

# Religion

“Courses abroad provide students with the opportunity to encounter distant religious traditions first hand, and to experience the cultures in which they flourish.”

*Steven Sacks, Associate Professor of Religion*

The religion department at Cornell College endeavors to bridge the scholarly and the personal as students explore traditions from around the world and develop skills in critical thinking, writing and argument, and, most of all, the ability to traverse experiences and ways of thinking that are far from one's own. The department's courses involve deep encounters with texts, experiences, and artifacts that represent the breadth of human experience and culture.

The academic study of religion is an essential ingredient in a liberal arts education because there is no better way to understand the foundations of one's own and others' culture and mode of thought than to comprehend its origins, development, and interaction in different regions, eras, and understandings.

#### **BENEFITS OF ONE COURSE AT A TIME**

##### **FOCUS**

Cornell's One Course At A Time curriculum allows the department to explore topics in depth, through discussion-based classes where every student's voice contributes to the movement of the course. Students and professors take the time necessary to discuss and examine religious texts, allowing students to engage with the text in new ways. Majors dedicate their full attention to their senior projects, which offer the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty member to undertake research. Recent examples include *The Xenu Myth* as an Innovative Text in Scientology, *The Concept of Evil* in Mapuche Shamanism, *Understanding ISIS* as an Islamic Group, *Analyzing Buddhist and Christian Ideas* in the Poems of T.S. Eliot, and *Confirmation Bias* in Scientific Studies of Meditation.

#### **OFF-CAMPUS STUDY**

The One Course calendar gives students unparalleled opportunities for off-campus learning, internships, and independent study. Students can move beyond the textbook for a block or longer to observe and experience a variety of cultures and belief systems in countries such as Mongolia, Morocco, Israel, India, and Japan. Students of religion have the flexibility to undertake monthlong internships in settings such as hospital and college chaplaincies, churches and other religious organizations, and social service agencies.

#### **CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS**

##### **FLEXIBILITY**

The department's flexible degree requirements allow students a great deal of freedom in charting their own paths. Students can study individual religions, get an overview of religious traditions around the world, study the intersection of art and religion, and examine contemporary religious practice. A number of interdisciplinary courses are offered as well, including art history, literature, and philosophy.

##### **SENIOR CAPSTONE**

Each religion major participates in a seminar that explores advanced issues in the study of religion, with an emphasis on individual research. Through their senior thesis projects, students have the opportunity to conduct high-level work in preparation for graduate school in the humanities, law, medicine, or theatre.

##### **OFF-CAMPUS COURSES**

Students may also travel abroad to Ethiopia, Mongolia, Morocco, and elsewhere, and there are many opportunities for independent studies based on student interests. Recent off-campus courses have included *Religions of Mongolia*, *Islam and Postcoloniality in Contemporary Morocco*, *Religions*

## *Faculty Bios & Courses*

### **STEVEN SACKS**

*Associate Professor of Religion*

Teaches courses in Judaic Studies and Comparative Religion, including Hebrew Bible, Issues in Contemporary Judaism, The Islamic Path, and Religions of China and Japan. He has also developed study abroad courses in Laos, Mongolia, and Morocco. He is the author of "Midrash and Multiplicity: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Reinvention of Rabbinic Interpretive Culture" (Walter De Gruyter, 2009), as well as articles in *Spiritual Dimensions of Judaism and Interpretation, Religion, and Culture in Midrash and Beyond*. As an undergraduate, Sacks took advantage of a study program in India and has since returned to India several times and has traveled extensively in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Ph.D., University of Chicago Divinity School; B.A., Grinnell College.

### **MICHELE PETERSEN**

*Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion*

Teaching interests include courses in Christian studies and comparative religion, including Christian Bible, global Christianity, issues in Christianity relating to religious diversity, religious plurality, and religious freedom, Christian mysticism, contemplative studies, Norse mythology, religious ethics, modern religious thought, philosophical hermeneutics, and religion, literature, and the arts. Her research interests focus on the work of Paul Ricoeur and Edith Stein, the ethical relationship between word and silence, and interdisciplinary reflection on language and experience. Ph.D., in religious studies, M.A. in history, B.A. in history and political science, University of Iowa. M.A. in theology, University of Notre Dame.

