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JOURNAL DESCRIPTION

The journal publishes a particular type of academic writing in which teacher-practioners critically reflect on their teaching practice—surfacing their assumptions, analyzing their pedagogical intentions, reflecting on the effectiveness of their learning designs, and diagnosing challenges to student learning.

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DISABILITIES AND PEDAGOGY

Revisiting Site Visits through the Lens of Disability Studies

Emily O. Gravett
James Madison University

ABSTRACT

The site visit (also called a field trip, excursion, or even field research) is a well-known learning activity in religious studies classrooms. In this article, I will analyze site visits to reveal how ableism is embedded even in educational practices common to religion courses. First, I will provide a brief overview of disability studies, various models of disability, and the pervasive ableism that structures higher education. Next, I will describe the typical conceptions and components of a site visit, as illustrated by real religion syllabi, with consideration of the barriers that it may present for students who "deviate" from the "norm." I will then introduce some principles of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning, which may give readers ideas and tools for revising and expanding their assignments, including site visits. I will conclude with some (not definitive or exhaustive) ideas for making site visits more inclusive.

KEYWORDS

site visits, field trips, disability, disability studies, universal design, universal design for learning

Introduction

The site visit (also called a field trip, excursion, or even field research) is a well-known learning activity in religious studies classrooms, especially in introductory courses such as Religions of the World, which I teach every year.[1] Like other place-based or community-based educational experiences (the latter of which are "high-impact practices" [Kuh 2008]), site visits can give students direct observation of and even participation in the religions that, otherwise, they may only have been studying at some remove, from their academic "armchairs." The firsthand experience of site visits is thought to "bring alive the study of religion" (Brodeur 2004). They can be risky, unpredictable, and exciting (Burford 2004). Ashcraft (2015) reports that a field trip to a Shaker village during his master's program led him to research on new religions and then became the guiding theme of his dissertation. He

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claims, "The experience of seeing, of being present bodily, was crucial to my transformation" (2015). Some instructors even require students to visit a site of a religion different than their own (if they affiliate with any), to provide further opportunity for encountering new communities; stepping outside of comfort zones; complicating stereotypes, negative impressions, and/or inevitable biases; building empathy; honing ethnographic and reflective skills; collecting data; illustrating insider/outsider distinctions; practicing religious etiquette; acquiring religious literacy; and making connections between learning in the classroom and the so-called real world outside of it. Site visits have the potential to "rattle . . . students' cages" (Ashcraft 2015), making the strange seem familiar and the familiar seem strange, which is something that religious studies does at its best (Muesse 1997).

In writing about site visits within our field, experienced instructors have been generous in offering advice to others who wish to integrate this activity into their own courses. Indeed, the entire October 2004 issue of *Religious Studies News* was devoted to the topic. Such advice tends to focus on the "nuts and bolts of site visits" (Burford 2004). There are certainly logistical and legal details for instructors to consider. For instance, Hussain (2004) reminds us to make contact with the site about the impending volume of student visits, to work with the institution's risk management office to complete the proper documentation, and to arrange for campus transportation to take students to the site. And, of course, students need to be advised on what they might expect from the visit, as well as proper courtesy and conduct. Ashcraft (2015) shares that he tells his students to "keep an open mind," "be respectful," "ask questions," "listen and observe," as well as "participate only as much as you feel comfortable, based on your own understanding of what comfort is." While considerations of race and/or gender sometimes emerge in these discussions (such as, will all genders be welcome in all spaces at the site? will some students need to dress or cover up differently than others?), analogous considerations of disability do not. (Notably, in her list of potential reasons not to do a site visit, Burford [2004] does not mention questions or concerns of access.) Nor is there explicit mention that religious traditions have conceptualized disability—in their sacred texts, in their ritual practices, in their hierarchical social models—in limiting, even pejorative, ways (Schumm and Stoltzfus 2016), just as occurs with the sexism, colorism, and other forms of marginalization and discrimination from which religions are not immune. For a student with a disability (who, of course, also holds other social identities), these conceptions could make site visits an especially difficult, triggering, or hurtful experience. This inattention to disability, while unfortunate, does align with broader trends in higher education and society at large; disability is so often invisible and ignored, even though people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the US (United Nations n.d.). Site visits, like so many of our other assignments, are undergirded by implicit presumptions of a singular, "normal"—that is, non-disabled—student.

But we know that our student populations are no longer homogenous (if they ever really were). Past conceptions of the normal or typical student (that is, white, wealthy, non-disabled, cis-gendered, heterosexual, Christian, male)—and generic approaches for how best to teach him—no longer hold in increasingly diverse classrooms. (Even the notion of "average" is coming under scrutiny [see Rose 2016].) More women than men now attend college (Marcus 2017) and many projections, based on US census data, have whites in the minority in our country in just a few decades (Passell and Cohn 2008). According to the US Department of Education (2016), over 10 percent of undergraduates report having a disability, although even that figure is likely low, given the numerous impediments to disclosure (for example, getting an expensive diagnosis from a medical professional in order to provide appropriate documentation to an office of disability services in the first place; see, for instance, Toutain [2019]). What we do know is that there will be students with disabilities, visible or invisible (Disabled World 2019), in all our classes, *whether*—and this is important—*we know it or not*. As Rose says, variability is the rule, not the exception (2012). As a result, it is time for us to reexamine site visits through this lens.

In this article, I will analyze site visits to reveal how ableism is embedded even in educational practices common to religion courses. First, I will provide a brief overview of disability studies, various models of disability, and the pervasive ableism that structures higher education. Next, I will describe the typical conceptions and components of a site visit, as illustrated by real religion syllabi, with consideration of the barriers that it may present for the variety of students who deviate from the norm. I will then introduce some principles of Universal Design (UD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which may give readers ideas and tools for revising and expanding their activities, including site visits. I will conclude with some (not definitive or exhaustive, admittedly) ideas for making site visits more inclusive. Through a discussion about this particular assignment, I hope to call religion instructors' attention to disability more generally, so that we may become more aware of the inadvertent ways our assignments may exclude *and* so that we may better appreciate, leverage, and respond to the rich diversity of the human experience, in our classrooms and beyond.

Disability Studies

As I have written elsewhere with colleagues expert in disability (Trybus, Breneman, and Gravett 2019),[2] disability studies is an interdisciplinary field with a rich history and diverse scholarship (for example, Burch and Rembis 2014). It works to expose and increase awareness of ableism, defined by Liebowitz (2017, 153) as "the system of oppression that faces disabled people in our society, a system that marks disabled people as inferior and most importantly, other. . . . Ableism is dictating that there is a right, a 'normal' way to be, and disabled people aren't it. . . . Ableism is a world that is centered on the nondisabled, instead of being welcoming for everyone." Ableism is pervasive, insidious, and—like sexism or racism— invisible to many of us, especially those of us who identify with the dominant groups who hold power (Tatum 2000). We are all complicit with ableism, to some extent, because we live in (and may even benefit from) a world that privileges the abled. This does not, as Liebowitz underscores, make any one of us "a horrible soulless person"; rather, "being an ableist just means that you have privilege you need to acknowledge, and patterns of thought that you need to change" (2017, 155). The work of disability studies scholars is to remind us of the constructed nature of identity and to call attention to the arbitrary designations of certain differences as deviant, while everything else is normal, typical, and good.

Yet disability, like gender or race, is a fluid, not a fixed, concept. This fluidity is reflected in the various ways it has been defined. No singular definition is accepted by everyone; some disability scholars (for example, Linton 1998) even eschew offering a succinct or pat definition of the term. Legally, in the US, the Americans with Disabilities Act or "ADA" (2008) defines disability as: "with respect to an individual (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment." This definition situates the "problem" (and it is perceived as a problem, indicated by language like "limits") of disability with individuals and their lack of access to legal rights. This understanding of disability has certainly been beneficial in providing some legal advances and protections for a vulnerable population. And, practically speaking, institutions and their instructors must be aware of the legal ramifications (such as lawsuits) of failing to provide access. Yet legal models do not fully account for justice for people with disabilities.

What are called "medical" models of disability have also failed to provide full or useful accounts of disability, as my colleagues and I have previously written (Trybus, Breneman, and Gravett 2019). Early approaches to studying and navigating disability (especially in applied fields) pathologized it, focusing on the individual diagnosis as a deficit, with the goal being a cure. For many readers, "disability" may still conjure discrete medical or psychological conditions like Autism, Down syndrome, or color blindness. This is how I used to conceive of disability. Yet approaching disability solely from a medical perspective is restrictive (and abdicates responsibility) because it construes difference as an individual's "problem," like the legal model, as opposed to society's or the environment's (Linton 1998, 132-156). Moreover, this problem should ideally be resolved for the individual to be considered healthy, whole, and acceptable.

Conversely, social models of disability recognize the construction of disability as an oppressed and marginalized category of identity and locate the "problem" of disability not with individuals, as in the medical model, but rather with physical, social, and even rhetorical spaces. That is, it is an inaccessible environment and an exclusive, alienating society that is disabling—*that creates disability*—not any particular individual's medical diagnosis, difference, or so-called "impairment." The responsibility of creating more accessible environments thus becomes everyone's, not solely the burden of those individuals affected. Despite the benefits of social models, disability scholars like Siebers (2008) have argued that they, too, can fail to fully capture the lived experiences of people with disabilities. After all, even if it were possible to create totally inclusive and accessible environments (and it isn't), various impairments can still cause pain, frustration, and limitation. Many people with disabilities do wish for their symptoms to be erased or remedied (Jubilee 2019). As Shakespeare notes, a weakness of the social model is "the neglect of impairment as an important aspect of many disabled people's lives" (2013, 217).

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2   Much of the material of this section was originally written in collaboration with Matt Trybus and Daisy Breneman for an earlier article on disability studies, in which we also described the field and the various models of disability. Scholars like Mr. Trybus and Ms. Breneman are particularly attuned to and accepting of scholarly connection and interdependence; as a result, both were supportive of me reiterating some of our important points here for a new audience. For comparison, readers may turn to our co-authored article, cited throughout this section.

Newer, interactional models of disability seek to combine these previous models. They understand disability as the result of the interplay between an inaccessible environment and society, as in the social models, and an individual's particular impairment(s), as in the legal and medical models (Trybus, Breneman, and Gravett 2019). This combination recognizes that experiences of barriers arise from the interaction, with each side contributing. As such, these models focus on holistic strategies for fostering access, autonomy, and choice. It is not enough to create after-the-fact accommodations or narrow points of access, and we cannot dictate or assume others' needs. Rather, people with disabilities should be consulted (think of the adage "nothing about us without us" [Charlton 1998], or even, more plainly, "nothing without us") in the proactive design of inclusive spaces and learning environments and in the creation of multiple options for meaningful access and equitable engagement.

Site Visits and Their Potential Barriers

Obviously, site visits are not the only assignments given in religion courses. To help students learn, my colleagues and I routinely lean on readings, quizzes and exams, lectures, discussions, online polls, videos, research papers and reflective writing, and more. Part of the point of this essay is to use an analysis of the site visit assignment to increase our awareness more generally of disability, such that we may apply these insights to other elements of our instruction. Site visits provide an apt example of the ableism that, I contend, permeates our pedagogy.

For those unfamiliar, site visit or other similar ethnographic assignments in religion classrooms typically entail, as the name implies, students going on at least one trip to a religious site in the local area. They may do so alone or, more commonly, are asked to work in groups. Students are usually asked to provide some kind of reflection or report after the visit, for instance, comparing what they have witnessed or experienced during the visit to what they have learned about that religion from their readings or other course materials in the class.

Site visits may be presented as part of the course requirements, as we see in the following two excerpts from real religion syllabi:

> You will be required to complete a fieldwork project for this course. The project consists of several parts including two site visits, a web analysis, an interview, and a 6-8 page reflection paper which summarizes your findings. (Narayanan 2017)

> The final project takes place outside of the classroom entirely; it requires you to attend religious services/meetings and to interact with members of a faith tradition unfamiliar to you. You may do this either on your own or in small groups. This project requires a high degree of self-motivation, planning, coordination of schedules, and, if you desire, group work. After completing the off-campus portion of the final project, you will then write a paper. (Mathewson 2016)

Yet a question emerges from this sort of presentation. When site visits are articulated as part of the course requirements on a syllabus, what recourse or latitude might be available to a student who is unable, for whatever reason, to participate? These particular syllabi do not go on to note comparable alternatives or explain how a student could proceed if the site visit is untenable. It is also not always clear, from syllabi alone, how the site visit might contribute to specific student learning objectives, which could potentially be fulfilled in other ways, as I will discuss below.

Indeed, many religion syllabi do not elaborate on the site visit assignment; it is, rather, mentioned briefly and casually. For instance, in Hardy's syllabus (2014), under a section on "Field Assignments," students are told that they should "keep a journal of their experiences at places of worship at sites throughout the voyage. They will write a paper of 5-6 pp. on one of the major religions based on their field notes and reasearch [sic]." No other information is provided, though this assignment seems significant (that is, plural "experiences" at multiple "places" of worship, followed by a paper entailing outside research). Wiersma (2009) explains, within the "Reflection Essays and Learning Assessment" portion of the syllabus, that the "reflection essay will cover lecture material, and/or reading from the previous weeks and/or your impressions gained from our site visits." Though two appear on Wiersma's course calendar, the site visits themselves (such

as what they entail, how they are graded, what purpose they fulfill, and so forth) are not described further. Of course, this brevity is not especially surprising. Instructors routinely supplement their syllabi with verbal commentary or more detailed written instructions (for example, handouts or information provided via the learning management system) that provide elaboration on important assignments. I do so myself; otherwise, my syllabi would be twenty-five pages! Yet we must also recognize that the syllabus is one of the first and most important communications that students receive about a course (as well as the person teaching the course), including how accessible and inclusive it will be. If students with disabilities see such requirements on the syllabus—and only receive additional information at some future point—it may be too late.

Other religion instructors do provide detail about site visits, even on their syllabi, though these details do not necessarily make room for the inevitable classroom diversity that disability epitomizes. Some tell students how to prepare for the site visit(s), for instance, by reading *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* (2011). Others offer advice for what to do once students are on site. Henderson ([2015](#)) advises, for example: "Participate, don't simply observe. If everyone stands (or sits or kneels), you should, too." (As an aside, this particular advice may be risky to give students in a religious studies course; in some contexts, for instance, Native American sweat ceremonies, it is considered inappropriate and even offensive for outsiders to participate. Presumably, part of the in-class instruction would entail specifics about the individual religions, including their rituals and what sorts of participation, if any, would be welcome.) Yet site visit descriptions can reveal subtle barriers for students with disabilities. Henderson's above written instructions (2015), for instance, presume that her students will all be able to stand or sit or kneel, which may not be the case. (This is, in fact, one limitation of all physically active learning exercises; see Gravett [2018].) Other site visit assignment requirements presume that all students will be able to see what is happening on site or will be able to take notes, either by hand or with a device. Prohibiting the use of recording devices or laptops for taking field notes, which many site visit assignments do, may further hinder students for whom such technology facilitates their learning. (Indeed, one of the most requested accommodations at my institution is that of a note taker.) All syllabus descriptions presume that it will be easy for students to get to, into, and around the religious sites in the first place.

In fact, the very sites of site visits will likely be inaccessible in a variety of ways, even if they are technically ADA compliant (and, it is important to note that older buildings are not, necessarily). Religious sites are frequently punctuated by loud, unexpected, and (to many visitors) unfamiliar noises—from gongs to organs to bells to human chanting—yet these sounds could be jarring, disorienting, or even episode-inducing for some people. The same with strong smells, like incense, flowers, candles, or food. Forced interactions with, or even just the presence of, large groups (of people at the site) may interfere, for some students, with focused observation or comfortable participation. Moreover, many sites contain narrow entrances or aisles, multiple stories or levels, poorly arranged or designed seating, or rough and uneven surfaces. There is a Buddhist retreat center about an hour away from my institution, for example, which provides a nice opportunity for site visits, but the tour requires easy, free movement across sprawling natural spaces and in between detached buildings. If you are a person who uses a wheelchair or orthoses (braces), what would/could your participation in this site visit look like? Or, to take another example, a student in my recent Religion and Disability course realized that, in the church that he chose to study, the congregation had to walk down a long aisle and up a set of steps to arrange their bodies on very uncomfortable kneelers in order to receive the Eucharist; the minister went over to others who were known to need special consideration. If participation is encouraged by site visit assignments, we must ask, who is being left or singled out?

Requiring activities like site visits may have potentially deleterious effects for students with disabilities, even if inadvert. This is, in part, why I have been hesitant to require such assignments myself, though I am also convinced of its great potential. Such requirements may encourage students with disabilities to avoid or drop the class entirely, if they get the sense from the syllabus that they will not be able to complete a major assignment in the course (and if there is a sense that there is no flexibility in how they might otherwise gain or demonstrate the knowledge associated with the visit). Students with disabilities may be implicitly encouraged to try to "pass" as a non-disabled person or to "cover" their disability (Linton 1998), so that they can participate in a site visit and its accompanying assignments, like the rest of the students. Or they may be forced into "outing" themselves or disclosing their disability, in order to ensure their full inclusion and participation, when they may have preferred not to share this information (then or ever) with the instructor and/or with their peers.

One way or another, this sort of required assignment runs the risk of exacerbating feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and exhaustion, as well as disempowerment, discouragement, debasement, insecurity, and isolation, that we know students with disabilities already experience in college. Notably, students with disabilities have reported feeling disempowered and discouraged specifically by instructors who lack basic knowledge about disabilities or accommodations, including those who do not believe such students even have disabilities (Francis et al. 2019, 253).[3] Site visits may, unintentionally, "other" or stigmatize individuals and reinforce the invisible but pervasive ableism that students (and instructors) with disabilities encounter routinely in academia (Dolmage 2017)—and society, more broadly.

Universal Design/Universal Design for Learning

So, what can we do? How can we work toward providing equitable access to all experiences and knowledge for everyone in our classes? How can we retain or try out site visits if we so desire? We need not simply discard the site visit, especially if it is already been working well for us. If we did that with every assignment or activity that we realize is potentially ableist, I fear we would have nothing left in our teaching toolkit! Thus, it may be helpful to familiarize readers with universal design approaches at this point. These are not quick fixes or simple checklists to make our learning environments inclusive, once and for all. Rather, these approaches can guide our intentional design of courses and individual activities, like the site visit, by giving us questions and principles to consider in advance and along the way.

From the outset, it is important to note that there are many related terms and frameworks in circulation, including "universally designed teaching," "universal instructional design," "universal design for instruction," and "universal design of instruction" (for further detail see Burgstahler 2015, 34-44). The most relevant for our purposes here, however, are universal design (UD), which focuses on building inclusive products and physical environments, and universal design for learning (UDL), which focuses on helping learners access and represent knowledge in multiple ways. There is obviously some overlap between the two, as we will see.

Emerging from the architectural world, UD advocates for designing environments, including educational ones, to be "welcoming and useful to groups that are diverse with respect to many dimensions," including disability; these environments should be usable, accessible, and inclusive to the widest spectrum of users (Burgstahler 2015, 3, 15). It is a proactive position, not a reactive one (for example, not only after an individual has gone through the burdensome process of disability disclosure). In UD, for example, individual students with disabilities are not expected to adjust to inflexible learning environments; rather, the environments are to be designed for the needs and preferences of *anyone*, to the benefit of *everyone*. A familiar example of UD in space is the curb cut. Curb cuts not only increase access to a building or a sidewalk/street for someone using a wheelchair—as we might initially perceive—but also for people pushing baby strollers or food carts, people on crutches or with walkers, people lugging suitcases, people riding on scooters, and so forth.

Of the seven principles of UD described by Burgstahler, four seem especially relevant to our considerations here, in the context of site visits: equitable use, flexibility in use, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use (2015, 15-16). "Equitable use" means that "the design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities." Guidelines for this principle include providing the same means of use for all users (identical whenever possible, equivalent when not) and avoiding segregating or stigmatizing any users. With "flexibility in use," "the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities," providing choice in methods of use and adaptability to the user's pace. "Low physical effort" is when "the design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue." Included in the guidelines for this principle is the minimization of sustained physical effort. The principle of "size and space for approach and use" includes the recommendation to "provide a clear line of sight to important elements of any seated or standing user" and to "provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance" (15-16). We can keep each of these principles in mind as we design and assess all our learning activities, not only site visits.

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3   Alternatively, students in this study found great support in instructors who moved beyond the requisite accommodations and who were caring, warm, fun, and understanding (Francis et al. 2019, 253).

Similarly, UDL recognizes "the need to make education more responsive to learner differences" (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014, 5)—differences that are predictable and normal. We can "plan for expected variability across learners and provide curriculum that has corresponding flexibility" (10). Further, Meyer, Rose, and Gordon emphasize, "instead of seeing variability as problem, we now understand it to be an actively positive force in learning for the group as a whole" (10). Variability can be viewed as an opportunity, not a burden. The three core principles of UDL are that we, as an instructors, provide multiple means of engagement (the "why" of learning), multiple means of representation (the "what" of learning), and multiple means of action and expression (the "how" of learning) for students (7). This emphasis on multiplicity across the three guidelines is in recognition of the fact that "there is no one optimal path or learning method in any subject or skill" (27). Indeed, as Rose has shown, quite convincingly, in *The End of Average* (2016), individuals—both in terms of their personality traits as well as their paths toward goals—are actually quite "jagged."

The three UDL guidelines touch upon areas of learning variability that could represent barriers or, in a well-designed learning environment and from a different perspective, opportunities (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014, 110). In consideration of the first guideline, "multiple means of engagement," instructors can provide students with options for self-regulation, for sustaining effort and persistence, and for recruiting interest. An example of providing options for recruiting interest would be to optimize individual choice and autonomy in the learning process. In the second guideline, "multiple means of representation," instructors are encouraged to provide options for comprehension; options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols; and options for perception. As an example of the latter, we might offer alternatives for auditory and visual information. For the third and final guideline, "multiple means of action and expression," instructors can provide options for executive functions, expression and communication, and physical action. An example of the latter would be optimizing access to tools and assistive technologies, such as a laptop for note taking.

To reiterate, universal design frameworks and approaches such as UD and UDL do not offer instructors simple or singular solutions to the kinds of teaching conundrums that the site visit represents. As Price writes: "Universal Design is not one specific procedure, nor a recipe for success" (2014, 89); "efforts must always be partial and engaged in a process of continual revision" (87). At its heart, a universal design orientation encourages iteration, experimentation, and verification with those on the periphery. There is no one right or definitive way to make the religious site visit assignment—or any other learning activity—fully accessible for all students. Admittedly, this can feel frustrating or confusing. Yet, guided by UD and UDL, religious studies instructors can realize that they have many options for creating more inclusive assignments and learning environments where no average user with a certain set of abilities is assumed, where it is possible for everyone to participate, and where no one is singled out or stigmatized.

Some Ideas

As we near the end, I would like to offer some ideas for improving the site visit assignment—with the hope that these ideas, or at least the spirit behind them, may transfer to how we think about and design other learning activities. Yet, given that UD and UDL are not intended to dictate specific solutions to complex teaching questions or challenges, this section will naturally be less developed or directive than the others. When creating access, there is not one right way.

To begin, it is always helpful to consider what student learning objectives any assignment (including site visits) fulfills. We often (perhaps due to the lack of pedagogical training in many graduate schools) create assignments and other activities without thinking too much about them, because they seem fun and innovative, or they were assignments we ourselves received back in school, or they were what our predecessors did, or they are now what's easiest for us to do. If it turns out there actually aren't any learning objectives associated with the site visit (or any other assignment under consideration), then take this opportunity to develop some. . . or rethink having the assignment entirely. After all, why have an assignment if it doesn't serve some purpose in advancing student learning? This kind of intentional alignment between course objectives and assessments is the hallmark of backward design (see Wiggins and McTighe 2005; Fink 2013), a process routinely recommended to instructors to better help their students learn. Think back to the list of reasons that instructors assign site visits which I summarized near the start of the article; many of those could be student learning objectives for a religion course—and none *require* a site visit to accomplish.

Once there are learning objectives in place, it is important to recognize that there are usually many ways in which they can be fulfilled. Ideally, we would offer all students multiple means for accessing content and demonstrating their progress or mastery (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014); the site visit would then become just one option, among many. Let us consider the site visit assignment whose primary purpose is to allow students to witness real religious practices.[4] In this case, perhaps watching a documentary film or a homemade video could similarly suffice; my students, for example, have viewed recordings of *puja* or the Holi festival (from Hinduism) using YouTube videos in class. Or one could take advantage of resources such as the American Religious Sounds Project, and play sound for our students, like *adhan* (the call to worship in Islam) or Hebrew cantillation (OSU 2020). We could bring the site to the students by inviting an individual or group into the classroom, for example, to conduct a religious ceremony for observation or to answer questions about their own experiences and perspectives. One could leverage video technology like Skype, Zoom, or WebEx, so the religious individual(s) doesn't even have to make the trip to campus. Perhaps this is an exciting opportunity for us to explore virtual reality, in partnership with our libraries and/or instructional technology experts; there are virtual tours of religious sites— from the Dome of the Rock to the Sistine Chapel—already available online. Perhaps we could invite students, like one of my colleagues did, to gain first-hand experience by making food associated with specific religious traditions, like *challah* in Judaism. Perhaps we could bring religious art or artifacts for students to look at and even, if appropriate, touch; in my department, we have many such objects on display in our common area and instructors can borrow them to use in class. Or we could use some combination of the above, and more, to fulfill this learning objective.

Of course, if the intent of the site visit assignment is to fulfill a different learning objective or set of learning objectives, then other alternatives can be imagined. For example, Hussain (2004) took his students to visit a mosque in one course, for the purpose of showing them the architecture, because he had learned there had been some local opposition to its construction. This is obviously a different sort of site visit, with a different intent, than the one outlined above for the observation of real religious practices. With Hussain's objective, students could be given the option of looking at photographs of the site, if the visit itself was a barrier. The idea here, when guided by UD/UDL, is to proliferate options, rather than foreclose opportunity; the site visit need not be the only entry point into student learning.

Along these lines, we might do what one of my friends, a professor of Buddhism, does, which is to make site visits optional. In previous Tibetan Buddhism and Introduction to Buddhism courses, both relatively small, she arranged for students to take voluntary trips to nearby meditation and retreat centers. (Note that she is not trying to arrange these kinds of visits for multiple religions, as one might, for instance, in an introductory survey course; that approach has seemed untenable to her, in large part because of the amount of preparation and prior knowledge she feels that her students need to have in order to respectfully go into others' spaces and engage.) During these visits, her students have variously had the chance to take a tour of grounds and dorms, to do Question and Answer sessions with residents, to choose to participate in mindfulness meditation exercises, and to experience, in person, what they had only been reading and discussing in class, from a more analytical perspective. Her goal is to give students a vivid experience that they might actually be able to remember in five years: to be able to move in a distinct space, to see art, to smell incense, to hear tones, to really get a *feel* of the religious phenomena. As many as half of the students have chosen to come on these optional visits, and as few as two. My friend believes requiring these site visits would be difficult, for many reasons, but she is particularly attuned to equity and access along many axes (for example, socioeconomic status: some students may not have the time, money, or vehicle to be able to get to the site).

If, however, site visits are deemed a primary way for students to meet a particular learning objective(s) and it makes sense to require them, we can still do our best to at least ensure that the sites themselves are accessible, by doing advanced investigation. In consultation with an office of disability services, disability studies experts, and/or people with disabilities, instructors can scout and screen possible locations and provide a list from which to choose, rather than simply letting student groups decide randomly and on their own. (If instructors themselves have disabilities—and, of course, many do—their perspective on and experience with potential sites would be especially valuable.) To be clear, this would require the instructor to research and visit the sites beforehand, which is a good idea anyway. As with so much of our teaching, labor at the front end of an assignment prevents scrambling for adjustments and accommodations

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4   I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Christie Kilby at James Madison University for drawing upon her own experiences with site visits to brainstorm many of these alternatives for this example with me.

(which may require more work) later on. Realistically, if sites are limited in the local area and not all are fully accessible, then being clear with students upfront (for example, by providing detailed descriptions about the features of each site, including potential barriers), so that they can exercise choice about which to visit, goes a long way.

The site visit assignment, if integral to the course, provides a nice opening to have a discussion with students about disability, access, and inclusion. Many students, like many of our colleagues, are not aware of disability or disability studies; it certainly was not on my radar until a few years ago. Students may not realize the harm that can be done by casually using words like "crazy" or "wheelchair bound" in the classroom; they may not be aware of the history of American eugenics, institutionalization, and forced sterilization associated with disability that is a part of our shared heritage (see Dolmage [2017] for an important discussion of this past). They may not know that many disabilities are invisible, and that we cannot know much about a person (including other important parts of their identity) just by looking at them. They may not recognize that the impulse to help, pity, or find inspiration in people with disabilities is considered condescending and offensive to many in the community. These are but some of the many points of conversation about disability that an assignment like a site visit could prompt, even if briefly, in a religion course. And, for those thinking that these topics seem too far afield from the religious studies topics they teach, please remember that disability has always been part of the religious experience, and the religion classroom, whether we are aware of it ourselves or not.

Conclusion

Decisions about site visits, like all pedagogical decisions, will necessarily be context dependent, guided by the particular institution and department, the instructor's training and personality, the topic and level of the course, the student population, and more. As I hope is clear, I am not claiming to offer a one-size-fits-all solution. What is important is that all of us consider disability in advance when designing a site visit—or any other religious studies assignment—recognizing and trying to reduce the barriers it can create for student learning. I suspect we don't have a very clear idea of the sorts of barriers that site visits can present for students with disabilities because there may not be much intersection between those students and this kind of assignment, for the reasons I indicated above. It can be hard for us to know, unfortunately, without a specific individual calling our attention to a specific problem. As such, this assignment presents an opportunity for raising awareness, in students and in ourselves, about disability, and about the other kinds of diversity that inevitably exist in religious and even our own classroom communities. We can open ourselves up and actively seek out feedback and suggestions about this assignment or others, from students, colleagues, and community members with disabilities. It is in this way that we can engage in the continual process of reflection and revision—so important to universal design and to academia, writ large.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily O. Gravett is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion and an assistant director in the Center for Faculty Innovation at James Madison University. She earned her PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia.

DISABILITIES AND PEDAGOGY

The Spirit of Inclusion: Facilitating Dialogue and Developing Strategies for Inclusion in Catholic Higher Education

Alicia L. Brienza with Devon Sprague
Stonehill College

ABSTRACT

Inclusion means developing a shared language and cultivating spaces that are adaptable for all learners. In higher education, a campus-wide adoption of inclusion is difficult due to limited time and resources. However, the presence of students with learning differences is increasing on college campuses and challenging traditional images of students and the classroom experience. As the student landscape of higher education continues to shift, developing an inclusive philosophy and increasing accessibility will become imperative. This paper seeks to frame its discussion of inclusion from a theological, relational-ethics lens in order to provide context, strategies, and training for all educators.

KEYWORDS

site visits, field trips, disability, disability studies, universal design, universal design for learning

Introduction

Imagine hosting a dinner party and some of your guests are avid carnivores while others are vegetarian. Perhaps some are following a keto diet or are ovo-lacto-pescatarians. How do you create a meal that includes everyone? When applied to how we can create spaces of belonging, would it make sense to cook one meal and expect that every guest has the same experience? While this analogy is simplistic, we can begin to consider what it means to have everyone share the table and the gifts they bring.

This paper aims to: (1) Underscore the prevalence of students with learning (dis)abilities on college campuses; (2) Highlight implicit biases regarding cognition; (3) Provide meaningful dialogue for administrators and faculty; (4) Outline strategies for creating inclusive spaces using the person-centered approach for persons with learning (dis)abilities; and, (5) Conclude with next steps for educators. The strategies are intended for both faculty members and administrators. Moreover, the outlined strategies are intended to be adapted for other academic support offices such as campus ministry, academic services, tutoring centers, and other points of contact for students. The

term educator refers to persons who work directly with students and includes faculty, administrators, and peers. Finally, I use various forms of reference to persons with learning disabilities in order to underscore linguistic variance. All forms are person-first inclusive language models, unless otherwise noted.

Stonehill College is a private, Catholic liberal arts school located in Easton, Massachusetts. The mission and philosophy align with Holy Cross' principles including educating the whole person. The Center for Writing and Academic Achievement (CWAA) is a peer tutoring center with approximately fifty student tutors, offering tutoring in over twenty-five subjects and comprehensive writing-support. The CWAA's mission statement was recreated Fall 2019 according to the principles outlined in this paper. Data was provided by the CWAA's TutorTrac system which is an online platform for measuring utilization. Voluntary peer-tutor assessments by Stonehill students measured impact of services.[1] Over the course of one-semester, the CWAA's philosophy, practices, and operations adopted a more inclusive approach that prioritized accessibility. The results indicated a 9 percent increase in services with writing-support as having the most significant increase (43 percent). This article highlights how a prioritized vision of inclusivity increased student-utilization by creating a positive, hospitable learning environment. References to faculty training are based on professional experiences as writing instructors and other department collaborators. The final section on training has been presented to educators at Boston College, Learning Associations of New England (LAANE), Stonehill College and adapted to a College, Reading, and Learning Association (CRLA) Training for learning centers on working with students with learning differences (Agee and Hodges 2012).

Higher Education: Perceiving Difference and Disability

Biases regarding persons with learning (dis)abilities are not limited to higher education or education in general; rather, persons with disabilities have been a central question within communities. Problematically, narratives regarding disability have focused on its elimination; "Disability, then, plays a huge, but seemingly uncontested, role in how contemporary Americans envision the future. Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability, while dystopic, negative visions of the future are based on its proliferation. . . both depictions are deeply tied to cultural understandings and anxieties about the proper use of technology" (Kafer 2013, 74). Alison Kafer points out a particular anxiety regarding disability: the threat of becoming a person with a disability is tangible for all persons regardless of socioeconomic status, race, age, culture, or gender. Thus, disability is often portrayed by the community as a state of being that is incapable of contribution to society or as a burden to be eliminated. As a result, persons with disabilities are excluded from the community until they are able to adapt to an able-bodied image that values contribution as proof of acceptance; "Over and over, people with disabilities find themselves thrown into a stereotyped group where they have to deal with an identity not of their own choosing" (Thompson 2009, 214). As persons who are all temporarily-abled, this threat of exclusion from community leads to the widening chasm between persons with/without disabilities.

Ableism is defining a person's worth based on their contribution to society and maintaining the cultural perception that persons with disabilities are somehow less than the nondisabled or incomplete (Thompson 2009, 211). This perception comes to the fore when that difference is conflated with deficiency; "The persistence that some people are 'broken' or 'functionally deficient' is thus one of the core paradoxes of modernity" (Bock 2012, 2). Demonstrated in a 2012 survey by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Learning disabilities are often misunderstood as connected with intellectual deficiency, laziness, and/or a result of personal, controllable factors such as childhood vaccinations and too much television or they are viewed as requiring minimal support (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 7). These misunderstandings implicitly place the blame on either parents of children with learning disabilities or on the person with a learning disability when they advocate for more inclusive practices.

For persons with learning differences, executive function challenges like prioritization, time-management, and focus impede their ability to become academically successful in the current model without adaptations. Examples of ableist language in higher education can sound like the following: "If they cannot handle it, they should not be here;" "I did it so they need to also;" and "They are just faking it, so they do not have to do any work." Educators may even question their

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legitimacy or presume that having a disability gives a person an advantage in admissions. This perception is the subtext to a common, ableist question: "But how did they even get into college?" The struggle to be considered legitimate with a disability rather than simply lazy rests on the individual to bear the burden of proof, "The disability is often seen as a personal dilemma to be privately endured, and we have placed that responsibility to adapt on the individual with the disability. The person's flaws are to be hidden or fixed" (Thompson 2009, 211). Reflecting on the question, "But how did they get in?" implies the chasm between persons who are abled/(dis)abled on college campuses and destabilizes our preconceived, one-dimensional standards of cognition.

Investing in Disabilities Awareness Training and Inclusive Pedagogy

Institution-wide change is difficult when rapidly shifting student demographics require responsive training and resources. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLB) found that 7 out of 10 educators do not feel adequately trained or have the time/resources to support diverse learning in the classroom (Thompson 2009, 211). For Catholic schools, the statistics are stark: Abby L.W. Crowley and Shauvan Wall, "Supporting Children with Disabilities in Catholic Schools," found in a 2002 study sponsored by the USCCB that 7 percent of students in Catholic schools have some type of disability; the same study found that only 1 percent of those students receive the appropriate accommodations. Eighty-seven percent of Catholic School responded a lack of capacity to support these students (Crowley and Wall 2007). Indeed disability studies in, specifically, Catholic education remains an underserved field due to lack of consistency across institutions or a central model.

Both the NCLD and USCCB studies underscore common responses when surveying educators' responses to inclusive education models: time, money, and resources. Inclusive education is foremost a philosophy, and the execution of its interpretation may oftentimes feel burdensome and costly. Additionally, assessment of whether inclusive philosophy is working can be difficult to quantify. Indeed, private secondary schools and postsecondary institutions that do not receive federal funding directly are able to circumvent Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act's mandate that all persons are entitled and given "an appropriate education" (DOE OCR 2020). The Act states in response to postsecondary education that, "Recipients [institutions] are not required to make adjustments or provide aids or services that would result in a fundamental alteration of a recipient's program or impose an undue burden" (DOE OCR 2020). Problematically, private secondary and postsecondary institutions have great leeway in determining the economic burden of accessibility and which accommodations would dilute the academic standards. With this wide range of interpretation, it is possible for two students with LD to attend different institutions and receive different accommodations with similar diagnoses and subsequent challenges.

Exploring students with learning (dis)abilities in Catholic Schools is difficult due to the preconceived notion that persons with learning disabilities are the easier disability to accommodate. Melinda Hall, *The Bioethics of Enhancement: Transhumanism, Disability, and Biopolitics*, points out an important polarization within the discussion about disabilities, "That is, models of disability are typically meant to either symbolize or solve problems of exclusion and stigma that comes along with physical and mental differences" (Hall 2017, 35). This also points to a more systemic issue within disability studies on prioritizing which types of disabilities receive attention. Indeed, Kafer underscores an important gap even within disability studies: "Although there have been notable exceptions, disability studies, especially in the humanities, has focused little attention on cognitive disabilities, focusing more often on visible physical impairments and sensory impairments" (2013, 12). Furthermore, authors Meghan M. Burke and Megan M. Griffith, "Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools: Examples in Primary and Secondary Settings" state in response to the lack of examples of Catholic education supporting persons with disabilities that, "Other studies have similarly documented that when Catholic schools do admit students with learning disabilities, the students tend to have milder disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities) and do not require extensive support" (2016, 198). By generalizing that students with LD do not require extensive support, and contradicting extensive research by the NCLD, or by pointing out that persons with LD are considered those with "minor" challenges by Catholic schools underscores that the presence of persons with learning disabilities and specific challenges are fundamentally misunderstood.

Students with Learning Disabilities: "But How Did They Get In?"

The phrase *students with learning disabilities* seems antithetical to perceptions of cognition in higher education. According to research conducted by the NCLD (2012), 43 percent of respondents incorrectly associated learning disabilities with low IQ (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 7). The same survey reported that up to one-third of respondents believe inaccurate information regarding the cause of learning disabilities including: watching too much television, poor diet, and childhood vaccinations (2014, 7). As the study points out, nearly 79 percent of the general population agrees that people learn differently; however, an alarming seven out of ten educators, parents, and members of the general public believe that learning disabilities are the same as profound intellectual disabilities and approximately half (51 percent) think that a learning disability is simply "laziness" rather than actual impairment (2014, 11). These perceptions of learning disabilities, even amongst educators, highlight how little is understood about the presence of persons with learning disabilities in higher education. The assumption is that these students are simply not present in the classroom; thus, support for students through faculty awareness and collaboration with student resources is essential.

Learning disabilities are often categorized as silent disabilities, because these disabilities may not have a visual marker of difference. Other silent disabilities include mental illnesses like depression, personality disorders, and developmental disorders such as persons on the autism spectrum. While ableist attitudes surrounding physical disabilities are often centered on the body as the site of difference, for persons with silent disabilities the site of difference is internal: the brain. Particularly, for persons with silent disabilities in an educational setting, the reflex may be to pass as a person without difference in order to assimilate to the institution's image of what a student should or should not be. This reflex means that students with LD are not advocating for the same services they received in high school; the 2012 report found that only 17 percent of students with LD receive accommodations and support related to their disability during post-secondary education compared to 94 percent of students with LD in high school (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 28). While the same survey found that cost was a primary factor in students with LD not completing college, institutional conditions can exacerbate the stress and anxiety of higher education due to a lack of support combined with social pressure to conform. The cost factor response is also most likely linked to students taking longer to finish their degree and/or retaking courses they have not passed.

Kafer posits that disability studies must wrestle with the socially-acceptable figure (2013, 116). This means that educators must question beyond the image or boxes that a person checks-off when determining legitimacy. Indeed, rather than questioning whether a person deserves to be in college, the focus in the classroom needs to be placed on strengthening a person's capability. A community is strengthened when individuals are empowered. Referring to the Octopus, when the student disclosed that no one "sees" their intelligence, we must question what we miss when we choose to see only the surface challenges of working with students with learning disabilities. Urgently, we must also question a system that imposes rigid impressions of who is/who is not intelligent and how that intelligence manifests itself inside and outside the classroom.

The Person-Centered Approach and Creating Inclusive Spaces

For both faculty and administrators, an ethics based on inclusion means that two foundational values are present in the educator-student relationship. The first is that Catholic social ethics dictates respecting and maintaining the integrity of the person through Christ's giving of grace. Second, Jesus' ministry models that all persons are teachable. As an example, throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus' encounters place the humanity of the person at the center rather than their status in the community. In dialogue with Catholic social ethics, the person-centered approach by Carl Rogers (also known as the Rogerian method) and philosophy of inclusion will serve as the pedagogical lens for demonstrating person-first language and its contribution to inclusive education.

Mara Sapon-Shevin, as cited by Spencer J. Salend, defines the inclusive classroom as based on a philosophy "that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging, and community" (2008, 5). Based on the integration of students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom, inclusion seeks to desegregate and develop strategies that are adaptable for diverse

learning communities.[2] The emphasis on community and belonging is particularly resonant for Catholic education, and we can assess Jesus' practice of inclusion philosophy as a model by focusing on two essential ethics: integrity of the person and the belief that every person is teachable. The person-centered approach has three primary characteristics: (1) genuineness, realness, or congruence; (2) acceptance or "unconditional positive regard"; and, (3) empathic understanding (Rogers 1980, 117). Carl Rogers explains how these characteristics bring about a transformative change in the individuals, "Briefly, as persons are accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude towards themselves. . . There is greater freedom to be the true, whole person" (1980, 117). Rogers argues that the educator's goal in the person-centered approach is the "facilitation of change and learning" (1969, 104). Carl Rogers' transformative change is reminiscent of the conversion experience for persons who commune with Jesus. Again, communities are strengthened when individuals feel empowered by their experiences.

Establishing an Inclusive Pedagogy

The person-centered approach is an educational model for spiritual, intellectual, and personal formation. Inclusion in the context of Catholic education is distinct, because it is rooted in a shared purpose of uplifting a person or community of persons. By giving space for persons to orient their academic and personal experiences with faith, Catholic educators create spaces to engage students in a community of interpretation. Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching the Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living*, explains; "Christians are theologians as they are grounded in the traditions of faith, as they are empowered to reflect on the meanings of the faith, as they critique their own present, and as they seek to be faithful in a new time" (2014, 95). As a guide, educators play an active role in the faith and academic formation of others.

Faculty, administrators, and peer educators are considered influential bridges in their communities. These bridges serve by engaging persons with learning differences who are hesitant about participating or struggling to adjust. By assuming the mission of Catholic education, faculty and staff commit to the formation of persons through a practice of inclusion. Practices of inclusion in the classroom mean that educators are actively seeking ways to empower persons by:

1. Creating an adaptable space for all students

2. Encouraging self-reflection and dialogue

3. Modeling constructive listening and communication skills

4. Sharing life experiences

5. Bonding students as one community

All educators, both faculty and administrators, can become inclusive advocates who strive towards student-focused learning, and all students benefit from a sense of community within and outside the classroom. Overall, educators become more effective when students can guide the dialogue in a community in meaningful and compassionate ways.

Principle 1: Jesus as Mentor and Model for Inclusion

By becoming an active presence in the community, Jesus represents faith, wisdom, and understanding. Through Jesus' actions, He is both healer and teacher. Similarly, this model for Catholic inclusion encompasses both the healing and teaching potential within education through action and expression; "To imagine that we are educating in faith toward

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2 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) developed and updated by David Rose and Anne Meyer (2002) is the most well-known framework of inclusive classroom building. It is helpful to distinguish inclusion as the philosophy and UDL as the philosophy in practice. For a complete guide to UDL, Cast.org is an excellent resource for educators.

liberating salvation for people's lives and for society is truly an inspiring purpose. It can shape our whole curriculum—what, why, and how we teach Christian faith—in very positive and life-giving ways" (Groome 2011, 131). Indeed, Catholic teaching exemplifies faith when educators begin to view their vocation as a salvific activity for empowering communities.[3]

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was tested on Jewish content and tradition. Consistently, Jesus states that his intention is not to dismantle tradition; rather Jesus' mission is to fulfil its reality (Seymour 2014, 91). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is admired by witnesses at the Temple; "After three days, they found him [Jesus] in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46-47). Jesus flips the classroom by listening and asking questions rather than imposing a traditional model. This is distinct from educational models that overemphasize memorization. In the example of the Temple, Jesus exemplifies inclusive education by creating the space to listen, question, and dialogue to engage students with the material.

Principle 2: Solidarity with the Marginalized

In addition to asking questions, Jesus is attentive to people's life stories. On the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ approaches the two disciples who have endured a traumatic event. In their trauma, the two disciples do not recognize their Lord "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). Instead of Jesus simply announcing, "Here I am!" He listens to their stories and, in turn, provides the space to narrate their suffering. After hearing about the loss of their Savior, Jesus then asks, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Still, the disciples do not recognize the Risen Christ. It is after Christ has walked alongside His disciples and broken bread when the Disciples eyes are finally open (Luke 24:28-31). In, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, Thomas Groome underscores the road to Emmaus as paradigmatic for educators in faith; "The Emmaus road story leaves no doubt that Jesus' approach was to enable learners to bring their lives and pressing issues to the spiritual wisdom of their faith tradition, and then to bring that Faith back to new and renewed commitment to lived, living, and life-giving faith" (2011, 44). As Catholic educators, the image of walking alongside marginalized students in their faith-journey is emblematic of Jesus' solidarity with those who are suffering.

Jesus in the Temple and on the road to Emmaus highlights an important principle for Catholic educators who want to commit to inclusion: mutual accompaniment. Mutual accompaniment within Christian faith means that Catholic educators share these principles of Jesus' teaching in a collaborative, dynamic way. In practice, this means consistent reflection and candor on how we can best provide the tools for students to actively explore their learning journey. Moreover, Jesus' presence in the community and prioritization of those who are excluded underscores the impact Catholic educators can have on empowering marginalized students to become agents of their experiences.

Principle 3: Seeking, Understanding, and Expressing through Metaphor

Jesus' teachings through action, questions, and life experiences are exemplified in the parables on the Reign of God. The treasure and pearl parables provide a rich metaphor for a mentorship process that is based on seeking, questioning, and expressing. In seeking a great treasure, a person discovers this in a field and sells all their earthly possessions to purchase the field (Matthew 13:44). This precedes a similar construction when the merchant sells all their belongings for one pearl (Matthew 13:45). In each of these parables, the person is the agent who is seeking a great treasure, understands or discerns its value, and in turn takes necessary steps in order to acquire that treasure by parting with materials that are not comparable in value. In both instances the person and merchant undergo a spiritual, intellectual, and personal change.

Similar to the academic journey in Catholic education, the student leaves behind one community and joins another in order to discern their vocation. A cornerstone of Catholic education is for the student to become agents in their learning process today, so that they can become thoughtful, impactful leaders tomorrow. Through the use of metaphor and guided

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3 All biblical references are from the New American Bible (NAB), unless otherwise cited.

questions for reflection, Catholic educators can focus on establishing the students' sense of agency. Inclusion respects a person's learning process by remaining attentive to openings where further reflection may reveal insight into how the person learns and the quality of their educational experience.

In John 3, an ethics of inclusion is exemplified in the love between Father-Son-humanity; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16) and "The Father loves the Son and has given everything to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him" (John 3:36). This relationship expresses a new immediacy; Jesus is the direct link to God. Importantly, Jesus is sent to humanity with humanity so that the Son of God may be approachable, real, tangible, even touched by all. This sense of immediacy embodies the inclusive experience of God's grace and love. 1 John further develops Jesus' inclusion by commanding the community to love another, "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning; we should love one another" (1 John 3:11), continuing, "The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:16-17). The author begins the Gospel of John with the present knowledge and assumption that readers already know the story, as evidenced by the call to love one another and reference to the Resurrection. While we do see the emphasis on group identity and the expectation of serving one another in the community, as God sent and sacrificed his only Son for the good of humanity. Repeatedly, the emphasis is the distinction between those who believe/do not believe, but considering that Jesus' ministry is defined by His engagement with persons who are marginalized, the capacity to believe becomes the defining feature of group identity and not a person's place in society as defined by a lack. While we have seen that this has devastating effects for the characterization of the Jews throughout the Johannine Gospel, the call to love one another simply based on capacity for belief is embodied by Jesus' interactions with those who have been socially excluded.

Importantly, utilizing the person-centered approach does not imply that God or Jesus should be instrumentalized for personal growth nor should it detract from a theocentric orientation of persons to the Divine; rather, Jesus' ministry for persons who are considered outcasts in the community is parallel to the philosophy of inclusion and Rogers' primary characteristics, "In John's Gospel in general as well as in 3.16-21 in particular, Jesus brings the 'truth' from God, even if people do not want to hear it, but he also comes as an expression of divine love to help us love one another" continuing, "So while the language may be very different, perhaps it might be the case that John, in his own way and style, nonetheless agrees with the same combination of words and deeds, rigorous teaching, and inclusive acceptance" (Burridge 2007, 286). Throughout the Gospel of John and in Jesus' interactions, a radical transformation occurs whereby Jesus facilitates a conversation that leads the receiver to learn that Jesus is the Son of God culminating in a change or conversion similar to the transformative potential of an inclusive education.

