

# currents Spring 2017

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union

## New Horizons at the GTU

*Page 4*

### IN THIS ISSUE:

**Alum Uriah Kim Returns  
as GTU Dean**

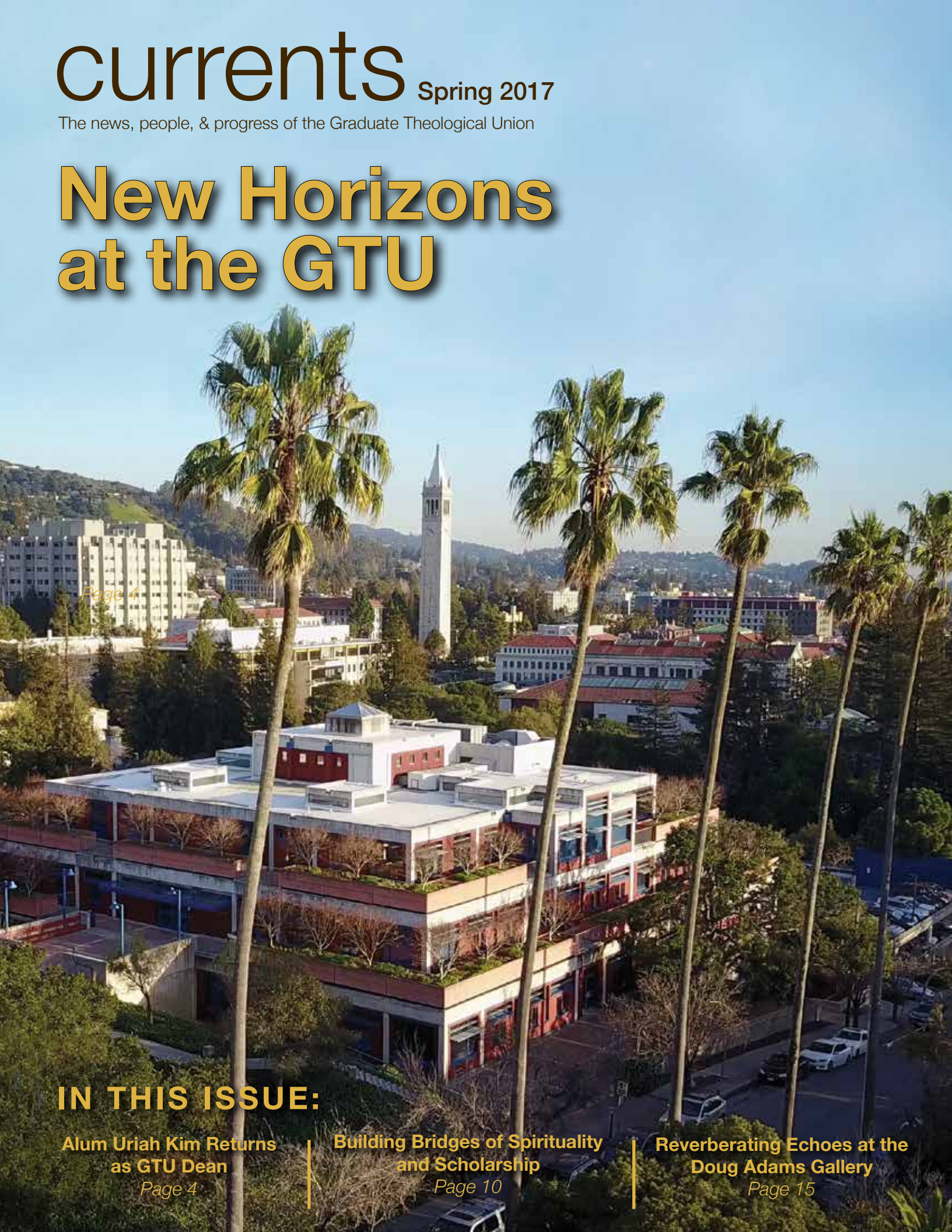
*Page 4*

**Building Bridges of Spirituality  
and Scholarship**

*Page 10*

**Reverberating Echoes at the  
Doug Adams Gallery**

*Page 15*



# currents

Spring 2017

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union

## FEATURES

- 3** *From the President*
- 4** *The View from the Dean's Office*  
by Uriah Y. Kim
- 8** *Making Memories, Taking Responsibility*  
by Carrie Sealine
- 10** *Scholarship and Spirituality as Bridges*  
by Jeffrey L. Richey
- 12** *Celebrating the Francisco J. Ayala Center  
for Theology and the Natural Sciences*
- 13** *GTU Opens New Collaborative  
Learning Space*
- 14** *Rees Named Director of Mormon Studies*
- 14** *Join Us for "Sustainable Societies"*
- 15** *"Reverberating Echoes" Continues*  
by Elizabeth Peña

## Back Cover *Upcoming Events*

### On the cover:

- Aerial view of the GTU's Flora Lamson Hewlett Library. Photo by Larry Pickard, San Francisco Theological Seminary.

