To Tackle Tough Issues

How do professors engage students in constructive dialogue about tough issues such as contentious political, religious, racial and cultural differences?

The Department of Religious Studies, with other MU units, is part of a national project to promote the open discussion of sensitive subjects. Mizzou is one of only 27 institutions of higher education selected to receive a $100,000 Ford Foundation grant to promote pluralism and academic freedom on campus. More than 675 colleges and universities submitted proposals.

The Ford Foundation created the Difficult Dialogues program in response to reports of growing intolerance and efforts to curb academic freedom at colleges and universities. (Continues on Page 2)
Tough Issues continued from Page 1

At MU, religious studies faculty are working with the theatre department, the law school’s Dispute Resolution Program and education’s Counseling Psychology Program to train professors in methods of facilitating tough conversations. Roger Worthington in the College of Education is coordinating MU’s efforts. Fifteen Ford Fellows who were trained in fall semester 2006 will use deliberative dialogue techniques in their winter 2007 classes. Deliberative dialogue and dispute resolution techniques investigate the range of perspectives in complex issues and help groups reach consensus. “These are the basic skills of civil participation,” says Sharon Welch, chair of the religious students department. “We teach faculty and students not to run from differences but to engage them.”

Welch speculates that MU was chosen to participate because of its diversity of strengths in conflict resolution, and she welcomes the opportunity to teach students that their differences can enhance each other. “Many MU students come without experience in diversity and don’t know how to interact with people of different political and religious backgrounds,” she says.

Religious studies faculty members conducted a religious literacy workshop that used their expertise in these areas: Robert Baum, African indigenous religions and Islam, Patricia Beckman, history of Christianity; and Welch, multiculturalism and religion and politics. MU law student and former Rhodes Scholar Antwaun Smith, BA ’98 religious studies, provided training in First Amendment issues and on religion and civil discourse. In related training, theatre Professor Susanne Burgoyne taught interactive-theater techniques; a series of winter 2007 classes.

The department welcomes news from alumni and friends. Dan Glover

Celebrate 25 Years

The Department of Religious Studies invites alumni, students, faculty and friends to participate in the department’s 25th anniversary celebration Nov. 8 to 10, 2007. Keynote speaker will be David Chidester, professor of religious studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Chidester also directs the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa and is a research associate with the Social Cohesion and Integration Program of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa. He is the author or editor of more than 20 books, including Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple and Jonestown. Please contact the department by e-mail at smithcr@missouri.edu, or phone (573) 882-4769 for more information.

Milestones

By Sharon Welch, Department Chair

The Department of Religious Studies has undergone some significant changes in the past year. Steve and Janice Friesen have moved to Austin, where Steve was appointed the Louise Farmer Boyer Professor in Biblical Studies at the University of Texas. The position will allow Steve to pursue his archaeological research, as well as his teaching. While he is sorely missed in Columbia, we are happy for him and the new opportunities this position will bring.

Three adjunct faculty, Nancy Weatherwas, Dennis Kelley and Henchand Gossai, also have moved to other positions. Weatherwas at the University of North Dakota, Kelley at Iowa State University and Gossai at Georgia Southern University. We are thankful to them for their excellent teaching and collegiality and wish them well.

We welcome two full-time faculty members, Robert Baum and Nate DesRosiers (See story on page 7). Baum, who received a doctorate from Yale University, joined us in November 2005 after five years as an associate professor of religious studies at Iowa State University. He specializes in the history and religions of Africa. His teaching interests include African religions, American Indian religions and history, Islam, religion and society, and religion and politics. His book Slaves of the Slave Trade: Dodo Religion and Society in Presidencial Senegambia received the American Academy of Religion’s award for Best First Book in the History of Religions. Nate was an instructor of Latin and religious studies at Stonehill College in Massachusetts and completed a doctorate at Brown University. He has teaching and research interests in New Testament, early Christian literature and history, Greco-Roman religions, art and archaeology and the Bible, and theories of religion. The topic of his dissertation is The anti-Oath Polemic in Antiquity. Moral Philosophy, Judaism and Matthew. DesRosiers began teaching in fall 2006. We are also pleased that Bob Flanagan has been promoted to resident instructor assistant professor. As all of you know who have taken his courses, he is a master teacher. We are delighted that his exemplary work as a teacher and a colleague is being recognized.

