Veetraag Vigyaan Endowed Professorship in Jainism
Georgia College and State University

Spring of 2023 was a momentous time for not only Georgia College and State University, but in many ways the entire state of Georgia. Thanks to the generous gift of $250,000 from Dr. Shailendra and Mrs. Rajkumari Palvia, the Philosophy, Religion and Liberal Studies Department of Georgia College was able to establish Georgia's very first Endowed Professorship in Jainism. This opens the door for students and faculty across Georgia to learn about Jainism, and how it can be applied to present day challenges. We began holding Jainism-related events before the Endowed Professor officially started his duties in August 2024; we are including Spring 2023 events in this report.

March 7th, 2023 Celebration at Jain Society of Greater Atlanta:
We held a grand celebration of the establishment of the first ever Endowed Professorship in Jain Studies in the state of Georgia. It was a glorious moment for Georgia as we are bringing together Jainism — the religion that brought the concept of Ahimsa to humanity — and Georgia, with its long connection with using Ahimsa in fighting for social justice.

The happy occasion was celebrated by over hundred attendees, many from beyond Georgia.



As Atlanta Dunia reported, "the well-attended 'S& R Palvia Veetraag Vigyaan Endowed Professorship in Jain Studies at GCSU' event was graced by the presence of the GCSU delegation comprising of Dr.Eric Tenbus, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Sunita Manian, Chair Philosophy and Liberal Studies; Dr. Justin Henry, Lecturer of Religious Studies; Dr. James Winchester, Professor of Philosophy; Bob Preston, Senior Development Officer, GCSU; Basil Cooper, undergraduate majoring in English and Art History; and Liam Landry, undergraduate majoring in Math and minoring in Philosophy; and Dr. Nuru Akinyemi, Director, Center for African Studies, Kennesaw State University, Professor Dr. Jagdish Sheth, Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Business, Goizueta Business School, Emory University and his wife Madhu Sheth; Dr.Sulekh Jain, the person without whom this Endowed position would not have been possible; BOD and EC members of the Jain Society of Greater Atlanta Temple; and Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA); and family members of Dr. Shailenra

Palvia and Mrs. Rajkumari Palvia," (Desai,March 2023) including Dr. Prashant Palvia and Mrs. Madhu Palvia, and Mr. Pankaj Palvia and Mrs Smita Palvia.



The packed program contained a lineup of popular Jain prayers and devotional songs, talks on history and growing popularity of Jainism in many parts of the world, a felicitation of GCSU delegation members, a gift of Jain literature to GCSU, and more.

March 8th Celebration at Georgia College and State University:
The celebrations of the momentous occasion continued the next day, when Georgia College and State University was honored to host our esteemed guests: Dr. Shailendra Palvia, Mrs. Rajkumari Palvia, Dr. Sulekh Jain, Dr. Prashant Palvia, brother of Dr. Shailendra Palvia, and his wife, Mrs. Madhu Palvia.



Georgia College was represented by Associate Provost, Dr. Holley Roberts; Dean Eric Tenbus; Dr. Sunita Manian, Chair, Philosophy, Religion and Liberal Studies, Mr. Bob Preston,

Advancement; Dr. Aran MacKinnon, Chair of History and Geography; Mr. Matthew Forrest, Chair of Art; Dr. James Winchester, Coordinator of Philosophy; Dr. Juli Gittinger, Coordinator of Religious Studies; Dr. Mary Magoulick, Professor of English; Dr. Mark Causey, Lecturer in Religion and Food/Animal Ethics; Dr. Ruben Yepes, Assistant Professor of Art; Liam Landry and Basil Cooper, students who are interested in studying Jainism at GCSU and beyond.

The Associate Provost Roberts, Dean Tenbus and Dr. Manian, gave speeches underscoring the importance of Jain Studies at Georgia College and the various ways in which we can further the study of Jainism at GCSU and prepare students for further study beyond college.



March 22nd, 2023, Dr. Palvia's Lecture on Gun Violence:
Dr. Palvia gave an impassioned presentation on the application of Jain Philosophy to the urgent need for legislation pertaining to Gun Control. The title of his lecture was: *Mahavir, Mahatma and MLK's Message of Ahimsa: How to curb the Epidemic of Gun Violence in the USA?*

Inspired by the passion that Dr. Palvia brought to the presentation, here is what one of the students, Gracie Bray said:

> *Although Professor Shailendra seeks ultimate peace and restfulness, he was persistent on the issue of violence in the states. I admire him along with other Jains who were in the discussion and those who live in the United States because they are able to protect their well-being and stay true to Jain principles while still advocating for change. I felt very inspired by their positivity and overall charm.*
>
> *Something that I noticed at the end was that Dr. Justin Henry spoke in a different language when saying goodbye. This was sweet to see people whose cultures and religions are different respecting each other and offering a moment of connection and decency. If only other religions, such as Christianity, were open enough to appreciate people with different beliefs in such understanding ways. I believe that Christians feel called as part of their mission to share the gospel and teach nonbelievers about Jesus Christ. They can't disassociate from their beliefs long enough to understand or appreciate the beliefs of others. Perhaps if they could, there would be less division in our culture.*

Thus, this student, like many others, had their horizons opened wide by hearing Dr. Palvia's presentation, and in hearing the interactions between Dr. Palvia, Dr. Sulekh Jain, and Dr. Justin Henry. Not only did she learn about Jainism, the presentation spurred her to critically reflect on her own background and find ways to make the world a better place.