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Please send comments, suggestions, alum updates, or address changes to [currents@gtu.edu](mailto:currents@gtu.edu).

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**T**HROUGH THE LEADERSHIP OF OUR Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies (CDS), the GTU has established an ongoing relationship with Radhanath Swami, one of the key spiritual leaders of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). This winter, CDS Director Dr. Rita Sherma and I flew to India to visit Govardhan, one of ISKCON's Ecovillages. We were there not only to discover more about their work but also to build toward a time when GTU students interested in Sustainability Studies can visit and learn firsthand.

The Govardhan Ecovillage is completely sustainable and recycles everything. The remarkable buildings there are made from compressed soil bricks and natural materials. Residents grow all their own food, and capture all the fresh water they need for the year during the Monsoon season. This innovative project is guided by spiritual principles derived from the Vedic texts held sacred by this Hindu group.

During our travels, we also visited the Bhaktivedanta Medical Center in Mumbai, which serves a population of 100,000, many of whom are unable to afford payment for medical treatment. Holistic care and spiritual well-being are woven into every aspect of the hospital's regimen, from doctors' interactions to the way food is prepared and presented.

Dr. Sherma and I were also given the opportunity to address the 450 attendees at a Nexus Conference on Water, held at the Bombay Stock Exchange. This conference was another example of the intentional weaving of spiritual discernment and education, giving attention to the search for creative and practical solutions to real-world problems.

Another visit was to a brand new high-rise

building in Mumbai where an entire floor is devoted to providing online education and video conferencing for academic, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. The GTU has committed to preparing and delivering five online courses on Hinduism and other religions for students in India over the next 18 months. Our leadership of these online courses will be facilitated by the new Collaborative Learning Space that's been created on the main floor of the GTU Library. (See page 13).

**We're building toward a time when GTU students interested in Sustainability Studies can visit this innovative project and learn firsthand.**

The connections established and deepened on this trip to India are part of the GTU's effort to create dynamic engagement with groups in other countries that are also working to fuse spiritual values, educational programming, and attention to persistent, perplexing problems. Such work fits well with the GTU's new campaign to develop interreligious student cohorts that will be examining a variety of challenging problems that demand sustainable solutions to enhance human flourishing while caring for the planet and all its life forms.

If you'd like to join in these conversations, the GTU and its Center for Dharma Studies are hosting a major conference on April 28-29 entitled "Sustainable Societies: Interreligious, Interdisciplinary Responses." This conference will feature lectures and panel discussions from more than 40 scholars representing the GTU, its member schools and centers, and more than a dozen other colleges and universities. Find out more on page 14, or register to attend at <https://gtu-sustainable-societies.eventbrite.com>.



*Riess Potterveld and ISKCON monk Nimai Prabhu at the Govardhan Ecovillage.*

*Riess Potterveld*

# The View from the Dean's Office

*By Uriah Y. Kim*

*Our new Dean reflects on the exceptional students, innovative scholarship, and bright future of the GTU.*

**O**n my first day of work at the GTU in January, I lifted all the window shades in the Dean's office to let the light in and saw the panoramic view of Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay unfold before my eyes. I couldn't believe anyone would lower the shades, ever, when there was such gorgeous scenery to enjoy.

About an hour later I realized why previous GTU Deans had to lower at least some of the shades. The sunlight in the office is blinding, and the corner where my desk is located got very warm very quickly. I guess it is possible to have too much of a good thing!

In my first semester as Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs, I have realized I have much to learn about the ins and outs of this office—the metaphorical one as well as the physical one. I would describe my first few weeks on the job as a bit like drinking water from a fire hose: a flood of new information to process, many people to meet and know, a myriad of tasks and meetings to oversee, and the complexity of the GTU to understand. Even for an alum like myself who is quite familiar with the GTU, the GTU can be a bit overwhelming. But when I spoke with my wife on the phone during those first few weeks, she observed, “Your voice sounds so vibrant and happy.”

She's right. I am extremely happy and excited to be the Dean of the GTU. It's always been my dream job to have an office on top of the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library—and this is, indeed, a perk I'll fully enjoy and utilize. But even more, I am excited because of the opportunities and bright future I see for the GTU's next 50 years.

