INTRODUCTION

Religion continues to play a key role in both domestic and international affairs and religious diversity is increasing on college and university campuses. As a result, institutions of higher education continue to look for holistic ways to foster interfaith cooperation and pluralism on their campuses. Of increasing interest is how to engage interfaith issues in the classroom and the possibilities of a burgeoning field of interfaith or interreligious studies. If there is indeed a growing field of interfaith studies, what are the learning outcomes of such a field? What might it look like to develop course sequences that achieve those learning outcomes? How might faculty from disparate fields share theoretical insights and effective pedagogical practices?

On January 23-24, 2014 over 100 faculty, administrators, and religious life professionals from more than 40 colleges and universities gathered at New York University (NYU) to examine these and other questions, share best practices and challenges, and gain insights to take back to their campuses. The gathering, Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies: Course Sequences, Pedagogies, and Best Practices was co-hosted by Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) and the Of Many Institute for Multifaith Leadership at NYU.
The gathering was inspired by a grant to IFYC from the Teagle Foundation focused on gathering faculty interested in interfaith studies curriculum, and providing grants to campuses to launch interfaith studies course sequences. The Carnegie Corporation of New York supported NYU’s partnership on the project.

The initial intention was to gather 30-50 participants from a handful of campuses. However, the response to the invitation-only gathering was overwhelming and in turn the conference had over 100 participants. Campuses sent delegations including faculty, department chairs, provosts, academic deans, university presidents, and religious life professionals. The conference represented much of the diversity within American higher education, including public universities, private research universities, and both religiously-affiliated and secular liberal arts colleges. While the majority of the faculty were from religious studies or theology departments, in attendance were faculty from a breadth of fields, including philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, education, business, economics, physics, and biology. In attendance were both senior scholars who have been exploring these issues for many years, as well as pre-tenure faculty interested in bringing fresh perspectives to the conversation.

This conference report will summarize several of the main themes, theoretical questions, and opportunities for practical application that the conference addressed, including:

1. The emerging field of interfaith studies
2. Interfaith studies and institutional context
3. The location of interfaith studies within university curriculum
4. Building course sequences in interfaith studies
5. Pedagogies for teaching interfaith studies
6. Tools and strategies for measuring interfaith learning
TOWARD A FIELD OF INTERFAITH STUDIES: CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Thursday, January 23rd

9:00-10:30am Plenary Session

- Toward A Field of Interfaith Studies: Opening Remarks
  - Eboo Patel – Founder and President, Interfaith Youth Core
- Institutionalizing Interfaith: The Role of Curriculum
  - Donna Carroll – President, Dominican University
  - Douglas Jacobsen – Distinguished Professor of Church History and Theology, Messiah College
  - Richard Morrill – Former President, Teagle Foundation and Chancellor, University of Richmond
  - Moderator: Eboo Patel – Interfaith Youth Core

10:45am-12:00pm Plenary Session

- Best Practice and Challenges for Course Sequences in Interfaith Cooperation
  - Rabbi Justus Baird – Dean, Auburn Theological Seminary
  - Charles Cohen – Professor of History and Religious Studies and Director of the Lubar Institute for the Study of Abrahamic Religions, University of Wisconsin, Madison
  - Thomas Donlin-Smith – Professor of Religious Studies, Director of the Institute for Professional Ethics, and Board Member of the Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue, Nazareth College
  - Imam Khalid Latif – University Chaplain and Director of the Islamic Center, New York University
  - Rabbi Yehuda Sarna – University Chaplain and Skirball Executive Director of the Edgar M. Bronfman Center, New York University
  - Moderator: Noah Silverman – Director of Faculty Partnerships, Interfaith Youth Core

12:00-1:30pm Networking Lunch and "Syllabus Swap"

Over lunch, attendees had the opportunity to share a course they teach that touches on interfaith understanding or cooperation.

