



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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## Summer Seminar Mentors Rising Scholars

Ten graduate and advanced undergraduate students selected from more than half a dozen institutions participated in the Mormon Scholars Foundation summer seminar held this past May and June under the auspices of the Maxwell Institute.

The theme for the seminar was “Foundations of Mormon Theology: The Nature of God and the Human.” Terryl Givens, professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond, and author of a forthcoming two-volume history of the subject to be published by Oxford University Press, led the students. Richard Bushman, Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies in the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, oversaw the seminar.

The Maxwell Institute mentors young scholars who are advancing in fields related to the work and mission of the Institute. The summer seminar gives the next generation of scholars the benefit of mentoring by leading Mormon scholars who publish in the field of Mormon studies.

Each of the participants presented a paper at a culminating symposium held at Brigham Young University, which showcased a number of important insights gleaned by the students from weeks of immersion in archives. Paper topics were as diverse as “Interracial Marriage in Early Mormon Thought,” “A Savior Unto Israel: Bloodlines and Assurance in Early Mormon Salvation Theory,” and “Wallowing in the Mud and Snorting Like Beasts: The Problem of the Body in Early Mormon Spiritual Experience.”

One example of discoveries made by participants concerned an important document published for the first time in the recent Joseph Smith Papers volume—a transcription of a song sung in tongues. The Papers editors had not been able to identify the speaker, the transcriber, or the interpreter of this text appearing in the Book of Commandments and Revelations, the earliest existing master record of Joseph Smith’s revelations. David Golding, one of the seminar students, found a broadside in BYU special collections that indicated that David Patton spoke the text in tongues, and Sidney Rigdon interpreted.

One participant summarized his experience with the seminar: “When I first applied to the . . . summer seminar, I wasn’t sure what to expect. As a non-Mormon who had grown up in the shadow of the church, I had been taught to view anything that BYU did with suspicion and as likely proselytizing. I had heard, however, that the seminar had produced some good scholarship and respected what I knew of the work of the professor who was leading it.

“What I discovered . . . was a community of scholars who was committed to understanding Mormon theology and history within an academic framework while at the same time recognizing its spiritual value for members of the faith. The knowledge and forthrightness of my fellow participants impressed me. . . . Participating in the seminar increased my respect for Mormon theology and scholarship.”

The Mormon Scholars Foundation, established in 2007 and directed by Bushman, Givens, and Andrew Skinner (Professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU and former executive director of the Maxwell Institute), organizes and funds conferences and seminars in collaboration with other organizations such as the Maxwell Institute. Information about future summer seminars will be made available through the Maxwell Institute. ♦

# INSIGHTS

The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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By furthering religious scholarship through the study of scripture and other texts, Brigham Young University’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship seeks to deepen understanding and nurture discipleship among Latter-day Saints while promoting mutual respect and goodwill among people of all faiths.



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