If we were to define the central characteristics of the GTU over its first 50 years (GTU 1.0, if you will), we might say the GTU's first five decades have been marked by its ecumenical spirit and its interdisciplinary approach to studying religion and theology. These characteristics are absolutely essential to the GTU,

part of our collective DNA, and they will certainly continue to shape our educational endeavors. But I believe that during its second 50 years (GTU 2.0), the GTU will be known for its entrepreneurial spirit and interreligious engagement. These qualities are already present now, but will continue to expand in the years and decades to come. I'm tremendously excited to be part of a talented and dedicated group of faculty, students, staff, trustees, and alumni that will shape and steer the GTU through the next chapter of its history.

The GTU is a remarkable and unique institution, what business expert and author Seth Godin would call a “purple cow,” standing out among the monochrome schools in the theological landscape of North America. The GTU is different, and we like it that way. But is it just our impression that the GTU is special? Exactly how is the GTU unique?

For evidence that the GTU is remarkable, just look to our students. GTU students are “blue-collar scholars” who are not afraid of getting their hands and feet dirty. Unlike Rapunzel from the old fairy tale, GTU students refuse to stay isolated in the (ivory) tower, expecting others to climb up. Instead, our students go to the village where the people are. Students who choose the GTU value passionate doing as much as rigorous thinking. GTU programs emphasize the interaction between theory and praxis, and studying amid the diversity of Holy Hill helps students deepen their compassion and care for the world and all of its people. To borrow an image from the Mount of Transfiguration episode in Matthew 17:1-9, GTU students don't



detach from the “real world” and isolate themselves within a community of scholars. Our students don’t have the luxury of leaving behind what goes on in the village when they walk through Berkeley; they see what ails the vast majority of people every day. They know that the knowledge and wisdom they acquire through their study and work are urgently needed. Ironically, in my opinion, it is not just the vast opportunities that the GTU offers but also the challenges students experience during their time here that help them become remarkable scholars, teachers, leaders, and activists.

As I have continued to consider what makes the GTU exceptional, I have been struck by something so obvious that perhaps those closest to the GTU take it for granted. The GTU is an indisputable leader in producing women scholars. This distinction needs to be understood in the current state of theological education to be fully appreciated. According to Daniel Aleshire, the Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools, “The gender distribution of faculty [at ATS member schools] has been overwhelm-

ingly stable. In 1994, women comprised just over 20 percent of the total of all faculty, and two decades later, they still comprise just over 20 percent” (ATS State of the Industry Webinar, September 18, 2015). While those faculty percentages are discouraging, statistics regarding the percentage of women in doctoral programs in religion are even more noteworthy. Among the GTU’s fourteen peer schools that have a PhD program, the percentage of women students ranged between 6.9% and 8.3% from 2010 to 2015. Since these peer schools are major suppliers of faculty to the ATS schools, it’s not surprising that the percentage of women serving on the faculty of ATS schools has remained unchanged for more than 20 years.

In comparison, during those same years, between 29.0% and 38.7% percent of the GTU’s doctoral students have been women. The GTU has had four times more women than its peer schools as measured by percentage of women in its doctoral student body. And the percentage is increasing. At the start of the Spring 2017 semester, 41.3% of GTU doctoral students were

## **“Students who choose the GTU value *passionate doing as much as rigorous thinking.*”**

women. If we include MA students, the percentage goes up to 43.4%. Furthermore, women make up 44% percent of the students enrolled in all degree programs across the GTU consortium.

Why does the GTU attract more women than its peer schools? One main reason, I believe, is the composition of the GTU faculty. Based on my count, out of 107 full-time consortial faculty, 42 are women. That's 40% of the GTU consortial faculty. Out of 56 core doctoral faculty members, 23 are women. That's 41%. The GTU has reached the critical mass of women faculty to attract women students—and that's great. But in order to continue to be the definitive leader and role model in recruiting, nurturing, and developing women scholars over the next 50 years, we need to

do more. If setting a target is helpful, then let's set a realistic target: 50% by 2030!

I believe the GTU is building a critical mass of interreligious thinkers with entrepreneurial spirit who will take the wisdom, principles, and insights from various religious traditions and engage the critical issues of the twenty-first century. We painfully learned in 2016 that people from all walks of life lack the basic ability to communicate and understand across differences and divisions; some have exploited this situation in order to advance their agendas. The GTU is about building bridges, enabling the exchange of ideas, and building connections between people, rather than raising walls that will isolate ideas and peoples. Our newly designed doctoral and master's pro-

grams will take advantage of GTU's resources and commitments to engage in interreligious theological education that will provide effective strategy, knowledge, and skills for dialoguing across differences and divisions.

I also believe the GTU is uniquely equipped to offer religious responses to the challenges of sustainability. This could be the GTU's signature theme for its interreligious approach to studying religion and theology: to address environmental, economic, and social sustainability that affect the Earth and the human world in the twenty-first century. This quest for sustainability is something we all can participate in and support even if our primary research interests or teaching expertise might not fit under this theme. But for the GTU to

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become recognized as a leader in theological research and education in sustainability, we will need a critical mass of interreligious thinkers (say about 25% of GTU faculty and students) whose primary academic interest is in engaging and responding to the challenges of sustainability.

