

Sara A. Swenson

Contact Information:

Email: sara.a.swenson@dartmouth.edu

Phone: (1) 218-330-7375

Website: saswenson.com

Curriculum Vitae

Academic Appointments

Dartmouth College; Hanover, NH

2021–Present Assistant Professor, Religion

Faculty Affiliate: Asian Societies, Cultures, and Languages Program

Visiting Appointments

Cornell University; Ithaca, NY

2023–2024 Visiting Fellow: Einaudi Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program

Education

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

2021 Ph.D. in Religion

Dissertation: “Sharing Hearts: Buddhist Charities and Urbanization in Vietnam”

2016 M. Phil. in Religion

2016 Future Professoriate Program Certificate in University Teaching

2015 Certificate in Women’s and Gender Studies

Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO

2012 M.A. in Comparative Religion (Graduated with Distinction)

Thesis: “Ascetic Salvation Narratives in the Food Practices of Modern U.S. Women”

University of Minnesota-Duluth, Duluth, MN

2009 Bachelor of Arts (Graduated “Summa Cum Laude” with Distinction and Honors)

Senior Honors Paper: “Love, Sex, and Commodification in *The Age of Innocence*”

Publications

Books

In Preparation, *Near Light We Shine: Buddhist Charity in Urban Vietnam*.

Journal Articles (Anonymously Peer-Reviewed)

- In Press (Forthcoming: December 2023), "An Uncouth Monk: The Moral Aesthetics of Buddhist Para-Charisma." *Journal of Religious Ethics*. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12456>
- In Press (Forthcoming: TBA), "The Merit of Meat: Karma as Social Fact among Buddhist Food Charities in Vietnam." *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.
- 2022 "Three Trees Make a Mountain': Women and Contramodern Buddhist Volunteerism in Vietnam." *Asian Ethnology* 81 (1–2): 3–22. Web: <https://asianethnology.org/articles/2377>
- 2020 "The Affective Politics of Karma among Buddhist Cancer Charities in Vietnam." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 15 (4): 33–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2020.15.4.33>
- 2020 "Following Feeling: Karma and the Senses in Buddhist Nuns' Ordination Narratives." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 21: 71–86. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/4030985>
- 2020 "Compassion without pity: Buddhist *dana* as charity, humanitarianism, and altruism." *Religion Compass* 14 (9): 1–10. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12371>

Journal Articles (Reviewed by the Editor)

- In Press (Forthcoming: February 2024), "The Life and Legacies of Thích Nhất Hạnh," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.
- 2021 "The Political Spirituality of Buddhist Volunteerism in Contemporary Vietnam." *Political Theology* 22 (1): 68–74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2020.1866815>
- 2018 "Mixed-Reality: Social Media as Ethnographic Method." *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology* 42 (1): 1–15.
- 2017 "Religious Wonderlands: Eros, Madness, and Ethics in Religious Studies through the work of Lynne Huffer." *Journal of Theology & Sexuality* 22 (3): 133–142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2017.1329885>

Co-Authored Journal Articles (Anonymously Peer-Reviewed)

- In Press (Forthcoming: TBA), "Religion, Food Charity, and Care in Vietnam." Co-authored with Le Hoang Anh Thu (Associate Professor, Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University). Introduction to a Special Issue of *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. Contributors: Le Hoang Anh Thu, Le Hoang Ngoc Yen, Sara A. Swenson.

Co-Authored Journal Articles (Reviewed by the Editor)

- In Press (Forthcoming: December 2023), "Buddhist Moral Emotions." Co-authored with Jessica Starling (Associate Professor, Religious Studies, Lewis & Clark College). Introduction to a Special Issue of *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Contributors: Yasmin Cho, C. Julia Huang, Julia Cassaniti, Maria Heim, Jessica Starling, Sara A. Swenson. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12454>

Book Chapters (Anonymously Peer-Reviewed)

In Preparation, “Engaged Buddhism as Diplomacy in the Life and Teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh,” solicited for *Figures of Buddhist Diplomacy*, edited by Chia Meng Tat Jack.

Book Reviews

In Press (Forthcoming: Date TBA), “Alexander Soucy – Zen Conquests: Buddhist Transformations in Contemporary Vietnam.” *Journal of Asian Studies*.

