

University of Oklahoma Department of Religious Studies

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER



From the Chair

by Deonnie Moodie, Ph.D.

Greetings all,



I am pleased to be returning as chair after my sabbatical this spring and to be composing this—the first RELS newsletter in a very long time. The newsletter will now come out annually as part of our effort to reconnect with alumni and to create community among our current and past students, faculty, staff and friends.

What a year it has been for all of us. I am so grateful to our faculty and staff for their flexibility in adjusting to remote and hybrid work, operating either from home or on a campus completely transformed by social distancing and masking measures. Our faculty have been working harder than ever to keep their ambitious research agendas going throughout the pandemic while our staff have adjusted to new systems and structures. Their many accomplishments are outlined below. Meanwhile, our students have worked incredibly hard this year. Congratulations especially to our students who made it to graduation day. The Department of Religious Studies celebrates each of you and wishes you all of the best as you make your way after your time with us. Please keep in touch.

The biggest highlight of the year for RELS was James Hill's acceptance of our offer for a new tenure-track position in the area of race and religion. Through a rigorous search process that included extraordinary applications from candidates across the country, James emerged as the leader. We are so fortunate that he will be joining us in the fall semester. He will be teaching courses on American religious history with a focus on Black religious experience. Congratulations, James, and welcome to OU.

In addition, our administrator and academic advisor, Lee Green, just completed her 20th year at OU. I know you all know Lee because she has been with the Department of Religious Studies (formerly program) for 17 years now. We celebrate the integral role Lee has played in RELS for all these years, and for all she continues to do to keep us going.

We are overjoyed to be returning to campus this year and plan to host a series of in-person events. We will kick off the fall semester with a welcome back celebration from 3-4 p.m., Friday, Aug. 27 (see below for more details). Keep an eye out for more announcements on that front.

Deonnie Moodie, Ph.D.

Introducing James Howard Hill, Jr.

Meet the Newest Addition to the RELS Faculty

The Department of Religious Studies is excited to welcome James Hill to our faculty this fall. Hill is finishing his Ph.D. at Northwestern University and is scheduled to defend his dissertation, titled "Transgressive Witness: Religion, Race Governance and the Michael Jackson Cacophony."

He is the author of several published and forthcoming articles and essays dealing with such topics as hip hop theopoetics, kneeling and Black athletic protest, Black politics and religion and religion in HBO's *Watchmen*.

You can find an example of Hill's work on the African American Intellectual History Society website - aaihs.org - "[Watchmen, Haunting, & the Religious Imagination](#)" from February 2020.

Hill will design and offer new courses inspired by his own research and interests, and he will utilize his own expertise and approaches to courses that make up the core religious studies curriculum. Hill comes to us with a rich background in mentorship programs and is eager to work with our students.

You can meet Hill at our Welcome Back event from 3-4 p.m., Friday, Aug. 27 in the Frontier Room at the Oklahoma Memorial Union. (See details below.) Stop by, introduce yourself and say hello when we welcome in the new academic school year.



Welcome Back RELS!

The University of Oklahoma Department of Religious Studies would like to invite *all interested students, Religious Studies majors, minors, faculty, staff, alumni and friends* to our Fall 2021 Welcome Back event.



We are excited to be returning to campus and cannot wait to see all of you!

3 -4 p.m. Friday, August 27

Frontier Room, Oklahoma Memorial Union

Pizza and snacks will be provided.

