

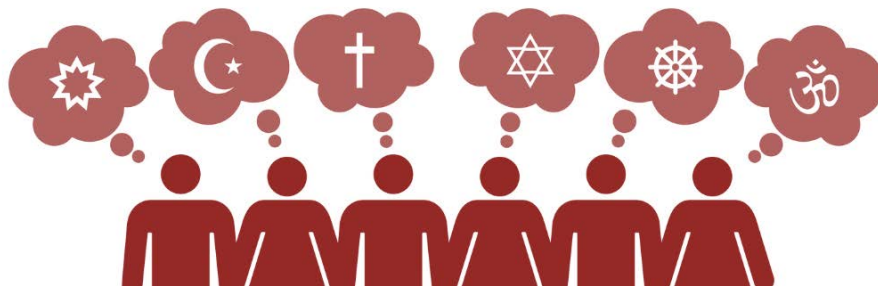


# COLLEGE *of* CHARLESTON

DEPARTMENT OF  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES



Fall/Winter 2020-21 Newsletter



# From the Chair



Dr. Elijah Siegler  
Professor and Chair of Religious Studies



**STUDY,  
RELIGIOUSLY.**  
☾ ☯ ✝ 🌸 ✨ ॐ

*Dear Students, Alumni, and Friends of the Department,*

*As I write this, in early December, there is no better way to describe 2020 than in the words of the [immortal saint](#): it both sucks and blows. The last 10 months or so have been stressful and dispiriting for all of us, with simultaneous crises in the realms of global health, the economy, and perhaps most troubling of all, our sense of a shared reality.*

*Here at 4 Glebe St. we are all generally healthy and productive, but Religious Studies, like the rest of the College, and much of higher education in this country, is facing declining enrollments, shrinking budgets, and faculty attrition. And I know that many of you all, our alumni, students, and friends have had to endure much unpleasantness.*

*But am I naïve in thinking some of us might draw on our experiences with the Department of Religious Studies to help in these times? Perhaps some of us are applying the skills of critical empathy and analytic thinking, and some recalling the teachings of the many religious traditions we study, and some drawing on the supportive community of scholars fostered here. If any of this resonates with you, and you have a particular anecdote illustrating how, we'd love to hear from you.*

*I am heartened by the fact that, although the pandemic is forcing us to teach online on more, that necessity is creating innovations in our teaching. I am also proud of the excellence of our current crop of majors, so many of whom are interning, writing bachelor's essays, peer-facilitating our First Year Experiences, and/or doing independent research. And, as you will learn more about in these pages, in the last year we have hired a wonderful new tenure-track assistant professor and organized our very first fundraising drive—more about that soon in a separate email! —that has already sustained some exciting undergraduate projects you'll read about here.*

*To paraphrase another [immortal saint](#), Religious Studies abides. And I know you all will as well.*

*Elijah Siegler  
Professor and Chair*

# Faculty and Staff News

Although 2020 has brought many things at the College and within RELS to a halt, there have been many great things happening to our faculty this year.

**Assistant Professor, Dr. Brennan Keegan**, joined the college in Fall 2020. Dr. Keegan received her BA in Religious Studies from Whitman College, completed graduate work in environmental history at Montana State University, and earned her PhD from Duke University in Religious Studies. She grew up in the American West, where she still returns to study the complex questions of Indigenous land claims and religious freedom. She teaches courses on sacred space, Native American religions, and religion and the environment.

**Assistant Professor, Dr. Matthew Cressler**, submitted his Tenure and Promotion review materials, and now awaits the outcome. But we are confident that he will gain tenure and earn promotion so that he can enjoy a well-deserved year-long sabbatical in 2021-22.

And with great sadness but tremendous appreciation for all that she has done, we celebrate **Senior Instructor, Louise Doire's** retirement at the end of the Fall 2020 semester. Professor Doire began teaching at the College in 1999 and became one of the school's most beloved teachers, who made an impact not only on her RELS students but in the Women and Gender Studies program and Honors College too. When asked to sum up her time here at the College of Charleston, Professor Doire said, "Teaching at the college has been the honor and privilege of my life. Leaving the classroom is bittersweet, but my relationships with colleagues and students are not left behind. I carry them with me. I leave with heartfelt gratitude for my colleagues who were always generous with their time, support, and friendship. Thank you to all my former students for your humor and hard work, but especially for your courage while confronting the difficult questions I brought your way. It's been a blast."



*From top to bottom:  
Dr. Keegan, Dr. Cressler and Prof. Doire*

## CofC 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

When **Dr. Matthew Cressler** planned the final assignment for his Religion in America (RELS 250) class spring 2020, little did he know that Covid19 would change the assignment that meant to be the Religious Studies' contribution to the [250th anniversary of the College's founding](#). What was a class-wide project morphed into a two-person, two semester investigation by Religious Studies Honors students, **A.J. Williamson** and **Allen Duggar** funded in part by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Religious Studies Foundation.