The department has been involved in two interdisciplinary initiatives on campus, the Difficult Dialogues project (See story on page 1) and the Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public. The Ford Foundation awarded $100,000 grants to 27 colleges and universities for projects that promote academic freedom, religious toleration and the open discussion of controversial public policy issues. Roger Worthington, associate professor of counseling psychology, leads the MU project, and co-investigators include faculty from theatre, religious studies and law. Religious studies faculty involved in the project include Baum, Patricia Beckman and myself. Alumnus Antwaun Smith, BA ’98, an MU law student, is also a member of the team. We will provide training for 40 faculty fellows that includes three components: conflict resolution and deliberative dialogue, religious literacy and interactive theatre. For more information, visit our Web site at difficultdialogues.missouri.edu.

Jill Raitt founded the Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public in conjunction with faculty from medicine, law, journalism, nursing, health sciences, engineering, social work and business. The current director is Debra Mason, the executive director of the Religion Newswriters Association. The center received a $1.5 million, 3-year renewal grant from the PEW foundation. The grant will allow the center to continue four interdisciplinary projects: examination of the journalistic coverage of issues involving religion; research into the relationship between religion/spirituality and healthcare; interdisciplinary collaboration on professional ethics; and campus and community colloquies on public-policy issues. Faculty from business, health professions, journalism, law, medicine, public affairs, religious studies and university extension are involved. Religious studies faculty members working with the center are Flanagan, Dan Cohen, Beckman, Phillip Clart and myself. For more information, visit http://rpp.missouri.edu/news-events/renewal-grant.html.

We encourage you to follow our progress online, and we invite you to return to campus Nov. 8 to 10, 2007, to help us celebrate the department’s 25th anniversary. Please save the date, and stay tuned for more information.
Trish Beckman spent academic year 2004-05 on research leave at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She worked on the manuscript “Writing Religion and Performing Piety in Medieval Women’s Mysticism: Mechthild of Magdeburg’s Flowing Light of the Godhead.” As a Heekin Fellow at Hill Monastic Library in Collegeville, Minn., she studied 13th- and 14th-century German manuscripts.

Beckman has contracted with Cambridge University Press to co-edit The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism, which will explore historical interpretations of mysticism and contemporary analytic categories and canons. She co-wrote an entry on Mechthild of Magdeburg for The Yale Guide to Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition and is currently revising an article for Church History on a 14th-century letter exchange between a Dominican nun and a priest. She contributed a review essay on studies of medieval mystical women to Church History.

With MU’s Global Scholars program in 2004, Beckman went to Russia to develop Russian-orthodox materials for her history of Christianity sequence. As a senior fellow in Religion, the Professions and the Public, she drafted an article on teaching history of Christianity and organized a panel on the Indus script at the South Asia Conference in Madison in fall 2005, where she presented a research paper on the topic. In her article “The Indus ‘Seal of Divine Adoration’ and the Khasi Myth of Origins,” published in Acta Orientalia 2005, she proposed a new solution to the riddle of the Indus Civilization. Beckman has argued that the Indus culture may have been the precursor of the Dravidian civilization in South India, or alternatively, the forerunner to early Vedic culture. Cohen suggests instead that there is some linguistic, cultural, and archaeological evidence indicating that the Khasi, a Mon-Khmer speaking tribe of northeast India, may be the descendants of the Indus population.

Chill Callahan spent the year on research leave to explore the religious worlds of 19th-century whaling. He is investigating religious practices and expressions of whaling men who sailed from New England ports to the Pacific Ocean on voyages often lasting three to four years. In pursuit of his own white whale, Callahan spent much of the 2005-06 academic year reading through whaling men’s journals and ship’s logs, mainly at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. He presented his work in progress at a May meeting of the Mid-Missouri colloquium on Religious Studies.