It is not an overstatement to say that I am truly honored and humbled to be serving as Dean of the GTU, especially when I consider the intellectual giants who occupied this position before me. Sherman Johnson, John Dillenberger, and Claude Welch were before my time, but I know their work established the foundation upon which we still build today. Margaret Miles was Dean during my years as a student here on Holy Hill, but I didn't get to know her well. I regret that very much. But I have gotten to know former Deans Judith Berling and Arthur Holder over the last few months. Before my arrival here, we were in constant contact, and they graciously and wisely prepared me for the job that awaited me. I must say, I was completely caught off guard by Judith's effervescent personality. Based on her academic gravitas, I thought she'd be serious at all times. But her hearty laughter is contagious, and her sense of humor puts everyone at ease. *A delightful person, she is*, as Yoda would say. And Arthur exudes goodness and warmth like homemade bread. Next to him, I feel like Darth Vader. And I always thought I was a nice guy!

The scholarly achievements and reputations of past GTU Deans are extraordinary. I think it would be unfair to hold me—or anyone else for that matter—to the standards of scholarship and productivity previous Deans have set. However, it is fair to hold me to the highest standards of spiritual, intellectual, and moral integrity. That's what should be expected of leaders in theological education, unlike some other



*Uriah Kim speaks with doctoral students at a forum in February.*

professions where character and humanity are deemed unimportant as long as they “win” (whatever that means). I promise that I'll perform my duties and responsibilities with utmost attention and care, always striving for excellence, and will encourage and enable individuals around me to do the same. I'll do my very best to uphold and strengthen GTU's commitment to academic freedom and its pledge to create an institution that embraces inclusivity and diversity and fights for justice. We are living in a time when these values and principles need to be defended and promoted more than ever before. Institutions don't protect themselves. Everyone needs to do their part, and I promise I will do my very best to do mine.

To the students of the GTU: I look forward to supporting, encouraging, and empowering you to develop your own theological voices and to acquire and hone the knowledge, skills, and wisdom to make positive impact on your communities, the academy, and the larger world. Please stop by my office to say hello. I'll lift the window shades for you.

To the esteemed GTU faculty: It is truly an honor to be part of a group of scholars, teachers, and leaders who are united by a pas-

sion for knowledge and truth, a concern for the Earth and all its creatures, a love for God, and a commitment to teach, train, and mentor our students. I look forward to working with you all.

To all the friends and supporters of the GTU: We value your contributions to the well-being of the GTU and your involvement in the life of this community. With your support and friendship, the GTU will continue to be a leader in equipping religious scholars who engage the critical issues of our world.

To our GTU alumni: Please know that I am united with the rest of the GTU's faculty, staff, and trustees as we root for you, cheering you on to success and satisfaction in your career and work, and wishing you fulfillment and happiness in your life and community. Because, to borrow a line from fashion icon Vidal Sassoon, “If you don't look good, we don't look good.” When you do good, be good, and enable good, then the GTU looks great. Together, we can make GTU 2.0 even better and stronger, more compassionate and creative, and more inclusive and diverse than ever before!

*Uriah Y. Kim (PhD, 2004) is the GTU's Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs.*

# Making Memories, Taking Responsibility

*By Carrie Sealine*



*Through her work at the GTU's Center for Jewish Studies—  
and a surprising friendship—Lea Heitfeld is keeping cultural memory alive  
and helping shape a more hopeful future.*

**L**ea Heitfeld has been in the news a lot recently. The granddaughter of Nazis, the 31-year-old MA student at the GTU's Center for Jewish Studies is the unlikely housemate of Ben Stern, a 95-year-old Holocaust survivor. Their unusual friendship has led to interviews with national and international media including the *Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, CBS Evening News, and Public Radio International. While the story of her living with Stern is indeed compelling, Heitfeld's decision to pursue a degree in Jewish studies, her work at the GTU, and her plans for life after she graduates in May provide a context for understanding how this extraordinary partnership came to be an ordinary part of her life.

Heitfeld grew up in a Germany that had no Jewish life or culture. "I lived there for 26 years and maybe I knew one person with a Jewish background," she said. "Jewish life and culture were completely foreign to me." She says her father's parents participated actively in the Nazi regime. Yet her own parents broke with that past, seeking to raise awareness of the Holocaust and asking what we can learn from that history.

Younger Germans like Heitfeld, now three and four generations removed from the Holocaust, live

in a different relationship to this history. She says most do not have a personal connection to the events anymore. While some feel a desire to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive, many are less interested in engaging the past.

