

RELIGION 200: INTERFAITH STUDIES

Dr. Caryn D. Riswold, Illinois College (Jacksonville, IL)

criswold@mail.ic.edu

Used with Permission¹

In 2015, Dr. Caryn Riswold 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

In this interdisciplinary course, you will gain knowledge and skills necessary to engage effectively in professional and community life in a religiously diverse 21st century. Using case studies, texts from multiple disciplines like religion, history, and sociology, alongside experiences and interactions inside and outside of the classroom, you will learn about multiple religions, about what is at stake when people who orient around religion differently interact, and about how you can become an effective interfaith leader. The course includes an opportunity to connect this work with a profession, a major, or an issue of specific interest to you.

Learning Outcomes

By successfully completing this course and its activities, you will be able to:

- ▶ Identify and appreciate multiple things, including persons, ideas, and events, significant to at least five different religious traditions, and discover shared values across those traditions.
- ▶ Define interfaith cooperation, recognize it in the campus and local communities, and be ready to take steps toward increasing its likelihood.
- ▶ Imagine yourself in leadership positions able to build interfaith relationships, find common ground, and work toward resolving conflicts and creating opportunities.
- ▶ Apply multiple theories of pluralism, religious diversity, and interfaith cooperation, as part of crafting your own worldview and professional goals.

¹In 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.

- ▶ Integrate classroom knowledge about religion and interfaith cooperation with experiences in the local community, and with your own goals related to a chosen profession or major field of study.

Illinois College Objectives

This course fulfills the BLUEprint exploration category of Social, Spiritual & Philosophical Issues, and contains two embedded experiences: Global Awareness and Speaking Extensive.

- ▶ *Inquiry & Analysis*: Knowing when information is needed, and being able to identify, locate, evaluate, and responsibly use and share that information.
- ▶ *Critical Thinking*: Exploring issues, ideas, artifacts and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
- ▶ *Written Communication*: Developing and expressing ideas in writing.
- ▶ *Collaboration*: Group tasks, interacting with others, quantity & quality of contributions to group discussions.
- ▶ *Oral Communication*: Prepared & purposeful presentation in order to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change.

Responsibilities of student

- ▶ You must complete all assigned reading for this seminar and, because it is focused on discussion of texts, bring the assigned text to class.
- ▶ Attendance and active participation at each class session is mandatory (50 points). Points are earned both for attending class regularly and for actively participating. The conditions for thinking and learning in class include the following behaviors:
 - Active participation in every class period includes things like bring the assigned book to class, taking notes, looking at references in the texts, asking questions, responding to questions, and engaging in group discussion and tasks when prompted.
 - Excessive absences could lead to failure in the course, and *every absence is detrimental to student learning*. More than two weeks, or two full classes, is considered excessive. You are fully responsible for all work, notes, reading, and information when you miss class. Notes are available from classmates, and I am available to answer questions whenever needed.
- ▶ Prompt submission of all written work [described in detail below]:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| • Weekly response papers | 200 points |
| • DIY Religious Literacy Reports | 100 points |
| • Essay Exams | 100 points |
| • Case Studies Activities | 75 points |
| • Site Visits & Reflections | 100 points |
| • Interdisciplinary Project | <u>75 points</u> |
| Total Points Possible | 700 points (above+50 for participation) |

Required Texts

- ▶ The Dalai Lama. *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together*. (New York: Doubleday, 2010)
- ▶ Samuel Huntington. "Clash of Civilizations." *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993). Online: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Huntington_Clash.pdf
- ▶ Interfaith Youth Core. "Interfaith Cooperation 101" Online: <https://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/Interfaith%20Cooperation%20101.pdf>
- ▶ Paul Knitter. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002)
- ▶ Ingrid Mattson. "Of Fences and Neighbors: An Islamic Perspective on Interfaith Engagement for Peace." Online: <http://ingridmattson.org/article/of-fences-and-neighbors/>
- ▶ Dalia Mogahed. "What Do You Think When You Look At Me?" Online: https://www.ted.com/talks/dalia_mogahed_what_do_you_think_when_you_look_at_me
- ▶ Eboo Patel. *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*. (Boston: Beacon, 2012)
- ▶ Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, & Gregory Mobley, editors. *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012)
- ▶ *The Pluralism Project*, Harvard University. Online: <http://pluralism.org/religions/>
- ▶ Robert Putnam, "American Grace," Online: http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/p/Putnam_10.pdf
- ▶ George Washington, "Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island." Online: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-the-hebrew-congregation-at-newport/>

