Fall is once again here. As we embark on a new academic year, I welcome students, core and affiliate faculty, Religious Studies Advisory Council (RSAC) members, and friends of the Religious Studies Program at East Carolina University. I hope everyone had a great and productive summer.

I am happy to report that we had a very productive 2017/2018 academic year. We were blessed by the visit of Dr. Joseph Hellweg, who served as the Julian David Whichard Distinguished Professor in the Humanities; Dr. Rev. William Barber, who was the 25th guest speaker of our annual Distinguished Lecture on Religion and Culture; and Dr. Stephen Prothero, who gave the Whichard Distinguished lecture. Other events of the year included the symposium on Religion and Public Health and the undergraduate symposium on religion, which highlighted our active research initiatives. Our majors made us proud by presenting their research at local and regional conferences. The RSAC and our alumni initiated, led and participated in various events, making the year the broadest collaboration to date of our program with the local community. The public enjoyed a free course on World Religions that was designed for the public and co-taught by the core and affiliate faculty. What a great year! We are delighted at what this year holds.

I am happy to announce that the Religious Studies Program will inaugurate an annual award of the newly-established Judith Whichard Scholarship for Religious Studies majors and with the generous endowment from the J. Woolard and Helen Peel Distinguished Professorship, awards for majors will be available to deserving applicants. We are grateful to our donors for their generous support, without which this would not be possible. We are especially proud that Dr. Calvin Mercer was presented with the Centennial Award for Excellence in Service at the Chancellor’s annual Awards Day program March 2018. We look forward to great achievements and further collaboration. Welcome to 2018/2019. We invite all who want to support the Program to join us.

Peace!

Mary

MERCER’S “EVENTS” EMAIL LIST

“Events” mailings provide information about religion-related cultural and/or academic events in the area and are sent to approximately 1,600 people who have requested to be on the list. This list is not shared with any other group or person. A mailing is only sent about once a month. Anyone wishing to receive the “Events” email should send their email to: mercerc@ecu.edu.

“In a world where people of all faiths are migrating and mingling like never before, we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril”
- Madeline Albright, 2015

Dr. Calvin Mercer received the Centennial Award for Excellence in Service at the Chancellor’s annual Awards Day program, March 2018. This award represents the highest award given to faculty and staff for excellence in service and is given “in recognition of excellent or exceptional service to the institution over a sustained period of time, with attention to a devotion to duty and an awareness of the importance of public service.”
LECTURE EVENTS

RECENT EVENTS

**Rev. Dr. William Barber**

**2017 Lecture**

Last year we were honored to host the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II. His Lecture, “Poor People's Campaign and National Call for Moral Revival”, saw an attendance of 950 people!


**The Symposium on Religion and Public Health held April 5-7, 2018**

Several videos of lectures from the 2018 Symposium can be found on our website at: [http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/religionprogram/Lectures.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/religionprogram/Lectures.cfm)

**Supporting Religious Studies’ Initiatives**

Would you like to support Religious Studies initiatives? Consider being a donor. Donations provide support for scholarships, study abroad, and public events. The generosity and support of our alumni and friends of the program have enabled us to host events and to engage the local community. As a donor, you will be kept informed of our activities and opportunities for involvement and your name will be listed in our newsletter. You can contribute online at: [http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/religionprogram/donate.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/religionprogram/donate.cfm) We look forward to your support, as every donation makes a difference in our students’ lives and an impact in the community.
Dr. Candida Moss will deliver the 26th Distinguished Lecture on Religion and Culture on September 27, 2018 in Hendrix Theater. The title is “The Myth of Persecution: How Persecution Radicalizes and Polarizes in the Ancient and Modern worlds”. More information can be located on the ECU Religious Studies website under Lectures. The lecture is free and open to the public.

Dr. Ron Cole-Turner and Dr. Calvin Mercer will be featured for the 2019 annual Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR) meeting. Dr. Ron Cole-Turner’s lecture will be “Are Scholars of Religion Posthumanists or Transhumanist”? Dr. Mercer’s lecture will be “Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Humanity”. The Religious Studies Program will host the conference on the ECU campus in Greenville, NC on March 8-10, 2019. For more information about the conference, see the website: https://secsor.org/executive-board. Paper proposals are accepted until October 1st, 2018 and must be submitted through the online submission form (https://secsor.org/proposal-submission-form).
Brian Austin Thaxton