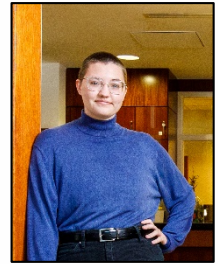
Dr. Cressler and **Mary Jo Fairchild**, manager of research services in CofC's [Special Collections](#), worked with A.J. and Allen on how to proceed with their research even as the College's in-person instruction was suspended. Ms. Fairchild photographed and scanned ledgers, documents and historic pamphlets from archives within Special Collections. She also assisted in locating other materials from other repositories to create a database of primary sources. Fairchild's work aided Williamson and Duggar in social distancing and working together virtually through the late spring and summer.

Excerpts from an article written for *The College Today* are used in this piece. Click [here](#) to see the original piece. Also this Project was highlighted in the *Post and Courier* on Dec.26, 2020. Click [here](#) to read it.

What A.J. and Allen found in their research was how "... religion, economics, politics, labor and academia are all intertwined and re-synthesize themselves in interesting ways throughout history, but those forces are still acting upon each other, influencing each other and will continue to do so into the future," says Duggar, a sophomore majoring in religious studies. "The influence of religion is obvious when we look back at our history, but religion is still acting on the forces that are alive today at the College."

These discoveries and the historical context they provided surprised the students. They wanted to share their finding on a larger scale, and dive even further into religion at CofC.

"The research we began over the summer was coming together in much bigger ways than we had originally anticipated," says Williamson, a junior majoring in religious studies. "It felt necessary for us to continue expanding on what we started so that we could produce something to show the public what our religious history really looks like at the College." Williamson and Duggar, who produced a video summarizing their summer research, have [created a website, which will be a permanent digital home for their findings](#). In the spring they plan to turn their attention to researching the history of the study of religion itself at the College.



A.J. Williamson



Allen Duggar

## COFC DAY 2020

On January 30, 2020, the College celebrated it's 250th anniversary. That day was also the kickoff for a college-wide, 24-hour giving campaign.

Religious Studies is very grateful and extremely proud of the alums and faculty (past and present) who donated over \$1600 to our Foundation Account. Those generous donations will allow us to continue providing the funding needed to provide our students with extra learning experiences such as field trips, scholarships to conferences, and stipends for research projects and internships. Please see story above for just one example of how those gifts were used.

CofC Day 2021 is scheduled for January 28, 2021. Again we encourage all of our alumni, parents, faculty, staff, students, and friends to participate by making a gift to RELS through the CofC Day online portal, by phone (843-953-5113), and by sharing your CofC story on social media with the hashtag #CofCDAY. For more info click on the [CofC Day link](#).

*Thank You  
for Your Support !*

### Thank You to the Following Individuals for Your Generous Gifts for Our Students!

Dorrell F. Addison  
Zeff Bjerken

Julianna Bradley

Michael Broderick

Michelle R. Coffey

Katherine D. Eaton

James M. Edmonds

Anthony J. Horton

Rachel L. Horton

Jared Jones

Rodney Knowles IV

June McDaniel

Lauren Schmidt

Elijah T. Siegler

Amberjade M. Taylor

Priscilla R. Thomas

Lauren M. Trexler

Hannah R. Wathen

Laura M/ Zagby-Dye

## The Alumni Corner

### RELIGIOUS STUDIES GRADUATING CLASS OF 2020



From top to bottom: [Alexandra Bowen](#) (HSS Scholar and RELS Outstanding Student), Hadley Chance, Grace Henderson, [Kehinde Ojediran](#) (HSS Scholar and RELS Outstanding Student), and Catherine Shuey

### ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

**Madeline Leibin ('18)** graduated from the College with degrees in Religious Studies, Philosophy and International Studies. She was busy, and that hasn't changed 2.5 years later. Madeline took some time out of her extremely full life to let us know what been happening with her and how majoring in RELS is impacting her life post-graduation.

**What have you been up to since graduation, and what are you doing now?**

After graduation, I moved to Israel and Palestine, where I earned an International MA in Conflict Resolution & Mediation at Tel Aviv University. I spent a lot of time thinking about identity politics, reparations, and the role of civil society. I then worked for Amnesty International Israel and an impact litigation project in Palestine.

In that work, there was this necessary conversation between the quotidian, personal problems of injustice as experienced on a day to day, and the more abstract policy reforms on a larger scale. The necessity of taking those two realities in tandem ultimately led me to the law. Today I am a 1L at NYU School of Law.

