

Holly L. Walters

Curriculum Vitae

holly.walters@wellesley.edu
1-781-330-3121

☆ **Digital CV:** <http://www.peregrinationblog.com/> About Dr. Holly Walters

Research Interests: Religion; South Asia: India and Nepal; Divine-Object Personhood; Digital culture (AI) and robot religion; Myth, ritual practice, and material culture; Mobility, pilgrimage, and itinerant community identity; Narratives of religious experience.

Teaching Interests: Religion (Digital and AI, South Asia); Ethnography of Religion; Ethnography of South Asia; Myth and Ritual; Self and Personhood; Gender and the Body; History of Anthropological Theory and Philosophy of Science.

Education:

PhD, Anthropology, 2013-2018

Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

Dissertation Title: “*Shaligram: Sacred Stones, Ritual Practices, and the Politics of Mobility in Nepal.*”

Master of Arts, Anthropology, 2011-2013

Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology; Certificate: Archaeology, 2001-2004

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI.

Ethnographic Fieldwork/Research:

Pune and Mumbai, India and San Francisco, California: May 2023 – Present

- Current ethnographic fieldwork on digital religion and Hinduism supported by the Knapp Social Sciences Research Grant.
- Working with software developers, tech companies, and end users who create and use AI tools for religious or ritual purposes. This includes religious cellphone apps, computer programs, and robotics/animatronics.
- In 2025, IRB approval was obtained prior to an additional pilot study in Pune at the computer lab of Dr. Kaushik Gopalan, working on a Sanskrit LLM to be trained on Hindu religious texts marked as ‘cultural heritage.’
- This fieldwork is the basis for two edited chapters and a published article, as well as a planned book manuscript.

Mustang and Kathmandu, Nepal: June – August 2015, June 2016 – April 2017

- 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal supported by the Fulbright IIE Dissertation Research Grant.
- Worked primarily with Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims, and local Mustangi Bon shamans, in relation to Shaligram (sacred fossil) pilgrimage and ritual practices as well as textual and oral religious traditions.
- IRB approval was obtained prior to field research and recording. Pilot project was also supported by the Mellon Pre-Dissertation Exploratory grant and the Brandeis-India Initiative Fellowship grant.
- This fieldwork is the basis for two book publications: “Shaligram Pilgrimage in the Nepal Himalayas” (AUP 2020) and “Outward Spirals: A Guide to Shaligram Stones” (TLS 2024).

Mayapur and Kolkata, India: June-August 2012

- Designed and carried out an ethnographic study on ritual and domestic deity care among Vaishnava/Krishna devotees in Mayapur and Kolkata, West Bengal, India.
- IRB approval was obtained prior to 10 weeks of ethnographic field research and recording.

- Project was supported by grants from the Brandeis Department of Anthropology and the Brandeis Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. *(This work was presented to the Society for Religious Anthropology in November 2012 during the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in San Francisco)*

Programme for Belize Rio Bravo Project: Chawak but'o'ob (Field School), Orange Walk, Belize; June-July 2005

- Survey of water control features and residential terraces using Nikon Total Mapping Station.
- Excavation and stone-by-stone mapping of Mayan house structures in relation to religious structures, such as a temple and ball court. *(This research has been published in the Occasional Publication series by the University of Texas. It also appears as part of several papers of the 2006 Society for American Archaeology Symposium regarding the site of Chawak But'o'ob.)*

Teaching and Professional Experience:

Assistant Teaching Professor: *Wellesley College, Department of Anthropology; 2019-Present*

Courses: Intro to Anthropology (ANTH 101)

The Anthropology of Religion (ANTH/REL 233)

Divine Madness: Culture and Mental Illness (ANTH/REL 236)

Ethnography of South Asia (ANTH/SAS 237)

Digital Religion (ANTH 248/REL 238)

Advanced Anthropological Theory (ANTH 301)

- Instructor of record. Redesigned syllabi with updated materials and pedagogical methods. Created and prepared Advanced Anthropological Theory, Divine Madness, Digital Religion, and Ethnography of South Asia as new courses.
- Taught twice weekly classes and weekly seminars, including materials and lecture preparation, lecture presentations and discussion, grading written assignments, and supporting student projects and learning goals outside of structured class time.
- Principle faculty advisor for 9 undergraduate anthropology majors, 8 anthropology minors, 6 independent study students, and 3 thesis students.

Affiliate Professor: *Wheaton College, Department of Language and Culture; 2025-Present*

Courses: Intro to Anthropology (ANTH 102)

Medical Anthropology (ANTH 265)

Advanced Anthropological Theory (ANTH 301)

- Instructor of record. Joined on an as-needed basis to fill course needs and expertise not present in the current department.
- Taught twice weekly classes and weekly seminars, including materials and lecture preparation, lecture presentations and discussion, grading written assignments, and supporting student projects and learning goals outside of structured class time.