Brian Austin Thaxton, Religious Studies and Russian Studies double major, presented, “From the Temple of God to the Temple of the Proletariat: Iconography and the Soviet Aesthetic.” His paper was the product of his study abroad in Russia during the summer of 2017, combining his interest in Russian and Religious history, and was developed through an independent study course with Dr. Lee Johnson of the Religious Studies Program. Thaxton also published his paper in ECU’s journal for undergraduate research, The Outlook, pages 38-47 in Fall 2017. The journal can be accessed at https://issuu.com/lookout_2014/docs/2017-lookout-12-11-17

Kelly Kimble

Kelly Kimble, Public Health and Religious Studies major, presented her paper, “Cosmologies of Cocoa Slavery: The Ethics of Political Economy in Contemporary Côte d’Ivoire,” at the SECSOR conference held at Atlanta, Georgia on March 3, 2018. The paper argues that global measures against labor by abducted children on cocoa plantations in Côte d’Ivoire will likely continue to fail if such efforts neglect the conditions of global capitalism that sustain child labor in the first place. The paper was a product of a course and mentorship she received from Dr. Joseph Hellweg, the Whichard Distinguished Professor.

Nadiya Yerich

Nadiya Yerich, Religious Studies and Public Health double major, won the 2018 Robert H. Wright Alumni Leadership Award. Nadiya also presented a paper titled "Lowering Unintended Pregnancies among Women Sex Workers in Kenya" at the Symposium on Religion and Public Health that was held in April 5-7, 2018 at East Carolina University.
Katie Chandler

Katie Chandler, Religious Studies, History, Philosophy, and Great Books quadruple major, presented “An Analysis of Existentialism and the Ontological Possibility of Authentic Love” at ECU’s Research and Creative Achievement Week. Katie’s paper discussed the disagreement between two well-known existential philosophers that were also lifelong partners, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre famously denied the possibility of authentic love within the existentialist doctrine, while de Beauvoir famously affirmed it. Katie concludes that Sartre correctly follows existentialism’s foundational notion of radical freedom, while de Beauvoir did not and was therefore not a true existentialist. The paper has been published in ECU’s journal for undergraduate research: [https://issuu.com/lookout_2014/docs/2017-lookout-12-11-17](https://issuu.com/lookout_2014/docs/2017-lookout-12-11-17) Katie also presided over the undergraduate research portion of the Religious Studies Symposium: “Religion and Public Health: Bridges to Collaboration.” Katie is doing her senior thesis on themes connecting two of her majors—Great Books and Religious Studies—by examining the historical evolution of representations of the Hindu deity Shiva.

Joseph Perez

Joseph Perez, a graduate student in the International Studies program who received his undergrad in Religious Studies in 2017, submitted a paper titled “Sāñchī: A Relic of Buddhist Development in Ancient India”. This paper analyzes the development of Buddhist ideals at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Sāñchī in central India, in particular noting changes in archaeological and artistic styles, burial practices, and monastic involvement in the worship of relics to illustrate the maturation of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice in India. His mentor was Dr. Derek Maher, who helped him to develop his research through an independent study course.
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

Frank Dembowski

“I am proud to have majored in Religious Studies because it shaped my intellectual thinking, my potential as a working citizen, and my spiritual life. I certainly benefitted from the Religious Studies Program academically, but more importantly, Religious Studies had an ineffable impact on how I experience life.” –Frank

Mansi Trivedi

“The time I have spent in the Religious Studies Program at ECU has completely changed the way I view education…after taking courses in religious studies that have forced me to challenge and critically assess my beliefs, I have learned that the path towards true knowledge and discovery is not necessarily the easiest one. When you put yourself in challenging situations and when you ask yourself those hard contemplative questions, you truly learn and discover something new about yourself.“ –Mansi

Aashna Lala

Aashna graduated with a double major in Religious Studies and Biology.

“I'm really grateful for that day that you convinced me to double major. It is helping me so much in med school. It is also something that has made me stand out and be different from all the other 'nerds' here.” –Aashna

Jesse Miller

Jesse Miller graduated with a double major in Religious Studies and Anthropology. He is currently a graduate student at Florida State University.

“Choosing to study Religious Studies at East Carolina University was one of the best decisions I have ever made for my professional career. These studies proved invaluable as I pursued graduate degrees in Religion. The comprehensive and holistic curriculum exposed me to the beautiful diversity of religious expressions around the world. Even though East Carolina’s campus community is large, my pursuit of a degree in the Religious Studies Program had a personal touch and my esteemed professors always made the time and effort to build my curiosity and foster my professional development. I also have the pleasure of passing on the knowledge I learned as I teach undergraduates in religious studies. Thanks to ECU Religious Studies, I am now well prepared as I move towards PhD candidacy in Religion at Florida State University.” –Jesse
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS CONT.