1:30-3:00pm Breakout Sessions

- Interfaith Youth Core Course Sequence Grants Overview
  - Noah Silverman – Interfaith Youth Core
  - Thomas Donlin-Smith – Nazareth College
The Interdisciplinarity of Interfaith Studies
- **Mary Ellen Giess** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Rhys Williams** – Loyola University Chicago

Teaching Interfaith at Catholic Schools
- **April Kunze** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Rita George-Turtkovic** – Benedictine University

Teaching Interfaith at Protestant Schools
- **Katie Bringman Baxter** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Jacqueline Bussie** – Concordia College-Moorhead, MN

3:30-5:00pm Breakout Sessions

Course Sequence Grants Overview
- **Noah Silverman** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Rabbi Yehuda Sarna** – New York University

Incorporating Experiential Learning and Practice into the Classroom
- **April Kunze** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Jeff Carlson** – Dominican University

Teaching Interfaith at Public Schools and Private Secular Schools
- **Mary Ellen Giess** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Kristy Nabhan-Warren** – University of Iowa

Working with Administrators to Support Interfaith Curricula
- **Katie Bringman Baxter** – Interfaith Youth Core
- **Peter Felten** – Elon University

Friday, January 24th

9:00-10:15am Plenary Session

Pedagogies for Teaching Interfaith Cooperation
- **Ali Asani** – Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures, Harvard University
- **Jeanine Diller** – Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion and Director of the Center for Religious Understanding, University of Toledo
- **Jeannine Hill Fletcher** – Professor of Theology, Fordham University
- **Jennifer Howe Peace** – Assistant Professor of Interfaith Studies, Andover Newton Theological Seminary
- **Moderator: Cassie Meyer** – Director of Academic and Curricular Initiatives, Interfaith Youth Core
10:30am-12:00pm  Plenary Session

- Measuring Interfaith Learning
  - Jeff Carlson – Professor of Theology and Dean of the Rosary College of Arts and Sciences, Dominican University
  - Peter Felten – Assistant Provost and Executive Director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Elon University
  - Trina Janiec Jones – Associate Professor of Religion, Wofford College
  - Matthew Mayhew – Associate Professor of Higher Education, New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development
  - Moderator: Cassie Meyer – Director of Academic and Curricular Initiatives, Interfaith Youth Core

12:30-2:00pm  Closing Remarks and Lunch
CONTEXT: THE EMERGING FIELD OF INTERFAITH STUDIES

In his opening remarks Eboo Patel reflected on the emergent field of interfaith studies and shared key recommendations for promoting and practicing this growing academic field. Following is a summary of his evaluation of the context and key recommendations. For a more comprehensive analysis please see his article “Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies.”

Interfaith work has grown dramatically over the past twenty years. A half century ago, few cities had any organized interfaith programs. Today, dozens have some sort of initiative, everything from interfaith councils to festivals of faith. Religious denominations have invited leaders from other religions to give keynotes at their gatherings and local congregations have started interfaith exchange programs. Think tanks have commissioned task forces and issued reports. Muslim and Christian theologians unveiled a document called “A Common Word Between Us and You.” Celebrated world religions author Karen Armstrong used her TED prize to issue a “Charter of Compassion” calling all religions to re-define themselves by that shared, core value.

Alongside this concentrated growth in interfaith work, religious violence and interreligious tensions remain a reality, even as the fact of religious diversity in daily life becomes status quo. These factors raise questions for scholars on the role of the academy in this growing area, the particular shape of the field of interfaith studies, and best practices for interfaith research and curriculum design. In light of these questions, following are three recommendations for approaching and growing the nascent field of interfaith studies.

1. **Foster research and reflection regarding the implications of interaction between people who orient around religion differently.** Interfaith studies should examine the multiple dimensions of how individuals and groups who orient around religion differently interact with one another, along with the implications of these interactions for communities, civil society, and global politics. It should be an interdisciplinary field. For example, a social psychologist might research what kind of common projects best bind different identity groups into a larger whole. A neuroscientist could illuminate how the “moral machinery” of our minds facilitates “Us vs. Them” thinking. A political scientist would look into whether bad behavior by some members of a religious group affects how the broader population views the entire community.

   Without a doubt, research projects such as these exist, but they are disconnected—published in separate journals and discussed independently at different conferences and in different departments. Formalizing Interfaith Studies as its own field is useful in bringing these disparate projects together, creating spaces for colleagues to engage in long-term data gathering, sustained reflection and extended discussion. Consider similar areas that have become fields, gathering scholars from different disciplines to inquire, connect and apply—urban studies, human and family studies, education, community development, and public health.

