



Fostering Excellence
In the Study of Religion

A Quarterly Newsletter for AAR Graduate Students
Vol. 2, No. 2, April 2009

In This Issue

Reports From the Spring Regional Meetings

The annual AAR/SBL/ASOR regional meetings wraps up this weekend, and Speaking of Students has received news reports from most of them.

Mid-Atlantic

Christopher Denny of **St. John's University** reports that 25 students attended the annual meeting March 26-27 in Baltimore, MD, 17 of whom presented papers. **Christopher D. Shaw** of **Villanova University** won the \$200 Robert F. Streetman Prize for the best student paper — “A Prolegomena to Any Future Study of ‘Religion’: An Anthropological Critique of the Intellectual and Cultural Category of ‘Religion’ in Schleiermacher’s Early Religious Thought in Light of Dubuisson’s Analysis of Western Intellectual Imperialism.”

A number of the students who presented at the Mid-Atlantic meeting had attended an October workshop on writing paper proposals. Led by **Dr. Devorah Schoenfeld** of **St. Mary's College (Maryland)** and sponsored by **The Catholic University of America**, the workshop was geared toward students and first-time presenters. It included an overview of the submission and review process, guidelines for writing an AAR paper proposal, and tips about what makes a successful proposal. Students who brought proposals with them also got feedback from Dr. Schoenfeld and **Dr. Dan McClain** of **The Catholic University of America** and **Loyola College (Maryland)**. Dr. Schoenfeld developed the workshop for the **Graduate Theological**

1. [Recapping the Regionals](#)
2. [Beyond the Boundaries: A Call for Presentations](#)
3. [Students and the JAAR](#)
4. [AAR Committee Opportunities](#)
5. [Kudos](#)
6. [News/Feature: The Meditation Room at the University of Redlands](#)

Contact Us

American Academy of Religion

Union, where it is now a part of a professional development program.

Southeast

Dr. Brian Pennington of **Maryville College** reports that 94 AAR and SBL student members attended the regional meeting March 13-15 in Greensboro N.C., with at least 70 of them presenting. The \$200 prize for outstanding graduate student paper went to **Rosemary B. Kellison** of **Florida State University** for her paper, "The Contribution of the Study of Modern Judaism to Contemporary Critical Theory in Religion: A Postcolonial Reading of Moses Mendelssohn."

Also at the regional meeting, the executive committee of the Southeast Commission for the Study of Religion announced its support for an initiative by the Fund for Theological Education to hold a meeting and information sessions at next year's annual gathering in Atlanta to recruit students of color to graduate study in religion, Bible and theology and to consider professions in academia. These sessions may be complemented by a workshop based on the AAR's Career Guide for Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, which is available online at:

www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online_Publications/REM_Career_Guide

Southwest

Dr. Donna Bowman of the **University of Central Arkansas** reports that 128 AAR and SBL students attend the regional meeting March 7-8 in Dallas, TX, 14 of whom presented papers in AAR sections. There were no student awards.

Upper Midwest

Dr. Susan Hill of the **University of Northern Iowa** reports that 56 graduate students and 23 undergraduates attended the regional meeting March 27-28 at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Among the graduate student presenters who received travel grant awards were **Daniel Lloyd** of **Marquette University**, **Ezra Plank** and **Dan Morris** of **The University of Iowa**, **Joel Cassady** of **St. John's University**, **Steven Lee** of the **University of Wales Lampeter**, and **Rebecca Proefrock** of the **Lutheran School of Theology** in Chicago. A number of the graduate students also attended a pre-conference luncheon entitled, "The Dos and Don'ts of Networking."

The 2010 Upper Midwest regional meeting will be April 9-10, again at Luther Seminary.

Rocky Mountain

Joan Carnegie of **Regis University** reports that 51 students attended

825 Houston Mill Rd. NE
Ste. 300
Atlanta, GA 30329-4205

Tel: 404-727-3049
Fax: 404-727-7959

www.aarweb.org

the regional meeting March 6-7 in Denver, CO; 39 of them presented papers. There was no award for student presenters.

