



CORH CONNECTION:

Message from the chair:

Dear students, colleagues, alumnae, and friends of the department,

My first year as department chair has come to a close and I want to express my gratitude for all the generous help I've received over the past year, especially from former chairs Joel Zimelman and Jed Wyrick, and our new ASC, Shereen Baker. Without them, I never would have made it through!

2017-18 was a big year of changes and absences, as members of our small department continued to serve in leadership roles across campus. Kate McCarthy was appointed Interim Dean of Undergraduate Education last summer and will continue in that role in the coming academic year. Jed Wyrick, who served as Chair of the Academic Senate this past year, was re-elected for the coming year. Jason Clower will continue as the Asian Studies program advisor and as coordinator of the Heath and Wellness Pathway. Daniel Veidlinger and I continue to serve on the Humanities Center Board, and I have been appointed to the Master Plan Working Group, responsible for charting the university's next ten years.

This past semester, Bruce Grelle entered his first year of the Faculty Early Retirement Program (FERP) and Daniel Veidlinger was on sabbatical doing research around the world, so those two were also sorely missed during Spring semester. Finally, in our list of changes, Jeanne Lawrence (lecturer in Humanities) announced her retirement: congratulations Jeanne!

This year we added some wonderful new lecturers to our department. Lee Gilmore (PhD, General Theological Union) and Vanessa Avery (PhD, University of Exeter) taught online RELS courses for us. Heather Altfeld (MFA in Creative Writing from CSU, Chico) and Ray Barnett (retired CSU Chico Biology Professor) taught on-campus Humanities courses.

Last fall we launched our new Certificate in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations and saw our first students enroll in that program. The certificate was developed by Kate McCarthy and includes courses from many departments across campus.

I wish you all a productive, fun-filled, and relaxing summer!

Sarah M. Pike, CORH Chair

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Luke Davies

**Feb. 15 & 16—Luke Davies,
“An Evening of Journeys”**

Interview with Luke Davies

By Daniel Veidlinger

Along with the Humanities Center and Writer's Voice at CSU Chico, the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities co-sponsored screenwriter Luke Davies' visit to campus on February 15 and 16. Davies spoke about his experiences working on the screenplay for the academy award nominated movie *Lion* and read from the autobiography of Saroo Brierley on which it is based. He also read from his screenplay, showed clips of the actual movie, and discussed how it evolved during each step, providing us with a clear picture of the process of turning a story into a movie. For his second lecture, Davies gave an evocative reading from his recent poetry and novels including excerpts from *Totem* and *God of Speed*.

Daniel Veidlinger: I am here with Luke Davies, who is the Oscar nominated screenwriter for the movie *Lion*, a heartwarming true story about a man's journey to find his birth family in India after having been raised in Australia. Luke has also written a number of acclaimed novels including *Candy* and *God of Speed*, as well as several award-winning collections of poetry, including *Totem* and *Interferon Psalms*. Hi Luke and welcome to Chico. It was really great to have you here. Everybody enjoyed your talks and it looks like you've got a lot of exciting things in the pipeline.

Luke Davies: I had a lovely time here, thank you very much.

DV: Let's begin by talking about religious language, images and biblical tropes that might have entered into some of your poetry recently. Did you think consciously - for example in the *Interferon Psalms* but also in other works - about trying to use this mode of discourse or is it something you feel is just part of your writing style that you don't think about?



LD: Well I think that growing up Catholic as a choir boy in one's early years is something that gets into your bones and in some kind of subconscious way in terms of the language of the liturgy makes a deep impact on the way one thinks about language. For me what happened more overtly was becoming a poet in my teenage years and going to university to study English literature and becoming obsessed with the sixteenth and seventeenth century metaphysical poets. At some level I would say that the musicality of the King James Bible and the glory of that particular moment in the history of the English language where all these people came together and made the language ring out like a bell that echoes to this day, that had a knock-on effect in terms of incantatory musicality. In a book like *Interferon Psalms* I just wanted to be playful with that kind of language and to operate in this high register of mock or perhaps actual seriousness and to mix it with this kind of low register of idiom and colloquial phrasing.

