

Faculty Research Awards Spring 2017

SMALL GRANT AWARDS

Small grants are for \$6,000 or less.

Professor Catherine Ciepiela

Department of Russian

Title: *Russian Writers in Riga*

Latvia ambivalently hosts the largest Russophone population of all the former Soviet republics. Some ethnic Russians, in turn, resent Latvia's new independence. In the capital city, Riga, however, there has emerged a community of Russian poets and scholars (some Russophone, some recently emigrated from Russia) who embrace a cosmopolitan, culturally-hybrid orientation against forms of post-Soviet nationalism. Professor Ciepiela will be interviewing cultural leaders of this community about their distinctive situation at this moment of tension between Putin's Russia and Europe.

Professor Christopher Dole

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

Title: *Living On: Essays on Care and Endurance in Post-Disaster Turkey*

Professor Dole will conduct an eight-week period of fieldwork in Turkey to complete the research for his book project "Living On: Essays on Care and Endurance in Post-Disaster Turkey." Based on ethnographic research with the survivors of a massive earthquake that struck western Turkey in 1999 and a group of Turkish mental health professionals who provided humanitarian psychiatric care in the wake of the earthquake, "Living On" examines the relationship between transnational forms of psychiatric expertise and long-term experiences of loss and suffering in a context marked by catastrophic destruction. As such, "Living On" engages a set of forces and processes that have emerged as a defining feature of our so-called "Age of Catastrophe"—namely the vital convergence of large-scale disaster, scientific expertise, and human suffering. The additional period of research will be used to conduct thirty to forty follow-up interviews with previous project participants, as well as to acquire documents related to the earthquake that are not available outside of Turkey.

Professor Deborah Gewertz

Department of Anthropology

Title: *The Worth of an Endangered Species*

Over the past several years, Professor Gewertz was concerned with what "nature" was worth, to whom (in the past, present, and future), and why. She focused on aspects of nature for which there has been a strong constituency in the agricultural Midwest. In particular, she concentrated on the hunters who press for the conservation of waterfowl and pheasant habitat. Last summer's research, however, considered what nature is worth when it has negative "use value"—when its conservation entails substantial human inconvenience, if not economic loss. Professor Gewertz investigated the controversies, including those within science, surrounding the federally mandated protection of an endangered species, the pallid sturgeon: a species that, because its conservation/protection directly affects human control of water resources along the heavily damned Missouri River, has proven particularly contentious and, hence, interesting. Next summer she will continue this work, examining two salient social contexts. These are the meetings of the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee and the research programs of pallid-centered fish biologists.

Associate Professor Tariq Jaffer

Department of Religion

Title: *Acts of Wonder*

Professor Jaffer's research examines the ways that acts of wonder were defined, defended, classified, contested, and interpreted in medieval Islamic societies—societies in which such acts were woven into the social fabric of everyday experience. The questions motivating this project center on the nature, significance, and implications of extraordinary acts: What qualifies an extraordinary act—such as the transformation of a staff into a serpent (Moses)

or the splitting of the moon (Muhammad), as miraculous? Do acts of wonder, for example the power to heal the sick (Jesus), or the thousands of others that are catalogued in the hagiographical literature which expounds on the lives of the saints, qualify as divinely administered miracles? How did theologians distinguish a miracle from magic, which Islamic society had set off against each other as rivals, acknowledging both as real and effective arts? The challenge to resolve these difficulties had far-reaching implications within the history of Islam, and this study is essentially an investigation into the ways that Muslim theologians, mystics, and philosophers (Aristotelian-Neoplatonic) resolved these difficulties.

Professor Klara Moricz

Department of Music

Title: *Russian Music at the Crossroads: Émigré Composers in Interwar Paris*

Professor Moricz will conduct research for her book project, “Russian Music at the Crossroads: Émigré Composers in Interwar Paris.” The book will highlight cultural transformations that occurred as pre-revolutionary Russian culture migrated West, interacting with French culture and, gradually, with the newly-minted Soviet culture that was aggressively pushed into Paris through Soviet propaganda and was welcomed by the French intellectual elite despite desperate protestation of Russian émigrés. Professor Moricz argues against presenting post-revolutionary Russian culture as existing in two unrelated versions: a distorted form in Soviet Russia and a hermetically preserved old form in the cultural space of exile. She shows that the cultural border between the Soviet Union and interwar Paris was porous and allowed productive, although sometimes bizarre interactions.

Professor Monica Ringer

Department of History and Asian Languages and Civilizations

Title: *God's Intent: The Historical Turn in Islamic Modernist Thought*

Scholars have noted the centrality of the embrace of Historicism as an intellectual watershed that not only characterized the nineteenth century, but in many ways defined modernity. This is no less true for the Middle East. Professor Ringer's current book project is conceived as a study of ways in which ideas of Historicism, Rationalism and their intellectual companions—universalism, progress, humanism, etc.—posed particular challenges to the Islamic religious tradition. Her book attempts to resuscitate the contribution of Islamic Modernism into the story of modernity in the Middle East. Celal Nuri's *The Seal of the Prophets* (1921) was one of the only new 'life of the prophet' books, and was directly inspired by Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863). It is a central text for exploring ways in which Islamic modernists digested historicism and altered ways in which methods such as 'tradition as precedent' gave way to historical context as a means to identifying Divine 'intent' in ways not completely dissimilar to the methods deployed in the varied practices of Biblical Criticism.

