The Religion and IR (REL) section is now completing its third year as an ISA section.

1. Membership and Funds:
As of November 2015, this section now boasts 245 members. This is a 13% growth in membership compared to last year. We are now the 22nd largest section out of 32 ISA sections in terms of membership. Our balance as of November 2015 is $3228.09.

2. Governance:
The acting executive committee that formed this section was formally voted into office at the annual convention in Toronto in 2014. It consists of: Ron Hassner (chair), Nukhet Sandal (vice chair/program chair), Larry Rubin (secretary), Turan Kayaoglu (communications chair), Sara Silvestri (treasurer), Jocelyne Cesari (awards), and Patrick James (at large).

Per our charter, the chair and vice/program chair will serve for two years whereas all other positions will serve for three years prior to reelection. As a result, we will run elections for chair and vice chair/program chair at the forthcoming ISA convention in Atlanta (March 2016).

3. The 2015 Convention:
The recent ISA convention in New Orleans was our second chance to host panels. Through the efforts of our program chair, Nukhet Sandal, we managed to co-sponsor 17 panels (up from 8 at the prior convention), including panels on religion and foreign policy, human rights, secularism, violence, the Middle East, and many more. These panels were extraordinarily well attended.

Impressive as these numbers are, our program chair outdid herself further for the 2016 convention. We were allotted 14 slots but will be co-sponsoring 26 panels! We are delighted to sponsor a range of religion and IR panels that is representative of our rapidly growing membership.

Our reception was equally well-attended. It was sponsored by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs (Georgetown University) and the journal Review of Faith and International Affairs. Some 100 members joined to eat, drink and celebrate our achievements as a new section. The catering costs of that reception amounted to $2263.17, of which the majority ($2000) was funded by the two sponsors.
We handed out our first “Best Graduate Student Paper Award” to Jason Klocek (U.C. Berkeley), who was selected by a committee headed by Jocelyne Cesari, our awards chair. We also hosted our first Distinguished Scholar panel, honoring Dr. Douglas Johnston.

4. The Forthcoming 2016 Convention:
In addition to panels, the business meeting, and the reception, we will be hosting our first working group, organized by our co-chair, Nukhet Sandal, and our communications chair, Turan Kayaoglu. The title of the working group is “Religion and Peace: Possibilities, Challenges and Prospects”. It is co-sponsored by the Peace Studies section and features panels and discussions prior to, during and after the convention.

This convention also offers our first opportunity to present an award for the best book on religion and IR. A committee, headed by Deina Abdelkader (Harvard University), selected two co-recipients for the award. They are Amy Reynolds, for her book Free Trade and Faithful Globalization: Saving the Market (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics); and Avi Max Spiegel, for his book Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics). The winner of our graduate student paper award is Tanya Schwarz (U.C. Irvine) for her paper “Interfaith Development and Humanitarianism”.

The distinguished scholar honored at the 2016 convention will be Dr. Jeffrey Hayes (London Metropolitan University). As in the prior year, the distinguished scholar was selected by the executive committee by consensus. At our forthcoming business meeting, we intend to institute more formalized procedures for electing distinguished scholars.

We have raised $2,000 for our reception in Atlanta, half from the Religion and Politics Program (U.C. Berkeley), and the rest from the journal Review of Faith & International Affair ($500) and Cornell University Press ($500). This sponsorship will enable us to cover more than half of the costs of the catering for our 2016 reception (total cost $3760). This will be our first time drawing significant funds from our budget, which we have been careful to grow over the last three years.

5. Outreach and Goals
Our membership goal is 300 scholars by ISA 2017. To achieve this goal, we are sending out bi-annual newsletters to our members. We have also set up a facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/groups/336226026577855/). Eighty-eight of our members have already joined that facebook page.