

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Three Credits con't	2
Theses Updates	2
Golem Factory Open!	3
Marx Presents	3
Notes from the Field: Whicher	4
Notes from a Classroom	4
Reflections on a B.A. in Religion	5
Book Publication: Marx	6
Notes from the Field: Dubois	6
Publications: Brown	7
Notes from the Field: MacKendrick	7
Reflections on a PhD in Religion	8
D&D Fundraiser Success!	9
Calling All Student and Alumni	9

## Three Credits: Letter from the Chair

***Don't let your course be used only for three credits.***

This past June the Department of Religion had the privilege of hosting Dr. Merinda Simmons and Dr. Nathan Loewen from the University of Alabama. In joint presentations Merinda and Nathan lead discussions on the state of the study of religion and the state of post-COVID humanities for the Dept of Religion and the Faculty of Arts.

I had been trying to get Merinda and Nathan to our campus since Fall 2019, hoping for a visit in April or May 2020. As with many events, April 2020 unexpectedly turned into June 2023. My reason for bringing Merinda and Nathan to the University of Manitoba campus was simple – despite the erosion of interest in programs in

the humanities, a gradual decline documented over the past fifteen years, interest in the study of Religion at the University of Alabama swims against the tide. It is not a large program by any means, but it is a visible and successful program by almost any metric. I wanted to know how they managed to do this.

The presentations and open discussions included everything from social media tags to curriculum. If I can let a single comment by Nathan Loewen stand in for two days of discussion, it would be this piece of advice: “Don’t let your course be used only for three credits.” This is a shrewd piece of advice for instructors and students.

From a technical point of view, a three credit course can be used to satisfy the basic needs of a student

pursuing a degree. However, aside from this rather accumulative view of enrollment, what other opportunities are open to students enrolled in one of our Religion courses? Answering this question might give us insight into what makes a program successful.

To begin, we might want to think about what it means to enroll in one of our courses. According to our bylaws, enrollment in an RLGN course offers membership within the Department. Any student enrolled in a Religion course is a member of the Department. Students enrolled in our classes are not simply clients but also constituents and can participate in the nomination of student representatives for Department Council meetings.

**(con't on page 2)**



**Ken MacKendrick**  
sporting some  
University of  
Alabama merch

## Three Credits (con't from page 1)

We might also consider that enrollment in an RLGN course also offers less formal membership within an academy, the more inclusive place where religion is studied. The academy includes other Departments of Religion as well as professional associations such as the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) and the International Associate for the History of Religions (IAHR). In a very tangible sense, curriculum is community.

If we see ourselves as a community of learners and not simply a provider of credit services, how might we locate a three credit course within this larger community

that includes the Department of Religion and Faculty of Arts as well as other academic institutions and non-academic communities? How can empower a greater sense of belonging? Merinda and Nathan encouraged us to think about the networks available to us that allow us to connect students with other students of religion and encourage the sharing of knowledge and a sense of belonging at all levels. What opportunities does a three credit course offer for meeting other students with similar interests, either at the University of Manitoba or other institutions? How might the skills and knowledge learned in a class be shared with oth-

ers? Would an assignment make for a good blog or podcast housed on the Department webpage? Could a particular topic addressed in class work for roundtable discussion with students from neighbouring institutions or for the basis of an editorial for a local newspaper? How can we make what we do in the classroom relevant to people outside the classroom? If we view a three credit course as something more than a degree requirement, how might we multitask our curriculum into more than just a degree?

Ken MacKendrick  
Dept. Head

## Thesis Updates

Congratulations goes out to:

**Christopher Gotting**, for his successful MA thesis titled, "Gottesvergessenheit: Wolf Krötke and "Godforgotten-ness" in the DDR (Dec. 2022)

**Daniel Boswick**, for his successful MA thesis titled, "Subject for Discourse Ethics " (July 2023)

# Golem Factory Reopens!



Prague-Golem (Wikipedia Commons)

For the first time since Winter 2018, Kabbalah (RLGN 3824) is in session, and once again students will attempt the creation of a golem – a humanoid being, traditionally formed of clay, brought to life through the power of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The attempt to do this six years ago was enjoyable for all concerned, including a

group of deer who materialized at the end of the golem ritual, but was not crowned with success. This year, however, resident Kabbalah teacher Rabbi Yaakov Lewis is optimistic. “We are a very diverse group. The range of cultural perspectives and academic knowledge will open up many possibilities.

