In 2014, Dr. Nancy Klancher 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 https://www.ifyc.org/content/ifyc-cic-resources.

Course Description

All Personal Development Portfolio (PDP) courses are taught in the style of a seminar: the overarching model is of a small group of students learning critical thinking skills through discussion, deliberation, and peer review. All PDP courses incorporate five modules (one class each) that orient first-year students to college and academic life. Our particular PDP class focuses on skills needed to engage in productive civil discourse about spiritual commitments through consideration of our own and others’ spiritual journeys and identities. We will need to figure out together how to make our classroom a safe space so that we can practice relating well to Others in the world at large. We will try to develop good relationships in the classroom and in interviews we conduct with others outside the classroom. We will read excerpts from a range of spiritual autobiographies, learn active listening and perspective taking skills, and engage in public reasoning about how authentic encounters with religious Others can create a culture of peaceful pluralism.

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: MANY PATHS, ONE WORLD

Critical Inquiry in the Liberal Arts
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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 Goals
Upon successful completion of this course, you will...

- Have read spiritual autobiographical texts written by adherents of Native American religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Secular Humanism, and Creation Spirituality;
- Be able to critically analyze texts, viewpoints, and arguments by asking and answering relevant questions, applying basic principles of critical thinking, but also by active listening and perspective-taking (this means taking seriously the ideas of others, and reframing those ideas by paraphrasing what you heard and imagining the way that others would approach an issue, and exploring the implications of an issue from multiple often contradictory points of view);
- Practice participating responsibly in discussions about contested issues, and engaging in deliberative and collaborative efforts to find better ideas and creative solutions to whatever issue is on the table;
- Be able to offer useful analysis and feedback on another student’s written work, and, last but not least;
- Understand the expectations of college students at Bridgewater and be able begin to set personal/academic goals.

Required Texts
- Supplementary Readings: additional readings will be posted on Moodle (our course website).

Course Requirements and Assignments

1. **Reading Responses:** analyzing texts. Critical reading is the primary skill taught in this course. You will practice creating written responses to texts, learning:
   - **Critical reading / basic comprehension:** summarize and evaluate content,
   - **Analysis:** explore the perspectives within texts, including the author’s; ask questions in response to texts and thinking about ways to respond to your own questions, and
   - **Critical thinking:** identify and assess the basic logic of texts’ perspectives/arguments. The reading load will not be heavy, but analyzing the texts well will take time. Be prepared to spend 1-2 hours preparing for every class session by reading and preparing questions and comments to contribute in class discussion. Make sure to bring a print copy of the day’s reading to every class, as well as your responses to the readings.

2. **Engagement in Civil Discourse in Classroom Discussions and External Interviews**
Civil discourse and academic and social solidarity involve the ability to engage in constructive discussions, work towards common goals within a group, evaluate ideas through interaction with others, lead discussion in proactive and focused directions, and deliberate collaboratively to reach solutions. See “Tools for Deliberative Discourse” resource to learn more about this classroom activity.
3. Peer Revision and Review
Peer-Reviewed Writing is a key tool that you will use to learn how to apply the critical skills of critical reading, analysis, and argument. You will review each other’s work on written assignments and reflect on group work and community engagement. You will satisfy this requirement by reviewing 10 pages of other students’ writing and revising 10 pages of your own peer-reviewed writing.

4. Final “Autobiography” (Self-Authorship and Reflexivity)
Over the course of the semester, you will learn how to pay attention to your own personal, intellectual, and ethical perspectives as they develop in our work together. I want you to begin to develop your own unique voice, interests, and goals; to try to use your voice to articulate your own perspectives and commitments, and, perhaps most importantly, develop the intellectual and personal resilience to be able to reassess and adjust your conclusions in light of the viewpoints of others and your relationship with them. This work will enable you to articulate your own spiritual journey for your final autobiography (10 pages).

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Wednesday
► Go over syllabus
► Define the Personal Development Portfolio (PDP), Foundations in Liberal Arts (FILA), and Senior Portfolio course goals
► In-class group work: “50 Questions.” Collaborative decisions about guidelines for classroom discussions

Friday
► Define “public/civil discourse”
► In-class discussion of assumptions underlying ideals of civil discourse

WEEK 2

Monday
► In-class discussion: What do you think of the values reflected in PDP, FILA, civil discourse?
► Post preliminary responses on Moodle

Wednesday
► In-class definitions and techniques: storytelling, reflective structured dialogue, active listening, paraphrasing (reframing), and open-ended questions
► Moodle: Patel, Kunze, and Silverman, “Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work”
► Post reading response on storytelling article; answer one of the questions at the end of the article

Friday
► In-class discussion: reflective structured dialogue and exploration of intersectionality
► Post reading response on Tatum
WEEK 3