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of Laos, and Religions of Ethiopia. The courses, which last for one block, are designed to expose students to as much of the local religion and culture as possible, including other college students and religious leaders, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the religious traditions and practices at hand.

#### AFTER CORNELL

##### ALUMNI CAREERS

College resource advisor, UCLA BruinCorps VISTA, Los Angeles, California (Class of 2015)

Content intern, Announce Media, St. Louis, Missouri (Class of 2014)

Collections consultant, Lanesboro Historical Museum, Rochester, Minnesota (Class of 2013)

Youth assessment coordinator, Anchorage Youth Development Coalition, Anchorage, Alaska (Class of 2013)

Content and outreach coordinator, Saving Antiquities for Everyone, Athens, Georgia (Class of 2013)

Chief, Camp Duncan, Aberdeen, North Carolina (Class of 2013)

Volunteer, Hosteria La Luna de Mojanda, Otavalo, Ecuador (Class of 2013)

President, Niche Naturals LLC, Chicago, Illinois (Class of 2013)

Trauma data analyst, Suburban Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland (Class of 2012)

Instructor/assistant manager, Pinot's Palette, Chicago, Illinois (Class of 2012)

FEMA Corps WebEOC specialist, AmeriCorps, Washington D.C. (Class of 2012)

Chaplain resident, University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview, Saint Cloud, Minnesota (Class of 2011)

Webmaster, Saint Vincent de Paul Parish, Oshkosh, Wisconsin (Class of 2011)

Performance and management specialist, City of San Antonio, Texas (Class of 2011)

Outreach coordinator, Green Iowa AmeriCorps, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Class of 2011)

Program associate, AmeriCorps, Vinton, Iowa (Class of 2010)

Account coordinator, 6 Degrees PR, New York City, New York (Class of 2009)

Fund development coordinator, Youth Eastside Services, Redmond, Washington (Class of 2009)

Quality assurance, Pipeworks, Springfield, Oregon (Class of 2007)

Project manager, Nonprofit Management Services of Colorado, Denver, Colorado (Class of 2007)

Multimedia coordinator, Slackline Industries, Boulder, Colorado (Class of 2007)

Technical writer, Epic Systems, Verona, Wisconsin (Class of 2007)

Pathologist's assistant, American Pathology Partners, Denver, Colorado (Class of 2006)

Director of children's and youth ministry, Bear Creek United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas (Class of 2005)

Assistant professor, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa (Class of 2005)

Social worker, State of Iowa, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Class of 2004)

Executive director, Golden Hills RC&D, Oakland, Iowa (Class of 2004)

Public librarian, Carlisle Public Library, Carlisle, Iowa (Class of 2004)

Pastor, New Life United Methodist Church, Machesney Park, Illinois (Class of 2003)

##### GRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED

M.A., art history, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (Class of 2013)

M.S., biotechnology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (Class of 2012)

M.S., computer software engineering, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois (Class of 2011)

Master of Architecture, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, Illinois (Class of 2011)

Master of Public Administration, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas (Class of 2011)

Ph.D., international relations, City University of New York, New York City, New York (Class of 2011)

M.Div., St. John's University School of Theology, Collegeville, Minnesota (Class of 2011)

Master of Public Administration, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas (Class of 2011)

M.S., public relations and corporate communication, New York University, New York City, New York (Class of 2009)

M. Div., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois (Class of 2007)

Master of Social Work, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico (Class of 2006)

#### CATHERINE QUEHL-ENGEL *Chaplain of the College*

Teaches *Suffering and the Sacred*. She is an Episcopal priest and has studied and researched in the fields of religion and visual arts, theology of human suffering, the history of Jewish-Christian relations, and anti-semitism and Holocaust education (including a summer of study at Yad VaShem World Holocaust Center/Hebrew University in Jerusalem). Doctor of Ministry in Christian Spirituality, Washington Theological Union, District of Columbia, M.A. and M.Div., Pacific School of Religion; B.A., Cornell College.