What Can I Do Tomorrow?

Strategy 1: Develop a Shared Inclusive Vocabulary

Person-centered pedagogy must begin with person-first or inclusive language. Emphasizing that language is an evolving code begins when students enter their first class on their first day of college. The primary challenge is that inclusive language changes as more communities begin to name their experiences. A second difficulty is that instruction on communicating inclusively is not part of every members' lexicon, thus the practice of teaching inclusive language is siloed to specific disciplines or optional workshops on-campus. Thirdly, many may feel intimidated or overwhelmed by an evolving code and perceive that they are censored or their good intentions are suddenly offensive. Finally, what constitutes person-first language and how do we keep-up with changes and then transmit those to our community?

Person-first language means that the person is the agent of their experience, as Carl Rogers' models in the person-centered approach. This is the linguistic distinction between persons with disabilities and disabled persons. But, there are no hard, fixed rules—rather, person-first language is less a rigid code and more so a perception that communities and persons are

agents of their vocabulary. For example, you may see persons with disabilities or the term persons with (dis)abilities. In contrast, Disabled Vets prefers disabled as the adjective. If your brain feels like it is spinning, then this is a good sign. Inclusive language means that listeners pay attention to how communities and individuals refer to themselves and mirror that language affirmatively. It also means paying attention to words and phrases that are exclusionary or antiquated. A prime example for theologians is the move from using man to denote the human experience or the term Creator in contrast to Father. These terms are now seamlessly woven into an academic vocabulary and, in turn, the field has evolved to include marginalized voices. As a philosophy in practice, when working with students, it is important to listen to how they describe their identities and experiences. In the classroom, asking students to probe, question, and take risks with using language that they see/hear every day creates the space for everyone to re-evaluate their own linguistic code. Most importantly, modeling inclusive language is key for all educators and incorporating person-first perspectives in interactions with students will create a space to develop a person-first perspective.[4]

Strategy 2: Set Guidelines for Discussion

An ongoing, inclusive dialogue aims to create a community of accountability where communities are self-dialogical about their own negative narratives. As a result, faculty, staff, and students must actively deconstruct harmful narratives by first cultivating a hospitable space where students feel free to discuss challenges, struggles, failures, and successes in order to take ownership of their experiences. On the first day of class or during a training session for staff, a facilitator can ask participants to create a set of guiding principles for discussion and, together, they can reference this foundation to hold one another accountable. Common examples from past trainings include: (1) Assume best intentions, (2) Listen before speaking, (3) Give everyone a chance to respond, and (4) Speak respectfully of one another outside of this discussion. This practice revolves around affirming a student's agency and role in the community while also modeling inclusion of others' experiences. Moreover, educators can be especially attentive to the destructive narratives students experience regarding education and its influence on how they perceive their role in the academic community. This, in turn, can be used to further adapt policies and practices that are causing barriers to access.

Strategy 3: Make Accommodation Statements Visible and Adaptable

Every institution is distinct in coordinating accommodations for students, but at some point a faculty member is presented with an accommodation letter for an individual student. While this process is responding to a specific need, how can we become proactive even before students approach us with this letter? As the NCLD highlights, many students will not self-advocate for their full accommodations and may feel a sense of trepidation when approaching a professor for the first time. In order to mitigate this, reflect on where the accommodations statement is located on the syllabus. Oftentimes, accommodations statements are buried after course information, objectives, classroom policies, and grading breakdowns. Sometimes, accommodations statements are grouped-in with other on-campus resources. Moving the statement closer to the beginning or even as the first statement after the course description creates visibility and prioritizes accommodations for all students. Faculty may even suggest that any student may request lecture notes or that copies will be available online. By denoting that inclusion is beneficial for all students, faculty can model how accommodations are adaptations for all students.

For administrators, an accommodations statement is essential. Consider how your space is a classroom and include contact information for students to approach with accommodations requests, as many students may not even consider an office meeting as an opportunity to request a required accommodation such as recording the meeting in order to recall information later. Unlike faculty, administrators may not necessarily have access to letters or notes regarding students and must depend on self-reference. Assess what the office manages logistically (ex: private spaces, recording sessions, and alternative formats) and include trainings that focus on learning differences for staff and how to adapt accordingly.

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4 Online Resources on inclusive language include Human Rights Campaign (HRC.org), GLAAD Media Reference Guide (GLAAD.org), and United Nations Fact sheet about Persons with Disabilities (UN.org). To research how particular communities refer to themselves, organizations like the National Association of the Deaf (NAD.org) and Disabled Veterans of America (DAV.org) websites have guidelines for reference.

For example, an ongoing issue for learning centers is physical space and providing a distraction-reduced environment for all students. An effective strategy is to identify quieter times when there is not as much traffic or have extended hours as an offering for all students.

FERPA maintains that all students are agents of the information they choose to share with educators, and FERPA has served both to protect ostracization of persons with LD and to maintain their integrity as an agent of their information. This is also is an opportunity to develop a privacy policy. In reference to students disclosing learning differences, always ask how they would like that information to be used. Sharing practices and strategies with staff on how to work with a student may not necessitate revealing the specific learning difference and offering all students adaptations will make students feel less outed by the process.

For both faculty and staff, when a student presents a letter or self-refers, the following question can be: "How do you learn best?" Having an honest, transparent conversation about what the student needs and what you can provide is important for keeping dialogue open to adaptation. For example, in an effort to seem accommodating by setting no deadlines, ask the student if deadlines would be helpful and how you can hold each other accountable. For students with learning differences, self-managing can be a difficult task and having open-ended times can cause undue stress on the student, faculty member, and administrator.

Strategy 4: Engage with Technology and Remove Barriers to Access

Adopting bias-free inclusive language and prioritizing accommodations statements are steps prior to an evaluation of policies and practices to determine which create barriers for students. This evaluation is the praxis of inclusion and educators must assess impact above intention. One example is the accessibility of content online for e-readers. Microsoft Word and Adobe, two common programs, now have accessibility checkers and LMS, like Blackboard, rate content with an accessibility score while providing suggestions. While it may seem onerous to convert an entire semester's worth of colorful PowerPoints to easily readable documents, consider that persons with LD are not the only students who can benefit from text-to-speech readers. Students who prefer an audio format may also utilize a text-to-speech reader and students whose primary language is not English will also benefit from converted files. For faculty who do not wish to have their lessons recorded, making documents accessible for e-readers, uploading supplemental lecture notes, and posing pre-classroom discussion questions can be adapted. We are all agents of our experiences and adaptations are an invitation to dialogue.

Increasing technology in the classroom will lead to a reevaluation of how we interact with students. Replacing the physical classroom with an online format means that faculty will have less opportunities in the physical classroom to build community among students. This may place more responsibility on faculty members to have policies regarding in-person communication as a means of assisting students or offering online, virtual meetings as an alternate office-hour format. With Blackboard and Skype, it is possible for students to record these office hours and use closed-captioning programs. Strategies which help guide office-hour conversations and working with students individually will become imperative, particularly if classrooms are increasingly more virtual. For students with learning differences, the increase in virtual classrooms may provide flexibility; however, it may also exacerbate social isolation and adjustment difficulties. The increase in virtual classrooms will mean that faculty and students will need to be more proactive in establishing dialogue either online or in a physical space.

Technology can also become burdensome for administrators because they lack the physical classroom and set time to send a cohesive message to all students. Students become inundated with emails and no amount of high priority subject-lines ensures that students even read them. For administrators, consider how students access resources with the following questions: Are sessions appointment-based, online, or drop-in? Do you have a front-desk staff? What's on your website? Do you have or want a social media presence? Do you use an online booking system? How many hours in advance can students book? Is this system ADA accessible with mobile-view? Understanding the organizational structure is important for recognizing barriers students may face. Foremost, all students must be able to easily access information on a public website. Schedules must be clear and the ability to book appointments intuitively (if necessary) is essential. One of the first steps in evaluating the intuitiveness of the system is to hold student-focus groups or survey the student staff on the

ease of accessing the services. If the office uses an online system, how many steps does it take for a student to book an appointment? Can staff in other departments easily assist students? When possible, streamline these steps, so that a student can search for and book an appointment for the first time in under ten seconds, the average attention span of Generation Z.

Strategy 5: Redefine Success: Process vs. Product

Self-advocacy remains a significant challenge, as students move from a high-school environment where there was more structure and well-developed connections. Particularly for students with learning differences, guardians may have acted as the primary advocate. Now, students are the primary advocate and conversations regarding accommodations and communicating with faculty and staff becomes a necessary step in order to become successful in college. However, this process for students can feel like they must come-out continually as a person with differences while also trying to navigate new norms and expectations.

Creating an inclusive environment centers on reframing narratives about what a successful college student looks and acts like. In an age of constant comparison, we tend to look sideways at others and believe they have it together while we are struggling. In higher education, cultural identity and group membership is a current that connects students but it can also polarize students with differences, because the tendency to compare is higher when students live, work, and study in close quarters. Particularly, with such dynamic changes to an evolving student body's needs, it is possible to surmise that college is simply not the same as it was—and that, fundamentally, this is okay. Students with learning differences do not dilute the academic standards, rather, they bring capabilities that shine a light on outdated practices and perceptions about success.

When entering college, students will bring fixed perceptions of education and ideas about who they are as a student. Perhaps they were the top of their class and expectations are high. For some, the damage inflicted by the one person who told them they are bad writers or terrible in math is everlasting. An example in higher education is the constant refrain that students cannot write. This is untrue and damaging, because college students have demonstrated a standard of literacy but still need to adapt to changing practices and attitudes about college-writing. While we cannot magically erase the damage, we can guide students towards a reframing technique. We can also educate each other about our own learning processes, and the importance of practice. Particularly for students with learning differences, their experience with these challenges is an opportunity to explore the diverse ways people learn and grow through adaptation.

The first step in this strategy is emphasizing process rather than product. Product is the grade whereas the process is how the grade was attained. Indeed, there are students who may receive As, but their practices are unsustainable. Developing sustainable strategies for success (DSSS) is and should be the educator's primary focus for initiating college students to new academic standards.[5] DSSS includes balancing school, work, community, and well-being through practices that serve long-lasting goals rather than short-term end-results. Students tend to tie their self-worth in a grade as a concrete form of external validation. In turn, educators engage in an authentic dialogue by having students narrate their version of success in order to guide students through realistic and idealistic expectations.

Process does not mean a formula for receiving an A, and it does not mean dismissing a student who feels grades are important. Process, in this context, means that a person plans each step intentionally, pays attention to how they are moving through the steps, adjusts if necessary, reflects on the product with compassionate non-judgment, and narrates the experience. Eventually, the goal is for students to see the grade as part of the learning process and not the defining feature. This provides a guide for faculty working with students during office hours or peer tutors/administrators who want to engage students in this process. From these conversations, students can begin to see each assignment or task as

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5   Saundra Yancy McGuire and Stephanie McQuire's work, *Teach Students How to Learn* (2015), is an excellent guide for educators on what these skills are and how to teach students. There is also a student-version.

an opportunity to refine this process and, overwhelmingly, large assignments with heavily weighted grade percentages seem more manageable. Developing agency is the primary objective and having students reframe their experiences from one that feels anxious, isolating, and unfair to an open dialogue about how learning is an adaptable process promotes this. For persons with verbal challenges or who prefer not to share this experience, the narrating process will be different and underscoring that there is no assessment in the process portion of learning is important. This is not process by force; rather, it is intended to give students a new perspective on learning.

Trainings for educators that focus on incorporating academic skills like time-management, focus, prioritization, study, and test-taking strategies are indispensable. More so, when peers can serve as mentors in academic skills, they can provide other students with actual, real experience. Hiring peers who have experienced their own challenges and can effectively narrate their journey with candor will create a staff that is more inclusive of everyone's experiences. Prioritizing the process rather than focusing solely on students with a 4.0 will also give students without higher than average GPAs an opportunity to become leaders on campuses. Hiring questions that focus on what diversity and inclusion means and giving space for staff to discuss their own perceptions of cognition or what grades mean to them invites an authentic, real conversation about success in all forms.

Peer and Faculty Training: Bringing it All Together

What Does Your Brain Look Like?

Metaphors are powerful. By encouraging metaphorical language, the educator provides the space for students to express their feelings with creative intention. It also creates distance by distinguishing between the personal and the symbolic. For students with learning disabilities, the brain can be a fraught point. Whether the disability is something known or newly discovered, students with learning differences understand that they are unique both in challenges and capabilities. "What does your brain look like? Use a metaphor" (see Figure 1) in an inclusive class will help students and faculty to recognize that everyone learns differently. Figure 1 exemplifies the conversation from asking this question. A student shared that their brain is like an octopus. For someone with ADHD, the arms of the octopus pick objects up and sometimes they become so distracted by these objects, they forget which arm is holding what object. The student shared that their intelligence is underneath the octopus, because "no one seems to see that it's there." Whether a shamrock, concert, improv dance, tipped filing cabinet, a cavernous recess, or a Ferris wheel, our brains are the same but different. As educators, our purpose is to facilitate the act of learning in an environment that is receptive to people's experiences, challenges, and differences. Below is a training that all educators can do tomorrow for any audience whether they are faculty, staff, or peer educators. It can be adapted to any institution's values and mission, private, public, or secular. The learning objective is to start seeing what we may have missed by not looking underneath the Octopus. Perhaps, we will find that the way to a person's spirit is through their brain.

Training Outline

- Time
  – 1.5 hours but may be adjusted

- Materials
  – Drawing markers
  – Paper
  – Computer
  – Projector

First Activity: Seeking, Expressing, Understanding through Metaphor

- Ask audience members to use a metaphor: What does your brain look like? The audience has five minutes to think of a metaphor. They can draw, narrate, or utilize any mode of choice to describe their brain.

- At the conclusion of five minutes, they can turn to others and describe their brain. Finally, the group will come together and share their metaphors.

- The facilitator will write the metaphors on the board or computer.

Guiding Questions about the Metaphors:

1. What similarities/differences are there?

2. What do we notice as a group?

Guiding Questions about Individuals' Metaphors:

3. Why did you choose this metaphor?

4. What does this metaphor tell us about you?

5. How does this metaphor connect to how you learn?

Second Activity: Developing an Inclusive Vocabulary

- Display the Octopus and describe what it means to learn differently.

- Discuss what are the common perceptions about college students and learning differences

- Content: Inclusion and the Person-Centered Approach
  – Developing principles for discussion
  – Creating a common inclusive vocabulary around persons with disabilities
  – Identifying fixed perceptions and helping other reframe narratives

- You may also include information about on-campus services such as Accessibility, Technology, and other support.

Third Activity: Redefining Process and Product

- Directions: Depending on the size of the group, place participants in groups of two and hand each group a set of student experiences to role-play.

- The groups will also receive Respondent cards with language that reflects fixed perceptions of success like:

   – "Just try harder"
   – "I have no idea how to help you."
   – "Maybe you just can't keep up."
   – "Everyone does it this way."
   – "Well, what were your grades in high school?"

• In groups, participants will read aloud a situation. One participant will play the role as Student Experience and the other will play the role as Respondent.

• Participants will then rewrite a dialogue that uses inclusive techniques, reframing, and make suggestions for sustainable strategies for success.

• Volunteers will be asked to act out the new scripts.

Final Closing: Guiding Questions

1. What have we learned today about each other?

2. How do you think these metaphors may change? Will they remain the same tomorrow or twenty-years from now?

3. Why was it important to set principles first?

4. How did we feel after rewriting the script?

5. What can we do tomorrow?

Figure 1

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Author Alicia L. Brienza is the current Assistant Director of the Center for Writing and Academic Achievement at Stonehill College. She has worked previously as an Academic Coach for students with learning differences at Boston College. Alicia holds a Master of Arts in philosophy, theology, and English and her post-master's Th.M. focused on ethics and disability studies in Catholic higher education.

Contributor Devon Sprague is the current Director of the Center for Writing and Academic Achievement at Stonehill College. She is co-director of the Boston Area Writing Center Director's group and regularly presents at local and national conferences, including the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network Summer Institute and the annual conference for the International Writing Centers Association. Devon holds an MFA from the University of Southern Maine and has published short fiction, poetry, and an illustrated children's book titled Chase's Tale.

Expanding the Theological Classroom: People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as Theological Learners

Sarah Jean Barton
Duke University

ABSTRACT

In contexts of theological education, questions related to ableism, access, and disability remain under-investigated. This essay considers the history of disability in theological education, highlighting pressing considerations for contemporary theological educators. Offering a case study of a course in Christian ethics and pastoral care with degree-seeking Duke Divinity School students and community learners with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this essay analyzes both challenges and supports for the participation of diverse students in theological education. Emerging from the case study as well as from conversations with scholars in the areas of disability studies and education, this essay also considers some best practices for theological educators committed to inclusive pedagogy and universal design for learning.

KEYWORDS

ableism, accessibility, disability, inclusive pedagogy, theological education, universal design for learning

Introduction

Take a moment to identify who comes to mind when you imagine a student pursuing theological education.[1] Next, imagine what theological education might look like for this student. What specific practices and content will this student encounter as part of their theological formation? What particular contexts and commitments will shape this student's experience? The characteristics we assume of theological learners hold profound implications that shape our pedagogical practices, the assembly of theological learning communities, and the kinds of materials and contexts we engage as educators.

Innovative initiatives in theological education, such as certificate and degree programs for incarcerated students (Jobe 2019) as well as Princeton Theological Seminary's (2018) Farminary, provide examples that challenge theological educators to expand their imaginations about the "typical" theological learner. The shifting contexts of theological education, including an increase in distance learning and hybrid programs (ATS 2018), calls to reconsider the local parish as the primary site for theological education (Bonfiglio 2019), as well as the need for novel resources in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic (ATS 2020), continue to diversify the kinds of learners who can access and participate in formation for ministry.

In this essay, I consider current realities related to disability in theological education, offering a case study of a course populated by both degree-seeking divinity school students as well as community learners with a variety of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Attention to disability in the context of theological education is desperately needed. A critical engagement of disability can help those of us who are educators expand our imaginations about the kinds of students who constitute theological classrooms, help us to consider novel content related to disability in theology, religious studies, biblical studies, and interdisciplinary fields, as well as transform our pedagogies to focus more intentionally on accessibility and inclusion, through a particular commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL).[2]

While seminaries, divinity schools, and religious studies programs seek to increase curricular attention to disability (Annandale and Carter 2014, 90; Creamer 2015, 1), as well as provide foundational supports for students seeking accommodations through the Americans with Disabilities Act (Annandale and Carter 2014, 85; Creamer 2015, 2; Gilbert 2001, 75), I frame this essay by asking how the central cry of the disability rights movement—"nothing about us without us" (Charlton 1998, 1)—shapes teaching in contexts of theological education. I develop this essay in three parts: first, an overview of ableism and its impact within higher education, accompanied by a review of current intersections among disability, accessibility, and learning within theological schools. Second, I offer one account of resisting ableism in the theological classroom by reviewing a case study of a graduate course in theology and disability that I co-instructed with Dr. Warren Kinghorn at Duke Divinity School in the spring of 2018.[3] Third, I conclude with a brief reflection on the ways in which this case study reveals how theological educators might begin to embrace best practices for inclusive pedagogy through adopting the principles of UDL.

What's Going On? Ableism, Disability, and the Landscape of Theological Education

The realities of ableism, or disability-related prejudice, constitute an important area of consideration for theological educators. Disability studies scholar Michelle Nario-Redmond offers the following definition of ableism: "ableism is simply defined as prejudice and discrimination toward individuals simply because they are classified as disabled—regardless of whether their impairments are physical or mental, visible, or invisible" (2020, 2). Nario-Redmond emphasizes that ableism consists of three interconnected components: "affective emotions or attitudinal reactions, behavioral actions/practices, and cognitive beliefs/stereotypes that go beyond general negativity" (2).

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2 According to CAST (the Center for Applied Special Technology), "universal design for learning is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how people learn" (CAST 2017).

3 While this essay offers some insights applicable to students across a diversity of disability identities, its case study and conclusions for teaching practices focus on theological learners with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The reason for this particular focus of the essay is multipart. First, on a pragmatic note, the community learners in the case study for this essay were predominantly people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In addition, the essay responds to key concerns in the current literature on disability, the academy, and vocation. For example, Deborah Creamer raises a concern that "particularly within the academy, we have seen very little accessibility for or engagement with experiences of cognitive difference, and very little interest in it as a specific topic or category of concern" (2009, 104). Beyond academic contexts, Ben Conner argues that "while many congregations and seminaries can imagine people with mobility challenges or sensory disabilities as ministers, few can imagine a vocation in Christian leadership by someone with intellectual or developmental disabilities" (2020, 140).

Focusing on the context of higher education, disability studies scholar Jay Dolmage defines ableism as the positive valuation of non-disabled people,[4] creating rhetorical power that makes both able-bodiedness and able-mindedness "compulsory" for learners in post-secondary settings (2017, 7).[5] Dolmage writes that ableism renders disability and disabled people "as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human" in contexts of higher education (46).

In the introduction to her edited volume *Disability Studies in Education: Readings in Theory and Method*, Susan L. Gabel similarly defines ableism as the deployment of an assemblage of negative social biases "against people whose bodies function differently than what is considered 'normal'" (2005, 4). These social biases foster beliefs about disabled learners that often lead to discriminatory pedagogies. Post-secondary educational statistics highlight the implications of ableism, revealing in 2017 that only 14.3 percent of disabled people (ages 25-34) attained a bachelor's degree or greater, in comparison to 37.2 percent of non-disabled people in the same age range (Lauer and Houtenville 2019).

Considering theological schools in particular, what are the existing realities in relationship to disabled students, ableism, and best practices responsive to accessibility concerns? The answers to these questions are difficult to determine, in part because little research exists on students with disabilities and ableism in the context of theological education (Webb 2020). Take, for example, the 2018-2019 Annual Data Tables from The Association of Theological Schools (ATS 2019). Despite ample available data on age, gender, denominational affiliation, race or ethnic group, and enrollment status among students at ATS member schools, no information on disability identity or accommodations for students, administrators, or faculty is currently available. In addition, the newly released (2020) ATS survey materials for incoming students, graduating students, and alumni, do not include question about disability.

However, some theological schools have begun to make progress in regard to dismantling ableism, supporting students with disabilities, and integrating disability as a key area of curricular content. For example, some institutions have committed to removing architectural barriers to access and have also increased their efforts to provide specialized supports for students with learning disabilities (Creamer 2015, 1-2). Other theological schools have committed to integrating disability as a content area in their regular course offerings (Webb 2020). A small number of institutions support student groups focused on disability awareness and advocacy, such as Princeton Theological Seminary's Association of Disabled Seminarians and Allies (PTS 2020). Two ATS member schools offer formal certificate programs related to disability: Western Theological Seminary's Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry (2020) and United Theological Seminary's Certificate in Disability Ministry (2018).

Yet even with these signs of progress among theological schools, attention to institutional and pedagogical practices focused on access, disability, and anti-ableism remains a relatively low priority. Disability studies scholar Cathy Webb argues that "the current lack of intentional inclusion of disability in diversity initiatives and discussions places it squarely within the null curriculum" (2020, 114). If disability remains in the null curriculum at a majority of theological schools, it will also remain largely absent in what Elliot Eisner calls "intellectual processes"—practices of discourse, critical reflection, and learning (1979, 83). Pathways to incorporate disability into courses and curricula, as well as concrete commitments to support disabled students and take up disability as a critical hermeneutic within theological education, remain areas of significant concern.

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4   In this essay I alternate between the use of identity-first language (e.g. disabled people) and person-first language (e.g. people with disabilities) as a means of reflecting the variance of preferences for disability language among disabled people themselves. For the last several decades, person-first language has been the universal standard for academic, professional, and other public writing on disability. However, an increased turn toward identity-first language has surfaced, particularly among physically disabled people as well as the autistic community. While most professional and medically-based organizations still call for the exclusive use of person-first language, the disability community has pressed for a shift toward identity-first language, even in academic publications. For further reading on language of disability identity, see Brown (2011); Evans (2014); Gernsbacher (2017); Gustavsson, Nyberg, and Westin (2016); Haller, Dorries, and Rahn (2006); Peña, Stapleton, and Schaffer (2016).
       Throughout the essay, I also employ the term "non-disabled" (instead of "able-bodied" or "abled" person) as a more neutral descriptive term. The National Center on Disability and Journalism provides a Disability Language Style Guide (2020) with helpful background on terms related to disability as well as style recommendations for academic and professional writing.
5   Dolmage's (2017) book is available in a free, open access version through University of Michigan Press.

Disability and Theological Education: A Basic History

In what follows, I trace existing research on disability in theological education to highlight the pressing need for further investigation into this area of curricular and pedagogical importance. It is my hope that this background section provides foundational rationale for resisting ableism in theological education as well as provides necessary groundwork for theological educators to begin asking critical questions about engaging disability in their teaching contexts and practices.

In their 2010 policy guideline regarding disability, the ATS committed to "live toward a vision of inclusion of all God's people in theological education." However, calls to attend to disability in the context of theological education predate this ATS policy document, and even precede the 1990 passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States. In 1979, the World Council of Churches *Faith and Order Paper 89*, authored by Harold H. Wilke, highlighted theological education as a priority area for "disability concerns." This document stressed that theological schools must become "aware and expert" about disability (Wilke 1979, 160-161).

In 2003, as part of a special issue of the *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health*,[6] Robert Anderson calls for attention to assumptions related to "normalcy" in theological schools (2003a, 38). Anderson laments the notable underrepresentation of disabled students in theological schools as well as significant issues with accessibility (44). Anderson offers three practical proposals: first, to heighten theological and biblical reflection on disability within curricula; second, to reimagine the practice of pastoral ministry (including disabled people as ministers and not just the recipients of ministry); and finally, to make explicit efforts to contextualize theological reflection on disability by inviting disabled clergy and community members to lead portions of courses and other campus events (45).

In an additional essay for *Theological Education* in 2003, Anderson specifically commends "curricular infusion" of disability concerns within theological schools. This infusion consists not simply of adding some disability-related content to a theological school's curriculum but of actively recruiting people with disabilities as students and instructors, while also championing the importance of rigorous theological reflection on disability (2003b, 134). Additionally, Anderson recommends a focus on accessible pedagogical practices, supported by ongoing trainings and continuing education opportunities (147).

Bruce Birch's essay in the *Graduate Theological Education and the Human Experience of Disability* delivers a theological mandate for "welcoming students with disabilities" (2003, 24). Birch denies that the primary obligations for accessibility and the inclusion of disabled students should be legal matters, denominational positions, or the pressure of particular special interest groups. Instead, Birch argues, "whatever the nuance of a particular setting or tradition, theological schools are in the business of providing for and equipping the ministries of the whole people of God. If, on reflection, a portion of God's people have been pushed to the margins, denied full access, or left out altogether, then we have failed at our task" (2003, 24). For Birch, a firm commitment to support theological learners with disabilities and to embrace disability as a core subject within theological curricula "is a sign of God's Spirit continuing to work in our midst" and a means of community enrichment (31).

The ATS's 2010 policy document on disability recommends that theological schools "prepare men and women for ministry with attention to the unique gifts and needs of persons with disabilities who will be present in their congregations and communities" (13). Interestingly, this commitment is oriented toward the *future*. These disabled people, who "will be present" in ministry contexts one day, are not imagined as those who are currently learners at theological schools. The ATS policy document also commends increased curricular attention to disability, through interactions with disabled seminarians and other members of the disability community, as well as increased integration of texts from the area of disability theology (2010, 14). The ATS also encourages member schools to review their mission statements, in order "to ensure that qualified persons with disabilities are not excluded on account of those disabilities from education preparing them for the ministries of the church" (13). The policy guideline identifies the importance of addressing architectural, attitudinal, and financial barriers that face students and other community members with disabilities.

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6 The essays in this special issue were simultaneously published by The Haworth Pastoral Press as the collection *Graduate Theological Education and the Human Experience of Disability*, edited by Robert C. Anderson.

Notably, ATS identifies these approaches to disability in the context of theological education as "aspirational in nature" (2010, 14). The ATS commends their member schools to cultivate environments of "welcome, understanding, and assistance" in their relationships with disabled students, even suggesting that seminaries take up roles as "advocates and interpreters" if disabled learners encounter difficulties with their ecclesial bodies as they pursue ordained and lay ministry positions (14-16). In this way, the ATS casts a vision—theological schools "can become a model for the broader community" in embracing practices of welcome, support, and inclusion for all (16).

In their 2014 study related to disability and accessibility in North American theological education, Naomi Annandale and Erik Carter conclude that

> Most academic leaders felt that their graduates receive little or no preparation that would help them to include peo-ple with disabilities into multiple dimensions of congregational life (i.e., fellowship, worship and ritual, religious education, service, and leadership) or to respond to spiritual questions resulting from disability experiences. (2014, 94)

This striking conclusion aligns with the study's additional findings, including limited curricular attention to disability, minimal exposure to people with disabilities in non-classroom activities, and an under-resourcing of faculty and staff with regard to accessibility (95). Annandale and Carter also uncovered widespread difficulties among theological schools in providing necessary modifications and accommodations to enroll disabled students (91). The article concludes that additional efforts among theological schools in relationship to accessibility are needed—not only to change practices, but also to transform attitudes and to support the development of new competencies among theological faculties, administrators, and non-disabled students.

In 2015, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the thirtieth anniversary of the Canadian Human Rights Acts, and the thirty-third anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Deborah Creamer of ATS wrote a short article addressing "progress and possibilities" related to disability in the context of theological education. Creamer notes the importance of centering each individual school's "mission, context, and resources" in relationship to access and disability, but argues that the most powerful barriers facing theological schools are attitudinal in nature (2015, 2). Creamer encourages schools to assess their attitudes toward disability: do they appreciate the social expectations that "disable" people with certain kinds of bodies and minds? Do schools consider disability "a common human experience" and a category of identity that all students, administrators, and faculty will likely experience at some point in their lives? Creamer stresses the importance of conscious and proactive consideration of disability within theological curriculums.[7]

To support efforts toward increased access, Creamer highlights a number of resources for theological educators. These resources include the annual gathering of the Institute on Theology and Disability (2020),[8] documents from denominational groups and other faith-based organizations related to accessibility and disability,[9] professional guilds with focus groups related to disability,[10] and co-curricular programs that provide opportunities collaboration with disabled people.[11] Finally, Creamer commends use of the ATS's "Disability and Theological Education Self-Assessment Tool" (2015).

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7 Infusing disability into curricula across theological schools requires careful consideration. Various scholars offer guidance for specific curricular changes related to disability. For example, Hebron Ndlovu (2016) suggests teaching disability content within a liberatory theological framework. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen (2020), underscoring the precarity of core Christian doctrines for many people with disabilities, discusses the importance of foregrounding discussions of disability language and conceptual understandings of the body, as well as appreciating bodily limitations as core commitments for theological educators.

8 The Institute on Theology and Disability holds an annual gathering for ecumenical and interreligious disabled and non-disabled clergy, lay people, academics, service providers, theological educators, and other professionals and practitioners "to foster diverse and authentic interfaith conversations at the intersection of theology and disability."

9 See, for example, the United Methodist Church's accessibility audit tools (2020), as well as organizations including the Collaborative on Faith and Disability (2020) and All Belong (2020).

10 Examples of program units related to disability include AAR's Religion and Disability Studies Unit (2020a) and the SBL's Healthcare and Disability in the Ancient World (2019). AAR also supports the Status of People with Disabilities in the Profession Committee (2020b).

11 Creamer notes the work of Friendship House Partners USA (2020) in their mission to collaborate with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to provide "safe, affordable, community-oriented housing." There are currently eight Friendship Houses in the United States, where seminary students live with young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Creamer's suggestions from 2015 remain relevant in light of the findings of Webb's (2020) recent research that investigates how curricula at accredited MDiv programs within Mainline Protestant institutions in the United States prepare students as leaders who can faithfully work with individuals and families experiencing disability. After an extensive curriculum review of eighty schools, Webb's study concludes that "future Christian leaders are poorly prepared to meet the needs of disabled people and their families due to limited curricular exposure" (2020, 65). However, Webb's study also offers a positive conclusion, emphasizing that institutions of theological education hold strong potential for systemic change. Webb expresses confidence in a capacity for transformative curricular growth among theological schools which she understands as directly related to cultivating faith communities marked by belonging, with and alongside disabled people.

Literature on Students with Disabilities in Contexts of Theological Education

A small amount of research probes the experiences of disabled students in theological education. Harold Wilke's 1978 essay, republished in 2003 by the *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, explores areas of concern and intervention for students with disabilities. Wilke's essay finds its foundations in his own experience of disability, as well as conversations with approximately one hundred disabled clergy. His essay identifies the following four attitudinal barriers facing disabled learners: negative expectations for disabled students among staff and faculty, negative general assumptions about disability, lack of familiarity with disabled people and potential access needs, and lastly, negative connotations of disability arising from particular interpretations of biblical narratives ([1978] 2003, 9). Though the article is over forty years old, Wilke's calls for intervention remain pertinent for theological schools today: a commitment to a "practicable openness" ([1978] 2003, 21) with regard to prioritizing access, partnerships to build disability-related resources, and the development of symposia on disability to help shape curriculum, culture, and programmatic support for all theological students.

A 2001 study by Laura-Jean Gilbert investigated faculty, as well as disabled student and alumni perspectives on accessibility in seminaries affiliated with the United Church of Christ. Among the thirteen alumni and current students Gilbert interviewed, negative attitudinal and emotional barriers held by faculty, staff, and non-disabled student peers proved most detrimental to the educational experiences of the surveyed learners (2001, 82).

Conclusions from the Existing Literature

These few studies on student experiences focus on students with physical disabilities, as well as d/Deaf [12] students and learners with visual impairments. However, 22.9 percent of faculty and staff surveyed in Annandale and Carter's study reported they had students with "intellectual or developmental disabilities" enrolled in their theological school (2014, 91). This percentage is striking in light of the reality that out of 282 post-secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the United States, no ATS member schools are listed (Think College 2020).

As the literature from the last five decades suggests, there are urgent questions surrounding the capacity of theological schools to adequately support students with disabilities, as well as engage disability as an explicit curricular emphasis. The current research also highlights more general questions for theological educators today: how is disability imagined or storied in the praxis of theological education itself? What models for thinking about disability and the lives of disabled people are assumed in theological classrooms?

Resisting and transforming pervasive ableism in theological education certainly requires supporting learners with disabilities, but it also demands a critical reimagining of how disability is constructed in the curriculum and classroom in the first place. As Dolmage writes, "people with disabilities have been traditionally seen as objects of study in higher education, rather than as teachers or students" (2017, 45). In the field of Christian disability theology, this has

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12 "Deaf" with an uppercase "D" is used to describe people with hearing loss who identify as culturally Deaf (typically, these individuals participate in the Deaf Community and communicate with sign language). When a lowercase "d" is used, "deaf" typically indicates the condition or impairment of hearing loss. People with hearing loss who do not participate in the Deaf Community, including many people who prefer to communicate orally, often use "deaf" as a self-descriptor.

often been the case for people with intellectual disabilities. For example, much theological reflection on people with intellectual disabilities foregrounds the capacities they lack while emphasizing their experiences of suffering (Haslam 2012, 6-9; Hauerwas 1986; Smith 2019, 505).[13] Given this often fraught attention to people with intellectual disabilities in contemporary theological literature, it is important to explore how people with intellectual and developmental disabilities might be active participants in theological learning.

Imagining people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as learners poses critical questions for theological schools—how will building inclusive theological learning communities resist the objectification of students and community members with disabilities? How will disability be "re-storied" in educational settings (Ware 2005, 108)? How will theological schools actively witness against ableism?

Toward a Critical and Faithful Response:
A Case Study of an Anti-Ableist Theological Classroom

A key aspect of cultivating an anti-ableist environment requires a renewed vision of access. In her recent book *The Disabled Church: Human Difference and the Art of Communal Worship*, theologian Rebecca Spurrier argues that "access is sacred and essential, not just something that would be good to have if possible and feasible" (2019, 210). Bethany McKinney Fox, a Christian ethicist and the pastor of Beloved Everybody Church (2019) echoes Spurrier's reframing of access in the context of theological education, writing:

> Beyond logistical modifications for accessibility of physical and pedagogical structures, creating real access means being a community that recognizes the theological importance of accessibility, and values the presence, experience, and God-given gifts of our students and other community members with disabilities and diagnoses of all kinds. Without reframing how we think about disability and access, we might incorrectly believe that accessibility simply benefits the students who directly need it, when in reality it benefits our whole community. Or we might regard accessibility-related tasks as chores we do only to meet legal requirements, or out of pity for people who we regard as lesser in some way. These ways of framing the issue create inaccessible, inhospitable learning environments. (2019, 69)

Reframing our approach to access in theological education offers one avenue to resisting ableism, part of what Gabel commends as an "emancipatory approach" (2005, 9). This approach embraces the international disability rights maxim "nothing about us without us" by seeking the full participation of disabled people in educational contexts. Disability studies scholar Alison Kafer envisions this emancipatory approach as rooted in coalitions between disabled and non-disabled people that allow for collective reimagining (2013, 9). In what follows, I offer a case study that sought to embody a coalitional and emancipatory pedagogical approach to embracing disability in the context of theological education, offering a reimagined vision of theological education.[14]

In the summer of 2017, with Duke Divinity School faculty member Warren Kinghorn, I began to critically consider who exactly constitutes a learner in the theological classroom. Building on the work of practical theologian Craig Dykstra from a disability perspective proved helpful. Dykstra argues for an imagination about theological learning that expands far beyond cognitive knowledge of theological propositions. Dykstra's vision for learners in the theological classroom destabilizes a strictly cerebral notion of knowing, creating space for theologizing through musical, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic modes (2008, 51). For Dykstra, these expansive ways of knowing enliven what it means to do theology

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13 Critiques of early work on intellectual disability by scholars such as Hans Reinders, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jean Vanier have resulted in interventions that seek alternative theological methodologies to portray people with intellectual disabilities less as objects of suffering and more as individuals with particular vocations that are indispensable to the life of the church. See Harshaw (2016), Haslam (2012), Swinton (2016), and Swinton, Mowat, and Baines (2011).

14 Rev. Dr. Erin Raffety (2020) briefly describes another novel example of cultivating an anti-ableist classroom through co-teaching with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in her blog post on Church Anew entitled Leaning Into Disability, Lamenting with Freedom.

and allow for the development of a "pastoral imagination" among those in theological formation (51). Experiences in theological education play "a crucial role that has consequences for decades" on the kind of imagination and practices embraced by theological learners (47).

This multifaceted vision of theological knowing pushes against what Deborah Gallagher calls the "technical-rational" framework for education (2005, 140). Instead, by embracing an expansive vision of theological learners that includes people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Gallagher calls for "constructivism" as the foundation for an inclusive pedagogy. This approach views learning as an inherently social and meaning-making process, where each learners' values, interests, experiences, and cultures are inseparable from knowledge construction (148).

From this understanding of theological scholarship, Kinghorn and I set out to recruit participants for a Christian ethics class at the intersection of disability and pastoral care. Instead of asking people with disabilities to guest lecture in our course sessions or asking disabled students at the Divinity School to take on significant instructional burden, we made a decision to recruit students for the course who were community members from Durham, North Carolina that had some connection to a local community center serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We also recruited degree-seeking students at the Divinity School.

Experiences of disability were overlapping among the students enrolled in our course—our learning community consisted of degree-seeking students who were both disabled and non-disabled. While most of the community learners who joined the course experienced intellectual or developmental disabilities, some were non-disabled and others lived with forms of disability marked by difficulties with emotional regulation and social relationships, rather than cognitive impairments.[15] Kinghorn, a non-disabled theologian and physician, served as co-instructor. As the other instructor, I contributed my experiences as a theologian and an occupational therapist who lives with a disabling chronic health condition.

The course description helped to frame an emancipatory approach to learning. For example, an excerpt reads:

> This class will engage the lived experiences of people with disabilities. For approximately one half of the course meetings, enrolled students will engage in practical ministerial training alongside persons with various disabilities, primarily intellectual and developmental disabilities, through a partnership with a local community center. . . . [E]nrolled students will learn alongside persons with disabilities as a means of not only fostering skills for ministering "to" persons with disability, but engaging in shared processes of Christian formation, spiritual practices, education, and project development.

As we recruited a group of very eager learners from Duke Divinity School and the local community, Kinghorn and I continued to develop our course with explicit attention to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL hinges on three main principles: facilitating multiple modes of learner engagement (the "why" of learning), providing multiple modes of representation to learners (the "what" of learning), and allowing for multiple modes of learner action and expression (the "how" of learning) (CAST 2017). Dolmage characterizes UDL as "about building—building community, building better pedagogy, building opportunities for agency" (2017, 118).[16] Kinghorn and I envisioned our course design as a collection of "places to start"[17] in dismantling ableism through UDL and inclusive pedagogy, rather than a maximal and exhaustive application of UDL principles.

The course began with two introductory sessions held at Duke Divinity School for degree-seeking students only. In the first session, "Framing Talk about God and Disability," we focused on exploring different frameworks for disability and establishing a collaborative space where we could investigate our assumptions about disability and practice asking each

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15 Students in this course, including both degree-seeking students and community learners, identified with a number of disability identities including (but not limited to) autistic individuals, people with Down Syndrome, students with learning disabilities and ADHD, those with disabling chronic health conditions, and non-disabled.

16 Examples of implementing UDL principles can be found within an online resource entitled "Universal Design: Places to Start" (Dolmage et al. 2017). The resource includes helpful examples for implementing UDL in the classroom that correspond to the main principles of UDL for higher education.

17 Dolmage et al.'s (2017) provision of "Places to Start" with regard to the application of UDL principles resists the notion that a singular set of practices can achieve a fully accessible and anti-ableist classroom. Dolmage instead encourages educators to take up practices that promote active and multimodal forms of learning one at a time.

other questions about these assumptions. In addition, we provided space for students to express their particular interests and questions that led them to enroll in the course, as well identify any particular excitements and anxieties they held about the semester. In the second course meeting, "Encountering One Another: Power and Pastoral Care," we explored materials on intersectionality with careful attention to perspectives from both theological studies as well as disability studies. Our course activities, including participating in the opening activity of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's TEDWomen talk (2016), as well as structured individual and small group reflection on identity, helped students raise critical awareness of issues related to intersectionality and power in the work they were about to begin in collaboration with community learners. Resonate with UDL principles, Kinghorn and I laid out clear roadmaps and goals for each of these course sessions, delivered material in interactive and multimodal avenues, allowed ample break times throughout course sessions, solicited real-time feedback on course content, format, and delivery, and finally, maintained a classroom with maximal space for free movement with clear and accessible exits.

After these two introductory sessions, the heart of the course (the middle six sessions in a semester with thirteen weeks of instruction) was held at the community center, with both community learners and degree-seeking learners together.[18] This alternative meeting space for class sessions helped to disrupt some ableist expectations of students within an "ivory tower," and also provided a setting that was highly familiar to our community learners, physically accessible, and reachable via multiple modes of free transportation. Seating in this community classroom was not fixed, allowing students to freely enter and exit the classroom from multiple accessible doors. During large group work, with about twenty-five total participants on average, we sat in a circle to allow for maximal access to visual and auditory information and modes of engagement. Consistent breaks were built into the agenda between course activities.

A single-sheet syllabus[19] was provided for all co-learners in the course. Each session included orienting questions to assist students who benefitted from increased structure and the ability to work ahead.[20] This practice was of benefit to learners from the community as well as degree-seeking students, who both upheld strenuous weekly schedules. In addition, this practice allowed for students who experienced anxiety in a classroom setting pre-class access to discussion topics. Finally, this practice eased access for students using alternative and augmentative communication supports.

Each class period at the community center (and at the final five sessions hosted at the Divinity School) started with a practice called "circle time." Circle time, adopted from a regular practice in the community center, allowed an initial chance for participation and check-in by each learner present. Going around a circle, each member of the learning community would offer their name (either by speech, augmentative communication, or introduction by a peer) and an answer to the day's question, such as "What do you bring to class today?"[21] All learners offered either a single word in response, repeated or clarified as needed for participants with hearing loss, and/or a gesture, that would be verbally described for those present with visual disabilities.

Following this opening practice, a brief roadmap for the course session was described.[22] When we discussed readings, large print hard copies of the texts were provided, and read aloud collectively, slowly, and by multiple readers (with both voice and assistive communication device output). Weekly course materials ranged from poetry, memoirs, biblical readings, and theological essays, to podcasts and YouTube videos. Course themes included disability in the Bible, preaching, prayer, and liturgy. A variety of pedagogical approaches were offered within the consistent pattern of our course meetings, including posting short lectures for access before course meetings, in-class engagement of audiovisual materials, large and small

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18 Community learners were invited to attend the last five course sessions held at Duke Divinity School, but few of these learners elected to participate due to scheduling and transportation barriers.

19 Kinghorn and I followed insights for syllabus development found on the online resource "Accessible Syllabus" (2015). Like many universities, Duke also provides its own "Accessible Syllabus Project" (2020).

20 For example, for the course session "Disability and the Old Testament," students were invited to engage 2 Samuel 9:1-13, the story of David and Mephibosheth. Questions on the syllabus included, "Who is your favorite person in this Bible reading? Why? What do you think Mephibosheth felt like when he talked to David? What do you think Mephibosheth's life was like in the beginning of the story? At the end?"

21 This question was made available ahead of class for students who benefitted from increased preparation time.

22 For example, "First we will discuss the assigned readings and questions in small groups, and then spend forty minutes working in teams on our collaborative midterm projects."

group reflections, communal close-reading exercises, and collaborative project development. Transcripts of all auditory course materials were provided. These transcripts, along with all written course materials,[23] were made into accessible files (for download to various student devices for audio access).[24]

In our final course meeting at the community center, we hosted a performance of collaborative midterm projects. Students had been assigned into groups of four to six learners (a mix of degree-seeking and community students) and were invited to develop a collaborative midterm project on a course theme of shared interest. Most groups worked together to offer a fresh interpretation of a biblical story. The presented projects included multimodal performances of shared preaching, original song composition and singing, storytelling, presentations of original visual art, as well as dramatic readings and enactments of Scripture.

After the course's conclusion, through formal course evaluations and informal conversations, students consistently expressed their enthusiasm about the diverse course materials and their rich experiences of participation. Several degree-seeking students noted their own increased confidence in skills related to facilitating accessible meetings and activities, as well as an increased awareness for disability prejudice and how to address ableist biases in their various contexts. One degree-seeking student wrote: "In my experience, disability studies has been discussed in the Divinity School as something people are either interested in or not. But this course has challenged that 'extracurricular' framing of disability by presenting theology of disability as an imperative of holistic discipleship." This comment reflected two key learning outcomes initially framed in the course description: an expanded sense of the importance of access for all people, with or without disabilities, and the priority of establishing ministry partnerships marked by collaboration, rather than practices oriented to doing "to" or "for" disabled people.

Many students expressed that they had found a "new language," especially from disability studies perspectives, to aid them in identifying, dismantling, and transforming realities of ableism in ministry settings. Part of this new language arose from community learners initiating and energizing collaborative conversations about theological questions related to disability, as well as questions of biblical interpretation. These conversations often took place after the formal class sessions had ended, and even extended beyond the course's conclusion. These new and collaborative perspectives on transforming realities of ableism also sprung from conversations related to evaluative feedback on both course participation and midterm projects. These conversations were driven by requests from community learners for reflection and critical evaluation of collaborative coursework.

Over half the degree-seeking students identified this course as the best they had taken in their entire seminary career. One of the degree-seeking students who felt this way commented,

> This course was crucial for my theological growth and preparation for ministry. Before this class, I had paid no attention to ableism, disability, and accessibility in my church (or other contexts). Now I'm noticing examples of disability and accessibility everywhere I look and feel prepared to attend to these matters in a pastoral, ethical, and intelligent manner.

Perhaps most importantly, both degree-seeking and community learners expressed a sense of meaningful and authentic collaboration within this theological classroom (and beyond). One degree-seeking student expressed it in this way:

> This course was essential in thinking critically and in-depth about disability and its relationship to the Church. . . learning alongside community participants was core. . . it centered the role of each person in ministry and fostered an environment where we were encouraged to collaborate. . . as a result, my ministry will be greatly impacted.

Several community learners reported a highlight of the course as "actually learning and working with Duke Divinity students in a real class." Co-learning provided a new and meaningful experience for most of these community learners,

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23 Conversion of written documents to accessible formats was completed using Duke University's subscription to the services of SensusAccess (2020).
24 Degree-seeking student evaluations demonstrated appreciation for various aspects of course access: "Conversion of PDFs into audio recordings was super helpful and careful attention was given to possible different learning styles of students"; "I learned a lot from the audio and visual technological components that were used."

despite previous connections with some divinity students through other activities at the community center. One degree-seeking student put it this way: "The time at the community center was the most formative experience. Not only were we learning about disability, but we were co-learners with people from outside the Divinity School of all abilities who each brought fresh perspectives and experiences."

What Lies Ahead? Limitations of the Current Case and Opportunities for the Future

In order to reimagine the theological classroom in a way that resists the rhetoric of ableism, coalitions among learners with and without disabilities are desperately needed. Dolmage helpfully emphasizes that UDL can only be truly successful when we resist erasing embodied difference (2017, 123). I would add that in the theological classroom, action is needed to also resist the assumption that possession of an "able mind" is compulsory for the generation of theological knowledge. Collaborative partnerships that resist the erasure of disabled bodies and rethink assumptions about theological learning in light of disability might begin in curriculum committee meetings, with the adoption of new supports for disabled students, or through forging novel partnerships with disabled co-learners in the community. These kinds of coalitions provide the foundation for embracing the kind of multifaceted approach to theological learning championed by Dykstra—an approach resonate with the principles of UDL. These partnerships create a fertile context where educators and students across a diversity of disability identities can access learning through multiple modes of engagement, representation, and expression.

Several barriers, of course, challenge this vision for the future of theological education as a site of transformative coalitions with disabled learners and leaders. Concerns regarding sustainability and labor are central. For example, developing and facilitating the case study course described here required me to take on a significantly heightened workload. In addition, to the dismay of many learners in the 2018 course, the class was not offered during the subsequent academic year at Duke Divinity School, due in part to my departure for a fellowship at a different institution and Kinghorn's scheduled sabbatical. Though enthusiasm for this particular course was supported by existing informal partnerships between Duke Divinity School and the local community center, not all theological schools may have access to similar community programs.

