This fall I did a direct enrollment program in Mendoza, Argentina. I took classes at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo with local Argentine students as well as a Spanish class with the students in my program. It was an incredible semester and I loved having the chance to improve my Spanish and learn more about Argentine culture. It challenged me everyday as I had to learn how to navigate a new city and a new educational system in a different language, but I'm so glad I took advantage of the opportunity to go completely out of my comfort zone. It taught me the importance of being open to new (and potentially intimidating) experiences and I realized that everyday activities, such as going to the grocery store, can be full of learning opportunities. Argentina is a beautiful and diverse country and I'm excited to share more about my experience with the Carleton community!

In the fall I participated in the Budapest Semester in Cognitive Science. As an interdisciplinary field drawing from psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, and other areas to draw a complete picture of the mind, cognitive science complements my studies in religion extremely well especially in regards to psychologically interesting phenomena such as possession and mysticism. In Budapest I had the chance to study this field in more depth, and to experience living independently in the "real world" away from Carleton and the US. It was a great experience and someday I'd love to return to Europe, but at this point I'm more excited than ever to be back here in Northfield!

This fall, I spent a semester living along the holy Ganges River in Varanasi, India. For four months, I lived with a host family and took classes with local professors. My classes included Urdu, Religion, Peace and Conflict Studies, and a textile apprenticeship! As part of my classes, I visited a wide variety of sacred spaces and did independent research on Sikhism. I also had time to travel independently all over northern India. My semester abroad was a tremendous growth experience, through which I learned a lot about lived religion in South Asia. I also had plenty of time for personal writing, learning to roll with the crazy punches India throws, and perfecting the art of an efficient bucket shower.

Over the fall, I spent three months in Madrid with Carleton’s Spanish Studies Program. I had the wonderful opportunity of being able to live with a Spanish host family and take classes on art history, politics, and film with 17 other Carleton students at the local university. The program’s main focus was the philosophy of urban living and I put theory into practice by thinking actively about how I was navigating and claiming spaces within the city and what it meant to be anonymous amongst a multitude of people. It was an extremely rewarding experience and I came away with a better handle on my Spanish as well as with a better understanding of myself.

In February, Kayla McGrady ’05, Senior Writer/Editor in the Carleton Office of College Communications, talked to students interested in Religion about her job and life after Carleton. She advised students to treat their first careers as stepping-stones to achieving their ultimate goals, and to use this time to discover their true talents and abilities. Kayla also stressed the importance of networking. Abby Trout, Associate Director of the Career Center, informed the students about the various ways in which they could connect with alumni through the college’s directories and websites to find out more information about prospective career options. She also helped students identify concrete skills they have gained in the religion major that will be very valuable to employers.

Do you have career stories about how you use religion-major skills in your job? We want to hear from you! Email our department at ssaari@carleton.edu.
What motivated you to choose the IAS fellowship in particular?

My first encounter with IAS was when I gave a talk there in 2011. I was immediately struck by several unique characteristics that made a fellowship there seem so very attractive. First and foremost, the Institute seemed uniquely to balance quiet time for contemplation and writing with an active program for scholarly engagement. In the School of Social Science, where I was offered my fellowship, I loved that scholars from a whole range of disciplines, and with a wide range of interests, could be brought together to discuss and debate across their various fields. I was confident that such exchanges would force me to make my research relevant to a broader set of concerns than those of my sub-specialty alone. Neither a university nor a “research center,” IAS seemed a unique model of intellectual community and one of which I deeply wanted to be a part. Moreover, the fact that the IAS fellowship is a residential program was extremely compelling to me. Scholars not only work together, but live side-by-side on its campus. This means that some of the most edifying conversations take place not in the seminar rooms, but at the playground while watching our children, over walks through the woods, and through late night dinners at colleagues’ houses.

One aspect of the Institute that ended up being one of the most valuable components of my experience there was the fact that senior colleagues among my cohort and in the permanent faculty were so committed to mentoring me as a junior professor in their midst. The time that they took to read through my writings and to help me deepen and improve them was invaluable to my development as a scholar.

How did your work at IAS supplement your current publications?

