

August 25, 2008

Dear Majors and Minors,

In the immortal words of **Sean Beadore**, one of the REL majors who joined me in Greece this past May (more on that in a moment), things around Manly Hall are “the same ... but different.” Writing to you at the start of each semester provides me with an opportunity to make sure you’re in the loop on the differences. As for the similarities? Well, you can probably see those for yourself.

First off, we have a new faculty member for the 2008-9 academic year: Ms. **Merinda Simmons**. Merinda is nearing completion of her Ph.D. dissertation in our own Department of English, and we’ve hired her for the year, as a full-time Instructor. Ms. Simmons’s own specialty involves the literature of the African diaspora, a topic she shares with our own Dr. **Maha Marouan**; while working for REL, Ms. Simmons will be teaching sections of REL 100 and REL 105, and in the Spring 2009 semester will also offer our REL 234 Women & Religion. We’re quite pleased to have her join us for the year and we hope you’ll say hi to her—her office is between Prof. Ramey’s and Prof. Marouan’s.

Another piece of news that you may have already heard about is that Prof. **Tim Murphy** was promoted from Assistant Professor to the rank of Associate Professor and that he has been awarded tenure, both as of this semester. Congratulate him when you see him. As you may know, there are three different ranks that Professors can hold throughout their career and each signifies progress through the profession, making any promotion a significant accomplishment. With Dr. Murphy’s promotion that leaves Assistant Professors **Ramey** and **Marouan** working on their own eventual applications for promotion and tenure.

Speaking of Profs. Steven Ramey and Maha Marouan, they each had busy summers: **Ramey** taught his newly developed online REL 220 Asian Religions course (which we’re also offering this current semester) and worked with his publisher on the final stages of preparing his first book for publication and **Marouan** spent the first part of the summer in Ghana, Africa, participating in a study abroad program (offered through the Department of Geography), and then traveled to Washington DC, where she spent much of the rest of the summer carrying out research for her own first book.

Another change is that Prof. **Ted Trost** is teaching our REL 112 Introduction to the New Testament this Fall; during the summer, he was working on developing an online version of the course, as was Prof. **Murphy**—in his case, he is developing an online version of REL 100. As I have said before in one of these letters, although the Department has no plans of creating online courses for on-campus degree students, we do wish to serve the needs of off-campus students. So, as of the Spring 2009 semester, we’ll begin limiting enrollment in these courses to off-campus students. Although these are our courses, they are administered through the College of

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Continuing Studies (CCS) and graded by Dr. **Mark McCormick**, a scholar of religion at Stillman College and good friend of our Department. And, with online courses in mind, this Spring Prof. **Steve Jacobs**—who has just returned from a very productive Spring 2008 sabbatical—will begin work on a new online REL 110 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible.

As for me, as noted earlier, I took four REL majors to Greece last May (along with the Department helping out, some funding came to us from the College of Arts & Sciences and the Capstone International Programs), for twelve days. **Chris Hurt** has graduated, but if you find him on Facebook, or if you ask **Keke Pounds**, **Sean Beadore**, or **Jaci Gresham**, I think they'll all tell you that they had a great time (even if they were stuck beside me for the trans-Atlantic leg of the flight; if they say I snore they're lying!). I'll include a flyer with this letter (and throw in a copy of last Spring's newsletter too), because I'm doing it again this coming May and am looking for another small group of motivated majors and/or minors in our Department who want to spend 16 days in Thessaloniki, Greece. (To see what you'll be doing, visit the website that Jaci made; the address is on the flyer). Talk to me soon if you're interested—registration happens when you normally register for Interim/Summer courses.

As in past years, we have some guests coming to the Department this year. Prof. **Jacobs** is now heading up our lunchtime discussion series and, as you'll see on the Events page of our website, one is already being planned. And Prof. **Ramey** continues to plan our public lectures: the influential Historian of Religions, Prof. **Bruce Lincoln**, of the University of Chicago, is this year's **Aronov Lecturer** (October 23; we anticipate a lunchtime discussion with him as well) and Prof. **Hayden White**, who is among the most influential Historians in the U.S., is coming in mid-April to offer workshops for students and faculty alike (Arts & Sciences, English, and New College are helping us host this event). Getting both Lincoln and White in the same year is quite a big deal for us and we're really looking forward to it. Check the Events page of the site for further information.

By the time you receive this, Ms. **Donna Martin** will have returned to work in the main office, and, of course, Ms. **Betty Dickey** steers our ship from her office, just off the main office. Between the two of them they can answer almost any question you might have. Joining them in the main office this Fall are **Jaci Gresham** and **John Lyles**, both helping out in the main office as well as each assisting Profs. Ramey and Simmons in our large enrollment REL 100 classes. You'd be amazed how many of its own students the Department has assisted with such employment over the years—in fact, you can find all of their names, and some of their faces, posted at the Silverstein Fellows link on the Students' Desk page on our site. And with the site in mind, we hope that you're exploring it, because it has to be among the most content-rich Religious Studies sites currently on the web. You'll find online and PDF degree worksheets for the 2008-10 catalog (which will help some of you when it comes to time to meet with our Undergraduate Advisor, Prof. **Trost**) as well as information on past classes, going as far back as 2001.

So welcome back and good luck this semester.



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