**How has your RELS education helped you in your career/studies. Or how has it shown up in your day-to-day life?**

RELS taught me about "lived religion" — adherence as identity that informs one's sense of space, calendar, community. In the Middle East and in the United States, I reflect often on the division that can create — that construction of the Other.

Those thoughts showed up in a lot of the dialogue facilitation I've done on a consultancy basis for the past three years. And they loom large in law school. I have been really curious about how religious free exercise intersects with nondiscrimination law, and how religious identity is treated differently than other identity categories like ethnicity, ability, race, gender, sex, etc.

**What advice would you give to current RELS students and upcoming graduates?**

Be kind, be creative, collaborative... Take it easy on others and yourself, especially in this tumultuous time. Vonnegut says "so it goes..." and it does. Savor it, RELS and CofC.

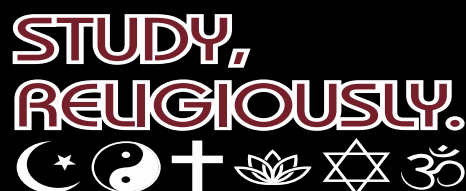


# RELS Spring 2021 Course Offerings

(and Courses Taught by RELS Faculty)

Course	CRN	Title	Meeting Days	Meeting Times	Instructor
RELS101.02	21085	Approaches to Religion: Pilgrimage to Sacred Places in North America and to Hindu India	MW	1400-1515	Bjerken
RELS101.04	21927	Approaches to Religion: Sacred Space	MWF	1100-1150	Keegan
RELS101.05	21928	Approaches to Religion: Sacred Space	MWF	1200-1250	Keegan
RELS105.01	20665	Intro to World Religions	MWF	0900-0950	Lowe
RELS105.02	20666	Intro to World Religions	MWF	1000-1050	Lowe
RELS105.03	20667	Intro to World Religions: ONLINE	TR	925-1040	Fisher
RELS105.04	21414	Intro to World Religions: ONLINE	TR	1215-1330	Fisher
RELS115.01	21702	Religion and Society: Black Religion & Black Nationalism from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter	TR	1215-1330	Cressler
RELS117.01	23302	Premodern History of Religions	MW	1600-1515	Huddlestun
RELS117.02	23303	Premodern History of Religions	TR	1050-1205	Huddlestun
RELS201.01	23301	Hebrew Bible: History & Interpretation	TR	1340-1455	Huddlestun
RELS210.01	20996	Theories in the Study of Religions	TR	0925-1040	Cressler
RELS235.01	23309	The Islamic Tradition	MW	1400-1515	Davidson
RELS250.01	21932	Religion in America: ONLINE	MWF	1100-1150	Siegler
RELS298.01	23310	Special Topics: Illusion and Reality in Asian Religions	TR	1215-1330	Bjerken
RELS298.02	23311	Special Topics: Religion, Ethics, and Health Care	TR	1505-1620	Fisher
RELS305.01	23304	Topics in Indigenous Religions: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge	MW	1600-1715	Keegan
RELS451.01	21087	Capstone Colloquium: ONLINE	M	1300-1350	Siegler
FYSE134		Finding Your Way: The Ancient Chinese Secret to Happiness	MWF	0900-0950	Siegler
HONS240.01	22976	Honors Colloquium on Value & Tradition in Asian Religions	TR	0925-1040	Bjerken
HONS250.04	22981	Black Religion & Black Nationalism from Slave Rebellions to Black Lives Matter	TR	1340-1455	Cressler

**SPRING 2020 REGISTRATION  
BEGINS 11/5/2020!!!  
CONTACT YOUR ADVISOR.**



*Make a Difference!*  
**DONATE**



*Thank you*



Everyone can be a philanthropist to the College of Charleston. Gifts to the Religious Studies Foundation account are vital to supporting student study abroad, internship opportunities, and travel to attend professional conferences. Most importantly, your annual gift gives us the ultimate flexibility to seize opportunities that will advance the mission of the school and address unforeseen challenges faced by faculty and students as they arise.

Your investment is the ultimate vote of confidence in everything Religious Studies at the College of Charleston stands for and everything it can become.

To make an online donation please click on our [department giving page](#), select "other" in the designation section, then indicate that you want to contribute to the Religious Studies Fund (R434) in the comments section.

## We Would Love to Hear from You!

The Department of Religious Studies at the College of Charleston would love to hear what our alumni are up to now. Let us know about the exciting professional and personal milestones you've reached since leaving the College. You can email Dr. Siegler or Ms. Butler-Byrd with the details at [sieglere@cofc.edu](mailto:sieglere@cofc.edu) or [butlervc@cofc.edu](mailto:butlervc@cofc.edu).

### College of Charleston

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