Monday
► In-class discussion: basic features and context of Islam
► Moodle: “Basic Islam” + one of the other five reading options:
  ► “Women in Islam”
  ► “Shari’a Law”
  ► “Islamic Theology/Philosophy”
  ► “Sufism/Islamic Mysticism”
  ► “Timeline of Islam”
► Post reading response on Islam readings

Wednesday
► In-class discussion on Islam: Reflective Structured Dialogue format

Friday
► Islam: Watch at least one of the following short interviews and talks: Muslims Speak (interviews and talks): “The Beauty and Diversity of Muslim Life,” “Why I Wear A Hijab,” “The Power of Stories,” “The Courage to Tell A Hidden Story.” Incorporate your response to at least one of these into your revision of your 9/11 reflection.
► Due: reflection on Sept. 11, 2001
► In-class peer-review session led by Professor Trupe of the Writing Center

WEEK 4

Monday
► In-class discussion on Islam: Eboo Patel, autobiographical excerpts
► Discussion Leader(s): _________________________________________________________________________
► Post analysis of Patel’s intersections

Wednesday
► In-class discussion: basic features and context of Hinduism
► Moodle: “Basic Hinduism” + one of the other two reading options: “Gandhi,” “Timeline of Hinduism”
► Post reading response on Hinduism readings

Friday
► In-class discussion on Hinduism: Reflective Structured Dialogue format
► Moodle: BBC My Life, My Religion: Hinduism; Rambachan, “Hinduism & the Encounter with Other Faiths”

WEEK 5

Monday
► In-class discussion on Hinduism: Shudha Mazumdar – autobiographical excerpts
► Moodle: excerpts from Mazumdar, Memoirs of an Indian Woman. In-class discussion
► Discussion Leader(s): _________________________________________________________________________
► Post analysis of Mazumdar’s intersections
Wednesday
- In-class group work and discussion on Hinduism: “What Does It Mean to Be a Hindu in Today’s World?, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard on Working Towards Interfaith Understanding”
- Due: revised reflection on Sept. 11, 2001 (also hand in your peer reviews at this time)

Friday
- First Year Module: “Academic Support Services” (Chip Studwell)
- Due: First Year Module: “Information Technologies” online tutorial

WEEK 6

Monday
- In-class discussion: basic features and context of Christianity
- Moodle: “Basic Christianity” + one of two other reading options: “The Story of Jesus of Nazareth,” “Salvation”
- Post reading notes on Christianity readings

Wednesday
- In-class discussion on Christianity: Philip Jenkins, “Reading the Bible with the Global South”
- Post reading response to Jenkins

Friday
- In-class discussion on Christianity: Pastor Surprise Sithole – autobiographical excerpts
- Moodle: excerpts from Sithole, A Voice in the Night
- Discussion Leader(s): ____________________________________________________________
- Post analysis of Sithole’s intersections

WEEK 7

Monday: No Class

Wednesday
- First Year Module: “Library” (Cori Stricker in the Library)

Friday
- Civil Discourse Day: Religious Traditions and Intersectional Identities

WEEK 8

Monday
- In-class discussion: basic features and context of [Zen] Buddhism
- Moodle: “Basic Buddhism” + How Meditation Reshapes Our Brains
- Post reading notes on Buddhism reading and video

Wednesday
- In-class discussion and Moodle readings on [Zen] Buddhism: excerpts from Hahn, My Master’s Robe
- Discussion Leader(s): ____________________________________________________________
- Post analysis of Thich Nhat Hanh’s intersections

Friday
- In-class group work on [Zen] Buddhism: Oprah Interviews Hanh
WEEK 9

Monday
➤ In-class group work: Vocational exploration (from Nash and Murray, *Helping College Students Find Purpose*)

Wednesday
➤ In-class group work: First Year Module, “Advising and WebAdvisor”

Friday
➤ In-class discussion: basic features and context of Creation Spirituality
➤ In-class screening of video, “Journey of the Universe”

WEEK 10

Monday
➤ In-class discussion and Moodle reading: excerpts from writings of Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry
➤ Post reading responses on these excerpts

Wednesday
➤ In-class discussion and Moodle reading: excerpts from Redmond, *When the Drummers Were Women*
➤ Discussion Leader(s): _________________________________________________________________________
➤ Post analysis of Layne Redmond’s intersections

Friday
➤ Civil Discourse Day: Religion and Science, Intersections

WEEK 11

Monday
➤ In-class group work: exploration of students’ intersections with authors we have read so far/autobiographies

Wednesday
➤ In-class group work: students work together to prepare for their community interviews; brainstorm questions
➤ Due: prep work for this discussion; details of interview due (name, religious tradition, date, time, questions)

Friday
➤ In-class group work: peer review of reflections on Civil Discourse Days
➤ Due: reflection on Civil Discourse Days