Carleton Religion Majors Engage in Summer Research

Meg Holladay ’14 – Haitian community in FL
This summer I spent seven weeks in the Haitian community in South Florida. I was an intern at Educa Vision, a Haitian-American educational publishing company, where I made the first map of the world in Haitian Creole and helped recruit authors to write children’s books in Creole. I also did research for my comps at a Baptist church where the entire congregation was Haitian immigrants. I studied the ways different languages (French, Creole and English) were used in the church and what religious meanings they had for the church members. My host family are members of the church and what fun I had cooking and gathering mangoes with my host mom. It was so rewarding to study a living religious community; I would love to do more fieldwork in the future!

Marcus Rider ’14 – Taizé monastery in France
This summer I lived for a month at the Community of Taizé, an ecumenical Christian monastery in Burgundy, France. I went because I wanted to take some time to think about what I might do after my next and last year at Carleton, along with needing to practice my French. Besides attending dialy worship services my activities at Taizé included spending a week in silence, living in a small international community of young voluneteers, and coordinating the daily distribution of breakfast to close to 4,000 people who were visiting from all over the world. My experiences provided me with a newfound appreciation for solidarity as well as revealed things about my character, such as how I enjoy stressful and intense situations. I also honed ‘practical skills’ such as hitchhiking and bribing train conductors.

Student Dinners with Fall Speakers and Professors

Each year, Carleton religion faculty sponsor special events that bring students in contact with well-known academics, artists, and religious leaders. In October, students in Asuka Sango’s class, “Introduction to Buddhism,” practiced meditation with Bhante Sathi, a Buddhist monk from the Theravada tradition who is founder of Triple Gem of the North (Eden Prairie and Mankato, MN). After a classroom session on meditation, students shared dinner with Bhante Sathi that evening in the religion suite, and continued the conversation about Buddhist doctrine and Bhante’s life story.

Later in October, religion students went out to dinner at the Ole Store with award-winning Israeli filmmaker, Noemi Schory (pictured at left), who delivered Carleton’s Forkosh Family Lecture this year. Schory discussed her documentary films about the Holocaust, reflecting on the power of images from the past in representing history in the present.
Lauren Osborne

NN: What would you consider to be your focus within the realm of religious studies?
Lauren: Most broadly, I would say that my focus is on sensory experience and non-discursive modes of understanding in relation to religion—both religious experience and religious texts (and especially experience of texts!). Most specifically, I focus on Qur’an recitation and the ways in which we can understand meaning across the sound of the text—the meanings of the words, patterns of rhyme, rhythm, and assonance, the use of pitch and melody, and emotional or affective meaning on the part of the listener.

NN: If you could study and research anywhere in the world, where would you go?
Lauren: In an ideal world I would go back to Sana’a, Yemen. I was there in 2007 to conduct some preliminary dissertation research and to study Arabic. One of the most striking and stressful aspects of life in Sana’a is why I want to go back; there is almost constant noise, and it’s impossible to get away from it. Unlike some of the more modernized Middle Eastern cities, there are lots of people in the streets at all hours in Sana’a, and you can’t get away from their sounds. And then there’s the call to prayer; it operates at a volume and level of pervasiveness in Sana’a that is unlike anywhere else I’ve ever experienced. Sound is something I think about a great deal in my research, and this aspect of life in Sana’a is one of the most enduring memories I have from my time there.

NN: What has been one of the most impactful academic experiences you’ve had?
Lauren: When I finished my graduate school qualifying exams I was probably more exhausted than I’d ever been before—physically, mentally, and emotionally. I met with my advisor the day after the oral exams and something he said has really stuck with me: he told me that I know things other people don’t know, and it’s time to start acting like it. At the time this comment was devastating, and I definitely wasn’t in a good mindset to hear it. But since that time it’s served as a good reminder to have on hand for myself when I need a little nudge. Academia isn’t always great for one’s self-esteem, and I find that reminding myself of my authority over my own knowledge is a good antidote.

Max Mueller

NN: What, to you, is the most fun thing about studying religion?
Max: Charles Sheldon’s famous 1896 novel, In His Steps (the book that gave us the ubiquitous "What Would Jesus Do?" mantra), attempts to place its readers in Jesus’ steps, if Jesus was a turn-of-the-century social gospeller. In an academic way (as opposed to the confessional ideals presented by Sheldon), I appreciate how religious studies demands its scholars to enter into the theological and existential worlds of the people we study, and then take a "step" back and apply our training to what we’ve vicariously experienced (R. Marie Griffith calls this, "critical empathy"). This is a wonderfully challenging intellectual exercise.

NN: How have you liked Carleton so far?
Max: Carleton is a mythical place for me, as it formed me both personally and academically as much as (or more than) my graduate training. So it’s been wonderful to return. But, to quote Thomas Wolfe, "you can’t go home again." So I’ve enjoyed recognizing what has changed (cell phones) and what hasn’t (intellectually curious and adventurous students).

