

## CHECK IT OUT!

- Welcome
- Upcoming Event: CORH Symposium
- Tune in to “Evening Jazz” show KCHO Chico (91.7 FM) / KFPR Redding (88.9 FM)
- Students’ Corner: Featuring Rick Niese’s and Sarah Nimmo Gagnebin’s essays

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Upcoming Events and Past Events	2
Faculty News	3-4
Student’s Corner: Rick Niese and Sarah Nimmo Gagnebin	5-6
Religious Diversity Association (RDA)	6
Awards & Achievements	7
Alumni News	8-9
Keep In Touch!	10

## From the Editor

We are having an exciting semester so far. This is the first semester that Joel Zimbelman has been back and teaching full time since his six year term as Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts. We are happy to have him back and thank him for many great years of service as Dean during a particularly difficult period of budget cuts and dwindling state support. Our chair, Jed Wyrick, is on sabbatical

this semester where he is busy working on a number of projects related to Judaism in classical antiquity, and we are being ably lead in his stead by Sarah Pike.

A final note: please don’t hesitate to contact us with questions, ideas, and news of your own—we are always interested in hearing from former students, community members, and those who are

simply interested in what fascinates us (corh@csuchico.edu). We’d love if you would “like” the Religious Studies at Chico State Alumni page or the CSUC Culture and Religion Student Society (on facebook.com). And if you have the means, please consider giving a gift to the department or the center (<http://www.csuchico.edu/corh/> or <http://www.csuchico.edu/cpur/>).

## Upcoming Events

Don't miss our CORH symposium where students will present their research and papers to the public. This will occur on Wednesday May 7 at 5 PM in Colusa 100A.

## Past Events

**W**e were happy to welcome Dr. Tanya

Erzen on Wednesday April 2. Dr. Erzen is a 2013 Soros Justice Fellow and the director of the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, a non-profit that works to increase access to educational opportunity through higher education programs in prisons. She spoke about the punitive incarceration and religious revitalization that are occurring simultaneously in prisons throughout the United States, and asked about the implications of the state's promotion of religious groups as a replace-

ment for other kinds of programs in prison. She pointed out that the vast majority of groups and volunteers who come to the prisons to work with the inmates are affiliated with religious groups of one kind or another, and therefore the inmates who have little choice of activities are much more likely to get involved with these groups than they might otherwise have been in the free market of ideas. She said that more research needs to be done about the effects of religious education and involvement on recidivism, because the

faith-based programs – and much of the state support given to them – operate under the logic that religious conversion and redemption will transform prisoners into new human beings who will not return to prison. It is unclear, however, whether this is actually so.

Dr. Erzen is also the author of several very interesting books including "Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement," and "Fanpire: The Twilight Saga and the Women Who Love It."

## Faculty News—Jason Clower, Snoot, and Molly

**A**fter more than five years of teaching full-time, Snoot is turning to new challenges this semester. Over winter break, he adopted a puppy named Molly (seen here assisting him with research) and has begun giving up some of his teaching in favor of administrative work that will allow him to

spend more time with her. Working mostly from home as assistant coordinator of the Health & Wellness pathway and assessment director for the Asian Studies program, Snoot will still maintain a presence on campus in Religious Studies through guest lectures and occasional office hours and research presentations. He is currently applying for grants to help the department make the best use of new distance learning technologies.



SNOOT AND MOLLY

## Bruce Grelle

**T**his past November 2013 was a busy month for me. I presented a paper on “Human Rights-Based Religion Education in Public Schools: Theory and Politics,” at a conference titled “Whose Religion? Education about Religion in Public Schools” at the University of Ottawa, Canada, on Nov. 6. I was invited to participate in a global forum on “The Image of the Other: Interreligious and Intercultural Education” sponsored by the King Abdulah Bin Abdulaziz Internation-

al Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna, Austria, Nov. 18–19, where I served as facilitator of a round-table discussion on “Religion and Society: Creating Mutual Respect between Secular and Religious Worldviews.” I also chaired two panels sponsored by the “Religion and Public Schools: International Perspectives” group at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Baltimore, Nov. 23-26.

This semester I’m teaching RELS 480 “Theories and Criticisms of Religion,” along with RELS 247 “Religion, Ethics, and Ecology” and several sections of RELS 358 “Religion in American Public

Schools” online. I also continue to host the “Evening Jazz” show on KCHO Chico (91.7 FM) / KFPR Redding (88.9 FM) every other Tuesday night from 9 to midnight.