DV: You are so right that the Bible is such an influential piece of literature. Sometimes people don't appreciate that. In fact, Bruce Grelle who teaches here is a specialist on religion in the public school systems and he has studied the problem of teachers being afraid to teach the Bible as literature because they don't realize that it is a perfectly acceptable topic, as long as you don't insist to the students that the stories are literally true. The upshot is that students in America today are not religiously literate and have often never studied the Bible even though these stories have shaped our society and the language has shaped the whole way English itself has developed.

LD: Biblical literalism as a form of religious belief is to me one of the things that causes many of the world's problems today. I love what Joseph Campbell once said, that people who are literalists are not understanding the intent of texts and the glory of metaphor as a pathway to your own way of living your own life mythically. He added that to be a literalist or fundamentalist is the equivalent of going into a restaurant and eating the menu not the food.

DV: That is a great image, I will keep that in mind! So, you did work on the movie *Lion* on location in India and of course India is known as a great spiritual marketplace with many different ancient religious traditions. I wonder what you felt you learned about religion in India while you were there?

LD: At a gut level the extraordinary thing about the experience of being in India, for me, is that the poverty is so extreme that the basic everyday surface levels of pleasantness, warmth, affability, friendliness and happiness that you witness must somehow be connected to the acceptance of what is going on and engagement with what is on some deep level. I've never experienced chaos like the chaos of being a human being moving through time and space in India and I've never experienced or observed that kind of poverty.

DV: I was definitely struck by the difficulties of life in poverty in India and then seeing how the people are able to live within that, it kind of creates a spirituality all of its own, a seeking after happiness that is by necessity non-materialistic.

LD: Now, in terms of the Biblical literalism we were just talking about, Hinduism seems to me to separate itself categorically and conceptually from the other major religious traditions in the sense that many of the others are quite specific and rigid at the basic levels of telling you what to believe, whereas Hinduism is like a cacophony of infinite possibilities, infinite stories, infinite loops, infinite regressions.

DV: So, your first novel *Candy* deals in a moving and evocative way with your struggles with drug addiction and there is research that has come out recently comparing those who are addicted to the high given by drugs to those who are seeking peak experiences through religion. Perhaps they are trying to seek something that religious people are also seeking – an elevated experience that helps one to get beyond oneself, so I wonder if you have ever thought about the connections between religious thinking and drug addiction?

LD: Yes, actually I have thought about that a lot and as a former heroin addict I feel that it is an insightful and helpful way of viewing how this all began – this thing that led to a destructive and catastrophic decade in my own life. I don't know what it is for other people, but personally my earliest experiences were beautifully ecstatic in the mystical understanding of ecstasy like those I have read about in St Teresa and St John of the Cross. Addiction is trying to chase after something – an ecstatic communion, let's say - that can never really be retrieved, and in that sense it is really Biblical, like trying to re-enter the Garden of Eden. That is why I feel like the experience of getting clean – and this is my Catholic childhood coming into it – was like this: I stopped using drugs and I am in this garden and God says you can have anything you want now, but you can't have the fruit from that tree, and so then I go "Argh, OK... damn, but I'll try." And that is the pact. And I haven't had the fruit from that tree in 28 years. And my life has become better even though that fruit was my favorite thing.

DV: You have done a nice job of framing this experience in religious terms, I am glad I asked that question.

LD: Well, you know I guess I would say that I have gone through my life to find that I am basically an atheist. Nonetheless I sometimes experience the world as being utterly Godsoaked and so my kind of atheism is that I feel very aligned with Spinoza who was kind of an atheist and a heretic who was kicked out of the Jewish community for his views but he seems to have been saying in a proto-panteistic way not that there is no God but rather that there is only God and that everything else is merely components of God.

DV: Yes, perhaps there is only one kind of stuff in the universe.

LD: And that one thing might as well be God.



Luke Davies (interview continued)

DV: What sort of career opportunities do you think there might be for students who study religion?

LD: I am a great believer in following your passion. When I went to university in Australia in the 1980s I knew what I wanted to do: a so-called useless degree studying literature, but even my dad, who was very supportive, said that I should really do a law degree. But back then if you got a good college education you could go on to get a good job, regardless of the subject you studied. Now there is so much pressure to do so-called practical things. I have always tried to follow my passion and ignored the idea that I needed something to provide me with stability and I have had to appreciate that I might live in poverty at points. From very early on in life I had thought about what is to be done with existence in the face of its unbelievable shortness, and so it helps to try and be of that mind in your life. Then you might not make decisions that you regret on your deathbed like “dang! I wish I had gone for a few more walks.”

