

Taft Faculty Release Fellowship Cover Sheet

Date of Application: 1/14/13

Name, Department, Rank:

Laura Dudley Jenkins

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

Affiliated Faculty Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies

Time Period: Spring Semester 2014

Location:

Cincinnati OH

Maharashtra and Mizoram, India

Title of Project: "I will not die a Hindu": Identity improvisation in India

Requested Research Supplement (if any): \$1500 toward RT airfare to Kolkata, India

Probable Results of a Grant (such as external funding, publications, and presentations):
a book

Other Funding Applied For or Received for This Project (list source and amounts requested and awarded):

H. F. Guggenheim Fellowship \$38,443 requested

ACLS Fellowship \$34,647 requested

Checklist

- Signed Cover Sheet
- Project Description (800-1200 words)
- Supplement explanation, if necessary
- 2 page CV
- One external letter of support sent to Taft.

Review Taft website for full application guidelines

Taft Grants Received in the Last Five Years:

1. Type and Dates: International conference travel
Amount: \$1751
Project Title: "Eat Paint Shove: Art, tourism and overdevelopment in Bali"
Resulting Publications and Presentations:

Presented paper at International Colloquium on "Tourism, Roads and Cultural Itineraries: Meaning, memory and development," Quebec City, on June 15, 2012

Short version of paper published in *Proceedings of the International Conference: Tourism, Roads and Cultural Itineraries*, edited by Laurent Bourdeau, Pascale Marcotte and Mohamed Habib Saidi, published electronically, Presses de l'Université Laval. ISBN number: 978-2-7637-1789-0.

Longer, revised version being prepared (with Michael Romanos) for submission to scholarly journal *Tourism and cultural change*.
2. Type and Dates: Domestic conference travel
Amount: \$489
Project Title: "A college of one's own: Historically Dalit colleges and the value of minority institutions"
Resulting Publications and Presentations:

Presented paper at the Annual conference on South Asia, October 2011

Submitted (April 2012) to Orient BlackSwan as a chapter in the book manuscript, *Political Context of Education: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Parimala Rao.
3. Type and Dates: Domestic conference travel
Amount: \$594
Project Title: Conversion as seduction: Islamophobia in the law and media
Resulting Publications and Presentations:

Presented paper at the Annual Conference on South Asia, Oct 2010

Updating and revising for inclusion in single authored book.
4. Type and Dates: Taft Center Fellow 2009-10
Amount: stipend to political science department to pay for instruction
Project Title: The politics of religious conversion in India
Resulting Publications and Presentations:

"Caste discrimination and reservations." In *Hinduism and law: An introduction*, ed. By Donald Davis, Timothy Lubin and Jayanth Krishnan. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

With Harita Patel. "India's democracy: Success against the odds," In *Achieving Democracy: Democratization in theory and practice*, edited by Mary Malone, Continuum Books, 2011.

"Scheduled Castes, Christians and Muslims: The politics of macro-majorities and micro-minorities," In *Minority Studies*, edited by Rowena Robinson, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Wrote proposal for edited volume with chapter authors from seven countries, Routledge book contract in 2011, final manuscript due spring 2013. Jenkins, L. D. and Moses. M. S. ** (Eds.) (Forthcoming). *Affirmative Action Matters: Creating Opportunities for Students Around the World*. Routledge International Studies in Higher Education Series. New York and London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis. **Editors made equal contributions and are listed alphabetically.

Presentations:

“Bigamist converts and Romeo jihadis! Renegades and victims in conversion narratives and policies,” National Women’s Studies Annual Meeting, Atlanta, November 14, 2009.

“A lost tribe? Religion, nation and migration from India to Israel,” Charles Phelps Taft Annual Research Symposium, May 13, 2010.

“Anti-caste possibilities: Conversion and affirmative action,” for “Anti-casteism workshop,” University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, April 6, 2012.

“The intersection of caste, class, religion and gender in South Asian politics” for “Women’s representation: A global perspective,” a roundtable at Xavier University, Cincinnati, March 29, 2011.