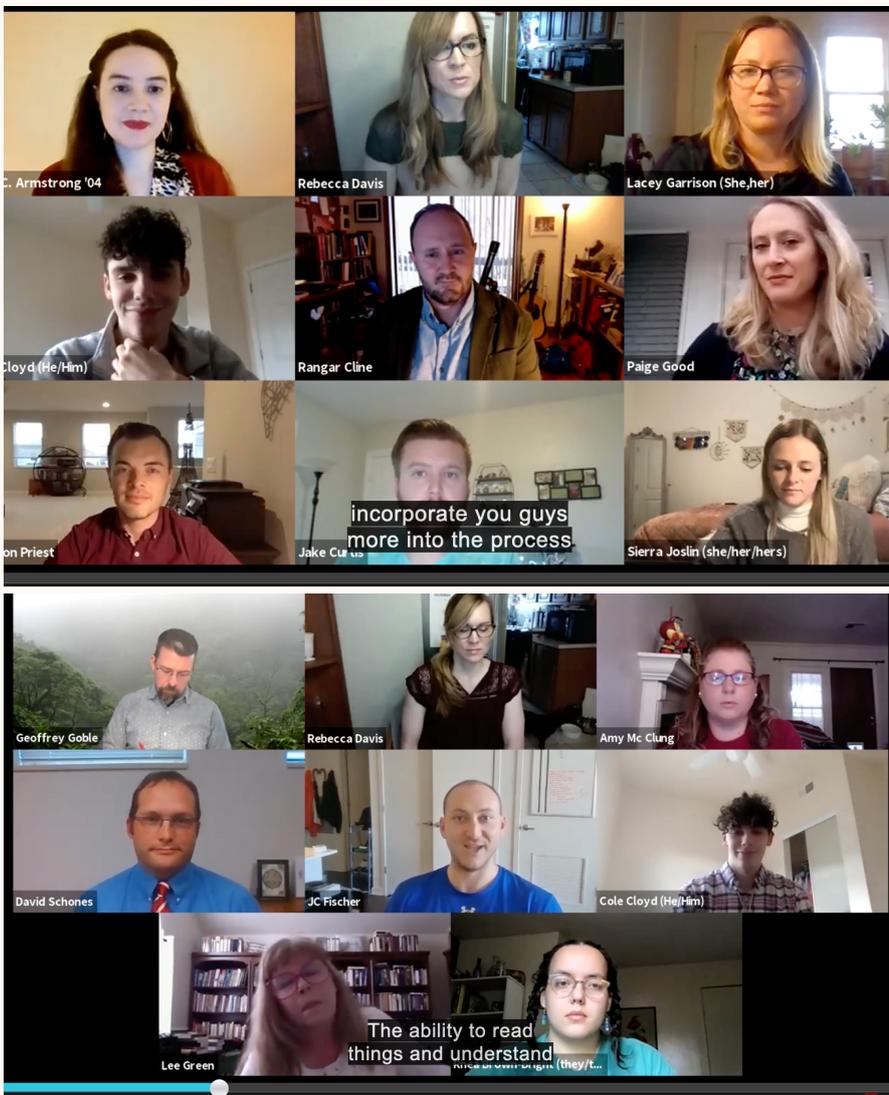
Bring a friend and join in the excitement for the new academic year to come.

Re-Connecting with Alumni

This year, the RELS department launched a major initiative to reach out to our alumni with whom we have been out of touch for a while. We learned that they are up to so many exciting things! Many have gone on to successful careers in education, law, nonprofit work and medicine. Our Student Services assistant,

Rebecca Hall-Davis, has done a wonderful job connecting those alumni with our current students through a new [OU RELS LinkedIn page](#) and by organizing a number of events bringing them together. We are so grateful to the alumni who shared their experiences and knowledge with our students about getting into graduate

schools and various career paths at two separate events this year. In October, our alumni - including J.C. Fischer, attorney and engagement manager for McKinsey & Co. in Dallas; Amy McClung, current graduate student at OU with a master's degree in professional counseling and a master of divinity degree from Southern Methodist University; David Schones, visiting assistant professor of religious studies at Austin College as well as our own Associate Professor Geoffrey Goble, advised our RELS students on considering graduate school, researching different schools, using critical thinking, seeking mentorship and adapting to new situations. In November, our alumni Paige Hoster Good, trial attorney for McAfee & Taft; Brenton Priest, a family physician in Orlando; Lacey Garrison, technical recruiter for Affirma in Fayetteville and former recruitment specialist for City Year in Tulsa and April Armstrong, special collections assistant for public services at the Seeley G. Mudd Library at Princeton University, led a discussion with our RELS students on the varied career paths a religious studies degree can create. We look forward to more alumni/student discussions in the future. If any other alumni would like to be involved in these events, please let us know.



If you would like to reconnect with us, please email us at rebeccahd@ou.edu or join us on LinkedIn! Our LinkedIn group is titled University of Oklahoma Religious Studies Alumni. You can find us at: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12451766/t>

RELS Alumni Spotlight: Paige Hoster Good

Paige Hoster Good (*RELS Spring 2009*) is a trial attorney who represents employers in all phases of labor and employment law. She is a frequent speaker on issues affecting the workplace and has been a contributing author to numerous business and professional publications, including, *The Oklahoman* and *Oklahoma Employment Law Letter* among others. Good's achievements have earned her inclusion in *The Best Lawyers in America: Ones to Watch* and Oklahoma Super Lawyers' list of "Oklahoma Rising Stars."



