

Seth Ligo

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EDUCATION

- Ph.D.** Duke University (Durham, NC): Religious Studies, Asian Religions, Hinduism, 2020.
Dissertation: “Fear and Fruition: Bhairava in Text, Art, and Practice.”
- M.A.** Duke University (Durham, NC): Religious Studies, Asian Religions, 2016.
- M.Div.** Harvard University (Cambridge, MA): Hinduism and Christianity, 2012.
Thesis: “Reconsidering the Kāpālika: Multiple Interpretations and Diversity in Hinduism Made Accessible through the Intriguingly Grisly.”
- A.B.** Princeton University (Princeton, NJ): Religion, 2008.
Certificate (Minor): South Asian Studies
Honors Thesis: “Music and Spiritual Seeking in a North Indian Sacred City”
University of Wisconsin, Madison and Banāras Hindu University, 2006-2007.
Cultural Year in India Program
Thesis: “Classical Concert ya Qawwali: The Creation and Intersection of Hindu and Muslim Sacred and Musical Spaces,” under Prof. Ritwik Sanyal, BHU.

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

- 2024–present The Pennsylvania State University
Department of Asian Studies
Assistant Teaching Professor of South Asian Religions
- 2024–2026 Yangra, LLC - Providing accessible, app-based education about Hinduism
Senior Academic Advisor, Specialist in Śaiva and Tantric Traditions, Lived Hinduism
- 2023–2024 Duke University
Department of Religious Studies
Visiting Instructor of Asian Religions
- 2020–2023 The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Department of Religious Studies & Global Humanities Program
Adjunct Assistant Professor (taught 4 classes/year)
Co-convenor for the development of a Global Studies Center (2021–2023)
Manager of the McClinton Endowment & Scholars Program (2021–2023)

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles

- Forthcoming “Trimūrti, Trinity, and Hindu Deities: A Curious, Often Counterproductive Introduction to Hinduism.” *Education About Asia*.
- 2022 “Kāśī Kṣetra Kāśī Maṇḍala: Mapping Evolving Interpretations of an Idealized Sacred City.” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 26. [DOI link](#).

2019 “Invisible Neighbors: Metaphysical Members of Society in Vārāṇasī, India.” *Science, Religion and Culture* 6, no. 1: 50-58. [DOI link](#).

Book Chapters

- Forthcoming “Troubling ‘Tantra:’ Local Warp, Bhairava, and the Interweaving of Trans-Regional Traditions” in Anya Golovkova and Hugh Urban (eds.) *The Tantric World*. Routledge Worlds Series.
- 2025 “Your Friendly Neighborhood Bhairava: the Tantric and Transgressive Ties of a Temple Dedicated to Baṭuk (Little-Boy) Bhairava” in Amy Allocco and Xenia Zeiler (eds.) *Sweetening and Intensification in Hindu Traditions*. New York: SUNY Press.
- 2023 “Bhairava, Hanumān, and the Deified Dead: A Material Study of Vernacular, Official, and Folk Hinduism” in Sravana Borkataky-Varma and Aaron Ullrey (eds.) *Living Folk Religions*. Routledge.

Book Reviews

- 2023 Review of *Guest is God* by Drew Thomases. [Reading Religion link](#).
- 2021 Review of *Demons Are Forever* by David Gordon White. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 89, Issue 4: 1485–1487. [DOI link](#).

Other Publications

- Forthcoming “Hinduism.” Course text and asynchronous teaching module for *Introduction to World Religions*, The Pennsylvania State University World Campus.
- Forthcoming “Emplacement, Embodiment, and Indigenous Studies: Insights from the Comparative Study of American Indian and Hindu Indigeneity.” Harvard’s Center for the Study of World Religions Bulletin, Summer 2026.
- Forthcoming “Vārāṇasī.” Annotated bibliography for Oxford University Press. Submitted and accepted.
- 2020 “Deities of Encounter and Theory of Experience: an Analysis of *The Great Darkness Text*” in Edward Simon (ed.) *The Anthology of Babel*. (Earth: punctum books), 49-72. [academic fiction]

AWARDS & HONORS

- 2022-2023 Nominated twice for UNC-Asheville Teaching Award.
- 2019 Bass Teaching Fellow: Original Course in Asian Religions.
- 2019-2020 John Hope Franklin Institute Digital Humanities Returning Fellow.
- 2018-2019 John Hope Franklin Institute Digital Humanities Fellow.
- 2017-2018 International Dissertation Research Travel Award (Duke).
- 2016-2017 Fulbright-Nehru Research Fellow.
- 2013-2019 Kiran Bedi Fellow: Minority Studies in South Asia.
- 2015-2017 Kenan Institute for Ethics Collaborative Scholarly Projects in Ethics Grant.
- 2010-2012 Lane Family Fund Fellow (Harvard).
- 2010 Stendahl Symposium Prize (Harvard).

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Panels Organized

- 2020 “The Implications of Being Earnest: Sincerity in South Asian Contexts,” Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religions, online due to COVID.
- 2018 “A Convergence of Opposites: The Importance of Insight into Theoretical Misfits,” The Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison.

Papers Presented

- 2022 “Your Friendly, Neighborhood Bhairava: How Beneficence Enhances the Efficacy of a Supremely Transgressive Deity.” Lesser-Known Deities Panel, The Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison.
- 2019 “Mapping Maṇḍalas: Tantric Constructs in a Purāṇic City,” Digital Tantra Panel, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religions, San Diego.
- 2019 “Cries of Terror, Shrieks of Laughter: Marginal Yogīs and the Complementary Modalities of Humor and Fear,” Religion and Humor Panel, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religions, San Diego..
- 2018 “Vārāṇasī, Bhairava, and Purity Amidst Pollution in the Age of Decay,” Flourish and Decay Graduate Conference, Syracuse University.
- 2017 “Acts that Liberate and Acting Liberated: Asceticism, Devotion, and the Worship of Bhairava,” at The Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- 2016 “Monster in the Middle: Terrific Deities in Orthoprax Hinduism,” at Magic, Miracles and the Paranormal in Religious Imaginaries conference, The University of Texas at Austin.
- 2015 “A Story, A Dream, A Stage: Sacred Space and Drama in the case of Hariścandra,” American Academy of Religion National Conference.
- 2014 “Reconsidering the Kāpālīka,” at Beasts, Monsters and the Fantastic Graduate Conference, Brown University.