“Caste and religion,” “Indian democracy, political parties and caste,” and “Reservations and affirmative action,” for “Democracy and the Persistence of Casteism in South Asia: A Workshop,” University of Iowa, Feb 17-19, 2011.

5. Type and Dates: Domestic Conference travel grant

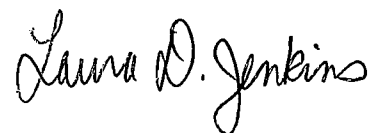
Amount: \$76 for bus to Chicago (rest paid for by Fulbright grant)

Project Title: “Backward classes and Creamy Layers: Intersectionality in Indian Affirmative Action”

Resulting Publications and Presentations:

Presented this paper at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, March 2009.

Coauthored chapter with Kavita Sharma, “India: Beginning a new debate on reserved admissions for castes, tribes and ‘Other Backward Classes’” for Jenkins, L. D. and Moses. M. S. ** (Eds.) (Forthcoming). *Affirmative Action Matters: Creating Opportunities for Students Around the World*. Routledge International Studies in Higher Education Series. New York and London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis. **Editors made equal contributions and are listed alphabetically.



“I will not die a Hindu”: Identity improvisation in India

Taft Faculty Release Fellowship Proposal

Thousands of Buddhists gathered in Maharashtra, India in 2006 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the largest mass conversion in history, when half a million men, women and children from the lowest castes in India rejected Hinduism and become Buddhists. Children in blue uniforms marched alongside monks from other parts of Asia, while speeches blared from speakers mounted on autorickshaws. Busily taking photos, conversing with participants and perusing the political and religious book stalls, I began to grasp how intensely important this conversion still is to the converts and their descendants.

Mass religious conversions are a provocative form of nonviolent resistance, a strategy that shifts numbers between majority and minority groups, and a trigger of backlashes and countermeasures to keep people “in the fold.” *Can religious conversions lead to other forms of mobility for marginalized groups?* My book manuscript on mass conversions by subjugated castes or tribes in India to minority religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism) will demonstrate how group conversions can lead to **social, political** and even **spatial mobility**. *How do people attempt to quell conversions and preserve the status quo?* Conversions to minority religions (including Islam) spark political, media, and legal strategies to **discredit, dissuade** or **disallow converts**. My conclusions reconceptualize religious rights, which currently tend to privilege identity preservation, to better protect the right to change identities.

Explanation of the relevance of the project to the applicant's professional development

A spring semester 2014 release would allow me to complete my book manuscript during a full year sabbatical. With a \$1500 research supplement, I would interview twenty more low caste converts to Buddhism in Nagpur (Maharashtra state) and twenty leaders and members of the Jewish Bnei Menashe community in and near Aizawl (Mizoram state). Completing this book will allow me to become a full professor. I have discussed the project with interested editors at two university presses and will be

sending my formal book proposal in the summer, when my current contracted book manuscript will be done.

Religious conversions caught my attention while researching my first book, on affirmative action in India (2003, 2009). The foremost advocate of this legal and legislative approach to countering social injustice, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, declared conversion an additional, necessary step to empower lower castes. Subsequent research resulted in my publications on mass conversions to Christianity (2007), female converts to Buddhism (2008b), laws against “forcible” conversions (2008a), “religious freedom” arguments both protecting and preventing conversions (2009), and conversion politics’ impact on minority-majority relations (2012).

The book will compare and contrast waves of mass conversions in India and various strategies to prevent them. It is based on a decade of archival and legal research, analysis of print and online media, collection of government and organizational documents in India, Britain, and the US, and interviews of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, activists, social scientists, lawyers and converts.

An account of the proposed final publication

Chapters 2-4 are case studies of the *social, political* and *spatial mobility* facilitated by conversion. Chapter two features lower caste “mass movement” conversions to Christianity in the late colonial era, which upset the political balance as religious communities were becoming a basis for legislative representation. While Mohandas Gandhi opposed these conversions as nationally divisive, Dalit (untouchable) leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar vociferously announced, “I will not die a Hindu!” and openly pondered which religion Dalits should embrace.

