot of triumph and sat down with them and hello, what? Have them break it down and I'll never call them may not be what it is, but let's unpack this. Why? What exactly had your religion telling you? Stuff like not good. If there's a lot of insulted where I've kinda like even that not true about your religion. Or if someone like, well, the Bible says like homosexuality, it was then. Of homosexuality. The term was coined until the 19th century in all your sacred texts or from the seventh century. So hold on. Is that something you're coming up with based on what you're reading or what it actually being said. But it's really nice to have that background and kind of like know what I'm talking about when I'm stepping in and trying to advocate for the people in any way without belittling anybody else's religion or spirituality. Okay. Thank you. Yeah, that's a great answer. Thank you. I necessarily want to ask Mike

about the other the other correctional officers. Do you think that there would be acceptance amongst them to learn more about other religions? I personally believe that correctional officers, as a rule would be very open to the to the humanity in bold in the discussion that we're having. I believe that most officers get into their job because they have an altruistic you the world and they want to make a difference and they try to make a difference. But the system itself, with regard to that question, the system is designed to not allow you to make a difference. The employee, not one person within the employee as the employer, the employer as a whole big the state of California wants to establish division between incarcerated and those who are holding them incarcerated. They want to vary pretty distinct line between the two. And all training is designed to reinforce that divide, that chasm between the two cultures incarcerated and those holding those and culturing. But I believe that anecdotally and I met a lot of officers throughout my experience as president of the CTP. Away, there were and I believe that the overwhelming majority tried to do the right thing and they're interested in doing the right thing. And doing something for humanity and doing something for the community as well. But there are too many, there are a lot of bridges. And like I said, I could talk about that at great length. About what the design of the us versus them. How that's foundational to the entire society within a prison. Values like understanding and compassion in the prison environment or not. Those things that we in society seen as valuable or see as valuable or not viewed as having value within the prison system, they are viewed as being kindness is viewed as weak as, and I'll just leave it at that. And if you ever step on a yard, want to know who the kindness in. Nobody wants to be known as the kindest inmate, and nobody wanted to be known as the kindest officer either. But I think there's something to be said in that that if the employer encouraged and, and and engage in that type of inner, inner communication, those kind of skills that could advance the objective or the mission of the department. I think they could do a lot for not even the people that they're currently, that we're currently housing, but for the society as a whole when they're released. And I do believe that in answer to the question in short, yes. I believe the officers are interested in doing the right thing by their own beliefs, by the system and by the incarcerated, they're charged with keeping I've got a question for Alexandra. I ne we've been hearing about trauma and serving communities with trauma and especially I was asked of Mark and I'd like to extend it to Alexandra. To Alexandra, You mentioned that you serve some of the LGBT LGBTQIA plus community in some of your work. And as you mentioned and as Morgan, I mentioned, that when serving the LGBTQIA plus community, when it comes to religion, there can be a lot of trauma there. So I'm wondering how do you have any examples of how your knowledge helped you to more effectively serve the LGBTQIA. Plus so with the work that I've done, I've actually done more work with some younger people that are non-binary. Like I have a young one that's 15 and identifies as non-binary and habits so much experienced, necessarily like that. I have experienced it more, not so much with the clients as I have with practitioners who are religious and Christian. And in fact, I mean, it's something that came out of their mouth was so appalling that I just kinda looked at them and was like, Well, my understanding is that Jesus lived and unconditional love and that God is the one that gets to, to judge. So why is it that you are being so judgmental and hateful of somebody? I said, Why, Why aren't you looking at somebody with compassion? Why aren't you looking at them with an open heart? Why are you looking at them from this lens of judgment and hatred? And so more than anything, the way that I view religion is more from the perspective of if this is your leader and this is the person that you are falling following, how would that person treat them like if you are a Christian and you're being hateful, is that would Jesus would do? No, it's not because there's just not a not a thing. As far as supporting LGBTQ IA people. It's been not so much