

Bergren Forum presenters to assist participants in tracing religious Roots and Routes

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Dr. Wakoh Shannon Hickey, Alfred University (AU) professor of Religious Studies, along with several AU Students, will present “Genealogy.com, Google Earth, and Grandma: AU Students Trace Their Roots and Routes” as part of Alfred University’s Bergren Forum series. Their presentation will take place on Thursday, April 25 at 12:10 p.m. in Nevins Theater, Powell Campus Center. The event is open to the public free of charge.

Hickey, along with the University archivist, a teaching librarian, and a Geographic Information System specialist, teamed up with undergraduate students to help them trace their lineages and relate history to their own lives. Through their research, these students were able to trace their families’ religious histories back four generations, creating a visual “Religious Family Tree.”

By collecting oral histories, searching genealogical databases and other archives, depicting their lineages visually, using library sources, and plotting their ancestors’ movements using Google Maps and Google Earth, the undergraduates were able to learn how their individual families’ histories and movements fit in with the broader picture of American religious history. Difficulties within the research yielded fascinating results, showing the effects of immigration, migration, and slavery on the oral and written history of the students’ ancestors.

The students and Hickey, a faculty member in the Human Studies Division, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will share the results of their research, along with the tools and process of the research so that attendees may trace their ancestry in a similar fashion.

Hickey earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science from the University of California-Berkley, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She continued her education and received a master of arts degree in Buddhist and Christian Studies from the Pacific School of Religion and a Ph.D. in Religion and Modernity from Duke University. Hickey is also an ordained Soto Zen priest and enjoys flying stunt kites on breezy days.

The Bergren Forum, sponsored by the Alfred University Division of Human Studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, meets Thursdays during each academic semester at the University. Participants are encouraged to bring a lunch; coffee and tea will be available.