DV: Well thank you so much for delivering some great talks here and for taking the time to discuss these issues with us. We wish you all the best in your future endeavors.



Totem Poem
by Luke Davies



Pilgrimages

ON APRIL 2, CORH CO-SPONSORED A HUMANITIES CENTER TALK BY ANTHROPOLOGIST SIMON COLEMAN: "HOW PILGRIMAGE DEFINES OUR WORLD: AN IDEA, A FIELD, AND A PRACTICE"



Simon Coleman, Chancellor Jackman Professor,
University of Toronto

On April 11, as a follow-up to Simon Coleman's talk, Sarah Pike, CORH Chair, organized a panel on "**Pilgrimage and Tourism**," co-sponsored with the Humanities Center. The multi-disciplinary panel included **Pike, Jesse Dizard (Anthropology), William Nitzky (Anthropology), Matthew Stone (Recreation), and Corey Sparks (English)**. The panelists discussed the meanings and nuances of pilgrimage, sacred journey, and tourism. In examining sacred and profane journeys from medieval times to the present, along with the motives behind such journeys, the panel focused on the question, "Are there differences between pilgrimage and tourism, and if so, what are they?" Panelists discussed topics and case studies, including quests, food tourism, pilgrimage to a memory, mystic Margery Kempe, relics of saints, pilgrimage maps, Chinese international tourism, cultural nostalgia, and the Burning Man festival.



Colusa Virginia Read Day with CORH Panelists

Saturday, April 28, 2018

**Colusa County Library, 738 Market Street
Panel Discussion on *The Book of Joy***

What are the common denominators across religions regarding the true nature of joy? How do other cultures view the right to pursue happiness? Many community members joined Colusa County Library on Virginia Read Day as we posed these, and other questions to Chico State University professors from the Comparative Religion Department, [Kate McCarthy](#), [Micki Lennon](#), and [Joel Zimbelman](#).

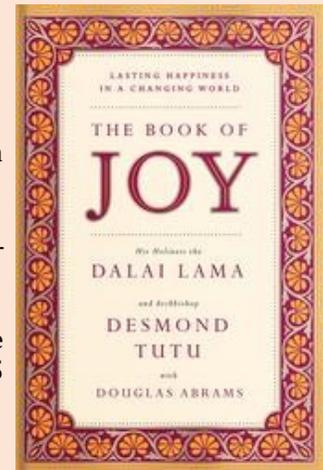
The wide-ranging conversation began with the question of why the idea of joy (or happiness) is currently getting so much attention, as evidenced by this book and others like *The Happiness Project*. Is there a joy deficit, due to stress, technology, or something else? Is the conscious pursuit of joy a luxury only for the affluent?

The eight “pillars of happiness” distilled from conversations between the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu are perspective, humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity. While we agreed that these are universally present in the world’s religious traditions, different emphases and inflections are worth noting. For instance, the Christian understanding of the potential spiritual value of suffering contrasts with the Buddhist diagnosis of suffering as the fundamental problem of the human condition. This tension between the commonalities and differences among religions was one of the richest areas of dialogue. What, if anything, is lost when we focus on the sameness of religions? Is a “buffet” model of religious identity, taking ideas and practices from different traditions to build a personal spirituality, the inevitable future of our global religious connectedness?

It was a great pleasure to connect with the vibrant community of readers in Colusa.

***The Book of Joy*,**
by HH Dali Lama
and Archbishop
Desmond Tutu with
Douglas Abrams

Co-author Douglas Abrams summarizes a rich and delightful week-long conversation between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who came together in April 2015 in Dharamsala, India, to celebrate the 80th birthday of His Holiness. In the midst of laughter and tears, the two spiritual leaders grapple with the enduring question:



How do we find joy in the face of life’s inevitable suffering?

Interreligious/Intercultural Mixer



April 14, 2018

Local Interreligious/Intercultural
Representatives and Professors

Dr. Kate McCarthy,

California Pluralism Project

and

Rev. Elena Rose Vera ,

Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples in
San Francisco

Fruit water, appetizers & desserts
by AS Conference Services

Organized by Sarah Gagnebin
sgagnebin@csuchico.edu ARTS 373

This year, CORH launched the new
**Certificate in Interreligious and
Intercultural Relations.**

This certificate equips students in a variety of
majors with competencies suitable to a range of
professional activities involving religiously diverse
populations - including education, healthcare, social
services and community development, business,
and governmental and non-governmental
organizations.



