

# *University of Oklahoma Department of Religious Studies*

FALL 2022 NEWSLETTER

## What's New in Religious Studies

### *Wendy Mallette Joins the RELS Faculty*

Introducing Associate Professor Wendy Mallette, Ph.D.

The Department of Religious Studies is excited to welcome Wendy Mallette to our religious studies faculty this fall. Mallette comes to us from Yale University, where she earned her Ph.D. in Religious Studies as well as a graduate certificate in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Mallette also has a master of arts in religion degree from Yale Divinity School and a bachelor of arts degree from Valparaiso University. She is currently working on a book manuscript that draws on the archives of lesbian feminist public cultures of the 1960s through the 1980s to intervene in conversations in queer studies and religious studies. Mallette mentored students at Yale, and she is eager to work with our students. She will diversify our course offerings and help us forge connections with units across campus. Come introduce yourself at our Fall Welcome Back Week Open House. (See details below.) Welcome to the department, Wendy Mallette!



### *Welcome, Rebecca Hall-Davis, Our New RELS Administrative and Financial Coordinator*

Introducing Rebecca Hall-Davis

Rebecca Hall-Davis, who has served as the department's student services assistant from January 2012 to December 2021, accepted a new role as financial and administrative coordinator for the Department of Religious Studies. She brings with her a broad experience in the academic environment and a wide range of skills. She has a bachelor of business administration degree in management information systems, a bachelor of arts degree in history, and a master of arts degree in history with a focus on early modern English religion. She looks forward to a successful and engaging new academic year! Hall-Davis is taking over this position from Lee Green, who was promoted to the position of budget manager at the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences. We wish Lee the best in her new endeavor, and we thank her for her years of service to Religious Studies!



### *New Academic Advisor for Religious Studies*

Meet Our New Academic Advisor, Jennie Lazar



Religious Studies is excited to introduce our advisor, **Jennifer Lazar**. Lazar is located in Ellison Hall, Room 124, and Religious Studies majors and minors are encouraged to utilize her as a resource. You can reach her at [jlazar@ou.edu](mailto:jlazar@ou.edu) and you can schedule an appointment with her on **iAdvise**.

# Upcoming Events in the Department of Religious Studies

*Keep an Eye Out for These Upcoming RELS Events!*

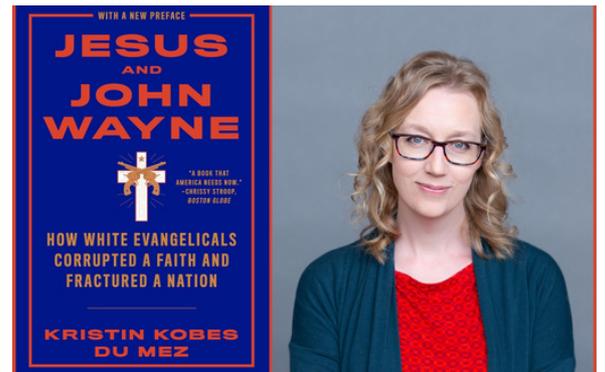
## Welcome Back, RELS!

The Department of Religious Studies is thrilled to welcome everyone back for the start of a new academic year. We invite the entire Religious Studies community (faculty, staff, alumni, interested students, etc.) to our Welcome Back Week Open House from 3 - 4:30 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 26 in our department on the first floor of Robertson Hall. Cookies and beverages will be provided. Gluten-free and vegan options will be available. We can't wait to see you!



## Kristin Kobes Du Mez to Visit Department of Religious Studies

On Thursday, September 8, the Department of Religious Studies with the Department of Sociology, University of Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Forum, Honors College, Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, and Department of History will welcome noted scholar **Kristin Kobes Du Mez** to campus. Professor Du Mez's presentation will be followed by a panel discussion with Du Mez, Jill Hicks-Keeton, James Howard Hill Jr., and Sam Perry from 5:30 - 7 p.m. in Meacham Auditorium in Oklahoma Memorial Union. We hope you can attend.



## Second Friday RELS Student Lunches

Second Friday Student Lunches - Students, enjoy a free lunch with RELS faculty and staff on the second Friday of each month!

Dates include Sept. 9, Oct. 14 and Nov. 11. Majors and minors are welcome.



## Tulasi Srinivas, Ph.D., to Speak at RELS in Pujari Lecture

At 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 10, professor of anthropology, religion and transnational studies at the Marlboro Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies at Emerson College **Tulasi Srinivas, Ph.D.**, will present a public lecture on *The Missing Goddess: Religion, Ecology, and Violence in a Millennial City* sponsored by the Pujari Foundation. Find out more about Srinivas and her work [here](#). Please keep an eye out in future RELS communications for details on this great event!



