

Regional Development Grant Application

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Contact: Ariel Schwartz, Committee Chair

nureligiousstudiesconference@gmail.com

<http://sites.northwestern.edu/religionandnaturalelements/>

Graduate Conference on “Religion and the Natural Elements”

Introduction

The Graduate Student Association of Northwestern University’s Department of Religious Studies will host a graduate student conference on “Religion and the Natural Elements” to be held October 30th through November 2nd, 2014. Students and faculty from institutions around the region and across the United States will convene to explore various theoretical and methodological approaches to religion’s intersections with aspects of nature, from the environment, climate, flora, and fauna, to human interactions with the natural, in the form of spirits, gods and goddesses, and miracles. Focusing on the relationships among ecosystems, religious practice, and religious thought, presenters will discuss topics such as Druid rituals, John Muir’s theology, *eco-halal*, sacred geography, and Manichean food practices. At this intentionally interdisciplinary, regional conference, burgeoning scholars will reflect on the interplay of religion and nature in the heart of the Midwest. We are applying for an AAR Regional Development Grant to help cover some of the costs of this endeavor.

Event Details

The three-day conference will include three invited keynote speakers, four graduate student panels, and a site visit. We look forward to hearing from three excellent scholars from diverse fields: Dr. Leigh Schmidt, Rev. Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams, and Dr. Dyan Elliott.

Dr. Leigh Schmidt is the Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*; *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*; and *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period*.

Rev. Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams is a Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University. Previously, she taught at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Oxford University, Yale University, and UCLA. She focuses on medieval philosophy, philosophy of religion, and, in her works *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* and *Christ and Horrors: the Coherence of Christology*, the problem of

evil. She is currently working on two books: one about medieval theories of the soul and another on the sanctification of matter.

Dr. Dyan Elliott is the Peter B. Ritzma Professor of the Humanities and Professor of History at Northwestern University. An historian of western Europe in the Middle Ages, she focuses on gender, spirituality, and sexuality in her works *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*; *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*; and *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500*.

We will open the conference on Friday evening with a keynote address and a light reception to provide participants the opportunity for further discussion. Panel sessions will take place throughout Saturday, followed by a second keynote address and reception that evening. An additional panel session will follow early Sunday, and the third keynote speaker will give closing remarks before a lunch break and a site visit to the only Baha'i Temple in North America, in nearby Wilmette. Each graduate student panel consists of four visiting student papers and a graduate student moderator from the department. We have preserved ample time for formal and informal discussions after paper presentations, and we hope to cultivate strong ties between faculty and graduate students from the region (and beyond) at evening receptions and meals.

A committee of graduate students from the Religious Studies department is planning the conference with the full support of the department's faculty and staff. The committee includes Ariel Schwartz, Candace Kohli, Joel Harrison, Will Caldwell, Myev Rees, Sarah Wolf, and Stephanie Brehm. The committee has already secured the conference's keynote speakers and graduate presenters. We will be advertising the conference on Northwestern's campus, as well as at other Chicago-area campuses and on campuses across the country. The committee is handling all academic, professional, and logistical aspects of the conference.

Tentative Schedule

Friday, October 31

4-5 PM: Check-In

5:30-6:30 PM: Welcome and Keynote Speaker 1

6:30 PM: Evening reception

7:30 PM: Graduate Students and Keynote Speaker Dinner

Saturday, November 1

9-11 AM: Sacred Wilderness Panel

11:15-11:30 AM: Break

11:30 AM-1:30 PM: Where Religion Takes Place Panel

1:30-3 PM: Lunch Break

3-5 PM: Food, Purity, and the Body Panel

5-5:15 PM: Break

5:30-6:30 PM: Keynote Speaker 2

6:30 PM: Reception

7:30 PM: Graduate Students and Keynote Speaker Dinner

Sunday, November 2

9-11 AM: Nature, Politics, and Action Panel

11-11:15 AM: Break

11:15 AM-12:30 PM: Keynote Speaker 3

12:30-1:30 PM: Lunch break

1:30-3 PM: Optional Site Visit

Budget and Expectations

We expect the following attendance numbers at the “Religion and the Natural Elements” conference: 40-50 Northwestern graduate and undergraduate students; 20-25 graduate students from other universities; and 15-25 faculty.

The committee would like to make this event as welcoming, beneficial, and cost-effective as possible. The budget below is our wish list based upon previous years’ actual expenses. Thus far, we have received partial funding assistance from the Northwestern Religious Studies Department (\$3000), the Northwestern Philosophy Department (\$300), and The Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities at Northwestern (\$1200). We plan to request financial support from other Northwestern departments as well. We are requesting \$4,000 from the Midwest AAR Regional Development Grant for expenses.

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| <u>Keynote Speakers</u> | | |
| Honoraria | | |
| Airfare | | |
| Lodging | | |
| Food & Ground Transportation | | |
| | Subtotal: | |
| <u>Facilities & Catering</u> | | |
| Facility Rental Fees | | |
| Equipment Rental Fees | | |
| Catering | | |
| Dinners with Keynotes | | |
| | Subtotal: | |
| <u>Printed Materials/</u> | | |

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <u>Advertising</u> | | |
| Printed Materials | | |
| Miscellaneous | | |
| | Subtotal: | |
| | | |
| | Total: | |
| | Total requested from AAR: | |

Regional Development

This conference on “Religion and the Natural Elements” will bring its participants to the geographical and symbolic heartland of the United States to take part in interdisciplinary conversations about religion and the natural world. Known as the “breadbasket of America” and home to the Great Lakes, the Midwest is rooted firmly in agriculture, industry, and transcontinental exchange, rendering a Midwestern conference on religion and the environment not only compelling but also necessary. Current issues like the Detroit water shut-offs and the mining of fracking sand in the Plains States demonstrate the importance of convening a conference in the Midwestern region that deals explicitly with religion and nature. The “Religion and the Natural Elements” conference will allow established and developing scholars to address such pressing ecological issues at an epicenter of their importance.

Moreover, Chicago in particular is central to many institutions and associations concerned with religion and the environment, such as the Religion and Environment Initiative and Faith in Place. Our conference will offer the space for graduate students from across the country to engage with emerging scholarship on religion and nature as they interface with this subject matter in the surrounding world. For example, the weekend includes a site visit to the Baha’i Temple, which was built in Wilmette specifically for its central location in the Midwest and for the recognition of its specific site on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan as a “chosen place.” Conference participants will consider their Midwestern environment in the context of their academic discussions of religion and the natural elements. Drawing together graduate students from various disciplines and from across the nation, our conference on “Religion and the Natural Elements” will situate its participants in the American heartland to reflect on issues of religion and nature that benefit scholars of religion in the Midwest region and beyond and hold broader implications for the world in which we live.

Conclusion

This conference will advance graduate students’ intellectual and professional growth, stimulating interdisciplinary conversations about religion and the environment and engaging graduate students in the crucial professional experience of running and participating in an academic conference. The conference will foster a community of developing scholars who can

bridge the approaches of different disciplines and more closely anchor their academic work to their surrounding world. Beyond the intellectual benefits of academic discussion, conceiving and planning a conference provides a tremendous opportunity for graduate student professional development. Graduate students from across the country will present their own work in a professional setting and develop their academic networks in a Midwestern environment, at the historical crossroads of American transnational exchange. Northwestern University's Religious Studies graduate students would greatly appreciate the financial support provided by an AAR Regional Development Grant to cover some of the expenses for this three-day conference.