After independence, Dr. Ambedkar and his followers participated in the world’s largest conversion, the focus of chapter three. This explicitly religious and political move into Buddhism is emulated in contemporary conversion ceremonies. A few decades later, a marginalized tribal group in northeastern India declared themselves one of the “lost tribes” of Israel. Chapter four documents how nearly two thousand have formally converted to Judaism and migrated to Israel, funded in part by US-

based Christian Zionists who believe their return will expedite the second coming of Christ. These competing interests expose the possibilities and limits of converts' spatial mobility.

Discrediting, dissuading and *disallowing* conversions are strategies featured in three subsequent chapters. Chapter five dissects court cases and a government report about so-called "bigamist converts" to Islam and political and media hype over an alleged "love jihad" to seduce and convert large numbers of young women. These portrayals discredit Muslim converts, particularly women. The Indian government has expanded affirmative action policies for lower castes, as explained in chapter six, to include low caste Sikhs and Buddhists but continues to deny eligibility to low castes Muslims and Christians, thus dissuading converts to certain religions.

The contemporary proliferation of state-level policies against "forcible conversions," the focus of chapter seven, disallow conversions, particularly of women, low castes or tribes, who are assumed to be ingenuous. The concluding chapter reconceptualizes religious rights to better safeguard identity continuity and change.

Justification as a long-term project resulting in significant contributions to the applicant's field

Understanding relations between religious communities is a pressing political issue, and the impact of conversions is a neglected area of study. Conversions or conversion rumors sparked recent conflicts in Pakistan, Egypt, and India and countless historical conflicts worldwide. Identity change is an overlooked aspect of identity politics and empowerment. Identity politics research formerly concentrated on discrete, often competing, groups formed around singular identities. Subsequent "intersectionality" research analyzed the ways multiple identities (and forms of discrimination) overlap (Crenshaw 1989, 1995). My concept of "identity improvisation" expands this critique by examining dynamic shifts by individuals or groups *between* identities. Improvisers make choices that reshape traditions.

Recent research on cultural mobility and elusive identities calls attention to identity mobility as an important area for further study (Greenblatt 2010, Scott 2009). Work on the "fear of small numbers" inspires my examination of efforts to impede conversions to minority religions while also using them to fire up majorities (Appadurai 2006). Studies of political contingency and odyssey experiences signal a

cross-disciplinary preoccupation with change and the need for more animated analyses (Hothschild 2007, Smelser 2009). Political science must heed “dynamic categories and the context of power,” instead of treating groupings such as race, gender or religion as “static traits located toward the beginning of the causal chain” (Junn 2009, 25). My book on identity improvisation assesses identity as a process that shapes and is shaped by power relations.

Detailed project schedule

Already completed: Chapter 1 Introduction: Conversion as identity improvisation, Chapter 2 Mass conversion: Christianity, and Chapter 7 Anti-conversion laws

Summer 2013 Polish sample chapters and send proposal to publishers for consideration

August-September 2013 Chapter 5 Islamophobia in the law and media

October-November 2013 Chapter 6 Affirmative action and conversions

December 2013-January 2014 Research in Maharashtra and Mizoram, India

February-March 2014 Chapter 3 Political apostasy: Buddhism

April-May 2014 Chapter 4 A lost tribe: Judaism

Summer 2014 Chapter 8 Conclusion: Dynamic rights, send manuscript to publisher

Fall 2014 While teaching, revise manuscript in light of external reviewers' comments

Brief budget outline, with explanation of costs

\$1500 research supplement will be used for airfare to India for research in Maharashtra and Mizoram.

Windows of opportunity necessitate prompt interviews of two convert groups. Maharashtrian Buddhists who remember their 1956 conversion are aging. Revised travel regulations for Mizoram allow access to the Bnei Menashe community, and the Israeli government just reauthorized their immigration.

