This summer I worked as a Public Outreach Intern with Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest. My tasks included tabling at events in Seattle, doing political advocacy work at three Planned Parenthood clinics, and assisting with administrative tasks at the main Seattle office. I had an incredible experience working with Planned Parenthood and especially enjoyed interacting with people at our tabling events. It was eye opening and inspiring to hear about people's experiences with Planned Parenthood and it helped me appreciate the significant impact the organization has on people's lives. I hope to pursue a career in public health after Carleton so it was great to work with an organization dedicated to making health care affordable and accessible!

I was in Minneapolis interning this summer with Witness for Peace, a national grassroots organization committed to changing unjust U.S. military and corporate practices in Latin America. Our work over the summer was focused on popular organizing against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and building Congressional pressure against military aid to Honduras. My role involved a number of different tasks, including handling mass outreach, writing fundraising appeals, and organizing rallies, and in the process I learned quite a bit about international activism, political advocacy, and nonprofit management. My hope is to be able to put these skills to good use in the future!

I interned at ISAIAH, a faith-based community-organizing group in the twin cities. There I helped bridge the gap between black churches and the Black Lives Matter movement. I established and assisted with social justice teams at four congregations in Minneapolis while organizing them to address suspensions in the Minneapolis public schools, the juvenile justice reform, mass incarceration, and payday loan lending. I left this summer realizing the power that I have to help organize people and liberate them from systems that bring pain.

This summer, I worked as a rhetoric assistant for the Summer Writing Program at Carleton. I was able to work closely with high school students to help them hone their academic writing skills and navigate the challenges that accompany writing at the college level. I had the opportunity to collaborate with professors from different departments to organize lesson plans, construct paper prompts, and lead workshops over a three-week period, and I was also able to lead small discussion groups to help the students better understand the texts that they were writing about. The program not only reaffirmed my passion to become an educator in the future, but it also gave me a short glimpse into the rigor and skill that the profession demands.
My second day of classes at Carleton was September 11, 2001. Like people across the world, the members of my class tried to make sense of the events of that day. We were lucky to be starting our college careers in relative safety, and with the resource of the college in which to voice our concerns, share our thoughts, and ask our questions. I understand that when it came time for the members of that class to pick our majors, an unusually high number picked religion. For me, the importance of belief and how it shapes our everyday lives seemed particularly real and important at that time.

The classes I took focused on lived religion and the vast range of American religious thought and experience. I appreciated the chance to share viewpoints with classmates coming from various backgrounds, religious and otherwise. I found it rare and valuable to be able to discuss charged topics in a way that respected the importance of the subject matter while still asking big and challenging questions.

These days I'm a lawyer at the Minnesota Attorney General's Office, and I still use the skills and experience gained from the Carleton religion department daily. I think that the ability to relate to diverse colleagues and professional acquaintances is a crucial skill in any job. As a lawyer, in particular, a big part of my job is talking to people who disagree with me strongly, and working with them to solve a problem. Studying religion at Carleton helped me be comfortable with the fact that people can hold views so fundamentally different from my own, and to learn how to start to understand how and why they might hold such a view.

Religion Matters: “Religion and Marriage Quality: The Kentucky Case”

Panel by Michael McNally and Noah Salomon
by Prathiksha Srinivasa ’16

The panel on Religion and Marriage equality was the first event in a new series sponsored by the religion department called “Religion Matters.” In her introduction, Prof. Lori Pearson introduced the series as an “opportunity to provide a space for discussion and reflection on the intersections of religion with the public and the private,” and as a place to discuss the role of religion in the contemporary political scene. The event took place in the Gould Library’s Athenaeum and was well attended by students representing a diverse range of majors.

Prof. Noah Salomon began the panel by showing a video highlighting county clerk Kim Davis’ personal perspective on her role in the Kentucky Marriage Equality case. He maintained that this was important in order to step back from taking staunch positions and listen to both sides of the story. Prof. Salomon then encouraged the audience to think about the intersections between religion and the law, and the possible ramifications of a conflict between these two spheres. He posed the question of whether absolute religious freedom was possible in a nation that guarantees religious freedom but also upholds constitutional laws. Do people whose religious beliefs contradict the law have a moral obligation to obey or disobey these laws? Should the government avoid taking positions on religious matter altogether?