2022 “Allison J. Truitt – Pure Land in the Making: Vietnamese Buddhism in the US Gulf South.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 17 (2–3): 176–179. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2022.17.2-3.176>

Awards

Grants and Fellowships

- 2023 American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship: \$60,000
- 2023 Luce Foundation Responsive Grant: “Learning with and Resourcing Asian-American Religious Coalitions” (Led by Jonathan Tran, Melissa Borja, and David Chao); Research Fellow: \$10,000
- 2022 Dartmouth College Leslie Humanities Center Project Grant: \$15,000
- 2022 American Academy of Religion Collaborative Research Grant: \$4,300
- 2020 Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Writing Fellowship: \$27,500
- 2020 Pre-dissertation Fellowship, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany (*Declined for Newcombe*): \$28,000
- 2020 Syracuse University Dissertation Fellowship (*Declined for Newcombe*): \$22,000
- 2018 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Grant: \$49,205
- 2017 Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in Buddhist Studies: \$30,000
- 2017 Boren National Security Education Program Fellowship (*Declined for Ho Fellowship*): \$28,000
- 2016 SEASSI Tuition Scholarship and Stipend to attend SEASSI (Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute) in Madison, WI: \$2,000
- 2015 Syracuse University Moynihan Institute East Asia Summer Research Grant for field research in East or Southeast Asia (Vietnam): \$2,000
- 2015 Syracuse University Religion Department Grant for Fieldwork in Vietnam: \$2,000
- 2015 FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) Fellowship to attend SEASSI (Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute) in Madison, WI: \$5,100
- 2014 FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) Fellowship to attend SEASSI (Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute) in Madison, WI: \$5,100
- 2011 Beatitudes Society Summer Fellow, Internship in San Francisco, CA: \$2,100

Prizes and Nominations

- 2023 Nominated for the ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award (the only dissertation selected to represent Arts & Humanities from Syracuse University). Under Review.
- 2022 All-University Doctoral Prize for Superior Achievement in Completed Dissertations, Syracuse University
- 2021 Marleigh Grayer Ryan Graduate Writing Prize (New York Conference on Asian Studies)
- 2020 Graduate Dean's Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Work at Syracuse University
- 2020 Vietnam Studies Group Graduate Paper Prize (Association for Asian Studies)
- 2017 Albert Clark Award for the Best Graduate Paper from the Theta Alpha Kappa National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology
- 2015 Nominated Usha Mahajani Memorial Prize for outstanding graduate student in Southeast Asian Language study (for Vietnamese)
- 2015 Mary Hatch Marshall Award for the Best Essay Written by a Graduate Student in the Humanities at Syracuse University
- 2014 Nominated Usha Mahajani Memorial Prize for outstanding graduate student in Southeast Asian Language study (for Vietnamese)
- 2012 M.A. Outstanding Achievement Award, Iliff School of Theology
- 2012 Student of the Year, Iliff School of Theology (Denver, CO, USA)
- 2009 Mike Lenz Creative Writing Award, University of Minnesota Duluth (Duluth, MN, USA)

Language Training

- Vietnamese: Advanced – three years of intensive coursework in reading, writing, and speaking, plus eight years of experience in field research and conversational use.
- French: Certified academic reading proficiency.
- Spanish: Certified academic reading proficiency.

Teaching

Assistant Professor: Dartmouth College

- 2022–2023: “Compassion: Religion, Giving, and Care”
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom
- 2021–2023: “Buddhism, Gender, Sexuality in Southeast Asia”
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom
- 2021–2023: “Religions of Southeast Asia”
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom/Online hybrid
- 2021–2023: “Sisters, Sages, Seekers: Women and Religion”
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom/Online hybrid

Instructor: Syracuse University

- 2020 (Spring) "Religions of the World"
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom/Online hybrid
- 2019 (Fall) "Introduction to Buddhism"
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2017 (Spring) "Sisters, Sages, Seekers: Women and Religion"
Level: Advanced; Mode: Classroom

Teaching Assistantships: Syracuse University

- 2020 (Spring) "Jesus in the Bible, Theology, and Art," (Dr. Virginia Burrus)
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom/Online hybrid
- 2019 (Fall) "Atheism and Agnosticism" (Dr. Gareth Fisher)
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom
- 2017 (Spring) "Religion, Spirituality, and Nature" (Dr. M. Gail Hamner)
Level: Advanced; Mode: Classroom
- 2016 (Fall) "Religion, Meaning, and Knowledge" (Dr. Marcia Robinson)
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2016 (Spring) "Introduction to the Study of Religion" (Dr. William Robert)
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2015 (Fall) "Community and Morality" (Dr. Gareth Fisher)
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom
- 2015 (Spring) "Religion, Meaning, and Knowledge" (Dr. Marcia Robinson)
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2014 (Fall) "Religions of the World" (Dr. Joanne Waghorne)
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2014 (Spring) "Introduction to Buddhism" (Dr. Gareth Fisher)
Level: Introductory; Mode: Classroom
- 2013 (Fall) "Community and Morality" (Dr. Gareth Fisher)
Level: Intermediate; Mode: Classroom

