



Religious Studies at UNO

May 2006

Michael Homan named 2006 Distinguished Alumnus



Dr. Russell Palmer and Dr. Michael Homan

Dr. Michael Homan was named the 2006 Distinguished Alumnus by the Religious Studies faculty Thursday, 20 April during the annual UNO Religious Studies Honours and Awards Dinner. Dr. Russell Palmer and Dr. Dale Stover made the presentation. Among the words by the presenters were the following:

Dr. Michael Homan received his BA with honors from UNO in 1993, finishing his undergraduate work with three majors – religion, history and psychology. Michael received his MA (1997) and his Ph.D. (2000) from The University of California – San Diego in Ancient History with Hebrew Bible as his major field. Since 2001, Michael has been an assistant professor at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans.

Michael's dissertation was published in 2002 by Brill Academic Press under the title *To Your Tents, O Israel! Function, Form and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. In 2003, he received the Frank Moore Cross Publications Award from the American Schools of Oriental Research for his book. He is also the co-author of three other books, the author of a dozen journal articles and the contributor of festschrift chapters, encyclopedia entries and book reviews.

Michael has served as an area-supervisor for archaeological excavations in both Jordan and Israel. He has already established a distinguished record of teaching during his five years at Xavier University. The Religious Studies Faculty at UNO takes pride in the exceptional record of accomplishment by Dr. Homan and is pleased to cite him as our distinguished alumnus for 2006.

Homan's response on receiving the honour can be found on his personal blog. It is the entry posted on Monday, 24 April 2006 at the following URL: <http://michaelhoman.blogspot.com/>

Students honored for success



Todd Daganaar, Tammi Owens (front from left) and Karen Kempkes (center back) were recognized as honor students. Shown with them are Dr. Dale Stover (back left) and Dr. Michele Desmarais (back right)

Three Religious Studies students have been recognized by the University of Nebraska for their all round success as students this year.

Todd Daganaar was named the Religious Studies Honor Student for 2005-2006. He is a religion

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major in the College of Arts and Sciences and carries a 3.95 grade point average on a 4.0 scale.

Karen Kempkes is a Religious Studies major in the Division of Continuing Studies, College of Public Affairs and Community Service. She was the Division of Continuing Studies honor student this year.

Tammi Owens has a double major, Religious Studies and Fine Arts. She was the honor student for the College of Communications, Fine Art and Media.

Sundance experience carries over to showing of Five Movie Shorts



Native American Studies Academic Director Beth Ritter (left) and Dr. Michele Desmarais (right) with Director Gail Maurice at Sundance 2006. Maurice was here for the Native Americans in Film Panel in April.

Dr. William L. Blizek, founding editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film*, **Dr. Paul Allen Williams**, editor and **Dr. Michele Desmarais**, associate editor, attended the 2006 Sundance Film Festival in January to review films for *JR & F*. They were joined this year by **Dr. Beth Ritter**, anthropology associate professor and academic program director for Native American Studies who reviewed Native American films for the *Journal*. A "Report from Sundance" appears on the *JR & F* site (www.unomaha.edu/jrf).

Sundance short films were shown at the Movie Night held by the program in March. Five films

were seen. They included Tiffany Shlain's *The Tribe*; Nash Edgerton's *Fuel*, Jon Daniel Ligon's *Ha Ha Ha America*, Gail Maurice's *Smudge* and David Napier's *The Art of Farewell*.

Essay Contest winners named; present papers



Mandy Randall, Todd Dagaanaar, Hanna Wanzenried and Karen Kempkes (above from left). Brian Linnell is pictured below right.

Todd Dagaanaar, Mandy Randall and Brian Linnell, the top three winners in the UNO Religious Studies Essay Contest, presented their papers Thursday, 20 April.



Brian Linnell

Dagaanaar's paper was on "A Meditation on Buddhist Meditation." It took first place. Randall, second place, chose "The Bhagavad Gita and War" as the topic for her paper. "Darwinism and the Eastern Theology of St. Irenaeus of Lyons" was third place finisher Linnell's topic.