April 27th, 2023, Jainism in Art Presentation and Calligraphy Workshop:
The Philosophy, Religion and Liberal Studies department was excited to coordinate with the Department of Art to host Ms. Mina Choksi. Ms. Choksi made a brilliant presentation on Jain Art that helped the GCSU community get a deep understanding of the subject.



Ms. Choksi also guided GCSU students in a workshop on Calligraphy using the Brahmi script. The picture above shows students deeply engaged in following Ms. Choksi's excellent guidance.

May 2023, Endowed Professor of Jainism Hired:
In December 2022, the final paperwork for the Veetraag Vigyaan Endowed Professorship in Jainism was completed. The Philosophy, Religion and Liberal Studies department immediately went to work on hiring a faculty member for this position. Working through Spring 2024, we conducted a national search. We hired Dr. Caley Smith, who is a scholar of early South Asian religious history and political imagination in May 2023. Dr. Smith received his Ph.D. from Harvard University..

Dr. Smith's work focuses primarily on the conceptual continuities and disruptions between the Vedas and emergent ascetic and householder traditions. His current book project, *The Invisible Mask*, explores the ritual impersonation of the god Indra and its influence on the recitation traditions of early Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Student Study Abroad in India:
December 15th, 2023, was the beginning of an adventure of exploration, discovery and learning for two GCSU students, Basil Cooper and Liam Landry, along with professors Sunita Manian and James Winchester. Thanks to a generous gift from JAINA (Jain Association in North America) supplemented with funding from GCSU's Honors College, MURACE, the COAS Dean's office, and the PALS department they embarked on a 15-day, 5-city journey to study Jain

art, architecture, and philosophy. This program entailed many months of detailed planning beginning in August of 2023 until December of that year.

This truly transformative experience brought a new perspective on South Asian religion and culture, according to Basil Cooper (double major in Philosophy and Liberal Studies) who plans to pursue graduate studies in Religious Studies: “Studying South Asian religions in the classroom really pales in comparison to being able to stand in these caves and temples that are over 500 years old (and in some cases over 1000 years old). I was able to truly experience the deep history and culture, and the trip has really made me more passionate about my studies!”

The first stop was Udaipur, the beautiful City of Lakes, which served as the base from which we explored the sublime beauty of Jain architecture that extolled the virtues of the Jain tirthankaras (spiritual teachers) who guide humans into the path of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) and *anekantvad* (non-absolutism). The first Temple we visited was in Ranakpur, with 1444 pillars intricately carved in marble pillars, in 24 halls dedicated to the first Tirthankara, Parshvanath, whose carved sculpture made of a single marble slab stands awe-inspiringly in the center. As Dr. Sulekh Jain so aptly put it, we were “listening to music in stone!”





A second day-trip from Udaipur had us travelling to the Dilwara temple complex, another sublime masterpiece of carvings in marble with five interconnected temples dedicated to the Jain Tirthankaras, Mahaveer, Adinath, Parvanath, and Neminath. In the words of Basil Cooper, “I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. The temples we went to had some of the most astonishing carving I have ever seen— the details at the Ranakpur and Dilwara temples were unlike any other art or architecture I have ever experienced, and it was great to travel with our professors who were able to explain the stories and people we saw!”



Liam Landry echoed many of Basil's reactions as well: "I had seen many of these sites and others like them in pictures during my classes, but it really does not compare to being able to see them in person. The size of Ranakpur really floors you when you see with your own eyes. Additionally, the carvings at Dilwara were probably the most intricate carvings I have ever seen."

That last set of temples that we explored were the vast rock carvings of the world famous Ellora Caves, an ensemble of 34 caves built between the 7th and 11th centuries, that stands as the emblem of the syncretism of Indian religious traditions. Twelve caves are Buddhist, sixteen are Hindu, and four are Jain. We were dumbstruck by the sheer scale of the sculptures, many of them still retaining the intricate carvings, after more than a thousand years. The pictures below show the group at the Jain Temples at Ellora.





In addition to the visits to Jain Temples the Study Tour included a visit to the International School for Jain Studies (ISJS) in Pune. The GCSU team visited the site of the museum dedicated to Jainism, as well as attended a lecture on Jain philosophy given by Dr. Shrinetra Pandey. Dr. Pandey even arranged for a virtual lecture on Jain Art and Architecture by renowned scholar Dr. Maruti Nandan Prasad Tiwari. This lecture helped us "see" the temple art and architecture in a new light.







All in all, the engagement with the past helped Basil and Liam appreciate the present. As Liam said, "We can learn about these things in a classroom, but when you really face it, you can feel how people worked tirelessly to create these sites. It created, for me, a much richer appreciation for not only the cultures and the history, but also for the people who live and experience it every day."

