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ECU RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM ANNOUNCES FIRST J. WOOLARD AND HELEN PEEL DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORSHIP IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
lg/October 8, 2008

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Greenville – The Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences at East Carolina University is pleased to announce that Dr. Mary Nyangweso Wangila has joined the faculty as the first recipient of the J. Woolard and Helen Peel Distinguished Professorship in Religious Studies.

“I feel tremendously honored,” says Wangila. “What fascinates me about the position are the values that it embodies – values of diversity, social justice – values which I have embraced in my teaching and research, and values that I hope to continue to promote in the classroom and the university in an effort to make a difference in our communities.”

Established in 2007 by Dr. Jesse R. Peel, the professorship honors Peel’s parents J. Woolard and Helen K. Peel of Everetts, NC. J. Woolard Peel, who passed away in 1984, was a graduate of North Carolina State University. Helen K. Peel, who passed away in 2005, attended Louisburg College.

“I had the privilege of meeting Jesse Peel,” says Wangila. “I was most impressed by the kind of person he is. In life we tend to look for heroes ‘over yonder,’ when they can be found in our own backyard. I consider Jesse Peel a hero not only because of his generosity to our program, an act that facilitated the availability of this position, but because of who he is as a person and the values of social justice that he embraces. From what Jesse told me about Helen, I believe the Peel family provides an example to emulate in order to make this world a better place.”

As recipient of this distinguished professorship, Wangila’s primary duties will be to enhance the offerings of the Religious Studies program by maintaining an active research and teaching agenda, serving on the Religious Studies Committee and contributing to the Department of Philosophy, Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences and ECU. She is now the third full-time religious studies professor in the department.

“I strongly believe in engaged scholarship,” Wangila comments. “Real knowledge is as good as dead. Real knowledge should seek to contribute something to the surrounding community. Our religious program encourages scholarship that is engaged, by exposing students to cultures of the religions they have studied in a study abroad program.”

It is one of her goals, Wangila says, that her students will discover an appreciation for different religious perspectives and the roles religion plays in the lives of men and women.

Wangila comes to ECU from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is the author of *Female Circumcision: The Interplay between Religion, Gender and Culture in Kenya* (Orbis Books, 2007), as well as many other publications in scholarly journals and selected book chapters.

She has served as an invited speaker at a symposium on “Women and HIV/AIDS in Africa” held at the University of Illinois and as a presenter at the American Academy of Religion in Washington, DC. Wangila is a member of the African Studies Association and the American Academy of Religion.

Professor Wangila received her doctoral and master of philosophy degrees in sociology of religion from Drew

University in 2004 and 2002 respectively; a master of theology from Emory University in 1999; a master of philosophy in religion from Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya, in 1992; and her bachelor of education from Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, in 1988.

For additional information, contact Wangila at 252-737-2422 or wangilam@ecu.edu.

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