2. **Offer definition, guidance, rigor and evaluation for the growing activity in the field of practice that is interfaith cooperation.** Imagine coming across a group of public health workers and asking them what disease they were trying to address. In response, they shrugged their shoulders and said they did not know. Could be malaria, could be AIDS, or something else. They were running their program because they knew disease was rampant and they wanted to do something about it. This
could be an analogy for the current state of interfaith programming and action. The positive side to this story is that there has been a broad proliferation of such programs. The problem is that there is little definition, direction or rigor in the field of practice right now. Few leaders of interfaith programs can articulate clear objectives, and fewer still use research to guide their work or data to evaluate it. This is to be expected in a young and rapidly growing field of practice and the academy is well suited to address the problem. Similar to university-based public health and education programs, interfaith studies in higher education can contribute frameworks, methodologies and resources that help practitioners run more effective programs.

3. **Prepare specialists for professions that require engagement with religious diversity.** Scholars in the aforementioned fields – urban studies, public health, education – ask and pursue critical research questions, but they also create programs of study that shape leaders who “do” in their areas. Public health departments educate public health workers, education departments train teachers, urban studies departments train city managers, and so on. A major part of what interfaith studies should do is nurture a cadre of professionals, a group that might be calling “interfaith leaders.” An interfaith leader could be understood as someone with the framework, knowledge base and skill set to help individuals and communities who orient around religion differently build mutual respect, positive relationships and a commitment to the common good. Students prepared in such programs might be hired by, for example, the U.S. State Department, as it becomes increasingly aware of the role of religion in international conflict and peacebuilding. Similarly, staff of international development organizations attempting to spread polio vaccines in South Asia or anti-malarial bed nets in sub-Saharan Africa need to be aware of the religious energies in those places. City officials in rapidly diversifying cities like Atlanta, Houston and Birmingham should have some knowledge of the Hindu customs of its Indian population. The frameworks, knowledge base and skill set one would acquire in an interfaith program of study will be highly attractive to a range of professional settings.
Institutional context can offer valuable assets or significant constraints to the exploration of interfaith studies on any campus. Faculty and administrators looking to create a space for interfaith studies should be attentive to their campus type (public versus private; religious versus secular, etc.), campus mission, and the disposition of relevant departments within that institution. The following are a series of identified challenges and recommendations for institutional leaders seeking to incorporate interfaith studies with attention to institutional context.

Interfaith Studies at Public and Private Secular Universities – Making a Case for Civic Relevance

Challenges. For many working to develop interfaith studies at public and secular universities, addressing questions around the separation of church and state is a primary concern. Many perceive interfaith work as too focused on individual or personal spirituality and therefore outside the bounds of the academic study of religion. Pre-tenured faculty in particular may feel cautious of supporting interfaith work, for fear of how it will reflect on their academic commitments.

Key Insights and Recommendations

► Connect interfaith studies to broader civic responsibility. Faculty can emphasize the civic relevance of interfaith work by articulating its contribution to students’ success both within and beyond college and by clarifying the difference between “teaching about religion” and “teaching religion.”

► Build on Student Interest and Goals. Many students are expressing interest in interfaith topics even as enrollment in religious studies in particular and the humanities more broadly is down at many institutions. By focusing on interfaith themes, faculty have a unique opportunity to articulate the relevance of the study of religion to their students and potentially increase interest in disciplines that may be facing declines in enrollment.

► Connect to Institutional Commitments. Religious diversity can be connected to existing institutional commitments such as engaging multiculturalism and diversity. This connection provides an untapped opportunity to articulate the value of interfaith work and find new resources and support. Utilizing language about diversity in the mission statement or other institutional strategy documents provides a way to articulate the institutional value of interfaith.

► Size and Diversity. The sheer size of many secular institutions offers opportunities to look for unexpected allies, particularly in other disciplines, who may not have the same reservations about interfaith studies as those within religious studies. Sociology, political science, history, business, economics, amongst others, are all potential allies for interfaith studies. Additionally, many public universities have religiously diverse student bodies, which makes them a natural environment for interfaith engagement.

Interfaith Studies at Catholic Universities – Drawing on Catholic Values

Challenges. Despite the many ways that Catholic universities are often amenable to interfaith work, many faculty struggle to articulate the value of interfaith work in a way that does not threaten or challenge a campus’ Catholic identity. While students, faculty, and administrators at Catholic institutions often value
interfaith engagement, some are concerned that trustees or local religious leaders might see interfaith as compromising the Catholic mission of an institution.

