



CORH CONNECTION:

FROM THE CHAIR

In this issue, we are excited to share with you the stories of recent and soon-to-be-graduates of our BA program, told in their own words. These intrepid people testify to the variety of career paths that students in our majors are able to take. Graduates of the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities excel at jobs that require critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to reflect on questions of meaning and value in a pluralistic context. While some Comparative Religion majors go on to graduate work in Religious Studies or related fields, others find themselves prepared for work in public service, international affairs, and not-for-profit endeavors, largely as a result of their sensitivity to issues of diversity, their global and cultural literacy, and their skills in writing and critical thinking. Similarly, Humanities students are widely recognized for foreign language skills, facility in writing and critical thinking, ability to analyze specific cultural and social artifacts, and awareness of a remarkably wide variety of ideas and traditions. We hope that these students' stories will re-awaken your own comparable interests and enable you to recognize their relevance to the contemporary world.



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HEATHER COONS—

GRADUATED 2009

In 2009 I graduated Magna Cum Laude from CSU, Chico with a BA in Social Science and in Religious Studies. Since my time at Chico State I have earned my CA Teaching Credential and today I am a secondary school teacher in the Lodi Unified School District at Ronald E. McNair High School in Stockton, CA. I teach Geography (Freshman), World History (Sophomores), and Advanced Placement United States History (Juniors). It's the toughest and most rewarding job that I've ever had.

In my four years at McNair, my Religious Studies education has been a secret weapon in my arsenal of teaching tools. My Religious Studies background has helped me to understand the individual backgrounds of my students and their parents better and it has also been especially helpful in my Freshman Geography class, where we study the world's major religions. For many teachers, teaching about religion can be terrifying and daunting. I know teachers who are terrified about bringing up religion in their classrooms because of possible repercussions from students

and parents. For me, this was never a concern. I had taken Dr. Grelle's "Teaching About Religion" class and learned about the CA 3 R's Project (Rights, Responsibility, and Respect) and knew how to be culturally sensitive in approaching my students as we began studying religion. One of my all-time favorite lessons that I teach is comparing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When I started this lesson a few weeks ago, I began by saying that "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam hold many characteristics in common." It was at this point that one of my students interrupted me and said, "NO WAY. Aren't all Muslims terrorists? Christians aren't terrorists!" It's moments like these where I sigh and draw upon my education. I'm constantly reminded that when we're young our worldviews are small and limited and it's my job as a teacher to help students discover, understand, and appreciate other cultures, even if they are different and/or in opposition to their own. I often tell my students that we fear what we don't understand and then I quote Yoda from Star Wars (Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering) in my best Yoda-like voice.

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In response to the above reactions, I developed a lesson on terrorism, which has unfairly been associated with Islam, especially since the 9/11 attacks. After learning about Islam, we learn about terrorism around the world and break the word “terrorism” down and define it. After a grueling discussion about what it is, whether or not the motives of the perpetrators are important, questioning who decides when an event is terrorism or when it is not, and giving students real scenarios to consider (were the American colo-

nists terrorists in rising up against the British?), the kids are left more confused than they were when entering the discussion and I love that effect! I want my students to feel disoriented. I want them to break down their biases and have uncomfortable discussions because this is where true learning happens. I’m not sure that I would have the courage to have these meaningful and terrifying discussions with my students, had I not had the instruction that I did in Religious Studies.

RAJBIR SINGH JUDGE—

GRADUATED 2010

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of History at University of California, Davis. I graduated from CSU Chico in 2010 with a BA in History, Religious Studies, and Philosophy. Continuing with these variegated interests cultivated at CSU Chico, my dissertation examines the relationships between Sikhs and the Theosophical Society at the end of the 19th Century. Eschewing the conceptual rubrics of the secular nation state and utopian contact that scholars typically associate with the Theosophical Society in India, my dissertation asks: how did Sikhs render Theosophy legible in their own tradition? What forms did these renderings take in a secular colonial project that continuously sought to reconstitute the Sikh tradition? What forms of political contestation did these engagements engender within the Sikh population in the Punjab and transnationally?

In order to answer these questions, relying on the vast array of literature the faculty at CSU Chico first introduced me to, I

focus on how Sikh ethical practices looked to mold moral dispositions that provided their own temporal coherence to Sikhs, which, in turn, provided a space to subvert colonial rule that cannot be made derivative to European political formations.

Currently, I live in New Delhi with my wife and two children as an American Institute of Indian Studies Junior Fellow affiliated with the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. I will continue with this peripatetic life until mid-2016 when we will return to the United States.

