



Edited by Maya Donovan '23

Interview with Visiting Professor of Islam Kambiz GhaneaBassiri



We're excited to welcome Benedict Distinguished Visiting Professor Kambiz GhaneaBassiri to Carleton. Professor GhaneaBassiri teaches Religion and the Humanities at Reed College and is an internationally renowned scholar of Islam in America.

What is your specialty within the realm of religious studies and what classes should students be excited about for next term?

Within religious studies, I focus on Islam, and within Islamic studies, I am primarily known for my work on Islam in America, but I also specialize in and have published on the intellectual and social history of Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa or West Asia in both the modern and classical periods of Islamic history. In Spring, I will be teaching a class on "Islam in America: Race, Religion, and Politics" (RELG 285) alongside "Introduction to Islam" (RELG 122).

In "Islam in America: Race, Religion and Politics" I will be teaching by asking students to look at the history of religious pluralism in America through the experiences of Muslims in America, so we will go through the colonial period looking at Muslims arriving as slaves in the lands that would eventually become the US. Then we move forward from there until we get to the very present, looking at the ways in which ideals of religious freedom, religious diversity, and pluralism as well as ideas of race, ethnicity, and citizenship have been

conceptualized from the perspective of Muslims in America. While today some view diversity and multiculturalism as potential issues, we live in such diverse cities that often embody these ideals. We don't, however, have adequate explanations for how we arrived at such places as New York or Los Angeles in our public understanding of what it means to be American. We don't have a historical narrative of America that explains not just how these places became so diverse, but also how diversity is managed in them through people's everyday encounters with one another. One of my aims in this class is to look at the history of religious diversity in America to see if we can provide a narrative of America in all its diversity and complexity. How have people with such a broad range of religious and political backgrounds used the idea of "American citizenship" or "American national values" to build the nation we see today.

What is one thing you have heard about Carleton that excites you?

You know the cold comes to mind! I've heard people are still walking around at negative 68! If I am to be honest, the thing that I am most excited about is teaching in a different liberal arts context where students are not just eager to learn, but are also thinking about grades. I teach at Reed College, where students don't see their grades unless they go out of their way to ask for them from their advisor or the registrar's office. I see Carleton as a school like Reed where students are intellectually curious and eager to learn. They are there for the educational experience the college has to offer rather than the region's tropical climate or beaches! In terms of tradition, I know about the traying, the silent library dancing, broomball, and the weekly lectures!

Another thing is that the religion department at Carleton is impressive for a liberal arts college. It will be exciting to work with such high-caliber colleagues.

Lecture or Discussion?

Discussion. One of the privileges of teaching students at an elite liberal arts college is that you learn from your students. You have extremely bright students with minds that haven't been shaped by others, unlike graduate students; they look at the material I have worn out with fresh eyes. They glean new insights from them that I hadn't considered. I remember when teaching master's students, it was so different. They came to the material with predetermined interests. The student interested in Foucault wanted to see Foucault in everything. Lecturing just doesn't give me that opportunity to learn from how students engage with course material.

Introducing the Religion Minor

If you've taken and loved your Religion classes and want to continue exploring more, now you can do so by declaring a minor in Religion! If you are a junior, you can declare as early as Feb 15, 2022. If you are a sophomore, please declare in spring (any time after March 3, 2022).

The religion minor offers students a flexible and broad exposure to the discipline, emphasizing the *diversity* of religious practices and understandings, both within and among religious traditions, while providing opportunities to master *theoretical tools* and to apply these in the study of *specific themes or traditions*. These skills and perspectives enhance academic work in majors across the college and in numerous career paths after college. Whether entering fields related to public policy, health care, nonprofit advocacy and service, education, law, or more, a religion minor can nurture habits of mind and competencies that enable students to be

professionals with a unique understanding of religion as a pervasive, significant, and complex dimension of human life.

Religion After Carleton featuring Olivia Nyberg '18 and Kate Hoeting '19



On Thursday, February 17, the Carleton College Religion Department hosted Kate Hoeting '19 and Olivia Nyberg '18 via Zoom for the department's Religion After Carleton event. Kate and Olivia spoke about their respective work in social advocacy and medicine and how the Carleton religion major informed their career paths, giving them tools to be successful in their fields.

Nyberg '18 decided to major in religion after taking a few of Professor Lori Pearson's classes through which Nyberg appreciated "how religion can be applied to social justice and advocacy work." As a theoretical study with tangible applications, Nyberg knew religion and medicine were something she wanted to do with her career. While at Carleton, Nyberg tailored her comps and coursework to explore women's health care. Nyberg's comps project, "Women in Pain: How Narratives of Pain and Sacrifice Complicate the Debate over the Catholic Provision of Obstetrical Care," earned distinction and was [recently published in the British Medical Journal](#). The inspiration for these projects was Nyberg's interest in clinical perspectives of pain versus "the ways in which pain can be fruitful religiously, in which it [can] be celebrated, in which it [can] be representative of martyrdom or sacrifice."

Now a first-year medical student at Brown University, Nyberg spends her time learning about science, bodies, and medicine, placing a strong emphasis on patient advocacy and support. "Religion was really important in honing my ability to talk to people in a non-biased manner but also in a critical thinking manner," Nyberg said in Thursday's discussion. Patient interactions are brief, yet crucial times of connection and Nyberg takes seriously being an advocate for her patients, listening intently to them and just being with them—skills she learned as a religion major. When asked about the connection between religion and medicine, Nyberg underscored centering a patient's experience with humility and empathy.

