Dear Dean Wikle:

I am writing to express my interest in the position of Program Director for the interdisciplinary Religious Studies Program within the College of Arts and Sciences. I am excited to see how much progress has been made already in revitalizing this program, which I think can be a critically important resource on campus.

My vision for the program is that it should foster “understanding through knowledge.” As a state school, all students should have equal footing, regardless of what their faith background is or is not. No religious platform should be promoted by the university. That does not mean that students should not study religion. In fact, in a world in which hatred against or violence towards persons of varying faiths is an all-too-common headline, a strong argument could be made that a basic understanding of the varieties of religious traditions in the world should be a prerequisite of any college education, or at the very least a valid subject for academic study.

Since the program was so long in a holding position with only one tenured faculty member, its offerings were limited to what he and a handful of adjuncts could handle. Clearly the number of students taking these religious studies classes is immense (more than 600 per year was the figure given) and potential for the future of the program bright, especially with the two new TAP hires. Much work remains to be done in rationalizing a curriculum that could be taught with the staff we now have, augmented by affiliated faculty. We need to create program tracks that make sense and that are feasible for a student to complete in a timely manner. This will be a key area that the new program director will need to tackle at once: what can be done most effectively with the resources we now have?

But the number of students taking these courses seems to indicate a larger need. If the aim of the program is to foster understanding of the variety of religious traditions in the world, then our current strengths in Christianity and the Middle East need to be expanded upon. If given the honor of becoming the program director, I would seek to work intensively with the Foundation to establish three new tenure track lines: ideally one in Judaism or Hebrew Bible, one in Hinduism or Buddhism, and one in African or Caribbean religions (in accordance with the input of the program’s core faculty).

I am very optimistic that a robust course offering could be developed within about 5 years. As this is happening, we need to be reversing the downward trend in the number of minors. I would envision this in several steps. First, getting the data “bricks” from Dr. Martindale so that one can see facts and analyze real trends. Second, reaching out to the advisors
in the departments that religious studies minors most often major in, to make sure they are aware of the Religious Studies program offerings. Third, greater visibility to the students, through an updated and improved webpage, social media presence, programming or even just “tabling” in front of the classroom building.

It may be that student interest is enough that we should consider having a religious studies major down the road. If we were to get to that point, I would like to explore the option of instituting a 4+1 MA program. Having the MA would distinguish us from OU’s Religious Studies Program, which could be important in showing the Regents that what we propose is not duplicated elsewhere in the state.

Combining academic courses with real-life experiences would be a priority for me. I would encourage travel abroad or study courses, if possible, for credit towards the minor where appropriate. I strongly believe in the value of internships and early coordination with the Career Services office. Internships could be at approved religious institutions, but I would also encourage students to “walk a day in someone else’s shoes,” to explore a tradition not one’s own, or to take on short internships at local food banks, hospices, Habitat for Humanity or Legal Aid. It will obviously take time to set up this program in a responsible way.

Outreach and visibility to the student body as a whole and also the Stillwater community should also be an integral part of the Religious Studies program. I would be happy to try to coordinate with the Norris Fund and with the Allied Arts group (the latter of which I know well, having served on this committee for ten years, on and off) to see if one could bring to campus a group like the Whirling Dervishes or a performance of Bach’s Passions with a suitable introduction by the relevant Religious Studies faculty member. It might be possible also to work with the Center for Sovereign Nations or other existing campus organizations to bring additional meaningful experiences to the community. I would envision a speakers series as a more long-term goal, suitable for the point at which the program had majors.

My qualifications for this position can be divided into three subheadings: teaching, research and practical experience. My teaching experience between about 1992-2000 was almost exclusively in courses on the Hebrew Bible, as my c.v. shows, and I have in fact returned to teach these topics in seminars and honors courses at OSU more recently (e.g. I am offering my honors class “Religion and Mythology of the Ancient Near East” again in the fall). I have in fact taught at a divinity School (H.D.S.) as part of my “fellowship” there in the study of women and religion. Thus, I am well-versed in the study and teaching of religion at an academic, non-sectarian institution and would (I hope) be a suitable person to supervise and mentor the new TAPs.

My research in the last decade or so has concentrated on the topic of women in religion in ancient Mesopotamia in the 21st century B.C. I have argued that previous discussions of women’s religion often relegated them to either being agents of their father’s or husband’s religious agenda, or to the status of foreigners who contaminated native religion with imported ideas. In fact, we can see that women often acted on their own agency and chose religious practices of their own, though often in order to help family members and gain social status. My
work has been published by reputable presses and journals, and I have in fact been honored with a commission from one of the foremost institutes in Biblical studies in Jerusalem. I have a solid reputation within my field as a scholar in the field of ancient Mesopotamian religion.

Finally, while at OSU, I have developed some experience in the practical skills that a program director would need. Having served on the Group II Graduate Council for two years, I have seen how the wider university works. For the last two years, I have served as the history department’s scholarship and philanthropy chair, working fairly intensively with Jayme Ferrell and others at the Foundation and allocating a budget of about $60,000 in various accounts. I was also put in charge of the department newsletter this year. There would be many areas (such as scheduling courses) that I would have to learn, but I feel that the practical skills I have mastered could be valuable assets.

Religious Studies has the potential to be a truly rich interdisciplinary program, with important existing strengths in Philosophy, which has for many years provided a home for the program, augmented with assets from History, English, Sociology, Art History and potentially others. Whether the director is from History, Philosophy or another CAS department, I am optimistic that we can all work together to help get this important program off the ground.