# Donors Make a Difference

## *Thank you, RELS donors!*

The Department of Religious Studies would like to extend its gratitude to our donors this year.

This spring, former Director of Outreach for the Religious Studies Program Rev. Barbara Boyd and Rev. Larry Angus generously contributed to an OU Foundation fund designated solely to RELS student enhancement. The department is excited to support a number of exciting new opportunities for RELS students in the upcoming academic year through this fund, including the sponsorship of four students to attend the annual meetings of the AAR in November 2022.

Also, **the Pujari Foundation's** generous donation to the department of Religious Studies will allow us to bring Tulasi Srinivas to OU's campus this year. We are deeply grateful to Pujari Foundation founder, Roshan Pujari, as well as Drs. Gita and Ganga Pujari and Foundation Executive Director Guy Bramble for making this lecture possible.

## *American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting Student Opportunity*

### **OU RELS Students will visit AAR this year!**

The Department of Religious Studies is excited to announce student sponsorships to attend the **American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting** in Denver this year from Nov. 19-22. This exciting opportunity is made possible through our Student Enhancement Fund with generous donations from former Director of Outreach for the Religious Studies Program Rev. Barbara Boyd and Rev. Larry Angus. Four sponsorships are available to current RELS students. Students may apply here: **[AAR Student Funding Application](#)**. Thank you to Rev. Boyd and Rev. Angus for creating such an amazing opportunity for our students!

## *Foster Student Development in the Department of Religious Studies*

### **Making a Difference in RELS at OU**

The Department of Religious Studies looks forward to more exciting opportunities for our students and faculty in the future. If you would like to support to the Department of Religious Studies, you may visit **[our OU Foundation page](#)** devoted to RELS student enhancement at OU.



[Support RELS at OU](#)



Follow us on your favorite social media platforms:

Facebook: **OU Department of Religious Studies**

Instagram: **oureligiousstudies**

Twitter: **@OUReligStudies**

YouTube: **OU Religious Studies**

Also, RELS alumni have their own group on LinkedIn. Please search for "University of Oklahoma Religious Studies Alumni" on LinkedIn or click on **<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12451766/>** to join.

# Another Successful Year in Religious Studies

## Student's Corner With Kenna Williamson



### A view of our 2021 Welcome Back event through the eyes of a RELS minor

My name is Kenna Williamson, and I am currently going into my sophomore year at OU with a major in public relations and minor in religious studies...

Religious studies often has a lot of misconceptions surrounding it, but I know to write well I need to understand people, and religion happens to be the backbone of a lot of people's morals and actions. Religious studies has done me a favor by bringing special interest to my writing. I can return that favor by actively participating in RELS-related things like this newsletter, even though it feels more like a fun hobby than school. **I feel so lucky to have found my interest so early in my academic career, but I couldn't have done it without the caring faculty in the RELS department.**

## RELS Throws Successful "Welcome Back" Event

The Department of Religious Studies and students reflect on the "Welcome Back" event that opened the school year with alumni, faculty and food on Aug. 27, 2021.

-By Kenna Williamson

The Department of Religious Studies threw a "Welcome Back" event that invited all students, faculty and alumni to celebrate the beginning of a new year. The event took place in the Union courtyard to keep things COVID-friendly in the midst of the pandemic. Religious Studies professors were in attendance to welcome new and returning students back to the department.

"This was the first Religious Studies event I attended, and I felt really welcomed, which made me want to take more classes in religion actually," student Isabel Gruhlke said.

The "Welcome Back" event was the first event of its kind to be hosted by the Department of Religious Studies. The event was also the first in-person event for the whole department since the pandemic began.

"Seeing professors in a relaxed environment allowed for all of us to just enjoy the day and be grateful that we could finally have another in-person event to celebrate the beginning of the school year, especially for the [Department of] Religious Studies," student Isabel Gruhlke said.

Deonnie Moodie, chair of the Department of Religious Studies, said that her wish is to provide spaces for students to meet before their last year of college in their capstone class. "My main hope is that these events are a good opportunity for Religious Studies students to get to know one another," Moodie said.

The "Welcome Back" event celebrated some of the students' first and last years in the Department of Religious Studies. Professors in attendance also introduced themselves to incoming students.