Heitfeld's work at the Center for Jewish Studies has sought to find ways to encourage constructive engagement with Holocaust history. Her thesis focuses on the construction and dynamics of "cultural memory" in the context of the Holocaust. Drawing on the field of memory studies, Heitfeld analyzes how the Holocaust has been taught in German history textbooks since the 1950s, identifying how this educational material reflects both changing cultural attitudes and different stages of memory. She contends that Holocaust education should provide not only an opportunity for meaningful historical-political engagement but also an opportunity to understand how each new generation plays its own influential role in bearing and transmitting cultural memory. She proposes that by incorporating memory theory into Holocaust education, schools can encourage students to engage history more deeply and to monitor, secure, and shape the ways the Holocaust is commemorated in Germany today.





Heitfeld's journey to pursue a degree in Jewish studies at the GTU began with volunteering in a Jewish retirement home. After moving to the Bay Area from Germany in 2014 with a background in education and social work, Heitfeld sought to supplement her day job as an *au pair* with some volunteer work. Entering the doors of the Reutlinger Community would profoundly change her life. "When I realized it was a Jewish community, I began reflecting on my own responsibility in the chain of cultural transmission of the Holocaust and how to keep the memory alive among youth who have less connection to the past," she said.

Although she knew little about Jewish culture when she started volunteering, she began learning and soon was studying with a rabbi. "I just loved it," she recalls. One of her new friends was the mother of GTU/CJS student Renée Powell, and asked Heitfeld when she was going to get her own degree. It was an overwhelming and intimidating thought for Heitfeld, who wasn't certain she had sufficient background to be successful in such a program. Nevertheless, she entered the MA program at the Center for Jewish Studies in spring 2015, an act she describes as "closing the circle" of her reflection

and engagement with the Holocaust.

Lea is deeply appreciative of the level of community she has experienced among faculty and students at the Center for Jewish Studies. "The level of personal care from professors Naomi Seidman and Deena Aranoff has made the GTU so special for me," she said. "I have always felt well supported and welcomed." She says her time at the GTU has been very different from her university experience in Germany: "For the first time I felt my professors were not working against me. The personal warmth at the CJS has made it the most wonderful learning experience. In Germany, they don't rank the universities like they do here. But I rank the GTU as the best academic experience I've had."

CJS Professor Naomi Seidman was also responsible for connecting Lea Heitfeld with her housemate, Ben Stern. After Stern's wife moved into an assisted living facility, his family was seeking a live-in companion for him. Seidman, who knows the Sterns through her synagogue, immediately thought of Lea. "Naomi wrote to me, saying Ben is 'the coolest, funniest, most handsome old dude I know.'" Lea recalls with a smile. She describes her friendship with Ben as "the rarest of gifts."

Heitfeld plans to use her work on memory theory to develop new curricula for Holocaust centers, museums, and education centers in Holocaust memorials or former concentration camps. She wants to engage people through the power they have to remember. She is sensitive to the fragility of memory and respects the power that people hold to be "alert to monitor cultural memory." Emotional responses of distancing, dissociation, and defense have their roots in the events of the past. Once people are "made aware of the processes of memory," she says, "carriers of cultural memory have the opportunity to act."

*Carrie Sealine completed her MA at the Center for Jewish Studies last fall, and is now a PhD student in the Department of Historical and Cultural Studies of Religion. She is the communications assistant in the GTU's Office of Advancement.*

***Visit [www.gtu.edu/cjs/friendship](http://www.gtu.edu/cjs/friendship) for links to recent stories about Lea Heitfeld and Ben Stern.***

# Scholarship and Spirituality as Bridges

*Dr. Jeffrey L. Richey (PhD, 2000) is the GTU's 2016 Alumnus of the Year. Dr. Richey is Professor of Religion and Asian Studies at Berea College in Kentucky, where he holds the Francis Alexander McGaw Chair in Religion. A highly respected scholar of Chinese and Japanese religions, Richey has published and edited numerous books on both historical and contemporary Confucianism and Daoism, and is currently at work on a book tentatively entitled Interfaith Spirituality in Post-Religious America's Asian Century.*

*We are pleased to share this article, adapted from Dr. Richey's speech at the GTU Alumni Reception during the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in San Antonio last November. Congratulations to Dr. Jeffrey L. Richey, the GTU's Alumnus of the Year!*

When I think about the GTU, I often visualize the iconic view of the Golden Gate Bridge as seen from the PSR campus. I use the word iconic—in the sense of imaging the sacred—deliberately. For me, this truly is a sacred image, insofar as it has the power to evoke the deepest capacity of the human imagination, the power to conjure another world—or rather a conjunction of worlds—that ordinarily might not seem possible. As the ancient Chinese master Yáng Zhū 楊朱 says: “The sage preserves the sacred and accomplishes the great pacification of the world...by building bridges between Heaven and humanity, making them one without any separation.”