**Key Insights and Recommendations**

- **Draw on Roman Catholic Teachings and Theology.** Many faculty notice a predisposition in their students to interfaith work emerging from Catholic interests in ecumenical conversation as well as Catholic social thought. As a result, these students often resonate with approaches to interfaith studies that emphasize common action or service work. Resources like the Vatican II statement *Nostra Aetate*, which speak directly to interfaith engagement in the church, are clear assets for articulating a connection between a university's particular Catholic identity and the value of interfaith work.

- **Welcoming Campus Environments.** Due to Roman Catholic doctrines and practices, Catholic institutions draw a religiously diverse student body, with Muslim students in particular finding that Catholic religious values resonate with their own. Thus, many Catholic institutions have a robust religious diversity on campus that is lacking at other secular institutions. This gives Catholic institutions a unique opportunity for interfaith engagement in the classroom that may be lacking in more religiously homogenous institutions.

**Interfaith Studies at Protestant Universities – Connecting to Campus Mission and Vision**

**Challenges.** One substantial challenge for many Protestant-affiliated universities is that their campuses are relatively small and located in more religiously homogenous areas of the United States. Given this institutional context, there is often important relationship building work to be done between conservative Evangelical Christians and mainline Protestants who tend to come from theologically and politically liberal perspectives. While there are many opportunities for broader work around interfaith cooperation on these campuses, the Evangelical/mainline or conservative/liberal divide is often a deep fault line that can distract from other interfaith work if not addressed directly.

When it comes to engaging religious diversity outside of the Christian tradition, campus leadership should be mindful of language or practices that might seem inclusive from a Christian perspective but run the risk of alienating those in other traditions, or non-religious students. For example, interfaith work housed within a campus ministry program or that meets in a Christian chapel might not feel welcoming to students from other religious traditions.

A final challenge for these campuses – similar to Roman Catholic institutions – is ensuring that interfaith work is connected to the mission and vision of the institution. It can be challenging to create buy-in around interfaith cooperation with trustees, board members, and other high-level campus stakeholders who may see interfaith as a distraction from or even in conflict with the mission of a Protestant institution.

**Key Insights and Recommendations**

- **Connect to Campus Mission.** Campuses that are able to take time to create a connection between the core mission of their institution and the values of interfaith cooperation have found increased institutional support for both curricular and co-curricular interfaith work. The very process of creating such a statement is fruitful because the conversation helps to bring key stakeholders together to build-buy in, reach consensus, and voice relevant concerns. Such statements can
foster campus development of more inclusive language and spaces by building upon consensus that such work does not threaten their core mission or identity.

- **Bringing Together Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants.** Service learning can be used to help bridge the divide between conservative and liberal Christian groups on campus. It promotes collaboration while leaving space for real disagreement over exclusive truth claims. Service-learning creates a common ground for participants to dialogue from while acknowledging fundamental doctrinal differences. Additionally, faculty and staff can employ “ethical” or “community agreement” guidelines in the classroom, in interfaith programming, and university-wide. These guidelines help establish respect for different religious commitments while outlining shared ways of studying, learning, living, and working together.
An important question for this emerging field is the interdisciplinary nature of interfaith studies. While much of the work of interfaith studies began within religious studies, faculty from diverse disciplines are interested in the field and subject matter.

**Strengths, Challenges, and Questions for an Interdisciplinary Field.** One of the benefits of articulating interfaith studies as an interdisciplinary field is the ability to make religion and interfaith relevant to a broader number of students. The applied nature of interfaith studies is key to this approach. Interfaith studies should offer concrete skills necessary to a broad number of professions – such as business, education, health care, and public service – where students will naturally interact with religiously diverse constituents. As such, the field becomes necessarily interdisciplinary, requiring buy-in and expertise from faculty in the disciplines the field hopes to engage and impact.

At least two key concerns arise with the interdisciplinary location of interfaith studies. First, interdisciplinary work has baggage for many faculty. It can be seen as a way for administrators to try and reduce the number of resources given to individual faculty and disciplines in an effort to funnel limited resources to a broad project. Secondly, interdisciplinary work can lack clear or shared goals. At its most troubling, it can be seen as merely a “free for all” where faculty engage in whatever interests them with little collaboration or consensus. Given this, there is a need to articulate the purpose and narrative of interfaith studies – while acknowledging that this articulation would likely vary from institution to institution – so that interfaith studies is not lost amongst other interdisciplinary efforts. Such an articulation of goals can help make the case for funding and resources, especially at a time when there is often pressure to reduce support for the humanities.