Written Requirements

Please review the various written assignments for this course (listed below). Details for assignments will be discussed further in class before they are due. All questions clarifying the assignment ought to be directed to the instructor well in advance of the due date.

Weekly Response Papers:

- ▶ In order to facilitate engaged reading and your preparation for discussion, you will submit a short paper (500 words minimum, ~2 pages) via email attachment to the professor. This is due at least 24 hours before each class as noted (10 total), 6:30pm on Sunday.
- ▶ A reaction or response paper is where you demonstrate active reading and engagement with a text. "Whatever you choose to focus on, the response must be *critical*, not simply a description of your own personal feelings The response paper consists of your close examination of the text and the questions in the text that most intrigue you." *Critical thinking* is defined by AAC&U as "the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion."

- ▶ Each response paper must discuss *at least three separate main points* that you find interesting and/or important from the reading. You are encouraged to include *questions about the text and ideas that you would like to discuss in class*.
- ▶ These papers are worth 20 points each, and will be graded on the *quality* of discussion of specific ideas from the text demonstrating comprehension and reflection (12 points), and *clarity* of writing and organization of thoughts (8 points).

DIY Religious Literacy Reports:

- ▶ Knowledge about religious traditions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for interfaith cooperation and leadership. To that end, you will complete *five religious literacy reports* on religions that are not your own using resources from *The Pluralism Project* website, where there are seventeen traditions listed from which you can choose: <http://pluralism.org/religions/>. Select a religion that comes up in your reading for the week, or in the news of the day. These Do-It-Yourself Literacy Reports, completed on your own time and due anytime, no later than the dates specified, ask you to find and read about essential elements of at least five religions of the world, including central persons, sacred texts, key beliefs, basic practices, global location/situation, and role it plays in those cultures.
- ▶ Five worksheets will be handed out in class, and should be completed by hand. This assignment requires you to know what information is needed, find it using the required texts, and write a summary of basic information. Each report is worth 20 points, based on clear and concise answers and on-time submission.

Case Study Activities:

- ▶ You will have three opportunities in class to participate in a case study activity that puts you in a decision-making role in an event where people who orient around religion differently must interact and solve problems.
- ▶ The general structure of the activity will be as follows: The entire class will read about an event or moment. Everyone will be given the chance to ask the professor clarifying questions. Each student will then be assigned a role in the story, and will be arranged in a small group with all other students inhabiting that role. Working in collaboration, you will discuss what knowledge you have and what knowledge you need, and as a group make a decision about what you would do in the role assigned to you. Each group will then make a brief presentation (10 minutes) about their decision and the reasons behind it. At the conclusion of all presentations and large group discussion, each student will have approximately ten minutes to write a brief individual reflection on the process, the issues, and your own insights.
- ▶ This activity will give you the opportunity to read, think, discuss, present, and reflect in writing. Each case study activity will be worth 25 points, and graded based on active participation (10), the quality of the collaborative presentation (7), and the quality of your individual written reflection (8).

Essay Exams:

▶ **Interfaith Cooperation: what, why, and how**

In this essay exam, you will have the opportunity to show that you understand what interfaith cooperation is, why some argue for it, why some argue that it is impossible, and various models for how it might be done. The exam will draw on key texts read and discussed so far in the semester. The exam will be worth 50 points.

▶ ***My Neighbor's Faith***

In this essay exam, you will have the opportunity to analyze connecting themes that emerge throughout the essays in *My Neighbor's Faith*. You will have the chance to draw upon your own experiences of religious difference from the semester, and you will be asked to write a draft of your own contributing chapter/story for a volume like this. The exam will be worth 50 points.