Visiting Lecturer in Anthropology: *Babson College, Department of History and Society; 2019*

Culture and Mental Illness; Spring 2019

- Instructor of record. Restructured and developed previous course as a writing-intensive, ethnographic, seminar for the History and Society Department.
- Taught twice weekly classes, including materials and lecture preparation, lecture presentations and discussion, grading written assignments, and supporting student projects and learning goals outside of structured class time.
- Principle faculty advisor for two undergraduate senior projects.

Teaching Fellow: *Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology; 2012 – 2015, 2018-2019*

Post-Colonial Feminism; Spring 2019

Culture and Mental Illness, Global Pandemics; Fall 2018

Linguistic Anthropology; Fall 2015, Psychological Anthropology; Spring 2015
Myth and Ritual; Fall 2014, Queer Anthropology; Spring 2014
Culture and Mental Illness; Fall 2013, Museums and Public Memory; Spring 2013
Communication and Media; Fall 2012

- Lectured part-time and ran undergraduate section meetings.
- Conducted semi-regular graduate sections for Masters and PhD students.
- Graded written assignments, including midterm, and final exams.
- Taught additional materials or facilitated review of the lecture material and readings.

Lecturer: *Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology, 2016*
Culture and Mental Illness; Spring 2016
The Anthropology of Religion; Spring 2016

- Instructor of record. Taught twice weekly classes and held regular office hours.
- Carried out all materials and lecture preparation, lecture presentations and discussion, and grading assignments.

Brandeis-India Initiative Program Coordinator: *Brandeis University; 2013-2015*

- Planned overall program budget and distributed student grants for the Brandeis-India Fellows Program (a scholarship program for undergraduates and graduate students working in India and Nepal).
- Planned and organized on-campus events for the South Asian Studies Department and for the Soli Sorabjee/Brandeis-India lecture series.
- Coordinated staff and faculty travel to India and Nepal, including managing student and alumni events in South Asia.



Publications:

Open Access copies of most of my publications can be found at: <https://wellesley.academia.edu/HollyWalters>

Books:

Walters, Holly. Shaligram Pilgrimage in the Nepal Himalayas. 2020. New Mobilities in Asia Ethnographic Series. Amsterdam University Press.

Walters, Holly. Outward Spirals: A Guide to Shaligram Interpretive Traditions. 2024. TLS Press.

Edited Chapters:

Walters, Holly. "Code Smoke: How GitaGPT Became the Voice of Krishna." (In Press, 2026). In Edward Elgar Handbook of Religion and Artificial Intelligence. Edited by Robert M. Geraci. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Walters, Holly. "Shaligram Online: When the Dark Web Becomes a Sacred River." (In Press, 2026). In Social Media, Religion, and Culture. Routledge.

Walters, Holly. "'But What Is It Really?' The Problem of Science, Pseudoscience, and Religion in Fossil Folklores." (In Press, 2026) In Addressing Pseudo-Archaeology: A Guide for Teachers and Professionals. Digital Press at the University of North Dakota.

Walters, Holly. "Fear Itself: Vampires as Moral Panics." 2021. in Monstrous Males/Fatal Females: Gender, Supernatural Beings, and the Liminality of Death, Rebecca Gibson and Jay VanderVeen, eds., Lexington Books.

Articles:

Walters, Holly. "How to Raise a Fist: Beyond Awareness Through an Anthropology of Action." (In Press, 2026) *American Anthropologist*, Special Issue on "Power." Elizabeth J. Chin (ed.).

Walters, Holly. "Shaligrams in a Dark Digital River: Decolonizing Ritual Practice Through the Online Exchange of Sacred Stones." (Under Review, 2026). In "Proceedings from the Conference on the Academic Study of Religion in India."

Walters, Holly. 2026. "Shaligram Stone in an Ammonite World: The Importance of Understanding Himalayan Fossils as Geo-Heritage." *Special Issue: Myth, Perception and Geology: The Intangible Values of Geoheritage*. In *Geoheritage*. Springer Nature.

Walters, Holly, Simon MacKenzie, Donna Yates, and Diana Berzina. "Ritual Misdeeds and Dutiful Transgressions: Rethinking Crime through the Agency of Sacred Fossils." *Nature + Culture*, Volume 20:1. 55-76. Berghahn Journals: New York and Oxford. Spring 2025.

Walters, Holly. "Etched in Stone: Shaligrams as Object-Texts." *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief*. Taylor and Francis. Oxfordshire, UK. August 2024. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2024.2380937>)

Walters, Holly. "Cornerstones: Shaligrams as Kin." *The Journal of Religion*. University of Chicago Press. Volume 102:1. Jan. 2022. (<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/717110>)

Walters, Holly and Hannah Gould. "Bad Buddhists, Good Robots: Techno-Salvationist Designs for Nirvana." *Journal of Global Buddhism*, Special Issue on Bad Buddhism. November 2020.