The inequalities of academic credit present another concern. Community learners in our course, because they were not enrolled at Duke University, were unable to earn academic credit in this inaugural class. In addition, we did not collect robust learning outcomes and course evaluation materials from the community learners in the course, challenging the fullness of our commitment to "nothing about us without us." Other challenges from the course included repeated class session absences from both community learners and disabled degree-seeking students, raising questions around accommodations and how best to support collaborative group work in the midst of these multiple absences. Both Kinghorn and I served as mediators in response to occasional tensions present in the midterm project working groups. In addition, there were some audiovisual technical issues present at the community center, as well as some concerns about aural access to discussions due to noise levels that impeded optimal participation among all learners. Gratefully, we had flexible use of multiple spaces at the community center that allowed us to respond to these concerns during the course of the class sessions themselves.

Despite these challenges and limitations, the case considered in this essay raises key considerations for theological educators around best practices for inclusive pedagogy and UDL. Though not every theological educator can commit to developing and teaching an entire course within an anti-ableist paradigm, all educators can choose to embrace one or two practices resonate with UDL. In other words, educators at theological schools can decide on what Dolmage calls a "place to begin," and from this commitment to a singular practice or principle of UDL, begin building a repertoire of skills and an expanded imagination for inclusive pedagogy. Additionally, institutions of theological education might take up a commitment to train faculty, staff, and administrators about UDL and other inclusive pedagogical practices. Schoolwide attention to questions of access and disability help faculty and students alike to recognize the human experience of disability as a vital part of theological education and not merely an optional "extracurricular" focus.[25] In addition to a best

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25 In addition to the online UDL resource from Dolmage and his colleagues (2017), I have found Thomas J. Tobin and Kirsten T. Behling's (2018) book *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education* to be a very helpful primer on UDL, with a wealth of practical suggestions applicable to the context of theological education.

practice of high-quality, ongoing training in UDL for theological educators, scholars in disability studies and education also recommend frequent and meaningful collaboration with disabled students across institutional bodies, with sensitivity and respect for issues of disclosure and labor, particularly among students with disabilities who may "pass"[26] as non-disabled (Freedman et al. 2017, 304-306). At theological schools, integration of students with disabilities is critical for committees which oversee curriculum and academic life, as well as for areas of theological education such as student care, worship, spiritual formation, and diversity.

As evidenced by the students who participated in case study course, cultivating disability-centered coalitions in theological classrooms can truly impact communities as a whole, serving as a benefit not only to theological schools but the communities in which they are embedded. Students from the course have continued in collaborative projects together, including songwriting and preaching, beyond the course's conclusion. Multiple degree-seeking students who took the course are now serving as accessibility advocates in the faith communities where they work, and I have provided them with coaching to implement anti-ableist and accessible practices in their vocational contexts around the United States. One community learner with an intellectual disability worked with me to deliver a presentation about the course at a theology conference in the summer of 2018. This individual and I are also co-authoring an article about the class for submission to a popular magazine.[27]

Conclusion

The ATS urges theological schools to model active inclusion and advocacy for people with disabilities to the broader community (2010, 16). Perhaps theological classrooms must first consider coalitions with disabled students, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as a primary site for resisting ableism and fostering partnerships marked by access and participation. These partnerships, by embracing a commitment to "nothing about us without us," provide a powerful way for theological education to re-story its construction of disability and witness to new ways of learning together. These coalitions also support Dykstra's notion of theological education as a practice of practical theology: "a shared endeavor involving Christians who live and work in a wide variety of contexts and circumstances" (2008, 60).

Partnerships between diverse learners—disabled and non-disabled people as well as degree-seeking students and community learners—provide creative opportunities for theological educators to embrace practices of inclusive pedagogy and UDL, not only for the sake of those in their classrooms alone, but to prepare learners across a diversity of intersectional identities to support the robust participation and leadership of disabled people in ecclesial settings for the long run. Resisting ableism and embracing the fullness of God's people—disabled and non-disabled—as active participants in God's ongoing work in the world will require creative and intentional transformation in theological curricula and pedagogical practices. As Eisner warns, "what students cannot consider, what they don't know, processes they are unable to use, have consequences for the kinds of lives they lead" (1979, 88). Moving disability out of the null curriculum provides contemporary theological educators with a pressing yet exciting task—reimagining theological learners and embracing an expanded notion of the theological classroom.

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26 "Passing" refers to disabled people with imperceptible or difficult to perceive disabilities who may choose to present as non-disabled. Allison Carey (2013) writes a fascinating chapter about passing among people with intellectual disabilities.

27 I regret that due to geographical and scheduling limitations, this essay was not co-authored with a learner from the 2018 course. This shortcoming highlights the importance of ongoing accountability to the disability rights maxim "nothing about us without us."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Jean Barton is currently Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy and Theological Ethics at Duke University, with a dual appointment in the School of Medicine and the Divinity School. Her research, writing, clinical work, and teaching explore Christian theology and ethics, disability, liturgy, and occupational therapy.

DISABILITIES AND PEDAGOGY

Learning with Lessened Limitations: Choose Your Own Adventure

Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen
Pacific Lutheran University

ABSTRACT

This essay explores how enlisting the spirit of the "Choose Your Own Adventure" approach to major papers or projects might support students who are learning to take agency and understand themselves as political negotiators in the classroom and in their own learning. To that end, this essay will first briefly explore using Universal Design for Learning in the classroom, and then survey how dedication to an inclusive classroom can assist and encourage students of multiple identities to take responsibility for the management of their own time and their learning.

Politics around inequality shape multiple components of the educational experience, not only with respect to content, but also in connection with the pace of learning.[1] Inequalities in the classroom are broader than gender and race. An increasing number of students with invisible and visible disabilities are attending college and university. At present, a significant number of university students of all ages struggle with hidden disabilities in the form of mental health issues, anxiety disorders, and learning and social disabilities. Moreover, many students have come to use the language and vocabulary of mental health and disability as a way to understand their own emotional and physical development. A focus on these categories of inequalities and an analysis of methods by which faculty might bridge some of the distances between professor and student in the classroom are increasingly the substance of conversations on campuses across the country and among academic researchers.[2] I will explore how one pedagogical practice—a "Choose Your Own Adventure" approach to major project deadlines—might assist students to take agency and understand themselves as political negotiators. I will first outline the method that

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2 As noted in Hosek and Soliz, "much of the research on teacher–student communication actually highlights the benefits of reducing the psychological or social distance reflected in the traditional academic hierarchy" (2016, 224).

assists me in this process—Universal Design for Learning—then survey how dedication to an inclusive classroom assists and encourages students of multiple identities take responsibility for the management of their own time and learning process.

Universal Design is the proactive design of a space, product, event, or—in this case—curriculum to make opportunities accessible for every person (Burgstahler 2015, xi).[3] When applied to the classroom, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) means that whatever is being designed should be done as broadly and inclusively as possible (Burgstahler 2015, 17-18). Unlike programs or procedures adopted to accommodate specific, identified populations, UDL strategies within higher education settings adopt a proactive approach for access to learning and facilities in order to better meet the needs of students with physical, visual, hearing, learning, attention, social, and communicative limitations or differences without calling undue attention to them as a distinct population (Burgstahler 2015, 5-6). Additionally, if there are challenges in the classroom around learning, a UDL response locates a "disability" within the curriculum, rather than within the individual learner (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014, 129). In this way, UDL is culturally responsive—as well as culturally responsible—teaching for it assists in building full citizenship in the classroom for all learners. Promoted by a group of architects, engineers, and environmental and product developers, Universal Design is guided by a set of principles which can be summed up as flexibility, simplicity, and equitability.[4] While UDL's initial intention was to create accessible spaces for people who might have physical challenges, in time UDL embraced the ethos of making all spaces accessible to all people. As applied to curriculum and classroom climate, UDL operates similarly, seeking to transform the classroom into a space in which all students—irrespective of identity or ability—have equal opportunity for success.

I teach at Pacific Lutheran University, a small, private, Lutheran university in the Pacific Northwest. Founded by Norwegian Lutherans in 1890, the school is a draw for students from many Lutheran congregations along the West Coast and from the western half of the United States. That said, nearly half of our students are not overtly religious, and most students in my classes are there only to fulfill one of their two required courses in religion. Consistent with the greater population of the Pacific Northwest, my students most often claim no religious identity, they have little to no basic knowledge of any religion, and some are hostile to religion. Thus, there are invisible challenges to the subject itself, before we even begin discussing the subject matter. In addition, the multiple layers of student identity[5] play into their reception of the course content and their willingness to engage in active learning. For students struggling with a disabling component to their life, the subject of religion can cause a type of stress or anxiety different than other subjects, as it is closely linked to the vocabulary of shame and guilt that students with disabilities inherit. For students with medically documented visible or hidden disabilities, the Office of Accessibility and Accommodation (Pacific Lutheran University 2021) works to support faculty and students in the process of understanding what types of accommodations are needed for students to have equitable access to learning. Reasonable accommodations for accessibility can include, but are not limited tom, equipment in the room, seating arrangements, extended deadlines, additional time for exams, separate exam rooms, large-print materials, and note-takers. Most importantly, academic accommodations are case-by-case, and they should be specific to the needs of the student and the learning goals of the class.

Initially I created the Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) due dates in my RELI 220: Early Christianity course to provide simple, equitable, and flexible options for due dates for major papers and projects. I had in mind those students identified through university legal and/or medical channels requiring formal accommodations for classroom assignments. However, in keeping with UDL's educational ambition to create space and methods of assessments that are inclusive of all students irrespective of their ability identity, in time I expanded the option to the entire class, offering all students the opportunity to benefit from the characteristics of UDL and to make the organization of their own semester's work more manageable.

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3 To be fair, UDL is not the only system that applies accessibility theories to education; for example, "differentiated instruction and assessment" argues that as with clothing, instruction in a classroom should not adopt a "one size fits all" model (Gregory and Chapman 2012).

4 Or "Usable, accessible, inclusive," in Burgstahler (2015, 15). UDL includes seven guidelines: equitable use, flexibility, simplicity in use (intuitive), tolerance for error, low physical effort, perceptible information, and appropriate space (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design 2020; see also Burgstahler 2015, 15-16).

5 What I mean by "multiple layers of identity" is that students today are acutely aware of the various ways in which they might understand themselves, and this contributes to both marvelous and challenging encounters with the material. For examples, a student grappling with gender identity might read the gender-bending Thekla differently than a student who has a different understanding of their own gender; likewise, a student grappling with identity construction as a first-generation college student, as a student struggling with depression, as a Latina student, as a Muslim student, as a student with a visible or hidden disability, or as a male, white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant might engage the materials in ways that are different from one another. The responsible professor will always be aware of, and sensitive to, these multiple means of engagement.

The CYOA due date is inspired by the popular Choose Your Own Adventure style of children's books that began to appear in 1979 and which are still quite popular. Though many of my students were born in the mid-to-late 1990s, these books remain well-known among them as they were popular with their parents and therefore even the title of the series elicits a touch of nostalgia.[6] Much like the open-ended, but yet structured, Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game, a reader of the Choose Your Own Adventure books is introduced early in the narrative to a level of agency regarding the direction of the story.[7] When applied within the learning environment, my model of self-scheduling major assessment due dates allows students a similar agency to determine which dates work best with their individual course schedules. Students are encouraged to read through the course syllabi for each of their classes, to organize the semester's work for larger projects alongside additional commitments and, then, to choose the due date that will, to their best estimation, offer them the greatest pathway for success. Students identify their selection by the end of the second week of the semester and commit to turn in their assignment on that date. Because students select preferred dates with me individually and privately,[8] no one knows why a request might be made for one date over another and the later date is not viewed as an accommodation. The beauty of UDL is that accommodations do not need to be made because the class, as it already stands, is preemptively accommodating. It is worth noting that students do not have open-ended options but are given a selection of dates from which to choose; unlimited options are as likely to increase anxiety as having no option at all.[9]

I used to limit the options to try and stagger papers more evenly, but I now open all dates to all students (if the whole class wishes to turn in their papers on the first date, fine; if they all wish to turn in their papers on the last date, fine). This successfully assuages any concern that the professor might be attempting to regulate student choice and reinforce professorial power. Instead, this method allows students to embrace power that they can rightly claim in the organization of classroom learning, power over the best use of their own time in the writing process.

Here are three reasons why this is an effective and inclusive method of organizing paper and project due dates. First, as the syllabus and options of due dates are made available to students well in advance of the first day of class (with an accompanying email), students who enter the class with academic accommodations who might need additional time can see that it is already built into the design of the class in several ways. In addition to the CYOA due date there are elective methods for the midterm for all students,[10] homework preferences that allow students to make choices about which homework assignments will match with their schedules,[11] an "UnEssay" alternative for students who propose a creative option for their writing project,[12] and one-hour final exams with a two-hour time window. Within this context of stability, simplicity, and equitability, these opportunities uplift and encourage student accountability and support students even as they are challenged as emerging adults and critical thinkers (see Kegan 1994).

Second, from a purely social exchange perspective this is an attractive option. Every student in the class, no matter their ability status or identity, can compare my course syllabus with those of their other courses, make their calculations about time management, and organize their research and writing schedules for the term (Stafford 2008). This flexibility encourages maturity in the administration of their own workload. Official language about accommodations increasingly indicates that there are students whose disabilities around perception and memory impact or prohibit them from effectively

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6 See, for example, the best-selling *Beast Quest* series by Adam Blade. In this series, readers are encouraged to "Master Your Destiny." Readers learn on the first page that the land of "Gorgonia is doomed" but "Tom has sworn to help us, and he has a new companion on his Beast Quest—You." Notice that "you" in that phrase is capitalized, granting it the role of a proper noun, which suggests that "You" are a participant in the story (Blade 2011).

7 For example, after entering a temple which you have been forbidden to enter, you are cursed to live a nonhuman life as punishment. If you survive, the administer of the curse may decide to return you to your human form. In one of the most unique—and bizarre—of the CYOA series, the reader is challenged to think like a series of animals and make choices that lead to one of fourteen endings (Packard and Wing 1985).

8 I cannot engage in conversation or suggest a specific date for a student unless I have received official notification that allows me to communicate with a student about their accommodations. Even then, I cannot have that dialogue unless initiated by the student, a process that promotes student responsibility and, I find, assists them in confidence building around their ability and identity.

9 A. W. Bendig and P. T. Hountras noted that "The highly authoritarian individual dislikes and becomes highly anxious in an unstructured and ambiguous social situation and expresses strong preferences for formal structure" (1959, 1).

10 Students can select to take the midterm in a format that works with their learning skills and talents; they can opt for an essay exam or a format consisting of true/false, multiple choice, and fill-in-the-blank questions.

11 Over the course of the semester students have approximately thirty-five homework assignments in which they reflect on the reading and demonstrate critical engagement, nearly one for each reading. While students are expected to do all the reading and think about all of the questions in preparation for their participation in class with their peer discussion groups, they are free to choose which twenty assignments they wish to complete in writing and hand in. Some students complete twenty out of the gate while others stagger their assignments as time and life permits. Because they do the reading and reflection irrespective of doing the written homework, students show up to class prepared, and the arc of student learning remains unhindered.

12 An "UnEssay" is an alternative way to demonstrate knowledge and analysis, one that allows students to play to their specific and unique strengths, talents, skills, and interests within an academically rigorous context.

organizing information (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities 2013). In these cases, I request private meetings with students in my office or in the Office of Accessibility and Accommodation (Pacific Lutheran University 2021). We sit together, look at their syllabi from other courses and a calendar, and I assist them in mapping out a good CYOA due date. Alternatively, if a student prefers not to work with me on this, I encourage them to meet with a faculty person or with their Accessibility and Accommodation contact, someone with whom they might be more comfortable engaging in this process. While emergencies do still occur,[13] this process successfully eliminates potential conflicting course assignments, papers, or projects.

Third, this simple provision for structuring their own learning for the purpose of encouraging their academic success provides all my students with the chance to practice self-sufficiency and responsibility. They are challenged to practice metacognitive skills[14] and reflect early in the semester on their potential as students, which includes a realistic self-assessment of their own personal academic workload, their own study habits and abilities, and the amount of time they may need for completing a major paper or project.

In addition to allowing students to take active agency in the organization of their learning, CYOA due dates achieve four further pedagogical benefits. First, as noted above and quite simply, this method allows additional time for students who require either a wide variety of academic accommodations. Second, an informal poll of my students[15] suggests that this method reduces some degree of anxiety which is an increasingly prevalent experience among college students (Denizet-Lewis 2017; Tate 2017). When the work itself begins with an act of self-efficacy, this alone can help reduce anxiety around the assignment.[16] Third, the method increases student agency while still providing some degree of structured guidance; students develop the skill of agency alongside an adult who provides space within which they can decide for themselves how to best organize their schedules.[17] Finally, this method allows for staggered grading, making it possible for the instructor to provide more in-depth feedback for students. While not all faculty find that staggered grading works for them, a *Chronicle of Higher Education* forum (n.d.) on staggered due dates and grading suggests that this is a common practice among faculty. I have found that if staggered due dates are built into the syllabus from the beginning, many potential problems can be preempted, including—and especially—the unconscious bias that can emerge when students with disability status need special accommodations.

Ability status and identity are not the only factors that should be considered when making a teaching and learning space inclusive (see Llewellyn Ihssen 2020). UDL seeks to remove barriers which are often invisible within the classroom. When most effective, UDL is itself invisible because it supports the normalizing of alternatives and, in this way, celebrates and welcomes the increasing levels of diversity in higher education. This CYOA due date teaching tactic is inclusive because it acknowledges that multiple factors go into identifying the way in which deadlines impact how and when a student might be more successful, and it acknowledges student choice and individual identity construction in that process.

Allowing students to choose their own due dates encourages and cultivates self-awareness around learning. For example, students who are highly academically motivated, who thrive better with an earlier due date, or who have additional responsibilities like family or work, most often know that and select appropriate dates. Likewise, students who need an extended time for papers and projects, who have due dates falling at the same time, or who simply know that they write better under that unique pressure of a time crunch can select a later option. (It is worth noting that not all students who have academic accommodations automatically choose the last possible due date). Finally, as was made clear earlier, the choices are neither numerous nor infinite; students have three dates from which they can choose, and they cannot deviate from those options.

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13 Emergency situations are completely independent of this, and so I will not address accommodations for major illness or family emergencies in this context.

14 The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion contains a fine library of resources on metacognition (2021).

15 In an anonymous poll on our digital learning platform, 100 percent of the students responded "Yes" in answer to the question "Do you find that having been given the freedom to make a choice for when your final paper/project is due assists you in better organizing your work for the semester, and therefore—at least in some small way—reduces some level of anxiety?"

16 The cause of student stress and anxiety is not limited to academics but can also include loss of community for those moving away from home, challenges transitioning into higher education (i.e., feelings of inferiority or alienation), and finances.

17 Durre et al. write: "It is important for students to recognize their role in making requests early and otherwise developing positive relationships with faculty by applying skills in self-advocacy and problem solving" (2015, 120).

It is incorrect to assume that students who turn in their work later will have a longer time to devote to the assignment. This assumes that the students are beginning their work on the assignment at the same time, that they are engaged in careful research, reflective reading, composing outlines, and working through the painstaking process of drafting and editing at the same pace as one another. Rather, it is my experience as a professor of religion for undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate learners since 2002 that students born after 1995 begin work on papers or projects at roughly the one-to-two-week period before the assignment is due, and sometimes even closer.[18] This is a different than my adult learners. These students will often choose the early due dates and organize their thinking and process early on. This is not because they are better students, but because their learning styles are shaped by their age, life experience, and professional goals.

Interestingly, no students have expressed regret over their submission choice, and unlike when I used single due dates, not one student has attempted to negotiate with me for a different due date. This suggests that students understand the importance and seriousness of their commitment to their choice. In practical terms, there is neither an advantage for students who select the early due dates, nor any penalty for students selecting the later dates; all papers are graded according to the same set of metrics, and no grades are released until the final set has been graded.[19]

To conclude, I encourage professors to try UDL in their curricula; the evidence suggests that it creates a more inclusive environment for learners of all types. An additional benefit is decreasing the cost and time required to organize additional and separate accommodations for students. At a programmatic, practice, and pedagogical level UDL makes sense for the higher education classroom.

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18 This statement is not supported by scientific evidence. It is anecdotal, but it is confirmed by conversation with colleagues. This is, I believe, linked to the issue of time.

19 If a student is anxious about their grade or their assignment, I do make reasonable attempts to either grade their work early or to place it near the top of the pile. I teach sixty at minimum per semester (ninety maximum), so students must be reasonable as well in understanding my burden. This is an anxiety that I can help them manage by grading their work as early as I am able. Additionally, all papers and projects are returned in person, so I sit with a student and we go over their feedback together.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen is Associate Professor of Early and Medieval Christian History at Pacific Lutheran University (USA). Her scholarship explores themes of social ethics in patristic and Byzantine literature, including economics, healthcare, dying and death, and the function of pain and suffering as a form of religious identity construction in martyr accounts. Additionally, she has published articles on Lutheran Higher Education, on teaching religion and healthcare, and ability/ disability identity in the classroom. She is the author of *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow: Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World and They Who Give From Evil: The Response of the Eastern Church to Moneylending in the Early Christian Era.*

Let's Be Buddhists for the Next Few Weeks! Costs and Benefits of Making Students Explore Buddhism From the Inside

Anna Lännström
Stonehill College

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the risks and rewards of integrating theory and practice in the study of yoga and meditation in college classes. It focuses on a case study of my Yoga, Mindfulness, and Indian Philosophy course. The course combines hatha yoga and meditation practice with the study of those practices and their origins. We use yoga and meditation to relieve stress and anxiety. We study Buddhist and Hindu worldviews. We examine ethical issues in the ways that yoga and meditation are appropriated and removed from their religious contexts (including the ways we use them in the course itself), we reflect on the ways in which our practice differs from traditional practices, we assess different types of contemporary practice, and we weigh the benefits and the costs of our Western embrace of yoga and meditation.

The Indian religious and philosophical traditions were brought to the West with an invitation to experiment and to experience: Try for yourself! See if it works for you! Don't blindly obey but verify for yourself. It's in this spirit that I introduce Buddhist meditation to the students in my Yoga, Mindfulness, and Indian Philosophy course: Try this on. See how it fits. Play with it.

I created the course because I wanted to address my students' suffering. I teach at Stonehill College, a Congregation of Holy Cross college of 2500 students outside Boston. Our students are mostly traditional undergraduates, New Englanders, upper-middle class, and culturally Catholic. Until a few years ago, they seemed like a reasonably happy bunch. In recent years, I have become increasingly worried about them as I've watched each incoming class struggle more and more with stress, anxiety, body image, and depression. My hunch was that students would

benefit from meditation and yoga practice, so I wanted to create a course that used yoga and mindfulness to help students figure out how to better cope with the stress and anxiety of living in our modern world. I am a long-term yoga practitioner, but I don't teach yoga myself, so I recruited my colleague Kristy Donnelly Kuhn to help me teach the class.

But I had two problems. First, I didn't want the course to lack rigor and intellectual content and just be a form of self-help. Second, I have ethical concerns about how we in the West have appropriated and commercialized yoga and meditation. We have reduced Buddhism to stress relief and mindfulness apps, and we meditate to become more effective business and military leaders, oblivious to the tensions between our own goals and Buddhist teachings about greed and violence. Given all that, could I with integrity encourage the students to use meditation for stress relief? How different are contemporary uses of meditation and mindfulness from "real" Buddhist practice? Can we use these techniques and still be sufficiently respectful to the religious and philosophical traditions involved?

I still struggle with these ethical questions. But I decided to make that very struggle the centerpiece of the course, using it to ensure that the course has serious intellectual and philosophical content. The course combines hatha yoga and meditation practice with the study of those practices and their origins. We study Buddhist and Hindu worldviews. We examine the ethical issues I just mentioned, we reflect on the ways in which our practice differs from traditional practice, we assess different types of contemporary practice, and we weigh the benefits and the costs of our Western embrace of yoga and meditation.

The class is half on Buddhism and half on Hinduism. For the Buddhist portion of the course, we read a brief overview of Buddhism and some classical sutras, Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975), and the Dalai Lama's *Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999). We also watch Bill Moyers' (1993) special about Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, and we read about the Buddhist roots of MBSR. We examine the Dalai Lama's critique of anger (1999), contrasting it with Kristin Neff's call for fierce self-compassion (2018). We end with Ron Purser and David Loy on McMindfulness (2013) and discussions of cultural appropriation in Bhanu Bhatnagar's *Who Owns Yoga?* (2014) and Tejal Patel and Jesal Parikh's podcast *Yoga is Dead* (2019-2020).

Throughout our discussions, I encourage the students to articulate how the views we are studying challenge and are challenged by their own views and to notice when they feel threatened or insulted by the materials. I stress the need to stick to the principle of charity even when that happens. I encourage them to initially bracket their own views and "be Buddhist," but to also jot down their reactions and think more about them later.

If things go well, the students get a good sense of traditional Buddhism. They understand that meditation was important for monks and nuns but not for lay Buddhists in the past. They see that Buddhist meditation aims at developing compassion and seeing reality as it is. All that prepares them for comparing traditional Buddhism to the uses of meditation in MBSR and other types of contemporary mindfulness practice, and developing an informed view about the ethical issues involved.

We do a five to ten minute seated meditation in the beginning of each class. During the first few weeks, we do breathing meditation. In yoga class, we alternate between seated meditations and using the yoga sequences as a moving meditation. The students pay attention to their breathing and to the movement, lose focus, and regain it again. We practice, reflect, and discuss. They quickly realize how difficult it is to pay attention, and they are relieved when they realize that the rest of the class struggles too. They argue about whether background music helps or whether the room should be quiet, and they share stories about their successes and failures. We use the Hindu notion of the Atman as a witness to help them observe their thoughts instead of getting caught up in them. I encourage anyone with a religious practice to compare this practice to their own. Is it like prayer? Is it anything like saying the Rosary? From the beginning, I encourage students to experiment and find ways that work better for themselves, while also carefully noticing when they make significant changes to the practice or to its meaning. We experiment with relaxation techniques like listening to music and coloring, and we compare those to meditation.

Halfway through the semester, we introduce loving-kindness meditation. This is before we discuss compassion in class, and it comes as a pleasant surprise for my students who at that point usually feel like they have spent an eternity discussing unpleasant ideas about detachment from the world, their loved ones, and their own self. We start with a shortened version

of loving-kindness meditation—students focus on themselves, a loved one, and then the whole world. *May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be loved*. Here too, we practice, reflect, and then discuss. We consider character development: *Can* you change your character? For instance, can you make yourself more compassionate? Or is our character fixed? If you can change, how do you do that? We look at some of the recent data from Singer and Bolz (2013) and others which suggests that loving-kindness meditation can help us change. After a couple of weeks, we expand the loving-kindness meditation, sending our thoughts to somebody neutral, and then to someone we dislike. We discuss the purpose of this sort of meditation, and we compare it to forgiveness in the Christian tradition. We consider the difficulties we encounter in sending good wishes to people we don't like, and we come up with "improved" and more honest mantras. "*May you be happy, may you be healthy, oh, damn it, May you be eaten by wild dogs,*" was especially popular last semester.

I present all these types of meditation and relaxation practices for students to try out, reflect on, and discuss, and I see them understanding the Buddhist and Hindu traditions better as they do. I ask them to give a fair chance to each approach that we play with, but I also invite them to alter the practice when needed. I encourage them to experiment with these and other techniques for calming down, to figure out what works better for them. I mention the *Visuddhimagga* and its claim that different types of people need different types of meditation. Students experiment, letting the loving-kindness meditation turn into a prayer to God or realizing that counting the breath works much better than simply focusing on breathing in and out. They share their results and experiment more.

Assessment of the course is still in the early stages, as is the study of mindfulness-based techniques in the world beyond my classroom, and it faces some of the same challenges (for example, excessive reliance on self-reports). My impression so far is that the integration of meditation and yoga practice can enhance student learning in three important areas: First, they get better at self-care. My students report getting better at noticing to how they are doing and at self-regulation (for example, using their breathing to calm down or using meditation to go to sleep). They say they come out of the meditation sessions feeling much calmer than when they arrived and that this calm lasts throughout much of the day. They notice ways in which their own thinking makes their suffering worse and ways in which they can try to adjust their thinking, and sometimes they even manage to make such adjustments. They realize that self-care isn't a one-time fix but a lifelong practice involving much backsliding, and they get basic tools to use and practice in how to use them. For many of my students, this type of self-awareness and self-work is entirely new. They can't master it in a semester, but it's a start.

Second, the practice can enhance students' understanding of the theoretical content of the course. Meditation, in particular, provides them with a direct experience in which they seem to stand outside of themselves, watching thoughts and feelings race around with no sense that they are actively generating any of them. This helps them make sense of the Buddhist and Hindu views that our thoughts, feelings, and ego are not our self, as well as of the related idea that they are not as important as we tend to think. That in turn helps students understand Hinduism and Buddhism better and it increases the chance that they regard them as serious options rather than exotic oddities.

Finally, integrating the practice motivates them to study Buddhism and Hinduism. Students are initially unaware of the origins of yoga and mindfulness—I always have at least one student in the class say that they had no idea that yoga had anything to do with Hinduism or India. They quickly become troubled by the ways in which the practices seem to have been corrupted, distorted, and just plain appropriated. But because they notice how valuable the practices can be as self-care tools, they are also reluctant to say that we shouldn't use them. Students generally conclude that, at a minimum, responsible use of these techniques requires a good understanding of their religious and cultural roots, thus creating an obligation for themselves to learn more. This semester, a student initially defended her mother who is teaching mindfulness to grade school kids. But she and her friends in the class concluded that her mom wasn't doing it right, and now she plans to teach her mom about Buddhism and to convince her to include it in her teaching.

Students come to this class from different religious commitments and backgrounds and with different mental health challenges. Part of the challenge for the instructor is to work with all that. But with a deeply personal class like this one, a class which requires students to experiment with different religious practices and to look deeply into their own hearts and minds, it is also essential to ensure that students know what they are getting themselves into before the course starts. In particular, students with serious philosophical and religious objections to the practice, and students with a history of trauma, should think twice before enrolling.

I have little experience dealing with students who have serious philosophical and religious objections to meditation and yoga practice. None of my students have expressed discomfort with participating in the practice or have asked to opt out. This is partly because of the student population at my college. Virtually all my students are at least mildly curious about Buddhist and Hindu traditions and they don't see exploring different religious traditions as a threat to their own faith. Meditation and yoga might *bore* them, but other than that, they have nothing against participating in those practices. When I mention that some Christians have spiritual objections to yoga and Buddhist meditation, they just roll their eyes. But I live in the Northeast and my students are generally vaguely Catholic and on the liberal end of Catholicism. Some work with very different student populations.

To ensure that students can make an informed decision about the class, I make sure that the course description and any advertising for the course highlights the practice component. We also need to check that this type of course is not the only course given for fulfilling a general education requirement. With appropriate information given beforehand and other course options available, students who have serious concerns about spiritual dangers from the practice have been able to avoid my course, which is good for them and for the course.

In teaching a course like this, we must also be aware of how students' history of trauma and PTSD can affect their ability to participate safely in meditation practice. David Treleaven (2018, 2019) has done important work on this issue. Here are the highlights:

- Meditation sometimes triggers flashbacks for people with PTSD.

- Focusing on the breath is especially likely to be a trigger so it may be better for this population to use other anchors for attention.

Let's not overreact. Meditation can be helpful for students struggling with anxiety and trauma. But we need to put safeguards in place so that we don't ask a student with PTSD to meditate in class without either of us being aware that it can trigger flashbacks. Here are the safeguards I have put in place, using Treleavan's recommendations: I email the students after registration and explain that meditation and yoga practice will be a regular part of the course and that we are happy to help them adapt the practice so that it works for them. I explain that while meditation and yoga are often helpful to people struggling with mental health issues, trauma survivors with PTSD should be aware that meditation can trigger flashbacks. I repeat all this the first few times we meditate in class, and I provide choices when I guide the students in meditation practice. I invite students to use anchors beside their breath, like sounds or the sensation of their feet on the floor. I offer these options upfront and as equally valid options for everybody. *Try them on. See which works better for you.* I try to reduce the shame associated with not "doing meditation well" by talking about how common it is to struggle. I share stories about my own difficulties with meditation, and I repeatedly invite and encourage students to speak to me or to the yoga instructor if anything doesn't feel right with their practice.

This may sound like an excessive level of caution. As far as I know, I have only had one student who was dealing with PTSD. But trauma and PTSD are all too common. I have probably worked with several students with PTSD over the years—they just didn't disclose that information to me. Furthermore, inclusive practices like those outlined here are helpful for my other students as well. They regularly express surprise and relief when I tell them to adapt the practice to their needs instead of struggling to sit or move exactly right or to follow a script to the letter. They benefit from having permission to adapt the practice and from seeing alternative approaches as just alternatives, and not as inferior options for those who are bad at meditation.

A final thought. One of the most important parts of the "let's be Buddhists for a few weeks" type of teaching is to respect the intellectual integrity of the students. I ask them to bracket their own views and to try to understand the worldviews that we are exploring from the inside as much as possible. I challenge them to articulate how a philosophically-savvy Buddhist might critique their own way of life and their religious beliefs. But later, I let them remove those brackets, and I encourage them to critically examine the views and commitments that they have immersed themselves in throughout the course of

the semester, and I help them develop the strongest possible arguments for what they actually believe. If this means that they argue that greed is good, that meditation is a waste of time, or that there is no such thing as cultural appropriation, then I swallow hard and help them do it better.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Lännström is professor of philosophy at Stonehill College where she teaches philosophy of religion, Asian philosophies, and ethics, as well as a learning community course which integrates yoga, mindfulness, and Indian philosophy.

Now I Can See the Moon: Contemplative Pedagogy Informed by Western Influences in Teaching and Learning in Twenty-first Century America

Namdrol Miranda Adams
Maitripa College

ABSTRACT

Contemplative pedagogy has been used to inform a variety of educational goals in higher education, and there has been significant work done on exploring ways in which the contemplative traditions inform teaching and learning. New work continues to emerge in this field, and extant fields have taken on new life, but there remains a lack of research exploring ways that Western pedagogical strategies might inform contemplative education. This article addresses that gap through a discussion of some elements of Western teaching and learning that may be used to inform curricula and are being put into practice.

KEYWORDS

contemplative education, contemplative pedagogy, scholarship of teaching and learning, Freire

One day very long ago a family left their home early in the morning. They were a traditional family: a mother, a father, and two children. They spent all day out: doing errands, enjoying nature, visiting friends. When they returned home, they found that their home was completely burned to the ground.

The father was distraught: "How could this have happened?" he wailed. "Our things! Our clothes! Our house!" "Oh, oh, oh," cried the children with tears running from their faces. "Our toys! Our books! Our precious belongings!" They ran to and fro, inconsolable.

But the mother stood a little way back, looking up at the sky. "Ah!" said the mother. "The house has burned down!" She took a breath and smiled with great joy.

"Now I can see the moon!"

This story is a traditional Buddhist narrative from the Zen Buddhist tradition, and indicates how a shift in perspective can inform the meaning of our experience with great impact. The use of contemplative pedagogies in teaching and learning can have a similar effect, inviting the student to slow down, reflect, and, in the space that arises, reevaluate and reconceptualize their experience (Barbezat and Bush 2014). The application of frameworks from our own Western traditions to curriculum and course design in contemplative education can increase and enhance this shift.

Contemplative pedagogy (a "quiet revolution," in the words of Arthur Zajonc [2013],) has been used to inform a variety of educational goals in higher education, including increasing focus, attention, and positive states of mind in classrooms, for the past several decades (Barbezat and Bush 2014; Ergas 2018; Morgan 2014; Simmer-Brown and Grace 2011; Zajonc 2013). Notable results can be seen in a multitude of programs and courses offering a contemplative component as part of course methodology, and the rather astounding increasing prevalence of the word "mindfulness" in connection with modern education. Also notable is the emergence of institutions of higher learning purposely dedicated to contemplative pedagogies, organizations dedicated to developing the culture of contemplation in American society, and journals, websites, and other publications that embrace the conversation and offer a place for it to flourish (Barbezat and Bush 2014).

There is no question that contemplative pedagogies have taken root in Western culture. Importantly, in addition to the functions listed above, contemplative pedagogies rely on methods that integrate subjective experience (first-person approaches) and the consideration, analysis, and application of meaning-making and ethics in education (Zajonc 2019). Contemplative pedagogies connect students to the lived, embodied experience of their own learning; students become more aware of their internal world and connect their learning to their values and sense of meaning, which enables them to form richer deeper, relationships with their peers, their communities, and the world around them, and to act as agents of positive change. Up until this point, there has been significant work done on exploring ways in which the contemplative traditions inform teaching and learning in American higher education (Barbezat and Bush 2014; Braxton et al. 2018; Owen-Smith 2018). New work continues to emerge in this field, and extant fields have taken on new life, but there remains a lack of research exploring ways that Western pedagogical strategies might inform contemplative education. This article addresses that gap through a discussion of some elements of Western teaching and learning that may be used to inform curricula and are being put into practice. Such a conversation may contribute to the developing fields of contemplative education, contemplative pedagogy, and the scholarship of teaching and learning in the broader academy.

The Purpose of Education: Education as an Act of Freedom

The framing of the purpose of contemplative education is a logical starting point for this conversation. Orienting the integration of a reflective dimension to teaching and learning beyond the superficial rationale of productivity, job placement, or even academic success is critical to grounding the contemplative approach to education in a broad purpose beyond individual gain, and ensuring that we do not monetize its integration according to the norms of our current capitalist culture (Forbes 2016).

The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, famously writes of education as either an instrument of freedom or an instrument of oppression (1970), and articulated an aspiration and a yearning towards the contemplative as part of a holistic education (1994). He wrote often and prolifically of the need for reflection and action as a means to social change.

One of the quintessential characteristics of the work of Freire in relationship to education is his belief that education, at its best, is a practice of freedom and has the potential to either liberate students from systems of oppression or further shackle them in systems of inequity by reinforcing oppressive norms. Intentionally framing contemporary contemplative education with a similar awareness can ground the purpose of our work in the classroom in a context of the greater good, directly or indirectly. At its simplest, this may be done through a moment of silence at the start of most classes, in which all present are invited to simply arrive in the room and be present for the work of the day, together. Most of the time this moment can be spent in complete silence, although sometimes a motivation for the benefit of all, or an aspiration that our work together will be of benefit might be spoken aloud. Besides bringing quiet clarity and focus to the group, this simple practice will also connect learners to one another, and to the time to be spent together. It will orient the learning that is about to transpire to a purpose that transcends individual gain, and in this way situate the educational process in a context

that recalls, very gently, a sense of social responsibility. Depending on the subject matter of the class, this intention may naturally evolve into a consideration of the course content in the dynamics of the actual world in which we live and the systems that we live by.

The Authenticity of the Educator: Spirituality in the Academy

The second most compelling work from Western educators that might inform contemplative curricula and programming relates to the role of the educator. The place of spirituality in the academy has become a topic of increasing interest over the past decades even outside the domain of contemplative studies. Higher education in the United States famously began in the form of educational institutions focused on training young men for the ministry, and where a young man could get an education in theology and philosophy as a preparation for his life (Marsden 2000). At no time in the early days of American higher education is there a record of a consideration that an education would be complete if it was *separated* from a study of the internal life of the mind or spirit. In the tradition of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, religion, philosophy, and how such ideas functioned in the world in actual practice were very much a part of the discourse of early American higher education (Marsden 2000), and therefore, very much integrated in the discourse and experience of early faculty. However, as time passed, in response to a host of mitigating factors, professors began identifying themselves as "scientists" and "scholars" who were primarily dedicated to the pursuit of "objective truth" in order to produce research that would result in social progress. Thus began the era of area specialties and research-based scholarship, and the evolution of the culture of American academe that we see today, wholly separated from the religious and spiritual dynamics of the human mind (Gross 2007). In contrast to this evolution, research shows that in the twenty-first century, most higher education faculty embrace religion and spirituality as significant ways of knowing (Lindholm 2014), and many share the concern that the academy's narrowing focus on empiricism, scientific thought, and professional training is excluding too much (Chickering 2003).

There is a body of scholarship emerging that addresses the role of internal experience in the mind and life of contemporary faculty. An initial challenge arises from the fact that most research on faculty in academia has thus far focused on external conditions and the objective domain, thereby establishing those as the norm of faculty experience. However, American institutions of higher education, as, at their best, centers of knowledge and learning, have an important responsibility to respond to this split, and address the question of balance between the internal and external facets of life and experience (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011). The harmonious balance of the internal and external experience of an individual (as may be manifested in the exploration of oneself as a "spiritual" person) has been shown to affect how the individual actually engages with others. It has also been shown to foster an increased awareness of the interdependent nature of the world and our existence, and a subsequent aspiration towards empathy, virtue, and social justice within a person (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011). The original rationale for a liberal arts education (essential for free citizens of Greece and Rome) holds much in common with this explication (Parker 1890).

In the literature on spirituality in the academy, the salient points that emerge establish clearly that, regardless of our philosophical positions, faculty have internal lives and seek spirituality as a meaning-making endeavor. They do this for themselves and their students (Lindholm 2014; Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011). There is a hunger and a need for the expression of subjective ways of knowing to be considered valid in the academy (Simmer-Brown 2019).

In relationship to these points, an individual's spirituality (as distinct from religion) is a crucial lens through which meaning and knowledge are constructed (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011), and so should certainly be considered part of a complete education. As Astin and colleagues assert, faculty members who identify as "spiritual" are consistently more likely than those who do not to demonstrate behavior that meets the public expectations for higher education. There is growing evidence demonstrating that "good" (and effective) teaching is dependent on much more than teaching technique alone (Palmer 1998). The sense of connection with others that facilitates a teacher's ability to move students, and thereby influence them, is considered a quality apparent in teachers who engage in self-reflection; itself part of a spiritual practice.

Secondly, since the traditional American academy does not at present consider subjective ways of knowing to be an important part of the educational process, a student's individual subjective experience of education (as well as the subjective experience of teachers) is left completely unacknowledged, undiscussed, and separate from discourse on

research and education (Cozart 2010). This results in a textbook example of teaching a "null" curriculum, in which students learn that the subjective world and their own subjective selves are not important, indeed, in many instances, not even real (Palmer 1998). This is a mistake, and it distances students and faculty alike from important research, teaching, and learning strategies (Ng and Carney 2017). Instructors and faculty can counteract this inclination by, if not embracing, at least exploring the parts of themselves that value and embrace subjective experience.

The Relationship with the Student: Education as an Act of Love and Curriculum Design

The final element of Freire's work that directly informs this research is his commitment to dialogue, relationality, and communication. Freire developed a unique pedagogical method for working with students to promote their "critical consciousness" (*conscientização* in Portuguese) based on dialogic pedagogy.

Although the specifics of Freire's pedagogical technique will not be addressed here, the theoretical basis of dialogic pedagogy is central to this article, and is a key tool that may be used to inform contemplative education. Dialogic pedagogy is based in the assumption that knowledge is not transferred from the one who knows (the teacher) to the one who must learn (the student), but instead that knowledge arises in the space between them (Freire 1970). Contemplative pedagogy, at its best, approaches knowledge in the same manner, and is less concerned with transferring knowledge or truths than creating conditions for students to seek (and find) their own truths.

A final conspicuous element in the telling of the life and work of Freire is the continuous reference to the affect of the man himself, and his teaching, as being suffused with love. It is notable that in both the anecdotal and more formal accounts of his life and temperament, one of the most common descriptives used in narratives about him is the word "love" (Kirylo and Boyd 2017; Darder 2017). According to those closest to him, this sense of love functioned as an impulse for Freire's teaching; he famously held that "education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage" (Freire 1990, 24). This, too, is an important element for contemplative education and contemplative educators, and one that is not just emerging as part of contemporary discourse on teaching. Simply put, research demonstrates that the most effective determinant of a student's learning is their relationship with the teacher. Contemplative educators are not exempt from this. A trusting relationship based on a genuine sense of respect, caring, and kindness (even in a general sense for large groups) can be a touchstone for both educator and student to return to as education progresses.

Finally, course and curriculum design in contemplative education are specific areas in which Western models can help inform practice. Intentional course and curriculum creation offers a reflective process by which faculty may support contemplative education. Fink's (2013) framework is one which lends itself well to such practice. This framework is based on a "Taxonomy of Significant Learning," and includes six components: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn. This schema facilitates the synthesis of reflective elements with course planning and creation. In particular, Fink's "integration," "caring," and "learning how to learn" offer opportunities to expand our work in contemplative education to include a reflective element in curriculum and course design itself.

The primary challenges to the integration of Western frameworks of teaching and learning with contemplative education are the same as the challenges to contemplative education itself. The master narrative of our times—of modernity and its close companion, capitalism—presumes an autonomous, independent, rational self at the center of teaching and learning. Western ways of knowing value measurable, observable knowledge derived from scientific inquiry and are heavily influenced by positivistic world views, which largely reject the metaphysical or spiritual realm as a source of knowledge. These challenges to contemplative education are being met in a variety of ways, including a growing body of quantitative research that formally measures the physical inputs and outputs of contemplative programs and techniques with scientific instruments; increasing bodies of research using familiar psychological metrics for measurement; and an increasing presence of programs, courses, and projects emphasizing the contemplative domain in the mainstream. But there is much work to be done. Contemplative education can benefit from extant pedagogical frameworks and tools from our own traditions especially in relationship to an orientation in purpose and motivation, the interior life of the instructor, the relationship with the student, and course design.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Namdrol Miranda Adams is Dean and a founder of Maitripa College. She teaches Buddhist philosophy and contemporary engagement with faith and service at Maitripa. Since 1998 she has dedicated her life to the study and practice of the Tibetan language and philosophy in the context of American higher education. She practiced as a Buddhist nun for seven years, and is currently completing her doctoral work in Education at the University of Portland.

Integrating the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm with Buddhist-Inspired Compassion Meditation

Gloria I-Ling Chien
Gonzaga University

ABSTRACT

While Ignatian pedagogy is distinctive in Jesuit education, scholarly attention to its applications is scanty. This article demonstrates the relevance of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) to compassion cultivation by showing how it integrates into a Buddhist-inspired contemplation program, Cognitively-Based Compassion Training® (CBCT®). Using a case study of a CBCT® course at a Jesuit University aimed at developing students' "whole person" and ethical discernment, this research analyzes how CBCT® works with the IPP's five elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. This study evaluates changes in participant emotional well-being and ethical concerns by employing psychological measurements such as the Compassionate Love for Humanity Scale. The discussion concludes by elucidating how I have adapted this integrative pedagogical method to teach an undergraduate credited course, Buddhist Meditation and Practice. Broadly, this study contributes to a larger conversation about how educators can create an environment that supports both cognitive and affective learning.

Introduction

Mainly derived from Ignatius of Loyola's (1491–1556) *Spiritual Exercises*, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), developed by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), defines Jesuit education.[1] In addition to fostering academic excellence, the IPP attempts to form students as "persons of competence, conscience, and compassion" (ICAJE 1993, 249).[2] A course which aims to cultivate students' compassionate character therefore fulfills this educational goal. To create such a course, which also tied to my research agenda

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2   For a succinct investigation of the IPP's relationship with the *Spiritual Exercises*, see DeFeo (2009, 46–53).

on Tibetan Buddhist *lojong* (Tibetan *blo sbyong*, or "mind-training,") teaching (Chien 2016), I led Cognitively-Based Compassion Training® (CBCT®)[3] in the spring of 2018 at my institution as a ten-week, noncredit course. Surprisingly, I found that CBCT's learning model aligned with the IPP. This article analyzes how I bridged the pedagogical approaches from the IPP and CBCT to create a whole person (*cura personalis*) learning environment for ethical character formation. I will discuss the outcome of my course goals and conclude by elucidating how I have adapted this integrative method to teach my undergraduate credited Buddhist Meditation and Practice course. Broadly, this study contributes to a larger conversation about how educators create an effective learning environment by familiarizing themselves with specific pedagogical approaches (Gin and Hearn 2019).

Background and Purpose

My course aimed to widen participants' ethical concerns through CBCT's six contemplation modules, in which students trained skills in attention stability, self-compassion, impartiality, gratitude, and engaged compassion.[4] I conducted this project to support both the university's mission to cultivate compassionate leaders and the Jesuit educational goal of caring for the whole person. In cooperation with my colleagues, I recruited students from my Buddhism course and from other departments. The students enrolled had various majors and most of them were juniors and seniors. Eighteen students (eleven females and seven males) completed the class, attending an average of eight out of ten ninety-minute classes.

CBCT's emphasis on character formation parallels the IPP's concept of developing students through "a way of proceeding" that includes five elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. First, teachers adapt their methods to individual students' contexts. Then, teachers adopt strategies to encourage learning experiences that include both cognitive and affective domains. Third, students reflect on the new insights their experiences created. Fourth, these insights ideally inspire them to take action, which can be a change in perspective or a concrete activity. Throughout these four elements, teachers evaluate the progression in their students. The IPP can be applied to any discipline that endeavors to promote academic excellence (Nowacek and Mountin 2012) or to emphasize character development. The following analysis shows how I integrated the IPP with my CBCT teaching.

Bridging the IPP and CBCT

My teaching project attempted to enact CBCT's three levels of learning. I addressed the first level of intellectual understanding through presentations of CBCT tenets and scientific research on CBCT.[5] I led meditation practice to foster the second level, intuitive realization. Ideally, the students would then attain the third level, embodying a compassionate character. CBCT's three-step heuristic strategy endeavors to shift participants' habitual pathways of thinking and prepare them for behavioral changes. This goal correlates with ICAJE's claim that the IPP's learning model focuses on transforming students' habitual thought patterns (1993, 245). Outside of class meetings, the students followed my weekly meditation audio recording, kept a meditation log, and posted comments in our Facebook group. Their records document that they practiced CBCT® 3.2 times per week, averaging a total 7.63 hours of meditation time, which is 53 percent of the instructed amount.