Presentations

Invited Lectures and Symposiums

- 2024 "An Uncouth Monk: The Moral Aesthetics of Buddhist Para-Charisma." Public Lecture. Department of Religious Studies, University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA, USA).
- 2024 "The Merit of Meat: Politics of Vegetarianism among Buddhist Charities in Vietnam." Public Lecture. Religion Department. Saint Mary's University (Halifax, Nova Scotia, CA).

Invited Lectures and Symposiums, Continued

- 2022 "Murmurs and Yelps: Buddhist Ethical Soundscapes in Vietnam." Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies Brown Bag Seminar (Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA).
- 2022 "Common Karma and Collective Action." Paper. Lived Karma Symposium (Hanover, NH, USA).
- 2022 "Near Light We Shine: Buddhist Charity and Urbanization in Vietnam." Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, Manuscript Development Workshop (Princeton, NJ, USA).
- 2021 "'I am only alive thanks to supernatural energy': Women's Devotion in Buddhist Contramodernism." Gatty Lecture (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA).
- 2019 "Prisms of Practice: Researching across Tensions between Lay and Monastic Buddhists in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam." Symposium fellow. Robert HN Ho Family Foundation Symposium for Buddhist Studies Dissertation Fellows (Albuquerque, NM, USA).
- 2019 "*Triết lý về Cảm xúc* [Philosophies of Emotion]." Speaker. University of Culture Affiliate Scholars Lecture (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam).
- 2019 "*Xuất bản trên Tạp chí Quốc tế* [Publishing in International Journals]." Speaker. University of Culture Affiliate Scholars Lecture (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam).
- 2015 "The Medicine Buddha: Social Services, Religion and Privatization in Vietnam." Lecture. Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs East Asia Speaker Series (Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA).

Peer-Reviewed Conference Papers and Panels

- 2024 "Haunted Relics, Apocalyptic Flowers, and Fermented Kin: Making More-Than-Human Relations in the Anthropocene across Asia." Roundtable organizer and presenter. Association for Asian Studies (Seattle, WA, USA).
- 2024 "The One about Southeast Asia: Complications of 'Friendship'." Panelist. Association for Asian Studies (Seattle, WA, USA).
- 2023 "Curing through Karma: Buddhist Approaches to Cancer and Covid in Vietnam." Paper. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (San Antonio, TX, USA).
- 2023 "Affective Ethnographies of Buddhism, Sickness, Loss, and Grief." Panel organizer and presider. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (San Antonio, TX, USA).
- 2023 "Dharma in Motion: Preserving/Propagating Buddhism in Asia." Panelist. Association for Asia Studies (AAS), AAS-in-Asia Annual Meeting (Daegu, Korea).
- 2023 "Ayurvedic Mindfulness: Buddhist Health and Healing in Vietnam." Paper. Negotiating Boundaries in Buddhism and Buddhist Studies Conference, sponsored by the UK Association for Buddhist Studies (St. Andrews University, St. Andrews, Scotland, UK).
- 2022 "Collective Karma in Buddhist Philosophy and Lived Religion." Panelist. American Academy of Religion (Denver, CO, USA).
- 2022 "Sonic Dharma: Chanting and Reciting in the Global Buddhist Landscape." Panelist. American Academy of Religion (Denver, CO, USA).