My time at IAS was one of the first occasions in a very long time that I was almost exclusively devoted to writing rather than field research. I have a tendency to get extremely invested in the geographic areas in which I work and thus have trouble stopping myself from gathering more and more data. My stay at IAS allowed me the quiet and focus to finish a draft of a book manuscript I am tentatively calling “The People of Sudan Love You, Oh Messenger of God”: An Ethnography of the Islamic State.

Will you be integrating your research into future courses that you plan to teach at Carleton? How?

My research informs every course I teach at Carleton. My syllabi are generally framed by a set of questions that I came to ask in the field. Further, whether as a means of illustrating a concept we’ve encountered in some reading — showing how it comes to life and attains complexity in its travels through time and space—or when I find that there are insufficient texts conveying the kinds of worldviews I encountered in my research, my teaching starts to rely very heavily on my research. I find myself apologizing to students for the sheer number of conversations that seem to tie back to my experiences in Sudan! Though I am cognizant not to allow particulars to stand-in for universals, Sudan remains for me a constant touchstone for understanding the complexities of the Muslim world.

Remembering Marcus Borg: Professor at Carleton from 1976 - 79

The Carleton community was saddened to hear that Marcus Borg, who taught in the Religion Department from 1976-79, died on January 21, 2015 in Portland, Oregon at the age of 72. A New Testament scholar and theologian, Marc went on to teach primarily at Oregon State University and became one of the most influential thinkers in progressive Christianity. He wrote 21 books (many of which were translated into some 12 languages), including The Heart of Christianity and Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. His Ph.D. was from Oxford, and he was Chair of the Historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature and a Fellow of the Jesus Seminar. He gave a convocation address at Carleton in 2002.

Borg was a controversial thinker who shared his doubts about the doctrines of human sin and forgiveness through Christ as upheld within the mainstream Lutheranism of his childhood. Carolyn Fure-Slocum ('82; College Chaplain) remembered that “he always engaged people with great kindness and a gentle wit.” Indeed, at Carleton, he was a beloved teacher. As Emeritus Professor Richard Crouter has said, “Ever a kind and thoughtful person, one had no inkling that Marc was to become a national presence in progressive Christian circles. Perhaps his most popular course was on ‘Death and Dying.’ He had concluded that most undergraduates knew little of bereavement and loss and he sought to do something about that. It was one of many ways he connected with students.”

The Religion Department is proud to have had Marcus Borg in its midst and we express our sadness at the loss of this committed, probing, generous public intellectual and teacher to many.
On the 20th of January 2015, Carleton hosted a campus wide dialogue to discuss racial justice in America following the repeated instances of police brutality that led to the tragic deaths of several African-American citizens over the course of the past few months. The panel of speakers included President for the Coalition of Impartial Justice, DeRay McKesson; Professor of Law at the University of St. Thomas and Director of the Community Justice Project, Nekima Levy-Pounds; Carleton alumna Sarah Catherine Walker, President of the Minnesota-based Coalition for Impartial Justice; Assistant Professor of Educational Studies at Carleton, Anita Chikkatur; and the department’s very own Kevin Wolfe, Robert A. Oden Jr. Postdoctoral Fellow for Innovation in the Humanities in Religion at Carleton. The overarching theme of the discussion was the importance of activism and how protest is not just about confrontation and disruption, but an integral part of building a community. The speakers tried to hone in on the importance of being aware and alert, especially in the self contained environment of a small liberal arts college like Carleton. DeRay in particular talked about how protest is not just physical, but is also an intellectual process, and that silence does not have the ability to save lives because deaths in this particular context are systematic and structural. Professor Levy-Pounds stressed that our system is one of privilege and it supplemented Professor Chikkatur’s point that racial privilege is the ability to go on with life as usual during such tumultuous times. However, Kevin Wolfe emphasized that it is also a privilege to be able to engage in civil people and students need to recognize and need to be thinking about. While acknowledging the importance of dynamic demonstration, Sarah Walker served as a good mediator and brought the audience’s attention to the fact that energy from the protests needs to be channeled into legislative changes to truly make a difference. She also advised the audience to have conversations with people who do not necessarily present themselves as allies in order to truly have meaningful dialogue that considers multiple perspectives on the issue.