Along the way, he found time to finish his book on religious responses to industrial coal mining in eastern Kentucky and to move ahead on publishing a volume of papers resulting from “Moving Boundaries: American Religion(s) through the Louisiana Purchase,” a conference organized by the MU religious studies department in 2004. He was a panelist in the Chancellor’s Global Issues Forum on the historical impacts of the Tennessee Scopes Trial, and he attended the final meeting of his fellowship with the Young Scholars in Religion(s) through the Louisiana Purchase, a conference organized by the MU religious studies department.

Callahan has completed a book manuscript on religion and peacemaking, After Empire: The Art and Ethics of Enduring Peace. He has presented lectures on the topic of “Making Peace in an Age of War” for the Gender, Religion and Politics Lecture Series at Hobart and William Smith Colleges; and “Beyond Empire: Sustaining Alternatives to Violence,” for the American Academy of Religion.

Welch has written several essays and book chapters: “The Art and Ethics of Enduring Peace,” Tikkun, March/April 2006; “Artisans of Hope, Artisans of Wonder,” in Theology That Matters: Ecology, Economy and God; “Beyond Theology of Religions: The Epistemological and Ethical Challenges of Inter- religious Engagement,” in The Oxford Handbook on Feminist Theology; and “Learning to Teach as Theatre of the Oppressed,” co-written for Advances in Research on Teaching, Vol. 11. Welch has completed a term as a member of the board of Meadville Lombard Theological School. She continues as president of the U.S. committee of Global Action to Prevent War and as a member of the International Steering committee of the organization.

STAFF

Cheryl Smith and husband moved to Missouri in 2001 from the state of California, where their two married children and six grandchildren live. She began work at Mizzou in engineering and transferred to the Department of Religious Studies in June 2001. Smith says she enjoys teaching because it helps people she works with, especially the students.
Gay Albers, BA ’88 religious studies, biology, and husband Greg Roberts, MD, celebrated Gay’s 40th birthday by welcoming their new baby into the world, which is already popularized by their adopted son, Daniel, and their birth-son, Joel. The family lives in Craig, Colo., a small mountain town near Grand Junction.

Justin Arft, BA ’00, MA ’03, has been teaching for William Woods University and Westminster College in Fulton, Mo., since he graduated and will soon start at Columbia College in Columbia. He also has taught a religious studies course, Got Religion?, at the 2005 and 2006 Missouri Scholars Academy. He plans to continue working on a dissertation and has a particular interest in religious studies in secondary education. Arft has been exploring his entrepreneurial side. He is co-founder of Certified Local (www.certifiedlocal.com), an Internet service for locally owned and operated businesses. Arft is testing the service in Columbia and has ambitions of going national.

Monica Cavvey, BA ’94 religious studies, English, recently said goodbye to Chicago after 12 years and moved to the East Coast. In May she accepted the position of vice president of development at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. In her new role, Cavvey will direct all fundraising operations for the Constitution Center and hopes to take advantage of the “national” part of the center’s name to travel around the nation.

Thomas Finan, BA ’89, assistant professor of history and interim director of the Center for International Studies at St. Louis University. Continuing from his days as a Mizzou student, Finan’s interests have centered on the topic of the church in medieval Ireland. He is director of the church and settlement in the Medieval Diocese of Elphin project and project director of the archaeological excavations at Kilteasheen, County Roscommon. Kilteasheen is a high-medieval, Gaelic ecclesiastical settlement that includes a bishop’s palace, a medieval cemetery and more than 200 examples of Neolithic stone tools. Finan is working on volume one of the site publication and a history of medieval Ireland for the Cambridge University Press Medieval Textbook Series. He lives in St. Louis with his family. His Web site is at www.tjfinan.com.

