FAITH IN DIALOGUE: INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP

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In 2015, Dr. Jacqueline Bussie participated in a Teaching Interfaith Understanding faculty development seminar, run in partnership between the Council of Independent Colleges and Interfaith Youth Core, and generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. For information on future seminars, and to access more resources created by seminar alumni, visit www.ifyc.org/content/ifyc-cic-resources.

Course Description

This course introduces the burgeoning interfaith movement in the United States, a movement which adopts as its foundation the concepts of interfaith cooperation, service, and bridge-building. In this course we will gain the religious literacy, skills, and appreciative knowledge that will help us to address the following urgent questions of our time: How do I dialogue with people who belong to religious (and non-religious) traditions other than my own? How do I work together with people of different faith backgrounds to achieve the common good? What is pluralism, and how do we protect it from prejudice? How is pluralism different from diversity? What is the difference between dialogue and debate? What is meant by the term ‘interfaith leader,’ who are some past interfaith leaders, and how might I become one in my own community? What steps can be taken by interfaith leaders to overcome the religious divisiveness and polarization of our contemporary culture?

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1 In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author’s context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.
Course Learning Goals
If you attend class sessions and do all course assignments, this course aims to help you:

- Attain a deeper, more compassionate understanding of people from diverse religious and philosophical traditions;
- Become responsibly engaged in interfaith leadership in the world;
- Develop an appreciative knowledge of religious and philosophical traditions that are different from your own;
- Discover shared values and commitments across religious traditions;
- Constructively bring your own religious tradition into dialogue with traditions divergent from your own;
- Demonstrate empathic understanding and authentic listening skills; and
- Examine your own religious/spiritual journey in a deep and meaningful way.

Student Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of this course and all class assignments, you as a student should be able to:

- Construct your own philosophy/theology of interfaith cooperation along with an explanation of why such cooperation is necessary in the 21st century;
- Demonstrate in both oral and written form thoughtful and informed knowledge of interfaith leaders and the interfaith movement in the United States;
- Define diversity and pluralism, and describe the distinction between the two;
- Experience other people's perspectives and critically and constructively evaluate the ideas of others/peers;
- Engage in civil and respectful dialogue with peers and religious neighbors with whom you agree and disagree;
- Recognize and deconstruct your own past/current assumptions about major religious traditions different from your own;
- Demonstrate critical reading skills and the ability to critically evaluate texts (oral, written, or visual);
- Fluently cite past and present historical examples of religious prejudice in the United States and their deleterious effects; and
- Identify shared values, practices and/or commitments between your religious tradition and other major religious traditions.
Required Texts and Course Materials

- Brian McLaren, *Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?*, Jericho Books, 9781455513963

Assessment of Student Learning

1. Participation 25% 25 grade points
2. Interfaith Passport Completion 5% 5 grade points
3. Learning Journals/Letters to Authors (4 X 10pts) 40% 40 grade points
4. B.R.E.W. Interview Assignment 5% 5 grade points
5. One Final Critical Reflection Research Paper 20% 20 grade points
6. Discussion Lead/Injustice Watch & Hope Med. 5% 5 grade points

TOTAL=100 points

Course Assignments

*Interfaith Hope-Meditation and Justice-Watch Assignments*

Every week, one of you will be in charge of sharing with the class 5-10 minutes of an Interfaith Hope-Meditation and an (In)Justice-Watch. You may bring this to class or e-mail via Moodle prior to class if you wish. Please keep it short and sweet (but awesome!) as the discussion leaders have a lot to share with us as well. For the Interfaith Hope Meditation, please share with the class something that you saw/heard/read/experienced within a religious tradition (preferably, from one that is not your own) and which you found hope-inspiring. This meditation can take any form—a quote from a tradition’s sacred text or well-known thinker, poem, a story, an act of interfaith kindness you witnessed, a breakthrough moment experienced during your community service, a prayer, a picture, anything that you believe will inspire us in the face of the world’s religious prejudice, stereotypes, and misassumptions. One of my favorite sites for inspiring global interfaith cooperation stories is Council for a Parliament of World Religions at www.
For Interfaith Justice-Watch, take the opportunity to share with classmates a religious conflict/prejudice/injustice (global or local) which you saw/heard/read about/witnessed/experienced recently and that has been on your heart and mind. Good sources for global concerns are Human Rights Watch, www.hrw.org and the BBC website www.bbc.com; good sources for local concerns are the news, conversations with friends and family, and even Facebook and other social media (where unfortunately, many hide behind technology to voice their prejudice). Enlighten us briefly about the issue, so that our awareness is heightened about an interfaith conflict or concern of which we may not be aware. Why these exercises? They remind us that religious prejudice or conflict is not an abstraction, but a reality that wounds people’s lived lives. In my experience, the fight for interfaith cooperation must be fought on 2 fronts: 1) awareness (often we are blind to religious prejudices which do not directly hurt us, and in which we are often unintentionally complicit) and 2) resistance to despair (stories of interfaith hope don’t usually make the news, and so we must tell this hope-news to one another, or risk never hearing it). I highly recommend that our class form a closed facebook group, where we can post anytime stories of hope and justice for one another, and in that way keep a record of all that we have shared in class.