The first IPP element, context, advises educators to adapt their teaching to students' own life situations and larger environment (ICAJE 1993, 380–382). To apply this principle, I paid attention to potential triggers. For example, those who have survived traumatic experiences may find focusing on breathing disturbing. To avoid this potential problem, I gave my students options, such as counting numbers in their mind or keeping their eyes open and trained on an object. Being

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3 CBCT® is a contemplation program inspired by *lojong* practice and is led by Emory University's Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE), see Emory University (2020 a) CBCT® was created by Dr. Lobsang Negi, a leading figure at the former Emory-Tibet Partnership. The 14th Dalai Lama inaugurated the Emory-Tibet Partnership in 1998. It was later merged with CCSCBE. For more information, see Emory University (2020 b).

4 CBCT®'s sequential contemplation includes a foundation practice and six modules. The foundation trains participants to recall an experience during which they felt supported and cared for. Modules I and II aim to help participants cultivate mental stability with a focus on breathing and non-judgmental observation of their feelings and thoughts. From Modules III to VI, practitioners learn analytical meditation to reflect on concepts related to self-compassion, common humanity, gratitude, and compassion. For more information, see Negi (2017).

5 For the relevant research on CBCT® in psychology and neuroscience, see the bibliography.

aware of potential sensitivities is always important for educators; it is crucial in a meditation course because students may experience both positive and negative emotions.[6] I also guided students to be aware of their own contexts. I coached them to investigate how their habits hindered the execution of their plans to practice meditation.

The second IPP element, experience, encourages experiential learning to engage the equally important affective and intellectual domains (ICAJE 1993, 383–386; DeFeo 2009, 57). Similarly, CBCT® embeds the cognitive and emotional dimensions through contemplation experience. For instance, CBCT® claims that the degree of compassion we feel when witnessing the suffering of others correlates with how endearing those others are to us (Negi 2017, 24). Because we more easily identify those whom we appreciate, Module V attempts to elicit gratitude in practitioners. Informed by the IPP's principle of experience, I designed a drawing activity to help students recognize the interconnected factors that contribute to their life. I then led a Module V contemplation practice that fostered students' reflection on how their well-being depends on others. The activity and contemplation attempted to stimulate a direct experience of gratitude in students to enhance their affection toward people whom they would generally not consider. A year after our course, one student shared with me that they had developed the feeling of social warmth and a sense of responsibility toward the people they interacted with. These experiences were not based on a single practice session, but on cognitive changes from a ten-week cultivation period. This shows how both the IPP and CBCT® support experiential learning to synthesize intellect and emotion for character formation.

IPP's third element, reflection, instructs students how to examine their learning experiences for insights that will lead to action (ICAJE 1993, 386). CBCT®'s second level of learning, analytical meditation, supports the IPP's element of reflection through participants' reconsideration of their relationships. For example, because one generally feels compassionate toward those who are close to oneself, Module IV's practice tries to diminish the demarcation among friends, strangers, and adversaries. Participants meditate on how all people share humanity's common desire for well-being.[7] While it was not easy, students gradually began to see the situations from the different perspective of their "adversaries." A student posted in our Facebook group:

> Sometimes it's challenging to empathize with those people in our adversary category, but I've realized it does neither them nor I any good to dwell on the little things that cause this feeling but rather focus on the underlying fact that we both are in pursuit of happiness.

This comment demonstrates that CBCT® was effective for this student and exemplifies the IPP's reflection goal. Furthermore, the IPP's reflection element challenges teachers not to impose values, such as altruism. Therefore, I formulated questions that would deepen students' understanding and made my guided meditation invitational. This integrated pedagogical method attempted to motivate students to achieve the next IPP element, action.

Action has two aspects: Inward action refers to interior choices, such as changing a perspective; Outward action results when that new attitude is manifested (ICAJE 1993, 389–390). CBCT® offers the IPP a systematic method for approaching both. For example, Module III aims to generate a "determination to emerge" in which practitioners decide to move beyond misleading and self-blaming thought patterns (Negi, 2017, 20). The following student's response indicates a shifting perspective, which can be seen as the IPP's "inward action."

> Through the practice of compassion towards ourselves we can break out of old thinking patterns . . . I will try to stop myself from falling into the trap of self criticism [*sic*] and negative thinking . . .

CBCT®'s final goal is to help practitioners embody a compassionate mindset beyond their personal concerns. The actions they may take based on this cultivated mentality parallel the IPP's area of "outward action." For instance, Module VI directs

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6 For discussion on the potential pitfalls of meditation, see Compson, (2014). Brown University (2020) has training workshops about creating a safe environment for teaching meditation.

7 I asked my students to picture only "adversaries" they personally knew and for whom they felt only minor negative emotions. Stronger negative emotions could have been too intense at this early stage.

participants to acknowledge others' pain and cultivate an urge to help the vulnerable. To make this practice relevant to their personal contexts, I integrated students' stated concerns for the indigent, immigrants, refugees, animals, and so forth, into our guided contemplation practice.

Both CBCT® and Jesuit education strive to cultivate this compassion. However, detecting students' moral growth is often challenging through regular academic assessments. Thus, ICAJE suggests that teachers use methods like journaling, self-evaluation, and voluntary service to measure their students' progress (1993, 390–391). Aligning with the IPP element of evaluation, my CBCT® course used various strategies to measure students' whole-person development. First, I either had one-on-one or group discussions about issues that students encountered during their practice. Second, the students' Facebook comments allowed me to investigate to what extent students' perspectives had shifted based on their intellectual understanding and meditation practice. Third, I designed class activities to promote students' self-evaluation. For example, through "mindful listening," students practiced concentrating nonjudgmentally on their partner's concerns and summarizing what they heard. To evaluate my students' overall changes in ethical concerns and emotional health, I used three self-evaluated measurements, which students completed both before and after the course: the Compassionate Love for Humanity Scale (Sprecher and Fehr 2005), the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona 1980), and the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond and Lovibond 1995).[8] While there were some limitations for this pilot study, the results show positive correlations between my students' CBCT® experience and their increase in compassion levels and emotional well-being.[9] As ways to examine amorphous learning outcomes, like spiritual growth, are scarce (Lovette-Colyer 2014), my use of these scales gives educators some additional methods to actualize the IPP's evaluation element.

Conclusion

This study indicates that incorporating contemplative practice inspired by Buddhism into the IPP supports the Jesuit educational goal of caring for an individual's whole-person development and compassionate character formation. My students' course evaluations also demonstrate the effectiveness of this integration. They felt it improved their emotional well-being and empathy for others, and in the words of one student: "This class has truly helped me to become a happier and more compassionate person."

Based on this teaching project, I created the credited undergraduate course Buddhist Meditation and Practice, for which I adopted both the IPP and some aspects of CBCT®. For example, in an essay, students needed to reflect on how their one-week mindful breathing practice differed from the practice described in *Anapannasati Sutta* (*On the Full Awareness of Breathing*), and on which concepts in neuroscientist Wendy Hasenkamp's ([2013](#)) "How to Focus a Wandering Mind" resonated with their personal contexts. Such an integration of pedagogical methods supports students' ability to synthesize their experiences with the readings so as to reach the higher level of cognitive work of constructing their own knowledge.[10] While I have applied this combination in a Buddhist meditation class, it would be equally possible to connect the IPP with the principles of contemplation practice in other disciplines, such as in a Western religion class, a biology class, a class with a service component, a course on ethics, and so forth. This bridging will ideally encourage educators to further enhance students' learning by paying attention to their contexts, inspiring their affective experiences, deepening their understanding of subjects through reflection, and inducing their inner transformation through inspiring action or a shift of perspectives. Furthermore, including contemplation exercises with the IPP fits into the emerging discipline of contemplative studies (Komjathy 2018).[11] More educators are integrating contemplation practices, such as mindfulness, into higher education (for example see, Barbezat and Bush 2014; Roth 2014; McGuire 2019).[12] A further dialogue between Ignatian and contemplative pedagogies can be fruitful because the IPP and contemplative learning value students' development (for example, see Grace 2011, 116).

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8 For those measurements, I conducted a paired samples two-tailed t-test.

9 These self-evaluations were only used as a reference for my teaching. The Institutional Review Board considered such usage and my CBCT® course to be a "quality improvement project." The results are restricted to my students and will not be necessarily applicable to other CBCT® practitioners.

10 To address the level of cognitive work, I borrowed the concept of six-order thinking skills listed in the ThinkWell-LearnWell Diagram ([Learnwell Projects 2020](#)).

11 I acknowledge that teaching at a private university allowed me to lead my CBCT® teaching project and to include contemplation practice in my Buddhist Meditation and Practice course. It is more challenging to have such application in public universities (see [Brown 2019](#)).

12 Also, an increase of the applications of contemplation techniques across disciplines is demonstrated by eager participation in the annual summer workshop organized by the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education at Smith College (personal participation in 2019).

In conclusion, my incorporation of contemplative practice inspired by Buddhism into the IPP created a collaborative classroom that emphasized experiences in both the cognitive and affective dimensions, fostering ethical character formation as a result. Because achieving holistic growth is complex, educators would be well-served to merge multiple pedagogies. The IPP is an ideal candidate for teachers merging pedagogies. This study suggests that educators across disciplines can employ similar methods to my approach to build a rigorous, well-rounded learning environment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Gloria I-Ling Chien is an Assistant Professor who teaches Buddhism and Asian religions in the Religious Studies Department at Gonzaga University. She is also a certified instructor in Cognitively-Based Compassion Training®.

Advocacy for Teaching Mindfulness Practices and World Religions in Public Schools

Trung Huynh (Thich Hang Dat)
University of Houston

ABSTRACT

People from various walks of life, professions, and traditions, including Christians, have been implementing mindfulness practices as cost-effective tools to deal with physical and mental health issues. Notably, numerous studies have demonstrated that mindfulness training has brought tremendous benefits to K-12 students, both physiologically and psychologically. As a result, this training should be implemented in public schools for the sake of our children's well-being, behavior, mental health, and educational success. Some states, such as Texas and Kentucky, have given the Christian Bible priority and teach it in schools while excluding other traditions and sacred texts. This precedent, however, violates the First Amendment. Public schools in this modern globalized era should instead provide teachers proper training and knowledge so they can teach their students broader perspectives on world religions, including Western and Eastern traditions.

Introduction

After more than four decades of scientific evidence, mindfulness-based practices, which are rooted in religious traditions, especially Buddhism, but which have been stripped of their religious notions, are widely used. In school settings mindfulness-based practices help students deal with stress, anxiety, depression, attention deficit disorder, behavior issues, general function, executive disfunction, and impart learning skills that improve their educational achievements. Therefore, school districts around the country should provide training and tools for teachers to use cost-effective mindfulness interventions when they teach world religions to help students with their physiological and psychological health issues and so students understand broader religious perspectives that can better prepare them to become global citizens.

Children's learning, behavior, and overall health may be compromised by excessive stress. Other influences—family-system disturbances, peer-interaction conflicts, sociocultural components, and vulnerabilities to physical and mental health risk factors—can create toxic stress. To address these mental health issues and to enhance students' academic achievements, mindfulness practice is considered the most cost-effective tool.

Throughout history, many civilizations have practiced mindfulness meditation for spiritual and well-being purposes (Braboszcz and Arnaud 1910). Buddhist mindfulness meditation, one of the religion's core teachings and practices, was preserved and gained popularity in the modern age through a secular style that has stripped of its Buddhist textual and descriptive roots.

Mindfulness is described as a mental state and a set of practices, made up of two constituents: one, the attentive self-regulation that sustains immediate experience and increases the recognition of mental events in the present moment, and two, the adoption of an approach to experiences in the current moment based on curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Suárez-García et al. 2020).

Contemporary mindfulness excludes Buddhist notions of ethics, judgment, and memory. Specifically, while promoting the universal principles (which include Buddhist theory) of loving kindness and compassion, contemporary mindfulness removes strict and instituted Buddhist moral guidelines, specific vows, and certain orthodox frameworks which then allows practitioners to set their own ethical standards. Contemporary mindfulness also implements a nonjudgmental attitude by not evaluating the mental state as something to be cultivated or discarded, as advocated by classical Buddhism. It also does not utilize Buddhist terminology to examine the mental state. For instance, in contemporary mindfulness, practitioners are supposed to recognize their distractions and return to their focus object without employing any mental manipulation or using any morally charged judgments. In classical Buddhist mindfulness, practitioners are supposed to "recollect" or "keep in mind" their spiritual goals, ethics, or vows (such as various mental states that need to be cultivated or rejected) without dwelling on past occurrences or future engagements. In contrast, contemporary mindfulness does not include "recollections" or "retentions" and instead encourages practitioners to sustain their present awareness without clinging to the past or future. As a result, there are no Buddhist textual descriptions of ethics, judgments, or memories within contemporary mindfulness (Dunne 2015, 254–258).

Contemporary mindfulness is the most cost-effective means to meet the government's objectives regarding children's mental health and to enhance teachers' and parents' well-being. Resilient school-based mindfulness approaches can increase students' learning achievements and overall study behaviors while serving as effective interventions (Sapthiang et al. 2019, 117). Scientifically, regardless of age and level of education, mindfulness practice is considered the most effective, useful, free (or least expensive) method for improving students' focus skills, problem-solving, craving control, interpersonal skills, and emotional stability (Leland et al. 2015, 19–23).

Recently, mindfulness-based intervention programs in the West have been increasing dramatically and helping the 13–14 percent of the youth population who have stress and other mental health issues. For example, in 2019 the United Kingdom began providing a mindfulness program to help youth with their health problems in 370 schools through a large-scale governmental investment, the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. The program will continue through 2021. Similarly, recent research studies, reviews, and meta-analyses about mindfulness-based interventions' (MBI's) efficacy and evidence have increased from 207 published papers in 2014 to 590 papers in 2018 (Emerson et al. 2020, 62–63). Worldwide, mindfulness and meditational techniques have been increasingly utilized in education because they improve students' cognitive control and academic grades while decreasing behavioral issues, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and attention deficits (Fung 2018, 2).

Regarding the physical benefits for the students, recent evidence indicates that mindfulness-based interventions are feasible and applicable to K-12 students so they can improve their self-discipline, attention spans, and emotional control and reduce their brains' deleterious effects caused by excessive stress. Studies between 2005 and 2009 have found connections between mindfulness training and increased thickness of cortical structures (gray matter) that are related to awareness, working memory, processing sensory input, self-reflection, empathy, and affective regulation (Meiklejohn et al. 2012, 4).

Another study demonstrates that the decrease of amygdala responses to negative stimuli correlates to the neurocognitive mechanism for stress built through mindfulness training. In particular, students with mental health problems benefit from mindfulness-based training. This, in turn, helps healthy normotensive youth benefit by dealing with their high blood pressure and increased heart rate in relationship to stress, especially among children who are at an increased risk of hypertension (Bauer et al. 2019, 569).

Regarding mental benefits, school-based mindfulness research mainly follows the clinical approaches for adults, and thus these approaches are acceptable and compatible with school-age children, adolescents, and youth (Meiklejohn et al. 2012, 6). In educational settings, while obtaining new knowledge and proficiencies, students can experience stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which may inhibit their learning ability. As a counterpoint, mindfulness practices can enhance students' learning skills and academic achievements through healthier study habits, good planning, higher organizational skills, and better interpersonal aptitudes. Students who practice mindfulness can maintain their focus on their schoolwork, heighten their memories, and support skills specifically for taking the tests successfully.

A University of California at Santa Barbara study showed that mindfulness practices helped students increase their GRE scores by 16 percent (Mrazek 2013, 778). Instead of looking outwardly and competing with others to achieve high scores, mindfulness helps students recognize their own wisdom through inward reflection of views and beliefs while refining their critical thinking to become more astute.

For better behavior and self-control of mental fluctuations, implementing mindfulness practice helps students recalibrate their automatic impulses by teaching new problem-solving skills, proper behaviors, and healthy responses, as well as extending the duration between an impulse and an action. For bullying-related issues, practicing mindfulness can help students improve their behaviors and self-control; resolve classmates' conflicts; instill compassion, tolerance, empathy, and generosity; and increase their courage to speak up and report any incidents. Students with ADHD who practice mindfulness can improve their study habits; reduce impulsive, disruptive, overly physical behaviors and problematic interpersonal skills; and improve their self-control (Leland 2015, 19–23). Mindfulness also provides the skills needed to deal with emotional dysregulation, rumination, and maladaptive perfectionism (Johnson and Wade 2019, 1495). Some studies found that mindfulness-based interventions improve attention span, decision-making function, and social behaviors among children and adults (Quach et al. 2020). Furthermore, many researchers, educators, and therapists have used mindfulness-based intervention to successfully treat children and adolescents suffering from anxiety, pathological concerns, and obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms.

Psychological flexibility, defined as the ability to be "aware of thoughts and feelings without thought manipulation, changing, and persisting while pursuing an important interest and goals" was developed primarily by mindfulness-based interventions and by acceptance and commitment therapy interventions for children and adolescents (Garcia-Gomez et al. 2019, 1–2).

Research on mindfulness skills programs showed two perceived intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits: self-awareness and self-regulation of cognition, emotions, and behaviors. The development of relationships with family members, friends, and teachers, and learning to trust others are the focal premises of interpersonal benefits (Wisner and Starzee 2016, 245). Evidently, mindfulness training is an effective and cost-efficient way to optimize healthy brain development and function and to enhance stress resilience.

By practicing mindfulness, school-age children can train their minds to concentrate attentively, have internal and external experiences of the present moment objectively and responsively, and have the ability to accept any experience, be it pleasurable, neutral, stressful, or difficult, to improve their curiosity and develop a nonjudgmental mindset.

Regarding social-emotional learning, mindfulness training can help children's awareness, their expression of their emotions, and their moderation of the intensity and duration of emotion-related arousal. This training also helps children self-regulate attention through repeated and intentional focusing, sustaining, and shifting of attention (Meiklejohn et al. 2012, 6).

Regarding educational benefits, mindfulness-based training can enhance and instill the pedagogy's contemplative education (Cheek et al. 2017, 2565). Specifically, the combination of the direct and indirect school-based mindfulness training provides sustainable benefits to the school community to help students and teachers develop stress-resilient skills and emotional competence (Meiklejohn et al. 2012, 14).

Various research has also experientially supported how mindfulness practice positively impacts the levels of needs, satisfaction, and frustration of college professors, students, and school employees. For example, the need for satisfaction correlates positively with mindfulness practices, but it relates negatively with frustration (Li et al. 2019, 8). Another study demonstrates that in education mindfulness can serve as a promising gateway to the primary psychological need for satisfaction because highly mindful students experienced more satisfaction and less frustration, even when they learned in a low autonomy-supportive teaching environment (Li et al. 2019, 1).

In the past decade, mindfulness-based training in school settings such as Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART), and other training in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, and other countries have been implemented in K-12 education to benefit students' and teachers' physical, emotional, and mental well-being. These programs help students improve their attentional skills and ability to deal with psychological and academic challenges, instill pro-social behavior by strengthening self-control and impulse regulation, reduce the destructive stresses that negatively affect learning skills, develop the brain's hygiene skill set, and enhance physical and emotional well-being throughout a lifetime (Meiklejohn et al. 2012, 6).

Other research studies have demonstrated that better grades, better attendance, and higher standardized test scores in math and English language arts related to higher aptitudes for mindfulness. Even at initial stages, those who participated in mindfulness training can prolong their thoughtful and emotional attention, which, in turn, enhances their insights, studying, and self-regulations (Gutierrez et al. 2019, 7).

With sufficient evidence of mindfulness-based intervention, research has shown that by practicing relaxation and mindfulness, adolescents obtain tremendous benefits, such as having substantially enhanced school performance; increasing self-concept, self-efficacy, and social skills; improving information process skills focused more effectively on academic tasks; and decreasing anxiety. In a school context, this intervention was shown to have a significant influence on attention, self-regulation, and aggressiveness. According to teachers' reports about mindfulness interventions, attention problems were reduced sustainably over time. The biggest improvement was the deficit reduction in self-regulation, but it was less sustainable over time than that of attention. Aggressiveness was also reduced significantly (López-Gozález et al. 2016, 122-3, 131).

This study of effective mindfulness-based training in the school context was in line with previous published research. Studies showed that mindfulness-training in school settings can improve students' skills moderately and raise their cognitive performance; diminish their behavioral problems; and positively affect their stress, coping skills, and resilience. Mindfulness training has a greater effect in late adolescence than in the middle of childhood (Suárez-García et al. 2020, 10). Also, students will have significant changes if mindful teachers utilize various combinations of mindfulness techniques (Suárez-García et al. 2020, 10).

In practical terms, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy-Self Help (MBCT-SH) in a student sample shows its effectiveness as a therapeutic intervention to help students inexpensively deal with mental health difficulties. It reduces anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms while significantly improving life satisfaction, mindfulness, and self-regulation (Lever-Taylor et al. 2014, 69).

The Inner Explorer (2020) uses a series of daily five-to-ten-minute audio-guided mindfulness practices that include breathing and relaxation exercises, being aware of the five senses, utilizing thought and emotional regulation, fostering compassion and connection, and advocating social and emotional learning. The Calm Classroom focuses on mindfulness-based approaches to providing the skills needed to develop a calmer learning environment for students and teachers through self-awareness, mental focus, and emotional resilience (Calm Classroom 2020). Mindful Schools (2020)

provide educators with practical skills for self-care, facilitation, and connecting with youth through simple and effective mindfulness techniques that can be tailored into school activities and integrated into diverse environments. These meditative techniques are nonsectarian and scientifically proven. In short, teachers can implement these mindfulness-based interventions to help improve students' academic achievement and well-being.

Disregarding the meditative benefits for educators and students, some critics unfortunately allege it is unconstitutional to offer mindfulness courses in public schools. The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) recently posted some articles that challenge the public schools that offer mindfulness practices (Southerland 2019); for example, the ACLJ alleges that schools using the Inner Explorer (2020) violate the law because they used public funds to instill Buddhist principles (Southerland 2019).

Founded by minister and televangelist Pat Robertson in 1990 (along with chief counsel Jay Sekulow, who is President Trump's personal lawyer), the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) collected more than 85,000 signatures to promote "Stop Forcing Buddhist Meditation on Kids in School" in late 2018. However, legal experts and mindfulness educators felt confident that the opposition to mindfulness in schools would not reach the Supreme Court. Moreover, *Tricycle* magazine raised concerns about future challenges for these advocates (Agasar 2020). Despite no clear legal strategy for defending mindfulness-based training, it still spread across US school districts like wildfire as teachers and administrators progressively utilized it to reduce stress, improve productivity, and cultivate social and emotional skills in students, teachers, and administrators.

The US Department of Health and Human Services statistically enumerated the substantial rise in children's participation in mindfulness practices from 0.6 percent in 2012 to 5.4 percent in 2017 (NIH 2017). Legally, the First Amendment allows religious expression such as a prayer before government meetings, Bible study after school, et cetera. Since 1970, however, a three-pronged approach (the Lemon Test) has been used by the court to determine any violation in the First Amendment, any obvious evidence of religious purpose and effect, and any governmental involvement in religious affairs-related decisions.

Since yoga has been stripped of all religious references, it is now permissible to teach it in public schools, based on recent court decisions. According to Susan Kaiser Greenland, a longtime mindfulness educator and a former lawyer, due to the scale, underfunding, and lack of a legal strategy, the use of mindfulness in education community is not ready to make a coordinated response to challenges, especially those posed by well-funded individuals and organizations as in the case of Sedlock v. Baird (2013) in San Diego (Agasar 2020). In the mindfulness-in-schools community, there is no clear leader or "coordinated, big picture effort" in place to deal with court cases or future challenges. Greenland proposes to form an independent organization to develop unity between the community and skeptics and to work on coordinated legal responses. She is concerned about how to teach mindfulness with religious neutrality and in children's best interest, as well as how to manage trauma properly and provide practices that are age appropriate (Agasar 2020).

Shannon Pitcher-Boyea, a former principal and a certified yoga and mindfulness teacher, as well as a member of the International Mindfulness Teachers Association (IMTA), warns about the accidental line crossing between religious neutrality and religious implications when schools allow enthusiastic educators to teach mindfulness as an effective way to deal with societal pressures, stresses, bullying, and other school-related problems. While working with school districts, Pitcher-Boyea provides a sample letter for staff to let the parents know clearly about the mindfulness program with a chance to opt out (Agasar 2020).

In her book, *Debating Yoga and Mindfulness in Public Schools* (2019), Candy Gunther Brown, a religious studies professor who has testified several times in courts about the religious roots of yoga and mindfulness, insists that taking out religious references will not separate those practices from their religious origins. As a result, Pitcher-Boyea advocates that school staffs and teachers should be trained properly on civil liberties and in teaching mindfulness in schools (Agasar 2020).

Laura Bakosh, a longtime Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) practitioner (and cofounder of Inner Explorer [2020] which provides pre-recorded audio mindfulness programs that are used in three thousand schools), mentioned that the ACLJ has failed to stop any mindfulness program across the country. Its challenges have mainly reinforced organizations'

secular stance by using narrative flexibility in teaching mindfulness practices. Her primary concern is not how to respond the complaints or how to make a strategy for the future, but the disparities between the descriptions and understanding of mindfulness. She also mentioned that after more than four decades of scientific evidence, many health professionals and professors, even at Christian colleges across the country, are utilizing mindfulness as an effective and inexpensive tool to solve the major issues of stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The ACLJ challenges serve to bring awareness about the availability of mindfulness to enhance children's success, and that is positive (Agasar 2020).

In general, children should be educated about the various religious roles in society and the world and not be indoctrinated by certain religious traditions (Evans 2008, 449). To do this, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) affirms extensive safeguards for people of every religion. Thirty-five religious and civil liberties organizations advocated for students' religious rights in public school, including the right to pray, discuss their religious views, form religious clubs, access to school facilities under the Equal Access Act, distribute religious literature, and take religious courses ("The Bible and Public Schools").

Contrarily, for many decades, Christians have been pushing successfully for teaching Bible courses in the public schools. For instance, the president of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools proudly boasts that 93 percent of school boards in forty-one states with 3,274 high schools are offering Bible courses in various ways to more than 650,000 students (NCBCPS 2019). To date, press releases mention only six states passing laws to teach the Bible in public schools. For example, Kentucky House Bill 128 makes teaching Bible courses in Kentucky's public schools legal (KY HB128/2017/ Regular Session).

Greg Abbott, then the Attorney General of Texas, gave school districts there the option to teach Bible courses (Abbott 2008). In Texas during the school year of 2011–12, fifty-seven school districts and three charter schools offered Bible courses or incorporated them into other subjects such as English, social studies, and general electives, and student enrollment ranged from one to fifty (Chancey 2013, 14, 17).

Chancey pointed out that several Texas Bible courses used prevalent public sources and non-academic Bible supplemental sources that target churchgoers' children and strengthen their faith (2013, 13). For instance, Dalhart ISD used a book produced by a biblical apologetic organization to promote that God is perfect, infallible, holy, pure, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent (Chancey 2013, 28). Four school districts used fictional movies to strengthen Christian faith and evangelize non-Christians (Chancey 2013, 19).

Chancey also reported that Dayton ISD used Gene Taylor's *The Gospel of John: Evidences for Belief* (2005). The Preface defines the author's goals clearly: "May this study be of value to you. May you fully come to believe that 'Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.' And may you have 'life in His name'" (Chancey 2013, 18).

The ACLU of Kentucky recently sent a complaint regarding the "Bible Literacy" courses offered in some of Kentucky's public schools, which adapted lessons and exercises explicitly and directly from online courses used in Sunday schools, as well as required students to memorize passages directly from the Bible (ACLU 2018). Teaching Bible courses in public schools can strengthen the Christian faith, promote a perfect good, and encourage a belief in Jesus. However, it is rare to find research studies showing that Bible study improves students' learning skills, achievement, classroom behavior, and so forth, except some studies which confirm that spirituality, regardless of the religion, may generally improve the adherents' mental well-being (Wall 2012). On the other hand, almost one million children used meditation every day in 2017 because of its tremendous benefits (Black et al. 2015, 9).

As stated previously, the Inner Explorer (2020), Calm Classroom (2020), and Mindful Schools (2020) promote self-help, self-awareness, and self-regulation to enhance students' well-being and development. Yet, the ACLJ led by Jay Sekulow opposed the use of mindfulness in schools on his radio program and collected more than 80,000 signatures on an evangelical website in December 2018 (Hignett 2018). Paradoxically, in August of 2019, the ACLJ celebrated Supreme Court's decision to reject a lawsuit to have 'In God We Trust' removed from our national currency while fighting to preserve the secularity of public spaces from mindfulness and yoga practices to preserve Christian influence over American culture (Helderman 2019).

An unfair discrepancy exists between how nonsectarian mindfulness practices with their rarely mentioned Buddhist expressions as promoted by the Inner Explorer and other mindfulness-based enterprises are branded and condemned as "Buddhist indoctrination," whereas Judeo-Christian teachings of Bible courses easily and explicitly slip into US public education as stated above.

In conclusion, since almost one million children used meditation in 2017 due to its effectiveness and improvement of achievement, study skills, behaviors, self-regulations, and so forth, public school students should have the legitimate right to learn and practice meditation in a nonsectarian way and in accordance with academic standards. Also, by comparing how the school districts in six states preferentially teach Bible courses directly and explicitly to their respective students while those offering mindfulness courses (like Mind Up [2020], Inner Explorer [2020], Calm Classroom [2020], and Mindful Schools [2020]) without claiming any Buddhist connection are protested, there are some degrees of unfairness and discrepancy religiously and constitutionally.

As a result, since several states have allowed teaching Bible courses as part of religious education, per religious rights and liberties, any public school that allows the teaching of Bible courses should offer other religious studies as well, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, because parents of all religions pay taxes for funding public schools. Furthermore, by studying Eastern traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, students will broaden their knowledge and be better prepared global citizens.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trung Huynh (Thich Hang Dat) is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Houston, Indiana University Southeast, Indiana University South Bend, and Indiana University Kokomo. He specializes in Buddhist Education with research focus on religious equality, Zen Buddhism, and early Vietnamese Buddhism.

BUDDHIST PEDAGOGY

'Teaching of' and 'Teaching about' Meditation: The Legal Limits and Educational Prospects of a Contemplative Pedagogy

Peter Romaskiewicz
University of California, Santa Barbara

ABSTRACT

The growing interest in meditation and meditation-inspired classroom practices has garnered its share of advocates and detractors. The recent critiques in Candy Gunther Brown's *Debating Yoga and Mindfulness in Public Schools* (2019) offer the most trenchant legal and ethical obstacles to implementing a contemplative education in American public schools. I trace the contours of Brown's legal claims relevant to higher education and propose a pathway forward by arguing for the importance of underpinning contemplative practices with sound pedagogical theory. I offer one example of contemplative pedagogy based on metacognition as implemented in my Zen Buddhism course.

KEYWORDS

contemplative pedagogy, meditation, First Amendment Establishment Clause, teaching of religion—teaching about religion, metacognition

Framing the Issues

There has been an increasing focus on meditation and meditation-inspired classroom practices over the past decade due in part to the emerging field of contemplative pedagogy.[1] In the words of Louis Komjathy, contemplative pedagogy is an "emerging experiential and experimental educational methodology that explores contemplative practice and contemplative experience" (2018, 159). Because meditation or contemplation is not only an object of inquiry (what we study), but also a method of inquiry (how we study), contemplative practices have been embraced by educators outside of the theological and religious studies classrooms. In a seminal volume on this topic, Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace further note that "there is no single contemplative pedagogy and no single prototype of the contemplative professor" (2011, xii). Because of its diversity of interests and advocates, contemplative

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pedagogy functions as a malleable umbrella for practices as wide-ranging as reflective journaling, community activism, and formal meditation or mindfulness activities. Moreover, proponents claim these classroom practices lead to a more wholistic education, where enhanced learning, deeper inquiry, and increased attentiveness, among other benefits, can be cultivated.[2]

These approaches are not without opponents, however, especially those raising concerns over covert religious indoctrination. Since many contemplative practices are openly recognized, and oftentimes promoted, as having origins in Asian religious traditions (especially Buddhism), these concerns may appear substantiated. When seemingly endorsed by institutional bodies, the worry is that religious practices would be unjustly thrust upon students within secular educational environments.

The responses to these attacks of covert proselytization are varied, but I want to focus on one particular cluster of apologia offered by prominent educators who use a "contextualized approach" to meditation in their courses (I discuss this approach and others below). Grace, for example, notes that "contemplative methods do not teach, encourage, or require students to become religious or to adopt a particular worldview or faith commitment" (Coburn et al. 2011, 169). Additionally, Harold Roth notes, "there is nothing students have to 'believe'; they experiment with contemplative techniques without prior commitment to their efficacy" (Coburn et al. 2011, 170). Lastly, Simmer-Brown notes, "We are not creating little Buddhists, Hassids, Sufis, Daoists, or Trappists. . . contemplative practice is about cultivating less belief, and more direct experience" (Coburn et al. 2011, 169). I do not highlight these responses because they are problematic; they express real ethical concerns and exhibit rationalized "conversion protections" for students. At the same time, responses like these conform to a particular model of religious studies education that divides the faith-based seminary from the secular university. This division is often casually expressed as the difference between "teaching of" and "teaching about" religion. As long as these two domains remain disentangled, so it is presumed, student engagement with contemplative practices should remain ethically unproblematic. Furthermore, such carefully enacted distinctions in the classroom would, again presumably, not run afoul of the First Amendment Establishment Clause barring the endorsement of religion by a state-sponsored entity, like a public school or university.

These presumptions have recently been challenged in the provocative study by Candy Gunther Brown, *Debating Yoga and Mindfulness in Public Schools*. It is impossible to rehearse Brown's lengthy and nuanced legal argument here, but the implicit tone and explicit conclusion of her work provides a strong warning against the unrecognized "reestablishment of religion" in American classrooms. Based on her considered opinion, Brown ultimately finds it unlikely for meditation to be taught in a fully secular manner in primary and secondary schools (Brown 2019a, 297).[3] Elsewhere, citing both ethical and legal reasons, Brown notes that she abstains from meditation-inspired "critical first-person" or "introspective" exercises when teaching at the university level, even if she were to attempt to reframe the exercises as secular ([Brown 2019b](#)). It is hard to imagine how Brown's trenchant criticisms would not have a chilling effect on those in higher education who have found these practices to have a positive educational impact or those curious to implement them.

Due to these concerns I would like to outline the contours of the Establishment Clause, based on the legal analysis of Brown and others, as it pertains to teaching meditation and other contemplative practices in public university and college settings and suggest some points of consideration. Specifically, I hope to distill a few of the core legal concerns and point to some possible misconceptions, especially regarding the "of-about distinction" for teaching religion. In brief, contrary to Brown's abstentions, students in higher education have been considered less vulnerable to indoctrination than students in high school or of a younger age. Yet, I would suggest that Establishment Clause jurisprudence dictates that an educator's claims of protection against student conversion are possibly not enough in isolation. Thus, I contend, clearly articulating sound pedagogical theory that motivates classroom instruction in contemplative practices may not only be a professional courtesy, but, minimally, an ethical responsibility and, maximally, a legal necessity. I end with a

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2 For recent surveys examining different types of contemplative classroom practices, see Komjathy (2018, 159–199) and Owen-Smith (2018, 24–57). An interdisciplinary bibliography for contemplative education is maintained by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society ([2015](#)).

3 I am reading Brown's assessment as based in her views of how courts might rule should a practice like school meditation be legally challenged. I am only interested in drawing out Brown's legal reasoning and analyzing how it impacts higher education.

discussion on how contemplative pedagogy, a field that is currently too insular, can begin to have deeper interactions with scholarship on teaching and learning to create a firmer basis in well-established educational theory. I illustrate this last discussion with use of Mind Labs in my course on Zen Buddhism.

Legal Limits: The *Lemon* Test and the Reasonable Observer

As of yet, no federal or state court has examined the Establishment Clause in conjunction with meditation in public schools, whether in primary, secondary, or higher education.[4] Looking for an analogous court decision to provide guidance, Bradford Masters directs attention to *Sedlock v. Baird*, a 2013 San Diego County Superior Court case which decided to allow the teaching of yoga in public schools. As Masters notes, this case was selected, "not for precedential value, but as an example of how a modern court might deal with a similar question about meditation" (2014, 261). Critically, the *Sedlock* court determined that yoga, broadly considered, was religious, but that yoga as it was taught did not violate the Establishment Clause. Consequently, following Masters, this ruling opens the possibility for teaching contemplative practices as long as they are taught with a valid secular purpose.[5] Brown, who testified as an expert witness in the Sedlock case, claims in her study that the court failed to correctly apply previous case law and subsequently "turned legal precedent on its head," a point we will return to below (2019a, 113). Brown's critiques of the *Sedlock* decision notwithstanding, a 2015 state appellate court affirmed the lower court's decision (2019a, 134–137).

This decision might resonate with scholars of religion who also aver a crucial distinction between the teaching of religion and the teaching about religion. This language was used in the landmark 1963 *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* Supreme Court decision where the court prohibited devotional Bible reading in public schools but allowed the Bible to be taught as a cultural, historical, and literary artifact. Importantly, as Sarah Imhoff (2016) has shown, the critical "of-about distinction" was already circulating among scholars of religion; it did not originate with the *Schempp* court. Moreover, incorporated as part of the concurrence penned by Justice Arthur Goldberg, the of-about distinction was not established as a test of constitutionality to which future cases could be measured, nor as Imhoff iterates, was the court necessarily concerned with applying its decision to higher education (2016, 3). The language of the court reflected common usage, albeit now afforded the air of authority because it was used by the highest court in the land and later cited by religious studies scholars and legal theorists to talk about college and university programs.

It should be noted that Brown uses the of-about distinction in slightly different manner than is customary, and this points to an important ambiguity. The ambiguity specifically appears in the meaning behind the teaching of religion. On one hand, in what could be called a normative interpretation, many scholars read teaching of religion to refer to the explicit or tacit agreement by students to understand the course's claims normatively (as one might find in theological settings). In the sources analyzed by Imhoff, this appears to have been the typical interpretation of the phrase at the time of the *Schempp* decision (2016, 6–9). As I have noted, this general framework is also assumed by many advocates of contemplative pedagogy who protect students from assenting to commitments of faith. Ultimately, this reading reflects a relatively high threshold of permitted instruction since a student's personal religious convictions would have to be transformed or otherwise coercively threatened. This allows for a critical reframing and specialized instruction in practices that *might* be deemed religious by some outside observers, but nevertheless do not require religious conviction of the student participants.

On the other hand, there is also a performative interpretation for "teaching of religion" that matter-of-factly points to students performing religious activities, regardless of their personal convictions. This is the interpretive stance taken by Brown who reads *Schempp* as a general proscription against the performance of religious practices by students. In its simplest terms, Brown understands the "teaching of" religion to indicate the "performance of" religion. To emphasize her point, Brown sometimes substitutes the language of "performing religious practices" for the more commonplace

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4 While *Malnak v. Yogi* (1979) is the most comparable case, the court only addressed the constitutionality of teaching Transcendental Meditation (TM) in combination with the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI) curriculum, not the meditative techniques alone (Masters 2014, 260). A concurrence by Third Circuit Justice Arlin Adams left open the possibility that TM could constitutionally be taught as an isolated technique (Brown 2019a, 41–2), but this dictum has a limited precedential value. Brown cites *Malnak v. Yogi* to support her abstention from teaching contemplation techniques in her university courses but fails to note the crucial role of SCI in the *Malnak* court's decision (cf. Brown 2019b).

5 Taking the contemporary curriculum of TM as a case study, Masters ultimately argues that it "probably does not violate the Establishment Clause," in contrast to the *Malnak*-era SCI/TM curriculum (Masters 2014, 294–5).

"teaching of religion" (Brown 2019a, 24; Brown 2019b). This then becomes the basis for Brown's contention that the *Sedlock* court overturned *Schempp* precedent by allowing the mere practice of yoga (2019a, 137).[6] This reading reflects a much lower threshold for permitted instruction since the simple performance of an apparent religious activity would be prohibited, regardless of religious conviction.

I will save the assessment of Brown's assertions regarding court precedent to others, but it is important to emphasize that the of-about distinction is not typically determinative as part of modern Establishment Clause jurisprudence as Brown seems to hint.[7] When adjudicating cases, courts have developed doctrinal tests based on constitutional foundations to determine a finding (Bell 2001). Per Masters, if meditation in public schools was challenged, the courts would most likely apply the *Lemon* test as first devised for the 1971 Supreme Court case *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (2014, 268). This was the test applied in the *Sedlock* decision, in which case the San Diego school district's instruction in yoga passed. To pass, the challenged activity (yoga, meditation, etc.) must meet three criteria, called "prongs." Namely, (1) it must have a valid secular purpose, (2) it must have a principal or primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion, and (3) it must not foster excessive entanglement with the government (Masters 2014, 268; Brown 2019a, 24–5).

Both Brown and Masters consider the second prong the crux of the *Lemon* test, so I will focus my discussion there.[8] A discussion in this area also sheds the best light on advisable pedagogical practices. The "effect" prong does not consider the intent of the actors promoting the challenged activity (in our case, the educators), but its immediate and direct effect on the receiving audience. Clarified by later Supreme Court decisions, courts may consider specifically whether the challenged activity "conveys a message of endorsement or disapproval," to cite the language of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (Brown 2019a, 28). Endorsement, if it is considered, does not address proselytization, although it may be considered a component, but whether the state is seen as promoting or being favorable towards a religion (Brady 2015, 33–34). Thus, when considering an endorsement effect, courts posit a hypothetical informed and reasonable observer and determine if that person would perceive a message of government endorsement of religion. The hypothetical observer would be in the position of a student in the classroom, not a parent or guardian, nor community member or school administrator, nor an expert on religious history. Moreover, by postulating a reasonable observer, the court also rejects what is known as the "heckler's veto," where every subjective perspective would need to be considered with equal weight (Brown 2019a, 29).

Let's reflect to see how these considerations might guide classroom instruction. One apparent concern is making sure students hold a clear understanding of why they are engaging in an activity such as contemplation, meditation, or mindfulness. Stating a clear (secular) pedagogical purpose of the activity may be legally desirable so as not to have students believe that the state, operating through the publicly funded educator or institution, is somehow endorsing a religion or religious practice. Simply asserting that there is no covert attempt at proselytization may not, on its own, adequately frame the activity or communicate its educational purpose to the student. Ultimately, I consider an educator's clarity of purpose for contemplative exercises not distinct from articulating an activity's learning outcome, a fairly standard pedagogical practice. A call for this clarity also assists instructors with our own critical reflection so as to avoid promoting "playing Buddhist" or offering a "buffet-style" course comprised of superficial contemplative activities. As other have noted, such practices run the risk of cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism (Brown 2019a, 287–291; Simmer-Brown 2011; Purser 2019).

There is a further final point that merits strong consideration here. Courts have consistently noted that students' age, generally seen as an index for having more life-experience and abstract cognitive ability, is relevant when applying doctrinal tests. Coincidentally, on the same day the Supreme Court decided *Lemon*, it also gave its decision on *Tilton v. Richardson*, another Establishment Clause case that applied the *Lemon* test. The *Tilton* decision states that "there is substance to the contention that college students are less impressionable and less susceptible to religious indoctrination," and as a

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6 Brown's interpretation makes sense in the context of the challenged, and ultimately barred, activity by the Schempp court: the uncontextualized reading of Bible verses in public schools. As we will see, the *Sedlock* court did not apply a straightforward reading of *Schempp*, but used a test developed in more recent cases to determine its findings.

7 For example, Brown cites the *Schempp* decision to illustrate the impermissibility of having college students perform contemplative practices (Brown 2019b). While one can make this argument, it also obscures the development of Establishment Clause jurisprudence since the *Schempp* decision.

8 The first prong is typically easy to pass as long as the proposed secular purpose of the challenged activity is not a fabrication. The third prong is typically only problematic if a religious organization has control over the content of instruction. Of course, there can be much variation in the fact patterns between individual cases thus attracting the court's attention unevenly to different prongs. A more thorough reading of the *Lemon* test can be found in Brown (2019a, 24–29) and especially McConnell (2002, 372–398).

result colleges and universities "are characterized by a high degree of academic freedom" (Alexander and Alexander 2017, 69). Moreover, *Tilton* finds that in college "there is less likelihood than in primary and secondary schools that religion will permeate the area of secular education" (2017, 69). In sum, this points to a growing belief in the Supreme Court that students in higher education can adequately bracket classroom activities from attempts at religious endorsement (or proselytization), even if these activities might otherwise be barred for younger age groups. Legal scholars have noted the sometimes inconsistent manner in which the Supreme Court has adjudicated Establishment Clause cases (Bell 2001), but based on the trends of previous rulings, there appears to be sufficient room for contemplative practices in college and university classrooms to be offered within the bounds of constitutional law.

Of course, the implementation of such practices within a classroom extends well beyond legal considerations. Decisions are also made according to one's interests, educational goals, familiarity with contemplative techniques, or personal ethical concerns. Additionally, the consideration of a school's student population and institutional profile may present different barriers or pathways to contemplative instruction.[9] Brown personally employs an opt-in model of informed consent that meets her personal standards (Brown 2019a, 297–305).[10] Other educators employ a voluntary (opt-out) approach, with alternative work of equal value being offered for students who abstain (e.g. Roth 2019). When contemplative practices form the core of the course and are thus required, careful attention can be given to class advertising and the first class meeting should carefully outline the objectives of the course, giving students the option to drop (e.g. Komjathy 2018, 177–184). Optional grading, student self-grading, or emphasis on reflective writing or communication (not necessarily "seated" practice), can all be implemented as "release values" to meet the educational and ethical preferences of the instructor.

Educational Prospects: Approaches to Contemplative Practice in Higher Education

While scholarship on contemplative pedagogy is less than two decades old, there is already a proliferation of contemplative techniques that can be culled from the literature. Traditional Buddhist meditation comprises only a portion of those techniques, yet it is easy to get confused by the relationship between some of the commonly recommended practices. To help clarify these matters, I list three broad categories of contemplative practice. Each set of techniques, generally considered, has its own educational goals; thus contemplative educators may draw upon one or all of them depending on their specific needs.

One group of practices has been termed "hygienic" or "Jamesian," from psychologist William James (Smith n.d.; Houck 2019).[11] These practices largely concern calming the mind, creating inner stillness, and increasing focused attention, and as such overlap considerably with modern mindfulness techniques that aim to cultivate concentration and alleviate anxiety. Undoubtedly, this set of practices finds support in educational circles across disciplines due to the popularity of modern mindfulness which is portrayed as an evidenced-based set of techniques backed by contemporary neuroscience. Consequently, ties to institutionalized religious practices are often downplayed or effaced.

Another group of practices involves what Anita Houck has called the "contextualized" approach, which amounts to immersing students within the textual or lived tradition of a contemplative practice and having students practice it. This more typically falls within the disciplinary purview of religious studies or theology. For Komjathy, this approach reflects the cultivation of a disciplined "critical subjectivity" in which students are required to reflect on "unquestioned assumptions, ingrained opinions, and unrecognized biases" as part of the overall contemplative experience (2018, 169). Importantly, the primary texts and related religious communities remain the interpretive authorities as students attempt to form a sympathetic understanding of the material, as well as develop an intellectual generosity. A distinctive feature is that students are committed to a single contemplative practice for the duration of the term (2018, 169–170). A slightly different

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9   For comparison, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand and Rebekka King offer an insightful discussion and practical insight into the alignment of the newly created religious studies degree program at Middle Tennessee State University with the student body and the institution's mission and diversity statement (2019).

10   Brown's urging that public university educators only teach contemplative practices during "noninstructional hours" overlooks the *Tilton* and *Roemer* decisions which grant more leniency to teachers in higher education (cf. Brown 2019b).

11   The link to James is based on his noted preference for education that trains wandering attention (Houck 2019, 118), a hallmark of modern mindfulness practices which lie at the heart of this category.

approach is used by Roth (2006). He employs "critical first-person learning," where students' contemplative experiences are combined with traditional academic "third-person" approaches, namely, the critical reading of contemplative texts which, in turn, generate insightful discussion among students for the variety of different techniques they each engage. Roth also envisions a greater purpose in having students "discover fundamental dimensions of their nature as humans" (2006, 1789). For Christopher Key Chapple, this approach embodies the learning by doing principle where student can explore their "hitherto largely unknown intellectual and psychic processes" (Brucker and Chapple 2017). This is accomplished by having students form small "learning communities" and engage in meditation practice with local teachers, participate in local temple activities, and keep journals about their experience. Thus, even within the contextualized approach, individual educators will shape the curriculum in distinctive ways that match their interests and resources.

Between these two categories range individual practices that do not fall neatly into either one. Victoria Smith has suggested the name "modes of inquiry" for exercises that combine a hygienic practice with some other activity such as writing or drawing (n.d.). Since many other contemplative practices, such as reflective journaling, free writing, deep listening, deep reading (sometimes called *lectio devina*), and so forth, typically share a foundation in focused attention or inward reflection, a catchall category of modes of inquiry will work for the purposes of our discussion.

I would argue the reason many of the practices above, especially in the second and third categories, are envisioned to fall within a contemplative framework is they involve at some level thinking about thinking, or metacognition. Yet, direct reference to metacognition is rare in literature on contemplative pedagogy. Given the emphasis often placed on reflection, this is odd. Even more rare is reference to the growing field of metacognitive studies in education, which has even spawned its own dedicated journal, *Metacognition and Learning*. Some of the thrust behind the contemplative pedagogy movement comes from its presumed ability to fill in the gaps of so-called traditional education. This, unfortunately, also engenders a parochialism where reference to "non-contemplative" pedagogical theory is too uncommon. As noted by Patricia Owen-Smith, the expertise found in the Scholarship on Teaching and Learning could "potentially yield an expanded consciousness about the significance of introspective methods to deep learning" (2018, 21).[12] While metacognition can be defined simply as thinking about thinking, an expanded understanding would include the planning, monitoring, evaluation, and regulation processes that, when explicitly taught, can be highly effective for learning. This effectiveness is often testified to in research studies, including a recent meta-analysis that found metacognition predicted academic performance even when controlling for intelligence (Ohtani and Hisasaka 2018). I do not mean to presume that contemplative practice and metacognitive practice map perfectly onto one another, but there seems to be enough overlap that a bridging of ideas could bear fruit. I would also suggest metacognition is a good avenue of inquiry for educators looking to develop contemplative practices that are based in sound, secular pedagogical theory.