Site Visits & Reflections:

- ▶ During the semester, you have the opportunity to visit sacred sites from at least three different religious traditions. As a class, we will attend services at the *Islamic Society of Greater Springfield* (you can find their page with that name on Facebook) and *Temple Israel* (<http://www.templeisrael.org/>), both in Springfield. You are also required to visit a Christian worship service, and you can choose to do this on your own or with friends or with others from this class. Please choose a Christian church that is of a denomination not your own, ideally one that you have not been to before. I will provide a list of local churches and contact information and people to help you.
- ▶ Prior to these visits, please complete one of your DIY Religious Literacy Reports on that religion. This way, you will have some familiarity with the tradition before entering its space. In class, we will talk about the etiquette of site visits and how to make the most of the learning opportunity while being respectful representatives of Illinois College. During the visit, you will have plenty to pay attention to and a list of questions and things to look for that we will construct in class. After the visit, you will write a reflection using those questions and making specific connections to things we have been reading, citing texts.
- ▶ Three site visit reflections will be due on the dates noted in the schedule. Each will be worth 35 points, graded based on quality of participation in the visit (15), and quality of reflection paper including organization of ideas (7), clear writing (10), connection to and citation of class texts (8) and on-time submission.

Interdisciplinary Project on Interfaith Leadership

- ▶ A key goal of this course is for you to integrate classroom knowledge about religion and interfaith cooperation with experiences in the local community, and with your own goals related to a chosen profession or major field of study. To that end, select a profession, a topic, a field of study, or something else related to a professional goal you have for your future: How might you need to be an interfaith leader in that work?

- For example, as the *owner of a small business*, you might be asked to provide accommodation of an employee's religious practices in scheduling shifts; as a *nurse* you might be in a situation of providing care for a patient with religious beliefs not your own; as a *teacher* you might have a student asking to be exempt from saying the pledge of allegiance; as a *pastor*, you might be asked to participate in an interfaith community prayer service; as a *coach*, you might have a player who asks to lead the team in prayer when you know that there are nonreligious teammates; as an *elected official*, you might have to respond to a crisis in the local community when religious conflict erupts.
 - Think of the case studies we have done in class, and imagine one for your life in ten years. Then, research issues related to the work and connect it to what you have learned in class. In whatever situation you sketch out for yourself, reflect and write on what you need to *know*, what *skills* you will need to have, and how you will need to be *prepared* for such situations.
- ▶ Meet at least once with another professor on campus who teaches in the discipline related to the field or profession or major which you plan to focus on. Use this opportunity to ask questions about what interfaith issues exist, what the requirements (if any) of the profession/law are when it comes to these issues, and what kinds of things they suggest you look into and read about.
 - ▶ Write a paper that describes “what interfaith leadership looks like in _____.” The short paper (~7-8 pages, 2,000 word minimum) will make use of research conducted via Schewe Library resources (and professional web sources only when approved by the professor). It will cite at least three sources from your research, as well as at least two sources from assigned class material. It will identify the issues, including the challenges as well as the opportunities, demonstrating how preparation in interfaith leadership can make you a more effective _____.
 - ▶ Prepare a 10 minute formal presentation that summarizes your research and synthesis of the elements of interfaith leadership and cooperation as related to your chosen profession, major, or issue.
 - ▶ This project will worth 75 points total, graded based on meeting advance deadlines for topic selection (5 points), the written paper [55 points: organization of ideas (10), clarity in writing (10), effective use and citation of all sources (15), analysis & discussion of challenges and opportunities (10), integration of knowledge of interfaith leadership with selected topic/profession (10)], and quality of the presentation (15 points) as assessed based on the distributed rubric.