At the same time, we are emphasizing traditional methods of Jewish learning, especially havruta – text study in pairs, reading aloud and sharing insights. This will provide a more solid grounding than conventional academic study methods. Besides, last time around we began the course with other topics and only turned our attention to golem-making part way through. This time, whatever primary texts or academic sources we look at, we are keeping the final go-

lem in mind. And, I am open to looking beyond traditional artisanal methods of golem-making. Does a golem in 2024 need to be made of clay? Perhaps it will be an electronic entity. Perhaps recent advances in AI will be of some benefit to humanity after all.”

Rabbi Lewis promises that if this project is successful, the golem will be asked to help boost our enrollments by joining as many small Religion classes as possible. Admittedly, this may be controversial, like the question, disputed by great rabbis in past generations, whether a golem may be counted in a minyan (prayer quorum).

*“We are a very diverse group. The range of cultural perspectives and academic knowledge will open up many possibilities.”*

## Marx Presents

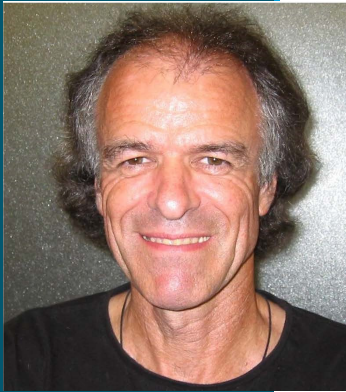
Heidi Marx is presenting this February at the University of Lethbridge as part of the Driedger Lecture series.

Her paper titled, “Healing and the Elements in the Ancient Mediterranean,” explores the connections between the elements and healing substances and practices as a way of exploring ancient cosmology

(the connections between the human and the universe), among other things.



Heidi Marx



Ian Whicher

## Notes from the Field: Whicher

Ian Whicher is on research leave, spending most of his time in Toronto, working on a book alongside his SSHRC Insight Grant.

He also had an article published titled, "The Convergence of Seeing and Action in Classical Yoga," *Journal of*

*Dharma Studies* Vol. 6 (1): 69-85 (2023).

In January, he will be giving talk at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, in Kolkata, at the International Seminar on Spirituality in the 21st Century. He has also been invited to speak

at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, a public university in West Bengal.

"Students carefully examined treasures from the collection..."

## Notes from a Classroom

This past winter semester, I had the opportunity to spend time examining manuscripts and rare books from the University of Manitoba's Dysart Memorial Collection with students from RLGN 2114 Monks, Mystics and Manuscripts in

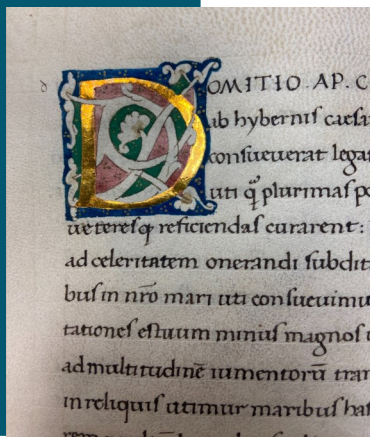
Medieval Christianity.

Students carefully examined treasures from the collection such as a manuscript psalter from

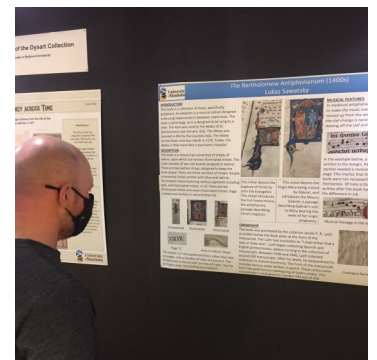
the 13th or 14th century and a 16th-century manuscript antiphony produced at the Abbey of St. Bartholomew near Ferrara, Italy.

Students produced large-scaled posters which examined these objects. An exhibit of their findings, entitled 'Medieval and Early Modern Treasures of the Dysart Collection' was on display until this past August at Elizabeth Dafoe's Archives and Special Collections.

Danielle Dubois



A sample manuscript; image provided by Danielle Dubois



Student looks on at exhibited posters. Image provided by Danielle Dubois.



# Reflections on a B.A. in Religion



Erica Friesen  
(photo provided by Erica)

Erica Friesen graduated with a BA in Religious Studies in Spring 2023, and is now working toward her B.A. in Education.

## Why did you major in Religion?

Quite honestly, my initial intention behind choosing religion as my major was simply out of convenience; I had done a year of biblical studies at another college and had a number of credits already in the subject.