I will use this point to pivot to how I utilize aspects of contemplation and metacognition in a course on Zen Buddhism. Reflective components are built into several layers of the class. For example, on a more mundane level, I have drawn regularly from the catalogue of classroom assessment techniques (CATs) first gathered by Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (1993). While many of these are now considered long-standing active learning strategies, several are especially helpful in promoting student metacognition and, I would argue, find a natural home in the "modes of inquiry" approach to contemplative pedagogy. Minute Papers, where at the end of class students reflect and write briefly what they thought was the most important topic of the day, and Muddiest Point Papers, where students reflect on a confusing issue, set an important tone about how the course will be conducted and the reflective habits of mind I wish students to cultivate. Importantly, regularly identifying points of confusion and explicitly asking students to acknowledge and embrace their confusion can lead to a learning environment where not-knowing is seen as a valuable part of the learning process (Tanner 2012, 116). In addition, reading assignments employ a modified Double-Entry Journal technique, where students cite passages from the text that are meaningful or controversial and explain their personal significance. This helps students assess their own patterns of reading, noticing both what and why certain themes and ideas are personally salient (Angelo and Cross 1993, 263).

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12 I disagree with Owen-Smith's contention, however, that there are few studies on student reflection and ways to implement reflective exercises in the classroom (2018, 40).

Pertaining more to the content of the course, I devised formative assessment exercises called "Mind Labs." Using both thought experimentation and small group discussion, my goal is to have students more deeply probe the meditative practices we are engaging largely through historical documents. The primary directive, which is explained in class, is to have students reflect upon their own assumptions about the human mind and to articulate, even nascently, a position about the nature of mind or how it functions. These ideas are challenged or refined through discussion and then used as analytical leverage to understand a textual description of a meditative practice, a component of practice, or a cognitive state. Thus, Mind Labs are meant to assist in understanding and developing skillful critical reading of historical sources.

The Mind Lab activities, which are held at the outset of class, run as follows. After posing a question or a set of questions I have students reflect quietly on their response for a few minutes. After the determined time, students initially respond through "polling apps" they access on their cellular phones or computers (or on slips of paper, if necessary). When using a polling app such as Mentimeter, responses can be tallied automatically and conveyed as illustrative charts to show the range of class opinions. (These charts also function as a record I keep for my own assessment of the activity.) Students then break into small groups to clarify individual responses and make observations about larger trends visible in the charts. I then engage in a class discussion where I ask further "checking" questions and invite students to comment on their peers' responses. I consider this last collaborative aspect crucial to the development and articulation of ideas that many students did not consciously hold when the class first started. These understandings are finally "measured" against passages drawn from primary sources so comparisons can be made and a deeper discussion about the text can be held.

A few examples are in order. One of the first exercises I do involves students tallying how many times they are distracted within a set period of time, usually only two or three minutes. I tell them to place the tip of a pen or pencil on a sheet of paper and to focus their attention on that point of contact. Every time they lose focus, they are to mark a tally line, reposition the pen, and start again. At the end they total their tallies. During discussion, in addition to sharing results and talking about the biggest distractors (I tell them they can be as specific or generic they like), I have students assess how they decided what counted as a distraction and what they considered continuous attention. Did they consider the ticking of the clock a distraction or could they simultaneously concentrate on the pen nib *and* the clock? Did they consider several seconds of distraction to be worth one or more tally marks? Was applying continuous attention or refocusing attention after distraction more difficult? The subsequent class discussions form a foundation for the day's lesson on the Buddhist conception of mind which was formulated through debates on similar questions.[13] During class conversation I do not steer students to the "correct" answer given by Buddhist thinkers, but have the students utilize their reasoned opinion to better conceptualize the depth and scope of historical debates on such issues.

A second exercise plays on misconceptions students often have when first encountering meditation—I ask them to try and think of nothing. For those who were successful, I ask them to describe the technique they used, and for those who were unsuccessful, I ask them to state whether they believe "thinking of nothing" is fully possible. Through discussion students refine their understanding of "nothingness" and debate the possibility of such a mental experience.[14] Other Mind Lab exercises include questions regarding spontaneity, the nature of non-duality, sitting posture, and the existence of pure (or impure) human nature. Typically, these exercises are done every other or every third class, and last about twenty minutes in total.

Overall, students have responded favorably to these exercises, often noting they were effective in helping them learn the relevant material. They are commonly mentioned among the more memorable aspects of the course. As formative assessments, the exercises are not graded, but I cycle through the roster to ensure every student has the opportunity to lead and report on the discussions that occur during the small group activities. Ultimately, I understand my contemplative classroom activities to be a form of apprenticeship into thinking deeply, where students can develop into better analytical thinkers, thoughtful communicators, and critical readers.

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13 Specifically, I use this exercise to introduce the theory of momentariness, and the mental functions of application and examination.
14 This exercise is used to introduce Buddhist ideas of non-conceptual thought, including the Zen claims about no-mind and no-thought.

Conclusion

Contemplative practices employed in educational settings can range from formal meditation practices, to modern mindfulness techniques, to more commonplace classroom activities that place emphasis on focused concentration and self-reflection. While Candy Gunther Brown has recently called into question the legal viability of using meditation or mindfulness in public colleges and universities, I contend that US courts have historically given a greater latitude of academic freedom to instructors in higher education. Nevertheless, as a best practice, educators should root their contemplative activities in sound pedagogical theory and clearly explain their reasoning to students. One of the more neglected avenues that bridge modern pedagogical theory with contemplative practice is metacognition, or simply thinking about thinking.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Romaskiewicz is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He specializes in medieval Chinese religions and the spread of Buddhism into East Asian.

ASIAN AMERICAN SCHOLARS IN MID-CAREER

The Challenges Facing Asian and Asian American Mid-Career Faculty

In the summers of 2016 and 2017, the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion sponsored a two-year colloquy for mid-career Asian and Asian American scholars of religion and theology at the Claremont School of Theology in California. The five facilitators and thirteen participants were administrators and faculties at divinity schools, liberal arts colleges, and universities. They discussed mid-career challenges and issues, including teaching, research, career development, mentoring, and the balance of life and work. The colloquy helped participants to reflect on their roles as mid-career faculty, articulate their visions and vocations as teachers and scholars, develop long-term career plans, identify issues in their institutional contexts, and recognize new strategies and resources in their work. It provided a supportive environment for participants to share their vulnerabilities and discuss intricate racial politics in departments of religious studies and seminaries. They also took field trips to Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple and the Jain Center of Southern California. These field visits helped them understand the contributions of Asian religious communities to society and provided the contexts for discussing the relationship between their teaching and research and Asian religious communities. In this forum, we invited five participants to share their reflections on issues facing mid-career faculty.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kwok Pui Lan is Dean's Professor of Systematic Theology at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a past president of the American Academy of Religion.

ASIAN AMERICAN SCHOLARS IN MID-CAREER

Can You Picture It? Curricular Imagination for the Transformative Art of Theological Education

Mai-Anh Le Tran
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT

This forum presents the written text (with added introduction) of remarks given at the installation of Mai-Anh Le Tran as academic dean at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Naming the "colonial design" (Jennings) buttressing contemporary theological education, Tran wonders how the cultivation of educational imagination might invigorate a vibrant and vital place-based curriculum for theological discovery and formation that does not anesthetize, but rather awakens our full, unfinished selves for sense-filled meaning-making and "utopian social dreaming" for the transformative art of religious leadership in changing and challenging times.

KEYWORDS

theological education, colonial design, symbolic pedagogy, educational imagination, Garrett-Evangelical, place-based curriculum, Isaiah 43, Psalm 23

Concepts for A New Endeavor: A Framing Introduction (Or Afterword)

"Modern theological education has always been inside the energy of colonial design. Colonial design is not one thing but many things organized around attention, affection, and resistance, each aiming, each navigating—each a design that designs" (Jennings 2020, 49). Synergized with the "aesthetic regime" (63) of white, Eurocentric, Christian vision, contemporary theological education as colonial design (and colonially designed) persists as an oft-concealed yet enduring inheritance that regulates *who matters* and *what matters* in the purposes of theological and religious teaching and learning. Whether on overt display or hidden in plain sight, this "bloody heirloom" (Coates 2017) claims transfixing monumental power within the theological habitation, "conjur[ing] a tailwind" for some beneficiaries, while communicating to others that they either do not really belong, or must prove their worth and legitimacy to remain (Anderson 2015).

The monumentality of colonial design, as piercingly depicted in Jennings's latest work, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, is not simply the implicit curriculum of theological education (when it is not the explicit curriculum, that is). It is a symbolic pedagogy, the undergirding principles, theories, and logics that organize

valuations, decisions, and habits—a "paradigm" in the sense proposed by Thomas Kuhn: that "constitutive pattern according to which something is organized as a whole-in-parts"; "a normative model for a human endeavor or object of knowledge, the exemplar or privileged analogy that shows us what the object is *like*" (Green 1989, 52, 54). The ways in which this symbolic pedagogy designs within theological academic space are myriad: it frames assumptions about what is critical thinking, what is valued knowledge, what is "hard" versus "soft" disciplines and methodologies, what is rigorous scholarship; it choreographs the evaluation and assessment of competence, mastery, and success; it is the impulse compelling the selection of texts, materials, and experiences, and the selection of students, professors, administrators, and staff; it regulates modalities of and mechanisms for knowledge production, and dictates how learners are to be (re) positioned within milieus for learning, sometimes (en)forcing an estrangement from that which is familiar (and familial) to those who are "otherwise." Most painful of all, it authorizes levels of reward and impunity to those who make explicit display of their entitlement to this "bloody heirloom" (Coates 2017).

I have spent the last seventeen years as an academic striving in earnestness to learn about and to care for pedagogies, curricula, texts, evaluation and assessment, faculty development, educational innovation, and international partnerships for contemporizing and transnationalizing theological education. By habituation, I was transfixed by the monumental power that designed (and still designs) much of what I loved, for which I cared, and to which I devoted my life and career. While I might like to think that there has always been a streak of resistance in my formation and training and a defiant impulse in my own scholarly trajectory, as a "resident alien" who often feels "otherwise" in academic space, I find myself continuously overcome by the malignancy of this awful heirloom.

It was with such angst that I wrestled with the decision to accept the invitation to serve as vice president for academic affairs and academic dean of the seminary whose people I love and whose mission I believe in. What follows is a lightly "touched up" text of a frazzled dean's remarks at her installation service in February of 2020, an event that ended up occurring, after multiple rescheduling, at the most inopportune time for an over-extended small shop that had no clue that it would sit right at the center of the vortexes of global pandemic, social pain, climate crises, economic shortfalls, and internal implosions from frustrated hope. The texts for the service were Isaiah 43 and Psalm 23.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Can You Picture It?

Referring to the spiritual fervor of Eliza Garrett, founder of Garrett Biblical Institute (the first Methodist seminary established in the Midwest in 1853), professor of Early Christian Literature Charles Cosgrove wrote:

> Eliza, like many earnest nineteenth-century women raised in Calvinist churches, was on a spiritual quest for signs that she was one of the elect. Presbyterians of her era required that those seeking church membership appear before the minister and church session and share personal experiences that testified to a true conversion. Eliza never felt confident that she had such proofs to share, and so, while she remained a faithful and active churchgoer, she did not become a member of any church until she attended a Methodist revival in Chicago, had an "experience," and was admitted to membership in First Methodist Episcopal Church. . . . Serious Methodists in her day prayed for "entire sanctification," and Eliza attended revivals in the hope of a "palpable" experience of this gift. It did not come. (2020)

It is not a stretch to say that every one of us spiritual types—and even those of us who don't identify as such—covets some palpable, emotional, even physical sign that, by God, we are the elect. Unfortunately for me, like Eliza, my sign has not come since I said "Okay, let's do it!" to President Lallene Rector in the spring of 2019. Oh, there have been many emotional states, all right. Surprise, bewilderment, befuddlement, apoplexy, fatigue, and, of course, due measures of joy and exhilaration, but not yet a "palpable" moment in which I experience "blessed assurance" that I am "entirely sanctified" to step into the role and take on the work with which I have been entrusted.

Perhaps part of it is the recognition of what historian George Mooar wrote back in the 1860s: that "[i]t required a courage bordering on rashness to venture on a Theological Seminary" (1894, 6). It takes a courage bordering on rashness to invest

oneself in the enterprise of preparing religious leaders—"religious professionals," some call them now—whose primary function within wider society, whose expected contribution to the national culture and global conversation, is that of "interpreting God."

By this, theologians and researchers of seminary education mean that the religious professional as *leader* apprentices themselves into a "transformative art"—an art that excavates inherited and unknown archives and repertoires of faith knowledge and faith traditions, and transforms them into not just tools and tricks, but rather "'strategies' of 'new engagement'" in the face of new situations, new challenges, new circumstances (Foster 2006, 23). This type of "engaging, integrating, and adapting learning" is not "skill training." Rather, it is an acute honing of our "way of seeing into and interpreting the world" (22)—a way of knowing, of being, and of making faith knowledge and faith experience palpable in our everyday sense-filled meaning-making.

In other words, one could say that we are in the business of cultivating *imagination*—religious, theological, ministerial, ecclesiastical, social-cultural imagination.

Now, when I am coloring with my seven-year-old niece, Amanda, imagination oozes out of her fingertips as she reaches for her acrylic paint and canvases, and pictures worlds in which unicorns, Squishies, Shopkins, and humans blissfully coexist!

But let us not be mistaken: imagination is not pie-in-the-sky make-believe or fantasy-filled voyeurism. (In fact, Amanda could tell you what's make-believe and what's not.) Rather, imagination is the capacity to picture—to *image*—the world beyond what is palpable to our human senses, to picture an "existence possibility" of something that defies the logics of our rational-deductive reasoning, and yet is firmly grounded in our deep, material attunement to what we know the world to be, as it presently is.

A fertile imagination recognizes what the late Brazilian education reformer Paulo Freire wrote: "The world [and we who are human parts of it] is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming" (1998, 72). And as a transformative art, imagination is not theory, but theory-laden, theory-in-the-making praxis—what religious educator Maria Harris described as "a set of bodily actions" that give flesh to hope (1996, 14), so that we may, in the words of Ghanaian Methodist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "wear hope like a skin" (Grey 2001, np).

This kind of imagination is not first-world ennui or privileged daydreaming—or, dare I say, not even "entrepreneurial innovation," in which we recycle ideas like you would go through some affluent rummage sale (à la Phyllis Tickle [2008]). Rather, it is about survival. One can see it instantiated by those who face dystopia, displacement, and debasement, whose backs are against the walls (Thurman 1996), who know too well what it means to not be able to "rest on the memories of your glorious past" or "lean on the certitude of your prior knowledge" (Isaiah 43:18). Theologically speaking, it is a "way of seeing into" and a "way of being" in the world that looks at the depths of evil and suffering, and asks, What on earth might God be doing in the midst of this?

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Now, here is the tricky thing—and I'm bracing myself for the glares from faculty and our Associate Dean of Assessment: The cultivation of this kind of theological and religious imagination requires a robust *curriculum* that—wait for it—defies "one-size-fits-all" learning, standardized outcomes, and mechanized assessment. To be clear: Our faculty (and even students) know that I am a staunch proponent of robust learning benchmarks, outcomes, and assessment. That is not the problem. The trouble is if the honing of vibrant theological imagination is not buttressed by a robust *educational imagination*, in which we are able to picture that the curriculum of a seminary is more than what is taught in our classrooms—more than the syllabi, the lectures, the accumulation of credit hours and letter grades, though all of that is a good part of it.

Rather, Garrett's "curriculum" is the entire course of this seminary's life, the vibrant biodiversity of our community, the fecundity of our broad-ranging ecology that scaffolds multiple ways of discovery, the theo-ethical principles that frame our

culture and guide our policies, the interpersonal commitments that choreograph our daily habits, and even the manuals that serve as guard rails in the event we lose our bearings. Garrett's curriculum is all of that—the explicit, the implicit, and even what's left out . . . because we know that what's not there teaches us as much as, if not more than, what is there.

For those of you who might be palpitating because you think the new dean is itching for curriculum revision, let your heart be at ease. Read my lips: No new curriculum revision! Instead, I mean *curricular imagination*: we live into the curriculum that we already *are*.

Dare we picture that the curriculum of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is place-based—it is rooted deeply in the terroir that we are in, the histories, legacies, peoples and memories, wisdom and technologies, past-present-future, both known and unknown to us. Remember—that which is unknown to us is very well known and named to others.[1]

Dare we imagine that the place-based curriculum at Garrett doesn't lean on the former regimes of our knowing, doing, and being—that it doesn't assume that it is good enough to be hospitable to the guests who come into our own house . . . as long as it remains "our" house. Instead, we run the course with the assumption that we are all guests in one another's worlds, and that learning begins with a curiosity about what is beyond us, and deepens with a critical awareness of our own unfinishedness.

Dare we picture that the place-based curriculum at Garrett assumes that a course is more than a class—a course is that which transports us into worlds we didn't know existed. A course is a "boundary event" that compels us into messy, gritty, skin-to-skin contact with those "other" to us . . . be they in contexts of our "cross-cultural immersion" experiences like Palestine, China, Ghana, Rome, or the fifth ward of Evanston, a neighborhood house of worship seemingly foreign to us, or somebody a few seats away from us, or somebody several offices down the hall from us.

In these instances, it is not enough to strive for competence in knowing the other—because one could just as easily master knowledge of the other in order to destroy them. The place-based curriculum at Garrett teaches us that "my salvation is entangled with yours," so let us learn together.

Dare we picture that the place-based curriculum at Garrett assumes that we are products of a broken world—we come to learn as we are, fully, wholly, holy, broken. For some of us, it is a world that is designed against our success, such that even before we come through the doors of a school, we have already been tracked for failure. Willie Jennings calls it a pervasive "diseased imagination" (2010); Emilie Townes calls it "fantastic hegemonic imagination" (2016); Henry Giroux calls it straight-up *dis*imagination (2014).

Against such *dis*imagination, dare we perceive a place-based curriculum that pays attention to how the traumas of personal, social, cultural, and religious violence are scored, seared deeply in our bodies and our psyche. Dare we perceive a curriculum that attends to the toll of learning in the way that religious educator Maria Harris once described: learning with "all the faculties of human beings, all our resources, not only our seeing and hearing and touching, but also our history, our education, our feelings, our wishes, our love, hate, faith, and unfaith" (1987, 9). In other words, a place-based curriculum at Garrett that doesn't anesthetize, but rather awakens our bodily capacities to sense our way through God's world.

Finally, dare we picture that the place-based curriculum at Garrett forms and fashions us for what biblical scholars call "utopian social dreaming" (Tran 2017, 115), an insistence that the kin(g)dom of God can be materialized here on this earth, and that we are invited to participate in a life-long and life-wide course of divine instruction?

In this curriculum made for utopian social dreaming, we are taught—formed and fashioned—by God, as we accompany one another toward a "*renewal* of moral conscience, *restoration* of communal agency, *reconstruction* of critical analysis, *resilience* in self-reflective dialogue, and *reconciliation* through passionate [and compassionate] action" (Tran 2017, 139).

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1   The stained glasses in the windows of our Chapel of the Unnamed Faithful depict images of those who are very well named and known in other worlds.

In the last few minutes, I have been referring to Garrett's place-based curriculum as though it is already here, even though we might very well be in the already-but-not-yet. Wearing hope like breathable, permeable skin, we recall that Second Isaiah implores, "Don't you perceive it? Can't you picture / image it? Is there capacity within your sense-filled meaning-making to recognize that God is *already* doing new things in your midst?"

<div align="center">***</div>

Let me close with an indulgent turn to the personal, to share with you how I witnessed this "perceptual capaciousness" in my late paternal grandmother. "Ô" was her name, Huỳnh Thị Ô—a single letter, like the number zero, so hollow it holds the universe. Grandma Ô was what you might describe as preliterate. She could barely read, but the banana stall that she kept in the town's wet market in Vietnam was the entrepreneurial ingenuity that fed four generations of hungry mouths in a household. In her old age, this life-long pious woman probably couldn't tell you if she had experienced any palpable signs of her entire sanctification. And yet, Grandma Ô could be heard chanting Psalm 23—couldn't carry the tune, but she'd chant the words as though it were a part of the systole and diastole of her beating heart. (We can call that "curricular rhythm," can't we?)

> Đức Giê-hô-va là Đấng chăn giữ tôi, tôi sẽ chẳng thiếu thốn gì . . .
>
> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

It was no warm-fuzzy "God and me" ballad. Psalm 23 was for her then, as it is for us now, a song of utopian social dreaming:

> God is our shepherd, not unjust earthly rulers who would deny us clean water and green pastures . . . In the deep shadows of our mortality, God is intimately there . . . In the face of life-denying threats, God abides as host . . . . Goodness and mercy will pursue us, rather than being ever beyond our grasp . . . . And in God we find our dwelling—our place *is* in God's world.

So, dear members and friends of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary: We do not cling to former things, or consider the things of old . . . . For the curriculum that we are currently running is *new* and will always be new because God is our Teacher, the world is our classroom, the transformative art that we are apprenticing ourselves into is that of interpreting God within changing and challenging times. And the purpose of our endeavor—the *why* of this course which we run—is the conviction that we have been called (through our baptism): to "share in Christ's ministry of love and service . . . to resist evil, injustice, and oppression, wherever and in whatever forms they present themselves . . . for the redemption, renewal, and restoration of the human family and the whole of creation."

Can you picture it?!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mai-Anh Le Tran is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Academic Dean, and Associate Professor of Religious Education and Practical Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL.

ASIAN AMERICAN SCHOLARS IN MID-CAREER

Transitioning from Early to Mid-Career as an Asian American Scholar of Religion

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier
Loyola Marymount University

ABSTRACT

This article explores the post-tenure challenges and opportunities for Asian American scholars of religion. Although the pressure of service can be a burden on mid-level faculty, service can offer a fulfilling way to integrate one's scholarly work and one's commitment to Asian American communities. Moreover, even as excellence in teaching often is not given much (if any) weight in promotion to full professor, it can be mutually illuminative to experiment with teaching at the same time as one is also reassessing one's field and place within it. Indeed, the mid-career offers a unique standpoint from which one can bring teaching and research together in a synergistic way. Revised approaches to courses in comparative theology and Hinduism both enhanced the author's scholarship as well as allowed her to better serve her students. Integrating teaching, scholarship, and advocacy can be deeply productive for Asian American scholars of religion after tenure.

KEYWORDS

Asian American religious studies, comparative theology, teaching post-tenure

The relief that I felt after getting tenure was short-lived. I had the unsettling feeling of "Now what?" The freedom to pursue research, teaching, and service post-tenure was an incredible privilege, but the sense of responsibility was overwhelming. No longer did I have to worry about numbers of publications, course evaluations, or whether my scholarly work would fit narrow guild definitions of "scholarship"; instead, I could pursue my work as a teacher-scholar-activist without fear. But what exactly should that work entail? What did it mean for me to develop my research and teaching beyond the limits of my field? And how would that prepare me for promotion to full professor?

Indeed, the transition to mid-career can be characterized by dueling poles of freedom and pressure. On the one hand, there is freedom to develop one's research agenda, to revamp old courses or teach new ones, to take on more leadership opportunities. On the other hand, whatever protections may be in place for junior faculty dissolve post-tenure. Increased service expectations—especially as faculty of color are encouraged to take on leadership positions—and the work of getting new research projects launched mean a crunch on time that all too often inhibits innovation in the classroom and a healthy balance of research and teaching, much less a balance of work and life.

Service, Administration, and Asian American Advocacy

The post-tenure slump is, of course, a well-documented phenomenon (Mathews 2014). But it seems to me that there is one facet of this phenomenon that is felt deeply by Asian American scholars, as well as by other faculty of color: responsibility to a community within and beyond one's institution or academic guild. Such a commitment adds a great burden to the mid-career Asian American scholar; it also offers wonderful opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment.

I teach at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles, CA. It is a Catholic university sponsored by the Society of Jesus (SJ), the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM), and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange (CSJ-Orange). These partnering communities share an evangelical desire to know, love, and share God, but their missions and spiritualities impact the curriculum of LMU in distinctive ways. The Jesuit quest to "find God in all things" attends to formation of the whole person in "an education that transforms" (self and others); the CSJ charism of unity, extending the Ignation or Jesuit vision, emphasizes an education that brings about the reconciliation of all persons; and the Marymount mission "that all may have life" focuses on an education that addresses structural questions of justice. LMU's institutional hybridity holds in productive tension personal formation, unity, and structural justice. Such a holistic, integrative, and structural approach to education means that faculty are encouraged to hold teaching, research, and service together. Generally following a 40-40-20 model for our evaluation (40 percent teaching, 40 percent research, 20 percent service—though, really, service is upheld as much as teaching and research), LMU strives to cultivate teacher-scholars. Missional interests in engagement with society and work for justice mean that teaching and research engagement with Los Angeles and the world are highly valued.

This integrative approach to teaching, research, and service was quite empowering to me as I moved through the process of tenure and beyond. I found colleagues and administrators who valued my teaching as much as my research, and who valued my public engagement and service as a positive extension of my scholarly life. This allowed me to get to know Japanese American Los Angeles at a number of levels and made my early career as academically insightful as it was personally fulfilling. Even so, and especially post-tenure, I have found that the Ignatian value of *magis* (more) at LMU sometimes comes at the cost of *cura personalis* (care of the person). The push to teach, and research, and serve; the desire to do and be more; the pressure to be available constantly for service to department, college, university, academy, *and* wider world: all of this can be exhausting and unsustainable. Mid-level faculty are in transition and working to resituate themselves and their work, even as they are gearing up for promotion. And while leadership in service is important at the associate level, it can have an adverse effect on teaching and research.

Although the pressure of service can be a burden on mid-level faculty, it can also offer a fulfilling way to integrate one's scholarly work. An LMU Faculty Service Assessment Survey, for example, found that while White women and associate professors had generally negative views of service (in its assignment, evaluation, and reward), faculty from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups actually had more positive perceptions of faculty service (Barnhardt 2017). This was particularly the case when the service was seen to complement their scholarship or had to do with something they cared about. While there is no analysis of why this may be the case, the survey findings are suggestive of the extent to which service can be a positive expression of scholarly life for faculty of color.

This certainly fits with my own sense of service post-tenure. Because I had the security of tenure, I now felt the freedom to decline any number of committee nominations and invitations to speak or work on issues that were not central to my interests. Prior to tenure, I felt like I had to say yes to everything, both because I wanted to have a robust tenure portfolio but also because I didn't feel like I could tell more senior faculty, scholars, and administrators no. After tenure, I felt less vulnerable. I felt I could tell more senior colleagues no. At the same time, I was able to take leadership positions and accept service opportunities at local, university, and academic levels that fit with my explicit commitment to women of color and Asian and Asian American interreligious communities.

The question of higher administrative and other leadership opportunities can be a bit more difficult to navigate. To what extent is it important for Asian American scholars and other scholars of color at mid-career to move into these posts? And how might the move into administration delay (or even derail) the step to full professor? I've been lucky enough to have had two Asian American associate deans at LMU, both of whom were mid-career and made a great impact on me. Even so,

the years spent in administration cannot come without cost to person, research, and teaching. One must therefore weigh a number of competing goods: personal interest in the position; the possibility in this position to mentor others and effect change for underrepresented persons and communities (versus the real possibility that one may end up being a tokenized voice with little power); a desire to explore the next step of a career, which may or may not include administration; and building one's portfolio for full professor.

Balancing Research and Teaching at Mid-Career

One of the great challenges for any scholar as they transition from early to mid-career is launching new research projects. For me, the freedom I felt post-tenure to rethink my research agenda and redefine my theological identity meant a wholesale questioning of my place in the field of comparative theology. As I had been trained, comparative theology was a deep, careful theological investigation of a religious tradition other than one's own, wherein the process of studying another tradition shed light on one's own. Careful boundaries, language study, and textual subtleties helped comparative theology be intellectually rigorous and ethically responsible to the traditions of study. But it often did not fit with my own Asian American Catholic experience, an experience that involved a good deal of ethnoreligious multiplicity, syncretism, and non-textual traditions. I wondered if my commitment to Asian and Asian American religious communities required me to shift away from the language of comparative theology. Of course, interreligious concerns would always be a part of my theological work; multireligiosity is fundamental to many Asian and Asian American contexts. But I wondered whether comparative theology was a helpful way to theologize in Asian and Asian American contexts when these contexts were so fluid and entangled.

Fortunately, the transition to mid-career is a perfect time to explore theory and methodology. At mid-career, all scholars—but scholars of color especially—have the security they did not have before to push their fields theoretically and methodologically. As I've faced persistent questions about how gender, race, and ethnicity intersect with interreligious and comparative theological dynamics, I've been able to express those concerns and think constructively about them. In the process, I've connected with scholars within and beyond Asian, Asian American, and comparative theology. These connections have opened academic doors and initiated conversations that have brought me new academic life. The transition to mid-career can be a time of scholarly angst, but that angst can be productive if embraced.

With the intensity of getting research projects launched and a dramatic increase in service, it often seems like there is little time to revamp courses. In any case, teaching the same course semester after semester can lead to boredom and burnout in the classroom. But even as excellence in teaching is often not given much (if any) weight in promotion to full professor, it can be mutually illuminating to experiment with teaching at the same time as one is reassessing one's field and place within it. Indeed, mid-career offers a unique standpoint from which one can bring teaching and research together in a productive, synergistic way.

For example, pairing shifting research interests with small changes in the classroom (one unit, one source, one lecture, one class discussion, or one assignment at a time) each semester can have dramatic effects on a course experience. After several semesters of small changes, one will have redesigned a course in substantive ways. This experimentation with sources and approaches inevitably helps to clarify one's own developing research, theory, or method.

Take, for example, my lower-division core course in comparative theology. My initial approach to the course structure was to set up clear theological categories for comparison. Each category (for example, creation, death, ultimate reality, self) would consider scripture from each tradition (Hinduism and Christianity). While this theological and textual approach pushed students to not conflate traditions (they often came into the course assuming all religions are the same) as they had to look carefully for differences as much as for similarities, it did not allow for sufficient connection to the relationship between text and practice. Also, while many students came to a deeper appreciation of (comparative) theological inquiry and of Hinduism and Christianity, they did not seem to come to a transformational awareness of the living religious communities surrounding them. Finally, the strict boundaries and borders surrounding the categories I had constructed

failed to connect with numerous students, many of whom grew up in interfaith, multireligious, or secular homes. Many of these students were of Asian descent, and I could identify with their mystification. They inspired me to look for ways to rethink my course, even as I had to be realistic about the limits of my time to completely revamp it all at once.

 I started with stories, real and imagined. For example, I added a unit on Shusaku Endo's *Deep River* (1993). This novel about a group of Japanese tourists in India not only raised theological questions pertinent to the course, it allowed me to explore the history of India, the multireligiosity of Asia, and the complex negotiations of faith in people's lives. Although my research at the time wasn't directly engaging Endo, the unit provided space for me to start thinking about comparative theology in Asian contexts.

Other semesters, I expanded my units on gender and sexuality. Students read and researched Christian and Hindu women activists. They learned about women's rituals. Looking for comparative Christian examples for Hindu women's rituals pushed me to look into Latina Catholic popular ritual practices (Marian devotions, home altars, and so forth). While this wasn't a part of my research, I was deeply interested in the topic. Eventually, it did find its way to publication. My expanded unit on sexuality was also fruitful; from the research I conducted for the class, I was able to give a presentation on campus at an event after a troubling transphobic incident at LMU. In these ways, my course was improved at the same time as my research and activism were enriched.

A more radical possibility that can bring research and teaching together is to design new courses (where possible) that approach topics in innovative ways: community-based courses, team teaching, media studies courses, project-oriented learning, and so forth. Moving beyond the traditional classroom allows for engagement with religious communities in important ways that can prioritize lived religion and concrete religious persons. This pedagogical shift, in turn, informs religious and theological scholarship in the sources engaged and topics privileged.

One course I developed, "Pop Hinduism," incorporates contemplative pedagogy. The class examines the representation of Hinduism in American popular culture. Drawing on critical theory, we assess how American popular culture has received and reinterpreted Hindu theology in creative and sometimes problematic ways. One unit centers on yoga in film, television, and social media. In order to analyze the representation of yoga, we look at the development of modern yoga in the West and its introduction through a number of Indian gurus. Even as we read the Yoga Sutras, I don't want students to essentialize yoga as a static spiritual practice or to see the Yoga Sutras as *the* definitive source for yoga. So, I introduce them to a modern yoga tradition, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta, and have students practice in its lineage throughout the semester, both inside the classroom (every day at the beginning of class) and at the local Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center (once or twice). Through this deep, more particular engagement, they are better equipped to think about yoga philosophy and practice. We meet with practitioners and learn from them; in the process, students see Hinduism and its many spiritual lineages as living traditions with powerful practices. They can no longer buy the stereotype of Hinduism they often see onscreen, or divorce yoga from its spiritual connection. For me, the process has helped attune my research to community concerns. For all of us, the contemplative classroom has made us more aware of the spiritual aspect of learning.

Finally, bringing Asian American and other students of color into research not only initiates students (and marginalized populations) into the creative process of research, it helps to bridge the teaching-research divide in a way that can help facilitate the transition to mid-career. This may involve faculty-mentored student research, joint research projects, hiring student research assistants, or more. In any of these scenarios, the challenge of meeting students where they are at and then moving with them through the research process can clarify what engages students (for the classroom) and what projects are important for the communities we aim to serve.

In the end, the most exciting parts of the transition to mid-career for me also tend to be the most difficult. Rejecting the boundaries surrounding Asian American teacher-researcher-activists does not mean that these areas will be integrated and balanced easily. Trying to do everything at once is a recipe for overwhelm and paralysis. Staying focused on a central concern (for me, privileging Asians and Asian Americans as well as women of color) and taking the mid-career one step at a time are essential.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier is Associate Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. Her work focuses on comparative theology, Asian and Asian American theology, feminist theology, Hindu-Christian studies, and interreligious dialogue.

ASIAN AMERICAN SCHOLARS IN MID-CAREER

Joining the Administrative Ranks? Potential Impacts and Discerning Factors

Tat-siong Benny Liew
College of the Holy Cross

ABSTRACT

With "diversity, equity, and inclusion" becoming a greater emphasis in many educational institutions, many faculty of Asian descent will need to consider if they want to move from fulltime teaching to some kind of administrative role. This article discusses various factors—societal, institutional, and personal—that impact upon this decision-making process.

KEYWORDS

institution; administration; Asian American, racialization; career

As the term "Asian Americans" represents many different people, so the phrase "academic administrative positions" represents many different roles.[1] There are some pretty significant differences between being, say, a department chair, an academic dean, or a chief executive officer of an entire institution (such as a seminary president). Reduction of classroom teaching (barring exceptional arrangements) is a common result of one's entry into the administrative ranks, even if one is talking about a part-time administrative position (such as heading up a center or a particular program), but the particular impacts on teaching and learning will vary depending on what kind of an administrative role one assumes.

For example, department chairs and academic deans have the potential to influence faculty hiring, curricular design, and assessment. Those of Asian American descent in these positions have a great opportunity, therefore, to bring not only diversity concerns to these processes, but also actual diversities in terms of who gets to teach, what is taught, and how teaching and learning are being done and evaluated. This is especially important since Asian Americans and Asian American concerns can still be invisible and unrecognized in many educational circles. Having (at least in theory) control over the academic budget of either a department or an entire institution, they can also set particular priorities for funding faculty research and new course design to help encourage teaching and research on topics that are related to race or to Asian America. While CEOs of educational institutions are arguably

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1 Having been an academic dean for only two short years in 2011-2013, I am not really qualified to write on this topic by myself. As a result, I solicited input and received many helpful insights from Susan Abraham, Carolyn Chen, Jane Iwamura, Uriah Kim, Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, Boyung Lee, Roger Nam, Sharon Suh, Sharon Tan, Frank Yamada, and David K. Yoo. While these wonderful colleagues' reflections inform and infuse my writing of this article, I alone am responsible for its final written form, including any shortcomings or inadequacies that may be present therein.

more removed from these academic decisions, their duty and responsibility to shape and implement an institution's mission and vision means that they cannot, and should not, be completely disengaged from these conversations, especially if the institution in question is relatively small. In fact, the need to think about some larger questions beyond one's own courses may cause one to think about and see teaching and learning in new ways. For instance, the experience of being an administrator may lead one to pay greater attention to issues of formation or questions about what constitutes "student success."

Even if a school's CEO of Asian descent has decided—whether because of the size of the school, time constraint, and/or other reasons—to completely disengage themselves from academic matters, what they do as an administrator can still have huge effects on teaching and learning. While a school's cultural and financial health, for which its CEO is ultimately responsible, will undoubtedly influence teaching and learning (for example, theological/ideological rigidity or flexibility, class size, or faculty morale), this is not what I have in mind here. Instead, I am imagining what might happen if an Asian American president decided, as part of his or her vision and mission for a school, to radically diversify the student population so students of color actually become the majority. This change alone has the potential to exert pressure on those who do make academic decisions to seek a more diverse faculty composition or, at the very least, to demand a diversification in course materials, even if those materials are taught by white faculty persons. Having a critical mass of persons of color on campus, whether they are students or faculty, alters the teaching and learning environment, which may in turn lead to pedagogical shifts, curricular changes, and different faculty compositions.

While an Asian American dean or president may not be involved in much, if any, classroom teaching of students, she or he can still be teaching a different population in a different setting. In an effort to work with the faculty, cultivate individual donors, build communal relations, or guide the board of trustees, an Asian American dean or president has opportunities to share what she or he cares about, including the importance of diversity in the study of religion and theology in general and the importance of paying attention to Asian American communities and concerns in particular. One should never underestimate the possible effects of such teaching and learning, as it may bring awareness, interest, or even personal or communal investment that can indirectly or directly impact classroom teaching. The rhetoric of "moving from faculty to administration," while commonsensical in some ways, can also present a false dichotomy. This is not a question of whether administrators retain faculty titles within an institution or whether they still spend time teaching courses in classrooms; it is a deep realization that teaching and learning are foundational and indispensable to an administrator's work in building institutions.

It takes intentionality on the part of an Asian American administrator, of course, for these indirect but larger scale impacts to have a chance to materialize. Similarly, Asian American administrators can still shape the classroom directly, if they intentionally choose to use whatever classroom opportunity they have to teach materials with an explicitly Asian American focus. This is especially important given the still low number of religion and theology faculty members with scholarly focus and expertise in Asian America.

The inevitable question that many Asian American faculty members in religion and theology face is whether one should consider becoming an administrator, especially since diversity is now a rhetorical goal in many institutions and an increasing number of Asian American faculty members are being tapped or invited to become administrators. This is not an easy question, and must be considered on several levels. First, there is the big picture, which has to do with not only teaching and learning in religion and theology, but also the social reality of race and racialization in the United States. As already mentioned, Asian American administrators have the potential to influence and change the broader culture of teaching, learning, and scholarship because they can participate in institutional governance and decision-making processes about policies and practices, including for what and how resources are being accessed and deployed. There are also structural problems in education, especially those that are related to the larger social dynamics around race and racialization (for example, white supremacist and normative values), that one cannot address, let alone transform, through one's own scholarship or classroom teaching.

Another big-picture consideration is the need to challenge the bias that Asian Americans are not well suited for leadership. The presence of Asian American administrators may change the minds of not only those of the dominant culture but also those of Asian Americans. Just as having Asian Americans on a faculty may help Asian American students imagine being

faculty members themselves, having Asian Americans in administration can have the same effect on current and future generations of Asian American faculty members in religion and theology. A lot of times, it does take "seeing" for an Asian American teacher/scholar to take the necessary steps to pursue an administrative position. Having more Asian Americans in various administrative roles can also help combat social temptations and tendencies to essentialize "Asian American" identities and categories. If one wants to be a changemaker, there are certainly many good reasons to go into administration.

Regardless of the specific administrative role in question, an Asian American administrator may be particularly effective in playing a mediating role among different racial/ethnic groups, given the group's placement as a "middle minority" within the racialized social structure of the United States. Being in the middle, of course, can mean either both-and or neither-nor. Depending on the specific situation and dynamics, Asian American administrators may also find themselves hanging in the balance precisely because of this somewhat liminal position, or at times even unrecognized, identity, and their administrative work rejected by other racial/ethnic groups as illegitimate or ill-advised meddling. There will inevitably be some within an institution who think that an Asian American's entry into the administrative ranks is solely based on race and political correctness. This big—and general—level of consideration, therefore, must be balanced by careful reflection on the particulars of the specific situation or institution. Intentionality must be present for Asian American administrators to bring about real changes, but intentionality undoubtedly works better with cooperation than against resistance. One must, in other words, evaluate if an institution is ready and eager to support a minoritized leader and does so with proper resources. What will it take, including what you have to do and not do (such as teaching and scholarship), for you to not only step in but also do the job well, and how much of what you need is already in place? Does the institution truly value you and your vision for this administrative role, or is the institution only interested in you as a diversity token because of recent demographic changes; as a model minority because you, in their imagination, will be a diligent and compliant caretaker who follows all the established procedures and processes all the necessary paperwork; or, especially in scenarios where an administrator is chosen internally, as an "ideal candidate" because your research and scholarship are deemed to be less significant than those of your (white) colleagues? Will you be the only Asian American or person of color on the administrative team?

Similarly, one will do well to consider the financial and emotional health of the institution in question. Is the institution undergoing significant transition of some kind? Will you be so mired in budget cuts or personnel conflicts that you are already set up for failure? These concerns, like the concern about support, all come down to one question: What will happen to your agency and your intention for your vision given the situation of and the personnel dynamics within the institution? Will your agency increase, decrease, or simply be neutralized? The transparency and fairness of the selection process is also related to this; a questionable process can undercut one's effectiveness from the outset because many within the institution will question your legitimacy.

In addition, there is the personal factor. Do you enjoy thinking about institutions and lean toward institutional forms of thinking? Do you value administration, or do you see doing administration as easier than developing your teaching and scholarship? If it is the latter, is it because you have less passion for teaching and researching, or is it because, as a person of color, your courses and scholarship are less valued? Do you feel a call to a particular administrative post, or is it a "model minority" sense of duty or even, in some cases, a bit of messiah complex? Also ask yourself honestly: are you mainly attracted by the pay raise that comes with an administrative position?

What about your temperaments and skill set? Are you able to work with different personality types or working styles? Do you move well among diverse cultures and interact comfortably with persons of different races and backgrounds? Can you not only stomach but also work through conflicts (including the expectation by some Asian Americans and other minoritized persons that you will always take their side, or the assumption that you, as an Asian American, should be meek and mild)? How do you react or respond to subtle and perhaps even sophisticated forms of racism against you, whether manifested through underperformance of your staff or microaggressions of those higher up (including those on the board of trustees)? Are you comfortable with being a "first" or an "only," since there may not be another Asian

American administrator before you or with you? Can you keep confidentiality? How do you handle uncertainty or crisis? Do you feel comfortable or frustrated with prioritizing and multitasking? While no one can be completely ready or perfectly equipped to take a new position in administration, asking these questions and answering them honestly can be very helpful in the discernment process.

One should also remember the different seasons in an academic career. Is this a right time in your career to become an administrator? Have you established yourself as a teacher and scholar so you can return to full-time teaching if you so desire? Joining the administrative ranks does not necessarily mean that you have to stay there for the rest of your career (provided you know and have what it takes to get back into the classroom). In fact, it may be wise to set some criteria and a timeframe to reevaluate continuing in administration. This is especially important if one enters the administrative ranks with ambivalence. The point of exploring and trying something is to gain clarity, so there is nothing wrong with moving out of administration after a test drive. Similarly, saying no to the administrative ranks at one moment does not mean that one cannot say yes later.

Finally, I must say that I do not see faculty members entering the administrative ranks in terms of "moving up" or "moving down." I see it as a personal decision that is not necessarily irreversible, although it should be made with careful consideration and honest self-assessment. With vision and intention, Asian Americans in administrative ranks can have a huge impact on diversifying the teaching and learning of religion and theology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tat-siong Benny Liew is Class of 1956 Professor in New Testament Studies at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. He is the author of *Politics of Parousia* (Brill, 1999), and W*hat Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008). Liew is the Series Editor of T&T Clark's *Study Guides to the New Testament* (Bloomsbury) and of numerous scholarly volumes.

Experiencing Flow through an Integrative Pedagogy

Kirsten S. Oh
Azusa Pacific University

ABSTRACT

Faculty face challenges of balancing many demands and needs from family, school, religious organizations, and different communities to which they belong. This article discusses integrative strategies for holding multiple roles and managing diverse demands from someone who has served as an administrator and professor and is a mother, wife, priest, and communal leader.

KEYWORDS:

flow, holistic, integrative pedagogy, Yin-Yang, self-care, contingency times

I walked back to my office feeling elated. I had experienced *flow* while lecturing and a sense of satisfaction filled my otherwise tired, end-of-semester body. Positive psychologist, Mihaly Csíkszentmihalyi, describes flow as "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost" (Encyclopedia.com 2019). My 85-minute class seemed to have flown by without any consciousness of the flipped course instruction that created an active learning environment. The creativity of this learner-centered class session followed a natural progression of various sections comprised of lecture, reflective writing, group discussion, and class sharing.

It was the last lecture of the fall semester. I scanned the room full of 54, mostly freshmen students with whom I had journeyed through their first semester of college. As a general education course in a large, private Christian university in California, this course introduced students to Christian beliefs, life, and service. The students demonstrated a combination of academic theories that resulted in an integrated praxis. The structure of this introductory, general education course was largely due to an ever-evolving design I had planned and improved upon for the last eight or more semesters grounded in current events, recent publications, and student demographics. Because of this complexity, I enjoyed the challenge of teaching this class, always hopeful that what and how I taught made a difference. However, I had not experienced this type of flow before. In this experience of being completely immersed in the teaching moment, I was cognizant that something had changed in me.

The intersections of my multiple identities and roles had somehow coalesced in this class session. In particular, the privilege of being a new mother in addition to all the other roles: professor, pastor, counselor, mentor, scholar,

writer, wife, daughter, sister, and friend intensified my perception of and experience with these students. These students were beloved young adults; their parents or guardians had entrusted the formative years of their college life to my academic institution, and in turn, to me as their teacher. In retrospect, I realize the experience of flow in this aforementioned class was a happy confluence of presenting my whole self in class coupled with a deep concern for the students and their learning. This is part and parcel of what integrative pedagogy can produce.

Balancing Professional, Personal, and Community Needs?
A Case for Integrative Pedagogy

The word "balance" has two distinct connotations. One is the keeping in tension of two opposing things while the other is juggling multiple worthwhile or good things. For me, the notion of the work-life balance evokes both connotations. Shaped by a cultural framework of "both-and" derived from a nonlinear, holistic, and dynamic Eastern philosophy of the Tao as reflected in the Korean flag's four trigrams surrounding the red and blue circle, I am oriented to hold multiple things in tension rather than to compartmentalize competing sectors of my life. I subscribe to an integrative model espoused by a dialectic Yin-Yang worldview in which "all phenomena are shaped by the dynamic integration of opposite yet complimentary elements" (Beveridge, Vallat, and De La Robertie 2018).

While the cultural framework I grew up with naturally oriented me to this integrative approach to teaching that incorporates my various roles and identities within a reciprocal human dimension, I was advised against it when I first entered the higher education workforce. I received wonderful advices from experienced professors and administrators; however, there was also a piece of advice that was not so helpful in my teaching career. It went something like this: "In order to preserve some form of sanity in your life in this complex world of higher education, you should compartmentalize your life; separate your personal from your professional life." Inadvertently, I entered the balance dilemma, to compartmentalize or not to compartmentalize.

This mantra did help me to leave my professional work as an administrator behind when returning home to my personal and communal life. The drive to and from work was my transitional time between professional work and personal/communal life (although friendships formed at work became part of my communal life). However, as a professor, this compartmentation of my professional, communal, public, and private selves seemed to compete with, and even dismantle, the very fiber of a practical theologian whose teaching pursues the tenets holistic integration. My experiences in the classroom have taught me to reclaim my cultural heritage and the cyclical nature of the multiple roles and identities that form, in-form, and re-form each other.

My Asian heritage recognizes and embraces paradoxes (within my multiple roles) as inevitable, persistent, and even desirable with the following three key tenets of dialectical thinking:

    a.   The principle of change indicating that reality is a dynamic, perpetually changing process

    b.   The principle of contradiction suggesting that opposites exist in everything and are mutually complementary

    c.   The principle of relationship and holism suggesting that nothing is isolated and independent (Peng and Nisbett 1999)

These principles help me live within the dynamic nature of reality. That is, personal, communal, and professional spheres are contextually integrative and interdependent. As a member of the sandwich generation who loves and cares for a toddler and for aging parents, my research, writing, and teaching recalibrates my heart to persist more patiently. As a pastor of the local and global Methodist church, my passion for the liberating and transformative power of the Good News means I need to bring my whole self to preach, teach, counsel, serve, and worship. As a professor at a teaching university, it is imperative to keep all parts of myself, including my parental heart, as an integral piece of the pedagogical craft. I

adhere closely to what Martin Seligman confirms: "People who can make an explicit connection between their work and something socially meaningful to them are more likely to find satisfaction, and are better able to adapt to the inevitable stresses and compromises that come with working in the world" (Seligman 2012).

When I bring my whole, dynamic and changing self to the classroom and interact with the whole dynamic selves of the students intersubjectively in an integrative pedagogy, I am aware of the "constant stream of fast-paced, important, in-the-moment decisions" that are the fulcrum of an integrative pedagogy (Copeland 2016). Such intersubjectivity means the students and I co-create situation-specific, context-driven, priority-setting norms within the parameters of the designated learning outcomes. At the core of this approach is the understanding that "significant learning is learning that makes a difference in how people live—and the kind of life they are capable of living. . ." (Fink 2013). Students embrace significant learning that impacts how they live precisely because they co-create the learning experience. However, because students are encouraged to engage in their own learning through the process of co-creating, controlled chaos may ensue especially in the uncertain spaces when more than one good decision emerge.

Moreover, sharing life in this integrated approach to teaching inevitably means that I draw stories from my own life. At times, this openness leads to a deep sense of vulnerability. The fear of oversharing versus the desire to be authentic tempers what and how much actually gets shared to prevent some all too vulnerable moments. For instance, disclosures of failures or mistakes to illustrate a point may end up missing the point entirely, and such confessions may leave me quite raw and sensitive. At the same time, the value of honesty and authenticity outweighs any presentation of false perfection. This healthy ambivalence provides the necessary tension to consider the collateral cost to sharing life.