COURSE CALENDAR

Class meets once per week

I. Pluralism, Social Capital & U.S. History

Week 1: *Introductions to the course, the participants, and the emerging field*

- ▶ Read “Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island,” by George Washington. *Online:* <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-the-hebrew-congregation-at-newport/>
- ▶ Read “American Grace,” by Robert Putnam. *Online:* http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/p/Putnam_10.pdf
- ▶ Read “Of Fences and Neighbors: An Islamic Perspective on Interfaith Engagement for Peace” by Ingrid Mattson. *Online:* <http://ingridmattson.org/article/of-fences-and-neighbors/>
- ▶ Read “Interfaith Cooperation 101” *Online:* <https://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/Interfaith%20Cooperation%20101.pdf>

Week 2: *Pluralism & the United States’ History and Future*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, prep for discussion: *Sacred Ground*, p.xi-128
- ▶ Watch for discussion: “What Do You Think When You Look At Me?” Dalia Mogahed. *Online:* https://www.ted.com/talks/dalia_mogahed_what_do_you_think_when_you_look_at_me
- ▶ Case Study 1 in class

II. Theories of Diversity & Models for Engagement

Week 3: *Theories of Religious Pluralism*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: *Introducing Theologies of Religions* p. xi-106
- ▶ Religious Literacy Report #1 DUE by 5:00pm

Week 4: *Theories of Religious Pluralism*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: *Introducing Theologies of Religions* p. 109-246
- ▶ Case Study 2 in class
- ▶ Weekend Site Visit to Islamic Society of Greater Springfield) <http://www.isogs.org/>; reflection paper due via email within 24 hours of returning

III. Religious Conflict & Peacemaking

Week 5: *Religious Conflict*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: “Clash of Civilizations,” by Samuel Huntington. *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993). Online: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/Huntington_Clash.pdf
- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion “TBD articles” by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Online: <http://www.rabbisacks.org/we-are-facing-an-unprecedented-age-of-terror/> or via the search: <http://www.rabbisacks.org/?s=interfaith> (i.e. multicultural Britain, respect is vital)
- ▶ Religious Literacy Report #2 DUE

Week 6: *Religious Peacemaking*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: Dalai Lama, p. vii -105
- ▶ Case Study 3 in class

Week 7: *Religious Peacemaking*

- ▶ Read, in prep for first hour discussion: Dalai Lama, p. 107-183
- ▶ In-Class Essay Exam on Interfaith Cooperation: what, why, and how

Week 8: *Spring Break – No Class*

IV. Engaging the Other, Navigating the Neighborhood

Week 9: *Encountering the Neighbor, Viewing Home Anew*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: *My Neighbor's Faith*, p.1-77
- ▶ In-class: Communication skills and interfaith cooperation w/Dr. Adrienne Hacker-Daniels
- ▶ Religious Literacy Report #3 DUE

Week 10: *Redrawing Our Maps, Unpacking Our Belongings*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: *My Neighbor's Faith*, p.79-162
- ▶ Religious Literacy Report #4 DUE
- ▶ Weekend Site Visit to Temple Israel, Springfield (<http://www.templeisraelsspringfield.org/>); Reflection paper due via email within 24 hours of returning

Week 11: *Stepping Across the Line, Finding Fellow Travelers*

- ▶ Read, write response paper on, in prep for discussion: *My Neighbor's Faith*, p. 163-240
- ▶ Topic for Interdisciplinary Project Due via email by midnight

Week 12: *Repairing Our Shared World*

- ▶ Read in prep for discussion: *My Neighbor's Faith*, p.241-266
- ▶ In-Class Essay Exam on *My Neighbor's Faith*, including your own contribution
- ▶ Religious Literacy Report #5 DUE

Week 13: *Easter Break – No Class*

V. Interfaith Leadership Project

Week 14: *Interfaith Leadership and _____* *

- ▶ Response paper is an update on reading and research related to profession/major/issue
- ▶ Working session on interdisciplinary project – consult meeting with other faculty
- ▶ Come to our classroom to work, read, write, talk to professor &/or classmates
- ▶ Weekend Christian church site visit Reflection Paper DUE via email before midnight

Week 15: *Interfaith Leadership and _____* *

- ▶ Response paper is an update on reading and research related to profession/major/issue
- ▶ Working session on interdisciplinary project – consult meeting with professor
- ▶ Come to our classroom to work, read, write, talk to professor &/or classmates

Week 16: *Interdisciplinary Project Presentations & Paper Due*