religious persecution that they've experienced. From that perspective. It hasn't been so much faith-based that I've worked with personally. But I will say that I've seen it so much more from the practitioner side and more like have taken kinda this defense mechanism to create a safe container to ensure that people are not entering the container, that might bring that energy to the space. And we do have practitioners, you know, that, that are part of that community themselves and making sure that people will are supported with somebody that can truly relate to the experience. So much of what we do is more based around their their personal growth and development. Like you don't have to be a licensed therapist to work with us. You just have to have done your work and how to, you know, What's your story and where are you at now? And we find that we get far better results because of the relational aspect rather than the power dynamic that may come with the therapist and client

relationship. We we really operate more from the heart space than we do from the other side. I'm not to say that therapists don't operate from the heart space. We just, we have so much more ability to go into these depths that others don't. And we're very mindful to make sure that people feel 110% supported through their experience. Thank you. You know, that's, that's so powerful to think that in other practitioners will benefit from kind of checking themselves on their biases. Because how can you serve a population if you, if it's in conflict with some beliefs that perhaps you haven't examined. And so it sounds like you're able to create a space for you. Both. Say, it doesn't really say that. Is that really part of it? I mean, imagine how many people who could be harmed by this practitioner who was harboring this belief. How effectively are they able to serve a population that they are not being able to see because I haven't examined their own beliefs. So the fact that I'm hearing you say that you're able to create a space, even have the conversation that sounds transformative and what are our entire, our entire foundation is operating through unconditional love, creating a container of unconditional love. And if you carry biases like that, you're not a container of unconditional love where somebody is going to feel safe to really do the deep work that they need to do to release the trauma that's been holding them back. Fantastic. And so there was another question for you about, as a chaplains, have you experienced families that have two different religious backgrounds? And the family started arguing about how the patient ought to be treated. Well, the patient maybe I'm conscious of this thing. Well, we should do these rituals. Are those rituals all the time? Yeah, I haven't quite often. I'm in many different ways that we're sometimes family members who are concerned about the health and well-being of the patient. So in wood asked me if I would try and convert them. Of course I would not do that. There's definitely been family arguments about what rituals to do as somebody is taking their last breaths, whether or not they should be Catholic rituals are non-Catholic rituals comes up quite a bit. And then afterward as well, There's wishes to be carried out. And so while a patient may have wanted something, it's important to be able to navigate with family, what they are going to do and what they're comfortable with. I'd like to ask a question for Esther. I know that you're taking some additional languages, right? You're studying Greek as well? Yes. And the ISO. So everybody we do have language study, it's usually done on an individual or very small class basis. I've taught Sanskrit a number of times. A doctor, why Rick has taught Greek. We've taught Hebrew. It depends on what the need is. So that's kind of on an as-needed basis. But between us, I did a survey a couple months ago. In the faculty. Between us we speak 18 languages, which is pretty amazing. So we have 8000 languages amongst the faculty. And Esther, I was wondering, did you feel that studying the ancient Greek gives you a different window into reading something like the New Testament or other texts in Greek that you wouldn't get in a translation? Oh, well, yes, because actually it turns out that some of the translations are just outright wrong. It's kind of stunning really. So I, I, I studied Greek in high school and college and dreamed of getting back to it. And so and tried to keep it up for all those years. And then I picked up Hebrew too. I'm not as good with Hebrew. But even with Hebrew, I have found things and it's like, well, okay, I just don't that is not what it says. And so, and I'm also really kind of interested in particularly how language around sexuality and marriage and infidelity and so forth doesn't translate well between cultures. So a word that means one thing in one culture. Just doesn't mean the same thing in another culture because there's a different value system at play. And so, so that's been really, I mean, it's an incredibly geeky thing to be interested in, but it's, it's, it's been very educational. And Jed, who I do greet with my Greek, has gotten so much better. I can read, you know, it's been pretty phenomenal. Actually. Had a question for us there. Briefly, if I may