## Sarah Pike

I chaired a session on Bruno Latour called Querying Natural Religion: Immanence, Gaia and the Parliament of Lively Things” and presented a paper on “Dark Teens and ‘Goth’ Subcultures” at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland in November 2013. I

also presented “Internal Revolutions: Collective Ritualizing and Youth Conversion to Radical Environmentalism” at a roundtable on “Re-assembling Democracy: Ritual as a Cultural Resource” at the University of Oslo and gave a paper,

“Earth First’ or Anti-oppression? Internal Conflicts Within Radical Environmentalism” at a work shop on “The Social Effects of Ritual,” sponsored by the Norwegian government in Grenavolden, Norway last December.

## Daniel Veidlinger

I have been teaching a course that I have not taught before: RELS 204 “Judaism and the Minority Experience.” This course is normally taught by Jed Wyrick who is on sabbatical this semester. It has been a great experience for me to delve more deeply into one of the world’s oldest religions, and one that has provided so many ideas that were subsequently adopted in various ways by other religions and have become an important part of American culture in general. I just read a news article about the new blockbuster epic movie “Noah” that is about the famous Biblical story of the flood. Apparently, there is a lot of criticism about the movie because it strays quite a bit

from the Biblical story. I found myself talking back angrily to the screen ( which was not listening, alas) and telling it that if it had only taken this class, it would have learned that the tradition of adding material to flesh out Biblical stories is as old as the Bible itself. Jewish scholars and rabbis have produced thousands of pages worth of additional material called Midrash that adds to and sometimes even alters the Biblical text, and this is regarded by even the most orthodox believers as perfectly acceptable. For example, in the Bible there is one line stating that Moses married an Ethiopian wife, and this was expanded in the rabbinical tradition into a



whole story about Moses having been the King of Ethiopia for several years that are not discussed in the Bible itself.

Besides becoming a movie critic, I have also just turned in a book that I wrote in conjunction with ten other scholars called “Buddhism, the Internet and Digital Media: The Pixel in the Lotus.” This book, to be published by Routledge in Fall 2014, is actually based on papers that were delivered at a conference that we held right here in Chico and it will be the first full book dedicated to examining how Buddhism is adapting to the new digital world.

## Student's Corner

**W**e are happy to print here two essays by recent graduates who have been exploring possibilities of a degree in our field:

### Rick Niese

I graduated last spring with a BA in Religious Studies and for the past 6 months (minus a brief Christmas hiatus) I have been living in China. I am an English teacher at a small University in the

small town of Shanxi Taigu, and for the last month of my winter holiday, I have been traipsing around the country with a co-worker of mine. My time in China thus far has taken me all across the country to countless cities that I had never heard of and, prior to my time in China, probably couldn't even pronounce. While Beijing and Shanghai were impressive, it is the tiny towns in the country side, most notably my little dust bowl that is Taigu, that have really captured my admiration. From the tiny wrinkled aunties on the street corners hawking their goods with more tenacity than you would ever expect, to the kids on the soccer fields pointing and shouting to their friends to check out the ever so rare foreigner. It is these little towns that have given me a real glimpse into the true nature of life in China. My religious studies education, while not directly related to my job, has given me

countless tools with which I have been able to gain a greater appreciation for every thing I have observed and experienced. I have seen 2000 year old Buddhist cave carvings, cerebral old men flowing through a *qigong* session, and crumbling remnants of Confucian temples that were demolished during the cultural revolution and I have found my ability to grasp the value of these aspects of Chinese culture greatly aided by the knowledge and experience I gathered as a Religious Studies student. My Religious Studies education is also responsible for fostering in me a deep curiosity that is ultimately what drove me to pursue my job in the first place, allowing me to enter into the fascinating and unique world of China.

### Sarah Nimmo Gagnebin

I n 2007 when I graduated from Chico state with a BA in religious studies I was often asked "what will you do with your degree?" While I had some answers I had no idea that my degrees would lead me into hospital chaplaincy. In 2008 I attended graduate school at the Pacific School of Religion, a Seminary in Berkeley, with a focus on psychology and religion and began working at San Francisco General Hospital as an intern chaplain. During this time I learned two important things: how to provide pastoral care to those in crisis, and how to navigate Christian Seminary and healthcare systems as someone from a minority religion.