The **Rev. Elena Rose Vera,**

Originally hailing from rural Oregon, she has
distinguished herself as a political and theological writer
with a focus on the intersections between colonial
history, race, gender, and queer liberation. Between
touring nationally as an acclaimed preacher and educator
and working as a minister-at-large in marginalized
communities, she emphasizes a compassionate approach
rooted both in deep scholarship and a commitment to
making that work broadly accessible. A board member
both of Solar Cross Temple, a pagan service organization,
and San Francisco's historic Church for the Fellowship of
All Peoples, Elena lives and labors in the East Bay.
(Bio from Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universal-
ists)

Spread the Word

Some examples of jobs that benefit from RELS knowledge of cultural diversity:

- * Many UN positions take special interest in people with RELS knowledge to help facilitate travel, meals, and necessities for folks from many world religions who gather at UN meetings.
- * The Hospitality industry looks for folks with RELS knowledge to accommodate Halal/Kosher meals, East facing rooms, fasting schedules for the kitchen, etc.
- * Of course, anyone working in medicine or Gerontology with RELS knowledge has an advantage helping patients with specific needs (issues on blood transfusion, gender issues and privacy for patients, role of religions in elders and end of life care, etc.)
- * Graphic design and video game creation, making for a slew of historically/religiously accurate gameplay.

A national survey done in 2015 of Religious Studies majors found that there was a high level of satisfaction with how the major had served them in their lives.

Here’s a summary of the survey:

All Institutions	N = 1469
Agriculture and Natural Resources	1%
Arts	3.3%
Business and Finance	8.0%
College Faculty & Administration	13.3%
Counseling & Mental Health	4.4%
Education K-12	9.6%
Government and Public Administration	3.8%
Hospitality and Tourism	3.2%
Information Systems & Technology	4.4%
Journalism & Publication	1.8%
Law	5.9%
Library Work	2.5%
Manufacturing & Construction	1.1%
Marketing	2.6%
Medicine and Nursing	5.2%
Military	0.5%
Non-Profit or Community Organization	8.7%
Religious Organization	20.3%
Transportation	0.4%

CORH News

Introducing our new ASC (Admin Support Coordinator),

Shereen Baker

Shereen comes from the Department of Kinesiology on the other side of campus where she was an ASA (Admin. Support Assistant). Before moving to Chico with her husband Forrest in 2016, she worked at the State Capitol for the Senate in various administrative positions.

Both Shereen and Forrest grew up in Red Bluff where both sets of parents still reside.

Their children, Sierra and Will, are current students at Chico State.

Go Wildcats!



Joel Zimbleman was granted Emeritus status.

Jason Clower was promoted to Full Professor.

Congratulations to

**Heather Altfeld
and
Troy Jollimore**

June 16, 2018



Faculty Accomplishments

Patricia “Micki” Lennon was presented the “Taking it to the Classroom Award”. The Taking It to the Classroom award recognizes an outstanding faculty member who possesses the courage and creativity required to successfully engage diversity issues in the classroom.

Jed Wyrick published “Hellenistic Biography, the ‘Method of Chamaeleon,’ and the Moses of Artapanus,” in: Michael Sommer, Erik Eynikel, Veronika Niederhofer, and Elisabeth Hernitschek, eds., *Mosebilder: Gedanken zur Rezeption einer literarischen Figur im Frühjudentum, frühen Christentum und der römisch-hellenistischen Literatur*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 390 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 97-121.

Jed Wyrick presented “The Ordering and Disordering of Language and Place in Greco-Judaean Texts from Egypt,” *Truth, Lies, and Language in Ancient Mediterranean Religion* (UC Davis, March 2018)

Jason Clower participated in an international conference for the project, “*The Awakening of Faith and New Confucianism*,” funded by a half-million dollar grant from the Australian government, a grant for which he is one of the Principle Investigators.

Jason Clower published an article: “Gun Rights Are Rights, Too” in *The American Moderate* in Nov. 2017 (<https://theamericanmoderate.com/2017/11/18/gun-rights-are-rights-too/>).