I am reminded of how bridges have performed important roles in expressing the human dream of connection. My teacher and advisor at the GTU, Dr. Judith Berling, once delivered an address as president of the American Academy of Religion in which she described the vocation of the religious studies scholar-teacher as that of a bridge—between cultures, traditions, values, and worldviews, not to mention people.



Another of my teachers, Fukushima-roshi, long-time abbot of Tofuku-ji, a Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto, Japan, was fond of bridges as sacred metaphors. Tofuku-ji itself is famous for its bridges, which connect various parts of the temple compound to one another, crossing leafy gorges that blaze brilliantly with color during the autumn months. These bridges conduct the novice, the pilgrim, and the tourist from the ordinary world into an extraordinary realm of deep insight into the impermanence, interdependence, and imperfection that link us all together in one ever-present moment. Like Professor Berling, Fukushima-roshi understood himself as a bridge—between Buddhism and other spiritualities, between Japan and the West, and between tradition and modernity.

The bridging power of spirituality and scholarship—which, I have come to believe, amount to one and the same thing—is what drew me to the GTU in the first place, what drove my interests as a young scholar and teacher, and what compelled me to seek a place in the academic institution where I have spent the last 15 years of my career.

I teach in the Asian Studies and Religion programs at Berea College, a small and historic liberal arts college located in the Appalachian foothills of



*“While some are busy erecting new barriers across human differences, the GTU maintains the difficult work and witness of engaging differences in ways that enrich all of us.”*

eastern Kentucky. We are an unusual school, in that we admit only students who demonstrate both great academic aptitude and profound economic need. We charge no tuition; we apply a sliding scale to assess other fees (many of our students pay nothing at all); we require all students to work on campus as part of their educational experience; and we privilege the southern Appalachian region as well as ethnic minorities in our admissions policies.

I believe that my preparation at the GTU has enabled and empowered me for such work, this work of helping build bridges—cultural, intellectual, political, spiritual—between some of America’s and the world’s most neglected and disadvantaged people and the rest of the world. It is work that is as rewarding as it is demanding, and I am grateful to be a part of it.

We are living in an era when bridges seem to be in short supply. Here in the United States and around the world, nationalists, religious exclusivists, xenophobes, and other reactionaries seek to burn bridges, not build or strengthen them, and some even propose that we construct walls to insulate ourselves from others. To speak frankly, the present does not appear to be a moment for bridges.

Yet we need bridges now more than ever. While some are busy erecting new barriers across human

differences, others—such as the GTU—maintain the difficult work and witness of engaging differences in ways that enrich all of us, not only by helping us understand others, but also by helping us understand ourselves better in that process. I see a radical shift underway in our cultural-historical moment that no elected official can undo.

Even as fewer Americans identify with a particular religious tradition, more and more of us—especially among our youngest—find value in multiple religious traditions. The meaning of the word *interfaith* is changing from a theological position, denoting a commitment to dialogue between traditions, to a mode of spirituality in and of itself, which bridges traditions to create a new thing in this country. In this sense, U.S. religious culture may be catching up with other religious cultures, such as those of East Asia, where multiple religious participation has facilitated a spirituality that is strong, unifying, and—above all—bridging, even as it has tended to keep exclusive religious identities weak.

I am proud to be part of an intellectual and institutional lineage that bravely bridges our all-too-divided world and seeks to learn from it, and I am humbled to accept this honor as an alumnus of the GTU.

## Celebrating the Francisco J. Ayala Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences



Francisco Ayala, Hana Ayala, Charlotte Russell, and Bob Russell.  
Photo by Dana Davis

The GTU and its newest addition, the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS), hosted a reception in February to celebrate a \$2 million pledge from renowned scientist Dr. Francisco J. Ayala. This generous gift will double the endowment of CTNS, bringing it to over \$4 million. In gratitude CTNS has been renamed the Francisco J. Ayala Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences.

Dr. Ayala's donation will complete the endowment of CTNS's Ian G. Barbour Chair in Theology and Science at the GTU, the Russell and Townes Fellowships, and the position of managing editor for the CTNS quarterly *Theology and Science*. It will support CTNS staff and programming, and will help ensure that CTNS continues to build on its 35-year history as a distinguished leader in the international field of science and religion. The addition of Dr. Ayala's name will provide CTNS with added credibility among the scientific community, which is often resistant to genuine dialogue between religion and science.

One of the pioneers in the fields of population genetics and evolutionary theory, Dr. Ayala holds three faculty positions at the University of California, Irvine. The author of 50 books and more than 1,000 articles, he was awarded the National Medal of Science in 2002, and was recipient of the Templeton Prize in 2010. Dr. Ayala joined the CTNS board of directors in 1997, has often served as a keynote lecturer in CTNS's international and interreligious programs, and was a CTNS Russell Fellow in 2008.