**Becoming Responsibly Engaged in the World (B.R.E.W.): My Neighbor’s Faith Assignment**

For this assignment, instead of just reading books about people from different religions, we are going to get out and get to know our interfaith neighbors and put all our ‘faith-in-dialogue’ skills into practice! First, you will need to find a faculty, staff, peer, or member of the Fargo-Moorhead community who practices a different religious or non-religious tradition than you do. For example, this means if you are a Lutheran Christian, you may not just interview a Catholic Christian or a Christian of another different denomination; likewise if you are a Reform Jew, you may not just interview an Orthodox Jew. Please challenge yourself—find someone about whose tradition you know very little or do not relate to very well—and remember that in our community we have a wonderful diversity of traditions including Buddhism, Native American traditions, Unitarian Universalism, Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, atheists, and Baha’i. Do not pick a close friend of yours unless it’s actually the case that you have never really talked to them about their religious tradition. Invite the person you choose to coffee or lunch, and tell them you would love to interview them for our interfaith class. Consider emailing the Native American Center of Fargo, Red River Free Thinkers, The Center for Interfaith Projects, the Project F-M, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fargo, or the Mormon Church of Latter-Day Saints (Fargo) to get set up with someone. Be of good courage and branch out!

Second, you will need to design 5-6 respectful and thoughtful interview questions. We can brainstorm these in class. One of my favorites is: “What is something about your religious tradition you really wish everyone outside of your religious tradition would better understand?” List the interview questions on your BREW assignment. See the book *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith* for great ideas for interview questions.

Third, write a reflection paper describing what you learned by allowing your faith to be in dialogue with your neighbor’s faith during this conversation. [Note: Do not mention their real name in your assignment unless you have asked and received their permission to do so.] Be sure to answer the following questions:
What did you learn about your neighbor’s tradition? What most surprised/challenged/interested you about your neighbor’s tradition? What assumptions did you bring into the interview that were changed/challenged/nuanced by the dialogue? Did you discover any shared values or practices, and if so, what were they? What was an area of disagreement or discomfort, and how did you handle it?

**Interfaith Leadership Log**

In order to help you write your final paper, you will keep an interfaith leadership log that will help you track the acquisition of skills, literacy, and appreciative knowledge needed to help you become an interfaith leader. This will not be handed in, but instead is provided as a guide for the final assignment. The log will have six components which are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share a moment of ‘unlearning’ an assumption you held about a religious tradition other than your own</th>
<th>Identify a shared value your own tradition has in common with other traditions. Be specific and cite texts.</th>
<th>Share a moment of interfaith hope you experienced this semester in your personal life or discovered in the media.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articulate and analyze a moment of interfaith doubt/division/concern/conflict or discomfort you experienced this semester. Be honest.</td>
<td>Share your favorite idea/practice/textual quote you learned this semester from someone of another tradition.</td>
<td>Identify and describe a moment in which your own faith or philosophy was deepened or nuanced because of interfaith dialogue.</td>
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**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**

Thursday:
- Icebreakers, Course Introduction, Moodle review

**Week 2**

Tuesday:
- Read Intro, Chapters 1-4 of Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith*
- Read Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) document “Interfaith Cooperation 101”

Thursday:
- Finish *Acts of Faith* (Chapters 5-8, and Conclusion, Postscript, and Afterword)
- Also if you have not yet done so, peruse Interfaith Youth Core’s website at [www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org)
**Week 3**

Tuesday and Thursday:

- No class – work on BREW “My Neighbor’s Faith” interview assignment which is due at the end of the week (Friday)
- Reading assignment for this week (which will help you prepare for your interview) *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith* pp 1-78 (Intro and Chapters 1-3) and Discussion Questions on pp 171-177. Many of these discussion questions would be great for your interviews—also skim chapter 4, it has great interview question possibilities as well.
- Due on Moodle by Friday at 10pm: B.R.E.W. assignment

**Week 4**

Tuesday:

- Review *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith* reading from last week
- Note: Today in class Amena Chaudry, a local Muslim friend who is a passionate teacher of nonviolent communication skills, will be training us in non-violent communication—a splendid skill to have in interfaith work!

