

Japanese Religions Beyond Japanese Religious Studies: Engaging a Broader Community

SSJR Roundtable at the AAR
November 19, 2022, 5:00-6:30 pm
Sheraton, Directors Row J

Chair: Matthew Mitchell
Panelist: Stephen Covell
Panelist: Megan Goodwin
Panelist: Jolyon Thomas
Panelist: Kaitlyn Ugoretz
Panelist: Duncan Williams

SSJR hosted an invigorating roundtable on how to best broaden our impact as scholars in the public sphere and within the university. Among the many topics addressed, there was inspiring discussion on the use of social media and related content platforms. Kaitlyn Ugoretz spoke of her success with her YouTube channel ([Eat Pray Anime](#)), where she is reaching large new audiences by creating videos that explain Japanese religions through anime and pop culture. Jolyon Thomas gave sound advice for effective and safe(r) Twitter use by recommending that we “stay in our lane” as scholars and avoid wading into issues beyond our expertise. At the same time, he’s found value in writing threads that respond to misleading essentialisms about Japanese religions and society that periodically arise in mainstream media and popular culture.

As for public-facing writing, Duncan Williams shared advice on tailoring his writing to various public outlets—whether in developing a narrative for longer form magazine articles or in punchier op-eds. Megan Goodwin of [Sacred Writes](#) likewise encouraged scholars to connect with local newspapers and media as a way to meaningfully reach communities close to home.

Panelists also offered advice on how to demonstrate the value and relevance of our field within the university. Stephen Covell, for instance, spoke of taking initiatives like launching study abroad trips to Japan or developing cross-disciplinary thematic projects with other departments and schools (e.g., religion and health) in order to stay competitive amidst declining budgets and even thrive in our corner of Japanese religions. On a final note, he suggested that we all watch more standup comedy to improve our classroom lectures—advice I’ll take to heart (Dana Carvey, here I come).

Following the roundtable, Caleb Carter facilitated the SSJR annual business to solicit ideas for future sessions. We continue to welcome them as we plan ahead.