

“ON THE EDGE: LAUNCHING A REGIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM IN THE SOUTHEAST”

Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society
Elon University, NC

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Project Description

This AAR Regional Development Grant will provide seed money for the inaugural meeting of a two-day scholarly symposium that seeks to foster interdisciplinary collaboration across institutions in the Southeast and to forge new pathways in the academic study of religion. “On the Edge: New Directions in the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion” will be hosted by the Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society (CSRCS) and will convene biannually at first, and then annually when additional funding is secured.

“On the Edge” will work at the theoretical and methodological boundaries of the study of religion by bringing scholars working in such fields as law, history, psychology, anthropology, literature, philosophy, art history, political science, classics, and gender studies into conversation with those from religious studies. Its sessions and publications will contribute to a multi-layered understanding of the role of religion in human societies, both now and in the past. Convened by two regional experts in the symposium’s biannual thematic focus, each symposium will result in a major publication in the interdisciplinary study of religion, with regional scholars serving as both editors and contributors.

To promote broad participation across fields by the region’s best young scholars and teaching faculty regardless of their individual institution’s resources, the CSRCS will provide lodging and meals during the symposium as well as limited travel subventions for presenters who do not have funding from their institutions.

Regional Impact

Elon University is ideally situated in the center of North Carolina, a state richly populated with institutions of higher education of various sorts, from world-class Research I institutions to numerous small, liberal arts colleges. In the midst of the state's many educational institutions, it is also within easy driving distance of two of its major airports (Greensboro and Raleigh-Durham), and, in addition, a large number of Virginia and South Carolina colleges and universities are within a three-hour drive. In many respects, Elon sits at a higher education hub for a sub-region of the US Southeast. Since its founding in 2012, the CSRCS has leveraged its central location to host a number of events that have brought scholars from institutions within its orbit—many of whom may themselves be far-flung from one another—together for small conferences, panel discussions, and “master classes” for faculty.¹ These successful events have helped establish and develop relationships among faculty at such institutions as Wake Forest University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Guilford College, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Duke University, University of Mount Olive, High Point University, Wofford College, and North Carolina State University. We are confident we can build on these successes to foster a more active and tightly knit scholarly community in this region. While this symposium's conversations and networks will be interdisciplinary in character, they will also reflect the commitment of the strategic plan developed by Elon for promoting inter-religious engagement in this region. Titled “Engaging Religions/Building Community,” this university-wide plan, whose implementation was initiated by the Provost in November 2015, calls for the development of collaborations across the institutions of this region that intentionally situate religion and its shifting place in a globalizing world at the center rather than at the margins of our scholarly dialogue.²

We expect that the symposium can extend the success of the AAR SE regional meeting, as working groups from the symposium will reconvene annually for post-conference consultations at SECSOR. We also anticipate that relationships that develop as a result of “On the Edge” will generate other proposals for the meeting,

¹ Examples of such events may be seen here: <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/studyofreligion/2013.xhtml>; here: <http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Article/129099>; and on p. 12 of the CSRCS 2014-15 Annual Report, which can be found here: <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/studyofreligion/annualreport2015.xhtml>

² “Engaging Religions/Building Community: Recommendation Report from the Multi-faith Strategic Planning Committee, Elon University.” Sept. 2015. Available at: <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/studyofreligion/Engaging%20Religions%20-%20FINAL%20report%20.pdf>.

thus deepening the level of the discourse there and modeling regional collaboration for graduate students and junior scholars. When fully developed, “On the Edge” will provide an annual opportunity for scholars who study religion from varied disciplinary standpoints to collaborate on a major publication project, thus enriching the intellectual life of this area of the Southeastern Region.

Focus on Early-career Scholars and Teaching Faculty

While faculty at this sub-region’s well-funded research institutions such as Duke and UNC Chapel Hill typically have access to resources that promote active speaking schedules and the cultivation of robust scholarly networks, faculty at its smaller institutions are often less connected to one another, even when they are proximately located. As an institution that has experienced recent rapid growth that has allowed it to reduce faculty teaching loads and to develop new resources for supporting faculty scholarship while, at the same time, remaining primarily committed to excellence in undergraduate teaching, Elon recognizes the challenges that both undergraduate institutions and their teaching faculty confront in trying to advance faculty research when faced with competing professional and institutional demands. Through this symposium Elon hopes to contribute to the intellectual life and professional development of faculty in the Southeastern region for whom the opportunity would be particularly meaningful: untenured faculty or those not located at research institutions. Although the symposium’s Call for Papers will be distributed nationally in order to ensure the quality of the programming and exchange, in both its promotion of the symposium and the selection of papers its organizers (the authors of this proposal) will seek to engage especially those kinds of faculty members. A principle goal of the symposium will be to foster collaborations and new connections for regional faculty who could most benefit from them.

