



Written by Maya Collier '19 and Kate Hoeting '19

Dr. Shaun Casey Gives Ian Barbour and Convocation Lectures

In January, Dr. Shaun Casey came to Carleton to give the Religion Department's Ian Barbour Lecture and the Friday convocation talk. Dr. Casey served as the first Director of the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs during Obama's presidency. Dr. Casey worked with John Kerry and a team of experts in diplomacy to promote nuanced perspectives on religion in foreign policy. He now teaches at Georgetown University and runs the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Before coming to campus, Dr. Casey already had a connection to Carleton: he knows Professor Lori Pearson and Professor Michael McNally from their time together at Harvard Divinity School.



On Thursday, February 17th, Carleton faculty, staff, and students gathered in the Great Hall for the Ian Barbour Lecture, named after a Carleton professor of Religion who mastered the art of surfing between religion and science. In many ways, Dr. Casey shares similar surfing skills between religion and politics: in addition to an MTS and a ThD from Harvard Divinity School, Dr. Casey also holds an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School.

During his lecture, Dr. Casey discussed two perspectives on religion that he found prevalent in the State Department when he arrived. First he described the framework of International Religious Freedom, often used to enforce conservative and Protestant values. The second framework, Encountering Violent Extremism (EVE), tends to characterize religion (read: Islam) as nothing more than a gateway to terrorism. As an academic, Dr. Casey attempted to counteract these two flawed perspectives by incorporating three scholarly perspectives: those of Robert Orsi, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, and Anna Su.

At a time when religion majors' families sometimes frame the religion major as an "unpractical" choice, Dr. Casey's ability to practice academic thought in diplomatic matters left many religion majors feeling validated. "It was really cool for me to see the ways that a religion major could be applied beyond 'the academy,'" said

senior religion major Maggie Goldberger. She was among multiple seniors who had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Casey about their comps topics, many of which grapple with issues of religion and government policy. Dr. Casey closed his visit with his convocation talk about the way that nuanced understandings of religion can contribute to more successful peace-making strategies. He is now writing a book that incorporates Rienhold Niebhuur's thought into perspectives on diplomacy.

Congratulations to Professor Ahoon Najafian On Her Dissertation Award



Professor Ahoon Najafian, Ira T. Wender Postdoctoral Scholar in Middle East Studies, was honored by the Foundation for Iranian Studies with an award for the Best Ph.D. Dissertation of the Year on a Topic of Iranian Studies for “Poetic Nation: Iranian Soul, Poetic Identity, Historical Continuity.” Professor Najafian received honorable mention for “superior scholarship, originality, clarity, and significant contribution to the field of Iranian Studies.” Her dissertation examines the role of fourteenth century Iranian poet Shams al-Din Mohammad Hafez Shirazi in constructing the identity of the Iranian people. According to Professor Najafian, her dissertation examines how “cultural memory is fabricated and unfolded in new understandings of the category of *‘erfan* or Iranian Mysticism.”

In her dissertation, Professor Najafian examines the work of three figures active in politics who use the poetry of Hafez in different ways: Prime Minister Abd al-Hosayn Hazhir, historian Ahmad Kasravi, and Ayatollah Morteza Motahari. Professor Najafian also discusses the work of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Communist poet H.E. Sayeh who present opposing perspectives on the poetry of Hafez. She analyzes the poetry of Hafez in relation to politics, history, religion, and literature as a means for conveying the complexity of Islam and Iran.

This term, Professor Najafian taught The Islamic Republic: Explorations in Religion and Nationalism. She will be teaching a Middle Eastern Language Course: Love in Persian Literature during the spring trimester.

Religion Majors Reflect on their Summer Internships

Fernando Dominguez '19: Intern at the Binger Center for New Americans

This past summer I interned at Binger Center for New Americans at the Immigration Delegation and Detainee Rights Clinics at the University of Minnesota. I worked with two professors who headed the two clinics respectively, Professor Ben Casper Sanchez and Professor Linus Chan. During my time there I researched country conditions, identifying the types of persecution immigrants would face if they were forcefully returned to their countries of origin. I also attended immigration court as both an observer and a translator. As an observer I gathered data on the treatment of undocumented detainees by immigration judges as part of a larger immigrant justice project of the Detainee Rights Clinic. As a translator, I would go with Prof. Chan to help him communicate with the immigrant detainees he was representing in court. This was often a very somber and intense experience as families in tears watched their fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters enter the courtroom in orange jumpsuits with chains binding their arms and legs. Often times it didn't feel like the help we were

providing was enough, and many people were deported without a proper trial. Nevertheless, I commend the efforts of the clinics and am proud to have been part of it for a brief time.