Good explains how RELS contributed to her success: "The coursework in RELS translated quite perfectly to the work of an attorney. RELS required me to listen, read, analyze, spot issues, ask questions and articulate my analysis and reasoning—whether in a written product or during in-person class discussions and presentations. This is, frankly, the work of a litigation attorney. Most importantly, RELS taught me how to think. How to develop an inquisitive mind. How to continually ask questions, even if the answers are unknown, because the questions in themselves are important. These are skills that can take you anywhere in life, regardless of a specific career path."

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RELS Student Spotlight: Cole Cloyd

Cole Cloyd (*RELS December 2020*) will be pursuing a master of theological studies degree in religion, politics and ethics at Harvard Divinity School, with particular focus on religious and political violence of extremist/hate groups.

Cole explains how RELS contributed to his success:

"I think the OU RELS department helped me in that we have a fantastic method of engaging with ideas and information at both a personal and systemic level. I think we

have some of the best faculty and staff across both the university and the country at consistently challenging students to look inward at our own religious and cultural identities, and outward towards the larger systems and communities that religion plays a factor in. As a department, there is a continuous effort to grow as a scholar (and I would think as a person) from the faculty, staff and the students themselves. There is no doubt without the RELS department, without the encouragement

and expertise of those within it, I would not have a great opportunity like I do at Harvard. I've been able to be around some the best scholars and mentors in my time at the RELS department, and for that I can't be thankful enough."



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Congratulations RELS Students

Congratulations to our amazing students for their accomplishments this academic year!



2020-21 Religious Studies Graduates

Fall 2020

Cole Cloyd
Jacob Curtis
Kenneth Frantz
Jacob Hitchcock
Matthew Merideth

Spring 2021

Sarah Brown
Rhea Brown-Bright
Tanner Carlson
Kevin Grane
Austin Satrio

Religious Studies Phi Beta Kappa inductees

Cole Cloyd
Christopher Dixon
Jacob Hitchcock
Austin Satrio

2021-22 Religious Studies Scholarship Recipients

The Heather Nicole Stephenson Senior Academic Excellence Award
Austin Satrio

The Timothy Cole Stephenson Junior Academic Excellence Award
Camryn Cartwright

The LeNorman Make A Difference Scholarship
Amber Nicholson

The LeNorman Scholarship for Religion and Ethics
Tyler Rogers

The Tom W. Boyd Scholarship for Religious Studies and Education
Caeli Dedmon
Sadee Songer

The Angus Family Scholarship in Religious Studies
Christopher Dixon

The Reverend Larry & Gloria Angus Scholarship
Courtney Witte

The Bernita L. Thompson Endowed Scholarship for Undergraduate Research and Writing
Rhea Brown-Bright
Jacob Curtis
Kenneth Frantz



Where They Are Headed Next...

Our graduates make us proud! Here's where a few of them are headed next:

Tanner Carlson will be moving to the Washington, D.C., area this fall to attend the University of District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. Rhea Brown-Bright will be attending Boston University's School of Theology. Kevin Grane is studying in Jerusalem over the summer, and has applied to the University of Denver to pursue a master's degree in religious studies. Jacob Curtis will be applying to medical school this summer after taking the MCAT. Kenneth Frantz continues to author articles for religion news services online. You can read some of his work on www.religionandpolitics.org.

Faculty Updates

RELS Departmental Faculty

Associate Professor Rangar Cline served as acting chair of the Department of Religious Studies from October until May this past year. He had two book chapters published: "[Water and Proof in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives](#)" and "[Valentinian III's Novel 23](#)." He continued his work on a pilgrimage souvenir database and with GIS maps for his next book project and presented some of that research in progress at international conferences. In addition, his first book, [*Ancient Angels*](#), was re-issued in paperback by Brill.



Associate Professor Geoffrey Goble had two encyclopedia entries on the 8th-century Buddhist monk, Amoghavajra, published this year in [*Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Religion*](#) and Brill's [*Encyclopedia of Buddhism*](#), respectively. He is currently conducting research on the material dimensions of Buddhist ritual performance in medieval China and the use of psychoactive flora in those rituals. In addition, he is developing a [*Reacting to the Past*](#) role-playing game on religions in medieval China.



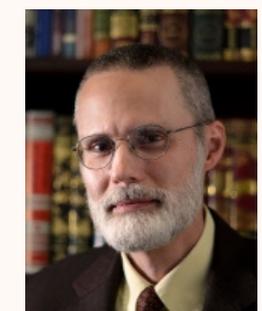
Associate Professor Jill Hicks-Keeton continues to serve as Presidential Teaching Fellow in the Honors College. Her book, *Who Owns the Bible?* is now in production with Cambridge University Press. This year she received three (three!) fellowships from three separate OU entities (the Office of the Vice President for Research, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Humanities Forum) in support of her next book tentatively titled *Good Book*. She also had multiple articles on women and the Bible published in [*Religion Dispatches*](#) as well as an article on pedagogy and the pandemic in [*Times Higher Education*](#).