Thursday:

- Read and finish the book *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith* Chapters 4-7

**Week 5**

Tuesday:

- Read *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths* Intro, Preface, and Chapters 1-4

Thursday:

- Read in *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths* Chapters 5, 7 8, 9, 10 and Conclusion (Note: Chapter 6 on Judaism is recommended, but not required)
- Due on Moodle by class time: Learning Journal #1
- Note: Tonight at 7pm in the Centrum is an interfaith lecture I would love for us to attend. The speaker, Stephanie Kaza, will speak on “Responding to Environmental Suffering: Insights from Zen Buddhism”

**Week 6**

Tuesday:

- Read Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One* Chapters: Introduction, Chapter 2 (Christianity) and Conclusion
- In class: we will discuss Prothero and have a chance to ask professor clarifying questions in class about the major traditions we have read about thus far—Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity. Please come to class prepared with three questions—either to discuss or ask the professor.
Thursday:

- Assignment: Read in Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One*, Chapter 1 (Islam) and review *True Kinship of Faiths*, chapter 5 on Islam
- Guest Speaker in Class: Fauzia Haider, our Muslim sister from the local Fargo mosque, will share her spiritual journey in Islam. Please bring to class on a note card 3 thoughtfully prepared questions for our speaker—use the readings and your own personal curiosity to design these—they will be handed in.

**Week 7**

Tuesday:

- Read in Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One*, Chapter 7 (Judaism) and review *True Kinship of Faiths*, chapter 6 (on Judaism)
- Guest Speaker in Class: David Myers, practitioner of Judaism. Please bring to class on a note card 3 thoughtfully prepared questions for our speaker—these will be handed in.

Thursday:

- Read *God is Not One*, Chapter 4 (Hinduism) & 5 (Buddhism)
- Guest speaker in class on Buddhism: Mark Bourdon, practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. Please bring to class on a note card 3 thoughtfully prepared questions for our speaker—these will be handed in.

**Week 8**

Tuesday: Spring Break, No Class

Thursday: Spring Break, No Class

**Week 9**

Tuesday:

- Read *My Neighbor’s Faith* Foreword, Introduction, Chapters 1-15 and also chapter 20. Also, Paul Raushenbush, the Executive Editor for Huffington Post’s Religion section, will be visiting our class today! Please prepare on a notecard 3 questions to ask him in class so that we will have sparkling conversation.
- Required attendance at Paul Raushenbush lecture @7pm in the Centrum

Thursday:

- No class, in exchange for attendance at lecture—continue reading *My Neighbor’s Faith*
Week 10

Tuesday:

- Read *My Neighbor’s Faith* all chapters found in Part III and Part IV
- Due on Moodle by class time: *My Neighbor’s Faith* Learning Journal #2: If you were asked to contribute a chapter to the book *My Neighbor’s Faith* telling your interfaith story of interreligious encounter, growth, or transformation, what would you write? Please make your learning journal for today the telling of one of your own interfaith stories—and keep in mind that stories of growth can either be positive or negative. Tell one of your formative stories which has shaped your views/commitment to interfaith! Please make your discussion questions for the journal about the reading for today.

Thursday:

- Finish *My Neighbor’s Faith* All Chapters in Part V, VI, and Part VII

Week 11

Tuesday:

- Due on Moodle: letter to author—learning journal #3. Please write your journal as a letter to Pastor Rob Bell.

Thursday:

- Finish Rob Bell, *Love Wins* Chapters 5-8

Week 12

Tuesday:

- Re-read Chapters 14 & 32 in *My Neighbor’s Faith* (both on Native American traditions)
- Guest Speaker in Class on Native American Religion/First Nation Traditions: Willard Yellowbird, Cultural Planner of Fargo. Please bring to class on a note card 3 thoughtfully prepared questions for our speaker—these will be handed in.

Thursday:

- Easter Recess, No Class

Week 13

Tuesday and Thursday:

- Reading assignment for the week: Brian McLaren, *Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?* Chapters 1-11 (pp1-98)
- In class film: *On Mormons*
Week 14
Tuesday:
- Read Brian McLaren, *Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?* Chapters 12, 16, 18, 22 and ALL chapters in Part IV (chapters 24-29)
- Due on Moodle: learning journal #4
Thursday:
- No Class. Begin work on Interfaith Passport

Week 15
Tuesday:
- Read *Faitheist* Foreword and Chapters 1-4; and *God is Not One* Chapter 9 (Atheism)
- Guest Speaker on atheism/secular humanism in class Kristi Del Vecchio, Co-President of Better Together Interfaith Alliance and IFYC trainer. Please bring to class on a note card 3 thoughtfully prepared questions for our speaker—these will be handed in.
Thursday:
- Read *Faitheist*, Chapters 5-8 and Afterword

Week 16
Tuesday:
- Discussion in class of Interfaith passports!
- Completed Interfaith Passports DUE in class
Thursday:
- Last day of class: Course Conclusions, Evaluations, and Presentation of all Final Papers and Projects
- Presentations

Week 17
Tuesday:
- Final exam period—Final Paper/Project Presentations. All Final Projects are Due on Moodle by Thursday

Week 18
Tuesday and Thursday:
- Class Field Trips To Hindu Temple and Zen Meditation Center—Dates TBD