LAUREN SKOUSEN—

GRADUATED 2011

I'm currently working for faculty affairs in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost at Utah State University (USU). This fall I'll be starting my pursuit of a graduate degree, a Master of Business Administration with a focus on management, at USU as well. My career goal is to work at a university (hopefully back in California!) as a director of a study abroad and international exchange program.



My education in religious studies gave me the ability to better understand and appreciate various diverse groups throughout the world. It helped me look at the world through lenses other than my own and gain insight into other compelling perspectives. The experience was enriching, fulfilling, and satiated my curiosity about our world and the fascinating, beautiful people in it. My desire to be more engaged with our global community, as I was when I was an undergraduate at Chico State, is what has motivated me to pursue involvement with an academic international program and go back to school.

When I was a student of religious studies at Chico State I tried to embrace every moment of my experience. During my time in classrooms and lecture halls I grew so much - not only academically but personally as well - and I credit that to my eagerness for engagement. My advice to current students would be to try to stay open to letting your educational experiences impact you in the same way. Let yourself be open to what the world has to teach you.

JASON DEANE—

GRADUATED 2012

What are you doing now?

As an undergraduate I double majored in Religious Studies (with honors) and Asian Studies. I am currently a graduate student at California State University Chico. I am working on an MA in Teaching International Languages, an MA in English with a focus on Creative Writing, a graduate certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and a graduate certificate in Teaching College Level Writing.

How did your education in Religion help with what you are doing now?

My work in Religious Studies gave me something to be genuinely interested in that kept me passionate about school and made me feel like I was not only working on my future, but also working on myself. It made me a better writer; researcher, critical thinker, and I would like to think a better person in general. Now that I am beginning to focus on Creative Writing, I can see religious, philosophical, and moral themes making their way into my stories and giving me material to work with that I might not have had as much exposure to otherwise.

Do you have any advice for current students?

I can't stress this enough, **STUDY ABROAD**. If you don't study abroad now, you can't later, and you will be missing out on not only one of the best parts of being a student, but one of the best parts of life. If you don't think you can, go to the study abroad office and you will be surprised at what is available in terms of grants, scholarships, cheap programs, and help in general. What I tell everyone about studying abroad is that if you can do it, don't think about it, just do it. I've never met anyone who regretted studying abroad. I have studied abroad three times, for a semester each, in Florence, Italy; London, England; and Bangalore, India. Each experience was priceless. My love of being abroad helped me to get a job teaching English for a year in Thailand after I graduated, and influenced my decision to get a degree in teaching languages, which makes it possible for me to teach anywhere in the world. Don't think about it, just go - now.

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Do you have a particular moment or story from your life since you have graduated that encapsulates the importance of studying religion or humanities ?

I have gained a broader outlook on life that would be less developed otherwise. I also have a variety of life experiences and achievements such as those mentioned above. I have wandered the streets of Rome at night with new friends and a bottle of champagne, stared at magazine clippings Anne Frank pasted to her bedroom wall in Amsterdam, jumped out of a plane over the Swiss Alps, seen Portia outwit Shylock at the Globe in London, danced till the windows fogged over in a bar packed with students in Edinburgh, ridden horses in Wales, explored the ruins of Athens, gotten lost in the Louvre in Paris, meditated with the cool Himalayan wind on my face in Dharamsala, educated kids in Ratchaburi, and made friends all over the world thanks to my experience with, and passion for, Religious Studies.

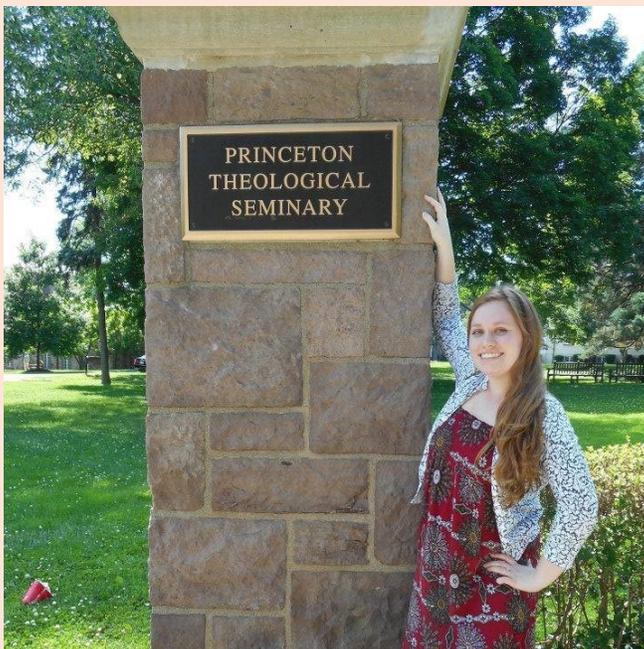
HANNAH NIELSEN—

GRADUATED 2013

I graduated Chico State with a degree in Religious Studies in the Spring of 2013. The fall after graduation I packed my bags and moved across the country to Princeton, New Jersey for graduate school. I am currently finishing my second year at Princeton Theological Seminary where I am studying for a Master of Divinity and eventually hope to be ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). As part of my education I am working as a student pastor at Beacon, a church in Philadelphia that operates as both a community of worship and a secular non-profit organization that provides free after school art and education programs in a low income neighborhood.