Anthony Beall

Anthony Beall graduated as a Religious Studies and English double major. He is currently a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

Katie Medinas

Katie Medinas graduated with a double major in Religious Studies. She is currently in the Master of Divinity Program at Duke Divinity School.

Calvin Bradley

Calvin Bradley graduated with a double major in Religious Studies and Rehabilitation Studies. He is currently completing his PhD degree and serving as Chaplain at Vidant Hospital.
Dr. Lee Johnson

Dr. Johnson published “Dining and Dunking the Dead: Post-Mortem Rituals in Hellenistic Society and the First-Century Church” in Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality, eds. Trothen & Mercer, New York: Palgrave/Macmillan (pp. 301-18). In the Fall she will present a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver entitled “Reluctant Egalitarianism in Paul and the Glossolalic-Centric Churches of the American South”. This paper is part of a new section of the Society of Biblical Literature—Historical Paul Session Comparative Forms of Religious Expertise. She is a contributing author to The Oxford Handbook of the Synoptic Gospels with an essay on “Oral Performance of the Synoptics. She is also the recipient of a Faculty Reassignment Award in the Arts and Humanities from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The grant is written to complete a monograph entitled Presenting Paul: Success and Failure of a Letter-Writer in a Non-Literate Culture.

Dr. Calvin Mercer

Dr. Mercer published “A Theological Assessment of Whole Brain Emulation: On the Path to Superintelligence,” in Religion and Human Enhancement: Death, Values, and Morality, Tracy Trothen and Calvin Mercer, Co-editors. Dr. Mercer was also awarded the Centennial Award for Excellence in Service at the Chancellor’s annual Awards Day program, March 2018. This award represents the highest award given to faculty and staff for excellence in service and is given “in recognition of excellent or exceptional service to the institution over a sustained period of time, with attention to a devotion to duty and an awareness of the importance of public service.” Dr. Mercer was invited to give keynote presentations on radical human enhancement at The New England Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and at the Christian Transhumanist Association National Meeting. He is invited to give a keynote on robotics and religion at a conference in Germany.

Dr. Kathy Barret Dawson

Dr. Dawson presented Contemplating Suicide or a Rhetorical Strategy to Strengthen the Philippians in the Midst of Opposition? Reading Phil 1:19-26 in Conjunction with Paul’s Emphasis on Suffering at the Society of Biblical Literature, Raleigh, North Carolina, March 2017. She was inducted as Vice President and Program Chair, Society of Biblical Literature/Southeast Region for the 2018-2019 year at the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion annual meeting in March 2018. She will publish “The Incestuous Man of 1 Corinthians 5, LXX Banishment Texts, and Eating with Sinners” an essay in Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in 1 Corinthians, edited by B. J. Oropeza and Linda Belleville, forthcoming by Fortress Press in 2019.

Dr. Mary Nyangweso


Dr. Derek Maher

ADVISORY COUNCIL AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES CLUB

ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Religious Studies Advisory Council was established in 2017 to promote the Religious Studies Program at ECU through community engagement, fundraising activities, and the development of broad-based support of the Religious Studies Program. The Council is comprised of Religious Studies faculty members, community leaders from a range of religious traditions, university students, alumni, and friends of the program. Council members play a significant role in the development of activities and events that engage ECU students, the youth and the elderly in the local community. Fundraising activities are designed to provide financial support for Religious Studies students and to underwrite public events that engage the community. The council meets periodically to discuss issues of interest or concern as well as make recommendations for students’ success and Religious Studies Program enhancement. We encourage anyone who is interested in joining the advisory council to contact the program director at wangilam@ecu.edu and submit our Aspiring Members Form at http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/religionprogram/advisory-council.cfm.