Associate Professor and Academic Chair Deonnie Moodie is working on a new book project on the emergence of religion in business schools in India and the United States. This year, her article "[Corporate Hinduism](#)" was published in [*Religion Compass*](#) and her co-edited special issue "[Business and Benevolence: A Cross-Disciplinary Intervention](#)" was published in the [*Journal of Human Values*](#). She was also a media partner for [*The Revealer*](#), which published three of her articles on Hinduism and public life, and she participated in an online forum on [Religious Studies and the Corporate Form](#).



Associate Professor David Vishanoff submitted the final manuscript of his book, *Islamic Legal Theory: A Critical Introduction Based on al-Juwayni's Waraaqat fi usul al-fiqh*, this year, which is soon to be published by Hackett. The International Institute of Islamic Thought published a book of essays he edited titled [*Islamic Law and Ethics*](#), which included a chapter of his own. He also had another book chapter "[Informative and Performative Theories of Divine Speech in Classical Islamic Legal Theory](#)" published in an edited volume. In addition, he continues his work on the Islamic Psalms of David.



Core RELS Faculty

Religious Studies core faculty who teach and research in the area of religion from different disciplinary homes continue to be an integral part of RELS at OU. Some highlights of their work this year related to Religious Studies include the following: **Associate Professor Marie Dallam** was named interim associate dean of the Honors College and her article on art and Mormon polygamy was published in the *Material and Visual Culture of Religion Journal*. Director of the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies, **Professor Alan Levenson**, had two articles published in *Modern Judaism*, and *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Chair of Classics and Letters, **Associate Professor Scott Johnson**, had three book chapters on Syrian hymnography, apostolic thought and Christian biography, respectively, published and continues to work on the history of the Syriac language. **Associate Professor Jane Wickersham** in History is working on an article and book on the Catholic church's prosecution of morality crimes in counter-Reformation Rome. **Associate Professor Roberta Magnusson**, also in History, is finalizing a book manuscript that includes research on the ways the medieval Church supported urban infrastructures. **Associate Professor Sam Perry** in Sociology recently published an article on the issues of slavery and antisemitism in the English Standard Version of the Bible in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and continues to speak to national audiences about Christian nationalism. **Professor Tom Burns**, also in Sociology, co-wrote and published two book chapters with RELS **Professor Emeritus Tom Boyd** on culture and ecology and environmental ethics.

Faculty Award Recognition

Congratulations

Associate Professor Jill Hicks-Keeton will serve as an **OU Arts and Humanities Forum Public Fellow** in the coming academic year. She was also awarded a **Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts Seed Grant** from the Office of the Vice President for Research, and a **Senior Faculty Summer Fellowship** from the College of Arts and Sciences. We are all looking forward to her future projects. Congratulations!

Congratulations to **Associate Professor and Academic Chair Deonnie Moodie** for receiving the College of Arts and Sciences **James and Jo Ann Holden Faculty Award**. The College of Arts and Sciences grants the Holden Faculty Award to faculty who "demonstrate excellence in teaching courses at the freshman or sophomore level... [and] exhibit[s] excellent leadership in research." Well done!



Staff Updates

Lots of things happen behind the scenes to keep an academic program running. This year along with departmental advising, **Lee Green** participated in University College's summer New Student Orientation, to welcome and introduce new students to Religious Studies at the onset of their OU journey. She managed the department transition to complex new financial reporting and HR/Payroll systems while keeping departmental financial processes, an essential element of supporting the academic mission, functioning. She crafted significant documents for the university and the regents in support of an expansion of the curriculum, a year in the making, to streamline completion of the degree. In addition, she assisted and supported the department's very successful faculty search.



Over the past year, **Rebecca Hall-Davis** has led an effort to build our RELS community by reaching out to our RELS alumni. She organized and moderated alumni/student events including the RELS career panel and the RELS graduate school panel. As the Student Services assistant in the Department of Religious Studies, she serves as a alumni and student liaison, maintains records and databases that guide decision-making in the department and help students know their course enrollment options and works to build the RELS community.



Staff Recognition

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to **Lee Green**, administrator, academic advisor and instructor for **20 years of service** at the University of Oklahoma, 17 of those in Religious Studies. She has nurtured the development of Religious Studies from a program into a department and has seen pretty much all of our students through to graduation throughout that time. Thank you, Lee, for all of your hard work and service to RELS and to the whole OU community!



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

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