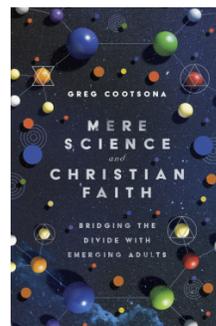
Sarah Pike gave the James Ackerman Distinguished Alumni Lecture at Indiana University on March 21: “Holy War for the Wild: Environmental Protests as Rites of Sacrifice and Mourning.”

Sarah M. Pike published “Feral Becoming and Environmentalism’s Primal Future,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Nature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)

Greg Cootsona published “Science and the *Sensus Divinitatis*: The Promise and Problem of the Natural Knowledge of God.” *Connecting Faith and Science: Philosophical and Theological Inquiries*. Claremont: Claremont School of Theology Press, 2018.

Greg Cootsona published *Mere Science and Christian Faith: Bridging the Divide with Emerging Adults* (InterVarsity Press). (<https://www.ivpress.com/mere-science-and-christian-faith>)

Cootsona was interviewed on “Nancy’s Bookshelf” about his book (above) on SPR Radio, Chico, CA, 21 March 2018. **Greg** also presented a talk on his book (right) at Rice University, Houston, TX, June 6, 2018.



Mere Science and Christian Faith

A Religion and Public Life Program lecture event

Science at a Particular Crossroads:

Bringing the Religious Implications of Mainstream Science to Evangelical Christians

A talk on the book, *Mere Science and Christian Faith: Bridging the Divide with Emerging Adults*

Greg Cootsona

Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities

California State University at Chico

Our Outstanding Students

Seve Christian

OUTSTANDING STUDENT RELIGIOUS STUDIES '18

Seve has accepted a position as a 2018-19 Jesse Marvin Unruh Assembly Fellow at our State Capitol.

Sandy McWhorter

OUTSTANDING STUDENT HUMANITIES '18

Sandy is pursuing a veterinary career and currently helping save animals by working at the Butte Humane Society.



Michel Riser

BIX WHITCOMB STUDY ABROAD AWARD '18

This scholarship was created by Chico State alum Bix Whitcomb to recognize outstanding students within the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and create an opportunity for them to experience the culminating experience of foreign study. While a student, Bix was a scholar athlete, excelling in swimming as well as in academics as an honors student in English. During his tenure at Chico State he had the opportunity to live and study for one year in Spain, which he considers one of the defining experiences of his college career.

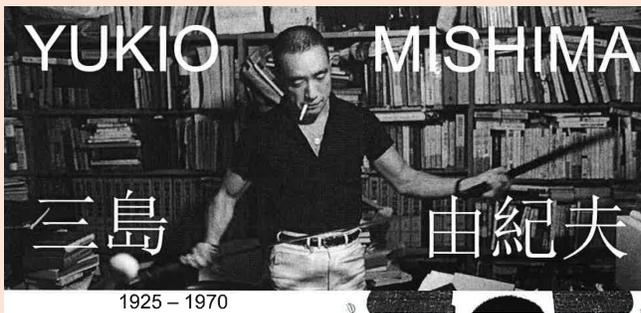
Michael will be studying at Shinshu University in Matsumoto, Nagano, Japan.



11th Annual CORH Symposium

Special Thank You to our Student Presenters:

Michael Riser: “Mishima’s Mizoguchi and the Battle of Self and Beauty”;



Mishima wrote novels, popular serial novellas, short stories and literary essays, as well as highly acclaimed plays for the Kabuki theater and modern versions of traditional Noh drama. He was a model and actor. Mishima was recognized as one of the most important post-war stylists of the Japanese language with a possible Nobel Prize before his planned suicide.

Angela Stieber: “Islamophobia in Post 9/11 America”.

Angela presented a PowerPoint presentation on continuing Islamophobia in the USA 17 years later.

Four books published in 2017 have recently been added to the Meriam Library for further reading on the subject of Islamophobia: *Islam, an American Religion* by N. Marzouki.; *Islamophobia and Racism in America* by E. R. Love; *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims* by N. C. Lean; and *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream* by C. Bail.



Program designed by

Syreka Wentworth

HFA '18 graduating student

We all enjoyed food and refreshments while Dept. Chair Sarah Pike summarized our department successes for the year and presented our department awards.