Walters, Holly. "The Things We Believe: Feminism and Anthropology in the #MeToo Era." *Feminist Anthropology*. Issue 1.1 The "F" Word: Anthropology's Feminisms. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. April 2020.

Walters, Holly. "I Am Not This Body: Persons, Bodies, and Boundaries in Vaishnava Ritual Practice." *Sagar: A South Asia Research Journal*. University of Texas at Austin. December 2018.

Walters, Holly. "Playing God: Participant Frameworks in the Ras Lilas of Krishna." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Volume 28, Issue 2-3. University of Toronto Press. Fall 2016.

Guides and Seminar Materials:

Hanes, Amy and Holly Walters. 2018. "A Long Journey Home: Supporting Students in the Field." Online. Retrieved from: <https://metooanthro.org>.

Walters, Holly and Kersten Bergstrom. 2019. "A Long Journey Home: Faculty Guide." Online. Retrieved from: <https://metooanthro.org>.

Book Reviews:

Walters, Holly. 2022. "Hear #MeToo in India: News, Social Media, and Anti-Rape and Sexual Harassment Activism by Pallavi Guha." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. Taylor and Francis.

Speculative Fiction

Walters, Holly. January 2024. *The Way By*. Three Little Sisters Press.

Walters, Holly. March 2026. *By The Way*. Three Little Sisters Press.



Public Scholarship:

"Shaligrams are Becoming Rarer Due to Climate Change." Associated Press (AP) News, *The Conversation*, Kalpana Jain, Ed. August 2023

"Bad Buddhists, Good Robots." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. Frederick Ranallo-Higgins, Ed. May 2023

"Robots are Performing Hindu Rituals." Associated Press (AP) News, *The Conversation*, Kalpana Jain, Ed. March 2023

“Shaligrams in the Presses.” *New Books Network* interview with Dr. Raj Balkaran. Dec 2022

“#MeToo Anthropology and the Case Against Harvard,” *SAPIENS*: <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/metoo-anthropology/> – 2022

G20 Interfaith Working Group on Science, Technology, and Infrastructure – Working Member
Invited member on religion, digital/internet religion, and the ethics of globalization. 2021

The Geek Anthropologist – Contributing Writer 2020

The Familiar Strange – Contributing Writer 2018 – 2026

- *Living Fossils*
- *MeToo Anthropology*
- *Fluid Masculinity: The Case of Krishna*
- *On Being Declared Missing in the Himalayas*
- *A Tale of Two Manuscripts*
- *Shaligram Stone in an Ammonite World*
- *Balancing Acts: An Ethnographer’s Reflections on the Study of Religion*
- *The Fallible and the Untrustworthy: Writing Culture as the Unreliable Narrator*
- *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective – Textbook Review*
- *Mission by Mail: Evangelism in a Pandemic*
- *Boob Boxes: Post-Mastectomy Prosthetics and the Artifice of Breast Cancer*
- *My Divine Pet Rock: Notes on Gender and Authority in Anthropology*
- *Breath-Taking: Magic and Experience in the Himalayas*
- *Bring Me the Head of Norman Vincent Peale: Self Care and the American Obsession with the Power of Positive Thinking*
- *A Trinket, A Trifle, and a Novel New Disciple: Fandoms and Consecrated Commodities*
- *A Nation of Mini-Me’s: Why White Nationalists Need to “Save the Children”*
- *The Way By: Reflections on Novel Writing in Anthropology*
- *Ad-Hoc Block: Dystopian Worlds and the War for Advertising*
- *Victorian Pseudoscience on a Netflix Budget: “Ancient Apocalypse” and the Paradox of Science Communication Online*
- *Teaching from the Textbooks: An Archaeology of the Current Historical Moment*
- *A Better Way to Namaste*
- *Diversity According to Whiteness*
- *A Memory, But Not Remembered: Ashes and Objects*
- *“Socially-Constructed” Does Not Mean “Not Real:” Knowledge-Making and the Meaning of Subjectivity in the Social Sciences*

#MeToo Anthropology Collective - Task Force Founder and Working Member 2015 – 2026

Invited Lectures:

“Hinduism Online: Mechanical Murti and Automated Adoration in a Virtual Age.” 2025

New Research in Religion Lecture Series. Department of Religion, Wellesley College.

“On a Robot and a Prayer.” September 2021

Interview. The Religion Lab. University of Virginia (Recording available: <https://religionlab.virginia.edu/podcast/on-a-robot-and-a-prayer/>)

“Shaligram Traditions and Interpretive Practices.” March 2020

Invited talk and Shaligram interpretive workshop for the Satsang Center (Hindu Community Center) of Woburn, MA.