After just one semester of studying religion at the University of Manitoba, I realized that religion was infinitely more complex and intriguing than I had experienced in courses

elsewhere. Issues in social justice, women's and gender studies, science,

government legislation, and personal growth are all aspects of religion and are discussed in different courses—it is an exceptionally multi-faceted subject.

Religion, as a major, has the potential to broaden one's perspective in a way that amplifies empathy, challenges hidden biases, and deepens understanding.

## How does your B.A. in Religious Studies help you with your next steps in Education?

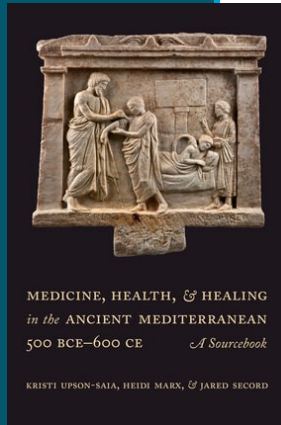
Obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in Religion expanded my breadth of compassion and knowledge, which awards me the advantage of understanding a variety of different subjects. Majoring in Religion gave me the opportunity to learn integral skills that I will be

using as I work towards a Bachelor of Education—skills such as introspection (for the purpose of recognizing biases), compassion, academic writing, and much more.

Religion is also considered a 'teachable subject', which means that the credit hours I acquired during my degree could be included in the required courses for Education. The credit hours that I completed in Religion go far beyond my transcript—my experience majoring in Religion was incredibly rewarding both academically and personally.

*"Religion, as a major, has the potential to broaden one's perspective in a way that amplifies empathy, challenges hidden biases, and deepens understanding"*

## Book Publication: Marx



Heidi Marx's latest publication

Since our last newsletter, Heidi Marx has published a book and open access instructor's guide to go along with it, titled *Medicine, Health, & Healing in the Ancient Mediterranean (500BCE-600CE)* and available at UCPress.

She has also given a number of presentations including "Navigating Ancient Waters: From the Hippocratic Corpus to Eunapius of Saris," at the European Academy of Religion in St. Andrews (June 2023); "Popular Art and Popular Culture in

the Roman Period," in Rome (June 2023); and "What Did it Mean to be Healed in Late Antiquity?" as a Keynote Address in Budapest (October 2022).

## Notes from the Field: Dubois

This past March, I attended the 48th Sewanee Medieval Colloquium at the University of the South for the first time, in balmy Sewanee, Tennessee. Sewanee sits atop a Plateau and boasts a large neo-Gothic campus surrounded by forest. The organizers of the conference claim the setting facilitates the

sharing of ideas, of new work, and the forming of new relationships. I particularly appreciated the format of the conference which required that participants submit papers one month

ahead of time. This gave the designated panel respondent, an expert in the field, time to offer extended comments on each paper and the panel as a whole. And partly because papers were not written at the last minute, the quality of presentations was particularly high. Proof that thoughtful deadlines can produce better work!

This semester, I am spending three months in Italy on research leave to study an association of women known as "Nel giardino delle beghine" (In the garden of the beguines).

Beguines were a group of lay religious women that emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages. They subsisted for eight hundred years, though their way of life was condemned by papal decrees in 1317. The last beguine is said to have died in Belgium in 2013. By observing and conducting interviews with members of the group, I hope to better understand the group's relationship to historical beguines, to the institutional (Catholic) Church and to contemporary non-institutional religious movements.

Danielle Dubois

Danielle Dubois (middle) at Sewanee (image provided by Dubois)



## Publications: Brown

Last February Donna Brown (PhD ABD) published an article on socially engaged Buddhism in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* titled, “Beyond Queen and King: Democratizing “Engaged Buddhism.” This article is open access at can be found at <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/2023/02/02/democratizing-engaged-buddhism/>.

This work was featured in

*Tricycle*, the most widely read of popular Buddhist magazine in North America, who listed it in its: “Our Scholarly Year-in-Review 2023: What we’ve recommended over the past year and a few extras worth reading.” The *Tricycle* article lists 10 articles/books worth reading, with Brown’s showing first. So that is quite a big accomplishment! *Tricycle*’s discussion of Brown’s article is here: <https://tricycle.org/article/scholarly-review-2023/>

And last November, Brown published an article titled, “Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism,” in *Contemporary Buddhism, An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Congratulations, Donna!



The Buddha (Wikimedia Commons)

## Notes from the Field: MacKendrick

This past year has been an exciting one for me. My book *Evil: A Critical Primer* was published by Equinox Press. Shortly after it appeared in print I was interviewed about “Evilology” by Alie Ward for her award winning podcast *Ologies* (forthcoming 2024).

