



## Multifaith Education in Seminaries: A Resource Document

From 2004-2014, Auburn was actively committed to advancing multifaith education in American theological schools. As part of our effort to support seminary faculty and educators who are committed to multifaith education, we created these resources. Auburn expresses its gratitude to the Henry Luce Foundation for its support of work in this field, which allowed Auburn to develop these resources. Comments and questions should be directed to Rabbi Justus Baird, Auburn's Dean.

### What's in this Resource Document

#### **ATS Accreditation Standard**

Text of the standard released in 2012 by the Association of Theological Schools.

#### **Teaching and Pedagogy**

Nine tactics for teaching in the classroom and the field from faculty experienced in multifaith education. Results of a faculty survey about pedagogies in use.

#### **Studies and Evaluations**

Links to program evaluations and studies on the practice of multifaith education in seminaries.

#### **Popular Press**

Links to articles that feature the role of multifaith education in theological education.

#### **Recommended Resources**

Recommended educational resources for seminary faculty engaging in multifaith education in the classroom and the field.

#### **Bibliography**

## ATS Christian Hospitality Accreditation Standard

From 2010 to 2012, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) engaged in the **Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices project** under the leadership of Stephen Graham. The project sought educational changes in the 273 member schools of ATS that prepare the majority of professional religious leaders in the United States and Canada. The goal of the project was to achieve curricular and cocurricular change within member schools to enhance the abilities of graduates to function effectively in pastoral contexts in a multifaith society.

**Below is the text of the new accreditation standard that emerged from the project.** For a detailed background about the project, see Stephen Graham's essay "Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices in a Multifaith Society: An ATS Project, 2010–2012" in *Theological Education* 47:1 (2012): 1-10.

- **A.2.3 Cultural context:** The program shall provide opportunities to develop a critical understanding of and creative engagement with the cultural realities and structures within which the church lives and carries out its mission.
- **A.2.3.1** The program shall provide for instruction in contemporary cultural and social issues and their significance for diverse linguistic and cultural contexts of ministry. Such instruction should draw on the insights of the arts and humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.
- **A.2.3.2** MDiv education shall engage students with the global character of the church as well as ministry in the multifaith and multicultural context of contemporary society. This should include attention to the wide diversity of religious traditions present in potential ministry settings, as well as expressions of social justice and respect congruent with the institution's mission and purpose.

## 9 Teaching Methods for Multifaith Education in Seminaries

Multifaith education presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for the seminary educator. Below are short descriptions of pedagogical approaches tested by top faculty. The bold heading indicates a name for the teaching method, followed by the professor's name and the name of the course, when relevant. A number of these descriptions (which were collected by Auburn) are published as teaching tactics in a special multifaith education issue of *Teaching Theology and Religion* (October 2013).

### **Multifaith / Multicultural Group Collaborations**

*Judith Berling, Graduate Theological Union*

Inspired by Confucian academies, where students would engage primary writings in conversation with one another and with their teachers, Berling divided

her students in a Confucianism and Christianity course across age, culture, academic program, and religious affiliation into small groups. First, each group discussed and presented primary material from Confucian thinkers. Second, they presented and critiqued a scholar of Christianity and Confucianism and his or her approach to the material. Berling reports, "The collaboration far exceeded my expectations. The diversity of the groups opened up conversations on a number of levels...The relationships among students within groups was itself part of the learning experience, since both cultural/learning styles and relationships to Confucianism varied considerably. They did not hesitate to address the challenging issues raised by the authors and by their own experiences, and the entire class benefited. Removing myself from fine control of all of the presentations led to a rich and engaging learning experience for the students."

### **Concentric Circles Dialogue**

*Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, Claremont School of Theology*

Kujawa-Holbrook adapted this large group process for 20 or more learners from anti-racism training for interreligious classroom and conference settings. Form a large double circle by asking participants to count off by twos. "1"s move with their chair into the center, form an inner circle and face their chairs outward. "2"s form an outer circle and sit facing a partner from the inner circle. Partners self-introduce briefly with context-relevant information. Engage partners in a series of questions about their own personal religious or spiritual tradition and experiences. Only one partner may talk at a time, and responses should be framed as "I" statements and not intended to speak on behalf of a group. After each question, participants in one of the circles rotate (by one or two chairs). Questions should become progressively deeper or more intimate. Questions might include, "What is your religious/spiritual tradition and what are you most proud of from that heritage?" "Growing up, what did the adults in your life teach you about religious differences?" "When and how did you first become aware of religious differences and that people were treated differently based on those differences?" "Today, what is your greatest fear in interreligious dialogue?" "How has religious prejudice/oppression kept you separate from others?" "What do you hope to gain from interreligious dialogue?" Consider a full-group debriefing to invite reflection on the exercise. "Did you learn anything new? What was the most difficult question? Are there any insights/learning that you would like to share with the group?"