“Shaligrams: Living Fossils.” 2019

Joint project with the invertebrate paleontology collections curators at the Oxford Museum of Natural History in the UK; proposing and designing a new museum exhibit on sacred fossils drawn from the museum’s collections.

“Fossil Folklores of the Himalayas.” April 2018

Invited talk and two-day lecture series by the Anthropology and Folklore Departments of Northwest College in Wyoming.

“The History and Interpretive Traditions of Shaligram Practice in India and Nepal.” April 2017

Invited and sponsored by the Hindu Cultural Society of London to conduct a three-day seminar on Shaligram practices for the Hindu community and Diaspora of England.

“Shaligram Shila and the Politics of Mobility in Himalayan Nepal.” March 2017

Invited lecture in Kathmandu, Nepal by the Fulbright Commission for USEF-Nepal / EducationUSA Advising Center



Conference Presentations and Symposia (Selected):

Working/Committee Member, American Psychosocial Oncology Society, “Restoring Harmony-- Navigating the Ethics of Treatment over Objection in Psycho-Oncology.” March, 2026.

Symposium member for developing new medical ethics in the treatment of cancer patients who object to medical intervention based on cultural ontologies at odds with bio-medicine.

Working Member, Symposium for the Introduction of the Study of Religion in India, FLAME University. Pune, India. July and August 2025

Symposium member for developing potential curricula for the academic study of religion, and introducing digital religion, in South Asian universities.

Presenter, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Toronto, Canada. Nov 2023

Executive Roundtable: “*Transfixed between anthropological care and harm.*”

Presenter, 7th International Congress on Love and Sex with Robots, Virtual, November 2022.

Paper title: “*Godly Robots: Automating Adoration Through Robot Ritual Performance.*”

Roundtable Presenter, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Seattle, WA, November 2022.

Roundtable title: “*Risks and Harms of Fieldwork and Fieldworkers in Anthropology.*”

Roundtable Organizer and Moderator, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Vancouver, BC. Nov 2019

Roundtable title: “*Consent and Vulnerability in Anthropological Practice.*”

Workshop Director, Alt-Sex Conference, New York City, NY May 2019

Workshop title: “*Queer Identity and Activism in South Asia.*”

Panel Chair and Presenter, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Washington D. C. Nov 2014

Paper title: “*Matters of Pride: The Construction of Race in White Power Rhetoric.*”

Panel Chair and Presenter, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Chicago, IL Nov 2013

Paper title: “*I Am Not This Body: Persons, Bodies, and Boundaries in Vaishnava Ritual Practice.*”

Presenter, American Anthropological Association (AAA), San Francisco, CA Nov 2012

Paper title: “*Divine Husband, Divine Lover: Sensuality, Subjectivity, and Sacred Space Among the Krishna Devotees of Sri Mayapur.*”

Presenter, NEAA-GBAC Conference, Boston, MA March 2012

Paper title: “*Father Knows Best: Personhood and Power in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).*”



Fellowships and Awards:

Knapp Research Fellowship, 2025-2026

Knapp Social Sciences Center

Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Writing Year Fellowship, 2017-2018

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Fulbright IIE Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, 2016-2017

Fulbright U.S. Student Program

Robert A. Manners Prize, 2016

Honoring a significant piece of scholarly writing for “Playing God: Participant Frameworks in the Ras Lilas of Krishna.”

Brandeis Outstanding Teaching Fellows Award, 2016

Mellon Foundation Pre-Dissertation Exploratory Grant, 2015

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Brandeis University

Brandeis-India Fellowship Research Grant, 2015

Department of South Asian Studies, Brandeis University

 Languages and Technical Skills:

Languages: Working proficiency in German and Hindi (speaking and writing)

Technical: Adobe Creative Suite and Microsoft Office. Experience with Atlas.ti and SPSS statistical software.



References:

Dr. Adam Van Arsdale
Wellesley College, Department of Anthropology
Pendleton East 331
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2935
avanarsd@wellesley.edu

Dr. Susan Ellison
Wellesley College, Department of Anthropology
Pendleton East 331
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2164
selliso2@wellesley.edu

Dr. Janet McIntosh
Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology
Brown Social Science Center, 226
Waltham, MA 02453
781-736-2215
janetmc@brandeis.edu

Dr. Sarah Lamb
Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology
Brown Social Science Center, 208
Waltham, MA 02453
781-736-2211
lamb@brandeis.edu

Dr. Ellen Schattschneider
Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology
Brown Social Science Center, 202
Waltham, MA 02453
781-736-2219
eschatt@brandeis.edu