Like Nyberg, Kate Hoeting '18 also believes strongly in holding the patient's experience at the center of her work, something she learned while serving as an abortion doula through Carleton's Advocacy Network of Doulas (CAN-DO). In her service as an abortion doula, Hoeting described how she "saw



so much religion.” “As somebody who understands religion,” Hoeting said, “I feel like I am much more primed to understand how important it is to center people’s own experiences and center the way that they view their own pregnancy.” She reflected that this work “totally changed my life and hooked me into this world of religion and [reproductive rights] ... if I weren’t majoring in religion, I don’t think I would have realized the significance of those experiences.”

Her background as a religion major and abortion doula at Carleton led Hoeting to pursue a Master’s in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School where Hoeting focused on religion and reproductive rights. As the managing editor at Catholics for Choice, a non-profit organization which challenges the narrative that “you can’t be Catholic and pro-choice,” Hoeting brings her religion education to her profession every day. In recent events surrounding Roe v. Wade, Hoeting’s role at Catholics for Choice has brought her passion for religion and reproductive rights to center stage in this national debate. For Hoeting, the “work of disrupting common narratives that we see about religion is so important,” because in thinking critically about religion and leaving room for tension within discourses about abortion for example, we realize that “any one story is not telling the whole story.”

Religion Outside the Classroom

This term the Religion Department hosted over Zoom, “Religion Outside of the Classroom,” an open conversation with current majors about their experiences this summer. Religion majors here at Carleton participate in a variety of opportunities over the summer, as well as exciting study-abroad programs throughout the year. The event highlighted some such examples. Finding opportunities for the summer can be daunting for students, and this event worked toward calming some fears and encouraging students interested in religion to think of options they perhaps never thought of before. Participating students talked about their diverse array of experiences, including public scholarship, curatorial work, and studying in Thailand.

Dawson Eriksen, Connor Jansen, and Karina Yum all shared their experiences working in research-driven positions. Dawson and Connor offered insight into what it is like working with a professor from our own department, detailing their work with Michael McNally on his ReligionsMN project this summer. The pair shared some of the ways in which working virtually was uniquely challenging, as well as the sometimes difficult, but always rewarding, work of public scholarship.

Karina also talked about the difficulties of being on Zoom and working on research as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow (MMUF). Her work on evangelicalism with the guidance of mentors from the MMUF proved to be rewarding. Her opportunity was truly unique, as it enabled her to take two classes at the University of Chicago on academic writing and engaging in scholarship through a summer program related to the MMUF. Dawson’s, Connor’s, and Karina’s experiences show how many amazing research opportunities there are for students of religion

Working as a curatorial intern for the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education this summer, Kamala GhaneaBassiri shared how the religion major can open pathways and work at public institutions like museums. She described the work as paradigm shifting. Through her work, she crafted comparisons between the idealized dream of Israel portrayed by the lithographs, and the reality of the conflict today. Hoping to expose

both the sincerity of Salvador Dalí's dream of Israel, as well as the colonialism and violence of the state of Israel, Kamala helped craft and exhibit with the goal of mediating and educating in equitable and inclusive ways.

Narayani Thijm and Georgia Wilson both went abroad to Thailand this Fall semester. A large part of the experience was focused on meditation: students on the program meditated twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. The program also asked students to take on five Buddhist precepts, including vegetarianism, no gossiping, and abstaining from drugs and alcohol. The program included an independent research project as the culmination of their time on the program. Georgia wrote about Christianity's minority status in Thailand, and the close interactions between Buddhism and Christianity there. Narayani wrote about ritual scripts used in Northern Thailand as a critical intersection among language, ritual, and religion. Narayani and Georgia agreed that having the ability to explore temples and meet monks in Thailand was the best part of the trip.

This was an excellent opportunity for younger students, some of whom are on the cusp of selecting their own majors this spring, to learn about the department beyond its excellent courses and engaging professors. Religion is a major which prepares students for a wide variety of experiences, and events like this help focus and render less intimidating the vast realm of possibilities in the department. We are incredibly grateful to our students who shared their experiences, and exceptionally proud of all their accomplishments.

Illuminating a Manuscript in Professor Anderson's Apocalypse How? Class



Professor Sonja Anderson's "Apocalypse How?" seminar addresses early Christianity's roots in the Jewish apocalypticism. "The earliest Christian literature assumes the imminent replacement of the world with a utopia called the Kingdom of God," she explains. "This message is embodied by the Book of Revelation. Monks, scribes, and lectors were most likely to encounter Revelation as a physical text. All of these people knew how to write and understood the physical process of creating a manuscript. When you read a manuscript you weren't just absorbing the content like we would now when we read books. You would be taking in another

artist's creation and noticing the interpretive choices they made when illustrating and illuminating the text."

Students from her class spent five weeks creating their own giant pages of Revelation in a studio space in the Weitz Center. Professor Anderson developed this project in response to the disembodied way of thinking and reading that became common during the COVID-19 pandemic. In short, she was sick of looking at a screen all day and wanted her students to encounter Revelation as a physical object, like pre modern monks, scribes, and

lectors did. Each student was thus charged with hand-writing, and illustrating with gold leaf, paint, and woodcuts two chapters of Revelation. Together, they made a modern copy of all twenty-two chapters of this ancient apocalyptic text, in the style of medieval illuminated manuscripts.

This manuscript was then presented to Carleton students and faculty who got to eat some delicious fried chicken and potato wedges catered by the Quarterback Club.

Spring 2022 Religion Courses

RELG 110: Understanding Religion

RELG 121: Introduction to Christianity

RELG 122: Introduction to Islam

RELG 213: Religion, Medicine, Healing

RELG 219: Religious Law, Il/legal Religion

RELG 237: Yoga: Religion, History, Practice

RELG 282: Samurai: Ethics of Death and Loyalty

RELG 285: Islam in America: Race, Religion and Politics

RELG 362: Spirit Possession