Works Cited

- Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. *Fear of small numbers: an essay on the geography of fear*. Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw Kimberlé W. et al. 1995. *Critical Race Theory*. New York: The New Press.
- 1989. "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, pp. 139-167.
- Greenblatt, Stephan. 2010. *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hochschild, Jennifer. 2007. "Contingency and intention in American racial and ethnic categories." With Traci Burch, in Ian Shapiro and Sonu Bedu, eds. *Political Contingency: Studying the Unexpected, the Accidental, the Unforeseen*. NYU Press.
- Katzenstein, Mary Fainsod. 1998. *Moving Feminist Protest inside the Church and Military*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jenkins, Laura Dudley. 2012. "Scheduled Castes, Christians and Muslims: The politics of macro- majorities and micro-minorities." In Rowena Robinson, ed. *Minority Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- 2009. "Diversity and the Constitution in India: What is Religious Freedom?" *Drake Law Review* 57, (summer) pp. 913-947.
- 2008a. "Legal Limits on Religious Conversion in India," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 71, 2 (spring) pp. 109-127.
- 2008b. "Women's empowerment through religious conversion: Voices of Buddhists in Nagpur, India" in Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus, eds. *Speaking truth to power: Religion, caste, and the subaltern question in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2007. "True Believers? Agency and Sincerity in Representations of 'Mass Movement' Converts in 1930s India" in Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhart, eds. *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity*, Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- 2003. *Identity and identification in India: Defining the disadvantaged*. London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon. Reissued in paperback by Routledge in 2009.
- Junn, Jane. 2009. "Dynamic categories and the context of power." In Gary King et al, eds. *The future of political science: 100 perspectives*. New York: Routledge, pp. 25-27.
- Scott, James C. 2009. *The art of not being governed*. Yale University Press.
- Smelser, Neil J. 2009. *The Odyssey experience: Physical, social, psychological, and spiritual journeys*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Laura Dudley Jenkins
Political Science Department, University of Cincinnati
<http://www.LauraDudleyJenkins.com>

Education

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Political Science 1992-8
PhD Political Science August 1998. MA Political Science May 1993, Languages: Hindi and Urdu
Lawrence University 1987-1991
BA *summa cum laude*, government and music majors, Phi Beta Kappa, Languages: Marathi and French

Academic Employment

Associate Professor with tenure. University of Cincinnati Department of Political Science 2004-present.
Assistant Professor. 1998-2004.
Interim Co-Director, International Human Rights Certificate Program, 2012-13.
Faculty Affiliate, Department of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies and Asian Studies Program.
Undergraduate Director, Political Science and International Affairs, 2006-2009.

Select Publications

Identity and Identification in India: Defining the Disadvantaged. London and New York: Routledge Curzon 2003, reissued in paperback by Routledge 2009.

"Scheduled Castes, Christians and Muslims: The politics of macro-majorities and micro-minorities." In Rowena Robinson, ed. *Minority Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

With Harita Patel. "India's democracy: Success against the odds." In Mary Malone, ed. *Achieving Democracy: Democratization in theory and practice*, Continuum Books, 2011.

"Caste Discrimination and Reservations." In Donald Davis, Timothy Lubin and Jayanth Krishnan, eds. *Hinduism and Law: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

"Diversity and the Constitution in India: What is Religious Freedom?" *Drake Law Review* 57, 4 (summer 2009) pp. 913-947.

"Legal Limits on Religious Conversion in India," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 71, 2 (spring 2008) pp. 109-127.

"Women's empowerment through religious conversion: Voices of Buddhists in Nagpur, India" in Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus, eds. *Speaking truth to power: Religion, caste, and the subaltern question in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.

"True Believers? Agency and Sincerity in Representations of 'Mass Movement' Converts in 1930s India" in Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhart, eds. *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007.

With Theano Terkenli and Marcia Bellas "Tourism impacts on local life: Socio-cultural continuity and change in Crete." *Aegean Geographical Journal*, 16, 1-2 (2007) pp. 37-52.

"Race, Caste and Justice: Social Science Categories and Antidiscrimination Policies in India and the United States." *Connecticut Law Review* 36, 3 (spring 2004) pp. 747-85.

Updated on 1/3/2013

“Another ‘People of India’ Project: Colonial and National Anthropology,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, 4 (Nov. 2003). pp. 1143-1170.

“Becoming Backward: Preferential Policies and Religious Minorities in India.” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 39, 2 (July 2001) pp. 32-50.