**The Relationship Between Interfaith Studies and Religious Studies.** If interfaith studies is conceptualized as an interdisciplinary field, what role does religious studies in particular play? Scholars within religious studies, comparative religion, comparative theology, and world religions have been wrestling with many of the themes of interfaith studies for many years. As a result, there is a risk that a significant burden will fall on religious studies faculty when colleagues in other disciplines need support in order to teach about religion excellently. Given that many students lack even a basic religious literacy, not to mention the theoretical frameworks necessary for thinking critically about religious diversity, one might argue that a religious studies major or minor should be a prerequisite for any degree or concentration in interfaith studies. Additionally, because interfaith studies is still not a widely accepted approach even within religious studies, there is still important work to do to validate interfaith studies within scholarly religious studies arenas. Such work requires regular publishing, paper presentations, research, and other work to situate the subfield as a legitimate approach to the academic study of religion.

For faculty focusing on the practical elements of interfaith studies, questions may remain as to whether or not interfaith studies should be situated first and foremost within religious studies. Such a location may overlook the practical knowledge necessary for applied fields. Skills such as active listening, facilitating conversations between those of diverse backgrounds, and organizing diverse constituents around shared concerns are essential for students who hope to make interfaith studies a part of their professions beyond...
college. Given the centrality of such skills, interfaith studies might best be situated within, for example, a leadership studies department or an interdisciplinary center that drew from many contributing fields.

**Key Recommendation: Consider Context.** Given these competing concerns, it is clear that institutional context matters and will likely be one of the most important factors in determining where interfaith studies “fits” in a given institution. Consider the following questions when exploring where interfaith studies might work at your institution:

- **Where is there faculty energy and interest?** If faculty from diverse disciplines are invested in the growth of this discipline, consider an interdisciplinary home. If most of the energy lies with religious studies faculty, situate the work within that department while looking for opportunities for collaboration as they emerge.

- **How is interdisciplinary scholarship and work perceived at your institution?** For some institutions, interdisciplinary work is seen as a way to spread thin already limited resources, and to stifle faculty expertise. At other campuses, interdisciplinary work is seen as dynamic and energizing. Such perceptions often differ from one interdisciplinary project to another. Being mindful of these dynamics can help faculty to avoid past mistakes and capitalize on models for interdisciplinary work that have already succeeded at a given institution.
BUILDING COURSE SEQUENCES IN INTERFAITH STUDIES

Rather than offer a single interfaith studies course, many institutions are interested in the development of course sequences in interfaith studies, such as a major, a minor, a concentration, or a series of courses within the core curriculum or general education. The following are three concrete resources to consider when constructing a course sequence.

**Nazareth College, Minor in Interfaith Studies.** The [Interfaith Studies Minor at Nazareth College](#) is an interdisciplinary minor that aims to demonstrate Nazareth’s commitment to “globalization, pluralism, inclusiveness, and spiritual values”; the minor is geared as much to students interested in deepening their academic knowledge of religion as those in fields such as social work, nursing, business, and education where navigating religious diversity will be a reality of their day-to-day work. Courses in the program are meant to be:

- Experiential: Emphasizing active and engaged learning
- Dialogical: Accentuating the tools of conversation, reasoning and mediation
- Empathetic: Building appreciation for the spiritual beliefs and practices of diverse cultures
- Critical and Interdisciplinary: Integrating the methods and insights of diverse disciplines to enhance analysis and understanding, challenging students to assess positions and evaluate strategies
- Constructive: Enhancing positive strategies for religious and cultural understanding as well as cooperation among diverse peoples

The minor is a part of the work of the Brian and Jean Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue, and is directed by Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, professor of Islamic and religious studies and executive director of the Hickey Center. Students are required to take two core courses, “Exploring Religion,” and “Interfaith Dialogue: Theory and Practice,” as well as four elective courses, no more than two of which can be of the same discipline. Faculty have collaborated to identify over 20 courses from diverse disciplines that contribute to the learning outcomes of the minor. Courses include several courses in different religious and ethical traditions, as well as those that connect interfaith work to the professional fields, such as “Nursing in a Multicultural Society,” and “Social Work, Religion, Spirituality, Wellness, and Health in 21st Century.” Finally, students are expected to participate in an applied or experiential learning opportunity such as an internships or service-learning project.