CTNS Director Robert Russell reflected, "Francisco Ayala's concern for constructive dialogue and mutual respect between science and religion led to our beginning a long professional partnership and a lasting friendship some two decades ago. His gift will continue CTNS's track record of outstanding interdisciplinary research and of academic excellence in seminary and doctoral education at the GTU, and will support CTNS's role in the future of the ecumenical and the interfaith dialogue and mutual interaction between the scientific and religious communities that is so deeply needed by our global world today."



# GTU Opens New Collaborative Learning Space



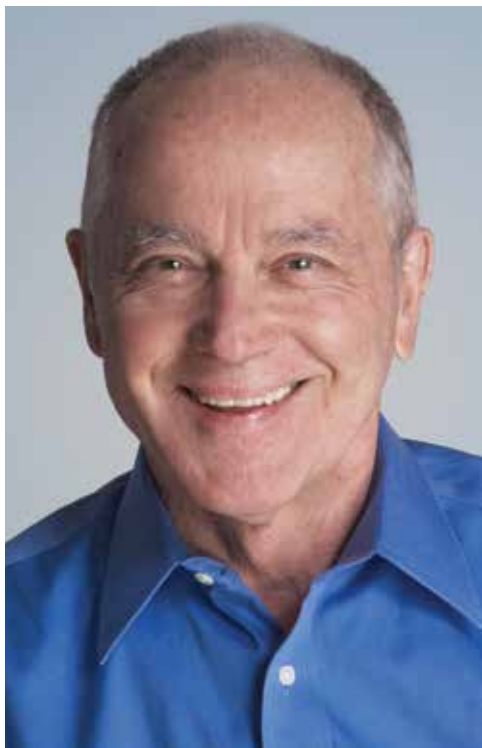
The Graduate Theological Union was pleased to unveil its new Collaborative Learning Space on the first floor of the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library this spring. Thanks to a generous grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the room that has served as the GTU computer lab since 2001 has been remodeled as a flexible smart classroom and learning space, highlighted by an 84-inch touchscreen LCD panel. The screen features a built-in computer and allows multiple computers to connect to it wirelessly for collaboration. Users can “draw” on the screen, or they can use the wireless keyboard and mouse. Whatever is placed on the screen can be saved and distributed to the class.

The new learning space is outfitted with chairs and tables that can easily be rearranged to meet the requirements for different class sizes and learning situations. In its first month of use this semester, the room has been set up in 10 different configurations. Such flexibility is a concrete representation of the GTU’s revised doctoral program, which encourages both academic innovation and interreligious and cross-disciplinary collaboration. This spring, required seminars for two of the four doctoral departments are being taught in the room; next semester all required doctoral seminars will meet there. Holding doctoral seminars in such a room increases possibilities for creative interaction, and situates the students in the library with full access to the reference librarians and other library resources during and after class.

The library staff has been making use of the newly designed space to offer in-person and online workshops both inside and outside of class time. In addition, the expanded technological capabilities of the new learning space will enhance opportunities for online course offerings, video conferencing, and other distance learning.

*Photos by Larry Pickard*

# Rees Named Director of Mormon Studies



**R**obert A. Rees has been appointed director of Mormon studies at the GTU. Dr. Rees has taught at UCLA, UC Santa Cruz, and UC Berkeley, and was a Fulbright Professor of American Studies at Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania. Rees has taught classes in Mormon studies at the GTU since 2010, and has published widely on Mormon and religious studies, as well as on issues of politics, culture, literary studies, and gender and sexuality studies.

Dr. Rees served as director of continuing education in the arts and humanities at UCLA, where he was also assistant dean of fine arts and director of the UCLA-Cambridge Program and the UCLA Royal College of Art and Royal

College of Music programs in London. Long active in interfaith work, Rees served as president of the University Religious Conference at UC Santa Cruz and, more recently, on the board of the Marin Interfaith Council. He is the cofounder and vice president of the Liahona Children's Foundation, a humanitarian organization that addresses malnutrition in the developing world.

Bob is a key member of the Bay Area Mormon Studies Council, which is working with the GTU and the wider Mormon community to establish an academic chair in Mormon studies at the GTU. We are pleased to welcome Robert A. Rees into this new role as the GTU's director of Mormon studies.

## Sustainable Societies: Interreligious, Interdisciplinary Responses

Sponsored by

**The Graduate Theological Union & the Mira & Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies**

**April 28th & 29th**

**The Flora Lamson Hewlett Library • 2400 Ridge Road • Berkeley CA**

In the face of unprecedented national and international challenges, when the linked injustices of economic, social, and environmental inequity are on the rise, what answers can our religious traditions provide? We'll explore these questions at **"Sustainable Societies: Interreligious, Interdisciplinary Responses,"** a two-day GTU conference with over 40 scholars presenting on major topics in Religion and Sustainability.