Discussant

- 2023 Panelist/discussant for “Beyond Insider/Outsider: Theorizing Practitioners, Scholars, and Critical Methodologies.” Roundtable discussion of scholar-practitioners at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religions, San Antonio.

INVITED LECTURES

- 2026 “Śaivism, Tantra, and Vārāṇasī
Dr. Kerry San Chirico’s *Modern Hinduism*, Villanova University.
- 2025 “Veṭāla, Piśāca, Bhairava - Power, Protection, Purity and Hindu Ideas of Liminality.”
Dr. Sophia Nasti’s *South Asian Literature*, Smith College.
- 2021 “Material Culture and Ethnography in the study of Bhairava.”
Dr. Aaron Ullrey’s *Hindu Traditions*, Youngstown State University.

- 2017 “Identity, Otherness, and Representation: Ethics and Objectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork,” University of Madison India Program, Vārāṇasī.
- 2016 “History of Ethnography and Contemporary Ethnographic Practice,” University of Madison India Program, Vārāṇasī.
- 2016 “Qualitative Research and Writing,” University of Madison India Program, Vārāṇasī.

TALKS

- 2025 “The Time Warp: Textiles, Terror, and Inter-Religious Analyses of Pan-Asian Tantra.” Penn State Society for the Study of Religion Lecture Series.
- 2024 “Hindu Perspectives on How to be Happy,” on the occasion of the joint Hindu-Buddhist celebration of Nirvāṇa Day, Duke University.
- 2023 “Hindutva and Scholarship in light of the Rām Janmabhūmi Mandir.” Hosted by the Alexander Hamilton Society of Duke University.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The Pennsylvania State University

- Introduction to Hinduism (Fall 2025)
 Introduction to Buddhism (Fall 2024, Spring & Fall 2025)
 Introduction to Asian Religions (Fall 2024 & 2025)
 First-year seminar: “Asian Religions in Cinema” (Fall 2024, Spring 2026)
 The Silk Road (Spring 2025 & 2026)
 Zen Buddhism Capstone Seminar (Spring 2025 & Fall 2026)

Duke University

- Graduate Seminar on Yoga and Tantra (Spring 2024)
 Indian Cinema and Social Change (Spring 2024)
 Magic, Monsters, and Marginal Practices: Minority and Mainstream Asian Religions (Fall 2019, Spring 2024)
 Buddhism (Fall 2023)
 Hindu Worlds of Art and Culture (Spring 2019, Fall 2023)

The College of Charleston

- A Survey of Hinduism (Summer 2023)
 Gilgamesh to the Gospels: Early Premodern Religion (Fall 2023)

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

- Introduction to the Study of Religion (Fall 2020)
 Asian Religious Traditions (Fall 2020)
 Global Humanities: The Ancient World (Spring & Fall 2021-2023)
 Introduction to Buddhism (Spring 2022)

Western Carolina University

Religions of the East (Fall 2021)
Hindu Tradition (Fall 2021)

Elon University

Religion in a Global Context (Spring 2018, Spring & Fall 2019, Spring 2020)
Monsters and Wizards in Asian Traditions (Winter term 2019)

SERVICE TO PROFESSION

Jurist for the American Academy of Religion - Religion and Arts Award, 2026-2030
Reviewer for *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief*, 2024-2025.
Reviewer for *ENQ (Enquiry): The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research*, 2025.
Reviewer for *UNC Asheville Humanities Reader - Ancient World Cultures*, 2022.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Hindi Language Program Faculty Reviewer. Penn State, 2025-2026.

South Asian Studies Speaker Series, Coordinator and Convener. Penn State, 2025-2026.

South Asian Studies Minor Development Team member. Penn State, 2024-2026.

Primary Advisor for Ruthie Kesri's undergraduate honors thesis, "Harmony Through Dharma: Hindu Resources for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding." Duke University, 2023-2024.

Master's Committee Member and Paper Advisor for Shuvan Shreshta, "Mahākāla, Bhakti, and Tantra." Duke University, 2024.

Native American Studies Initiative at Duke University, designed faculty orientation program, 2024.

Coordinator of the Community Outreach and Sustainability Taskforce, UNC Asheville, 2023.

Co-convener for the development of a Global Studies Center, UNC-Asheville, 2021-2023.

Primary representative for UNC-Asheville to the Academic Council on Education's Internationalization Lab, 2022-2023.

Designer and Manager of the McClinton Scholars Program, operationalizing a million-dollar endowment for the promotion of study abroad and supervising a peer mentorship for study abroad planning and preparation, 2022-2023.

TA for Cherokee Language classes at UNCA, 2021-2023.

Founder and instructor of UNC-Asheville's Hindi Language Group, 2021-2023.

Founder and instructor of UNC-Asheville's Sanskrit Language Group, 2022-2023.

LANGUAGES

English	Native
Sanskrit	Advanced
Hindi	Fluent
French	Fluent
Spanish	Fluent (Secondary household language)
Cherokee	Intermediate
Catalan	Intermediate (Fluent comprehension, beginner composition)
Chinese	Beginner

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Academy of Religion, 2015-2026.