

MA STUDENT STUDIES BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY AT PTS

Richard Flateau, a first-year student in the M.A. program, credits his penchant for cultural studies to his upbringing in Brooklyn, N.Y. As a child of educators, Richard was exposed to the many flavors of New York City. From diverse cultural experiences to encounters with different religious traditions, Richard's interest in these areas were fostered and encouraged by his parents. Although he was raised in a Christian home, Richard was surrounded by friends who came from Jewish, Muslim, and non-Christian backgrounds.



A deep interest in interfaith dialogue came out of the events that took place Sept. 11, 2001. Richard was only into his second week of high school when the World Trade Center tumbled to the ground. The reverberations from the attacks remained especially close to him. "9/11 is one of my most vivid memories of home." He contemplated leaving New York City, the epicenter of diversity in the U.S., because he wanted to have new experiences to draw upon in a place that was unfamiliar to him.

In 2005, Richard journeyed to Xavier University in New Orleans, La., located in the ill-fated 13th ward of New Orleans. After his first day of college, Hurricane Katrina hit, forcing the students to evacuate. After the city was cleared for re-entry, Richard was shocked to see the devastation. "When I arrived, I saw New Orleans had changed completely; large amounts of abandoned houses and displaced people populated the once vibrant city. A sense of emptiness pervaded not only the campus but the whole area as well."

Returning to New Orleans and seeing the aftermath prompted Richard to create two tutoring programs with friends on campus. "Tutoring was a way for us to give back to the community. Life had to go on and we wanted to help in a very specific way," he says. Participating in the rebuilding of New Orleans through the school systems gave Richard a passion to continue his education after college.

As Richard's faith grew, his interest in the Old Testament—specifically biblical archeology—likewise increased. Having little context or exposure to the field, he wanted to learn from Dr. Ron Tappy, professor of Bible and archeology, and Dr. Karen Bowden Cooper, curator of the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology. Through his study of the Hebrew language and classes that have opened up the historical and sociological aspects of the Old Testament, Richard is learning a bridge the Word and the world. Richard is traveling to Israel and Palestine with a team from the Seminary during the spring break. However, to be in the thick of interfaith and intercultural conflict will also give him great pause as he reflects on the many conversations he has had with his Jewish and Muslim friends. Richard prays that this experience will be a full circle moment for him as every part of his upbringing has brought him to this point in his journey.

Written March 2012

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