*Food by BacioCatering;
refreshments and desserts
from AS Conference Services;
and flowers from Shereen's
garden*



Congratulations to our Graduates

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES &
HUMANITIES GRADUATES**

Veronica Brevik

Sandy McWhorter

Tivon Lewis-Quigley

Molly Yarbrough

Seve Christian

Jocelyn Gonzalez

Samantha Gritz

Anna Hatfield

Vanessa Lemus

Alex Seltzer

Catherine Thompson

**Hello from Daniel
Veidlinger, April 2018**

“A GREAT MIX OF THE OLD AND
THE NEW, WITH GOOD FOOD,
GREAT SHOPPING AND MUSEUMS
AND OF COURSE WONDERFUL
SHINTO AND BUDDHIST TEMPLES.”

DANIEL IN
TOKYO, JAPAN

**Our Students Studying
Abroad 2018-19**

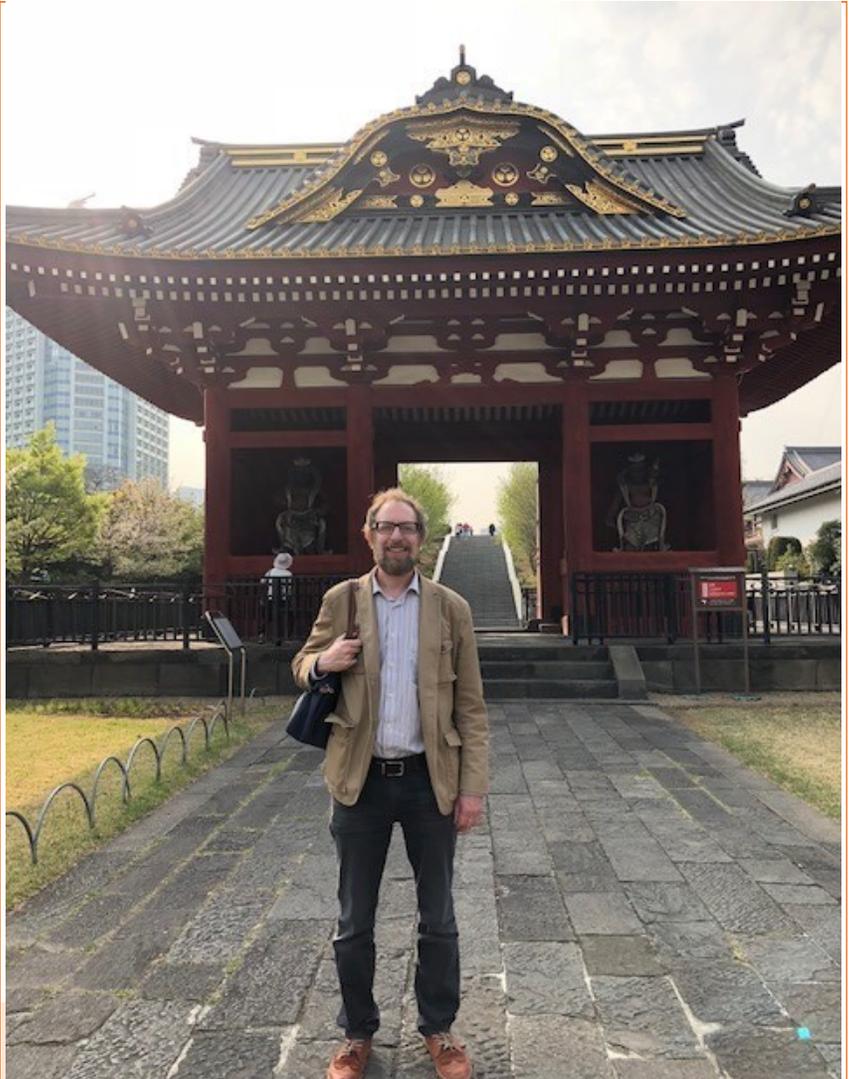
Carly Gootee-Thailand
Eliza Kern—Spain
Caitlin McKinnon –Japan
Michael Riser—Japan
Amber Schenk-Japan

For more info to study abroad:

[http://www.csuchico.edu/
studyabroad/](http://www.csuchico.edu/studyabroad/)

Visit us online:

www.csuchico.edu/corh



Comparative Religion and Humanities
377 Arts and Humanities Building
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA 95927-0740

Phone: 530-898-5661
Fax: 530-898-5468
Email: corh@csuchico.edu