Peer-Reviewed Conference Papers and Panels, Continued

- 2022 “Engaging Society and Nature through Science, Religious Practice, and Performance.” Panelist. Association for Asian Studies (Honolulu, HI, USA).
- 2022 “Religious food charity, care, and social agency in Vietnam and Myanmar.” Panelist. Association for Asian Studies (Honolulu, HI, USA).
- 2021 “Class Dynamics of Buddhist Charity in Contemporary Vietnam.” Paper. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (San Antonio, TX, USA).
- 2021 “Female Perspectives in Arts & Literature.” Panelist. NY Conference on Asian Studies (Online).
- 2021 “Legacy of Colonialism in Southeast Asian Buddhism.” Presenter and panel co-organizer. European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (Olomouc, Czechia).
- 2020 “New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Buddhism: From Extinguishing Suffering to Collective Transformation.” Panelist. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (Online).
- 2020 “Buddhist Circulations.” Panel respondent. Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Graduate Conference (Ithaca, NY, USA).
- 2019 “Micro-Charity and the Ethics of Cancer in Ho Chi Minh City.” Presenter and panel organizer. European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (Berlin, Germany).
- 2019 “Grassroots and International Charity Collaborations in Vietnam.” Presenter and panel organizer. European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (Berlin, Germany).
- 2019 “Better Futures for the Dead: Upgrading Ghosts with Infrastructure in Southern Vietnam.” Paper. Society for the Anthropology of Religion (Toronto, Canada).
- 2017 “*Thế hệ trẻ và Tổ chức Từ thiện Phật giáo ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh* [The Younger Generation and Buddhist Charity in Ho Chi Minh City].” Paper. *Hội Thảo Quốc Tế Phật Giáo Nhập Thế Và Các Vấn Đề Xã Hội Đương Đại* [Humanistic Buddhism Conference], (Ninh Binh, Vietnam).
- 2017 “Asian Transformations: Theories, Challenges, Opportunities.” Panelist. Globalization at the Crossroads: EADI NORDIC Conference (Bergen, Norway).
- 2017 “From Heaven to the Ends of the Earth: Vietnamese Buddhism, Modernity and Globalization.” Panelist. European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (Oxford, UK).
- 2016 “Friending Buddhists in the Field: Using Social Media as an Ethnographic Method.” Presenter. Buddhism, Humanities and Ethnographic Methods Conference (Burlington, VT, USA).
- 2016 “‘The Happiest People’: Buddhist Volunteering and Urbanization in Vietnam.” Paper. SEASSI Southeast Asian Studies Student Conference (Madison, WI, USA).
- 2016 “‘Sharing’ the Buddha: Social Media and Ethnographic Collaboration.” Paper. Society for Cultural Anthropology Meeting (Ithaca, NY, USA).
- 2016 “Affecting the Marginal: Buddhist Volunteer Work and Social Services in Vietnam.” Paper. Syracuse University Religion Graduate Conference (Syracuse, NY, USA).

Peer-Reviewed Conference Papers and Panels, Continued

- 2015 “Feminist Knowledge Production and Asian Inquires: Encountering Precarity in the Ethnographic Field.” Panelist. National Women’s Studies Association Meeting (Milwaukee, WI, USA).
- 2015 “Thich Nhat Hanh, Transnational Buddhism, and the Question of Authenticity.” Paper. American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting (Denver, CO, USA).
- 2015 “Sex, Ascesis, and Historiography.” Panel chair. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (Atlanta, GA, USA).
- 2015 “Zen in Vietnam: Legitimacy, Authority, and Possibility Past and Present.” Paper. SEASSI Southeast Asian Studies Student Conference (Madison, WI, USA).
- 2015 “Gendered Asceticism and Foucault’s Political Spirituality.” Paper. Syracuse University Religion Graduate Conference (Syracuse, NY, USA).
- 2014 “Cities: Sacred, Secular, Cyber.” Presenter and panel organizer. Syracuse University History Graduate Conference (Syracuse, NY, USA).
- 2014 “Gender in 19th Century New York Religions.” Paper. Eastern-International Region American Academy of Religion Meeting (Syracuse, NY, USA).
- 2014 “Revolutionizing Feminist Ontology? A Critical Engagement with Mary D. Pellauer.” Paper. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (San Diego, CA, USA).
- 2014 “No Superior, No Inferior, No Equal: Gendering Ritual Spaces in American-Buddhism.” Paper. Rocky Mountain Regional AAR Conference (Denver, CO, USA).
- 2013 “Is Ecumenical Dialogue through Monastic Communities Effective?” Paper. Rocky Mountain Regional AAR Conference (Denver, CO, USA).
- 2012 “Ascetic Salvation Narratives in Feminist and Womanist Veganism.” Paper. American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (Chicago, IL, USA).