Dr. Nicole Goulet and I received support from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund for our initiative “Digital Tutors – Aca-

demic Supports for Students Working with Multimodal Projects” which allowed us to hire three digital tutors to work with students on class projects involving podcasting, blogs, and short videos.

I also wrapped up a project with Kathy Block (Academic Learning Centre) supported by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Program, “Scaffolding Effective Writing.” This project brought tutors and teaching assistants into RLGN 1440 Evil and

World Religions with the aim of increasing self-efficacy in the completion of writing tasks.

Some of my students from RLGN 3112 Religion and the Imagination were also featured on the CBC in a LARPing demonstration hosted by the Duchy of Northern Fields. Huzzah!

Ken MacKendrick

# Reflections on a PhD in Religion

Catherine van Reenen is working on her PhD in religion, currently preparing for her comprehensive exams.

## Why did you decide to go with a PhD in religion (in our department)?

I would describe my primary field of interest as religion and media, so after getting my MA in media studies, I thought a PhD in religion was the next logical step.

University of Manitoba's Department of

Religion is very diverse and in-

terdisciplinary--our faculty members' and graduate students' research interests range from ancient medicine to Hasidic storytelling to critical animal studies, among other topics--so I felt my own eclectic research interests would be a great fit here.

## What does a PhD in RLGN allow you to do? That is, what are you working on? Where do you envision this will lead you?

My doctoral project will explore the relationship between religion and media through archival work on Dr. Thomas Glendenning Hamilton, a Winnipeg-based physician who became internationally recognized for his psychical research in the 1920s and 30s. I am interested in how and why

Hamilton and his colleagues used photography to study teleplasm, a mysterious substance thought to emerge from entranced mediums' bodies during seances.

I hope my project will contribute to the broader academic study of spirit communication and psychical research, as well as provide insight into how the central analytic categories of Western modernity--like 'religion', 'science', 'technology', and 'magic'--were constructed.

An image of teleplasm from the T.G. Hamilton collection in the U of M Libraries and Archives Special Collections





# D&D Fundraiser Success!



**Playing D&D**  
(photo by Ken  
MacKendrick)

The Department of Religion and the University of Manitoba Dungeons and Dragons student group would like to thank our sponsors: Justin Lewis, Sasha Thiessen, Chrissy Stewart, Shane Buck, Judith Owens, Heidi Marx, the Woolford family, Nicole Goulet, Ken MacKendrick, Greg Smith, Rob and Valerie Parker, Sara Payette and family, Randy Jamieson and family, Andrea Rounce, Jennifer and Michael Baspaly, John Coffin, Himalaya Dong, Jason Leboe-

McGowan, Asia Miyai, and Lea Stirling. Fortunately for the players we had many more helps than harms. Many characters were saved from meeting their doom that day and we have our sponsors to thank. The event raised over \$900 in food and funds for the University of Manitoba Food Bank.

We would also like to thank our guest Dungeons Masters, Chris Bowers and Himalaya Dong, who generously offered their time, creativity, and expertise to our cause (not to mention

maps and mini's). Thanks also to Chris Nichol, president of the University of Manitoba Dungeons and Dragons student group and all of our players: Charles Herscovitch, Jayde Harkness, Jonas Brandt, Hannah Bowers, Braedon Harper, Cole Wiebe, Chris Nichol, Ella Woolford, Ken MacKendrick, Asia Miyai, Brayden Storozinski, and Kajetan Hodor.

Ken MacKendrick would also like to thank the students of RLGN 3112 Religion and the Imagination (Fall 2023) who made this charity event possible with their enthusiasm for gaming and imaginary world building.

*The event  
raised over  
\$900 in food  
and funds for  
the University  
of Manitoba  
Food Bank*

## Calling All Students and Alumni

Are you a former or current student of the Department of Religion? We'd like to hear from you!

How has our program contributed to your current career? What did you value most about your studies with us? Why did you decide to study religion?

Email

Nicole.Goulet@umanitoba.ca  
with any inquiries or submissions.

**Department of Religion  
University of Manitoba**

328 Fletcher Argue  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, MB, Canada  
R3T 2N2

Phone: 204-474-9516  
Fax: 204-474-7601  
Email: religion@umanitoba.ca

If you would like to know more about our programs, what it takes to be a major in religion, or study an MA or PhD in religion, please contact us or check us out on our website.

<https://umanitoba.ca/religion/>

## Dungeons and Donations



Images from the D&D fundraising event hosted by the Department of Religion and the University of Manitoba Dungeons and Dragons student group (courtesy of Ken MacKendrick).