In addition to preparing me for the heavy reading load that is unavoidable in graduate school, my Religious Studies degree has helped me learn how to navigate these types of intersections of the religious and the secular. My M. Div degree will focus on the Reformed tradition but my Religious Studies degree has taught me about ecumenicalism and has prepared me to work in a world that is religiously diverse and in many ways post-denominational. The Religious Studies department taught me how to ask the right questions and be a critical observer both in and out of the classroom. During my time at Chico State I had the opportunity to study abroad in Bangalore,

India and then use what I learned to inform my senior honors thesis. My advice for current and future students is to study abroad and see how the religions we study are actually practiced, because often there is much more diversity in practice than we can discuss in one course.



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MICHAEL BUTCHER—

GRADUATED 2013

Since graduating from CSU Chico in the Spring of 2013, I have engaged myself in graduate studies in the Religious Studies department at Indiana University, Bloomington, where faculty members Sarah Pike and Micki Lennon also studied. My research has revolved around the study of Buddhism in Central Asia and ancient India from the time of the great king Aśoka (250 B.C.E.) to the Kushan era (third century C.E.). I have also continued my study of Sanskrit, which began in Chico under the guidance of professors Clower and Veidlinger. These past two years have seen me translating passages from the Mahābhārata, the Jātaka-mālā of Ārya Śūra which is a collection of stories about previous lives of the Buddha, and soon the Vedas. My greatest achievement has been a three-page critical edition of a portion of the Lotus Sutra, based on three manuscript fragments in Sanskrit from Central Asia and Nepal.

In addition, in the Fall of 2015 I will begin doctoral studies at the department of Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Washington, Seattle. There, I will undergo further study in Sanskrit and begin course-

work in Gāndhārī, an Indian dialect related to Sanskrit, under the auspices of the Ancient Buddhist Manuscripts Project there. To fund my study, the faculty there has graciously awarded me the 72nd Dhammachai Fellowship.



TIFFANY THOM—

CURRENT SENIOR STUDENT

I recently had the pleasure of preparing for and presenting at the 2015 Humanities and Fine Arts Symposium. Though I began the evening in a rather apprehensive state, I quickly found myself embraced in a warm and welcoming atmosphere that allowed me to begin my presentation with confidence and ease.

This semester I am a student of Dr. Laura Nice's Humanities Seminar class in which we are exploring the idea of memory. For our culminating project we are preparing a term paper on a topic of our choice under the umbrella theme of memory. In mid-March, Dr. Nice approached me with the request to present at this year's symposium, and although I was reluctant at first, her belief in me encouraged me to take a chance at something that would undoubtedly be a rewarding experience.

For my presentation I used several disciplines including philosophy, linguistics, and physiology to suggest that memory is a kind of knowledge that plays a crucial role in our understanding. We use indi-

vidual components from our past experience to form an accumulative kind of memory that is key for our ability to perceive and interpret our present, use our creative imagination, as well as imagine our future. Ultimately, it is how we experience and participate in the world around us.

I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to share my work with the students, faculty, and community members who attended the symposium. The confidence gained from this experience will certainly help as I pursue my goals of obtaining my MA in Hispanic Linguistics so that I may become a lower-division Spanish teacher once I graduate in December of this year. I highly recommend that any student with the opportunity to take part in this amazing event should do so without hesitation, and I also offer my sincere appreciation to everyone who helped play a part in preparing me for my own presentation.

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COMMENCEMENT SCHDEULE

SUNDAY MAY 17, 2015
COLLEGE OF HMANITIES
AND FINE ARTS
UNIVERSITY STADIUM
9:00 A.M
8 TICKETS PER STUDENT
GATES OPEN FOR GUESTS
AT 7:30 A.M.



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CALIFORNIA
STATE
UNIVERSITY | **Chico**

SAVE THE DATE

WHAT:

Student Celebration

WHEN:

May 7th, 2015

TIME:

3:30pm-6:30pm

WHERE:

Harlen Adams Theatre -Backstage Area

Comparative Religion and Humanities
239 Trinity Hall
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA 95927-0740

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