Dagaanaar and Randall are religious studies majors in the College of Arts and Sciences. Linnell is studying music performance – brass in the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media.

Honorable Mentions went to "Shamanism and the Christian Tradition," Karen Kempke; "Fight Club:

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An Exploration of Buddha” by Charley Reed, and "Joining the Tribe: Conversion to Judaism" by Hanna Wanzenried.

Kempkes is a religion major in the Division of Continuing Studies. Reed is studying Broadcasting,

with concentration in New Media in the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media, and Wanzenried is a religion and history major in the College of Arts and Sciences.



Beth Ritter, Native American Studies Academic Director; John Belindo; Sheila Rocha; Gail Maurice; Moses Brings Plenty, Barbara Robins, Panel Moderator; and Rich Barea at the Native Americans and Film Panel (pictured from left).

JR & F co-sponsors panel on Native Americans and Film

The *Journal of Religion and Film*, a publication of the Religious Studies program at UNO, was one of the sponsoring organizations for a Native American panel in April called “Lights, Cameras, Action: Native Americans and Film.”

The panel brought together Gail Maurice, Métis filmmaker and actor from Canada, and local Native American actors and playwrights, Sheila Rocha,

John Belindo, Rich Barea and Moses Brings Plenty, to discuss the role of Native Americans in film, how Native Americans are portrayed in film and some of the challenges they personally have faced while working in media of all kinds.

Three of Maurice’s short films, *Smudge*, *Little Indians* and *Memory in Bones* were shown as part of the special evening

Faculty News

Bill Blizek was quoted in the Jan. 1 editions of the *Bay City Times* (Bay City, Mich.) and the *Winston-Salem Journal* (Winston-Salem, N.C.). The article explored the abundance of religious-themed movies in 2004.

Dr. Rory Conces will be the keynote speaker at the 9th annual International Seminar “Democracy and Human Rights in Multiethnic Societies” at the Institute for Strengthening Democracy in Bosnia, Konjic, Bosnia-Herzegovina 10-14 July. He will

lecture on “The Hyperintellectual: Challenging Ethnic Nationalism and Strong Interventionism in the Balkans.” A veteran of this conference, he will also present a paper “On the Intimacy of Religion and Morality in Civil Society: Ripples of Hospitality and Empathy.”

Guy Matalon may now be addressed as **Dr. Guy Matalon**. He successfully completed his

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dissertation, titled "Maimonides on Immortality"
and defended it early this year at New York
University, receiving his Ph.D. this May.

During the fall of 2005, **Guy Matalon** worked with the Anti-Defamation League and the Omaha metropolitan area school districts in offering a series of graduate credit workshops for Omaha area teachers. The workshops, collectively entitled, "A Cooperative Approach to teaching the Holocaust," involved teams of teachers working together to study various aspects of the Holocaust with teachers generating curriculum materials for use in the classroom. Over 20 teachers participated and all of them were able to enhance their understanding of the Holocaust in an effort to better educate their students.

Steve Bullock, Political Science, helped set up the workshop. He said they hope to be able to offer the opportunity to teachers again but are still working on the details.

Dr. Desmarais, Dr. Matalon and Dr. Williams offered a graduate course on world religions this spring as part of a graduate certificate program for military and civilian personnel selected for the program by the Strategic Command at Offutt Air Force Base. The program is designed to broaden the knowledge of those working around the world in different cultures in the areas of political science, religion, communication, and computer security. The course is one of a series of four courses being offered by UNO faculty for this program.

Drs. Guy Matalon and William L. Blizek led UNO faculty on a trip to Israel to visit Western Galilee College in Akko, Israel, at the end of May. While there, both Blizek and Matalon made presentations to faculty members and met with faculty and students.

Dr. William L. Blizek made a presentation at the International Conference on Philosophy in Athens, Greece immediately following the Israel trip. His paper was on "Moral Philosophy & Religious Ethics."