Publication Objectives

Collaboration and professional relationship building are goods in themselves, but the ultimate objective of “On the Edge” will be to catalyze new research and produce publications of scholarly excellence on the symposium’s annual theme in edited volumes and special issues of refereed journals. Scholars who are accepted to deliver papers will be asked to commit to a timeline for publication, with all papers circulated in draft form a month ahead of the conference, small working groups convening at the AAR SE Annual Meeting each March, and final drafts coming due in the early summer following the symposium. “On the Edge” will be dedicated to the principle that the junior and teaching faculty it seeks primarily to engage are best served by seeing their preliminary research carefully reviewed by their colleagues

and their final essays published in a timely manner. The Director of the CSRCS will typically serve as editor of those collections and make certain they remain on schedule.

Funding Model

As is attested in the attached letter from Associate Provost, Dr. Tim Peeples, Elon University is committed to the continuing development of the “On the Edge” symposium and to building funding for its programming into its operating budget. It will achieve financial sustainability through both fundraising by its Office of Advancement and regular incremental increases to the symposium’s annual budget. Seed money provided through an AAR Regional Development Grant will allow “On the Edge” to launch on a small scale in February 2017 while these other sources of funding are developed. A budget for the fully developed symposium, at an annual cost of \$--, is attached. Elon has committed \$-- towards the inaugural convening of the symposium in 2017. In addition, the Office of Advancement will highlight the symposium as an opportunity for donors.

This grant application requests \$-- to help underwrite the 2017 symposium described below and to get the symposium on its feet. In this first year the event will be scaled to meet the available funding.

Inaugural Symposium

The 2017 inaugural theme will be, “On the Edge of Apocalypse,” which will engage speculations and predictions about end-of-the-world scenarios in multiple religious traditions to understand the patterns and anxieties that fuel the apocalyptic imagination. Convened by Elon folklorist Dr. Tom Mould and New Testament scholar Dr. Lynn Huber (co-authors on this grant proposal), the 2017 symposium will examine new approaches to the study of apocalyptic thinking across religious traditions and across historical periods. Dr. David Cook of Rice University will offer the keynote address, “‘Every Time a Horn Goes, Another Replaces It’: Cyclicity and Conquest in Muslim Apocalypticism.” We expect that his presentation will be of special appeal to the many Islamic studies faculty in the area, thus paving the way for regional connections and collaborations.

Included in this proposal is the timeline initially developed in the summer of 2015 to prepare for the February 2017 inaugural symposium. It will show that all preliminary organizing and planning are complete as we secure final finding, which we seek through this grant proposal.

Timeline

Date	Task	Status
August 2015	Vet topic proposals from local scholars	Complete
September 2015	Develop concept paper for 2017 theme	Complete
October 2015	Develop theme statement and draft Call for Papers	Complete
November 2015	Draft list of potential invitees	Complete
February 2016	Secure keynote speaker	Complete
March 2016	Finalize CFP	Complete
April 2016	Draft conference schedule	Underway
April 2016	Reserve meeting and hospitality space on campus	Complete
April 2016	Secure room block at Acorn Inn for participants	Complete
May 31, 2016	Post CFP and launch publicity efforts	Underway
September 1, 2016	Paper proposal due date	
September 15, 2016	Notification date	
December 31, 2016	First drafts of all papers due to CSRCS director	
February 9-11, 2017	Symposium dates	
March 3-5, 2017	Working groups meet at AAR SE Annual Meeting, Raleigh, NC	
May 1, 2017	Final essays due to CSRCS director	
June 1, 2017	Essays submitted for publication	

Budget (for 8 funded participants)

Travel for 8 participants	\$
Honorarium for keynote speaker	
Travel for keynote speaker	
Stipend for 8 participants	
Lodging at Acorn Inn, Elon, NC	
Meals and Hospitality	
Printing	
Student worker support	—
Total cost	\$



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May 31, 2016

Dear Review Committee:

In my capacity as Senior Associate Provost at Elon University, I write to confirm institutional support for the proposal submitted by Drs. Lynn Huber, Tom Mould, and Brian Pennington, titled, "On the Edge: Launching a Regional Interdisciplinary Symposium in the Southeast."

With the establishment of the Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society in 2012, Elon University committed itself to the development of a regional center for interdisciplinary intellectual engagement with the role of religion in society that could host the kinds of events and conversations this proposal describes. The Office of the Provost at Elon University has earmarked regular operating funds for organizing and hosting a bi-annual symposium beginning in Fiscal Year 2016-17, and it will continue to build further funding into the budget on an annual basis. In addition, the University Advancement Office will pursue direct fundraising among donors to ensure the sustainability and longevity of this important project.

The University has made a strong commitment to ongoing development of a strong multi-faith agenda. The proposal submitted by Drs. Huber, Mould, and Pennington is part of a larger, fully supported effort.

Sincerely,

Tim Peebles, Ph.D
Senior Associate Provost