**New York University, Multifaith and Spiritual Leadership Minor.** The [Multifaith and Spiritual Leadership](#) minor at NYU occupies a unique space within the university as a collaboration between the Silver School of Social Work, the Wagner school for Public Policy, and the [Of Many Institute for Multifaith Leadership](#). Overseen by Marcella Runnell Hall, director of the Of Many Institute, and an instructor in the school of social work, the courses in the minor are taught by NYU faculty across disciplines, as well as several university chaplains including Rabbi Yehuda Sarna and Imam Khalid Latif. The minor strongly emphasizes civic engagement, dialogue, and service, and is geared towards both religious students and those interested in religious diversity as a cultural reality.

Students are required to take two core-courses, “Multifaith Leadership in the 21st Century” and “Whose
Social Justice is it Anyway? Spirituality, Religion, and Civic Engagement,” and either “Diversity, Racism, Oppression, and Privilege” or “Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion.” Students work with the director of the minor to select an additional four electives that will fulfill the goals of the minor.

**Multifaith Education in Seminaries.** Interfaith studies and multifaith education have been matters of growing emphasis within American seminary education, culminating in many ways with the addition of a multifaith component as a part of the accreditation standards of the 273 member schools of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in 2011-2012. Auburn Theological Seminary was a major partner in the accreditation initiative, and has made available their extensive research on the state of multifaith education with seminaries, teaching resources, a bibliography, and other tools that faculty may find useful.

While the seminary context is of course quite different from many colleges and universities, there is still much to learn from the work of Auburn and ATS. Their work is particularly useful for religiously-affiliated schools that articulate interfaith studies in terms of ministry or vocation, or for schools who draw a connection between interfaith studies and students’ moral, spiritual, and leadership development.
Interfaith studies is concerned with both theoretical and applied learning outcomes and is in the process of codifying “signature pedagogies” that distinguish it from other fields. A given course within interfaith studies might have learning outcomes such as:

- Equipping students with theoretical lenses and skills to critically analyze the reality of religion in the world (both peaceful and harmful, inclusive and exclusive, evolving and stagnant, etc.).
- Offering classroom opportunities wherein students can demonstrate relationship-building across religious and ethical differences.
- Offering opportunities for students to apply concrete skills of interfaith engagement both inside and beyond the classroom.

Scholars in this nascent field have the important work ahead of identifying several practices that might contribute to such learning outcomes, and serve as initial key pedagogies for interfaith studies. The following are concrete examples of what might be identified as a growing catalogue of “interfaith pedagogies.”

- **Site Visits and Classroom Guests from Religiously Diverse Backgrounds.** For her interfaith studies courses at Andover Newton Theological School, Professor of Interfaith Studies Jennifer Howe Peace uses the guidelines of “encounter, engagement, and experience.” With the goal of learning with rather than from the religious other, Professor Peace takes her students on site visits to multiple religious communities and invites guests from diverse backgrounds into her courses. She privileges practitioners speaking about and teaching their own traditions wherever possible over students learning solely from texts or lectures. For more ideas on incorporating site visits into your classroom, see IFYC’s Guide for Religious and Interfaith Site Visits.

- **Case Studies in Action.** Case studies can be a powerful way to bring the challenges and possibilities of religious diversity into the classroom. Professor of Philosophy Jeanine Diller’s course on “Religion and Violence” at the University of Toledo looks at case studies of religion in situations of conflict. Using several theoretical frameworks, students analyze case studies pulled from the headlines and the local community. Students also assess the role of religion through their own experiences of volunteering on a project where they believe religion to be contributing to peace or violence, such as homeless shelters, social service organizations, and political marches. For additional case studies resources for the classroom, see the Case Studies Initiative at Harvard University’s Pluralism Project or IFYC’s Case Studies for Exploring Interfaith Cooperation.