Dr. Paul Williams received a travel grant and a mini grant this spring from the Civic Participation Program at UNO to travel to Fes, Morocco this

summer for language and cultural immersion. He will study Arabic and live in an old Islamic city. His study will contribute to Islamic studies in the UNO Religious Studies program and advance a research project on Islamist movements in North Africa.

He also has been quoted on several occasions in the Omaha World Herald and other national publications in connection with stories on religious themes and on the new film, *The Da Vinci Code*.

Dr. Michele Desmarais has submitted a book length manuscript for publication and is waiting to hear about its acceptance from the publisher.

Dr. Sarah Voss will offer a partially online course on Moral Math: A Window into Religion, Science, and Love at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago in 2007. The residential part of the course will be offered in January, 2007 at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago.

Monks visit classes in March



In March, monks from the Kharnang Monastery in Northeastern Tibet came to visit the World Religion classes of Dr. Michele Desmarais and Dr. Paul Williams. Dr. Doug Patterson and Dean Hendricks helped to arrange their visit.

The monks chanted and then Yangtül Rinpoche gave a talk about Buddhism. The Rinpoche is not only the supreme head of the monastery, but he also possesses a Geshe degree (the equivalent of a Ph.D. in Buddhist philosophy). The Rinpoche and other monks answered many questions about Buddhism and their lives as monks from students in the classes. After the talk, students were able to talk with the monks informally. The monks also had some Tibetan items students could acquire.

Desmarais and Williams are inducted into Honor Society



Karen Kempkes (left) with Dr. Michele Desmarais, Alpha Sigma Lambda's 2006 faculty inductee from UNOs Eta Beta Chapter.

Dr. Paul Williams and Dr. Michele Desmarais have been inducted into Alpha Sigma Lambda Eta Beta Chapter, a National Honor Society for Students in Continuing Higher Education.

Williams was inducted in April 2005. He was introduced at the initiation ceremony by Dawn Staszko.

Desmarais was inducted in April 2006. She was introduced by Karen Kempkes.

Each year a faculty person is chosen for induction into the society. Desmarais and Williams are the first members of the religious studies faculty to be so honoured.



Dawn Staszko (left) with Dr. Paul Williams, Alpha Sigma Lambda's 2005 faculty inductee from Eta Beta Chapter at UNO.

Faculty inductees are nominated by students within the honor society for their interest and assistance in making adult students successful in their academic careers.



Alpha Sigma Lambda is an honor society which partners with colleges and universities to celebrate the scholarship and leadership of adult students in higher education. Its aim is to recognize the special achievements of adults who accomplish academic excellence while facing competing interests of home and work.

Alumni News

Chriss Mountain (2005) is currently working as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She had been working through a temp agency since mid-February. She expects to work at a camp with mentally and physically challenged children and adults this summer.

Nikki Strayer (2004) is teaching history at Omaha North High School. She did her student teaching at North before being hired to teach there full-time.

Jessica (Nutz) Annis (2004) has finished her tour with the regular Army and is serving her Reserve time with a unit out of Grand Island. Her regular Army unit's anticipated year-long deployment in September 2006 played a factor in her decision to go into the Reserves.

She and her husband, Franklin, expect their second child at the end of July. They have moved back to the Omaha area.

Share your milestones

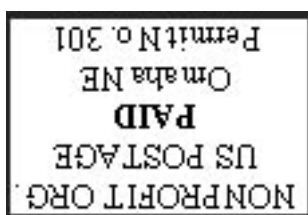
Please send news about your milestones (new positions, promotions, marriages, births, future education, etc.) by sending it to Religious Studies

Program, UNO, ASH 205, 6001 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68182-0265 or to Kathy Schwartz at kschwartz@mail.unomaha.edu.

Scholarship donations welcome

Donations are welcome for any of the religious studies scholarships. To donate to either the Ron Burke Scholarship Fund or the Dale Stover Scholarship Fund make your check out to the University of Nebraska Foundation and write the

scholarship fund name on the memo line. Send your checks to the University of Nebraska Foundation, 8712 West Dodge Road, Suite 101, Omaha, NE 68114.



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