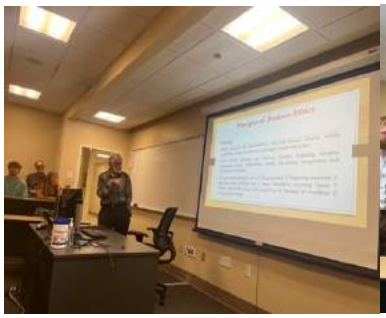
December 27-29, 2023, Conference Student Presentation on Jainism:
The GCSU team landed in Kolkata, to attend a Conference organized by The Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies and Academic Exchange. Basil Cooper presented a paper on temple art and architecture in India, drawing from visits to Ranakpur and Dilwara, while Liam Landry presented a paper on how Buddhism, Jainism and Communism contribute to ending human suffering. Their papers were well written and well received.

March 28th, 2024, Dr. Ellen Gough of Emory University:
Dr. Gough gave a presentation on **"Illustrating the Jain Ramayana."** What happens to our understanding of an epic when we begin not with texts, but with images? This talk compared illustrated Jain versions of the Indian epic the Ramayana, from the early modern period to the present day, to show how Jains used the narrative to highlight non-violence and renunciation.



Following the public lecture, Dr. Gough had a workshop for faculty interested in Jain Studies and students interested in studying Jainism after graduation from college.

April 17th, 2024, Dr. Shailendra Palvia, Lecture on Jain Business Ethics:
Dr. Palvia gave a wonderfully clear presentation on Jain Business Ethics to a rapt audience of Business students. They learned about the richness of Jain philosophy and how it can shape Business Ethics. Students had excellent questions and received thoughtful and thought-provoking responses.





July 4th, 2024, Dr. Caley Smith's Presentation at Young Jains Association Conference:
Dr. Caley Smith was one of the featured speakers at the YJA Conference held in Atlanta. He chose to present on the History of Aparigraha. The young people were engaged and asked many questions.

According to Dr. Jonathan Dickstein of Arihanta Institute the young Jain participants at the 2024 convention "relayed the challenge of adhering to the core Jain values of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness)." At the same time, "the young Jains were eager to learn more about their religious and philosophical heritage and to integrate it into their lives." (You can read the full article by Dr. Dickstein here).

Thus, Dr. Smith's presentation addressed an important concern/interest of the young people who attended the conference.



Jainism-related Classes Taught at GCSU since we established the Veetraag Vigyaan Endowed Professorship in Jain Studies:

In 2023:
Introduction to World Religions (3 sections)
Religion and Non-Violence (2 sections)

The two courses listed above are classes in the Core Curriculum, so it is open to all students, from different majors. Dr. Caley Smith, our Endowed Professor in Jain Studies, designed these courses to include a significant amount of Jainism, and helped students compare, contrast and find commonality between Jainism and other traditions. Thus, about 115 students at GCSU were exposed to Jain perspectives. Additionally, these students came from different academic majors (future Business

leaders, Educators, Health-care professionals, as well as Religion/Philosophy/History/Literature majors)

Religion and Wealth
Environmental Ethics

The two courses listed above were upper-level courses, so were typically taken by majors pursuing the study of Philosophy or Religion. *Religion and Wealth* was taught by Dr. Caley Smith. Jain ethics was a significant component in the course. *Environmental Ethics* was taught by Dr. Mark Causey, a faculty member in Philosophy. Many students in his classes on the environment and animal ethics go away with not only learning the material intellectually, but many get transformed a human being. Many students who take Dr. Causey's class tell us that they became vegan, and deeply invested in the welfare of animals, after taking the class.

In 2024:
Introduction to World Religions (2 sections)
Religion and Reciprocity (2 sections)

The two courses listed above were taught in the Core Curriculum. As mentioned previously, this allows Jain perspectives to be shared with students from different majors, who will end up in different walks of life. These two courses included about 90 students who were exposed to Jain perspective.

Religious Epics
Classical India

The two courses mentioned above were our upper-level offerings, taught by Dr. Caley Smith in 2024 (Spring and Fall, respectively). As the Endowed Professor of Jainism, his courses are designed to incorporate significant amounts of Jain perspectives and allow students to engage with the Jain perspectives in a comparative perspective.

In addition to these courses, several faculty members in Philosophy, have started incorporating Jainism in their core class, Survey of Philosophy.



Dr. Caley Smith, Veetraag Vigyaan Professor of Jain Studies



The picture above is of Basil Cooper presenting at GCSU's Student Research Conference. Basil presented a paper of Temple Architecture, using Rasa Theory, drawing from travels in Ranakpur, Dilwara, and the lectures heard at ISJS, Pune. Thus, in just over a year of receiving the S&R Palvia Veetraag Vigyaan Endowment for Jainism, we have managed to get students presenting research on Jainism related topics. Basil intends to study Prakrit in Pune next year after graduation, and in the future attend a PhD program in Jain Art.

All in all, Georgia College and State University, has been deeply grateful to Dr. Shailendra Palvia and Mrs. Rajkumari Palvia, for their generous gift which has made all the above possible. In a single year, students at GCSU and beyond, have been enriched by their exposure to Jain Perspectives, inside and outside the classroom.