New Faculty: Ellen Gough

The Department of Religion welcomes its newest faculty member, Ellen Gough, assistant professor of South Asian religions. Having recently graduated from the Religious Studies program at Yale University (2015), Gough brings an exciting set of methods and expertise to the study of the religions of South Asia. Her research focuses on how Jainism, one of the major classical religions of early India, alongside Hinduism and Buddhism, intersects with tantra, a diverse religious culture combining asceticism and domestic ritual that swept across India in the early-medieval period and continues to influence popular religious practice today. Gough’s focus on Jainism—both its history and its current practice—gives her a unique perspective on many of the traditional themes of South Asian religious culture including yoga, monasticism and asceticism, theories of salvation, ritual, karma, and nonviolence. In addition to her wide-ranging linguistic capabilities (Hindi, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Gujarati) and her extensive experience living and researching in India, she approaches her material using a variety of methods such as text study, art and object history, and ethnographic fieldwork. Her research and teaching embraces a broad and diverse vision of South Asian religions past and present. In her first year at Emory she is teaching the courses Is Yoga Religious? and Religious Arts of India.

The Religion and Ecology Collaborative

A New Interdisciplinary, Multischool Initiative

by Bobbi Patterson

The Religion and Ecology Collaborative began as the brainchild of three GDR students who convinced faculty members in Environmental Sciences (Lance Gunderson) and Religious Studies (Bobbi Patterson) to convene an interdisciplinary seminar to bring together interdisciplinary approaches to study the religions of South Asia. Over a year later, that team plus two more students, from the GDR and Islamic Civilizations PhD program, created a new interdisciplinary and multischool venture at Emory. The students who initiated the idea for the collaborative were Becky Copeland (eco-theology), Johannes Kleiner (ecological-biblical hermeneutics), and Elizabeth Whiting Pierce (environmental ethics). This year Lisa Hoelle (Jewish environmentalism) and Norah Ziad Elmagraby (ecology and Islam) joined the initiative.

Working at the intersection of environmental sciences, religion, and cultural/historical studies, the collaborative’s activities will elucidate complex socio-ecological dynamics that guide and determine individual societies’ responses to life-system (ecological) challenges. The collaborative also will develop a novel pedagogical agenda for cross-disciplinary research and community engagement.

With funding from the Laney Graduate School, the Office of Sustainability Initiatives, the Master’s in Development Practice Program, and Candler School of Theology, as well as strong support from the Religion and Public Health Program, the participants have taken first steps by offering a graduate-level seminar this fall: RLHT 735, Theories of Resilience Science and Civic Ecology, Questions about the Roles of Religion. The course is designed to establish broader research-practice partnerships with scholars around the country, beginning with professors Marianne G. Krasny and Keith Tidball of Cornell University. The authors will discuss their book, Civic Ecologies, via Skype for a class session this fall and visit campus for public lectures in the spring. Collaborative participants also are planning a retreat for the spring semester.

Combining the insights of religious and environmental studies, the collaborative will empower the Emory community and wider public better to understand and adapt to socio-ecological change.