LARGE GRANT AWARDS

Large grants are for more than \$6,000 and up to \$30,000.

Professor Elizabeth Aries

Department of Psychology

Title: *Class of 2009 Study: Eight-year follow up*

Professor Aries conducted a longitudinal study examining the challenges students faced on campus because of their race and social class and the extent to which students learned from the diversity in the student body. The study involved fifty-eight students from the class of 2009 from four groups: (1) white students with high financial need/limited family education (N= 16), (2) black students with high financial need/limited family education (N = 14), (3) affluent white students with no need for financial assistance (N = 14), and (4) affluent black students with no need for financial assistance (N =14). These students were interviewed and filled out online surveys at the beginning and end of their freshman year, and again in the spring, 2009, when most were graduating seniors. Professor Aries's proposed study entails a fourth wave of data collection on these four groups of students as they approach age thirty. Students will complete two-hour interviews and fill out online questionnaires in the spring, 2017. Professor Aries hopes to gain a better understanding of race and class differences in the following areas: the paths students traveled since graduation in terms of jobs held and higher degrees obtained; experiences on the job

and in graduate school; current occupational aspirations; the possession of “grit”, i.e., passion and perseverance, and its ability to predict outcomes; the extent to which participants feel they are bridging two different worlds –the world of home communities and the current world they inhabit; closeness with family and friends from childhood, with friends from Amherst and with friends made since Amherst; thoughts on parenthood; the nature of the communities participants live in currently and how they were chosen; and the nature and extent of their civic engagement. She is also interested in examining the role race and class have played in participants’ reflections on their experiences with diversity and inclusion while at Amherst, on the learning that took place at Amherst through being part of a diverse community and its influence on their ability to work effectively with people of different races/cultures, and on their views about the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in colleges and universities.

Professor Kerry Ratigan

Department of Political Science

Title: *Local Welfare Regimes and Perceptions of the State: A Survey of Popular Attitudes towards Social Policy in Urban China*

Professor Ratigan’s proposed project will develop the concept of subnational welfare regimes and explain variation in support for social policy in China. The project is collaboration between Professors Kerry Ratigan (Amherst College), Alex Jingwei He (Education University of Hong Kong), and Jiwei Qian (National University of Singapore). Through a large-scale survey, the study will discover the factors that are associated with public support for social policy reform. The resulting dataset will be used to evaluate hypotheses related to three broad categories of explanations for support for social policy expansion: interests, ideology, and institutions. First, the investigators hypothesize that vulnerable individuals will be more likely to support welfare expansion. Second, they propose that tolerance for inequality and related values will be associated with support for social policy. Third, they hypothesize that institutional configurations and performance will affect support for social policy. This project advances their knowledge and understanding of social policy and state– society relations in China and will provide recommendations for future policy reform.

Professor Krupa Shandilya

Department of Sexuality, Women’s and Gender Studies

Title: *The Poetics of Revolution: Gendered Nationalisms in Contemporary South Asian Cinema*

Professor Shandilya’s proposed book argues that the poetry and fiction of the Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA) (1935–1947), a literary-political association committed to a Marxist theory of revolution, is “re-mediated” into song in recent Bollywood cinema from India and mainstream cinema from Pakistan. She suggests this cinema contests the regressive gendered nationalisms of India and Pakistan through its use of Progressive literature and in doing so adapts and forwards the politics of the PWA. Specifically, the Indian films *Haider* (2014), *Dedh Ishqiya* (2014), and *Pink* (2016) as well as the Pakistani film *Manto* (2015) and the diasporic film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) use the work of progressive writers Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto to contest religious and sexual inequalities perpetuated by state nationalisms. At the time of their original publication, these Progressive texts defied the regressive nationalisms which led to the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947. These films deal with the Partition and also contemporary political issues that are in many ways a legacy of the Partition—the Kashmir conflict, Pakistan’s enmeshment in the war on terror, and the rise of the Hindu right in India and its reinstatement of reactionary laws curtailing the rights of minority subjects.

Professor Robert Sweeney

Department of Art and the History of Art

Title: *Painterly Abstraction: Animation within the Tuscan Landscape*

Professor Sweeney’s research grant will support the development of a new series of large paintings that will focus on pursuing the abstract relationships initially established in his on-site paint sketches from landscapes and interiors. They will also incorporate memory and intuitive re-configuration of the composition in response to the developing painting, and an increasingly more active use of the language of the paint as a central element in these new works. In this latest series of paintings, he will attempt to strip further layers off of the surface and have his paintings reveal what his imagination has been drawn to in his “close reading” of the natural world. His goal is to create an evocative series of paintings of nature not directly observed, but implied and remembered. In order to advance his goals, Professor Sweeney will travel to Tuscany in mid-September for an intensive five week painting campaign.

This will be his sixth trip to this region. Tuscany has served as his muse for most of his life as a painter. He plans to return with the goal of continuing to be inspired by this place in his quest to uncover the metaphorical seam that exists between the literal aspects of the landscape and the perceived animated qualities of light, color, pattern, form and space and engage them in the language of paint. Upon his return and over the next year, he will develop a series of large paintings that will attempt to distill from the oil paint, pastel studies and memory, the painterly discoveries of his Tuscan experience. This body of work will ultimately be exhibited in the Rolly-Michaux Gallery in Boston and the William Baczek Gallery in Northampton in 2019.