Western

Dr. Susan Maloney and **Dr. Jason Smick** report that 105 students attended the regional meeting March 21-23 at Santa Clara University. Three students won awards for papers related to the conference theme — “Standing at the Crossroads: 21st Century Challenges in Ethics, Religion, and Social Justice: Reclaiming Traditions, Renewing Commitments.” **Seth Clippard** of **Arizona State University** won \$300 for his paper, “The Conversation Between Deep Ecology and Buddhism.” **Sarah Robinson** of **Claremont Graduate University** won \$200 for her paper, “Islam, Ecology and Environmental Justice.” **Patricia Power** of **ASU** won \$100 for her paper, “Blurring the Boundaries: The American Messianic Jew.”

Pacific Northwest & Eastern International

The Pacific Northwest regional meeting was held April 24-26 at **Pacific Lutheran College** in Tacoma, WA, too late to make the deadline for this edition. SOS will have a report from that meeting in the next issue along with one from the Eastern International regional meeting May 1-2 at **LeMoyne College** in Syracuse, NY.

Religion Beyond the Boundaries seeks student submissions

The Graduate Student Committee invites submissions for the second annual Religion Beyond the Boundaries, a forum that allows students to step outside the formal academic setting at the national meeting and present their work as part of a series of evening coffee shop talks. Three 45-minute presentations will be selected for this year’s event at the national meeting Nov. 7-10 in Montreal. Although proposals may be submitted on any topic, the committee especially welcomes talks that touch on one of the following: the relationship between aboriginal peoples and the church in Canada, Jewish Montreal, and Islam in Canada.

This is a chance to put your research into a new framework, practice your job talk, and explain the relevance of your work to your peers. Come be a public intellectual for a day! If you are interested, please send a 150 word abstract to GSC member Janet Gunn at contact.gunn@gmail.com. The deadline is May 15.

Student opportunities with the JAAR

SOS erred in its last edition when it indicated that the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* accepts book reviews by students. It

does not. As **JAAR editorial assistant Emily O. Gravett** explained, the journal does not accept unsolicited book reviews from anyone. Instead it identifies particular books it wants to review and invites qualified experts to review them. All reviewers must have PhD's.

However, **JAAR Editor Dr. Charles Mathewes** told SOS that the journal "is always interested in papers submitted by grad students. In fact in my time (since 2006) we've published a number of grad student papers." Indeed he said much of the good work published in the journal comes from scholars who are relatively recent PhDs, including a number who were writing their dissertations when they submitted papers. (The evaluation process is long — up to a year — so it's not uncommon for a paper submitted by a student to be published after she or he has received a PhD and begun a job.) Whether the submitter is a PhD or still a student, the *JAAR* is eager to see good papers, Dr. Mathewes said.

To get an idea of what makes a good paper, take a look at an article by Dr. Mathewes in the March '07 issue of *Religious Studies News* (pp. 17-18) in which he elaborates on what the *JAAR* and other scholarly publications look for. AAR members can find and download the article at <http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/RSN/default.asp>.

AAR Committee Opportunities

The AAR wants to include students on its committees. Although some committees will be more open to student membership than others, **AAR Executive Director Jack Fitzmier** encourages students to nominate themselves if they have an interest in serving on any of the following committees and task forces, all of which have openings this year:

- Academic Relations Committee
- Book Award Juries
- Career Services Advisory Committee
- Graduate Student Committee
- International Connections Committee
- Public Understanding of Religion Committee
- The Task Force on the Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession
- The Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession
- The Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession
- Teaching and Learning Committee
- Theological Education Steering Committee

Descriptions of the committees and task forces as well as a list of their current members can be found at http://www.aarweb.org/About_AAR/Committees/default.asp. If you want to be considered, please e-mail a letter explaining your interest in serving on the particular committee, your participation in the AAR and your academic and professional interests along with a CV to nominations@aarweb.org. You can also fax the information to **404-727-7959**, or snail mail it to:

Jack Fitzmier
American Academy of Religion
825 Houston Mill Road NE Suite 300
Atlanta GA 30329-4205
USA

The deadline for committee nominations is **Friday, May 8.**

Kudos

Graduate Student Committee Chairman Whitney Bauman was one of 12 winners this year of The John Templeton Prize for Theological Promise. Whitney, who got his doctorate in 2007 from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., and is now assistant professor of religion and science at Florida International University, won for his dissertation, *From Creatio ex Nihilo to Terra Nullius: The Colonization of Creation*, which is being published this year by Routledge. To read about the prize, all of the 2009 winners and the 2010 competition go to http://www.fiiit.uni-heidelberg.de/award/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

GSC member **Almeda M. Wright** is co-editor along with **Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore** of **Emory University** of the newly published book *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling Word* (Chalice Press). The book is a collection of articles from 15 contributors, including Dr. Moore and Almeda. Almeda is a doctoral candidate in Practical Theology at Emory University, where she serves as the assistant director and research coordinator of the Youth Theological Initiative at the Candler School of Theology.

(SOS wants to acknowledge the accomplishments of student members of the AAR. If you've won a prize, recently published a book or an article, or have any news or achievements to report, please send the information to **SOS Editor Charles Bernsen** at cbernsen@comcast.net.)

Redlands Meditation Room gets wide acceptance

Since its debut 18 months ago, the **Meditation Room in the University of Redlands Religious Studies Department** has become a popular resource not just for the academic study of contemplative practices but for students, faculty, staff and community members who want to learn and enjoy the benefits of mediation.

Dr. Fran Grace, associate professor of religious studies at Redlands, said the idea for a "contemplative classroom" grew out of her own approach to meditation as an academic and pedagogic practice, not just a subject of study.

"I began using a contemplative pedagogy several years before the room

opened after studying the multiple benefits of meditation for academic learning and overall well-being,” Dr. Grace said. “The first years of teaching meditation in a traditional classroom environment were challenging. It is much better now to have a meditative classroom space that is suitable for rigorous interior investigation.”

Dr. Grace, whose teaching and research focus on the religious “inner life,” teaches several of her regular academic courses in the Meditation Room because its environment is so suitable for the contemplative pedagogy she uses. Other faculty members also use the room for what Dr. Grace describes as “contemplative lab sessions.” For example, a World Religions course might use the room to host a Zen Buddhist nun or other guest instructor/practitioner.

But the room serves as more than a formal academic setting. Every week, the department offers free meditation sessions for students, faculty, staff, and residents from the town of Redlands. The topics vary — Qigong, Zazen, deep relaxation, Tai Chai, Sufi dance, Christian meditation, Feldenkrais, restorative yoga and the like. “Sometimes these sessions are so full, we have to turn them away at the door,” Dr. Grace said.

Several times a year Dr. Grace conducts meditation sessions for specific campus constituencies. Recently she offered a 45-minute session on deep relaxation for university secretaries. In the past she has conducted a session for students dealing with depression as well as a stress-relief meditation session during final-exam week.

The Meditation Room has 28 zabutons (square meditation cushions) and 28 zafus (round meditation cushions), 28 yoga mats, several kneeling benches, folding chairs, a cubbyhole at the door for shoes and back packs. With its flowing curtains, high ceiling and soothing colors, the Meditation Room is designed to be a serene and inviting place. (See a picture of the Redlands Meditation Room at www.redlands.edu/x33381.asp.)

As a result it has become a popular space for individual students, faculty, staff, and townspeople who use it to practice meditation on their own or simply as a quiet retreat. (Read what Redlands students have to say about the Meditation Room and contemplative practice at www.redlands.edu/x34550.asp.)

SOS would like to thank **Dr. Arlette Poland**, adjunct professor of religion at the **University of Redlands**, for suggesting this story and helping produce it. If you have an idea for a news/feature about religious studies students or departments, please contact **SOS Editor Charles Bernsen** at cbernsen@comcast.net.

To read this issue online, go to:
<http://aarweb.icontact.com/newsletters/gradstudents>