- **First Person Narrative.** In her course, “Faith and Critical Reason: Living Religious Diversity” at Fordham University, Professor of Theology Jeannine Hill Fletcher uses first person narratives from diverse religious traditions to open her students up to religious diversity. Such narratives can allow students to connect what might seem like very distant or different traditions to their own personal experiences. Students can begin to see diverse traditions as not just ideas but living realities, narratives, and embodied practices. Narratives also help students to see the logic of other religious traditions – even while they may still disagree personally with those traditions, narratives can help students make sense of why one might adhere to a tradition other than their
own. Another approach is to ask students to read spiritual memoirs by diverse religious figures and then ask students to craft their own “spiritual autobiographies.” This practice can help students articulate their own religious or ethical commitments while seeing connections, tensions, disagreements, and similarities between their religious experiences and those of others.

Service Learning. Service learning can be a valuable tool for creating authentic opportunities for interfaith engagement in a classroom setting. Projects can be catered to fit course constraints—single engagements with many religiously diverse community partners or long term engagement with a single project that brings together multiple traditions. The most successful service learning projects work with community members as partners (rather than a community “being served” by the students) and fill a genuine need or opportunity articulated by community members. Service learning or volunteerism offices on campuses can be important partners for identifying strong service learning opportunities. Faculty should use guided questions and reflection to help students process the experiences and ensure learning objectives are met.

Using Art to Introduce Lived Religion. Ali Asani, Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures at Harvard University uses art – such as literature, poetry, music, architecture, film, and visual arts – to introduce his students to the lived aspects of religious traditions. Art, Professor Asani believes, can offer tools to help students think critically about the traditions they are studying, forcing them to see the diversity and complexity within traditions and seeking to understand traditions in modes beyond just studying doctrine or text.

Key Challenges for Teaching Interfaith Studies. Several important theoretical and practical challenges remain for teaching interfaith understanding. As the field continues to evolve and grow, the following questions recommend further consideration:

Does Interfaith Studies Have Normative Goals? If indeed interfaith studies is concerned with creating positive interactions between those who orient around religion differently, is the field based on a normative goal and is such a goal appropriate for an academic field? For many, this is a key component of interfaith studies, and a large part of what distinguishes it from fields such as religious studies. As such, interfaith studies might be understood as being analogous to other applied fields which often seek to articulate concrete goals beyond the academy, such as peace and justice studies, environmental studies, or academic programs in international development.

However, if interfaith studies does have a normative goal it may be in real tension with the critical lens of the academic study of religion, which for many requires “bracketing” personal religious views or moral imperatives. From such a perspective, religious studies should strive to teach students to think critically about diverse religious traditions and their own tradition, but not concern itself with interfaith engagement or organizing. The reality is that the tenor of these concerns, like many other topics addressed in this report, will depend on the institution. How does the institution understand the academic study of religion? Does the institution have clear goals such as shaping students to be civically engaged individuals as a part of its mission, and can such goals be drawn upon to articulate a need for interfaith studies despite some disciplinary tensions?

What does it mean to do experiential learning around interfaith well? For faculty hoping to create interfaith experiences for their students, there are several pitfalls that may arise when attempting experiential
learning. For example, site visits or classroom guests of diverse traditions may reinforce stereotypes or lead to tokenizing of religious minorities. This can occur when something unexpected happens on a site visit, when students are not provided with effective tools for reflecting on or debriefing the experience, or when students fail to see beyond their own preconceptions to the lived reality of the traditions. Thus it is important for faculty to build relationships with and prepare community partners beforehand and to be clear about the learning objectives when either visiting a community or inviting in a visitor. When courses allow, it can be valuable to visit multiple communities within a tradition, or inviting in multiple guests from that tradition to give students a chance to encounter the diversity within a tradition. Building careful relationships with community partners can help to avoid another pitfall, namely burning out community partners with too many visits or requests, which can happen in homogenous communities where one community partner might be regularly called upon.
Assessment continues to be a sensitive topic within higher education, and many faculty feel frustrated with the difficulty of measuring what may seem like intangible concepts like “pluralism orientation” or “interfaith engagement.” In an attempt to engage these questions and issues, the following three tools for measuring interfaith learning may be useful.

1. **The Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS).** The CRSCS was developed in 2009 and piloted by Dr. Alyssa Rockenbach (North Carolina State University) and Dr. Matthew Mayhew (New York University). In 2011, Drs. Rockenbach and Mayhew partnered with IFYC to integrate new measures specific to interfaith action and related attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Administered at 64 diverse colleges and universities to date, the CRSCS helps campuses to answer such questions as:

   - Do students perceive campus as a safe space for diverse worldview identities, beliefs, and practices?
   - What are the most positive aspects of campus climate? What areas of campus climate present challenges or opportunities for improvement?
   - How do students respond to and interact with others representing different worldviews?
   - What are students’ attitudes toward diverse worldviews?