### **Human Subjects Research**

*Paul D. Numrich, Methodist Theological School in Ohio and Trinity Lutheran Seminary*

Numrich supervises research projects at two Christian seminaries and chairs the human subjects research committee at one of them. He discovered that Christian seminarians often learn valuable lessons about interreligious relations through human subjects research. Human subjects research protects subjects from harm and invites them to give fully informed consent to be studied. For seminarian researchers, the process can trigger learning such as

attentiveness to historical and contemporary social dynamics; deeper awareness of majority/minority religious dynamics; and experiences of discomfort after making gaffes of improper greetings, gestures or personal/sacred space. Seminarians whose worldviews are challenged by a subject often engage in constructive introspection and dialogue (as opposed to defensiveness or disputation). Numrich reports that unanticipated, even awkward, field experiences can lead to deep learning, and shapes Christian seminarians to be more sensitive and trustworthy participants in interreligious relationships.

### **Small Group Experiential Learning**

*Christopher Key Chapple, Loyola Marymount University*

Chapple developed small group learning experiences for two courses. For a Religions of the World course, groups of 5 students are assigned one religious community and complete two assignments together: viewing and presentation of a film, and visiting three sites in the Los Angeles associated with their assigned religion. In World Religions and Ecology, groups of 5 students are divided (by interest) into earth, water, fire, air and space. Each group views and presents a film and completes 15-20 hours of field-based service work related to their area. Chapple reports that "each class learns firsthand what is happening in the field and also develops analytical (and sometimes critical) skills for the assessment of media."

### **Storytelling Partners**

*Jennifer Peace, Andover Newton Theological School*

To tap the power of storytelling for encountering the religious other, Peace developed this hour-long exercise for both classroom and community settings. The steps are: (i) divide the group into pairs (facilitator can participate if there is an odd number); (ii) each pair selects an initial storyteller and story-receiver; (iii) storytellers are given 5 minutes (use a timer) to share a "story of an encounter across lines of religious difference" (if they have note, substitute a story across any line of difference); receivers may not interrupt; (iv) story-receivers take 2 minutes to repeat back the story as they heard it, without interruption; (v) storytellers have 2 minutes to respond (to clarify, correct, explain or elaborate); (vi) partners switch roles and repeat steps iii-v. To conclude, de-brief the exercise in full group for 20-30 minutes. Peace reports rich sharing from the exercise. In the words of participants: "I found myself wanting to make connections while the storyteller was talking. It was humbling to just listen and realize, 'this isn't about me.'" "I haven't told this story to anyone in 45 years and until I spoke it out loud, I had no idea how much it has influenced my view of the world." "I was surprised at how healing it was, just to have another person really listen to my story."

*EDITOR'S NOTE:* Strategic storytelling is a critical component of public communication and media strategy (not to mention preaching and pastoral work). Encouraging future religious leaders to practice telling their own personal stories, and those of others, will help them develop powerful communication skills. – Justus Baird (For more information, see Auburn's training offerings in media

training, public narrative, digital storytelling, and more at [auburnseminary.org/learn/](http://auburnseminary.org/learn/).

### **Current Event Case Studies in Interfaith Engagement**

*Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer, Interfaith Youth Core*

Patel and Meyer use current events as case studies in interreligious tension or cooperation. They choose an article that highlights the complexities of religious diversity in American life (the subject of their course), such as this [New York Times article about Muslim workers at a meat-packing factory](#) in Grand Island, Nebraska. Students analyze the story then craft a response. Students begin by telling the story of "what happened," in small groups if the classroom is larger. Ask students to identify all the key actors and the intersecting issues that are at play. To craft a response, students are asked how, if they were a part of the community in the case, they would respond in order to foster religious pluralism or interfaith cooperation. "Imagine this situation happened near your community or campus and the community tensions were beginning to rise – what might you do to ease tensions?" Specific cases like Grand Island become a vehicle for students to explore concrete applications of the abstract concepts of interfaith engagement and religious pluralism. Working together in groups to devise a shared solution, students contend with the complexity of applying these ideas in real situations. Their responses to the case studies can serve as a formative assessment tool to check student learning.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For focused learning on the topic of religious leadership in a religiously diverse world, consider using the case studies developed by the Pluralism Project. Seminary faculty have used these cases with great success with both single-faith and multifaith groups of seminary students, adapting case study methods from the decades of case-study pedagogy at Harvard and other places.