Members

Mrs. Samar Badwan, Islamic Center
Dr. George Bailey, Chair, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Mr. Calvin Bradley, Alumni and chaplain, Vidant hospital
Mr. Dakota Bynum, ECU Religious Studies Major
Dr. Kathy Dawson, Professor, Religious Studies
Rev. Rod Debs, Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Frank Dembowski, Alumni, and graduate scholar in Anthropology
Dr. Joseph Hellweg, Whichard Chair, Professor of Religious Studies
Rev. Bob Hudak, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
Dr. Lee Johnson, Professor, Religious Studies
Rabbi Harley Karz-Wagman, Congregation Bayt Shalom
Dr. Derek Maher, Professor, Religious Studies

Dr. Calvin Mercer, Professor, Religious Studies
Dr. Mary Nyangweso, Professor, Religious Studies
Dr. Jesse Peel, Friend and Donor, Religious Studies Program
Dr. Desai Priti, Hindu community
Dr. Sherif Taha, Islamic Center
Rev. Theron Clark-Stuart
Mansi Trivedi-Alumni, and graduate student, Brody School

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CLUB

We welcome students to join the Religious Studies Club for live discussion and sharing of religious topics. The Religious Studies Club seeks to foster an understanding of world religions through discussions and presentations on a wide range of topics relating to all religions. The purpose of the club is to create an environment in which students, faculty members and friends of the program can discuss religion from diverse perspectives in a friendly and open dialogue. All members are encouraged to share their views in a respectful manner. The club hosts regular meetings that bring people together and promote mutual understanding. Members seek relationships with other religiously and culturally oriented organizations on campus and in the community. As an academic organization, the club does not favor or promote any particular religion, faith, or belief. Members, officers and those on the Board have also been active ambassadors of the Religious Studies Program. Meetings are often focused on a broad range of topics, including non-canonical books of the Bible and the different depictions of hell for multiple religions in the Bible. In the fall semester, participants meet to develop an agenda of interesting and timely topics. The club will also host several speakers and lecturers who will give presentations from different religious perspectives. Officers and members are invited to apply for this academic year.

For details contact: Benjamin Robert Law at: lawb16@students.ecu.edu
Visit our OrcSync page at http://eastcarolina.orgsync.com/org/rsc/home

Elections for new officers will be held in the Fall. Get involved!
The Religious Studies Program is very grateful to J. Woolard and Helen Peel, Dr. Jesse Peel, and Judith K. Whichard as our 2018-19 sponsors of student scholarships and awards. Students are encouraged to apply for these two major-specific scholarships that can be found on the ECUAwards website titled 1) The Judith Kirkpatrick Whichard Scholarship Endowment; 2) The Hellen Woolard and Jesse Peel Award. Religious Studies majors are encouraged to apply for these opportunities. The Judith Kirkpatrick Whichard Scholarship is listed on the ECUAwards site: https://ecu.academicworks.com/. Applicants for the J. Woolard and Helen Peel Distinguished Professorship Awards should direct their questions and proposals to Dr. Mary Nyangweso.

**Jesse Peel**

Dr. Peel, an eastern North Carolina native and Atlanta physician, believed deeply in the promise of East Carolina to transform the eastern NC region and that his gift at ECU would be more impactful than at any other institution. In early 2014 he decided to make a significant planned gift to East Carolina University to ensure that students in the LGBT community could have resources to support programming and operational expenses in the new student centers. The Dr. Jesse R. Peel LGBT Center, renamed in his honor, is the first of its kind in the state and one of only a few in the country. Dr. Peel was instrumental in endowing a chair in Religious Studies and has been supportive of the program in many other ways through the years.

**Judy Whichard**

Judy Whichard, a current double major in Religious Studies and Creative Writing, has deep ties to both the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences and the city of Greenville. The Whichard family has a long history of benevolence towards ECU. Dave Whichard, Judy’s late husband, played a role in helping ECU gain university status in 1967 and was an advocate for the development of ECU’s medical school. The David Julian and Virginia Suther Whichard Distinguished Professorship was established in 1995 to honor Dave Whichard’s parents. Extending back another generation, David Jordan Whichard’s grandfather was one of the founders of East Carolina Teacher’s Training School and his mother was a graduate from ECU-TTS. Soon after Dave’s passing, Judy continued the tradition of generosity by establishing the first scholarship in her own name. Judy was drawn to the Religious Studies Program initially because of her interest in the intersection of politics and faith; her own faith inspired her to understand different cultures, societies and how faith informs and promotes life in all arenas of life. Her interest in her community extends not only to her church and diocese, but to the arts, literacy, and horticulture.
RELIGIOUS STUDIES EVENTS PHOTO GALLERY

2017 Whichard Event
2018 Religion and Health Symposium
The Religion and Health Symposium brought together experts to discuss with local community leaders the very important issues and work being done in religion and health.

2018 Student Symposium
Our students performed remarkably well in this symposium, showcasing their work in understanding religion.
2018 Graduation