   One of the most relevant findings for faculty that came out of CRSCS is that interfaith activities positively relate to students’ pluralism orientation. The survey suggests that engaging interfaith work in the curriculum positively contributes to students’ pluralism orientation. For more detailed data, visit [https://www.ifyc.org/assessment/reports-and-literature](https://www.ifyc.org/assessment/reports-and-literature).

   In 2014, IFYC in partnership with Drs. Rockenbach and Mayhew launched a new survey entitled the Interfaith Diversity Experience and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS). This survey will be administered at 122 campuses, following a cohort of students across four years. This research design makes it possible to examine how students’ interfaith diversity experiences and attitudes change over time and to pinpoint programs, activities, and other environmental factors that foster meaningful interactions with diverse others. This study provides colleges and universities with a better knowledgebase in order to develop successful programs around worldview diversity. In addition, IDEALS makes it possible to compare the experiences of students from different institution types—public and private, large and small, secular and religiously affiliated. It is the first of its kind to address U.S. college students’ engagement with interfaith diversity in such an expansive and nuanced manner.

2. **Campus-Wide Interfaith Learning Outcomes.** Dominican University, in River Forest, Illinois, publicly articulated “interfaith learning” as central to their values as a Catholic liberal arts college educating students for diverse vocations and professions. As part of this, they identified fourteen “Interfaith Learning Outcomes” that focus on the Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills, and Actions all Dominican students should have upon graduating.

   Dominican has taken on the task of incorporating interfaith themes throughout curricular and co-curricular activities. Within their core curriculum, they have added required texts that touch on
interfaith themes to the seminars that all sophomores and juniors take. They provide resources for faculty interested in creating explicit interfaith learning opportunities for students and have created modules for facilitating an interfaith dialogue or a site visit to a local diverse religious community. In addition, they offer professional development space for faculty to discuss tactics for teaching interfaith texts as well as the proper role for interfaith engagement within the classroom. For more specifics about Dominican's interfaith programing see “Building and Assessing a Culture of Interfaith Learning” by Jeffery Carlson.

3. The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric. The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric, modeled on AAC&U’s VALUE Rubrics, was developed in partnership between faculty at Wofford College, Elon University, and IFYC; the work was supported by a grant from the Teagle Foundation. The rubric can help faculty assess student interfaith learning by looking at an individual project, paper, or program as well as considering student growth along the rubric across multiple assignments within a course. The rubric is a starting point and its terms and movements are meant to be contested. However, it is intended to help faculty think about how to measure the interfaith learning that happens in their classrooms and think about how such learning contributes to students’ development as global citizens. To read more about the creation and the use of the rubric, see “Measuring Student Learning for Interfaith Cooperation: The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric” by Katie Bringman Baxter.
CONCLUSION

The themes, topics, and questions explored throughout this report represent just some of the pressing concerns and considerations connected to the emerging field of interfaith studies. They suggest both a real need for and interest in interfaith studies as a field of academic inquiry that deals with both the theoretical and practical aspects of interfaith work. As this conversation continues, Interfaith Youth Core seeks to share resources that highlight tools and best practices, as well as serve as a convener for scholars and practitioners of this emerging field. Visit www.ifyc.org to learn more.

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- Alvernia University (PA)
- Andover Newton Theological School (MA)
- Auburn Theological Seminary (NY)
- Benedictine University (IL)
- Bethel University (MN)
- California State University, Chico (CA)
- Canisius College (NY)
- The College of St. Scholastica (MN)
- College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University (MN)
- Concordia College (MN)
- Dominican University (IL)
- Drew University (NJ)
- Duke University (NC)
- Earlham College (IN)
- Elizabethtown College (PA)
- Elon University (NC)
- Fordham University (NY)
- Harvard University (MA)
- Loyola University Chicago (IL)
- Messiah College (PA)
- Nazareth College (NY)
- New York University (NY)
- Northern Illinois University (IL)
- Oklahoma City University (OK)
- Rice University (TX)
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- University of Toledo (OH)
- University of Wisconsin, Madison (WI)
- Utah State University (UT)
- Wofford College (SC)