### **Bad Videos**

*Rob Nash, McAfee School of Theology*

Nash discovered this teaching tactic by accident during a student presentation in an Asian Religions course. For a project on Hinduism and the practice of yoga in churches, the student showed a Youtube video intended to expose yoga as a practice that is not compatible with Christianity (the student did not share the perspective of the video's producers). Nash reports, "A remarkable discussion ensued. The video provided example after example of the ways in which a religious tradition can be vilified and objectified by persons who have very little understanding of the tradition and who are then able to present half-truths about that religion...Class members immediately began identifying some of these half-truths and misstatements that were clearly apparent to them after the learning that had occurred in the context of the course. I had been searching throughout the semester for video clips that portrayed a proper understanding of the Hindu perspective on yoga and meditation. In fact, the best class discussion occurred as the result of a video that depicted the worst sort of objectification of

one religion by practitioners of another.” Such videos are readily available online. To guide the discussion, Nash uses questions like, 'In what subtle ways did persons in the video objectify or demonize the other religion?' 'Why would we want to depict another religion as somehow evil?' 'How do we assist people of faith to move beyond the tendency to vilify and objectify the religion of others?'

### ***Theological Dynamics in Process: Paper and Discussion***

*Mychal B. Springer, Jewish Theological Seminary*

Springer uses Theological Dynamics papers for multi-faith Clinical Pastoral Education, at the two-thirds mark of the program, and suggests that they would also work well in field education. Immediate contact with people who are suffering raises theological challenges for students, and this exercise gives them a chance to reflect theologically on key issues like suffering, anger, guilt, grace, peace, faith, loss, reconciliation, trust, meaning and hope. The strategy helps students integrate their traditions with their personal beliefs and experiences. Springer's Theological Dynamics paper assignment is 5 pages of creative expression (essay, poetry, fiction, journal entry). The heart of the exercise is to focus on a key issue or theme related to pastoral care. Students draw on their religious traditions and spiritual frameworks to reflect theologically on their chosen theme, emphasizing theological reflection as a process. Papers are read by the learning group. The student articulates goals for the ensuing discussion with peers and supervisors (40-50 minutes), creating a space for emotional, spiritual and theological engagement. Springer reports, "The experience of being vulnerable in presenting the place where their theology or spirituality is in process often leads students to a new level of integration as religious practitioners...being seen and heard by a group of peers and supervisors who come from diverse religious backgrounds helps students identify places of profound commonality and places of profound difference, within a context of engaged relationships, which models a healing way of navigating religious difference."

### **Connecting Learning "About" and Learning "With"**

*Pim Valkenberg, The Catholic University of America*

Valkenberg strives to connect book learning about religious others with experiential learning of learning "with" religious others. He collaborates with service-learning staff to find places where students can work on behalf of a religious community that is different from their own religious background, and as a backup, he gives students information about local religious communities they are interested in. Students first study specific aspects of a religion and develop questions for interviews. They make appointments with representatives to attend an educational or ritual activity of the community, a process that itself offers important learning because of cultural differences. During or after the experience, they engage in semi-structured interviews with members of the community. Students reflect on their experiences, the interviews, and their learning process in a group presentation and an essay. Valkenberg reports that the process "forces them out of their comfort zones to go and meet religious others. Many students were able to show in their group presentations how they did not only

discover unexpected insights about other religions, but about their own religions as well. This was even more true for students who worked with and represented religious communities through service-learning."

## Multifaith Education: Recommended Resources

The following resources are recommended by Auburn Seminary for use in multifaith education in seminaries.

1. [Building Bridges Seminar resources](#), from the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Includes sourcebooks of Islamic and Christian texts.
2. [Faith in the Five Boroughs](#): series of 4 minute films about lesser-known religious communities in New York City.
3. [Odyssey Networks](#) video collections. Many useful, short videos on youtube. One example: Rabbi Irwin Kula on "[Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life](#)"—on the need to find a method for addressing disharmony and complexity.
4. [Embracing Interfaith Cooperation](#): DVD and workbook of Eboo Patel seminars.
5. From the Pluralism Project at Harvard: (i) [Directory of Interfaith Initiatives and Resources in Theological Education](#); (ii) [Case Studies of Religious Leadership in a Multifaith Context](#) (well-developed real-life cases that can be easily used in single-faith or mixed faith learning communities to teach religious leadership or about religious pluralism). They have a dozen or more cases developed - contact Ellie Pierce for more info; (ii) [Directory of religious centers](#). Explore the diversity of religious communities in your own neighborhood; and a [Leadership Seminar on Building an Interfaith Community](#).
6. [JewBu.net](#): case studies designed to enhance the ways theological and religious educators teach about the changing religious landscape in America (using Jewish and Buddhist interactions as a starting point).
7. [Unity Productions Foundation](#) has several films which can be used in part or in their entirety as a discussion-starter. See particularly, *Talking Through Walls*, which deals with multifaith problem-solving. Some of these films also have their own educational websites.
8. [Ravel Unravel](#): a series of almost 1,000 short videos by individual about their own faith journey by Project Interfaith. Curriculum guides for using the videos in university and seminary settings are available. Learners can upload their own personal stories of faith to add to the collection.
9. [Scarboro Missions](#), a Canadian Catholic group, has curated and created a variety of curricula and other multifaith education resources (see links at top of the page).

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Last updated in 2013.

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