I had the opportunity to actively participate in larger and more complicated cases with Prof. Casper Sanchez that required both research at a desk and also traveling. This part of the internship was a lot more intensive and personal. I think the most exciting part of it was learning and working on a case so extensively you felt you knew everything about someone and their life experiences, and then going to court and actually meeting them.

The religion major helped me prepare for this internship and my aspirations of practicing law both practically and ideologically. More often than not, religion classes involve analyzing difficult and dense material, describing it, and writing thesis driven arguments. (I have done a lot of that in my four years here!) Similarly, when building a legal case, lawyers and law students read immense amounts of materials in preparation to create arguments for the court. Intense episodes of violence and injustice, regular in court documents, are not uncommon in readings about religion and violence in classes taught at Carleton. Morality, a foundation of the study of law, is also a core principle of the study religion. The endeavor to understand different iterations of human morality, action, and experience is what truly drew me to the religion major and is also what draws me to studying our legal system and defending those cannot help themselves.



Picture of Fernando (second from the right) and other interns at Binger Center for New Americans, including Daniel Tamez (Political Science '19). On the far right is Paul Dimmick, a Carleton alum and third year law student at the University of Minnesota.

Sarah Chebli '20: Youth Worker for the Muslim American Society

After my last class on Fridays, I quickly run out of my classroom straight towards my car. I have 2 hours to get to St. Paul, Minnesota in the height of rush hour, so I have to hustle quick. Once I reach my destination, a small masjid across the road from the State Fairgrounds, I run out and get straight to work. Every Friday I work from 5pm to 10pm to organize an Islamic youth program “by the youth, for the youth” called FNL (Friday Night Live). This work is done through an organization called Muslim American Society (MAS-MN). MAS-MN is an Islamic revival and reform movement, as well as an Islamic non-profit organization, whose mission is to move people to strive for God-consciousness, liberty and justice, and to convey Islam with utmost clarity. MAS-MN provides a variety of religious, youth, and political programs, as well as the annual MAS-MN Convention. MAS-MN is a community-based organization that seeks to make life better for all Minnesotans, through social services such as free dental clinic and food shelves.

How do I fit in with MAS-MN? Since 2015, I have been a youth worker, creating, planning, and putting on youth programs in the three masjids under MAS-MN. I have worked on different youth programs throughout my time with MAS-MN and different departments, such as the media department and the MAS-MN Annual Convention. MAS-MN is in the business of growing people as the executive director, Brother Asad Iman, likes to say. I started with youth programs geared towards helping middle schoolers examine their identities as Muslims in America. The programs aimed to make the masjid a safe space for middle schoolers to explore issues they felt were under-addressed. Then I moved on to, and currently I am a part of, a youth program geared towards college students. In this program, we focus on taboo topics that are not being discussed, anything from addiction to mental health to politics. *(Continued on next page.)*

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Sarah Chebli '20: Youth Worker for the Muslim American Society

I am also working in the media department. In this department, I am in charge of creating the majority of flyers for the various events across the organization. I also maintain MAS-MN's social media accounts (add us on Instagram: @masminnesota). In this department, I am trying to continuously figure out and tinker with how to get more people to attend the different events MAS-MN puts on.

I have also worked with the annual MAS-MN convention. I started out as a member of the registration team. For the last two years, I was the head of the registration committee, which means I had to form and train a team, was in charge of customer service, and was in charge of organizing and keeping track of the money and number of attendees. Last year was my last year as the head, however, that does not mean I am done with working on the convention. It means that MAS-MN knows that it is time to grow other people to take charge of this committee, and that I am ready for a new challenge.

My work with MAS-MN is ever fluid. Sometimes I participate in the interfaith dinners that happen during the holy month of Ramadan. This year I am going to be a moderator at a rally happening during the Annual Muslim Day at the Capitol. I also help create an Annual 5K Color Run/Walk, which this year will be for Autism Awareness.