

September 7, 2004

Dear Majors and Minors,

Sooner than you can say “Where t’heck did the summer go,” you’ve likely found yourself asking anyone who will listen, “Where t’heck did the summer go?” Well, it seems to have gone to the same place where all the flowers have gone (“long time passing...”). Accept this and move on, is my advice.

Speaking of moving on, I hope you’ve noticed all that has taken place in the Department over the summer. Thanks to **Betty Dickey**, our Senior Office Associate, and **Kim Davis**, her assistant, we have quite a new look for your return. The lounge has been moved to Manly 200, the Department library has been completely revamped, and new cupboards as well as book shelves for faculty have been popping up like mushrooms. With the lounge and library in mind, both will be open to students throughout the business day, though when the library’s door is closed it generally signals that an upper-level seminar is in session, so we’d appreciate you taking this into account if you’re using the lounge at that time. The lounge cupboard has some board games in it, the coffee table has some interesting books for you to flip through, and there are coffee makers and a fridge for your use. Feel free to chip in for some coffee and tea, or bring your own. And the library is stocked with frequently used reference volumes as well as some of the main periodicals in the study of religion (along with the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*). We hope that you find these useful.

The Department library also has a new multi-media system, but this is for class use only. A security system is being installed on this system, and it connects to a silent alarm in the campus police station. Please be mindful of this when you are using the library.

You’ll also notice that Ms. Dickey now has her own office (Manly 212-A) and that what used to be the lounge (Manly 212) is now the Department’s main office, where you’ll find **Donna Martin**, who works on a variety of special projects in the Department, as well as a space for student workers. Four students have already been hired for the Fall semester: **Guy Cutting**, **Josh McDonough**, **Samantha Sastre**, and **Marianne Stanton**, all of whom either majors or minors in the Department. Although Ms. Dickey will still be helping students, Ms. Martin will be the first person who will try to help you out with such things as registration problems. **Kim Davis**, who worked part-time in the main office for the past year and a half, has moved on to her new role as a **Blount Junior Fellow**, working toward an M.A. in Education. Given how much she did for the Department (e.g., much of our web site is due to Kim’s initiative, as were the **mugs** and the new Department **t-shirts**—got yours yet? If not, see Prof. Trost), we’ll miss Kim quite a bit.

With **Prof. Trost** in mind, be sure to make your appointment with him prior to each semester’s registration period, so that he can ensure that you are filling the Department’s and College’s degree requirements. And this goes not just for REL majors; all majors, double majors, and minors should speak with him at least once a year, and especially

prior to your last semester before graduation. Making an appointment at this time with the College of Arts & Sciences, to do a degree check, should prompt you to also make an appointment to meet with Prof. Trost, so that we can identify any gaps in your degree requirements and, hopefully, address them.

If working toward graduation is one of the goals of an undergraduate student, then working toward being awarded tenure is one of the goals of a university professor. For those who are not familiar with the process, professors are usually hired for a five to six year initial appointment, at the rank of Assistant Professor. During that time, annual reappointment reviews are done and, eventually, the candidate applies for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor along with applying for tenure—which, if awarded, generally provides job security, and thus academic freedom, for the remainder of the professor's career at his or her university. Eventually, an application for promotion to the rank of Professor (or what is often termed "Full" Professor) might also be made. With this in mind, I am pleased to announce that, as of the start of the current semester, three of our professors have been awarded tenure: **Steve Jacobs**, **Catherine Roach** (who was tenured through New College, the site of her primary appointment), and **Ted Trost**. As well, Drs. Roach and Trost were promoted to the rank of Associate Professor (a rank already held by Dr. Jacobs). Please congratulate them when you see them, for this is an important milestone in their careers. We hope for more good news in late Spring 2005, because Assistant Professor **Kurtis Schaeffer** is about to submit his application for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor and I am about to submit my own application for promotion to Professor.

Often in these letters I mention the upcoming courses that the Department will be offering; because Professor Trost is now the Department's **Undergraduate Advisor**, this topic is now something that his letters will address. So keep in mind that, prior to each registration period, a letter from Prof. Trost will arrive with a schedule for the upcoming semester. Letters from past semesters are archived at the Department's site: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/studentsdesk.html>; here you will also find information on our library resources, a sampling of news from graduates of our Department, as well as suggestions on where to go to get information on scholarships and careers in the study of religion. We've given considerable attention to our Department's web site and invite you to explore it. One innovation is that we now have a "secure" folder, which prompts students to enter their Bama ID and Password (the one you use to log on to bamamail.ua.edu); this is our way of regulating access to copyright materials, in PDF format, that we have posted on our site.

Finally, I want to mention the journal that we're sending to you along with this letter. As you know, the Department sponsors a variety of public events, all of which are now organized by Prof. **Tim Murphy**, who is also the faculty advisor for our student association (keep an eye out for announcements of upcoming movie nights!). Among these events is the annual Aronov Lecture (which is described in greater detail at <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/aronovlecture.html>). The inaugural speaker in this lecture series, Professor Martin Jaffee of the University of Washington, kindly allowed our faculty to use his public lecture as the basis for essays of their own and, this past Spring, the entire

collection was published in a national periodical. So far as we know, this is the first time that an entire Religious Studies faculty has published together on the same topic in the same issue of a journal, so this is indeed worth celebrating. As part of this celebration, we would like you to have a copy. The essays are also posted as PDF files on the Department's site: <<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/cssrbulletin.html>>.

We hope that you make good use of the resources that the Department has put in place for all of its students—in our classes, on the web, and on the second floor of Manly Hall. We've been busy getting ready for your return.

Welcome back!

Russell T. McCutcheon
Associate Professor and Chair