Cosponsored by the GTU and its Center for Dharma Studies, this event will feature panel conversations and presentations from dozens of renowned educators, including more than 20 scholars from the GTU and its member schools and centers. Featured plenary speakers include internationally known scholar of ecology and religion Prof. Mary-Evelyn Tucker of Yale University, and the renowned pioneer of major global initiatives on interreligious collaboration, Prof. Anantantand Rambachan of St. Olaf College & the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Join us for this exceptional event on April 28-29 at the GTU's Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, 2400 Ridge Rd., Berkeley. Visit [gtu.edu/events/sustainable-societies](https://gtu.edu/events/sustainable-societies) for more details, including the event schedule with all presenters. Registration is free, but space is limited—so register now at <https://gtu-sustainable-societies.eventbrite.com/>



# Reverberating Echoes Continues

by Elizabeth Peña

The Center for the Arts & Religion presents *Reverberating Echoes: Contemporary Art Inspired by Traditional Islamic Art*  
Doug Adams Gallery

*Reverberating Echoes: Contemporary Art Inspired by Traditional Islamic Art*, curated by Carol Bier (Visiting Scholar, Center for Islamic Studies), presents work by seven artists of diverse backgrounds, who share a common source of inspiration in Islamic visual culture. Chris Palmer folds single sheets of silk into intricate patterned displays, drawing from both Islamic geometric motifs and Japanese paper-folding tradition; Nazanin Hedayat Munroe reflects on her Persian heritage with an installation about poetry and destiny; and Manzar Rassouli's featured works demonstrate her shift from highlighting beauty to breaking with tradition. Some visitors are fascinated by Phil Webster's 3-D printed lamp, while others are moved by the Arabic text in Mamoun Sakkal's commercial prints. Guests are drawn to Nathan Voirol's stunning textiles and drawings, and to Hooman Koliji's light-filled architectural drawings.

Despite the artists' different backgrounds, subjects, and working methods and materials, their artworks seem to call across the gallery space, often in unexpected ways. Visitors give life to the show by making connections and contributing their own perspectives. We are constantly reminded that the arts can connect and sustain us across traditions, cultures, and faiths, a lesson that bears repeating in these troubled times.

Reverberating Echoes has welcomed more than 275 visitors, hosted six classes from the GTU and UC Berkeley, and presented five public programs—all in the exhibition's first six weeks! Upcoming programs include:

- April 4, 5-7pm, "Aesthetics & the Divine: Jewish and Islamic Perspectives," featuring Dr. Francesco Spagnolo (Magnes Collection, UC Berkeley) and Carol Bier. Co-sponsored by CJS and CIS
- April 9, 2-4pm, Gallery Dialogue: Carol Bier in conversation with Dr. Rossitza Schroeder (Art History, PSR and CARE)
- May 21, 2-4pm, Gallery Dialogue: Carol Bier in conversation with Dr. Bob Russell (CTNS)

An exhibition catalog, with essays by Carol Bier, biographies of the artists, and photographs of the artworks, is available for purchase through the Zaytuna College bookstore.

Photos by Peg Skorpinski



Doug Adams Gallery  
2465 Ridge Rd., Berkeley  
Open through May 26  
Tuesdays, Thursdays,  
Fridays 10am-3pm





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—Dr. Jeffrey L. Richey (PhD, 2000)

Professor of Religion and Asian Studies, Berea College  
2016 GTU Alumnus of the Year

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## Upcoming Events

### Islamophobia and the End of Liberalism

The 8th Annual Islamophobia conference, cosponsored by the Center for Islamic Studies

**April 21-23**

Booth Auditorium, Boalt School of Law, UC Berkeley

### Empathy and the Evolution of Compassion

A CTNS public forum with Dr. Celia Deane-Drummond

**April 26, 7:00 pm**

Dinner Board Room, GTU, 2400 Ridge Rd, Berkeley

### Sustainable Societies: Interreligious, Interdisciplinary Responses

A two-day GTU conference on sustainability

**April 28-29**

Dinner Board Room, 2400 Ridge Rd, Berkeley

### “What If Joseph Hates Us?”

A CJS event with Avivah Zornberg

**May 5, 9:30 am**

Dinner Board Room, 2400 Ridge Rd, Berkeley

### GTU Commencement

**May 11, 4:00 pm**

PLTS Chapel of the Cross, 2770 Marin Ave, Berkeley

All events are open to the public, unless noted.  
Visit [www.gtu.edu/events](http://www.gtu.edu/events) for more information.