-Kenna Williamson



## *Department of Religious Studies Welcomes Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar Donald S. Lopez*

The Department of Religious Studies welcomed Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in the Department of Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan **Donald S. Lopez**, Ph.D., to campus this past April. Lopez visited with students and faculty, participated in Associate Professor Geoffrey Goble's Chinese Religions and Tibetan Buddhism courses, and delivered a public lecture titled, "When Buddha Was an Idol: European Encounters with an Ancient Asian Sage."



Lopez's visit was an immense success, and we extend our thanks to him for his time spent with us at OU.

## *RELS End-of-Year Event Celebrates Students and Donors*

### **Celebrating our Religious Studies community**

On May 14 of this year, RELS students, faculty, staff, donors, and alumni were invited to the home of RELS Chair and Associate Professor Deonnie Moodie to celebrate a successful academic year. The beautiful May morning and the pleasant outdoor setting allowed our community to socialize together after the work of another semester. We celebrated our amazing graduating seniors and scholarship recipients. The department also announced generous donations from the Pujari Family as well as Rev. Barbara Boyd and Rev. Larry Angus.



## *OU Student Joins Associate Professor Rangar Cline on Huqoq Excavation Project*

### **A Life-Changing Experience in Huqoq, Israel**

This summer, OU student Josué Soto accompanied Associate Professor Rangar Cline on the **Huqoq Excavation Project**. Josué is currently a McNair Fellow and recipient of a Schusterman Center Scholarship. Associate Professor Rangar Cline joined the staff of the project, which has spent several years excavating a late Roman synagogue in Israel.



*Photo by Jim Haberman*

## *RELS Alumni Spotlight: Youssef Kamel*

**Youssef Kamel** is the [international student programs coordinator for International Student Services at the College of International Studies](#). Youssef is a former international student from Egypt who graduated in 2020 with a bachelor of arts degree in international studies and religious studies and a master of arts degree in international studies with a focus on the SWANA (aka MENA) region in 2022.

Youssef says, "I've honestly learned so much from being a RELS major – not only what we learned in class, but also research methods, critical thinking skills, and so much more that has helped me ever since. It helped formulate the structure and content of my thesis as a M.A. student, and it continues to help me today as International Programs coordinator at OU, where a proper understanding of different people makes it a lot easier to serve international students and anticipate their needs!"



*Youssef Kamel, Class of 2020  
International Student  
Programs Coordinator,  
International Student  
Services at OU*

## ***Congratulations RELS Students***

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



### ***2021-22 Religious Studies Scholarship Recipients***

*The Heather Nicole Stephenson Scholarship*  
Christopher Dixon

*The LeNorman Scholarship for Religion and Ethics*  
Ezra Koenig

*The Bernita L. Thompson Endowed Scholarship for Undergraduate Research and Writing*  
Christopher Dixon

*The Timothy Cole Stephenson Scholarship*  
Amber Nicholson

*The Reverend Larry & Gloria Angus Endowed Scholarship*  
Mennaallah Elsayed

*The Tom W. Boyd Scholarship for Religious Studies and Education*  
Benjamin Bernard

*The LeNorman Make A Difference Scholarship*  
Amy Hotchkiss

### ***2021-22 Religious Studies Graduating Seniors***

Fall 2021

Minors:  
Matthias Day  
Kylee Montgomery  
Benjamin Loper  
Feba Susan Finny

Spring 2022

Majors:  
Christopher Dixon  
Camryn Darrow

Minors:  
Coleman Allen  
Charlotte Bailey

Alexandria Cobb  
Kobi Ederi  
Erin Eisenmann  
Sierra Joslin  
Jacob P. Markman-Fox

Mennaallah Elsayed  
Phoenix Lawson  
Skylar Moomey  
Sadee Songer  
Abbey Young

## ***Where Our Graduates Are Headed Next...***

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

**Kylee Montgomery** will pursue her Ph.D. in sociology at the Ohio State University. **Christopher Dixon** will be a seminarian at the Pontifical College Josephinum of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Columbus. **Camryn Darrow** will pursue a master's degree in library and information studies at the University of Oklahoma. **Charlotte Bailey** will pursue a master's degree in computer science at Yale University. **Menna Elsayed** will pursue a master's degree in international studies at North Carolina State University. **Phoenix Lawson** will pursue their doctorate in audiology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

## *Faculty Updates*

### *RELS Departmental Faculty*

**Associate Professor Rangar Cline** presented his research on Roman and Byzantine pilgrimage souvenirs at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Overseas Research and the Society of Biblical Literature. He also joined the staff of the [Hugog Excavation Project](#), which has spent several years excavating a late Roman synagogue in Israel. In summer 2022, Cline supervised the excavation of an area of the synagogue where excavators found mosaics depicting the stories Jael and Sisera as well as Deborah and Barak.