Rich Gleba, BJ, BA religious studies ’94, is director of external affairs at MU’s School of Medicine. After graduation he worked as a reporter and editor of a daily newspaper before returning to Mizzou for his current job in public relations. Working with the medical school during a period of growth has reinforced his appreciation for the leadership of the religious studies department. Gleba credits current and former faculty members, including Jill Raitt, Ron Farmer, Steve Friesen, Joel Breretson, Sue Crowley, Phil Arnold and Bill Green, for some of his most valuable Mizzou memories.

Jodi Letterman, BA ’93 religious studies, English, recently received the Chancellor’s Distinguished Fellowship Award for postgraduate studies at the University of California-Riverside. She will pursue a master’s degree in religious studies there. Letterman spent a year in Japan as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching program (JET), where she taught junior-high school students on the island of Hokkaido. To satisfy her wanderlust, she traveled to such destinations as Southeast Asia but now lives in northern California, where she and enjoys photography and identifying wildflowers on forgotten paths.

Jawad Qureshi, BA ’00, received a master’s degree from the University of Georgia, followed by a Fulbright to study in Damascus, Syria, in 2002. In Damascus he studied Arabic, theology and Sufism. While there he met and married Jameela Jafri, a Pakistani-American student. Qureshi currently is doing graduate work at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, where he works with Michael Sells in the history of religions division. After four years abroad, Qureshi was eager to return to the Midwest.

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New Faculty, New Expertise

Baum teaches two new courses
With expertise in the history of indigenous African religions as well as Native American religions and Islam, Associate Professor Robert Baum has been teaching in the department since summer 2005. He moved to Mizzou after teaching at Iowa State University for seven years.

During the past year, Baum has focused on becoming acquainted with the students and faculty, while teaching two new courses: West African Interpretative Communities and Indigenous Religions.

As part of the Ford Foundation’s Difficult Dialogues Initiative (See story on page 1), he is working on methods of promoting a better understanding of Islam and Judaism. Baum also has been involved in the Pew Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public, particularly in outreach on Islamic issues.

Baum’s research focuses on the history of Dhola women prophets in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. He continues to work on a book-length manuscript on that subject. Future plans include another trip to Senegal in summer 2007 and work on a continent-wide history of African religions.

Baum’s wife, Peggy, is a grant writer for the Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public.

DesRosiers appreciates the quality of students
Assistant Professor Nathaniel (Nate) DesRosiers describes himself as an accidental biblical scholar. DesRosiers began as a classicist but found interests in areas where classicists don’t usually wander.

“I like the questions that religious studies asks that situ-
Lessons from Layke

Marie (Overstreet) Reynolds, BA ’87 (honors) biology and religious studies, and her husband, Kyle, have two children and an amazing story to tell.

Bryce, 7, is a bright, active boy, who loves reading and math, but their son Layke, who is afflicted with mitochondrial disease, was not supposed to live past his first year. He is now 5.

Reynolds has become an expert in his care. She learned and now teaches from her experience with Layke, who continues to baffle his doctors as he shows improved strength and immunity.

“Every day is an adventure, and I wouldn’t change my experiences for anything,” she says. The two-year-old boy who didn’t even recognize his mother is pointing to pictures in books at age five.

Layke’s hearing loss and peripheral blindness have vanished, possibly because the optic and auditory nerves have healed. He began walking this spring and is now climbing stairs. Though he once had terrible chewing and swallowing problems, he now feeds himself and drinks from an open cup.

Reynolds is pursuing a doctorate in naturopathy at Clayton College of Natural Health in Birmingham, Ala. For years she has worked as a consultant in lifestyle and nutrition for other special-needs families and their children, as well as some individuals with other challenges.

Reynolds intends to do additional studies in metabolism and nutrition, and she has taken some pastoral classes. She has no intention of being a “preacher,” but she believes in the need to “pastor” those whom she is called to help.

“Layke is a superb teacher, and I intend to make all we have learned serve those who cross our path and need a hand up,” she says.