NN: If you could study and research anywhere in the world, where would you go?
Max: Bhutan. The beautiful country, which few westerners have visited because of the foresight of Bhutanese monarchy, sandwiched between India and China, Nepal and Bangladesh is one of the "happiest places on earth," if you believe Business Week. I’d love to find out what they’re doing right that we’re not!

NN: What would you consider to be your focus within the realm of religious studies?
Max: I’m an Americanist focused on how texts shape history and memory of America’s past. I’m particularly interested in how words – spoken and written – can create "sacred spaces." Would Gettysburg be a pilgrimage site without Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address? I’m not sure it would.
**Why I Study Religion: An occasional Series featuring faculty, alumni, and student voices**

**Meera Sury ‘14 is a double major in religion and biology**

Paul Farmer, one of the founders of Partners In Health, contends that *accompagnateurs*—companions and/or advocates—are central in building effective medical treatment systems in developing countries. While a physician can be a patient’s *accompagnateur*, *accompagnateurs* are more often community health workers or family members who walk alongside a patient throughout each step of treatment. This idea of *accompagnateurs* no longer has a place in the modern Western medical system; as chronic disease diagnoses are on the rise though, I believe that patients need their medical providers to understand and treat more than symptoms. We need more doctors and nurses to serve their patients as *accompagnateurs*.

Studying religion at Carleton has given me the opportunity to understand some of the motivations and belief systems that drive people to act in particular ways. In this way, my majors in biology and religion are not so different: both provide a lens to understand human behavior, from the cellular mechanisms of movement to religiously motivated action. I am confident that my coursework in religion will prove as useful, if not more, than the sciences of medicine; as the broad framework of Western medicine starts to accept the importance of holistic medicine—caring for the mind, body, and spirit of a patient—physicians will at least have to recognize the influence of religion and spirituality in their patients’ lives. Moreover, recognizing that medicine is the form of ministry that I have been called to, I feel a sense of responsibility to understand my own religiosity and motivations for action. In essence, I study religion because the spirituality in providing and receiving medical care is often overlooked, and I contend that a background in religious studies is essential to becoming an effective physician-*accompagnateur*.

**Where Are They Now? The Class of 2013**

**Katie Powell** is doing a year of service with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps working to help low-income individuals with disabilities get government benefits.

**Lauren Alexander** is in Boston getting a master's from Harvard Graduate School of Education in school counseling and mental health for the year.

**Chloe Zelkha** is farming, educating, and organizing with The Food Project, a youth empowerment organization in Boston that brings diverse groups of teenagers together to work on sustainable agriculture projects and learn about social justice!

**Joe Concannon** rents the second story of a house in Northeast Portland, working primarily as a "counselor" for a non-profit alternative education after school program at Beverly Cleary Elementary School. He also works at an Italian bakery as a Barista and writes a column for Northwest Brewing News entitled "Trails and Ales."

**STUDENT DINNERS WITH FALL SPEAKERS AND PROFESSORS (CONT. FROM PG. 1)**

Carleton students also share meals in faculty homes. Shown to the left are students in Shana Sippy’s “Imagining Home” seminar (for first-year students) gathering for a meal in her home that included food from differing communities in Jerusalem, as part of their exploration of connections between food, tradition, religion and ritual. Students shared and helped prepare a meal inspired by the cookbook, Jerusalem, written by two people who live in London but grew up in Jerusalem—one an Arab in the Muslim quarter, and one a Jew in the Jewish quarter. In addition, each student brought a recipe and a story that they associate with home, and discussed these as they enjoyed their delicious meal.

Students from RELG100 Imagining Home class

For more information, or to contribute to Nume News, call or email Sandy Saari at (507) 222-4232, ssaari@carleton.edu
Career Center tips

→ Spend one hour on the Career Center website. There is enough helpful information in the “Student” section to make any summer or post-Carleton internship or job search feel doable!

→ Take an interest inventory test. There are a few available, and if you make an appointment, a career counselor can authorize you to take one, and will go through the results with you after you’re done.

→ Check out the alumni directory to learn about interesting things that alums are doing. You can search by different keywords, and then ask career counselors to help you craft a professional email to the alumni you find to get more information.

→ Come talk to anyone in the Career Center! Walk in, make an appointment or go to office hours. They will help you figure out what you might want to do for your job or answer specific inquiries about résumés, cover letters, interviews, job searching and the like.

The Religion Department sponsored a Religion After Carleton event on October 8th that included a mid-day presentation by Professor Asuka Sango, Career Counselor Deb Olien, and Beth Wright ’93. Beth also held a discussion for majors about post-Carleton life that evening.