

September 5, 2007

Dear Majors and Minors,

Yes, it's hard to believe that the end of the Spring semester is now a distant memory and Fall's classes are already well under way. For those of you returning to Manly Hall, we hope that you had a good summer and are settling back into daily life on campus (ride the buses yet?). For those of you new to Manly Hall, we want to welcome you (ride the buses yet?). If the main office staff (either **Donna Martin**, who works mornings, or **Betty Dickey**, our Department's full time Administrative Secretary) can be of any assistance to you, such as sorting out classes or contacting professors, then please don't hesitate to stop by Manly 212.

Unlike some past summers, when the Department's reinvention was at full speed, this summer was a little quieter. The Interim semester and Summer school kept the classrooms busy but, otherwise, the main office was free to catch up on some long needed tasks. By now you've likely already seen that we have new t-shirts (with new cartoons) as well as key chains bearing our motto—if you've not got your's then you'd better stop by the main office and pick them up. Though we've tried to distribute some of these items in our upper-level classes, you might also want to get a copy of last Spring's annual newsletter—it was produced just a little too late to mail out in May, so we're hoping that it makes for equally good reading in September. As you'll see in this issue, we've really emphasized the work accomplished by some of your peers, such as three of our recent graduates: **Tim Davis** (who is putting his double major in Spanish to work as a public school teacher), **Mark Premo-Hopkins** (who finished law school last Spring), and **Josh McDonough** (who is now entering his second year of law school).

If you're interested in some of our other summer projects, check out the web, to see some links to a few new features:

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/stdeskworkerssum07.html>.

With new things in mind, let me bring to your attention a change that the faculty decided upon just a few weeks ago: beginning this semester, we will distinguish between **Silverstein Scholars** and **Silverstein Fellows**, with the former being awarded based on GPA and given out at Honors Day each Spring (as we did in the past with what was then called the Silverstein Fellowship) and the latter being the new name for students hired to assist in the main office (some of whom help out in our large enrollment REL 100 classes, with some funding assistance from the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences). So, this means that **Jaci Gresham**, **Harrison Graydon**, **Chris Hurt**, and **Sarah Kelly** are the inaugural Silverstein Fellows. Congratulations!

Studying Religion in Culture



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Also, as announced on the web site this summer, the Amy Lynn Petersen Endowed Support Fund is now officially created in memory of a former student; it will help with buying a book for the students enrolled in REL 490 each Spring. We look forward to receiving a photograph of Amy from her mother, who lives in Huntsville, to hang in our lounge. If this fund is news to you, then please visit our site's Scholarships page, off the Students' Desk page, to learn more.

I'm sure that Prof. **Trost**, our Undergraduate Advisor, will, as usual, be writing to you prior to October advising for Spring registration; at that time he'll be sending you a copy of the Spring 2008 class schedule. We hope to meet your needs and interests as best we can; and, with next semester in mind, don't forget that Prof. **Jacobs** is going on sabbatical in the Spring 2008 semester. (No doubt he'll write a few more books during his time away from classes.)

As for this semester, Profs. **Ramey** and **Trost** are both developing online distance education versions of REL 220 and 112, respectively; in the Spring semester Prof. **Murphy** is doing the same for REL 100 and, upon his return from sabbatical, we anticipate Prof. **Jacobs** doing likewise for REL 110. These distance education classes are open to on campus students, but the Department has prioritized off campus students for these classes. (We have about 60 people enrolled this semester in such classes.) With the new online versions of these courses eventually up and running, however, the faculty will reconsider the role online education plays in the Department's regular course offerings. The grader for these courses is now Dr. **Mark McCormick**, a full time faculty member at Stillman College—we're quite pleased that he's part of our team.

As with last year, Prof. **Marouan** continues as the faculty advisor for the Religious Studies Students Association (**RSSA**)—they're already planning some happy hours and film nights, so please keep an eye open for their fliers (especially on their bulletin board near the classroom) and please come forward with suggestions of some fun activities they might consider sponsoring (did I hear someone say bowling?). I'm sure that they'll be sponsoring a few Religion *in* Culture lunches also—who can turn down a free lunch and stimulating conversation?

And with events in mind, we hope to see you at the conference that we are co-sponsoring with the Department of History, on **Religion and Conflict**—apart from one speaker, all of the presenters and respondents are UA faculty, presenting their own work. The event is free and takes place all day at Gorgas Library on September 28. So mark it on your calendars and watch for fliers to appear soon. Or visit the website that we've made for the event: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/religionandconflict.html>.

Well, keeping in mind our newly renovated bathrooms, the computing lab on third floor that was installed last summer, and the wonderful new lights on all of Woods Quad's balconies—not to mention the new door knobs we're rumored to be getting!—Manly Hall is a pretty good place to call home. Add to that the faculty, staff, students, and graduates who constitute the Department of Religious Studies and you arrive at one of the reasons why Arts & Sciences' motto makes sense: "College as it was meant to be." Amen.