Upon leaving the audience to consider these questions for the post-panel discussion, Prof. Salomon turned the panel over to Prof. Michael McNally who spoke extensively about the tensions between accommodation and establishment in the First Amendment. His presentation traced the historical development of religious freedom laws in the American constitution and he urged the audience to consider how religious differences could be settled in a pluralistic polity, and whether it mattered if a religious accommodation is claimed by a Christian majority versus a religious minority.

The questions that both speakers posed proved to be a great starting point for an extremely productive discussion, with several students voicing their opinions and concerns about the tensions between religious ethics and constitutional laws. Many left the discussion feeling more knowledgeable about the case, and admitted to having a renewed perspective on Davis’ motivations and the complicated relationship between religion, ethics, law, and politics.
Black Lives Matter: Remembering Trayvon Martin
Talk by Prof. William Hart, Professor of Religious Studies at Macalester College
by Prathiksha Srinivasa ‘16

This fall the Religion Department’s Oden Postdoctoral fellow, Professor Kevin Wolfe, organized a public event and guest lecture by Professor William Hart of Macalester College on the topic of “Black Lives Matter: Remembering Trayvon Martin.” One purpose of the lecture was to help connect the Black Lives Matter movement to previous struggles for racial justice in American history, and to trace the legacies of institutionalized racism and cultural attitudes that continue to function in the current criminal justice system, and that are at work in the treatment and perception of African American males in particular.

Professor Hart joined the Macalester faculty this year as the holder of the Margaret W. Harmon Chair in Christian Theology and Culture in the Religious Studies Department. Prior to this, he taught at UNC-Greensboro. A graduate of Princeton’s Ph.D. program in Religion, Ethics, and Politics, Hart is interested in the categories of religion and the state, especially in regard to questions of power and sacrifice in relation to religion, slavery, race, and criminality. His books include Afro-Eccentricity: Beyond the Standard Narrative of Black Religion (2011), Black Religion: Malcolm

Professor Hart’s talk was a riveting exploration of the “anti-black perception” in America that preemptively criminalizes black bodies through an incarcerating gaze. He spoke about how the perceptions of the dominant race, inevitably become the dominant perception, and how black people are viewed as prototypically criminal when viewed through this white supremacist lens. However, Professor Hart reminded the audience that this attitude is not exclusive to white people, but is an attitude that has been internalized by individuals from all racial backgrounds, including black people themselves.

He implored the audience to critically assess the root of our country’s stigmas while constantly remembering that no one is immune to the discourse that perceives black people as threatening and black criminality as ontological. His talk was followed by a productive discussion in which students and faculty members questioned how one could escape this internalized discourse and whether it was possible to change a system so deeply rooted in the country’s history. Professor Hart brought the discussion to a fitting close by sharing his own experiences as a black academic, which helped inject a personal dimension into his lecture.
Especially since the economic downturn of 2009, and in relation to current public debates about the value of a humanities major in today’s economic and professional landscape, one hears with greater frequency this question about the “usefulness” of a religion major. Voices in major newspapers offer a variety of answers, some emphasizing the concrete marketable skills one is said to gain with a humanities major while others point to the values that can be cultivated by studying religion. Still others, including Secretary of State John Kerry, note the value of a religion major for a profession in politics, especially in the area of international relations. Perhaps you are like those who think a religion major is intrinsically valuable, regardless of use.

We need your help! Join the Religion Department as we find new and old ways to communicate to students the value of taking religion courses and of majoring in religion. You can help students be exposed to this range of answers by participating in the Career Center’s new program called “Career Guides.” If you fill out their electronic form and update your profile at go.carleton.edu/beaguide, the Religion Department will be able to borrow from their website and make your experience and wisdom about careers and life after Carleton appear directly on our home page, for use by students. This program replaces our previous website and will have a new look.

We know you have gone on creative professional journeys after leaving Carleton. Won’t you consider sharing it with our students and assisting them in their life’s journey? Signing up as a Career Guide indicates to current students and fellow alums that you’re eager to talk about your career path, share advice, and provide insights on how you got from here to there.

Once more, here is the link if you are interested: go.carleton.edu/beaguide