The integrative pedagogy does *not* achieve a perfectly balanced life. In fact, such a life is an illusion according to Stephen Brookfield in *Skillful Teaching*: "Perfection is sometimes thought of as achieving balance. This state of balance is also illusory . . . Perhaps the most we can hope for is to keep these seeming opposites in a state of reasonably congenial tension. Working on the edge of tension, not achieving balance, is the name of the game" (Brookfield 2015). Instead, the integrative approach provides the permission to become more acquainted with our finite, limited selves. With this permission for the imperfect holding of tension, comes the awareness of the need for self-care and for the construction of contingency times.

Self-Care

The analogy of the airline attendants' instruction to place the oxygen mask on yourself first before you attend to others who need your assistance is apropos here to describe this self-care necessity. The element of self-care noted here is not just an individual desire for self-achievement or actualization, but one that promotes relational and reflexive paradigms that are prerequisite for building an integrative teaching model (see Knapik and Laverty 2018). In other words, self-care is not about putting ourself first or sacrificing others. Instead, it is about understanding the self in the multiplicity of our roles and caring for self in order to reinvigorate and recharge so self-awareness is possible. The space created by self care leads to recognizing how these various roles affect the self and those in our diverse relational webs.

Although I knew this notion of self-care was fundamental to my sense of wellbeing, I neglected this aspect of my life for the sake of urgent, immediate need such as infant-care being a new mother. When this tyranny-of-the-urgent took over the essentials of prolonged uninterrupted sleep and regular physical exercise, it resulted in a lack of focus on the various tasks my roles required. Even the basic walk to and from classes became a hurdle. During the first year and a half of my child's life, I managed to sprain my left ankle three times and needed to get appropriate treatments each time reminding me to slow down, assess, and realign myself.

I realized once again that I needed to practice self-care in order to flourish in my multiple roles. Currently, I see an acupuncturist monthly for continued treatment of my ankle and body alignment, during which time I practice centering prayer, a form of mindfulness. And at times, I alleviate sleep deprivation by simply sleeping during these sessions. In

addition, I am attempting to habituate into shape by hiking with the family often tracking my daily steps by wearing a smart watch and pursuing regulated sleep times. One of the ways of meeting the multiple requirements and the various roles I inhabit while retaining space for self-care is building into my schedule contingency times.

Contingency Times

In my first doctoral coursework, Ray Anderson, the late professor of practical and systematic theology and a pastor of a multi-generational congregation, briefly shared about using contingency times to manage his various roles. I was intrigued. I made an appointment with him to learn what exactly this method was. He shared, matter-of-factly, that he built in extra time from 10 to 30-minute increments between meetings, class times, family times, worship services, and such into his schedule on a daily and weekly basis as a provision for unforeseen situations. This way, if an urgent need presented itself, he had the luxury of time to pay attention to that need. If students request a conversation after class, he could attend to them, and if congregants wanted a counseling session, he had the time to schedule one. If there were no unforeseen situations, he had the luxury of time to add to his scheduled reading and writing times or time to play b-ball with the neighborhood kids; he was in his late 70's.

I have found this wisdom enduring. Berg and Seeber cautions against the "detrimental effects of time poverty":

> Time management is not about jamming as much as possible *into* your schedule, but eliminating as much as possible *from* your schedule so that you have time to get the important stuff done to a high degree of quality and with as little stress as possible. (Berg and Seeber 2016, 29)

I am learning to declutter not only my physical space (thanks to Mari Kondo), but my mind through thinking about time in a different way: I am not too busy. I have time, and I elect to do the prioritized relational pieces especially with my toddler, partner, and parents. I also select times to prepare, plan, and execute my scheduled and unscheduled work, e.g., teaching, leading, preaching, counseling, researching, and writing. Within these elected and selected times, I am learning to prioritize self-care and build in contingency times to allow for the luxury of paying attention to all aspects of my diverse relational webs.

An integrative pedagogy in which the confluence of my various roles and identities interacts with the various identities of my students require self-care and contingency times. The principles of change, contradiction, and relationship that reside in my being allows me to bring the whole of who I am to teach. Rather than striving to achieve a perfect balance through compartmentalizing all the roles I embrace, the integration of these roles and the intersubjective co-creation of the course with the students allows for significant learning such that *flow* is more possible in the classrooms.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirsten Sonkyo Oh is Professor of Practical Theology at Azusa Pacific University and the Ecclesiastical Associate Professor of United Methodist Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. She holds a Ph.D. in Theology with emphasis in Pastoral Care and Counseling and focuses her research on intercultural narrative counseling using multidisciplinary approaches, to address the intersections of Identities.

Racial Literacy, the Black-White Binary, and an Equitable Learning Environment

Joseph Cheah
University of Saint Joseph

ABSTRACT

The American education system is still using the black/white binary as the primary racial paradigm when the United States itself has become an increasingly multiracial and multicultural society. Even within this paradigm, African American histories and accomplishments have received a lower-tier treatment which is often tokenized and presented uncritically. This article acknowledges the pivotal role the black/white binary has played in American racialized history while challenging educators to include other binaries – e.g., the indigenous/settler and orientalism/war binaries in Andy Smith's categorization – in the US education system. Because the ideology of white supremacy operates differently in each binary, it is important for our students to cultivate racial literacy of American history as framed not only through the black/white binary, but also through the indigenous/settler and orientalism/war binaries.

KEYWORDS

black/white binary, orientalism/war binary, indigenous/settler binary, differential racialization, race essentialization

Because histories of racial minorities often receive scant coverage or are not included in mainstream textbooks, learning about the fundamental aspects of histories and narratives of racial minorities is vital not only for white students but especially for students of color. Understanding African American history critically (for example, not painting slavery as a relatively tame institution,) and understanding the alliances formed between Asian and African Americans during the civil rights movement will help Asian Americans to better understand their own history. Similarly, understanding how the "yellow peril" myth served to encourage discrimination and violence against Chinese workers, including lynching in some cases, that culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act would help African Americans find historical moment of solidarity in resisting white supremacy. What this means in terms of teaching and learning is that students must attain literacy of minority groups and instructors must be adequately prepared to teach them.

Accomplishing the goal of teaching racial literacy to our students may entail a curriculum change if a university does not offer a required survey course on American racial or ethnic minorities. If a curriculum change is not possible, the next possible step is to form an ad hoc Diversity Committee, with the support of the administration, to compile a list of ways in which different departments within the university engage in diversity and inclusion issues: courses already being taught, other curricular initiatives, lecturers sponsored by various departments, extracurricular activities (including programming, e.g., workshops, art, music, dance) related to race and diversity, immersion programs, study abroad programs, film series that explore diversity, and so on. More often than not, adjustments are required to create a less-biased curriculum so that students receive a holistic introduction to cultures and histories of the various racial groups in the United States.

The same ad hoc Committee, or another committee, may have to do the heavy lifting of getting faculty buy-in and organizing activities for faculty development. Some development can focus on faculty attaining literacy about minority groups that they are not familiar with. For example, a keynote speaker for faculty development day could offer pedagogies on teaching a diverse population of students and faculty who have training in specific racial/ethnic groups could lead concurrent sessions throughout the day. These faculty members could provide background materials, resources, as well as be mentors for their colleagues throughout the year.

The Black/White Paradigm

To cultivate students' racial literacy one cannot ignore the black/white binary paradigm that has operated in the US since the time of slavery. The black/white paradigm posits that African American history and experiences are so distinctive that African Americans constitute a prototypical minority group. Within this framework, African American experiences take center stage in any discussion of race to the extent that the word "race" itself has become a code word to mean African American (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, 75). Critics of this form of exceptionalism hold that the African American experience is distinctive, but does not structure the racialization of other minority groups. They assert the tenet of differential racialization in which every minority group in the US has been racialized differently (77). For example, few African Americans will be seen as foreigners or be made objects of ridicule by the manner of their speech, just as few East Asian Americans will be seen as dangerous or untrustworthy individuals that require close monitoring in stores and other settings. The differential racialization of American minorities demands that students learn about the histories and narratives of various racial minorities while not minimizing the historical suffering of slavery and ongoing discriminations endured by African Americans.

Feminist scholar Andy Smith argues that the black/white binary is the central paradigm in the system of white supremacy. She also maintains that any attempt to "go beyond" the black/white binary is tantamount to replacing "an analysis of white supremacy with a politics of multicultural representation" (Smith 2006, 70). The focus on the politics of multiracial inclusion can obscure the system of white supremacy operating in the black/white binary in a decisive manner. As Smith points out, any understanding of white supremacy must take the black/white binary into account (71). Besides the black/white or slavery/capitalism binary, Smith identifies two other binaries in which African Americans play a subsidiary role in the operation of white supremacy: in the indigenous/settler binary, "where Native genocide is central to the logic of white supremacy" and in the orientalism/war binary, where "Asians, Arabs, and Latino/as [are seen] as foreign threats, requiring the United States to be at permanent war with these peoples" (70-71). What this means is that having some understanding about the histories and experiences of various American minority groups constituted by these three binaries would be beneficial to our students living and working in the multicultural milieu of the US. By advocating for our students to think more critically about racial dynamics, we are teaching them how to function in a multiracial environment in ways that can disrupt white supremacy operating within their own respective binaries. Education is key for people of color to avoid falling into the "divide and conquer" trap, a classic method employed by a dominant group to pit one minority group against another, exemplified by the model minority myth.

Emerging in the mid-1960s during the African American civil rights movement, the model minority myth highlights individual achievements of Asian Americans while diverting attention away from structural and systemic racism confronted by all racial minorities. In addition, the stereotype pits Asian Americans against African Americans in particular because the function of the myth is to show that institutionalized racism is not an insurmountable barrier because Asian Americans

are able to successfully overcome it. This tactic is a variation of the "divide and conquer" principle employed by the dominant group to set Asian Americans up as rivals of African Americans; the model minority myth deflects attention from social structure. Thus, those in power and those who benefit from white supremacy avoid the responsibility of dealing with racial inequality and anti-black racism in particular. Understanding this racial tactic can enable African Americans and Asian Americans to work together to disrupt the white supremacy that affects all racial minority groups.

The black/white paradigm is evident in any discussion dealing with race, diversity, and inclusion. The addition of Latinx or "brown" to diversity and inclusion initiatives is a welcome recognition that the national conversation about race in the US must include orientalism/war binary as well. Asian Americans are often overlooked because they are perceived as a model minority; the high incomes of Asian American professionals and the high percentage of Asian American students in elite universities across the country may give the impression that Asian Americans do not suffer from racism. Yet this portrait of Asian achievements is also deceptive as Southeast Asian immigrant groups, such as the Burmese, Bhutanese, Hmongs, and Cambodians experience the highest poverty and high school dropout rates among all racial minority groups and are often left out of diversity and inclusion programs and conversations. For example, among Burmese Americans, 30 percent live below the poverty line and an alarming 39 percent are high school dropouts (Vang and Trieu 2014, 6-7). This means that Asian and Asian American faculty must make our voices heard: not only at professional conferences and speaking opportunities but also on our campuses, in ad hoc and official committees. We must highlight the structural disadvantages and racialization of Asian Americans without ignoring our own roles in anti-black racism and settler colonialism. These opportunities are "teachable moments" as Asian American faculty have much to teach about the complicated ways in which white supremacy has operated within racialized communities. As Brando Simeo Starkey (2016), an African American associate editor at The Undefeated, emphatically put it, "We must understand that a national conversation about racism that ignores the plight of Asian Americans carries an unforgivable omission."

Black/White Binary Caution

A word of caution about the black/white binary paradigm in teaching and learning is in order. The black/white binary can suggest that the experiences of non-black minorities contain racial components only insofar as they are analogous to those of African Americans (Delgado and Stefancic 2012). This can result in the tokenized addition or the systematic exclusion of the experiences of non-black minorities in undergraduate curricula about American minorities. In the courses I have taught over the years that included race and racism in the US, my students consistently asked, "How come we weren't taught that Asian Americans experienced racism as well?" This kind of comments indicate that students have had limited (or no exposure at all) to Asian American history and experiences in other undergraduate courses. In this scenario, the black/white binary might have become the only framework employed to consider all American problems of race and diversity. This is not to minimize the incomprehensible suffering of slavery and ongoing antiblack racism endured by African Americans which is at the heart of the black/white binary. However, we also need to attend to the indigenous/ settler and orientalism/war binaries through which the structure of white supremacy has operated. In other words, the ideology of white supremacy operates differently in relation to each nonwhite racial group to the degree that no person or group's experience is so paradigmatic that it can encompass all other experiences. Students of all races and ethnicities can benefit from learning about the three binaries proposed by Smith (2006) and the experiences of racialized groups within the US. Having some understanding of the experiences of people whose lives are structured within these three racial projects is crucial in learning to live ethically in a multiracial America.

The differential racialization approach to teaching and learning is still a work in progress. Most instructors who teach diversity and inclusion in their courses are confident in their racial literacy. Although many may know African American history and some aspects of Latinx communities, most college and university professors know little about Asian American history and experiences. By the time students graduate, many have been exposed to some elements of African American history and the black/white binary (though admittedly insufficient), yet many of these same students know hardly anything about the experiences of other nonwhite groups— those seen as permanent foreigners (orientalism/war binary) or those who have become invisible in the US landscape (indigenous/settler binary). As Starkey notes, "By not studying how racism impairs Asian-American lives, we underestimate and miss crucial intelligence on how white supremacy sabotages the

hopes and dreams of people of color" (2016). In other words, to live in a multicultural and inclusive society, our students must cultivate racial literacy of American history as framed not only through the black/white binary, but also through the indigenous/settler and orientalism/war binaries.

At the local institutional level, nonblack minority instructors, especially tenured faculty, must work in concert with African American colleagues to ensure that students foster racial literacy of various ethnic minority groups. We need to move beyond "oppression Olympics," which tends to focus on which group suffers the most, to a differential racialization approach which recognizes the different ways in which power, privilege, and white supremacy has operated in the lives of all groups. Moreover, any university committee or group that has a majority of faculty of color must be attentive so that it does not become a way for the administration to "manage" minority grievances or become another committee for minoritized members to participate in with no consequential impact on the curricula and student programming of the institution.

In a classroom setting, a pedagogical approach that helps my students to better understand the Orientalist logic of the Asian American experience is sharing information that has been excluded from mainstream textbooks. For example, most Americans do not know that it was nearly impossible for Chinese women to enter the US in the 1800s, that the vast majority of Chinese women who did manage to come in the US were slaves (kidnapped for prostitution), or that American brokers in Southern Chinese ports captured, kidnapped, and indentured thousands of Chinese as slaves and transported them on American ships to Cuba, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, and Mexico (Pfaelzer 2007, 5, 26). Promoting racial literacy through storytelling also functions as a powerful means for discussion and reflection. Stories ensure that students speak from their own experiences rather than acting as native informants or speaking on behalf of their racial or ethnic group. As an Asian American who grew up in an inner-city black neighborhood, I am hardly a dispassionate interpreter of issues concerning race and diversity. Having my students read my own autobiographical theological reflection "Life in the Fishbowl" (Cheah 2020), and watch eighteen-year-old Canwen Xu (2016) tell her story "I am not your Asian Stereotype," makes the Asian American experience concrete and alive. Telling stories and sharing experiences also helps me to reclaim teaching and learning as an essential part of faculty-student dialogue. This kind of "talk-story" approach can build connections and community.

Race Essentializing

Corollary to the black/white paradigm is "race essentialization." Essentializing, in many ways, is like stereotyping as both involve generalizing what it means to be of a particular race. Some examples of race essentialization include: "Asians are inscrutable," "Blacks are lazy," "Mexicans are wetbacks." In her qualitative study of teacher and student interactions at a small public high school, Jane Bolgatz offers one way of handling this kind of situation. She observes American history teachers encouraging their students to look deeper into racial assumptions by asking two interrelated questions: "What do you mean?" and "How do you know?" (Bolgatz 2005, 70, 79).

I found this approach quite useful when teaching about sensitive yet important issues concerning race and religion. In such cases, the social positions of students play a crucial role. Sometimes white students are afraid to speak up in class for fear that they might offend students of color or that they might not look good in the eyes of their peers. In a class with mostly white students, discussion can devolve into a therapeutic session more preoccupied with individual wounds and hurt feelings instead of with critical analysis of race and religion. To counter this tendency, I depersonalize discussions by talking about the larger institutional dynamics and systemic racism, and encourage students to look deeper into their racial assumptions by asking Bolgatz's (2005) questions: "What do you mean?" and "How do you know?" After years of teaching courses on race and religion, I have become a good facilitator in encouraging students, especially those who must take enormous risks to name their own truth and oppression, to discuss issues of race and religion in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Indeed, in any course exploring sensitive issues of race, oppression, and religious intolerance, creating an atmosphere of trust and respect is vital. Providing ground rules or guiding principles for student discussion is essential.

Race essentialization is not exclusive to the dominant group. A nondominant student can make race-essentializing statements as well. Bolgatz notes a young African American student who said, "A young White man will never

understand. . . what it's like to be a young Black man" (2005, 79-81). The entire class went silent, in part because white students might have been afraid of saying something offensive to their black classmates. In this situation, we can use the strategy of critical interrogation to further discussion. We can ask, "How do you know that a white man will never understand what it is like to be a black man?" Bolgatz observes that students who seem sure what it means to be of another race can see the problem of essentializing when asked to self-reflect and to define what it means to be of their own race. Bolgatz concludes that when they dig deeper, students realize how delicate their definitions of their own race are, and how easily one might contest the meaning they attach to race. In other words, race essentialization shuts down communication through oversimplification and claims that one cannot know others. It removes the possibility of learning from each other and censors the plurality of voices that are so necessary in the discussion of race (Bolgatz 2005, 79).

Conclusion

At the copyediting stage of this writing, Governor Ned Lamont announced on December 9, 2020 that the state of Connecticut to become the first state in the nation to require public high schools to offer courses on African Americans, Black, Latino and Puerto Rican Studies effective fall of 2022. This will make history courses offer at the high school level in Connecticut more inclusive and better reflective of the history of the United States. However, there are some drawbacks to this approach. First, by making it an elective course of study, one wonders how many students who are not African American, Black, Latino, and Puerto Rican would take this class. Second, United States was multicultural from the very beginning: Our students should attain some critical literacy in the histories of the original inhabitants of this nation, those who were brought here involuntarily, those who came here to escape from political and religious persecutions, as well as those who immigrated here for economic opportunities. In other words, the histories and contributions of non-white Americans should be part of the canon of American history textbooks. Such a textbook should include not only the history and contributions of European Americans but also the pivotal roles played by African Americans in the black/white binary, Native Americans in the indigenous/settler binary, and other racial minorities in the orientalism/war binary. Once we have a standard American history textbook inclusive of voices that have been tokenized, distorted, or ignored altogether, it makes sense to offer elective courses on selective minority groups. Otherwise, the inclusion of selective minority groups in the school curriculum would further marginalize those who were excluded. Creating an equitable learning environment for the histories and experiences of various American minorities will ensure that students cultivate critical racial literacy of all Americans. Forming coalitions among faculty for updating curriculum and programming can ensure that students acquire pedagogical skills to resolve the problems of race essentialism that show up in every class on race and diversity and that students are prepared to live and work in a racially and culturally diverse environment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Cheah is Professor in Religious Studies and Theology at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut. He is author of two books and many book chapters and articles in the area of race and religion.

Ecological Conversion in the College Classroom: Practical Theological Reflection as Transformative Pedagogy

Christy Lang Hearlson
Villanova University

ABSTRACT

This essay describes an introductory theology course that appears to support ecological conversion. Ecological conversion is a term from Catholic Social Teaching popularized by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si';* it indicates a transformation that results in ecological spirituality. The author, a Protestant theology professor at a Catholic university, makes a brief case for ecological conversion in the university and offers three reasons for the course's impact: (1) a case study on consumerism, (2) a transformative pedagogy, and (3) cultivation of attentiveness to interconnections and personal involvement.
The central theoretical claim is that Richard Osmer's practical theological reflection cycle, when operationalized in the classroom, functions as a transformative pedagogy in the tradition of Paulo Freire, which can itself be seen as pedagogy of conversion. The author shows how the course units track with a conversion sequence outlined by Lewis Rambo while calling for student agency and appropriation, thus supporting ecological conversion. The author details teaching practice and student engagement.

KEYWORDS

ecological conversion, pedagogy, Richard Osmer, integral ecology, transformation, Lewis Rambo

Ecological Conversion in the Classroom

Claire,[1] a reflective freshman, waited until the classroom emptied. She asked me, "I hope this isn't too personal, but what *does* Christmas look like at your house?" She explained, "I don't want to go home for the holidays and act like nothing has changed. Because for me, this hasn't just been a class. I feel like I'm a completely changed person, but people at home haven't been in this class. I'm not sure how to go home and explain why I'm not going to the mall."

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1 Name changed; story used with permission.

I would argue that Claire has undergone conversion—specifically, ecological conversion. Ecological conversion is a term championed by Pope Francis in his encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'* ([Pope Francis 2015](#)). Beginning in joyful celebration of the earth's beauty, Francis urges humanity to hear the cries of our "mother and sister," who suffers under our planet-killing way of death. He calls instead for worldwide "conversion" to "ecological spirituality." At stake in this call is life itself.

Drawing on work with my colleague Timothy Hanchin, I understand ecological conversion as a transformation of the self-in-relation in which we come to perceive the interconnectedness of all things, including environmental and social crises, take greater responsibility for the consequences of our own thoughts, emotions, actions, and ways of life, and seek the good of our common home. Ecological conversion is a transformative process more than a moment, with continual possibilities for development. Christian ecological spirituality is premised on the trinitarian life of God, as well as on the Incarnation of God in Christ (Edwards 2014). But ecological conversion is not limited to Christians. As Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin argue, the planetary crisis makes ecological conversion urgent for people of every faith and none (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 336).

Ecological conversion is especially urgent for students in universities and colleges. As those who will practice leadership and governance in coming decades, they will play a pivotal role in worsening or addressing the ecological crisis. Yet despite the need for ecological conversion, few concrete proposals for teaching toward ecological conversion have emerged,[2] and almost none consider the university context.[3] What might appropriate pedagogies of ecological conversion look like, particularly in theology classrooms?[4]

As a practical theologian, I wish to answer this question by reflecting on teaching practice. This essay arose out of my experience of witnessing what appears to be many students' ecological conversion in an introductory theology class I teach ([Lang Hearlson 2019](#)). I have taught my version of Faith, Reason, and Culture in three semesters to five sections of about twenty-five students each, for a total of 123 students over two academic years. Claire was one of them. When I planned Faith, Reason, and Culture, I had no intention of instigating ecological conversion; rather, I wanted to teach students how to do practical theology—a learning goal that continues to be central. Yet ecological conversion appears to have happened. The question is, why, and what can other educators learn from this experience?

In the following, I first give a brief overview of course content and learning goals, as well as the teaching context. I then comment on the appropriateness of advocating "conversion" in a university context. Next, I offer evidence of ecological conversion in my class. In the central theoretical contribution of this essay, I propose that the course I teach scaffolds ecological conversion for three reasons:

1. The case study we use, consumerism, illuminates the need for integral ecology.

2. The curricular structure, drawn from Richard Osmer's practical theological reflection cycle, functions as a transformative pedagogy, which supports a common conversion sequence, as described by Lewis Rambo.

3. Osmer's practical theological reflection process fosters sustained attentiveness to interconnections, including the connection between personal habits and social issues, which is a mark of ecological spirituality.

All three reasons have explanatory power as well as implications for educators who wish to scaffold ecological conversion in an age of ecological crisis. In the practical contribution of the essay, I describe the curriculum, with attention to content and method, demonstrating how the course supports a process of ecological conversion.

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2 For one modest proposal, see Ayers (2017).
3 For an exception, see Bannan-Watts (2009).
4 I thank my colleague Dr. Timothy Hanchin for conversations and reading recommendations on this topic.

Brief Context and Course Overview

While I am a Protestant theologian, I teach at Villanova University, an Augustinian Catholic private liberal arts university whose student body is 75 percent white. Many students, though not all, come from wealthy backgrounds; the annual cost for an undergraduate is approaching $70,000. Students go on to leadership positions in business, medicine, law, and other sectors.

Every undergraduate takes Faith, Reason, and Culture, a foundational course in the department of Theology and Religious Studies that reflects the department's motto of "Faith Engaging Culture." Students normally take the course in their freshman year in a class size of twenty-five, and the sections I have taught have all been during the school year on a twice-per-week schedule, on campus, and in person.

As we prepare to teach Faith, Reason, and Culture, instructors have freedom of course design. The two requirements are that we draw on the Vatican II document Gaudium et spes and address three shared learning goals:

1. Articulate how theological concepts and religious practices and beliefs reciprocally interact with diverse cultural contexts, local and global;

2. Correlate theological/religious and cultural responses to existential life experiences such as friendship and loss, beauty and suffering, love and injustice; and

3. Evaluate the significance of Christian practices, beliefs, and traditions for personal, communal, societal, and global living.

    To these shared departmental goals I have added two more for my course:

4. Practice and become adept at a basic process of practical theological reflection of describing, interpreting, evaluating, and strategizing around particular issues or situations; and

5. Interpret and evaluate the semester's focal issue of consumerism and its relationship to Christian faith, as well as to your own way of living in the world.

These two goals reflect my training as a practical theologian, and they also set the course structure: over the term, we learn how to do practical theology together by describing, interpreting, evaluating, and strategizing around the case study of consumer culture while drawing on Christian resources and perspectives.

Conversion and College

Advocating "conversion" of any sort in an academic context is provocative. Conversion has, for good reasons, a host of negative connotations, conjuring painful stories of forced baptisms and psychological manipulation. Thankfully, substantive theological work on conversion has emerged in recent decades. Catholic theologians such as Mary Boys, Walter Conn, Robert Doran, Thomas Groome, and especially Bernard Lonergan, as well as Protestants James Loder and Katherine Turpin, have offered normative visions of conversion in which they argue for the centrality of critical thought and personal appropriation, and in which they posit aims of liberation, love, hope, and work for the common good (Boys 1982; Conn 2006; Doran 2006; Groome 1981; Loder 1989; Lonergan 1990; Turpin 2006).

In this vein, I understand conversion normatively and theologically as a process of holistic transformation toward greater awareness, authenticity, integration, and responsibility, wrought in the context of community by the Spirit who gives freedom. The aim of such transformation is close to Elena Mustakova-Possardt's elaboration of "critical consciousness." Expanding on Paulo Freire, she describes critical consciousness as a "whole-person phenomenon" (Mustakova-Possardt

2003, xvi) that "engages in an intuitive and progressively more conscious critical moral dialogue with the world, spurred by a quest for truth and justice," and moving "the individual into moral agency," culminating in "moral maturity and empowerment" (2003, 3).

As a process *of* freedom and responsibility toward greater freedom and responsibility, true conversion cannot be coerced. Still, as Groome, Boys, and Conn have all explored, teachers can play a key role in conversion, forming communities of learners, asking questions that prompt self-reflection, urging learners to take responsibility for their arguments, values, and actions, and modeling self-transcendence (Boys 1982; Groome 1981; Conn 2006, 179). As Groome notes, to play such a role fairly and faithfully requires teachers to reflect critically on their power and to submit to "ongoing conversion" themselves (1981).

The aim of transformation is common in religiously rooted institutions such as Villanova. For example, Villanova's learning goals include growth in moral integrity; intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth; and contribution to the common good.[5] Writing about the aim of transformation in Catholic higher education, Bernard Prusak justifies this "radical aspiration" on several grounds, noting (1) the holism of any learning process, which already assumes underlying virtues and values; (2) the fact that much education already aims at changing people's minds, which involves affect, and (3) the reality that professors often reach students' minds by way of their hearts (2018, 180–81). That is, educators are already engaged in formative and transformative work, and they may do it in better and worse ways.

Nor is the aim of transformation limited to Christian teachers; Mustakova-Possardt has argued from a Bahá'í perspective that nurturing holistic critical consciousness should be at the heart of education (2003, 167ff). Along with educators such as Groome and Turpin, she has explored educational and communal processes that support the development of expansive critical consciousness (Mustakova-Possardt 2003, 141ff). This essay seeks to contribute to that ongoing conversation; if a particular kind of transformation—ecological conversion—is urgently needed, what pedagogical processes support it?

Obviously, difficult questions of assessment emerge. How does one recognize and assess transformation? Should it play any role in the student's grade? Is ecological conversion a learning goal, a hoped-for side effect, an ideal, or something else? While a longer discussion is not within the scope of this essay, I submit that a teacher can facilitate moral and spiritual aspects of ecological conversion without requiring students to demonstrate ecological conversion in order to do well in a course. I indicate how I attempt to do that in the following discussion. I also believe it is possible to hold spiritual or moral ideals for the outcome of a course that surpass concrete learning goals, though it may entail them. Thus, as Prusak (2018) argues, teachers may hope for students' transformation while assessing student work according to academic standards that any student can achieve with effort.

"This Class Changed My Life": Evidence of Ecological Conversion

Conversion, as I have described it, becomes "ecological" as we begin to perceive the world as an interconnected ecology, and ourselves as part of it, and as our affections, commitments, and habits consider the flourishing of the planet, as well as other people. That is, ecological conversion affects both the content of our caring and the pattern of our thinking.

Of the 123 students I have taught in this course, only one has described himself as undergoing an "ecological conversion,"[6] but other evidence suggests a process of ecological conversion for the majority. For example, on the last day of class, as part of a class exercise, students write anonymous responses to open-ended questions, including, "How will your life be different after this class?" In response to that question, all twenty-two students in the most recent semester wrote a comment that reflected a deeper sense of their responsibility to other people or the planet, or that suggested a more critical assessment of normal habits of mindless consumption and disposal. Eleven out of twenty-two students described themselves as more "conscious" (used five times), "mindful" (four), "aware" (four), and "concerned" (two) in relation to

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6   Comment used with permission.

sustainability or their impact on the world and other people. Fifteen out of twenty-two also commented on either increased commitment to environmental care or to others around the world, including "people in faraway places that I didn't know existed before this class," or to both planet and people. Such responses parallel responses in prior semesters.

Another form of evidence comes from the final brief assignment of the course, which offers students the option of writing a letter describing what they have learned, how they have grown, or how the course has impacted them. Of the sixteen students who chose this option in the most recent semester, thirteen stated that the course changed their life in significant ways, deeply impacted them, or dramatically changed their perspective. All sixteen wrote about an increased awareness of social or environmental problems, and half discussed new alertness to the impact of their actions. Six wrote about a desire to show greater love for the earth and for others, and twelve said they felt more hopeful or empowered. Five described the practical theological reflection cycle as essential, while two named specific moments of that cycle as influential.

Of special interest to educators who want to increase student interest in theology, eleven of the sixteen volunteered that they had been skeptical about taking a theology course but now understand the discipline as relevant and exciting (another sort of conversion!). One described it as the most important class he took that semester; another stated he believed it was the most important course he would take in college. It is possible they were writing to please me. But those who wrote about the course's impact insisted on their honesty on this point, sometimes repeating their statements for emphasis. Additionally, the mean score of the same semester's course, as rated anonymously by students for "overall value," was 4.8/5, well above the mean score for courses in my department and the larger college in which I teach.

This data does not, of course, reveal the durability of change. Having only taught the course for two years, I do not know about enduring impact. A long-term impact study would be useful. But from where I stand, students appear to be reporting experiences of ecological conversion. The question is, why, and how might educators interested in fostering ecological conversion learn from this experience?

How the Course Scaffolds Ecological Conversion

In the following section, which serves as an overview of the course structure, I suggest three reasons for the apparent impact of this course. First, the course takes consumerism as a case study. Second, it uses a practical theological reflection cycle that facilitates a common conversion sequence. Third, the same practical theological reflection cycle attends to interconnections between phenomena, also calling for self-implication.

The case study of consumerism. Since this course is meant to introduce students to using theology to engage culture, my original goal was to teach students a process of practical theological reflection. Such reflection requires an object of study. I chose consumerism because it is a cultural and economic phenomenon many theologians have addressed, and because it intersects with multiple social issues, connects with students' experience, and is so pervasive as to be invisible. I hoped that as students studied consumer culture, they would practice skills in theological reflection and become aware of the scope of theology.

Consumerism is more than an aspect of the current global capitalist system. Psychologically speaking, consumerism can be understood as "the particular relationship to consumption in which we seek to meet our emotional and social needs through shopping, and we define and demonstrate our self-worth through the Stuff we own" (Leonard 2010, 145). Consumerism can also be seen as a larger ideology, a faith system that forms desires and imaginations (Cavanaugh 2008; Clapp 1998a; Beaudoin 2003; Kavanaugh 2006; Turpin 2006; Mercer 2005; Smith 2009). Moreover, since rapid consumption requires displacement of older items, consumerism may also be thought of as "disposerism," with serious environmental impacts. Because of these features, studying consumerism offers ample opportunity for examining interactions of faith and culture.

I suggest that a critical study of consumerism scaffolds ecological conversion because such a study points to the need for integral ecology. As William Cavanaugh (2008) shows, consumer culture is marked by detachment. We are not attached

to our possessions, since we constantly seek to replace them with new things; we are disconnected from the people and processes involved in production; and in a throwaway culture, we ignore the destination of what we discard (Cavanaugh 2008). Integral ecology, by contrast, perceives that everything is connected, including us.

In the course I teach, we search for such connections by learning where our things come from (always somewhere, from someone), as well as where they end up (there is no "away"). I emphasize that asking questions of origin and destination is, in fact, the habit of Christian theology, which wonders where everything came from (see Genesis 1 and 2) and imagines where it will end up (see Revelation), as well as what it means to live responsibly and joyfully in between. When students recognize the damage done by an ideology of detachment and willful ignorance, they also see the logic and urgency of integral ecology.

In addition to elucidating the need for integral ecology, a critical study of consumerism also points to the need for some kind of personal change. In Freire's terms, a consumer culture of detachment means we are alienated from the world, an alienation that is symptomatic of our "estrangement from [our] own creative and responsible drive for self-transcendence" (Conn 2006, 154). The choice to reclaim that drive for self-transcendence is, according to Walter Conn, a sign of conversion. If we do not wish to remain detached, if we want to take responsibility, then we are already beginning a conversion process.

Practical theological reflection as transformative pedagogy. To take on our case study, I teach students a practical theological reflection cycle adapted from Richard Osmer's work. I build the course units around the four "tasks" Osmer names for practical theologians engaged in the work of leadership: the *descriptive* (what is happening?), the *interpretive* (why is it happening?), the *normative* (what ought to be happening?), and the *pragmatic* (what might we do?) (Osmer 2008).

Something important happens when we practice Osmer's cycle together, and here I offer the main theoretical contribution of this essay. When operationalized as a pedagogy, Osmer's cycle resembles the methods of problem-based, liberative (also called transformative) pedagogies in the tradition of Freire (1990) and bell hooks (1994). One such model is elucidated by David White (2005), who describes a process much like that of Osmer, though citing Freire as inspiration. White's process moves from *listening* to *understanding* to *remembering* and *dreaming* and on to *acting* (2005). Jennie Knight summarizes White's "transformative" approach:

1. Listen for a community's concerns around a generative theme,

2. Seek to understand and think critically,

3. Dream and reflect on the resources of their own tradition, whether cultural, faith, or ethical,

4. Act by planning and implementing a project. (Knight 2008)

As discussed above, the goal of this process is critical consciousness, what Freire called *conscientization*, which is "at once a way of thinking, acting, and feeling" (Goodwin 2018). Freire's work was grounded in liberation theology (Elias 1976; Ferry 1996; Goodwin 2018), and, as Conn has noted, *conscientization* is a kind of conversion (2006, 155), when conversion is understood as "liberation of critical creative intelligence" (324 n. 117). I submit that when Osmer's cycle is practiced with a community of learners, it becomes a transformative pedagogy. Because the liberation of critical consciousness is a conversion process, and because transformative pedagogies aim at such conversion, Osmer's cycle, when operationalized as a transformative pedagogy, scaffolds a conversion process.[7]

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7 An instructive comparison appears with Thomas Groome's (1991) process of religious education, in which we (1) name and express present praxis; (2) reflect critically on present action; (3) make accessible Christian story and vision; (4) appropriate Christian story/vision to participants' stories and visions, and (5) decide/respond for lived Christian faith. Tellingly, Groome links his approach to conversion (1991). Osmer's work also resembles Bernard Lonergan's (1990) transcendental imperatives to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. Lonergan understands the appropriation of these imperatives to involve conversion (1990).

How do transformative pedagogies facilitate conversion?[8] In my view, transformative pedagogies are potentially powerful not only because they are participatory, formalized processes designed to reflect human problem-solving, but also because their sequence mirrors the pattern of religious conversion as it unfolds in "ordinary" life.[9] While religious studies scholars disagree about the specifics of the conversion pattern, Lewis Rambo observes a common sequence, drawing on studies in psychology, cultural anthropology, and missiology, as well as "numerous interviews with converts from a wide variety of backgrounds" (1993, xi). Rambo's sequence is: *context*, *crisis*, *quest*, *encounter*, *interaction*, *commitment*, and *consequences* (1993).

As there are similarities between Osmer's process and that of Freirean pedagogies, so striking parallels between Osmer's and Rambo's sequences also appear:

1. They both acknowledge a starting place in a larger context.

2. Rambo observes crisis that sets in motion a search, while Osmer advocates description that follows being brought up short.

3. Rambo observes a quest for understanding, while Osmer describes a multidisciplinary interpretive task.

4. Rambo observes an encounter with an Advocate of another way, as well as interaction with that Advocate, while Osmer describes a normative task where we listen to and critically evaluate wise guides.

5. Rambo observes commitment, and Osmer describes a pragmatic, strategic task where we plan and act.

6. Rambo observes consequences of conversion, and Osmer describes reentrance to the reflective cycle.

The point is that, as I built the course around Osmer's reflection cycle, seeking to teach students how to do practical theology, I inadvertently structured a process that supports (though surely does not "cause") conversion. When this cycle comes alive in a community, it is more than an objectified set of mental operations. It is, in my experience, a catalyst for transformation. Table 1 elucidates the relationship between Osmer's cycle, transformative pedagogies, and Rambo's conversion sequence.[10]

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8 This is not to say that all transformative pedagogies result in intended outcomes.
9 This insight, that formal processes can reflect informal ones, with powerful effects, is the basis of much experiential education (Dewey 1938; Lave and Wenger 1991; Mezirow 1991). Whether transformative pedagogies reflect a particularly Christian history of conversion and transformation is an important question beyond the scope of this essay.
10 This is not to suggest that these processes are all identical. Osmer and Rambo are more individualistic; Osmer has in mind the work of well-educated congregational leaders and theologians, while Rambo describes individual conversion. Freire, by contrast, envisioned communities of oppressed workers and their teachers. Osmer and Freire propose normative structures, while Rambo, working as a scholar of religious phenomena, describes patterned phenomena.

Table 1: The Relationship between Osmer's cycle, Transformative Pedagogies, and Rambo's Conversion Sequence

Osmer's (2008) Practical Theological Reflection Cycle

Experience of being caught up short	Descriptive Task What is happening?	Interpretive Task Why is it happening?	Normative Task What ought to be happening?	Pragmatic Task What might we do?	Action Re-enter the cycle

White's (2005) Transformative (Freirean) Discernment Process

Experience of oppression	Listen Discover a community's concerns	Understand Think critically about themes and discover root causes	Dream Reflect on resources of faith tradition; discover a word of hope and guidance	Act Plan and implement an action project	Reflect

Rambo's (1993) Conversion Sequence

Emerging Crisis	Quest	Encounter, Interaction	Interaction, Commitment	Consequences

Rambo's "Context"

Despite the power of structures, conversion is not induced mechanistically by structures, nor do teachers "convert" their students. The growth that can happen within structures depends on the mysterious movement of the Spirit, as well as on the inner work and agency of the "convert" and the support of outside guides.

Training in attentiveness to interconnections.

The final reason that the course may scaffold ecological conversion is that Osmer's (2008) cycle trains us in attentiveness to interconnections. For Osmer, theological reflection is grounded in the call to attentiveness, which he regards as a spiritual and academic discipline (Smith 2009). Osmer's emphasis on attentiveness resonates with Laudato Si', which depicts the "path of transformation" as beginning in "attentiveness to the world around us" (Miller 2017, 12). Osmer's cycle begins where the path to ecological conversion starts: paying attention.

The goal of attentiveness, Osmer says, is wisdom that perceives the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate realities in the whole "web of life" (2008, 16). Such a commitment to the web of life aligns Osmer's view with the vision of integral ecology, which Vincent Miller defines as "an understanding that interconnection is the essence of reality, as a way of

seeing that can perceive interconnections among humans and the rest of creation[,] and as a moral principle for acting in harmony with them" (2017, 11). Participating in Osmer's reflection cycle raises ecological awareness. This is a crucial point: regardless of the case study topic, using this cycle would help us perceive that all things are connected.[11]

The Course Curriculum: A Pedagogy of Ecological Conversion

The above discussion has theorized reasons for the course's impact, as testified to by students. In order to help educators picture the concrete practices involved in the course, as well as to support the theoretical claims, the remainder of the essay describes the curriculum. Throughout, I show how its structure, based on Osmer's (2008) cycle, aligns with White's (2005) Freire-inspired transformative pedagogy and tracks Rambo's (1993) conversion sequence. Each section offers a theoretical frame, a description of teaching practice, and an explanation of student work.

Setting the Stage: Doing Practical Theology Together

Conversion in context.

Every conversion occurs in a context. Rambo argues that context, "the total environment in which conversion transpires," affects the likelihood and shapes the distinctive unfolding of each conversion (1993, 20). Osmer (2008) likewise recognizes that every practical theological reflection process is sparked by a prior experience in a particular context. Transformative educators who wish to scaffold ecological conversion must attend to context.

Some context can be created: I actively cultivate a class ethos. I ask students to make name cards on bright cardstock, which we use all term. I claim the classroom as a "magic phone-free zone," and I ask students to put their phones away before entering, even if they are early, so that they can talk with one another. To enable such conversation, I play music as students enter class and post questions to discuss. I arrange tables in groups, with students facing each other. We begin with a ritual of silence, which ends with welcoming one another by name.

I also set a *moral and intellectual context*; in the first two class sessions, I describe practical theology as a way of doing theology that attends to lived realities and to God. Students name major problems facing humanity, and we list our options for response—denial, despair, frantic action, or sustained hope. I invite them to do the work of hope.

I must also acknowledge contextual givens and their influence on conversion, one of which is my own power as instructor—power to structure experience, give assignments, evaluate work, dampen or enliven motivation, and even create additional "oppression of learners" (Fenwick 2005). I must constantly interrogate my use of power, as well as submit to ongoing conversion myself, so that I do not fall prey to the temptation to turn students into versions of myself (Groome 1981, 485). When grading, for example, I offer clear rubrics and evaluate work on its demonstration of academic skills, including students' adequate interpretation of texts, support for their arguments, appropriate application of ideas, and quality of writing, not on whether they agree with me or with the authors we read. That is, a student can do well in the course even if she does not evince ecological conversion. On the other hand, I require students to take responsibility for their claims and value judgments, which, while an academic value, is also one element of conversion. In anonymous end-of-term surveys, students unanimously agree that I evaluate their work fairly. That said, one area of growth for me involves assigning more defenses of consumer culture, offering students resources for argument and multiple perspectives.

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11 Since I began teaching this course, I have learned that two colleagues at other schools, Dr. Amanda Drury at Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana and Dr. Terri Elton at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota also analyze a semester-long topic using Osmer's cycle. They have used it to address the topics of poverty, mass incarceration, and specific ministry tasks and also report powerful effects.

Other contextual elements also matter. The religious context of a Catholic university, where half our student body identifies as Catholic, heightens students' "religious availability," as Rambo puts it, to ecological conversion, since their "religious beliefs, practices, and life-style are to some degree compatible with the new option" (1993, 62). I am myself an ordained Presbyterian minister seeking to show hospitality to students of all religions and none.

Age is another contextual factor. Young adulthood, where my students find themselves, is a time often marked by shifts in commitment, as well as a desire for transcendence, which Rambo argues can initiate conversion (1993, 50). I am in early middle age and early in my academic career.

Finally, economic and social class and race are important contextual features, as my students attend an expensive private university and are mostly, though not all, from upper-middle class backgrounds. The majority are white, though certainly not all. I am a white female professor. These features affect how we experience and respond to consumer culture.

The Descriptive Task

Crisis in the descriptive task.

Rambo (1993) notes that "some form of crisis usually precedes conversion." Such crises may include dramatic experiences such as mystical visions and near-death experiences, or simply a "vague and growing dissatisfaction with life as it is." Crises can also be "externally stimulated" (Rambo 1993, 48–55).

Our unit on the descriptive task often precipitates minor crises. In the descriptive task, we ask what is happening in the case of consumerism, engaging in what Osmer (2008) calls "priestly listening." Intercession, Osmer notes, begins with "entering into the situation of others through personal contact, listening, and empathetic imagination" (2008, 35). The descriptive task is not detached observation, but a deep dive into the world's realities.

This task aligns with the listening moment in transformative pedagogies, in which the community discerns its concerns. Yet as privileged consumers, my students' anxieties do not immediately overlap with the dire concerns of those whom consumer culture most negatively impacts. Most of my students have been shielded; the world's injustices have been hidden from them, its cries muffled. For this reason, even as I ask my students to describe their world, I must also show them the world as others see it, as well as help them discern their personal connection to the world's problems.[12] In my context, this is my primary work in the descriptive task: to lift the obscuring veil, to puncture the soundproof wall and let the cries in—or, in the case of students who have experienced the world's injustices, to honor the knowledge they bring.

Teaching practice in the descriptive task.

We begin with a simulation of a real-life summit that happened at our university. The summit brought together administrators, factory workers, Nike representatives, and the campus student group that protests sweatshops. It occurred after garment workers at the Hansae factory in Vietnam protested appalling working conditions—a factory where branded garments of our university are produced. In our simulation, each group must describe reality as they see it. The conditions of the factory make the injustice of the global economy clear from the beginning, but the summit format also clarifies the complexity of the issues, as we learn that apparent "bad guys" (such as subcontracted factory owners) are themselves caught in a larger system. Often, this activity alone sets some students searching for ethically-sourced clothes.

After studying basic definitions of consumerism and overconsumption, we face the effects of the hidden production and disposal processes on which consumer culture depends. Divided into three topics, our study reviews the effects of consumer-disposable culture on (1) ourselves, (2) on the environment, and (3) on people around the world.

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12 For an extended treatment of the theme of transformative pedagogy with affluent young people, see Turpin (2006).

Recognizing the positive dimensions of consumer culture, such as choice, innovation, and job creation, we also learn about its psychological and health impacts. Students resonate with the overwork and debt consumers experience, and they appear struck by studies that show that, after a certain level of prosperity, happiness does not track with greater wealth (Leonard 2010). They volunteer stories about the anxiety of trying to keep up appearances at an expensive university. They also make laughter-inducing "anti-commercials" for common consumer products like t-shirts, lipstick, and aluminum cans, drawing on information in Annie Leonard's work, *The Story of Stuff*, to reveal the human health impact of such items (2010).

To learn about environmental impacts of consumer-disposable culture, we watch a video about ocean plastic that ends up in seabirds (Leeson 2017), and students look around the room, registering how many of them have brought drinks in disposable plastic containers. We also learn about water shortages related to overconsumption of water in agriculture and manufacture. Everything is connected.

To study impacts on others around the world, we read about enslaved fishermen who catch fish for American pet food (Urbina 2015), and study a photojournalism essay about a Chinese toy factory (Jacobs 2017). We watch a video about the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory in Bangladesh, in which 1,134 people died and over 2000 people were injured (Fitch and Ferdous 2014). Most powerfully, students watch *The True Cost*, a documentary that explores the interconnected injustices of the fast-fashion garment industry (Morgan 2015). Students begin to note that everything comes from somewhere, often from places we would rather not think about. In journals and class discussion, students have remarked that they finally understand that workers half a world away are real persons with recognizable desires. Everyone is connected.

In this unit, we become "painfully aware" (Christie 2017). One student wrote in a paper:

> I am in a pit of balls. I am desperately attempting to find my footing to propel myself above the balls and gain some air, but the ground is simply unreachable. I continue sinking deeper and deeper into the pit, as the balls consume my body, until I am entirely surrounded by them. There is nothing for me to do, except sit here and sink, further and further away from the top of the ball pit. . . . The problems surrounding mass consumerism seem suffocating, over-whelming, with no end in sight.[13]

As educator, I must not ignore crisis, especially if my course is provoking it. Sinking and suffocation can snuff out hope; anxiety and guilt can induce paralysis. Further, raising emotion without reflecting on that emotion would be an academic form of Finneyism.[14] So instead of putting our subject matter at arm's length, we probe our emotions as part of the situation. We stop and talk about how we feel about the stories we have encountered, naming our emotions and the thoughts that accompany them. We are a part of the situation, so we must also describe ourselves, discerning links between our emotional responses, thoughts, and lived choices. I also assure students that we won't wallow in sad stories forever.

Student work in the descriptive task. At the end of the descriptive unit, students write a brief essay. They choose between three options: to track their expenses for one week and note patterns in their spending, to trace the origin of one mass-produced item, or to track their consumption of one commodity for a week. They need not draw any conclusions at this point; they simply note patterns. They are often astonished at what they discover, and they appear eager to share their findings with one another. Many are struck by the difficulty of finding out where their stuff originates, while others say how surprised they are to see small things (whether purchases, paper napkins, or plastic utensils) add up quickly.

This seemingly non-theological exercise plays fosters the attentiveness Osmer (2008) urges of leaders, since students become aware of their own habits while learning from one another. They locate themselves within the larger system. One student shared that he threw away seventeen plastic water bottles per week. He calculated how many plastic water bottles Americans would throw away every year if everyone did as he did. He commented, "I used to see the problem as other people. Now I'm realizing I'm part of the problem."

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13 Used with permission.

14 Charles Finney (1792-1875) was a famous Presbyterian preacher in the Second Great Awakening who founded a science of religious revival. He famously played on people's emotions and anxieties in order to persuade them to convert to Christian faith and invented the "anxious seat" or "anxious bench."