These two themes have continued to be important in my work and after graduating with an MDIV and MA in Pastoral Counseling I began to work as a chaplain with a Hospice care provider in Sacramento. As a Hospice chaplain the two themes converged into one; how do we provide pastoral care to people within minority religions? This continues to be the question that informs my work. I am now working as a Hospital chaplain in Sacramento. When I am not at work I present to hospital groups teaching how to provide pastoral care to those within minority religions.

The groups I present to are mainly chaplaincy and pastoral care providers who act as spiritual support and advocacy for patients in the hospital. I like to begin by introducing a brief segment on dominant culture and religious privilege not only to clarify why spiritu-

al support to minority religions is unique but also because some of the best discussions come from exploring privilege in our society. Many of the people I present to have a particular way of offering spiritual support that comes from their specific theological and religious understandings. I lay out



## Student Corner News, *continued*

some of these understandings, “God is Love” or “God has a plan” for example, and then show why these statements may not be comforting to folks within specific minority, polytheistic, pantheistic, or esoteric religions.

I briefly touch on specific religious notions that are important to those within minority religions but may not exist within Judeo-Christian frameworks. For example: Animism, ancestor worship, hospitality laws, and sacrifice are important religious notions in paganism that may not exist within dominant religious frameworks. I conclude with an interesting list of “what not to say” and a few acceptable alternatives. For example, do not say “God loves

you and He is looking out for you” instead try “you are deeply connected to the ancient divine, and She will hold you in life and welcome you in death.”

Presenting to these groups provides for some fascinating and educational conversations that rest on the assumption that all faith traditions deserve respect, and part of acting on that respect means educating ourselves on the ways of both dominant and minority religions.

The flip side of this work is that I also provide workshops to my own faith community covering how to navigate healthcare systems as someone from a minor-

ity religion. I find that education on both sides is valuable.

While chaplaincy and community education are unexpected uses of my religious studies degree, it is the most rewarding work I have ever engaged in. I spend my time listening to life stories and holding the hands of families during the most sacred and emotional times of their lives. I spend my time teaching healthcare providers how to respect minority religions, and teaching those in minority religions how to navigate healthcare systems. I couldn’t have planned it better.

## Religious Diversity Association (RDA)

**R**eligious Diversity Association (RDA) is a Chico State University organization whose purpose is to build and promote religious literacy within the student, faculty, and community populations. We are a coalition of students, faculty, and community members from Chico, CA working to promote literacy and to build bridges across lines of religious difference and across the religious/non-religious divide for the purpose of dialogue, friendship, and community building.

One of our goals as an organization is to create connections not only for our interreligious allies group, but also for the religious and non-religious community

members and students on the Chico State campus. For Spring 2014 semester, RDA (Religious Diversity Association) has been focusing on launching the Photo Campaign event. Our current project at hand is our Photo Campaign! One of our goals for this year is not only to assess the religious climate on campus, but also to break down religious stereotypes and promote religious and non-religious unity. We offer to you the opportunity to make all of these goals possible through The Photo Campaign. Allow us to take your picture and express in your own words either how you support religious diversity or how you defy a religious/non-

-religious stereotype. Join our movement today! You can contact the RDA for further information about the photo campaign either at [shalom85shalom@gmail.com](mailto:shalom85shalom@gmail.com) or through a message on Facebook! You can search us on Facebook "Religious Diversity Association"!



# AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

**CELT** 2013  
Center for Excellence and Learning in Teaching

Exemplary Online Instruction

Thomas Parker

RELS 332:  
World Religions and Global Issues

- Course has extensive "Start Here" area to help students, rich with resources.
- Syllabus supports online learners.
- Student to student and student to instructor interactions are maximized.
- Course is highly accessible.

Thomas Parker

**I. Getting Started**

1. Take the **Online Readiness Self-Test** (in **Class** State Resources) if you haven't taken an online course before. This will tell you if you and your computer are prepared to take an online course.
2. **Blackboard Learn** is our classroom. You will need to buy the **3 Required Books** for the class. Everything else is available through **Blackboard Learn**.
3. This course is "asynchronous." We do not meet together online. It is your responsibility to work according to the timeline and due dates given. You must keep up with daily and weekly work. This is the expectation of everyone enrolled in an online class.
4. To begin this class:
  - Click on the **Course Content** link on the left side of the page.
  - New click on **Unit 1**.
  - You'll see 5 weeks listed in **Unit 1**.
  - Click on **Week 1** and your reading schedule is there, along with links to **Video Lectures**, other readings and **Videos**, and so on. **Unit** links are to the right.
  - Scroll down to find links to **Discussions and Assignments**, below that only **Assignment 1** links you to see the journal link, all other Assignments are direct links.
  - There are 3 Units in this class. **Units 2 & 3** will be made available to you at the appropriate time. Each Unit will be laid out like **Unit 1**.