“Personal Law and Reservations: Volition and Religion in Contemporary India” in Gerald J. Larson, ed. *Religion and Personal Law in Contemporary India: A call to judgment*, Delhi: Social Science Press and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

“Caste, Class and Islam: Debating the Boundaries of Backwardness in India.” *Eastern Anthropologist* 53, 3-4 (July-Dec. 2000) pp. 327-39.

“Competing Inequalities: The Struggle over Reserved Legislative Seats for Women in India’s Parliament.” *International Review of Social History* 44, 7 (1999) pp. 53-75.

“Preferential Policies for Disadvantaged Ethnic Groups: Employment and Education” in Crawford Young, ed. *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: A Comparative Inquiry*. Macmillan Press, 1998.

Consulting Editor: *India and Pakistan: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2003.

Encyclopedia articles: Indian nationalism, caste, Dr. Ambedkar & the Buddhist Dalits, Women & constitutions

In progress:

Jenkins, L. D. and Moses, M. S. ** (Eds.) (Forthcoming). *Affirmative Action Matters: Creating Opportunities for Students Around the World*. Routledge International Studies in Higher Education Series. New York and London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis. **Editors made equal contributions and are listed alphabetically.

“Secularism, nationalism and transnational entanglements in India.” In Marian Burchard, Mattias Middel, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, eds. *Comparative secularities: Religion and modernity in five world regions*. Routledge and de Gruyter.

Select Fellowships and Grants

Fulbright New Century Scholar, \$37,000, research in India & South Africa on equity in higher education, 2007-8.
NEH grant to participate in summer institute “Diversity and Debates in Islam” June-July 2004.
Dartmouth Humanities Institute Fellowship, “Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity” Sept.-Dec. 2002.

Select professional service

Referee for journals *American Political Science Review*, *Comparative Politics*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, *Security Studies*, *Gender and Politics*, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *National Identities*, *Political Geography*, *Sage Open*, and *Politics, Religion and Ideology*.

Vice President since October 2012, Board Member since 2000, South Asian Muslim Studies Association.

Taft Research Center: Chair of Charles Phelps Taft Research Center Research Support Committee 2010-ongoing,
Member of Charles Phelps Taft Research Center Executive Board, 2010-ongoing,
Faculty Coordinator for Taft interdisciplinary Human Rights Research Group 2012-ongoing.

Updated on 1/3/2013



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Taft Faculty Release Fellowship Proposal Committee
January 13, 2013

Dear Taft Committee,

I write to you in my capacity as Head of the Department of Political Science to recommend without reservation Dr. Laura Jenkins' application for a Taft Faculty Release Fellowship for Spring 2014. Her proposed project "*I will not die a Hindu*": *Identity improvisation in India*" will lead to the completion of a book that will bring together several years of research she has been conducting. This book will cement her reputation as one of the top South Asian comparative politics specialists in the United States. The concept of identity improvisation as a means to social, political, and academic mobility is powerful and builds logically from Laura's earlier work on affirmative action policy. This construct will become an important explanatory framework in the field of identity politics.

Simply put, Laura is an exceptional academic. She has maintained an active research agenda despite continuously serving the department with a significant teaching and advising role. She guides or supports graduate student research annually with multiple doctoral and MA candidates working with her. She consistently goes the extra mile to enhance the undergraduate experience of our many majors and minors.

One of the justifications for supporting this release, which will attach to an approved academic leave, in my mind, beyond the high quality of the proposal and its likely impact in the field, and, thus the profile that it will bring to UC, is that Laura is so dedicated to the department that she is always devoting time to multiple issues. She deserves and needs dedicated release from these duties, so that she can bring this book to fruition.

My role as department Head is to balance our ability to deliver a quality curriculum with our commitment to be a department that is research active and nationally and internationally impactful. Given the number of open positions in the department, releasing anyone will require some creative effort on my part to find resources to sustain high quality instruction. The Taft Release would be a critical aid to the Department of Political Science and allow me to administratively balance holes in our teaching and fully support Dr. Jenkins's scholarship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard J. Harknett".

Richard J. Harknett, PhD
Head, Department of Political Science