All best wishes,

Tonia Sharlach Nash
Tonia M. Sharlach Nash

EMPLOYMENT

Professor, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 2017-present.
Associate Professor, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 2010-2017.
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, 2005-2010.


EDUCATION

Harvard University, Ph.D. in Assyriology, 1999.


PUBLICATIONS (under the name T. M. Sharlach)

Books:

Provincial Taxation and the Ur III State
Published by E. J. Brill, December 2003.

An Ox of One’s Own: Royal Wives and Religion at the Court of the Third Dynasty of Ur
Published by de Gruyter in the series Studies in the Records of the Ancient Near East
No. 18, 2017.

Published Articles:


“To everything there is a season, turn, turn, turn,” in S. Garfinkle and J.C. Johnson (eds.). The Growth of an Early State in Mesopotamia: Studies in Ur III Administration, Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo 5, Madrid 2008, 79-98. {Invited; peer reviewed.}

“A Collection of Model Court Cases from Old Babylonian Nippur (CBS 11324),” co-authored with Jacob Klein (Bar-ilan University) Zeitschrift für Assyriologie 97 (2007): 1-25. {peer reviewed}


“Diplomacy and the Rituals of Politics at the Ur III Court,” Journal of Cuneiform Studies 57 (2005): 17-29. {Peer reviewed}.


**Articles Stuck in Press**


**Articles in Preparation**

“Abi-simti and the Queen Mother in the Third Dynasty of Ur,” to be submitted in early spring 2019 to *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* {a blind, peer-reviewed journal}.


“Could Women in the Third Millennium B.C. in Southern Mesopotamia Own Property?” to be translated into Arabic and put up on an EU-run website, the Nahrein Network.

**Reviews**


**CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS**


“Shulgi, Mighty Man, King of Ur,” invited for the 60th *Rencontre Assyriologique, Warsaw (Poland)*, July 2014.

“The Role of the Queen Mother during the Third Dynasty of Ur,” read at the 222nd Meeting of the American Oriental Society, *Boston*, March 2011.


“The Court of the Third Dynasty of Ur: Definition and Evolution,” paper read at the 220th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, St. Louis (MO), March 2010.


“Boy-Kings and the Fall of Empires in the Ancient Near East,” read at the Phi Alpha Theta Colloquium, Oklahoma State University, April 2009.


“Social Change in the Late Third Millennium B.C.,” invited lecture in the President’s Dream Course Series, University of Oklahoma (Norman), February 2008.


"To everything there is a season, turn, turn, turn," paper given at the 49th Rencontre Assyriologique, London, July 2003.


“Marduk and the Amorites,” read at the University Museum, Philadelphia, November 2000.


GRANTS AND AWARDS

Oklahoma Humanities Council, research travel Grant, Spring/Summer 2010, Fall 2014.

Nomination, Outstanding Professor Award 2008-2009, College of Arts and Sciences, Oklahoma State University, Spring 2009.

Dean’s Incentive Grant, Oklahoma State University, for research 2006 and 2007.


Graduate Society Fellowship, Harvard University, for dissertation completion, 1998.


Graduate Student Council Research Grant to excavate in Syria, Summer 1995.

COURSES TAUGHT

At Harvard University (as a teaching fellow), 1994-1999:
The Cultural Legacy of the Ancient Near East  
Elementary Akkadian  
History of Mesopotamian Religion  
The Book of Job and the Joban Tradition  
The Bible and its Interpreters

At Cornell University, 1999-2000:  
Society and Law in the Ancient Near East  
Mythology and Religion of Mesopotamia and Canaan

At the University of Pennsylvania, 2001-2004:  
Women and Family in the Ancient Near East  
The History of the Ancient Near East  
Sumerian Administrative Documents (graduate seminar)

At the Harvard Divinity School, 2004-5:  
Goddesses, Priestesses and Dreams: Gender in the Ancient Near East (graduate Seminar)

At Oklahoma State University, 2005-present:  
Women in the Ancient World (graduate seminar)  
Kingship and the Gods (graduate seminar)  
The Hebrew Bible in its Ancient Near Eastern Context (Senior Capstone)  
Mythology and Religion of the Ancient Near East (Honors)  
Western Civilization prior to 1500 AD (survey)  
Eastern Civilization (survey)  
Ancient Greece  
Ancient Rome  
Ancient Egypt and Israel  
Ancient Mesopotamia

COMMITTEE SERVICE, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Allied Arts Selection Committee, Fall 2008- Spring 2014 and Fall 2017- present: a university-wide committee that brings world-class musicians and performers to campus.

Scholarship and Philanthropy Committee, History Dept., Spring 2013- present. Chair, Fall 2017-present.

Graduate Council and Graduate College Group II representative: Spring 2015- Spring 2017: Like a Roman tribune, this office serves to represent the concerns of the
Humanities departments (including history) to the Graduate College, vice-chair 2015-2017. This is an elected office.

Personnel Committee, History Dept., Fall 2008- Spring 2010; Fall 2011- Spring 2013: an elected office in the history department handling promotion and tenure.

Medieval Search Committee, History Dept. Fall 2012- Spring 2013.
Middle East Search Committee, History Dept. Fall 2013- Spring 2014.

Graduate Committee, History Department, Fall 2010-11; Fall 2018- present.

Library Committee: History department, Fall 2005-2008.

Norris Committee, spring 2011: a university-wide committee allocating funds for lectures.


ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

Supervisor: for a 10x10 m. square containing the remains of a Hittite-period house and kiln, Umm el-Marra, Syria, Summer 1995.


Field archaeologist: at a Roman pottery-production site, Martinhal, Portugal, Summer 1989.

MEMBERSHIPS

International Association for Assyriology