**II. Technical Problems and Questions**

- Contact **Student Support** using the link at the top of the page. I am not a resource for technical issues.
- You can also use the **Message** link to contact the class. Describe your technical issue, and see if others might be able to help you.
- For questions about the content of this course contact me through the **Journal** link on the left side of the page. Please give me 48 hours to respond. Typically I will respond much more quickly, but I cannot be available at all times.

**RE Collaborative Resources**

Please see **Learning & Assessment** section, please visit my course requirements: [RE Collaborative Resources](#)

Please complete steps 1 & 2 for course requirements & enrollment. If you have trouble, contact 773-224-1414 #RELP

1. **Historical Background to the 21st Century**  
Required
2. **Observations on War & Conflict**  
Required
3. **Understanding Justice & Norm**  
Required

- TOM PARKER — Outstanding Online Instruction Award
- JED WYRICK — Outstanding Academic Advisor Award in 2012
- JASON CLOWER — Assessment Coordinator for GE Health & Well-being Pathway
- KATE McCARTHY — GE Pathway Coordinator

# Alumni News

## Check out what our grads are doing:

- Michael Butcher (B.A in Religious Studies 2013) is doing graduate work on Buddhism at Indiana University in Bloomington.
- Hannah Nielsen (B.A in Religious Studies 2013) is studying at Princeton Theological Seminary.
- Rick Niese (B.A in Religious Studies 2013) is teaching English in rural China.
- Sarah (Nimmo) Gagnebin (...) is a hospital chaplain at Sutter Hospital in Sacramento.
- Ben Jaks and Happy Davis recently welcomed a baby girl into the world called Lylah.
- Jason Deane (B.A in Religious Studies 2012) is doing graduate work in the Teaching Languages Internationally program at Chico.
- Eric Garabay received a \$3000 scholarship to help him fund his studies abroad at Florianopolis University in Brazil in Portuguese.
- Katy Sylvia is doing a Masters Degree in Political Science at Chico.
- Heather Coons is teaching in Lodi California.
- Ally Wilson is completing her graduate studies at Princeton Theological Seminary.
- Michelle Nation is teaching at a private school in San Jose.
- Patrick Bultema was recently named outstanding alum for the HFA college.
- Audrey Allas Lycourinou is doing graduate work in Anthropology at Durham University in England.
- Jeff Veitch (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2009) received an M.A. in Biblical Studies from the Graduate Theological Union, an M.A. in Classical Art and Archaeology from King's College London, and is currently working on his PhD in Archaeology at the University of Kent.
- Andrew Lavin (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2010) is pursuing a M.A. in Philosophy at San Jose State university, where he currently also serves as an instructor.
- Luke Ham (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2009) received his M.Div. from the Pacific School of Religion and is now Pastor at San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church.
- Erin Goldfarb (B.A. in Religious Studies and Art History, 2006) is Assistant Director of Development for the College of Business and Economics at California State University, Northridge.
- Whitney Thayne (B.A. in Humanities and Theatre Arts, 2011) is a Wardrobe Attendant at Wynn Las Vegas.
- Colleen Garrett (B.A. in Humanities, 2001) completed an M.A. in Teaching English as a Second Language at the [School for International Training, Graduate Institute](#) . She is currently a Design Manager for Kathy Davis Associates, Inc., an [Acculturation Specialist](#) for [Catholic Charities Migration & Refugee Services](#), and a Program Assistant for [Public Consulting Group](#).
- Katie Fox (B.A. in Humanities and History, 2011) is pursuing a Master of Arts (MA), [Human Development and Family Studies](#), [Family and Community Services](#) at the [University of Missouri-Columbia](#).
- Kellie Marie Lavin (B.A. in Humanities, 2010) completed a Single-Subject Social Science Credential and is a [Student Services Specialist](#) at [Stanford University](#).
- Jillian Zarifis (B.A. in Humanities and International Relations, 2010) is a Global Immigration Paralegal at [Pearl Law Group](#).