The Interpretive Task

Questing through the interpretive task.

Rambo (1993) describes conversion as a process that begins with a context and is sparked by a crisis, which is in turn followed by a *quest*. The "notion of quest," Rambo writes, "begins with the assumption that people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance, and to resolve inconsistency" (1993, 56). After the plunge into the tragedy of the descriptive task, we enter the quest of the interpretive task, what Osmer (2008) describes as a period of sustained inquiry that listens to multiple disciplines and voices. In transformative pedagogy, this is the moment for "thinking critically about particular themes and discovering their root causes" (Knight 2008, 228).

Teaching practice in the interpretive task.

In this task, we seek to understand consumer culture better. For the sake of student agency, I introduce them to multiple interpretations of consumerism. I want students to learn the implications of our mental models and disciplinary perspectives, as well as to see that theology has become inherently interdisciplinary in the twenty-first century. We first interpret consumerism *historically* (Clapp 1998b), asking how it came about and what role religion played. We then encounter sources that interpret it as an *addiction* (Thompson 2012), as an *epidemic* (de Graaf, Wann, and Naylor 2014), and as the result of *evolutionary biology meeting modern technology* (Penn 2003). We compare and contrast these perspectives.

Moving onto the traditional ground of theology, we read interpretations that regard consumerism as a faith system (Turpin 2006), a spiritual training regime (Beaudoin 2003), and a form of systemic sin (*Laudato Si'*). We also discuss consumerism as a religion whose dominant mood is detachment (Cavanaugh 2008), and we construct a ritual calendar of consumerism, comparing it to the Christian calendar. The hope is that students will understand why consumerism is a relevant theological topic as they witness thinkers who bring theology to bear on the world.

Student work in the interpretive task.

At the end of the interpretive task, students write a second paper, drawing on two course sources to interpret their consuming habits or those of people around them. One student, for example, diagnosed himself as "addicted" to listening to music through his earbuds, cut off from everyone else, and he referenced Augustine's *incurvatus in se*.[15] Others have drawn on Tom Beaudoin's (2003) work to explain the preponderance of certain high-status brands among university undergraduates, while others have brought theological and evolutionary perspectives into conversation. As before, students share these papers with one another, and note how diverse disciplines help them understand the same phenomena differently. I have found that the interpretive quest changes how students think about theology. Over the course of teaching this class, I have several times heard students say something like, "I now see that theology isn't just about religion. It can pertain to almost anything you do."

The Normative Task

Encounter and interaction in the normative task.

Following the quest, Rambo describes an encounter with an "Advocate" of a new religious, spiritual, or moral option, noting, "encounter might be seen as the vortex of the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place" (1993, 87). Since humans struggle to imagine possibilities for different ways of life until we have witnessed something new, this encounter

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15 Used with permission.

is crucial, offering what Turpin calls "alternative imaginations," which include "alternative stories, symbols, and practices to live by" (Turpin 2006, 64). This encounter is followed by a period of interaction. Rambo comments of this phase, "For people who continue with a new religious option after the initial encounter, their interaction with their adopted religious group intensifies." Potential converts are invited to "become more fully incorporated" into a new group (Rambo 1993, 102).

In my course, the normative task of practical theological reflection provides sustained encounter with multiple Advocates of alternative visions, as well as opportunities for critical interaction. According to Osmer, the question of the normative task is, "What ought to be happening?" In this task, we seek a guiding vision, looking to theological and ethical norms, as well as examples of good practice, and reflect critically on those norms (Osmer 2008, 132–33). In transformative pedagogy, this is the phase of "dreaming," or "reflecting on the resources of one's faith tradition and discovering a word of hope and guidance about how to address the theme from a faith perspective" (Knight 2008, 228).

Teaching practice in the normative task.

To begin the normative task, we discuss visions of the good life. We examine the normative visions embedded in advertisements, noting how these visions of the good tend to be narrow, aimed at personal happiness. We contrast the ads with the expansive visions of Chief Joseph, Alice Walker, Susan B. Anthony, and Jesus. We discuss the power of normative visions to shape our picture of a good life.

Throughout the unit, we evaluate sources of normative visions that might help us respond to consumerism. For example, we do a dramatic reading of the first Genesis creation story, noting its call for human "dominion." I explain the ambivalent history of dominion, and students articulate the liability and potential of this story for environmental responsibility. We also enact trinitarian *perichoresis*: three students stand at the front of the room throwing objects to one another, and then begin throwing them out to other students, who toss them back. This kinesthetic task illustrates that in a Christian view, divine life is interconnected and opens out to include human life in a world that bears the imprint of God. Everything is connected.

We also examine Jesus' teachings on money, elements of Catholic Social Teaching, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon on the Good Samaritan (King 1962), the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Douglas Hicks' examination of justice (2010), and Laura Hartman's discussion of neighbor love (2011). Each of these "Advocates" offers "alternative visions." Students are by this time sensitized to the urgency of these visions; they understand what is at stake—their own well-being and the life of the planet—and they demonstrate moral and intellectual intensity in their journals and class discussions.

Student work in the normative task.

Rambo's (1993) "interaction" is most evident at the end of the normative task, when students write a third essay. Here I ask them to bring their own values, principles, or inherited stories into dialogue with one of the documents we have discussed. For example, students might describe a deeply-held value or tell a family story and then show how one of the thinkers we have encountered would expand the scope of its import. They may also disagree with their chosen thinker, as long as they explain their interlocutor's position clearly.

One Latina student began her paper by describing the practice of mutual blessing in her family. In a sign of love and respect, she greets her parents, saying, "*Ción*," (short for *benedición*, or "blessing,") and a kiss, and her parents reply, "*Dios te bendiga*," returning her kisses. She wrote how *Laudato si'* "emphasizes how these values [of love and respect] should be extended beyond our immediate worlds." She reflected, "When my family eats dinner, I thank my mother for preparing the meal that I am able to enjoy, but I don't say '*bendición*' for the immigrant farmers who work long hours under the sun to pick the vegetables in my food." She then considered how Francis' critique of anthropocentrism challenges her to speak *bendición* to non-human creatures. If her life is to express *bendición* to all, she wrote, it will happen in

both prayer and action, which includes "joining the fight against unethical consumerism, donating to charities that fight against sweatshops, no longer using things that have animal cruelty involved in [their] production, and not support[ing] companies that inadequately pay their workers."[16]

To be clear, these were her solutions. For a student who had never studied theology, this was an extraordinary work of practical theology, building on her own (nonconsumerist) cultural resources and on the wisdom of the church to respond to real-life suffering.

The Pragmatic Task

Encounter and commitment in the pragmatic task.

In Rambo's description of conversion, interaction culminates in commitment, what he calls "the fulcrum of the change process" (1993, 124). He notes that commitment may include "a specific turning point or decision," which is "often dramatized and commemorated—sealed with a public demonstration of the convert's choice" (124). Commitment is a possibility for students in the final unit of the course, when we do the pragmatic task of practical theological reflection. In Osmer's words, they are "forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable" (2008, 176). In transformative pedagogy, this is the moment for "planning and implementing an action project" (Knight 2008, 228).

Teaching practice in the pragmatic task.

Students often spontaneously cheer when we reach this unit; they are restless to act. Even as I give students space to "seal" any commitment publicly, I also want them to think critically and exercise freedom. Thus, as with the first three units, I invite students to study multiple possibilities, which in this case means encountering diverse models of response grounded in Christian history. (This is a reversal of many theology courses, which start with history as background. Here we retrieve history as a resource for strategic hope).

We start with the "ethical consumer" response, an approach with roots in religious campaigns. The core question here is, "Is there a more ethical, sustainable way to buy the things I want?" To answer this question, they work in groups, doing online research to complete "Ethical Consumer Challenges." Groups find an "ethical" woman's summer wardrobe; plan a sustainable birthday party; furnish an apartment with only secondhand goods found online nearby; find sustainable footwear for a man, and so on. This activity alerts students to the existence of companies who put sustainability at the core of their mission, as well as to sources of secondhand items. Remarkably, students have often told me in class that they previously believed there were no alternatives to buying new products made in sweatshops.[17] After they share their discoveries with classmates, I ask them to critique ethical consumerism. They identify problems with this approach's anthropology (we are still private consumers) and its neglect of the addictive quality of consumerism.

Noting such insufficiency, we move onto the next approach: asceticism. We meet the desert fathers and mothers, with their self-discipline and discernment. Instead of asking about better ways to buy, the ascetic asks, "Why do I want this in the first place? Am I capable of saying no to my fleeting desires?" We brainstorm contemporary ascetic possibilities, and I introduce them to ascetic movements such as Buy Nothing Day and minimalism. In response to asceticism, we consider aesthetic approaches—our third approach—that emphasize delight in the created world, savoring what we consume, and making rather than buying things. The core question here is not, "Can I say no to myself," but, "Can I love what I already have?" To invite critical thought around each of these approaches, I invite students to take up a position in the room that

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16 Used with permission.

17 This project, I joke with students, hacks their lives, because henceforth, the algorithms that feed advertisements to their laptops and phones will reflect their expressed interest in ethical, sustainable products. It is, I admit, a manipulation of the sources of manipulation in their lives.

indicates whether they think asceticism, marked by self-discipline and restraint, or aestheticism, marked by gratitude and savoring, is more important today in responding to the ecological crisis. The ensuing debate clarifies the potential and liabilities of each approach.

We go on to study a monastic-communitarian approach, asking how community can sustain us and hold us accountable, and a vocational/Sabbath approach, asking how work and rest together can provide meaning to life and respond to the world's crises. We end with a citizenship approach, learning the importance of seeing ourselves not only as consumers, but as active citizens who can join together to change the world. While each of these studies serves as another "encounter with an Advocate," we also stop to consider what effects commitment to each approach would have on our lives.

Student work in the pragmatic task.

Commitment becomes clearer as students take the lead in group presentations, in effect engaging in Rambo's (1993) "public demonstration" of whatever commitment they feel ready to make.[18] In these presentations, students describe one bounded issue related to consumerism and then use Osmer's (2008) practical theological reflection cycle to inspire responses. Topics of these presentations, which students generate themselves, have included dealing with the plastic water bottle crisis, breaking the fast-fashion habit, eating sustainably, celebrating an ethical Christmas, and holding more responsible summer barbeques. The groups offer possibilities for individual and collective action, after which the class enjoys a lively discussion, often with some controversy.

I grade each group according to a clear rubric, with the most important element being coherence; that is, their proposals for action must reflect their interpretation of the problem and their agreed-upon normative commitments. That is, they need to show that they can do practical theology. While many groups have cited scripture or Christian doctrines, others have drawn from human rights statements, while others have adapted Christian thinkers to articulate a secular normative vision.

In this way, we conclude Osmer's (2008) practical theological reflection cycle, having described and interpreted consumer culture from multiple perspectives, considered diverse theological and ethical viewpoints, and encountered multiple models of response. Throughout, I emphasize such multiplicity so that students do not perceive one single answer to the problems we face, but must instead recognize their viewpoints, articulate their deepest values and visions, and take ownership of their responses.

Learning to Care

In *The Moth Snowstorm*, Michael McCarthy observes that "most ordinary individuals do not care" about the ecological crisis "because people are quite naturally focused on their own concerns, which often seem harmless enough, and do not grasp that the essence of the trouble to come is their own individual choices, multiplied seven billion times" (2015, 19).[19] In my theology course, I have seen students start to care, even passionately, about other people and the planet, as they draw connections between their decisions and larger crises. I have seen students move beyond caring to hoping, as they imagine strategies of response.

I have theorized in this essay that such transformative change occurs for some students because the course (1) uses the case study of consumerism; (2) employs a transformative pedagogical approach that supports a conversion process; and (3) teaches attentiveness to interconnectedness. My hope is that other educators might adapt this approach to their own contexts as they teach the next generation of leaders to attend to their world, seek understanding, discern abiding values, and act for the common good.

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18 Not wanting to make public commitment a requirement, I used to offer students a choice between a group presentation and a final long paper. After multiple students who chose the final paper said that they wished they had done the group presentation, I changed the requirement so that everyone participates in a presentation, still offering multiple ways for them to participate.

19 Again, I thank my colleague Tim Hanchin for recommending McCarthy's book.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christy Lang Hearlson is Assistant Professor of Religious and Theological Education at Villanova University. She is a practical theologian with a specialty in religious education, with interests in spirituality, attention, consumer culture, the spiritual lives of children and adolescents, and consumer culture.

ARTICLE

Diverse Muslim Narratives: Rethinking Islam 101

Hussein Rashid
Independent Scholar

ABSTRACT

At this point, the critique of the study of religion as emerging out of a normative Christian framework is well-established in the field. Edward Said's argument for the ways in which Islam is constructed to meet American political interests, rather than an engagement with Muslims and their religion, is nearly forty years old. These power dynamics mean that students, through popular discourse, understand Wahhabi Islam as Sunni Islam, which they consider the "true Islam" against which other Islams are judged. I propose a model of looking at how Muslims define their religion through contestation and relation which allows students to understand the dynamic nature of their traditions. The approach I outline gives a greater breadth of material represented by a global religious community with over a millennium of history.

Introduction

Over the last several years of teaching courses related to Islam, I have had to contend with what students think they know about the religion.[1] Most of the time, their knowledge is framed by media coverage of Islam (Salem 2016).[2] This has been true in multiple contexts: a small liberal arts college, a large public university, several large private universities (including an R1), and several non-Muslim seminaries. Initially, I tried to understand that knowledge base and to engage it. However, I quickly realized that such an approach did not allow me to teach the richness of Islam, nor does it actually help the students learn. Starting with their preconceived notions of what Islam is reinforces that what they think is correct, and makes it more difficult for me to introduce a more expansive vision of Islam (Lakoff 2014; Ecker, Swire, and Lewandowsky 2014; Chan, Jones, Jamieson, and Albarracín 2017; Peter and Koch 2019).[3]

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1   I am indebted to the 2017–2018 Wabash Center Colloquy on Writing the Scholarship of Teaching in Theology and Religion, for the space, time, and funding to work on this article. In particular, the critical eyes of Thomas Pearson, Eugene V. Gallagher, Kwok Pui-Lan, Beverley McGuire, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, David Howell, and Martin Nguyen were helpful to me during my process. Thanks to my reviewers, especially the one who encouraged me to think of faith (*iman*) and religion (*din*) from within Muslim contexts.

2   For a brief discussion of how the university perpetuates media descriptions of Islam, see Kurzman and Ernst (2012, 26).

3   I rely on communications training that I have done to inform my reframing. I start with the knowledge in the frame I wish them to have, so that

In time, instead of meeting students where they were, and risk validating incorrect information, I started to teach Islam as though none of them had any knowledge of the religion. There were two major problems with this approach. The first problem was that students believed that they did know something. That belief was not incorrect; they did know something, and I was not showing them the respect of engaging with what they knew, whether to amplify or to correct that knowledge (Ambrose 2010, 10-39). I needed to demonstrate that they had knowledge, without validating that knowledge as correct. The second problem was that my reaction validated their perception of Islam as *a* tradition.

I questioned what I wanted students to understand, at a basic level, about Islam. I wanted to reveal to them the work of the discipline (Smith 2014). For me, this is that Islam is compromised of believers, Muslims, who are making meaning in a bounded system. In essence, I need to focus on a basic religious studies methodology: why people believe what they believe and how they express those beliefs. With that realization, I rethought how I approached my introduction to Islam.

Intellectually, I knew the formation of the study of religion was biased towards a baseline of Christianity as to what constituted true religion. (For an exploration of what this bias looks like in institutional practice, see Gallagher [2018]). The study of Islam inherited some of these structural biases, producing images of a normative Islam, Sunni Islam, and a heterodox Islam, Shi'i Islam. This construction shaped media images of Islam, which students were consuming. In response, I constructed an introduction to a method that was based on a religious literacy approach, which speaks to questions of context and power. The narrative of Islam I constructed was about contestations of power and leadership in the community, and how religious texts are utilized to explain and construct different models of authority.

This structure allows me to say to students, "You may have some information, but there is a method to how we will approach that information," so they feel respected, and can focus on the process of what we are doing (Nilson 2016). I guide them to understand that religion does not exist outside of the world, but is shaped by material realities. I can illustrate that different Muslim communities exist, and exist in relation to one another, so that I am not reifying "Islam" in a different way than the media might. They hopefully witness Islam as a living tradition that has importance to adherents of the religion (Khoja-Moolji 2014).

This article presents how I have structured my courses to consider critiques of the study of religion, student learning, and the diversity of ways of being Muslim. Some of this information will be familiar to those who specialize in teaching Islam, although there is new material for specialists. My hope is that this piece will be useful to those who are teaching about Muslims, either as specialists or non-specialists, in constructing their courses. The broader theoretical interventions can also be applied to the study of other religious communities and other lived traditions.

The structure of my current class introduction focuses on lived traditions to illustrate the principles of religious literacy. The readings I give students provide grounding knowledge with which I believe they should be familiar, and to which the class can refer for a common vocabulary. Barring questions from the students, class time is not spent discussing the readings, upon which they have done short reflection papers, but on illustrating the principles that should be drawn out from the week's work. The material is also structured to be spiraling, so that there is a clear methodological center to the work we are doing—there are many understandings of Islam that emerge from different contexts—and so that students can make connections across different units. Each unit ends with a demonstration of how Muslims are living their lives in the present day, so students witness the vitality of Muslim traditions. My primary concern in this article is how we educators can better teach the diversity of Muslim traditions through course design. Part of the design is based on student feedback and looking at how students are demonstrating their learning. While an extended discussion of student learning is beyond the scope of this paper, it is an important input in the structure, through formal and informal mechanisms. The following course outline is for the first half of a class that meets for fourteen to fifteen weeks, twice a week, for seventy-five to ninety minutes per class.

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becomes our common environment. Peer learning allows them to critically approach incorrect framing and information, without me telling them they are wrong. Students also restate their knowledge in a sympathetic frame for the class, which should be more durable than simply repeating what I suggest as a frame.

Study of Religion and Study of Islam

The category of religion is one that is imposed from outside a tradition, and as such, inherits the biases of the observer (Morgenstein Fuerst 2014, 226). As the study of religion emerges as a discipline distinct from theology, it maintains Christianity as the "normative paradigm" for understanding what religion is and should be (King 1999, 36). Using Christianity as the model for religion is masked by the language of objectivity and secularism (Asad 1986, 23; King 1999, 42-43; Morgenstein Fuerst 2014, 229). Emic notions of what a religious life could mean are submerged into an "objective standard" of what a religion is, without any attention given to the fact that not all religions are Christianity. As other traditions are measured against Christianity they are found wanting, so the study of religion is invested in the process of othering. The category of "world religions" is a manifestation of this othering process (Masuzawa 2005, 22, 49).

In this context, Islam is constructed through its textual tradition, favoring the language of Arabic and the legalistic mode of the religion over other methods of interpretation (see Kurzman and Ernst 2012). Other understandings of Islam are treated as deviations from the religion. There is no understanding or investigation of how regional situations affect the practice of the religion; that work is coded for area studies, not religion (Hodgson 1974a, 40). This simplified view of Islam is reinforced through academia, media, and governmental agencies (Said 1981, 136). The result is an anthropomorphized Islam—so that "Islam" is treated as a person with agency of its own—where the actions and beliefs of Muslims are irrelevant; this construction of Islam is the "true" understanding of the religion.

I argue that this "Islam" is described and manifested through two mechanisms: culture talk and scripturalism. Culture talk is the reduction of complex facets of a religion to a deterministic essence which explains the actions and behaviors of Muslims (Mamdani 2004, 17-62; Reinhart 2002, 24). Scripturalism is predicated on a Protestant understanding of scripture, whereby the Qur'an determines the behavior of a Muslim without consideration of any other factor (Ernst 2003, 55).

The construction of a legalistic, Arab tradition that can be essentialized and indexed to a preferred form of Christianity results in a Sunni Islam emerging as the normative Islam. But Sunni Islam is no more orthodox than other traditions: there are a multitude of interpretations determined by time and place. According to historian Farhad Daftary, orientalists "studied Islam according to Sunni perspectives and, borrowing classifications from Christian contexts, treated Shi'ism as the 'heterodox' interpretation of Islam, or even as a 'heresy,' in contrast to Sunnism which was taken to represent Islamic 'orthodoxy'" (Daftary and Miskinzoda 2014, 55). The theology of Sunni Islam did not recognize Muhammad's designation of a successor to his spiritual and religious role: his cousin and son-in-law Ali. The group that did recognize Muhammad's designation are known as the Shi'ah, short for Shi'ah Ali (supporters of Ali).

With this knowledge of the biases of the field, we scholars must think through how we teach about religion generally, and Islam specifically, to ensure that the diversity of voices within a tradition emerge. We also have to be careful to not simply present a laundry list of interpretations, without providing them within a web of meaning, including contexts and relationships (see Gaiser 2017). A cultural studies approach allows this sort of reimagining of the field.

Cultural Studies

Islamic studies scholars Carl Ernst and Richard Martin ask the key question for thinking about how to restructure an introduction to Islam: "why should the study of other [non-Arabic legal discourses] historically important (if not outright dominant) Islamic discourses such as Sufism, Shi'ism, philosophy, poetry, ethics, and history be ignored or dismissed in an effort to maintain an old, some might say 'Orientalist,' criterion of what is authentic or normative?" (2010, 14). By asking this question, we must confront not just the "why" of the current structure, but the "how" of creating something different.

Obviously, even a full semester introductory course could not meaningfully cover every aspect of Muslim understandings of Islam. However, even a truncated introduction should be enough to demonstrate (and help students internalize) that a variety of "Islams" exist (Asad 1986; El-Zein 1977). Talal Asad, an anthropologist, offers a way to recognize the contextual nature of interpretation of Islam, and the particularities of the expressions of those interpretations. He says, "the variety of traditional Muslim practices in different times, places, and populations indicate the different Islamic reasonings that

different social and historical conditions can or cannot sustain" (Asad 1986, 23). Asad would have us look at the meanings Muslims make of their tradition synchronically, and how those meanings define community (see Blizek 2009, 103; Hahn Tapper 2016).

In order to adapt Asad's insights into a structure for the course, I turn towards the Birmingham school of cultural studies. In part, their orientation is to "enhance and celebrate" social experience while understanding the causes of those experiences, and to recognize culture as everyday experiences, not something distinct from daily life (During 2005, 1). Both elements recognize the role believers have in generating their own understanding of religion, preventing us, as observers, from giving defining descriptions of what it means to be Muslim. Our sense of religion moves from being based on Christianity as a theological model, to the traditions people inherit and create on their own terms (King 1999, 42-43). From a pedagogical perspective, as students investigate a practice of religion that situates it in materialist constraints, they remove any notion that they can provide an "objective" definition of the religion; as observers, they are forced to recognize that they too are situated in particular circumstances that affect what they see.

In this educational position, we teachers must also be conscious of moral relativism. As religious education scholar Diane Moore states, totalizing knowledge and claims to objectivity and moral relativity are mirror images of each other. They allow the observer to deny responsibility and critical inquiry. Using multiple partial views allows us to actually generate a critical discourse (Moore 2007, 79-80).

For my approach to introducing Islam, I look at competing notions of leadership. These contestations of interpretations and of orthodoxies allow us to understand questions of relational claims to power (Lewinstein 2002, 52-53; Martin and Barzegar 2010, 182-186; Wheeler 2002, 11). I can situate the claims in history without making judgements as to which claim is the "true Islam" (see Hashemi and Postel 2017, 4-5). Since there is no declaration of a "correct" belief, I can also look at multiple ritual expressions of religion without offering a value judgement as to whether they are "Islamic," and simply observe what Muslims do. At the same time, I can discuss internal criticisms and defenses of theologies and practices.

Proposed Structure

To take the ideas of contested orthodoxies seriously, I must demonstrate to my students the ways in which the foundational texts of the religion are read. Religion scholars Laurie Patton, Vernon Robbins, and Gordon Newby speak of exercises that engage students in "interactive interpretation" (2009, 38). They put texts in conversation with one another across different religious traditions, while I have students focus on the same texts within the same tradition (see Nilson 2016). In this approach students engage with the same texts but with new parameters that allow them to see the texts differently. While Patton, Robbins, and Newby work across schools of thought in order to push bounds of comparative thinking, my approach focuses on a small set of verses from the Qur'an and traditions of Muhammad (*hadith*), to see how different Muslim communities approach identical texts.

Since students often have limited knowledge of Islam or Muslims beyond news media, my early grounding of the material is a hybrid approach that integrates history, politics, and religious literacy. As a result, the first few weeks of my courses tend to be more didactic than exploratory as I tell students what I think it is important for them to know. (Later in the course, the exploratory element predominates as we discover what is important together.) Once those initial parameters of the discussion are established, students are more comfortable engaging with the material and have a greater sense of ownership of it.

This brief outline shows how I structure the beginning portion of my courses. Many of the courses I teach do not require a prerequisite, so I find this basic outline useful for all my courses, from the Introduction to Islam to Islam and the Modern World to Muslims in America. I am also conscious that, as Gene Gallagher notes, my course may be the only class in religion that a student takes; I am responsible for contributing to their religious literacy in general, and their knowledge of Islam in particular (Gallagher 2009, 210; see also Smith 2014, 79).

My courses are organized by topics to indicate that they are not comprehensive units but spaces where I can enter into a discursive tradition for particular pedagogic aims (see Patton et al. 2009, 39). For example, the particular Qur'anic selections I use for an Islam and the Arts course would be different than what I use for an Islam and Politics course. However, in both instances, I want students to understand the role the Qur'an plays in the lives of Muslims, and that the ways in which groups make meaning of the text are always contextually constructed.

My approach is less historical and less prescriptive than others (Gaiser 2011) and more focused on diverse understandings of religious texts. This is what works for me in my Introduction to Islam course, how it fits into my educational approach to the study of Islam, and what choices I make to achieve those ends. Educators, I hope, will recognize where I am playing to my personal strengths and see ways in which they can play into their own strengths. The key point is to understand how my approach destabilizes a type of normative Islam that may appear in an introduction to Islam. The goal is to show the diversity in understandings of Islam that Muslims hold.

The basic structure of each unit begins with a broad outline of the material being studied, usually expressed in the topic title. As a class we then look at some text together. This text is usually not from the reading, which they have done and written a response to before class. We read the in-class text through the lens of the work they have done at home and understand how the theory is put into practice. These discussions are interspersed with audio-visual material, so students can witness the ways in which Muslims experience and express the interpretative details we are discussing. We discuss the material I curate to show how expressions change through time and place. In addition, my selections demonstrate that theoretically rigid boundaries of interpretation are in fact practically porous, so that students witness communities of interpretation borrowing from each other.

Topic 1: Study of Religion

Since my courses are usually offered through a religion department, the first week is an introduction to the field and the premises from which we will operate. The syllabus generally has some variation of the statement: "We [as a class] are not interested in determining if a particular understanding [of religion] is right or wrong. Rather, we want to understand the roles religion plays in society and for the individual." This statement opens an avenue to discuss our purposes: to observe truth claims, rather than make truth claims as to what Islam is. Therefore, as students of how religion functions, we will witness numerous competing truth claims. The key point of this introduction is for students to understand that religions are not monoliths, and that the understanding and practice of believers' religions is conditioned by the world in which they live. The introduction has to avoid a slide into moral relativism, where students suspend critical apparatus. Rather, we are interested in the context of the truth claims and how they relate to one another. It is at this point we discuss the work of Diane Moore (2006, 2007), an expert on religious literacy. Based on her work, and the selected reading the students have to engage with for the class, we establish certain parameters for the ways in which we expect to approach religion (Moore 2006). These parameters of religious literacy are:

Knowing the basic tenets of a religious tradition. We need to know the basic descriptive elements of religion, such as the core beliefs that make them unique from other religions, including how adherents define their sense of self compared to other religions. This survey allows us to have a common vocabulary and to challenge some of the assumptions we make about defining religion.

We do an in-class survey using The Pew Forum's *U.S. Religious Knowledge Quiz* (Pew Research Center 2021). I read the questions out loud and students vote as to what they consider the correct answer to be. I then ask them, "Simply because you know that Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims, do you know anything about why or what it means for Muslims in their daily lives?" We also critique the idea that Catholicism and Mormonism are separate religions and not different understandings of the same religion according to Pew. Because students often recognize both as types of Christianity, they are are more willing to think about more than one type of Islam.

Accepting that no religion is a monolith. This is easy to state but difficult to show, especially in a compressed time period. Showing contestations over how the religion is defined internally brings this point into relief, and the third point becomes more obvious.

Acknowledging diversity of expression in that tradition. Once students understand that meanings of the tradition are contested, they more easily understand that religion is expressed in a variety of ways. A majority interpretation is not *the* interpretation. For example, the first point of contestation for Muslim communities is the Qur'an. While individual Muslims may not consult the Qur'an for every issue, it is the point from which interpretation begins.

Understanding the way text functions, and the interpretations of the text.[4] Believers use texts in a variety of different ways and that engagement with text, both as scholastic and devotional source, generates different readings of the text. To illustrate this point, I have students imagine they are Martians who come to the United States and look at the national "scripture" of the Constitution. We start by looking for the primary message of this scripture. Each class generates different answers, demonstrating that they cannot agree on a basic message. I then provide them with some selections about money, and ask them where the Constitution allows the federal government to print money, especially money that is not tied to a gold standard. This exercise encourages students to think about the extra-scriptural material that is part of the act of interpretation. In this case study, it is about the role of the judiciary.

Connecting the understanding of text to the ways in which religion is lived. In generating different interpretations of the text, adherents generate codes by which they will live, so that distinct rituals emerge. Conversely, ritual is also an act of interpretation, so that people may live according to what they believe the text says, without scholastic grounding.

Recognizing that culture and religion interact and define one another. Religion is tied to the material condition of adherents. The ways in which believers approach their religion is impacted by their social, economic, and political environments. In turn, the broader society reflects religious concerns, usually of the majority religion. We complicate the idea that religion and culture can be neatly separated and divided. In class we use a working definition of culture as the product of human activity and religion as a manifestation of a struggle with the ineffable, therefore religion is the product of human activity, or culture.

I ask the students when they have holidays during the school year and what they are called. They quickly realize that winter break is really a Christmas holiday, and spring break an Easter holiday. We also talk about how the phrase "under God" was added the Pledge of Allegiance as a response to the perceived Communist threat, and was not part of the text from its genesis.

We end the discussion realizing that religious illiteracy is not limited to those outside a tradition but can also be exhibited by those within a tradition who see their understanding of the religion as the only, true understanding of the tradition. The study of religion must take into account interpretation and context, it must be interdisciplinary, and it is based in a power analysis. This caveat ensures that we do not take one Muslim's assertion as to what Islam is at face value. Ending on this critique moves us into a discussion of how Islam is studied.

This material is important for framing the course. While I do not consistently mention the principles again throughout the course, they do determine how I construct later units. As conversation spaces open, I will mention or discuss them with the class, but emphasize the "show, don't tell" approach to the material. This framework also helps create an environment where regardless of what students think they know, from the media or lived experience, they are forced to think through specific categories that they may not have considered prior to this course. This allows students to be more open to moving beyond what they think they know.

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4   Obviously, not all religious traditions have a written scripture to which they refer, but this course is Islam focused, so it is relevant.

Topic 2: Study of Islam

The class starts with the premise that we need to look at questions of power and narrative. While cultural critic Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism* is essential in understanding these questions, he does not directly address questions of religion in that work. Instead I assign students the work of a professor of Islamic studies, Carl Ernst (2003, 1-70), to bridge Said's work into the study of religion. This unit helps students understand how an identity is ascribed to Muslims, and the power of the describer.

We start the week with a discussion of a brief clip from the 1999 film *The 13ᵗʰ Warrior*, which is based on a loose retelling of the travels of an actual tenth century Arab traveler, Ahmad ibn Fadlan, combined with the story of Beowulf. The clip is of the first encounter of Ibn Fadlan with the Vikings whom he eventually befriends. I ask students to write a bullet-point summary of how Ibn Fadlan would describe the Vikings. Without delving into details of the movie, the five descriptors of Vikings we generally settle on during discussion are:

1. Violent

2. Dirty/unhygienic

3. Superstitious/illogical

4. Have poor gender roles/misogynistic

5. Uncultured/uncivilized

This conversation demonstrates two things. The first is how who defines the other is based on power. In the tenth century, it is the Arab-Muslim world that is the center of world trade and artistic and intellectual production. Therefore, as Ibn Fadlan would see the Vikings, they are pathetic. The second thing is the limits on the ways in which the other can be defined by those in power. We take the descriptors they have generated for the Vikings, and see how the same ones are deployed against Muslim, Black, Latinx, or LGBTQ communities today. The structural issues become much more obvious to the students.

The students then read a short section of *Orientalism*, where Said begins to define the term. The passage states:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and ana-lyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, autho-rizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said 1979, 3)

This selection demonstrates the institutions at play in establishing narrative control over a region, including academia, media, and governmental agencies (see also Said 1981, 161). In addition to the practical structure of Orientalism, which tells us such dominance is not accidental, we also look at the timing that Said puts forth, the late eighteenth century.

We use that time period to talk about the Enlightenment, the construction of the nation-state, and colonialism as a feature, not a bug, of the political and philosophical enterprises of this period. For this discussion, I draw heavily on the work of political scientist Mahmmood Mamdani (2004, 17-62). Informed by the work of religion scholar Tomoko Masuzawa, I return to the study of religion, and discuss the field's historic origins in this time period (2005). I help students understand that "religion" was indexed to Christianity, but the goal of a modern scholar of religion is to try to understand manifestations of religions on the same terms that adherents understand it, rather than in reference to Christianity or any other religious understanding with which they may be familiar (see Rashid 2018).

This discussion is reinforced by the introduction of Carl Ernst's use of "scripturalism," which he defines as "the expectation that one can understand everything of importance of the other religious traditions if one knows what is said in the their

scriptures" (2003, 55). His assumptions mirror the theoretical arguments that the class has been discussing, as he grounds his critique in Protestant Christian understandings of how religion functions and the role of text. We then revisit the points raised in the previous week around religious literacy. We return to the exercise on the Constitution again, and I ask students how the dynamic would change if the Martian had a gun and told them that they did not know what it meant to be an American; it is a crude exercise in exploring power relationships and how external forces can shape understandings of a religion.

These two units establish premises and methods for the class. Our individual understandings of Islam are conditioned by institutional framings of Islam, which are usually constructed as a means to dominate Muslims. The political forces are paired with religious illiteracy, which divorces religious expression from any sort of context, and creates a narrow understanding of the religion. I explain to students that we need to keep these biases in mind as we learn about Islam. We need to try to understand Islam in the numerous ways Muslims understand it.

Topic 3: The Qur'an

We start with the Qur'an, the sacred text for Muslims. At this point in the course, there is still a concern that students may make incorrect connections to what they think scripture is and how it should function. Since the point is to understand the Qur'an in its own way, and the ways in which Muslims struggle with the text, I try to make it acceptable for students to be unfamiliar with the Qur'an. If students do not believe they need to know the Qur'an, they are less likely to engage in superficial comparisons with other religious texts, of which they may also have little understanding. I assign readings that presuppose no knowledge of the Qur'an or any scripture in general. The first is a video by popular author Lesley Hazleton (2010). It is a TED talk that focuses on what she was surprised by as an agnostic reading the Qur'an. I couple this with a reading by Islamic studies scholar and Christian theologian Whitney Bodman (2009). His work touches on the struggle of trying to approach someone else's scripture with the biases of his own worldview. He also introduces some of the structural elements of the Qur'an. I choose these two sources to help students to feel more comfortable being confused about how to approach the text, and to reinforce the work of the previous units on understanding our own perspectives in approaching the text.

The third reading, Sells (1999), focuses on the oral-aural nature of the Qur'an. The text emphasizes the fact that many words in the Qur'an cannot be translated into English without establishing one meaning of a word that has multivalent meanings. Sells also demonstrates the aesthetic qualities of the recited Qur'an, and the effect it has on listeners, even those who do not understand Arabic. This point is our first entry into how the text functions as an emotive recitation.[5]

In class, we start with a discussion of why they have no direct readings from the Qur'an, but only references to selections from the readings. The rationale for this is to avoid having them turn into amateur theologians, creating meaning from the text that would not be recognizable to someone from within the tradition, or that simply confirms the biases with which they entered the course. We will read selections from the Qur'an as we engage with how Muslims have interpreted the text to create boundary definitions for various Muslim "communities of interpretation" (Daftary 1996). With this approach I am not trying to mask the work of religious scholarship but to reinforce the idea that we will not practice scripturalism. It is a method that emerges out of what I have outlined as limits in historical approaches to the study of Islam. This exemplifies for the students that the text is open to interpretation within the confines determined by Muslim communities.

In the beginning of the Qur'an class, we talk about the history of revelation and how oral texts are transmitted. The next logical question is what happens when an oral text becomes a written text? The first development is the emergence of a commentary tradition, allowing for a scholastic tradition, giving further meaning to the text. We also talk about how the meaning of the text can become fixed.

On the screen I display the following set of words and ask students to punctuate them.

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5   If time permits, students do a listening exercise where they listen to about six different recitations of al-Fatiha, and give their emotive responses after each one.

<div align="center">woman without her man is nothing</div>

Before asking them to tell me how to punctuate the sentence, I try to have a few of them read the words out loud. We then compare the reading and the unpunctuated sentence with two possible punctuated variants:

<div align="center">Woman, without her, man is nothing.</div>

<div align="center">Woman, without her man, is nothing.</div>

I point out that the words are the same, in the same sequence, with the exact same set of punctuation; only one comma is moved. This results in two sentences that give diametrically opposed meanings of the role of women in society. The "oral" text, which is unpunctuated, is open to interpretation by the listener. In the written version, the meaning is fixed, so the question of who is fixing the meaning becomes important. This discussion allows us to see that power determines what interpretation of religion is considered correct—it is not inherent in the text itself. The exercise is also a way for students to understand the contestations of meaning that occur and give rise to a diversity of interpretations within a tradition.

We end the unit with an exploration of calligraphy, which is enabled by the rise of the written text. Through this exploration, we see how scripture functions as devotional and artistic material, from amulets to monumental architecture.

Topic 4: Prophet Muhammad

After starting our study of the Qur'an, we turn to Prophet Muhammad, whom Muslims believe to have received the revelation of the Qur'an. The readings cover the history of the time in which he lived, his role in constructing ritual (both directly and indirectly), and as an object of devotion (Hussain 2010; Katz 2010; Saleh 2010). Our class discussions mirror this approach, looking at Muhammad as political figure, religious figure, and as a role-model and devotional figure for Muslims. Students need to see the overlapping roles Muhammad played in the community. He may be a prophet, but this is not a purely religious role. It entails having a role as a leader in the world, and as a model of perfection that Muslims want to emulate. Here, students should be able to recognize that to see Muhammad as having only one function limits their understanding of how Muslims interact with him. It is at this point that we can start talking about ritual, and differing ritual, amongst Muslims, as they look at the Qur'an and Muhammad for guidance on how to live their lives.

Our discussion of Muhammad as a paradigm starts with a verse from the Qur'an (33:21), where Muslims believe that God said that Muhammad was a "beautiful role-model." Therefore, in order to emulate Muhammad, Muslims need to know what he said and did, which is based on collected witness testimony known as *hadith* (tradition). We talk about the structure of *hadith*, and the ways in which people collected them and vouched for their veracity, and the grading of *hadith*. We then look at a short video of a lecture on Muhammad's relationship to one of his wives given at a gathering of Muslims (Sheikh 2012). The video shows how the *hadith* are turned into a narrative to offer moral guidance to believers, and become an important tool in the interpretative method.

From this exploration of Muhammad as a paradigm, we turn to another role of Muhammad—as an intercessor. This section turns to how the Qur'an deals with the power of intercession. We look at sections of the Qur'an to see how the Qur'an claims that all intercession belongs to God (39:44), that God can have someone else intercede (34:44, 2:255), the explicit endorsement of intercession (42:5), and that intercession will end (2:48). This reading of the text is the first of our provocations that looks at how the text is interpreted. We ask if the weight of text is such that intercession by a human being, like Muhammad, is impossible, or if possible, only for those God grants this ability to intercede. If it is the latter, we must then ask how do we know who was explicitly granted the authority. For the communities who do not believe in human intercessors, we question how they structure their religious life to come closer to the Divine. We end this part of the discussion with explicit references to Muhammad serving in the role of intercessor (48:10 and 4:64).

Muhammad serving as an intercessor leads to a discussion of a third role he plays, as a point of devotion. Using 33:56, in which the Qur'an says believers should send their blessings on Muhammad, we look at the ways in which Muslims do this.

The most basic form is known as *salawat*, and we listen to different versions of the *salawat* from around the world. We then move on to devotional songs, such as *qawwali* from South Asia, and more contemporary songs, such as American Muslim hip-hop artists, K'naan and Yasiin Bey's (Mos Def) "Prayers Song," and Lupe Fiasco's "Muhammad Walks." This survey allows students to engage with a living tradition that is manifested through the arts and is present in the United States. The material is less alien to them, and demonstrates how cultural conditions affect the expression of a religion.

Topic 5: Shi'ism

The earlier discussion on intercession lays the groundwork for the beginning of authority after the death of Muhammad. We ask what roles did Muhammad play, and which, if any, of those roles survive him, and how do they do so. Our first foray into looking at a clearly formed community of interpretation is the Shi'ah Ali, or Partisans of Ali. There is evidence that the theological origins of the community date back to the lifetime of Muhammad (Madelung 1997). Political and legal boundaries of the community developed slightly later, and all predated the formation of what would be called the Sunni community. Therefore, as a matter of historical narrative, it is most accurate to start with the Shi'ah Ali. This unit begins our process of understanding how text is utilized to construct boundaries, and what some of the cultural factors are which are at play in determining those boundaries.

Most of the background reading comes from a textbook on Shi'ism (Haider 2014). The class conversation goes through the various claims to leadership after Muhammad's death. One of the points I highlight is that although we are discussing the Shi'ah Ali (the present-day Shi'ah community), there were other shi'ah (partisans) who supported different figures to succeed Muhammad in different capacities. Therefore, it is inaccurate to speak of a Shi'ah-Sunni divide that goes back to the death of Muhammad. The use of "shi'ah" for different claims to succession makes it easier to highlight that these are conflicts over interpretation, rather than established theological positions and an insurgent theology.

We discuss selections from the Qur'an and *hadith* related to the role of Muhammad's family. While the preference is for the Shi'ah reading of the texts, we also try to read the texts in a way that is different. Because much of the distinction relies on the way the Arabic is structured, students often have to take my word on what the grammatical issues in the different readings are. However, one verse offers a clear number of readings in translation, and resonates with the discussion in the Qur'an unit on fixing the meaning of text through the act of writing. Echoing the earlier exercise of "woman without her man . . . ," I introduce the verse in question (5:55), which states:

> Your friend is Allah, and His Messenger, and the believers who observe prayer and pay charity, and worship God alone.

The key clause is "the believers who observe prayer and pay charity." As it is constructed in this translation, the friend of the believer, the one who is connected to God and Muhammad, is the one who prays and offers charity simultaneously. This act is a reference to a story common amongst Shi'ah communities that Ali, the first Imam of the Shi'ah, offered charity whilst in the middle of prayer.

Another way to read the text is to insert an extra comma, so it reads "the believers who observe prayer, and pay charity." This construction has less of a theological impact. God and Muhammad sit apart from other friends of the believer. These friends pray and offer charity as two distinct acts, so a believer should only take a believer as a friend. While not a perfect case study of what the process within Muslim traditions looks like, it is an effective comparison that encourages students to internalize how the process of interpretation functions.

From this early history, I turn to devotional material to emphasize that adherents are participants in the tradition and focus on what it is believers do. The material I use is from around the world, including South Asia and the Levant, as well as devotionals to Ali and Muhammad's family from non-Shi'ah communities in Turkey and India. The point is to destabilize notions of impervious borders between Shi'i and non-Shi'i communities. I end with a lyrical performance of "Love You More" by American performer Amir Sulaiman, to demonstrate the interplay between religion and culture.

Topic 6: Sufism

As we turn to Sufism, we are able to build on the work we did on succession to Muhammad, and articulate the different models of authority that emerge in Sufi communities. Many of the arguments that the Shi'ah use to argue for Ali's succession to Muhammad's political, religious, and spiritual authority to be the first Imam are echoed by Sufi communities to argue for Ali as the first Sufi. As a result of this parallel, we are able to do some slightly different work in understanding Sufi communities.

We again read selections of the Qur'an and *hadith* to understand that an approach of Sufism is the cultivation of an orientation to personal connection to the Divine. We also discuss some of the technical language of the practice of Sufism. However, much of our time is focused on looking at how the same core texts result in a variety of different practices. Many Sufi groups practice a type of devotional known as *dhikr*, or remembrance. This practice involves the chanting of Divine attributes, selections of the Qur'an, or other devotional material. Some groups do this silently, others do it out loud; some groups do it with still bodies, others do it with bodily movements. Looking and listening to clips of these allows students to witness how a common set of texts can result in distinct practices.

We engage in close reading of poetry, to see how symbols move through time and space and take on new meanings. Since Muslim legal rulings forbid intoxicants, we wrestle with how the symbols of intoxication in Sufi poetry are read within the tradition. We then extend the literary symbols to comparisons of devotional music and dancing as types of intoxicants, to understand the reticence some Muslims have towards engaging in these types of activities.

Perhaps one of the areas where students struggle the most is in understanding that the spiritual quest of Sufis does not mean an absolute withdrawal from the world but often demands a more active engagement with it: an engaged spirituality. While Sufi groups may not be interested in political power, that does not mean that they are apolitical, or have not allied with power. We read Sufism as a critique of power and authoritarianism (Huda 2007b, 695; Huda 2007a, 544; Abbas 2007, 628-632). One of our readings explores the construction of the term "Sufism" in English, and how it is based, in part, on Orientalist understandings of the tradition (Ernst 1997, 1-17). From here we can see how Sufism is constructed as a quietist tradition that represents a "good Islam," but that is not actually how the traditions function or perceive themselves. Through this comparison, we revisit our earlier discussion on how Islam as a whole is studied and presented. As with other units, we look at modern practices of Sufism, including in the United States. We question if those who identify as Sufi, but not Muslim, derive meaning from the sense of a religious community, or if they engage in appropriation. This discussion returns us to questions of power and authority, and the ascriptive ways in which Muslims are defined.

Topic 7: Sunnism and Shari'ah

By the time the class reaches the unit on Sunni Islam, the basic method of how communities use text to define themselves is fairly well established. In addition, we have discussed the multiple readings of texts. The point of this structure is not to invert the primary focus of study of Islam from Sunnism to Shi'ism, but to utilize an historical, cultural, and discursive approach to understanding the development of the traditions. The premise of the approach is through contestations of authority, with the focus on who gets to lead the community and how that affects expressions of beliefs. The first part of this unit is about understanding the formation of what we now consider the Sunni community in response to the so-called Shi'ah Century, when most of the largest Muslims empires were deeply connected to some sort of Shi'ism (Hodgson 1974b, 36-39). This period in the eleventh century, often misleadingly called the Sunni Revival, is the conglomeration of non-Shi'i groups into a more cohesive identity (Ephrat 2000; Tabbaa 2001).

Since much of the work about defining the community incorporates work from earlier units, we are able to discuss Muslim religious law, *shariah*, in the second part of the unit. I do not want to tie legal observance only to the Sunni community, so I remind students of the devotional material dedicated to Ali and Muhammad's family that comes out of Sunni communities, and that many Sufis identify as Sunni. I also point out that a Shi'i legal tradition emerges earlier than Sunni traditions. Many Sunni legal scholars studied with Shi'i scholars or Imams (Lalani 2000). This approach allows me to re-emphasize that although there are distinct communities, they are not neatly separated from each other.

In class, we do a quick exercise on how to interpret texts on intoxication as they apply to coffee and nonalcoholic beer. Using the same sources, we explore how cultural context and knowledge external to religious text influence their interpretations. This connection allows the class to revisit our understanding of religious literacy as being tied to material conditions, broader contexts, and power. I emphasize the question of power in interpretation by looking at several verses in the Qur'an and how they relate to gender. Informed by the work of Amina Wadud (1999), and more recently Ayesha Chaudhry (2013), we look at how text is historically interpreted to center the role of men in society. Returning to the methods we outlined in our first unit, we end the introduction to Islam by reflecting on how our method, informed by questions of religious literacy, challenge a unitary view of what it means to be Muslim.

Considerations

What I have outlined is a seven-unit introduction to Islam. In most of my contexts, that is seven weeks, one for each unit. However, the methodology is the important part and can be adapted to a variety of circumstances, including less time, limited materials, or not being trained as an Islamicist.

Students are most likely to encounter an introduction to Islam (outside of a dedicated course) in a survey course, like Introduction to World Traditions. In a class that covers a variety of traditions, Islam may only get two weeks. Even in that time, it should be possible to do much of the work of demonstrating how Muslim communities construct their boundaries in relationship with each other. From a content and process perspective, it probably makes the most sense to use the units on the Qur'an (Unit 3) and Prophet Muhammad (Unit 4). It is in these units that one can demonstrate how text functions, how it is interpreted, and how that interpretation connects to succession of Muhammad. By understanding devotion to Muhammad, students should be able to make connections to how different communities of interpretation in that tradition lead to different leadership figures.

Many educators are asked to teach traditions in which we have no specialization, particularly for survey courses. As scholars of religion, we may have taken courses on numerous traditions or taught courses as assistants on traditions outside of our specialization. However, the experience of teaching as the primary instructor for an unfamiliar tradition is qualitatively different. In this instance, I would think of the course as a methods course which the traditions illustrate. Therefore, in content selection and approach, I ask what material allows me to demonstrate the method. Lack of expertise on Islam should not be more of a burden than lack of knowledge of any other religious tradition. I believe the approach that I have outlined in this paper may be portable to teaching diversity in other religious traditions, through a combination of focus on theme and method; in my case, on authority and religious literacy.

Conclusion

I started by thinking about how to respect the knowledge my students walk into the classroom with. That lead me to better understand the limits of our discipline of religious studies, and the ways those limits affect Islamic studies. In order to teach more effectively, I had to rethink how to approach the Introduction to Islam.

