

## Tatum

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“It is actually, apparently, so intensive that they don't even allow you to meet up with your family or friends while you're there.”

ROBERT TATUM  
Economist



CLINT LATHINGHOUSE - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Robert Tatum, assistant professor of economics, will travel throughout Brazil with a group of 16 teachers from across America. Tatum said his main research focus is looking at how trade liberalizations are reducing trade barriers and impacting microeconomies of the world.

be that she decides to connect this with her senior research. Their expectation of it is that she at least presents at the spring symposium.”

The goals of this case study include examining economic issues surrounding property rights and credit markets and their implications for sustainable development and building and using a two-period model to analyze how the lack of formal property rights and access to credit interact to affect the small farmer's use of land, according to the 2007 Summer Research Partnership Proposal.

Regina Piexoto Vasquez, one of the program's coordinators, warns in an e-mail that the weather is not particularly reliable in Brazil. In Sao Paulo, the temperature drops between 6 and 20 degrees Celsius. However, in the Amazon, the temperature stays around 30 degrees Celsius.

“It's a country of a lot of different areas: you have the Amazons, you have the wetlands, you have the coastal lands, you know, all sorts of things,” Tatum said.

## Pastafarianism causes controversy, forces people to question religion

By Maggie West  
STAFF WRITER

To Cameron Bumgarner, his religion is best personified in the form of a gigantic airborne blob of spaghetti and meatballs.

“My religion says that the Flying Spaghetti Monster created the world after a night of heavy drinking,” said Bumgarner, 26, local photographer.

A self-described “Pastafarian,” Bumgarner is a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. The Internet based religion was formed in 2005 as a response to the Kansas School Board's attempt to teach creationism as an alternative to evolution.

“The religion's founder, Bobby Henderson, wrote the school and said ‘If you are going to teach your religious theories, you should have to teach mine too,’” Bumgarner said.

During the last few weeks, local and national media garnered much attention on the pasta-oriented religion, due to the recent suspension of North Buncombe High School student Bryan Killian.

The school suspended the 16-year-old student after he refused to take off his eye patch, which he said was a symbol of his Pastafarianism.

“According to the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, pirates are considered sacred,” Bumgarner said. “By putting on an eyepatch, the kid was observing the rituals of Pastafarianism.”

Shortly after Killian's suspension, Buncombe County School officials released an official statement to the press regarding the incident. In the report, they said the student had been suspended due to his infraction of the school's dress code.

For Bumgarner, Killian's suspension had everything to do with religion.

“I think this is really an issue of religious tolerance,” he said.

According to Bumgarner, the school persecuted Killian for his religious beliefs because they were not stereotypical religious practices.

“If you look at some of the tenets of Christianity, they make about as much sense as worshipping spaghetti,” Bumgarner said. “In communion, you are supposedly eating and drinking the body of Christ. How is that any better than wearing an eyepatch?”

Because of the media exposure surrounding Killian's suspension, many local residents have begun to question what exactly constitutes a religion.

“Who decides what's a religion and what's a joke?” said Bumgarner.

According to UNC Asheville Philosophy Professor Melissa Burchard, the definition of a true religion is one to which people are seriously committed.

“I suspect that no one who practices this religion of ‘spaghettiness’ is truly committed,” she said.

Although Burchard said she had her doubts about the sincerity of many Pastafarians, she said the dismissal of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster is



CLINT LATHINGHOUSE - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Cameron Bumgarner, 26-year-old self-described pastafarian wearing an eyepatch, which is a symbol of his religious beliefs. One tenet of Pastafarianism is that pirates are sacred beings.

“Who decides what is a religion and what is a joke?”

CAMERON BUMGARNER  
self-described Pastafarian

“Christianity is not a religion. It is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

REV. JERRY YOUNG  
Trinity Baptist Church

in no way indicative of her attitude toward emerging religious practices.

“The fact that this looks like a silly and not real religion doesn't mean that we should reject every claim of a new religion,” Burchard said.

Local religious authorities presented a variety of definitions considering what, in their opinion, count as a legitimate religion.

“A religion is something that provides the adherent with a coherent and cohesive set of values that inform his or her relationship to God and other human beings,” said Rabbi Robert Ratner of the Congregation Beth Ha Tephila.

According to the Rev. Jerry Young of Trinity Baptist Church, a religion is something with rules and regulations concerning one's behavior. However, the Asheville native maintained that his faith was not a religion. “Christianity is not a religion,” he said. “It is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

The Rev. Todd Page of Heritage Baptist Church issued a

similar statement concerning the nature of Christianity and religion.

“It's hard for me to speculate about other religions because anything that deviates from the Bible is a falsehood,” he said.

Some students say there should be a more specific criteria for what can be considered a religion.

“I think that there has to be a certain number of followers,” said Laura Francis, freshman French student.

For others, the acceptance of new religions is much more broad.

“I think that they should always be recognized,” said Anna Schlesinger, senior psychology student. “It's about respecting that person's beliefs.”

Schlesinger said that the only time in which one should not respect an emerging religion is when the actions of a particular faith advocate violence against others.

“When it harms another person, that is going too far,” she said. “But wearing an eyepatch isn't going to hurt anybody.”

## Marsha

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“I didn't know enough about it,” he said. “I didn't know what it would be like. But now I'm very thankful to have her.”

Marsha is a close friend to him, Spurrier said.

“I rarely ever leave her home, but when I do, it feels so weird. If you're used to having someone with you all the time, it doesn't feel right. If something happened to her, I would be very upset. She's had a really big impact on me.”



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY CHRIS SPURRIER

He was initially hesitant about getting a helper dog, though now Marsha is one of his best friends, according to Spurrier.

For more information on canine assistants, visit [www.canineassistants.org](http://www.canineassistants.org).

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