# Alumni News, *continued*

- Willow Sharkey (B.A. in Humanities, 2007) received her M.A. in Art History from California State University, Chico and is currently a lecturer in Art History at Chico State as well as an arts writer for Chico News & Review.
- Leigh Bryan (B.A. in Humanities, 2010) received her [Master of Fine Arts in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies](#) from Brandeis University and recently returned from an archeological dig in northern Israel.
- Lauren Burnett (B.A. in Religious Studies and Sociology, 2007) received her Master of Science in Sociology from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2009. She is currently a Consultant for Praescient Analytics.
- Jason Deane (B.A. in Religious Studies and Asian Studies, 2012) was an English instructor at the [Ratchaburikanukroh Secondary School - Ratchaburi, Thailand](#) and is currently in the Teaching International Languages M.A. program at CSU, Chico.
- Vernon Ruiz (B.A. in Religious Studies and Philosophy, 2004) received his M.A. in Philosophy: Professional Ethics from George Mason University and is manager of VA Runner.
- Christy Killion (B.A. in Humanities and Public Relations, 2009) is a Project Engineer at Vance Brown, Inc., onsite at Stanford University.
- Jordan Wise (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2008) is [Kindergarten Grade Level Lead](#) at [Rocketship Education](#). Having received her multiple subject teaching credential from [California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo](#) in 2011, she is currently pursuing an M.A. in Education at San Jose State University
- Susan Nicolls (B.A. in Religious Studies and International Relations, 2008) is pursuing a J. D. at [Regent University School of Law](#) and is an Intern for the [Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia](#)
- Kate Buckley (B.A. in Humanities, 1991) received her Masters in Social Science with an emphasis in Career Counseling from California State University, Chico and is an Advisor at the CSU, Chico Career Center.
- William Hovey II (B.A. in Religious Studies and History, 2005) received his M.A. in Humanities and Religious Studies at CSU Sacramento in 2010 and is currently an Account Executive at LIME Works.
- Jacob Acosta (B.A. in Religious Studies and Philosophy, 2010) is Assistant Manager at Jos. A. Bank Clothiers.
- Fawn Russell (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2005) is pursuing a Master of Library & Information Science (M.L.I.S.) from San Jose State University.
- Julie Sullivan (B.A. in Religious Studies and History, 2010) received her Master of Arts (M.A.) in [Irish and Irish-American Studies](#) at [New York University](#) and is working for Admissions & Records at Diablo Valley College.
- Erik Petersen (B.A. in Religious Studies, 2001) is a Manager of Product Marketing at [Arrow Electronics](#).
- Ryan Williams (B.A. in Religious Studies and Computer Science, 2012), is in the Master's program in Computer Science at CSU, Chico and is a Software Developer at SunGard Public Sector.

# COHR CONNECTIONS — Keep in touch!

- Jed Wyrick - [jwyrick@csuchico.edu](mailto:jwyrick@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-5661
- Kate McCarthy - [kmccarthy@csuchico.edu](mailto:kmccarthy@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-4485
- Bruce Grelle - [bgrelle@csuchico.edu](mailto:bgrelle@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-4739
- Daniel Veidlinger - [dveidlinger@csuchico.edu](mailto:dveidlinger@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-4637
- Micki Lennon - [plennon@csuchico.edu](mailto:plennon@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-5263
- Sarah Pike - [spike@csuchico.edu](mailto:spike@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-6341
- Jason Clower - [jclower@csuchico.edu](mailto:jclower@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-5863
- Laura Nice - [lnice@csuchico.edu](mailto:lnice@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-5534
- Jeanne Lawrence - [jlawrence@csuchico.edu](mailto:jlawrence@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-4160
- Joel Zimbelman - [jzimbelman@csuchico.edu](mailto:jzimbelman@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-3088
- Najm al-Din Yousefi - [nyousefi@csuchico.edu](mailto:nyousefi@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-5386
- Tom Parker - [teparker@csuchico.edu](mailto:teparker@csuchico.edu) or (530) 898-4165

CALIFORNIA  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Chico

## Comparative Religion and Humanities

239 Trinity Hall  
California State University, Chico  
Chico, CA 95927-0740

Phone: 530-898-5661

Fax: 530-898-5468

E-mail: [corh@csuchico.edu](mailto:corh@csuchico.edu)

## What is Religious Studies?

Religious Studies is a multidisciplinary field that takes a scholarly approach to the study of religious experiences, myths, rituals, doctrines, and the institutions of human beings in diverse times and places. It draws on perspectives from the Humanities and social sciences in order to understand the meaning and impact of religious and non-religious ideas, values, and practices.