Service

Professional Organizations

- Member, American Academy of Religion (AAR), 2010–Present
- AAR Steering Committee, Religion in Southeast Asia Unit, 2022–Present
- AAR Steering Committee, 5-Year Seminar on Collective Karma, 2022–Present
- AAR Mentoring Program for Junior Scholars, Faculty Volunteer, 2022–Present
- Member, Vietnam Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), 2015–Present
- Member, Association for Asian Studies (AAS), 2017–Present
- Member, European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (EuroSEAS), 2017–2023
- Member, American Anthropological Association (AAA), 2015–2016
- Member, National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA), 2015
- Graduate Student Representative, Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (AAR), 2014–2015

University Activities and Volunteer Leadership

Dartmouth College (Faculty)

Dartmouth Center for Social Impact: Olga Gruss Lewin Fellowship Selection Committee, 2023
Dartmouth Undergraduate Pre-Major Advisor, 2022–Present
Religion Department Faculty Committee, 2021–Present
Faculty Advisor, “House of Lewan” Student Drag Performance Club, 2021–Present
Faculty Guest Lecturer, The Spare Rib: Dartmouth Feminist Magazine, Spring 2022
Faculty Guest Lecturer, Alpha Theta Gender-Inclusive Greek House at Dartmouth , Spring 2022
Faculty Trainee, Campus Suicide Prevention Program, 2021

Syracuse University (PhD)

Religion Graduate Organization, President 2015–2016
Religion Graduate Organization, Member at Large 2013–2021
Syracuse Graduate Student Organization, Member at Large 2013–2015

Iliff School of Theology (MA)

Student Senate Secretary, 2011–2012
First-Year Student Senate Representative, 2010–2011
Founder and President of the “Iliff Ecologists” Student Environmental Organization, 2010–2012
Student Ambassador for Prospective Students, 2011–2012
Flame LGBTQ Students Association Member, 2010–2012

Event Organizing: Academic Conferences and Workshops

- 2024 “What Not to Do: Anti-Lessons for Ethnographic Fieldwork”
Workshop Leader; Department of Religious Studies (University of Pennsylvania)
- 2024 “Navigating the Academic Job Market in Religious Studies”
Workshop Leader; Future Professoriate Program (Syracuse University)
- 2022 Lived Karma Symposium
Planning Committee Chair; On-Site Coordinator (Dartmouth College)
- 2021 “Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy Workshop”
Religion Faculty Colloquium, Co-Facilitator (Dartmouth College)
- 2021 “Navigating the Humanities Job Market”
Workshop Leader; Future Professoriate Program (Syracuse University)
- 2019 “Lessons from Ethnographic Fieldwork”
Workshop Leader; Future Professoriate Program (Syracuse University)

Event Organizing: Academic Conferences and Workshops, Continued

- 2019 “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Action”
Workshop Leader; Future Professoriate Program (Syracuse University)
- 2017 “Writing a Successful Grant Proposal”
Workshop Leader; Future Professoriate Program (Syracuse University)
- 2016 Faculty Speaker Series
Planning Committee Co-Chair, Religion Graduate Organization (Syracuse University)
- 2016 Religion Graduate Conference
Planning Committee Member (Syracuse University)
- 2015 Religion Graduate Conference
Planning Committee Chair (Syracuse University)
- 2014 Undergraduate Conference
Planning Committee Member (Syracuse University)

Public Scholarship

News Interviews, Podcasts, Creative Writing, and Magazine Contributions

- 2022 “Thich Nhat Hanh’s Censored Legacy.” Interview. *BBC World Service – Heart and Soul* (December): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dqz093>
- 2021 “Episode 57: Sara Ann Swenson, Dartmouth College.” Interview. *Gatty Lecture Rewind*. Podcast: <https://gattyrewind.libsyn.com/episode-57-sara-ann-swenson-assistant-professor-department-of-religion-dartmouth-college>
- 2021 “Big Moves with Ragamala Dance Company.” Interview. *Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth*. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpvHgclqxm8>
- 2020 “Teaching and learning guide for: ‘Compassion without pity: Buddhist Dāna as charity, humanitarianism, and altruism’” *Religion Compass* 14 (9): 1–4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12374>
- 2017 “‘No Mud, No Lotus’: Experiencing Great Pines Monastery through Edward Soja’s Thirdspace.” Article. *Material Religions Blog*. 25 January 2017. Web.
- 2012 “Advent: Waiting on Bamboo.” Article. *Reconciling Ministries Network* (Winter). Web.
- 2011 “Purls of Wisdom: Needlework Ministry.” Article. *Her Voice Magazine* (Winter). Print.
- 2011 “Spring Paradox.” Poem. *Lake Country Journal Magazine* (March/April). Print.
- 2010 “The Nomad.” Short Story. *Fire and Dust Bemidji State Literary Journal* (Spring). Print.
- 2009 “Future Vend.” Short Story. *The Roaring Muse UMD Student Art Journal* (Fall). Print.