ask, sir, can you tell us how does religion intersect and when has ever religion intersected with finance? Well, I actually, I'm also kind of interested in this whole question of how religions fund themselves. I think there's a lot to understand about the economic. If you understand who it is that really funds religion. Who's giving due diligence, why they are, what they're getting for that I think there's frankly a lot. And later in mice, after I get more of a base, I'm hoping to spend some time on that. But even more importantly, in a more day-to-day sense, you really can't do business with people in other countries unless you understand how they think about money. And a lot of that is embedded with their religious attitudes. I mean, I said our global efforts weren't very successful and they were not at all. And partly because we really did not understand views about you, sorry. You know, things that aren't a real lending money to people, which is not really a problem and secular America, but is a big deal and other countries and we missed a lot of cultural cues that cost us to do. It's unproductive things. And like I say,

people are so nice to Americans there, so deferential. They won't there because of our power and money in somebody business situations that we can be oblivious to them and they don't want to say anything because we've got the and so we're just these clueless people stumbling through and now oh, yes, yes, yes. But really we're missing a lot about it. Is that can it make sense? So that's extremely helpful. I think the, the way that religious beliefs have been tied to lending money, as he can't understand the history of financing our bank without understanding that. And as you pointed out, so importantly, that's still a factor in many countries right now. So if you're going to do anything with international finance, you better have some religious literacy to inform that. Yes, yes, how banking laws are very embedded in how people feel about money and all different in every country. Not to mention that the word credits comes from the word Credo to believe beds, a religious concept that you have faith in the person's ability to pay you back, but is connected to religious ideas of faith. Not to mention that money, paper money was invented in China by basically a Buddhist monks who used it for various transactions. And of course they invented paper as well in order to have a better medium and on which to print the Buddhist texts. But not to mention, the printing press was invented both in China and in Germany, in both cases, only to Prince religious tax them and that's why they were invented and okay, maybe we'll print some other ideas someday on them. Basically, they figured we can use these things to express religious ideas in greater numbers by just printing things and getting them out there. So religion has been at the basis of so many developments. Not just in philosophy, but in science and technology and everything that we really deal with today. And sometimes people don't appreciate that enough. I think I would argue that science is a religion at this point where Sam, well, there's no doubt, Yeah. Although again, and there's lot of aspects of religion that rely on evidence and not faith, right? So people think that all religion means that you just believe whatever you read. But no, there's much more to it than just that. Of course. Many people don't know that when the Big Bang Theory was developed, there's a lot of opposition from scientists to it because they thought it sounded too much like the Bible. And they didn't want to endorse what the Bible says, The Big Bang Theory. Before that, do you know what scientists thought? How did scientists think the world began before the Big Bang theory became popular in the 1950s. How did most scientists think the world began? Any idea? They didn't think it began. They thought it had always existed since time eternal. The idea was that it never started, it just always existed for return. And the big banks that no, there was 1 when it exploded out. And they said, well, that's a little bit too much like the Bible. Religions can also be applicable to the film industry WHO absolutely In fact, we're starting a new course next semester, everybody, religion and film. We're going to be doing religion and film. We had ten years ago and people loved that course. So we're trying to build it up again. So keep your eyes out for that. Religion applies to film, music, to novels, to arts. I mean, how much I was up until 200 years ago, basically every art piece everywhere in the world was in some way connected to with it. So I mean, it plays a huge role in so many fields. It's really a great idea to learn more about it. So thank you so much everybody. We've enjoyed having you all as students. We enjoy having you currently have students. And we look forward to having others of you asked it someday in the future. If you'd like to learn more about the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities, please go to our website at [CSU Chico.edu slash CORH](http://CSUChico.edu/slash/CORH). That's [CSU CH ICO.edu slash CORH](http://CSUChico.edu/slash/CORH). I want to point out that the opinions expressed here and do not necessarily reflect those of the faculty and staff of our department.