

# “The Critical Study of Religion and the Future of the Humanities”

April 28-29, 2016  
At the Ohio Union



Keynote Lecture, April 28, 4:30  
Mini-conference, April 29, 10:00-5:00

Funded by the Humanities and Arts  
Discovery Theme Grant on  
“Public Celebrations”

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Support for this conference was provided by  
the Humanities and the Arts Discovery Theme  
Grant on “Public Celebrations” and by the  
Center for the Study of Religion

We wish to thank the following units for their  
generous support:

- The Center for the Study of Religion
- The Department of Classics
- The Department of Comparative Studies
- The Department of English
- The Department of History

We also wish to thank our staff members for  
their help and hard work in organizing the  
event: Nick Spitulski, Matt Brenn, Perry Miller,  
and Mike Polk

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Why study religion in the twenty-first century? And what is the role of the critical, comparative, academic study of religion in the public university, particularly in the face of the current “crisis in the Humanities”? This conference will engage these questions directly through a keynote talk by Timothy Renick (Georgia State University) and a series of presentations and discussions by OSU faculty and students.

Our conference also coincides with the 50th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Humanities. A striking number of OSU faculty have received major grants from NEH for projects relating to the study of religion, so this will also be an opportunity for us to celebrate their work and discuss the relevance of their critical analysis of religion for the University and for the Humanities more broadly.

In many ways, the unique approach that we have here at Ohio State offers a model for the critical, comparative, and interdisciplinary study of religion in the 21st century. Unlike many universities that have a separate Department of Religion, our model at OSU is explicitly interdisciplinary and cross-departmental, involving faculty and students in a wide range of programs, such as Anthropology, Classics, Comparative Studies, East Asian Languages and Literatures, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Folklore, History, History of Art, Philosophy and others. We believe that this interdisciplinary model highlights both the broad relevance of the study of religion today and the need for a respectful comparative and yet rigorously critical approach.

Our conference will begin on April 28 with our keynote lecture on “Why Study Religion?” On April 29, we will have three main events: first, a series of presentations by OSU faculty on their work and their reflections on the role of religious studies in the Humanities today; second, several presentations by OSU students and a broader discussion of the teaching and study of religion in a public university; and third, we will conclude with a broader discussion of our common interests and the possibility of a larger, more ambitious collaborative project undertaken by multiple faculty and students.

## Conference Program

**April 28, 4:30-6:00**

Ohio Union Interfaith Prayer and Reflection Room

Keynote lecture by Timothy Renick of Georgia State University  
“Why Study Religion? Rethinking the Value of the Religious Studies Major”



**April 29**

**9:30 -12:00**, Ohio Union Barbie Tootle Room

Presentations by OSU faculty followed by discussion

Introductory Remarks by Hugh Urban (Center for the Study of Religion)

David Brakke (History), “The NEH and Demons”

Daniel Reff (Comparative Studies), “Christian Missionaries and Indigenous Others”

Hannibal Hamlin (English), “The Bible as Literature in the Secular Public University”

Short Break

Isaac Weiner (Comparative Studies), “Religion Out Loud”

Carolina López-Ruiz (Classics), “From ‘Classical’ to ‘Mediterranean’: Researching Religion and Cultural Exchange”

Scott Levi (History), “The National Endowment for the Humanities: The View from Asia”

**12:00-1:00**, Lunch Break

**1:00-3:00**, Roundtable Discussion with students on teaching religion and religion in the classroom  
Participants: Sara Liebler, Jeremy Foster, Dillon Sampson

**3:00-4:30**, Roundtable Discussion on Religious Studies at OSU and possible collaborative projects between faculty, students and academic units