**Associate Professor Geoffrey Goble** is completing a [Reacting to the Past](#) course gamebook in collaboration with Erik J. Hammerstrom, Ph.D., of Pacific Lutheran College. The game reenacts religious debate in the ninth-century Chinese court, allowing students to imaginatively play the role of a Daoist priest, Buddhist monk, Confucian official, or Chinese courtier. He is also preparing a major research project concerning the botanical species *datura* in Asia and Asian religious cultures.



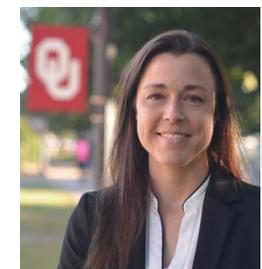
**Associate Professor Jill Hicks-Keeton** served as a Presidential Teaching Fellow in the Honors College. She published articles in [Religion & Politics](#), [The Revealer](#), [Religion Dispatches](#), [Times Higher Ed](#), [Ancient Jew Review](#), and [The Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies](#). Hicks-Keeton spoke as the plenary lunch speaker for the [26th Annual Conference of the Western Jewish Studies Association](#). She also developed new courses for the department, including Famous Bibles and Women and the Bible.



**Assistant Professor James Howard Hill Jr.** successfully completed and defended his dissertation, "Religion, (Anti-)Blackness, and Michael Jackson," for Northwestern University. He developed new courses for the department, including Religion and Black Popular Music, Religion and Social Change and Religion and Black Political Thought. Hill also just became a [fellow for the Crossroads Project](#) at Princeton University's Center for the Study of Religion for 2022-23.



**Associate Professor and Academic Chair Deonnie Moodie**'s co-edited Roundtable "[Living Neoliberalism Outside the West](#)" was published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* this year along with her solo-authored article, "[Retail Religion: Hinduism for a Neoliberal Age](#)." In addition, her book chapter, "[Kali and the Queen: Religion and the Production of Calcutta's Pasts and Presents](#)," appeared in the Routledge edited volume, *Spaces of Religion in Urban South Asia*.



**Associate Professor David Vishanoff** took advantage of the resumption of in-person conferences to present eight papers in Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. He also launched a new Introduction to Islam course, and continued to work on his translation of the Islamic Psalms, publishing several excerpts from them in [The Bloomsbury Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations](#) as well as an article on "[Images of David in Several Muslim Rewritings of the Psalms](#)" in a book on *The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. His book on [Islamic Legal Theory](#) was published. He developed the new course Hermeneutics: Approaches to Interpreting the Bible and the Qur'an for the department.



## 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 the Department of Religious Studies at OU. Here are some highlights of their work over the past year:

**Director of the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies, Schusterman/Josey Chair of Judaic History, and Professor Alan Levenson's** *Maurice Samuel: Life and Letters of a Secular Jewish Contrarian* (University of Alabama Press) appeared this summer. He spoke about this work at the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in August. This past year, he expended much effort in directing the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies and organizing the Western Jewish Studies Association annual conference (March 2022).



## Faculty Recognition

The Department of Religious Studies faculty celebrated a number of achievements this past year.

The Crossroads Project at Princeton University's Center for the Study of Religion named **Assistant Professor James Howard Hill Jr.** a Crossroads Fellow. The Crossroads Project "responds to challenges that call for deeper public understanding of and scholarly engagement with Black religious histories and cultures."

**Associate Professor Jill Hicks-Keeton** received the Dodge Family College of Arts & Sciences Senior Faculty Summer Fellowship, an Ed Cline faculty development grant, and a Faculty Investment Program grant from the Office of the Vice President for Research and Partnerships at OU.

In the spring, **Associate Professor Deonnie Moodie** was awarded a Faculty Investment Program grant from OU's Research Council to pursue research at Harvard Business School for her current book project, *B-School Religion*.

**Associate Professor David Vishanoff** was awarded the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences Senior Faculty Summer Fellowship.

Congratulations to our amazing faculty!

## Staff Recognition

Our **Administrative and Financial Coordinator Rebecca Hall-Davis** celebrated 10 years with the Department of Religious Studies in January 2022. Congratulations, Rebecca, and thank you for your years of service!



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