In an interview about the event and its ramifications on intra-campus dialogue, Kevin Wolfe mentioned that the reason why events like these are important is because this is not an exclusively minority-related problem. According to him, there are ingrained practices that reproduce systems of privilege that need to be challenged and changed and that this upheaval requires everyone’s awareness and cooperation. He also mentioned that events like #BlackLivesMatter on campus serve as platforms for students to get involved in the larger movement and he hopes that he can act as a guide to direct students towards possible courses of action. When asked if academic theorizing is the opponent of actual social change, Kevin responded that power and change do not operate in such linear ways and that nothing is totally complicit or totally resistant. He is of the opinion that academia has the power to transform discourses in ways that challenge current organizations of power and that it allows people to reflect critically on their roles in society. This, he hopes, will encourage people to question their privilege enough to get involved.

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“WHEN YOUR FAITH GETS YOU IN TROUBLE” – TALK BY ROSE BERGER OF SOJOURNER’S MAGAZINE

Rose Berger is an award-winning religion journalist, author, public speaker, and poet who specializes in writing about spirituality and art, social justice, war and peace. She is senior associate editor and regular columnist at Sojourners Magazine, the national ecumenical magazine based in Washington, D.C. that focuses on "faith in action for social justice." She is also the author of Drawn By God: A History of the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries from 1967 to 1991(with Janet Gottschalk, 2012) and Who Killed Donte Manning? The Story of an American Neighborhood. Rose's veteran history in social activism includes: educating and training groups in nonviolence; leading retreats in spirituality and justice; and writing on a wide range of topics related to faith, politics, and culture (including #BlackLivesMatter).

She has interviewed civil rights activists Vincent Harding and Yvonne Delk, the Love Canal’s Lois Gibbs, and Mexican archbishop Ruiz, Palestinian political leader Hanan Ashrawi, poet-farmer Wendell Berry, Filipino activist Karl Gaspar, contemplative prayer guru Thomas Keating, Latino organizer Nane Alejandrez, and many others. Active in the Sojourners’ community for more than 25 years, she has been a resident in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of D.C, where the movement first began in 1971. Rose spoke about three times her faith got her in trouble—and invited questions from the audience to engage in discussion about social and spiritual issues that matter to us.

Tuesday, March 3, 5:15-6:15 p.m., Gould Library Athenaeum, Carleton College.
This term the Religion Department collaborated with Carleton’s Humanities Center to bring to campus Barnard College Professor Janet Jakobsen to share her groundbreaking work on the ways in which attitudes toward sexuality are central to debates about secularism and religion in the U.S. today. Jakobsen is Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Director of the Center for Research on Women at Barnard College, where she teaches courses on social ethics, feminist theory, queer theory, activism, and religion and violence. She is the author numerous essays and volumes including *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference: Diversity and Feminist Ethics*; she is also co-author with Ann Pellegrini of *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. Before entering the academy, Jakobsen was a policy analyst and organizer in Washington, D.C., and her work continues to focus on the relation between academic work and activism.

Jakobsen has produced keen and original analyses that call scholars to speak of secularisms (in the plural) and not in the singular, and to investigate the meanings and operations of secularism, religion, politics, and law in particular places. More specifically in her own work, she has taken an interest in how Protestant values shape U.S. laws, especially in relation to sexual regulation, and how models of pluralism regulate the limits of acceptable religious and sexual difference in ways that fail to achieve goals of justice and equality.

Jakobsen’s lecture, held on Feb. 3 in Gould Library Athenaeum, is one of several activities being sponsored this year by a Carleton faculty research seminar called, “In Search of the Secular,” which met regularly in 2013-14 to read and share work on this contested and multiply defined and deployed term, *secularism*, and its relation to religion, politics, gender, and public discourse in a variety of contexts. Religion professor Lori Pearson participated in the seminar. She and College Chaplain Carolyn Fure-Slocum (’82; religion major) hosted a lunch presentation one week after Jakobsen’s visit to campus, in which they shared their own research related to religion and politics in the public sphere. Fure-Slocum spoke about the challenges and opportunities of religious diversity, and about debates over free speech and hate speech, on liberal arts college campuses, and Pearson shared her research about the ways in which debates over women’s rights in Europe shaped central categories in the modern study of religion.