

Models promoting religious literacy among citizens of a global society

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**Religion is often discussed in relation to/
context of another discipline/profession.**

Complete this phrase:

Religion and _____

Agenda

1. Why religious literacy?
2. Challenges unique to teaching about religion;
difficult dialogues small group discussions
3. SVHE Institute on Religion in Curriculum and Culture of Higher Education
 - a. Overview and programs being developed nationally
 - b. The student role in this process
 - c. Specific examples (co-curricular and curricular)
4. Small group discussion/sharing
what initiatives can your campus pursue?
5. Closing thoughts, Q & A

What is “Religious Literacy”?

“The religiously literate person is knowledgeable about religion, including its place in human experience and its impact on our world”

- *Center for Religious Literacy*

Wingspread Declaration

“All (students), regardless of their beliefs and values, need to understand how religions work.

They need to know the constructive and critical appraisals of religion’s historic and contemporary significance and, in particular, its impact on public life...

(Students) need to understand the historical relationship between religion and the disciplines... the contemporary relevance of religion to the disciplines, the professions, and public life... (cont.)

(Students) should understand the need to adhere rigorously to disciplinary procedures for constructing hypotheses and disciplinary standards for evaluating theories and truth claims...

Teaching about religion requires understanding of and respect for agnostics, atheists, and secularists, as well as for a broad range of religious perspectives"

– *SVHE Wingspread Declaration*

The situation

2004 Gallup survey

“Teenagers’ Knowledge of the Bible”

(1,002 private and public

high school students, ages of 13 -18)

Awareness of World’s Five Major Religions

Correctly named all five: 10 %

Correctly named three or more: 54 %

Unable to correctly name any of the five: 15 %

The situation, cont.

60% of American adults
can not correctly name half
of the Ten Commandments,
per Gallup poll.

Challenges to developing religious literacy and engaging in interfaith dialogue

- One of those topics that many are taught is not a part of “polite conversation”
- May artificially separate components of identity
- Creation of dedicated times and places
- Shifting to co-learner orientation

A taste of interfaith dialogue

- Creating a safe space – guidelines
- What's in a name?
 - Share your name story with your group
 - Does your name have any association (intended or unintended) with a faith tradition?
 - How does this association influence how you understand yourself in the world?
- Debrief and reflections

The Institute – Background, Models

Society for Values in Higher Education convened 2005 Wingspread Conference to address:

- Religious literacy – what do graduates need to know about religion in a diverse democracy and global democracy?
- Preserve standards of Intellectual Inquiry, Reason, and Academic Freedom;
- Attend to Students Seeking Purpose and Spiritual Meaning

Building on the Wingspread Conference,
the Society for Values in Higher Education,
with support from the Jessie Ball duPont
Fund,

invited 10 colleges and universities to
send administrator-faculty-student
teams to participate in a 5-day

Institute on Religion in Curriculum
and Culture in Higher Education to:

- Reevaluate the role of religion and religious literacy in higher education;
- To determine and address difficult questions generated by religious differences in the classroom and in society;
- To create exemplary curricular and co-curricular model programs to enhance religious literacy, reflecting the needs of the diverse participating institutions and their students
- To develop plans to assess learning outcomes of proposed programs

Participating Campuses and Projects:

- *Berry College (GA)* Monotheistic Religions and the Public Square (class)
- *Bethel University (MN)* Interfaith Dialogue with Non-Christian Faith Traditions
- *Colorado College (CO)* Community Service Learning Practicum for the Environment

- *Florida State Univ. (FL)* Mini-Curricular Module for Islam and Islamicate Civilizations
- *LaGuardia Community College (NY)* Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Religious Diversity
- **Portland State Univ. (OR)* Implementing a Religion Studies Program
- *Seton Hill Univ. (PA)* Assessing the Effectiveness of University Learning Objectives in Religion and Spirituality

- *Sewanee: The Univ. of the South (TN)* Establishing a Religious Life Learning Community
- *Univ. of Missouri-Columbia (MO)* Religious Literacy for Professionals (graduate-level E-course)
- **Univ. of the Pacific (CA)* Creating an Interfaith and Social Justice Learning Community

During the Institute each campus developed their proposal with the assistance of Institute “faculty” (mentors).

Each campus presented their project to other Institute participants for reflection and feedback.

Following Institute participation, each campus is keeping SVHE apprised of their progress toward implementation and assessment of their project.

Student Role in the Institute

- To give professors a different perspective regarding what goes on inside the classroom
- Offer opinions on how we think discussions should be guided

Student Role Around Campus

- To drive certain events in order to gain more student participation
- Add to conversation about religious activities in order to make the activity more student friendly
- Act as a liaison between students and faculty.

Examples of two campus Institute participants, demonstrating the range of projects underway.

- University of the Pacific
- Portland State University

Campus specific initiatives: Pacific

- Interfaith Council
- Interfaith and Social Justice residential learning community
- Capacity building in intercultural dialogue and interaction
- Alternative spring break interfaith exploration trips
- Sacred space and garden
- Interfaith Resource Center



“Let Knowledge Serve the City”

Motto of Portland State University

Learning Outcomes – Why this?

- Liberally educated students should know about religions and the common stories, traditions, customs, norms that are rooted in religious belief and practice.
- The University's mission and commitment is to global and local engagement, therefore it is important to understand the cultural and religious experience in both contexts.
- There is a need to address the variety of contemporary issues in which religion has a major influence and is influenced by including the social, economic, & political contexts.

■ *cont.* →

Learning Outcomes – Goals*

- Define and understand the basic tenets of major world religions by acquiring familiarity with religious history, literature, and thought.
- Comprehend, appreciate, and assess the place of religion in the public sphere.

cont →

Learning Outcomes - Goals *cont.*:

- Grasp the complexities of the interaction between religion and the city including the intersection of religion and the economic, social, and political domains of public life.
- Express the ways in which religion defines and guides the relationship between personal, social, and global well-being and personal judgment and action.

Portland State University will establish a 30 credit hour minor Religious Studies & Urban Life offered jointly by College of Liberal Arts & Sciences and the College of Urban & Public Affairs.

We plan to launch the minor Fall term 2010.

Programming – Content:

- RS 201 Religion in the urban context 4 Cr
- RS 301 Introduction to Religions I 4 Cr
- RS 302 Introduction to Religions II 4 Cr
- RS 401 Religion in the Marketplace 4 Cr
- RS 402 Religion in the Public Square 4 Cr
- RS 403 Religion & Urban Social Life 4 Cr
- RS 407 Religion & Urban Life Seminar or
RS 421 Religion & Urban Life Capstone 6 Cr

Assessment & Reporting:

- Learning goals will be mapped to the syllabi for courses in the minor.
- End of term student evaluations with learning goals mapped to the evaluation.
- Student learning will be demonstrated through completion of the student portfolio

Resources and support –

- The major collaborators in this project, particularly on campus, will be the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Urban and Public Affairs.

Your Turn...

- What initiatives can your campus pursue,
- curricular? co-curricular?
 - dedicated course(s)?
 - woven into existing courses?
 - discipline specific? cross-disciplinary?
 - profession-related?
 - student-oriented?
 - for all campus members?
 - for greater community?