The practice of teaching Islam in the American context has a particular intellectual pedigree. As an educator, I am aware of the critique of the study of religion as emerging out of a normative Christian framework. Edward Said's argument for the ways in which Islam is constructed to meet American political interests, rather than as an engagement with Muslims and their religion, is nearly forty years old.

I want to take the critique of power that scholars of Islam use in our research and think about the ways in which power permeates our discipline. In looking at a more comprehensive representation of Islam, I had to contend with the normalizing work that the discipline does, which is counter to the method I find effective.

While centering nondominant voices is an important start in the process, there is a deeper methodological question at play: Can we talk about a religious tradition without "taking sides?" Each person has their own biases, preferences, and

research interests. The push is not for an objectivity; such a claim would subvert the very purpose of the paper. Rather, recognizing our own situatedness allows us to push into a more reflective stance on what we are trying to achieve in the field of the study of Islam, located within study of religion.

Looking at how Muslims define their religion through contestation and relation allows students to understand the dynamic nature of the religion. My students may not fully understand the emic notions of religion, even in a fourteen-week introduction to Islam, but they should know that the ascriptive identification given to Muslims is incomplete. We academics can be as complicit in generating that identification as the media or the government. What I outline as an approach gives a greater sense of covering the breadth of material represented by a global religious community with over a millennium of history. Some of my students have gone on to write editorially reviewed op-eds about the diversity of Muslim life, and why it is important for others to know this information (Wiles 2016). These pieces serve as affirmations of my current approach. It is about teaching them about Islam, but also about how to be critical, active, expressive thinkers. While a broader discussion of student learning is beyond the scope of this paper, I am always conscious of trying to understand how students are taking their learning out of the classroom, and how to improve my practice for their learning.

My course structure tries to show the range of Muslims' interactions with their religion, and generates an ongoing tension that prevents either students or myself from making defining, theological claims. This first half of a course establishes space for the second half, where readings are all written by Muslims, to demonstrate the theories we have discussed in practice. It is an attempt to allow the subjects of our study speak for themselves.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hussein Rashid is an independent scholar, working at several universities in the New York City area. His research focuses on Muslims and US popular culture, and he is an educator and consultant working on public projects related to religion.

ARTICLE

Engaging Art to Teach Theology: A Brief Introduction to Resources

Jennifer Awes Freeman
United Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT

Visual art is an often-neglected resource in the theology classroom. This essay argues that it is essential to include visual resources in theological education to present a more robust and accurate understanding of theology as it has been not only written, but also lived. Art can be incorporated into lectures and assignments to complement or complicate what students find in theological texts. After outlining some of the basic principles of using art to teach theology, this essay provides one such example that could be applied to a lesson on Reformation theology. It concludes with annotated bibliographies on print and digital resources.

KEYWORDS

anti-racist, art history, historical theology

Professors of theology often neglect what should be one of their major sources: the visual arts.[1] To illustrate by contrast: it would be unthinkable to study, say, medieval art history without at least some discussion of contemporaneous religious practice—whether it be iconography of key figures, influential theological debates, or the liturgical function of sacred architecture. To put it even more strongly then, if professors of theology are not engaging the visual arts in their pedagogy, they are not addressing the full spectrum of their subject matter (e.g., Miles 1985). As someone who has taught in both art history and theology departments, I am keenly aware of both the gap and the potential for generative dialogue between the two disciplines. This is an understandable lacuna, as most faculty do not have an arts background, let alone training in art history. Such a disciplinary bridge can be daunting to approach, and—in the midst of class preparation and other professional responsibilities—impractical to take on. Nevertheless, these challenges and risks are worth the effort and indeed have the potential to enrich

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1   A version of this essay was presented in the "Art, Religion, and Literature Pedagogy" session at the 2018 American Academy of Religion annual conference.

theological education significantly by presenting a fuller and more historically accurate telling of the history of theology, by complicating some normative theologies, and by engaging learners in the theological classroom through new methods (Mercer and Foster 2001).

It is my goal in this brief essay to provide accessible resources for my colleagues in theological education—primarily those who have never or rarely incorporated images into their teaching. Furthermore, the comments and examples below are offered with historical theology survey courses in mind, as these are often text-heavy or exclusively text-focused. That said, I expect the essay may be of interest to others as well. While the methods and resources I describe here are certainly applicable to religious studies, in my experience religious studies is more open to the use of material culture (which refers to objects and architectural environments)—likely on account of its sociological and anthropological approaches. Because of space and my own specialty, I will focus on the visual arts, by which I mean both the fine arts and decorative arts. The comments of the present essay could also be expanded to include theater and performance arts, music, film, and so on.

Why Teach with Images?

Why include visual art in a theology course? Since at least the nineteenth century, theology as an academic discipline has been characterized by the study of texts, but for most of Christian history, the majority of Christians have been illiterate (i.e., were unable to read texts) and therefore engaged with theological content primarily through the spoken word (e.g., sermons and teaching) and images (i.e., particularly in and on churches). As Orlando O. Espín puts it in his book *Idol and Grace*,

> Christianity is not and has never been a text or a collection of texts or even an interpretation of texts. . . . Theology, specifically, cannot be reduced to the interpretive analysis of written texts. . . . Furthermore, it can be historically and easily demonstrated that most Christians have been illiterate during most of Christian history. Consequently, to identify the content of tradition and its traditioning with written texts alone (or primarily) is the same as reducing Christianity, and its witness to revelation, to a cultural produce of the literate (and conveniently dominant) elites. (2014, xxiii)

Thus, and perhaps most importantly, using images in theological education offers a way to recover voices and perspectives that have not been historically valued or even preserved in texts (e.g., those of women and people of color). In that sense, considering not just "high art" but also material culture—including, for example, the decorative arts (e.g., textiles, pottery, jewelry), which has historically been associated with women and therefore undervalued by (male) artists and art historians—as a valid vehicle for sophisticated theological meaning is also a social justice project. While he does not explicitly draw on visual culture in his analysis Orlando O. Espín argues for the importance of the marginalized in the creation and "traditioning" of theology. He writes that,

> There is no such thing as (and there has never been) a general or universal methodology or theology, because all are and have always been contextual, historical, cultural, gendered, ethnic, racial, and limited *by* the theologians' various social locations and contexts and by their personal biographies, social dominance (or lack thereof), and social interests. (2014, xxx)

Relatedly, the incorporation of non-textual theological sources, such as Ethiopian architecture, late medieval tapestries, or Mixtec manuscripts, into a historical theology course can be used to trouble narratives of theology as being white, European, and male. In other words, I suggest that the inclusion of art and material culture in the theology classroom can be a transformative anti-racist act.

To put it plainly, images are not merely illustrations of texts, but ought to be considered as primary sources in their own right (e.g., Jensen 2000; Steinberg 1996). And while it is delightful to find an image that seems to visualize a theological doctrine or religious practice perfectly, the tensions and dissonances between text and image are equally powerful opportunities for teaching. In all these capacities, art history is a valuable, unique, and, I argue, necessary source for theological inquiry. Additionally, incorporating images and architecture into courses not only appeals to so-called visual learners in particular,

but also renders concepts more vivid and therefore memorable for any student. Engaging visual art to teach theology conveys to students in concrete ways that theological concepts and debates did not occur only in the abstract, but also had effects in the physical world (and vice versa), as, for example, in the notable differences in depictions of the Trinity before and after the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (Jensen 1999).

Approaches to Teaching with Images

It is possible to use two broad categories to characterize the ways images are employed in theological education: (1) a text-driven approach frequently treats images merely as illustrations. In this case, images are often displayed alongside text without any kind of analysis of the image itself; in other words, the meaning is treated as being self-evident. This tends to occur with portraits of historical figures, which are commonly used as the equivalent of author photos. For instance, when a book on early Christian theological debates includes a nineteenth-century engraving of Augustine, what could it possibly reveal about the fourth and fifth centuries? Absolutely nothing, I would argue. While it may be relevant in understanding nineteenth-century conceptions of Augustine, such images have nothing to do with Augustine's historical context—and are often not addressed at all in the accompanying text.

Not surprisingly, I advocate for (2) an image-driven approach, which treats images as "texts" in their own right. That is, this approach is motivated by the fact that images are independent sources for theological meaning. This means that they may affirm, respond to, or even contradict the meaning conveyed in contemporaneous texts—but their value as sources is not limited to the degree that they reflect their textual counterparts. And significantly, images require interpretation. Precisely because images are capable of sophisticated theological meaning, they need to be "read" carefully. Just as we would not display an excerpt from the writing of Augustine or Emilie Townes in a PowerPoint presentation without any explanation or discussion, so too should an image of, say, Jesus as the Good Shepherd from an early Christian catacomb be given time for analysis.

How to Teach with Images

When I show an image in class, the first thing I ask students is simply, "What do you see?" [2] Because there are (almost) no wrong answers when describing an image, all students, regardless of training or experience, can participate in this exercise. This conversation may last five to ten minutes and should address as much of an image as possible. Descriptions can include but are not limited to the following terms:

- **Medium:** the material from which the image is made (e.g., oil on canvas, tempera on wood, bronze). When using digital projected images in class, the dimensions of the object should be provided.

- **Scale:** the relationship of parts of an image to the image as a whole.

- **Proportion:** the relationship of parts of a body to one another and to the whole.

- **Composition:** how the elements of an image are arranged. Noticing how one's eye moves through an image can help to describe the composition. Related concepts include movement, balance, symmetry, and repetition.

- **Perspective:** the representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Linear perspective was studied and significantly developed by the artists of the Italian Renaissance. There are multiple types of perspectival renderings, including one-point, two-point, and atmospheric. The delineation of foreground, middleground, and background can be used to create space and perspective in an image.

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2   In practical terms, a black background with white letters is best for the presentation of images. For any class, text in PowerPoint should be limited to key points, in abbreviated form and not long paragraphs, because students tend to copy text verbatim instead of listening to the lecture. Image files should be high resolution and the full information for the image (including the link for the image source, when applicable) should be kept in the notes window if not provided on the slide itself.

- **Line:** can be used to define shapes (contour lines), for shading (often crosshatching); implied lines are indicated through composition of elements or gestures of figures.

- **Color:** hue. Color may be used to communicate meaning in a variety of ways, from naturalistic to spiritual (e.g., through gold leaf). Relatedly, a color's intensity refers to its saturation and its value refers to its degree of lightness or darkness.

- **Content:** subject matter, though this moves into interpretation.[3]

While I usually take time on the first day of an introductory art history course to review these terms, in a historical theology survey course I define them as needed. When students make observations about an image using non-specialist terminology, or struggle to find the right words, I often affirm their observations through repetition or paraphrase while incorporating the relevant terminology. Describing what an image looks like and how it works visually is important because theological meaning is not only communicated via the subject matter (e.g., the crucifixion, the nativity), but in the very way that the subject matter is presented.

After sufficient description, students use their observations to interpret the possible meaning(s) of the image. Depending on the class, emphasis might be placed on the subject matter and iconography of the image or on the function of the image/object. It can be helpful to have students sketch an image in its entirety. (This is admittedly part of my personal agenda to convince students who abandoned art-making in elementary school that drawing is an important way of thinking and processing the world, regardless of "natural ability.") Not only are drawing exercises effective icebreakers and stress-relievers (e.g., Women's Health Watch 2017), but they also encourage "slow looking," that is, a practice of carefully observing an image and the way its parts fit together. As Jennifer L. Roberts (2013) has observed, "just because you have *looked* at something doesn't mean that you have *seen* it. Just because something is available instantly to vision does not mean that it is available instantly to consciousness. Or, in slightly more general terms: access is not synonymous with learning. What turns access into learning is time and strategic patience."

I have also found it effective to use art-making exercises and assignments in class sessions that do not have an art historical element. For example, in response to a reading on a theological concept like liberation I might ask students to make a quick sketch or, if time and materials permit, a collage. The key is to instruct students to refrain from using words in their image-making. Sharing their images with the class is always optional, but they are invited to reflect on how the process of making contributed to their understanding of the given concept or reading.

Images and objects, whether paintings, maps,[4] coinage, et cetera, can be useful in setting historical context, which can be accomplished even with brief treatment. For example, when teaching on Constantine and the legalization of Christianity, one might contrast Constantinian coins that depict *Sol Invictus* with his later coins bearing the *chi-rho* Christogram on a military standard. Furthermore, intercultural and interreligious exchange can be taught through materials, such as the use of ultramarine (which was sourced from Afghanistan) in western manuscripts or the appropriation of Islamic textiles into Christian liturgical contexts after the Crusades. The topic of materiality ought not to be neglected in the theological classroom, not only for the contextual and historical reasons named above, but also because bringing actual images, objects, and materials into class can provide students with a somatic connection to theology and history. This can be accomplished, for example, through handling papyrus and vellum samples when discussing the canonization of biblical texts or examining an Orthodox icon when working on Christology. I highly recommend reaching out to campus and local resources, such as libraries, digital humanities centers, museums, and galleries to arrange tours with or classroom visits by curators, artists, and other specialists. It should also be noted that there are increasing resources for making the study of art history more accessible to the visually impaired, with 3D printing being one of the more recent developments (e.g., Miller 2017).

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3 I recommend the introductory materials on the Smarthistory (2021) website, especially Harris and Zucker (2017).
4 Remembering, of course, that maps are abstractions and abstraction is not a neutral process.

What does teaching theology with images actually look like? There are endless possibilities, but I will offer a few here, intended for the Reformation unit of a historical theology survey course, for which students will have read Martin Luther's *On Christian Liberty* (1520). A late-medieval image of the Mass of St. Gregory can be used to establish the pre-Reformation context: while the details of the story vary in different accounts, in essence the motif is an affirmation of the doctrine of transubstantiation. According to legend, Pope Gregory I was celebrating the Mass in the presence of someone who doubted transubstantiation. Gregory prayed for a sign; in some versions of the story the Eucharist is transformed into a body part, in others Gregory has a vision of Jesus on the altar.[5] In this painting by Robert Campin (c. 1440), the perspective locates the viewer behind Pope Gregory, who kneels before an altar in a small chapel where he celebrates the Mass.[6] In fact, the viewer is potentially implicated as the doubting character, who is not visible in the image. The pope is flanked by two kneeling figures. The nude Christ stands directly over the chalice on the altar—straddling it, really, as he displays his wounds, which visually connects his bodily sacrifice to the Eucharistic elements below. Christ is surrounded by the *arma Christi*, that is, the "weapons of Christ"—the tools and persons that inflicted his Passion. Several elements in the painting work together to create a linear perspective that reinforces the centrality of Christ: on the left side of the image, the viewer can follow the lintel, which is highlighted in contrast to the capitals upon which it rests, and the off-white tile at the base of the same columns to where they converge at the side wound of Christ. Similarly, a line can be traced from the band that decorates the pope's chausable up to Christ's right leg. Even the taper that the acolyte holds in his right hand reinforces Christ as visual destination.

Note that Christ's body obscures the carved altarpiece behind him, the center panel of which presumably depicts the crucifixion. In other words, this image is representative not only of the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation—the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist—but also of late medieval understandings of spiritual vision and imaginative piety (Biernoff 2002). Christ is made triply present in this image—in the altarpiece, the Eucharist, and Campin's rendering of the envisioned "real presence."

After addressing Martin Luther's role in the Protestant Reformation, the discussion can turn to Lucas Cranach the Elder's painting Law and Grace (1529), alternatively titled *The Law and the Gospel*.[7] (I would recommend withholding the title of the painting from students until the analysis is complete.) Cranach was a court painter in Germany for almost fifty years and his portraits have been influential in shaping our image of Luther and his contemporaries. As always, I begin by inviting students to describe the image—it is important to give students ample time to carefully take in the entire image. Having students draw the image (or even "draw" by listing descriptive words) for about five minutes before talking about it will provide everyone with a chance to process the image. You can encourage participation by asking open-ended questions such as, "What is the first thing you notice about this image?" or "How does your eye move through this painting?"

Students might first note that the composition of the image is split in two by a tree in the center; the branches on the left are bare while those on the right sprout leaves. On the left side of the image, major elements include: a nude man (representative of the soul) being chased into sulfurous flames by a spear-wielding skeleton and a claw-footed demon in the foreground; a group of figures in the bottom right; Adam and Eve framing the Tree of Knowledge in the middle ground; some kind of camp in the background; Christ enthroned on an orb in the sky. On the right-hand side of the image, major elements include: a book-bearing clothed figure directing a nude figure (again, the soul) to look at Christ crucified on the right side of the image (behind which is the empty tomb); below the cross a standard-wielding lamb stands atop the demon and skeleton characters from the other side of the painting; above the cross Christ floats in an orb of yellow light, his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holding a cruciform standard. Along the bottom of the image run six panels of Gospel citations in German.

Depending on students' familiarity with biblical stories, they may be able to identify the iconography of some of these elements. Adam and Eve are easily recognizable to the general public and are presented with their tree as shorthand for the Fall and Original Sin. The man to the left of the image's central tree holds a set of Hebrew-inscribed tablets in his left

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5   Although Gregory's life dates were 540–604 CE the first written account of this story does not appear until the eighth century, and visual depictions do not occur until around the thirteenth century.

6   A 1539 Mesoamerican featherwork rendering of the Mass of St. Gregory can be an interesting companion in this lesson, as the pope commissioned an indigenous artist to create it and the image blends Mesoamerican methods with European iconography (see Kilroy-Ewbank 2016).

7   Cranach made multiple painted and printed versions of this image, with some variables. On the role of Cranach in the Reformation, see Ozment (2011).

and points to them with his right; despite his contemporary dress, students will likely be able to identify him as Moses. Provided a large enough image, or a detail, students will note that there are bodies and a serpent on a pole in front of the tents in the background. This is a representation of Numbers 21, in which God commands Moses to elevate a bronze serpent so that the Israelites may be healed from snakebites by looking upon it. A sword comes out of the mouth of Jesus, who sits in judgment in the sky, illustrating several verses from the book of Revelation (1:16, 2:12, 19:15).

On the right half of the image, students may be able to identify the red-cloaked figure of John the Baptist, who is commonly depicted in late medieval crucifixion scenes, as an illustration of his statement, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Here he points in the direction of the Lamb of God, and the crucified and resurrected Christ. Barely visible in the background is the angel descending to announce the birth of Christ to shepherds tending their flocks.

After thoroughly describing the image together, I would ask the students to begin interpreting its message: what does the painting tell us? In short, as the title indicates, the image juxtaposes the theological concepts of law and grace. According to the image, law, visualized on the left, leads to death, since humanity is incapable of perfectly following it. This is depicted, for example, in Adam and Eve, the barren branches of the central tree, and the snake-bitten Israelite camp. (It is interesting that in other paintings and prints of this same motif, Cranach places the camp on the right side of the image—presumably because the bronze serpent has historically been interpreted as a type for Christ, who similarly heals those who look upon him.) On the left side of the painting, Christ is depicted remotely enthroned in judgment as the soul is chased into flames of damnation. This is contrasted with the image of grace on the right side of the painting: the soul prayerfully lifts his hands as he looks upon the crucified Christ, the Lamb, "who takes away the sins of the world." The stream of blood that spurts from the side of Christ, on which the dove of the Holy Spirit seems to coast, and which passes in front of the head of John the Baptist to land on the soul may be read as affirming the priesthood of all believers—that the Christian needs no earthly, priestly intermediary to access the grace of God. Above all of this, the triumphant, resurrected Christ raises his hand in blessing, implying that it is through his mercy and grace that the soul is saved.

More specifically, how does this painting reflect Luther's theology as represented in the assigned reading, *On Christian Liberty*? Here, I have students refer directly to their reading to draw concrete connections between the visual and textual sources. They might compare Luther's distinction between the outward old man and inward new man to Cranach's two depictions of the soul. The right side of the image emphasizes Luther's concept of justification by faith and the importance of a direct relationship to God in both the proximity of the resurrected Christ and the soul's orientation towards the crucified Christ (note that the crucifix is angled towards the soul, not us the viewer). As Luther argues, the Christian is not compelled to keep God's law in order to obtain salvation (that is, justification by works, which as the left side of the image shows, does not end well!), but rather the Christian freely serves God and their neighbor thanks to God's grace.

Finally, we can also look at Reformation images that are in tension even with Luther's moderate stance on images.[8] For example, this 1521 print portrait of [Martin Luther by Hans Baldung](#) (after a portrait by Lucas Cranach the Elder) presents Luther as a tonsured monk, with an open book—presumably the Bible—before him. The dove of the Holy Spirit hovers over Luther's head, and the divine presence is reinforced by the halo of light that encircles his head. What did Luther think of being portrayed as a living saint? Several saintly images of Luther circulated in 1521, when the Edict of Worms declared Luther a heretic. Despite Luther's rejection of image veneration, there are accounts of Luther's followers purchasing, treasuring, and even kissing such portraits.

A similar tension is found in the numerous physical objects associated with Luther that came to carry relic-like status (here we move into material culture). Perhaps most amusing among these is a wooden beer stein that in 1694 was outfitted with a silver base and lid, complete with a portrait of Luther, inscribed with text: "God's word: Luther's teaching will not pass away on this or any other day," and "The late Mr. Luther used this jug at his table in Eisleben" (Kluttig-Altmann and

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8   Luther's position on images was rather a lukewarm one: for him, images had neither the power to enlighten nor to ensnare. They were *adiaphora*: "things not critical in themselves but important only because others made them so" (Aston 1988, 40). This perspective coincided with the didactic function of the image. For Luther, images were certainly not tools of divine encounter, but had the possibility of operating as tools of learning. See also, Luther (1968, 85–87, 91). For this lesson, and on this point in particular, I highly recommend the catalogue and essays that accompanied the exhibit *Martin Luther: Art and Reformation* (Oct. 30, 2016-Jan. 15, 2017) (see Kluttig-Altmann and Herbst 2016; Rous 2016).

Herbst 2016, 375). There is no conclusive evidence that the mug in fact belonged to Luther, but the mere possibility of its association rendered it an object of veneration. The haloed portrait and the beer stein are representative of the ways visual and material culture can complicate how we encounter texts. Taking such examples seriously as theological sources provides a very different understanding of the Reformation than that produced by simply reading Luther's writings.

This essay has offered but a brief example of what can be done with a single image or small group of images in a class period.[9] I have named the major elements of the above images and some of the theological meaning that can be gleaned from them, but there is always more to be found. I have demonstrated that incorporating visual and material culture in theology courses is possible even for the non-specialist and that the benefits are many. Art can complement and complicate theological texts, creating a more robust understanding of theological concepts and the history of religious practice.

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Harris, Beth, and Steven Zucker. 2017. "How to Do Visual (Formal) Analysis." *Smarthistory*, September 18. https://smarthistory.org/visual-analysis/.

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Jensen, Robin M. 2000. *Understanding Early Christian Art*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kilroy-Ewbank, Lauren. 2016. "Featherworks: The Mass of St. Gregory." *Smarthistory*, March 8. https://smarthistory.org/featherworks/.

Kluttig-Altmann, Ralf, and Katrin Herbst. 2016. *Martin Luther: Treasures of the Reformation* [exhibition catalogue]. Dresden, Germany: Sandstein Verlag.

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Mercer, Joyce Ann, and Charles R. Foster. 2001. "How Clearly Must I See? Art and Ethics in Pedagogical Practice." *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4, no. 3: 124–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9647.00103.

Miles, Margaret R. 1985. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

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9   There are of course many other relevant images that could be treated in such a class session—such as Lucas Cranach's Wittenberg Altarpiece (1547), Albrecht Dürer's *Last Supper* (1523), or Luther's German New Testament (1522).

Miller, Rachel. 2017. "Creating a More Accessible Art History Course through 3D Printing." Art History Teaching Resources, October 13. http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/2017/10/creating-a-more-accessible-art-history-course-through-3d-printing/.

Ozment, Steven E. 2011. *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Roberts, Jennifer L. 2013. "The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention." *Harvard Magazine*, Nov.-Dec., https://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience.

Rous, Anne-Simone. 2016. *Martin Luther and the Reformation*: Essays [exhibition essays]. Dresden, Germany: Sandstein Verlag.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF SELECTED RESOURCES

For the sake of space, this list is necessarily limited (as are my annotations). I have tried to represent a range here, though it is focused on visual art and admittedly reflects the premodern Christian focus of my own expertise.[10] While most major museums and libraries now have rich digital resources available online, I have named only a handful here. I welcome inquiries about additional resources.

On the Contemporary Relationship between Art and Theology

Adams, Doug, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, eds. 1987. *Art as Religious Studies*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
   This edited volume is a collection of twelve essays that are adapted from the religion and art lectures of the authors. Divided into three sections (on Judaism, Christianity, and praxis), the essays treat a selection of artworks from the ancient to modern. For someone new to incorporating art into religious education, the two introductory essays will prove helpful as they present a summary and assessment of the field. The three bibliographies in the last section of the book are also valuable resources, though now somewhat dated.

ARTS: Arts in Religious and Theological Studies. 2021. United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas. https://www.societyarts.org/arts-journal.html.
   This is the journal of the Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies, published biannually by the Arts and Theology Program at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas; it has been published for over twenty-five years. Its issues are organized thematically into sections titled "In the Study," "In the Sanctuary," "In the Studio," "On the Street," "In the Recording Studio," and "In the Classroom." Issues also include reviews of books and exhibits. See especially volume 20, number 2 (2009), which focuses on teaching.

Baggley, John. 1983. *Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press.
   An Anglican priest, John Baggley writes authoritatively and sympathetically about the origins and development of Orthodox icons, including the iconography and the spiritual practice of iconographers. This is an accessible introduction

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10 Theological aesthetics is a distinct and robust discipline, represented in the annotated bibliography below by Paul Tillich (1989), Nicholas Wolterstorff (1987), and Wilson Yates (1998). Other key figures include Jeremy Begbie, Jane Daggett Dillenberger, Frank Burch Brown, William Dyrness, Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, and Richard Viladesau, just to name a few.

for Western Christians, or indeed anyone, looking to understand the basics of icons in Eastern Christianity. (For more academic and comprehensive treatments, see the work of Vladimir Lossky, Leonid Ouspensky, and Robert S. Nelson, to name a few.)

Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. 2008. *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
This survey of Christian architecture from its origins to the twentieth century argues that in order to understand Christian buildings one must understand how they represent and reify divine, personal, and social power. Kilde's analysis presents the dynamic and complex construction of sacred space; her methodology, as outlined in the first chapter, is applicable to the sacred architecture of other religions as well.

Morgan, David, ed. 2010. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. New York, NY: Routledge.
David Morgan is an established scholar of the material culture of religion, focusing primarily on American Christianity. This edited volume brings together authors from a variety of academic disciplines to write on the religious function of material culture, architecture, and ritual performance across time and religions. It would be especially relevant for religious studies courses.

Rosen, Aaron. 2015. *Art + Religion in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson.
As the title indicates, this book focuses on the relationship between art and religion in the twenty-first century. Organized thematically by topics such as the sublime, embodiment, ritual, and cultural identity, the book demonstrates that contrary to popular belief, contemporary artists do not simply employ religious symbolism for shock value; rather many contemporary artists are producing significant spiritual meaning in their work. This book would be especially useful in courses that address contemporary theologies, such as liberation, womanist, and ecotheology, but the artworks included address general theological themes like incarnation, evil, death, and sacred space.

Tillich, Paul. 1989. *On Art and Architecture*. John Dillenberger and Jane Daggett Dillenberger, editors. New York, NY: Crossroad.
This is a collection of the essays and excerpts on visual art written by the twentieth century Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich, and edited by John and Jane Dillenberger, who were themselves pioneers in the field of art and theology. Especially in the decades after World War II, Tillich's theology celebrated art's ability to ask big question in pursuit of the Ultimate.

Vrudny, Kimberly. 2016. *Beauty's Vineyard: A Theological Aesthetic of Anguish and Anticipation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
This constructive work of systematic theology is grounded in the arts in two key ways: it is a theological aesthetic in which the incarnate one is understood as Beauty, and secondly, each of Vrudny's chapters is composed in conversation with a work of contemporary art.

Vrudny, Kimberly, and Wilson Yates, eds. 2005. *Arts, Theology, and the Church*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.
In this edited volume twelve authors contemplate the relationship between art and theology, bridging academia and ministerial contexts. Making an argument for the inclusion of the arts (broadly understood) in religious and theological education and practice, this book would be especially of use in seminary and divinity school contexts.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 1987. *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
This work of theological aesthetics pushes back against twentieth-century conceptions of "art for art's sake" to argue that art also has significant potential in its quotidian manifestations. See also Wolterstorff's more recent Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Yates, Wilson. 1998. "The Intersections of Art and Religion: Reflections on Works from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts." *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 1: 17-27.
Wilson Yates has been one of the key figures in the study and teaching of the relationship between art and theology; he has published numerous articles and books on the topic and is the founder of the journal SARTS.

On the Historical Relationship between Art and Theology

Belting, Hans. 1994. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
> This seminal work looks at images before "the era of art," that is, Belting describes the premodern understanding of art in which the emphasis was on holy presence and liturgical function rather than aesthetics. Translated from the German, it is a dense book that can be also be mined for individual chapters.

Bindman, David, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. 2010-2017. *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
> While not explicitly theological in nature, this multi-volume work is a revision and expansion of Dominique de Menil's 1960s project to archive representations of people of African descent in art from the time of the pharaohs to the twentieth century. This series is a rich resource for teaching on any period.

Brubaker, Leslie. 2011. *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*. London, UK: Bristol Classical Press.
> This short accessible book presents the argument that not only was the word "iconoclasm" a later invention, but there is also very little historical evidence that images were actually destroyed in this period. Brubaker argues that what we know as the "Byzantine iconoclastic controversy" was primarily a theological debate about Christology and the nature of images. Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm is essentially a condensed version of her previous work coauthored with John Haldon, Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era, c. 680-850: A History (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), which at almost a thousand pages in two volumes is a comprehensive overview of the visual and textual material of the period.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 2011. *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York, NY: Zone Books.
> Well-known for her scholarship on gender and religion in the Middle Ages (e.g., Holy Feast, Holy Fast; Jesus as Mother; Wonderful Blood), in Christian Materiality Bynum describes the increase in miraculous material objects from the twelfth to fifteenth century. By outlining the changing concepts of materiality, she also offers new ways to understand the context of the Protestant Reformation.

Camille, Michael. 1992. *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
> Image on the Edge looks to the edges of monastery, cathedral, court, and city to understand the interdependence between the sacred and the profane in the Middle Ages. For example, Camille describes the margins of manuscripts, and exteriors of monasteries and cathedrals, as places of encounter and paradox.

Duffy, Eamon. 1992. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
> This groundbreaking and award-winning text is a valuable resource for any course that addresses the Reformation. (Given its 700-page length, one might want to assign only portions for reading or use it only as a faculty resource!) Duffy provides detailed description and analysis of pre-Reformation Christianity, arguing that—in contrast to previous narratives that paint this period as corrupt and superstitious—medieval Catholicism was meaningful and popular.

Finney, Paul Corby. 1994. *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art*. New York, NY: Oxford.
> This book is concerned with what the earliest Christians (up till the Tetrarchy) thought about art and what later interpreters said that they thought. He argues that early Christian critiques of images were primarily part of anti-pagan rhetoric and did not necessarily reflect Christian practice. Finney offers several possible explanations for the apparent delay in the production of Christian art.

Freedberg, David. 1989. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

This now-classic text argues for a history of images rather than a privileging "fine art." Taking seriously the presence of images and miracles, Freedberg also argues for a history of viewer responses to images. The book is organized thematically around topics such as aniconism, idolatry, magic, and censorship.

Jensen, Robin M. 2000. *Understanding Early Christian Art*. New York, NY: Routledge.
This accessible survey of early Christian iconography includes a helpful introduction outlining issues in the interpretation of early Christian art. Organized thematically, the book can also be used as a reference work.

Jensen, Robin M. 2005. *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christian Art*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
Drawing on biblical, patristic, Greco-Roman texts and visual sources, this study of the origins of the holy portrait explicitly addresses the relationship between art and theology, including themes of idolatry and divinity.

Mathews, Thomas F. 1993. *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
This ground-breaking book argues the early Christian images previously mistaken as imperial in origin (what Mathews refers to as the "Emperor Mystique") were actually adapted from Greco-Roman pagan imagery in an effort to assert the superiority of Christianity.

Miles, Margaret R. 1985. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
A foundational work in the study of art and Christianity, Miles argues that visual art was integral to Christian worship and theology. She also urges readers to study Christian images in their contexts and to strive understand the reception of such images by viewers, as opposed to focusing only on the intent of the artist and/or patron. Framed by chapters on visual theory, three central chapters offer case studies from the fourth, fourteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

Steinberg, Leo. 1996. *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2d ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
This initially controversial work argues from hundreds of visual examples that the genitals of Christ were visually emphasized in Renaissance art in order to affirm the doctrine of the incarnation. The second edition includes a response to Caroline Walker Bynum's critique that the book conflated sexuality and gender and did not sufficiently address feminine/feminized conceptions of Christ.

Some Recommended Online Image and Teaching Resources

Art History Teaching Resources (AHTR). http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/.
This open-access website includes teaching content like lesson plans (organized by period and theme), bibliographies, activities, and assignments. It also produces a weekly pedagogy-focused blog and since 2016 has published the e-journal *Art History Pedagogy & Practice*.

ARTstor. www.artstor.org.
The ARTstor Digital Library provides access to over 2.5 million high resolution images of art, architecture, and papers from museums, archives, artists, and scholars. The website also includes a blog and teaching resources. ARTstor is part of the non-profit organization ITHAKA, as is JSTOR.

Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index. https://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/feminae/Default.aspx.
This open-access website is sponsored by the libraries of Haverford College and the University of Iowa. It is associated with the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship (which publishes the e-journal *Medieval Feminist Forum*). The index consists of over 40,000 books, articles, book reviews, and images that address women, gender, and sexuality in the Middle Ages.

Index of Medieval Art. https://ima.princeton.edu/.
   This database, formerly known as the Index of Christian Art, is managed by Princeton University (where the physical archive is housed) and requires a subscription. Images range from Late Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages. Each entry includes images, metadata, and a bibliography. The Index also produces conferences and publications, including the journal *Studies in Iconography*.

Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), Art. http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/art/.
   Although this website is no longer being updated or maintained, it hosts a list of art resources in Latin America, organized by country.

Louvre. https://www.louvre.fr/en.
   In addition to hi-res images of the museum's collection, the website also includes links to related databases and educational materials related to exhibitions and special events.

Libraries: e.g., the British Library, Bodleian, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Gallica), Beinecke Rare Books Library, Morgan Library.
These are just a few of the numerous excellent libraries around the world that have digitized their collections in recent years.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://www.metmuseum.org/
   This website includes high resolution public domain images of the collection, each accompanied by brief descriptions and bibliographies. The searchable Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History presents cross-referenced chronologies and essays on periods, geographies, and themes.

People of Color in European Art History. http://medievalpoc.tumblr.com/.
   "The focus of this blog is to showcase works of art from European history that feature People of Color," with the majority of images dating from the fifth to seventeenth century. The images are organized by century and tagged by country/culture, medium, subject, and topic; each entry includes basic identifying information. The website also has a resources page, which lists open-access image and text databases, as well as a bibliography of print resources.

Smarthistory. https://www.smarthistory.org.
   This award-winning open-access website is probably one of the most practical for theology and religion educators lacking an arts background. Its user-friendly interface is easy to navigate and its information is organized according to period and theme, and is also searchable. Moreover, it has helpful introductory information on the discipline of art history, and boasts about two thousand essays and videos, with new entries being added regularly.

Teaching History with 100 Objects. http://www.teachinghistory100.org/.
   Based in the British Museum, this project collaborates with museums across the UK to curate a collection of a hundred objects with which to teach history. Drawn from cultures around the world (though over half are British), the objects date from about 500 BCE to the present and range widely in material (e.g., coins, pottery, jewelry, photography, paintings, statues). Each object is accompanied by multiple essays about the object, its larger context, and ideas for the classroom.

Vistas: Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520-1820. https://vistas.ace.fordham.edu/.
   As the title indicates, Vistas is a robust online resource for visual culture in Spanish America from 1520-1820. It brings together thematic essays and videos, images, a bibliography, primary texts in original languages and English translation, a timeline, glossary, syllabi, and links to additional online resources.

Visual Thinking Strategies. https://vtshome.org/.
   "Visual Thinking Strategies is a research-based education nonprofit that believes thoughtful, facilitated discussions of art activates transformational learning accessible to all." The website offers information on VTS training and curriculum, as well as its journal.

Web Gallery of Art. www.wga.hu.
>   This is an open-access database of over 46,000 images of European art and architecture dating from the third to nineteenth century. It includes a glossary and brief entries on individual artists and buildings.

Theopoetics

There are many definitions of "theopoetics," but here I will share that provided by Arts, Religion, Culture (ARC): Theopoetics is (1) an emphasis, style, and positive concern for the intersection of religious reflection and spirituality with the imagination, aesthetics, and the arts, especially as (2) it takes shape in ways that engender community-affirming dialogue that is (3) transformative in effect and (4) explicit about embodiment's importance. (https://artsreligionculture.org/recommended-resources).

I offer but a few writings here and highly recommend the comprehensive list compiled on the ARC website.

Alves, Rubem. 1990. *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet*. Philadelphia, PA: Trinity.
>   Rubem Alves is a significant thinker in the field of theopoetics. This book engages poetry, film, and visual art to demonstrate the expansive nature and capabilities of theology, well beyond conventional, academic forms of theology.

Keefe-Perry, L. Callid. 2013. *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Press.
>   As the title indicates, this book is a primer to theopoetics—and a very helpful one. It begins with foundational authors, like Rubem Alves and Amos Wilder, and outlines where the field is today. It also suggests applications for contemporary practices.

Keller, Catherine. 2013. "The Pluri-verse." *In Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*. Edited by Roland Faber and Jeremy Feckanthal, 179–194. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
>   In this chapter, Keller provides a history of theopoetics and its trajectory from an alternative to theology to its incorporation into theology, with a focus on its connotations in process theology and its ability to embrace and foster theological pluralities.

May, Melanie. 1995. *A Body Knows: A Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
>   In sharing personal stories of death, sexuality, and spirituality, May's book is a performance of the embodied approach to theology that characterizes theopoetics.

Rivera, Mayra. 2015. *Poetics of the Flesh*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
>   Rivera draws on biblical, early theological, and philosophical texts to articulate a Christian poetics of the body, gender, and race.

THEOPOETICS Journal, produced by ARC. https://artsreligionculture.org/about-the-journal.
>   The journal is described as "an interfaith container for the intersection of several conversations with religious reflection: aesthetics, literature, embodiment, creativity studies, and the philosophy of imagination." Production was halted before the entire second volume was published, but all of the articles are available online.

Wilder, Amos. 1976. *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.
>   In this foundational work, Wilder urges his readers to take up a theopoetic approach to Christianity to articulate the experience of God. He argues that theopoetic language will be more compelling and indeed truer to the essence of Christianity—in contrast with some of the comparatively disinterested and disengaged theology of the twentieth century to which he was responding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Awes Freeman is the Assistant Professor and Program Director for Theology and the Arts at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in St. Paul, MN.

ARTICLE

Walking the Land: Teaching the Book of Joshua through Spatial-Kinesthetic Teaching Strategies in the Undergraduate Setting

Jonathan Deane Parker
Berry College

ABSTRACT

Outdoor Class Day provides a visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic way to introduce students to the land of the Bible as well as the book of Joshua. Students follow their instructor around the campus, visiting locations which are reimagined through role-play and visual association as parts of the biblical land and the story of Joshua 1-8. Research into Howard Gardner's (2011) visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences suggests they are not separable intelligences or styles of learning, but the terms provide helpful descriptors for the dynamics and benefits of active learning out of doors, including decreased abstraction of the biblical text, increased sense of the relevance of academic biblical study, increased memorable integration of the material, and increased religious literacy.

KEYWORDS

multiple intelligences, biblical studies, role-play, Joshua, threshold concepts

Recent research on the social context of learning has made instructors in religion and theology more aware than ever of its effect on student learning outcomes. Instructors often intentionally make room for students to ask questions, invite students to participate in the instruction (through student presentations, for example), encourage student-to-student on-task collaboration, and make informal efforts to know students in personal ways (Walker and Baepler 2018). What follows is an example of another attempt to modify the social context of learning through changes to student learning space in order to encourage better student learning outcomes. Specifically, this essay enquires about the benefits of outdoor instruction. What happens when students enact a biblical text (from the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible) outdoors and receive instruction by observing, hearing, and feeling in the context of nature rather than the classroom? It offers some reflection along the way and brief conclusions at the end. However, due to the new and experimental form of this instruction, appropriate goals and measurements of the learning that occurs in these settings have yet to be determined. As a result, the analysis provided here is more qualitative than quantitative and is presented as an invitation for others to join in this type of teaching and

reflection. More clarity on what is being attempted and what is occurring is a requisite initial stage before quantitative analysis will be possible. But first, before continuing with further goals and analysis, an introduction to this method and its inherent risks.

The Goals and Risks of "Outdoor Class Day": A Teacher's Story

 Unbeknownst to my students ahead of time, I choose a different wardrobe for "Outdoor Class Day." I wear my favorite broad-brimmed hat as a social signal of my intentional change to our usual classroom culture. Outdoor Class Day is also known to my students as "Joshua Day" because the course in which the method is employed is an introductory, Interpreting the Old Testament, and the content for the day is the plot, themes, and issues of the book of Joshua. The room as I enter is filled with twenty-five to thirty undergraduates of our four-year residential college who are abuzz with anticipation, but I purposely choose not to reciprocate. As with the hat, I want to send a social signal. I remain cordial, but I want students to recognize by my demeanor that our fifty-minute session is still learning time, not just play time. Because this is my sixth year at this institution, word has spread from previous participants to almost all of the current students: "Outdoor/Joshua Day is awesome. You'll love it," but it is up to me to keep the focus on the biblical content.

Yes, I take students out of the classroom and onto the grounds of our campus, but I will read to them from the Bible, point to various aspects of its geography, flora, and fauna, and ask students to reimagine them as part of the land of Israel or particular items in the text of Joshua 1–8 and 24. The focus remains on the biblical text, but in a way that involves them more in its world. This is not a field day; it is an attempt to use the outdoors as a new kind of classroom. Unlike "outdoor education/learning" (for example, Hill and Brown 2014) or "place-based education" (for example, Dolan 2015) programs, our use of the outdoor world will not seek to learn *from* the outdoors so much as to learn *within* it.

As an instructor, this energy, excitement, and change to the learning space is both a promise and peril. Like other experiments in teaching, colleagues might see my parading students out of doors as catering to baser student desires for fun rather than helping them truly to learn. Few, if any, other instructors at my institution do this kind of teaching. Some may hold class on the steps of a building, under a tree, or in an outdoor amphitheater; no others that I know of, however, dress up or march around. It is not what professors do here—at least not yet.

There is peril, too, not just in what fellow faculty may perceive but in what students may misunderstand. Our college is based on Christian values but not all students are Christians. Some from church backgrounds, however, may misread my efforts to be more like Sunday school than creative academic engagement. Therefore, my vocabulary and conceptual framing must remain academic, even while I seek to engage their imaginations. Additionally, students must be carefully prepared. They have been notified to "Be ready to be outside for the whole class period and to walk from building to building around campus, stopping and talking for extended periods sometimes." Students with mobility issues, or in need of any kind of special assistance, must be (and have been) consulted personally and plans made for their accommodation. While these students have been my biggest concern in attempting this kind of teaching, so far students with special needs have, in fact, been enthusiastic participants. The change in learning space has often provided an opportunity for me to demonstrate informal care and support to students at whatever level they desire (for example, a student with leg braces requested no special notice of them because they wanted to show other students their relative ability while, in a different case, a student who is legally blind chose, for themselves, a student classmate to assist them during the session should they need it). Weather is always a concern. I have only once been nearly rained out, but we managed to move during moments of lighter showers and cover enough to still get the full experience. All in all, there are certainly risks to this new attempt at teaching, but in my context the appropriate counter-measures I deploy appear to be working sufficiently. Further questions about whether the efforts are worth these inherent risks are, however, appropriate and part of the purpose of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

Parameters of Research

In a tradition of pedagogical reflection already established in the SoTL in theology and religion, this essay most closely follows the model of what has been termed "Show and Tell" (an essay demonstrating that *"insight about teaching proceeds directly from practice"*); however, it draws on other SoTL models as well, including ones that accent the person of the instructor and questions how instruction is generally done, especially in biblical studies (Killen and Gallagher 2013, 115, 119, italics original). Far from mere story, essays of this sort represent "systematic and sustained" reflection and are often helpful to undergraduate teachers outside the field of theology and religion (Killen and Gallagher 2013, 109). In the present case in particular, those in literature or history may particularly benefit from the principles of symbolic re-presentation of narratives since they share the common goal of the interpretation of event and/or text.

The specific type of teaching and learning experience I have practiced and survey here, not unlike other similar efforts before me (Wolfe 2009), is one which highlights what Howard Gardner has termed "visual-spatial" and "bodily-kinesthetic" "intelligences" (2011). We ought to note from the start that Gardner has claimed too much for his theory of "multiple intelligences." Waterhouse argues in her review of his work that Gardner himself "has not proposed testable components for the intelligences" nor has empirical testing found that separate parts of the brain contain completely separate neural pathways corresponding to his identified "multiple intelligences" as he suggests should be the case (Waterhouse 2006, 208–9; cf. Garner and Moran 2006).

Instead, Waterhouse suggests, what research has confirmed is "large-scale information processing pathways or processing streams in the brain," including (a) "*what* is it?" and "*where* is it?" pathways that appear to synthesize our various "perceptual analyses" but with overlapping triggers (such as touch) and (b) two distinct decision-making processes (a "fast, intuitive" process and a "slow, effortful" one, respectively named "System 1" and "System 2" by Kahneman [2003]) (Waterhouse 2006, 211). Together with other observations from evolutionary psychologists about adapted cognition modules, these empirically-based studies suggest that humans use many different things (that is to say with disparate brain activities) in the process of accumulating and acting upon knowledge. Different modes of presentation and expression beyond the verbal and analytical are inherent. In the end, we are mistaken to call these multiple complex brain processes across a range of perceptual input systems "intelligences," or to join Gardner (2011) in arguing for their separate evolutionary development or exclusive operation. Whatever changes in student learning take place as a result of moving a class session outside, it seems unlikely to me that they are engaging in a different "intelligence."

However, even if the findings above counter Gardner's (2011) claims, they still emerge from an examination into Gardner's theories and dialogue with them. His provocation to research ways we learn (especially among educators) should be duly credited. The end results of wrestling with Gardner are themselves suggestive. With regard to tactile, spatial, and kinesthetic approaches to learning, for example—and outdoors especially—one can well imagine utilizing both "what is it?" ("what are we doing?") and "where is it?" ("where are we going?") pathways, each shifting their decision-making process about the importance of the material presented to them from passive System 1 thinking to more active System 2 thinking (Kahneman 2003), potentially enabling better retention or modification of information (in other words, better learning).

That being said, my goal here is not to argue for such a synthesis of empirically verifiable learning outcomes for out of doors teaching and learning (if indeed such results could even be verified). Instead, the goal here is more modest: It argues that when my students express appreciation and delight in learning outside, they are not just being especially entertained in this particular class period but are (as self-reported in evaluations) actually learning better. The ways they are learning better are varied, including not just understanding concepts and retaining information, but synthesizing the information, values, and arguments presented with their own religious presuppositions and expectations. For now, we may speak of these advances as related to Gardner's concept of spatial and kinesthetic learning (2011), as a meaningful grammar for what we do as teachers and the kind of active learning students do (Joyner and Young 2006), even if we remain circumspect about the cognitive pathways and processes entailed.

One final point of clarification: This essay is decidedly not arguing for the use of teaching outdoors as a way to accommodate certain students' kinesthetic learning style. The notion of learning styles is still pervasive (perhaps especially among

those of us who teach but are not directly engaged in the fields of psychology or education). The notion that some forms of teaching help kinesthetic learners who have a particular learning style, meaning a "consistent way of responding and using stimuli in the context of learning," has been defined and debated since the 1970s and has yet to find any empirical support (Claxton and Ralston 1978; Husmann and O'Loughlin 2019, 6). Similarly, in the 1990s, the VARK model—standing for Visual, Auditory, Reading/writing, and Kinesthetic—was developed chiefly by Neil Fleming with a corresponding questionnaire, now available online (Husmann and O'Loughlin 2019, 6–7; VARK 2019). The VARK model proposed that students not only have preferred learning styles but that these styles (a) are the ways that those students learn best and that (b) teachers ought to teach with a variety of methods corresponding to these styles so that each student has an equivalent chance of success in learning. Husmann and O'Loughlin's review is only one recent example in a line of studies and meta-analyses demonstrating that the idea of "learning styles" is essentially a myth (Nancekivell, Shah, and Gelman 2019; Willingham, Hughes, and Dobolyi 2015; Rogowsky, Calhoun, and Tallal 2014). These reports suggest that changing teaching styles to match student learning styles does not significantly improve learning outcomes and that while students may have preferences for how material is presented to them, their actual performance is not impaired by receiving material outside that preferred manner of presentation (Husmann and O'Loughlin 2019, 7).

What I Do

Outdoor Class Day is dedicated to teaching students about the book of Joshua. Prior to class, students read Joshua 1-8 and 24 and take an online, timed, open-book, five-question quiz on the biblical text. Once gathered for our usual class period, students are reminded of the plan, and we head out. Some carry their Bibles, but as long as the key biblical texts (and handouts for later, more precise academic analysis) are on hand, they do not need a copy.

The Death of Moses and the Impact of Geography

Once outside the building, students stand in a semicircle, and I "introduce" myself as their tour guide for the day. We read Deuteronomy 34 aloud, describing the death of Moses and the introduction of Joshua as his successor and Israel's new leader. We take time to discuss both Moses and Joshua in a back and forth, question-and-answer style. We also intentionally discuss some of the geographic details: "Why does the text say he saw so far? Israel is only seventy miles wide at its widest point, but from Mount Nebo to Tel Dan is roughly 130 miles. It's a good view from Nebo at 2300 feet. A normal person would see about eighteen miles. But could he really see that far? What's going on?"

"Nettlesome questions." While students think about what is "going on" with Moses, something more important is "going on" in their learning. By posing a question they have not likely considered, they are pressed to think, in this case about prophets, promises, and covenants. I agree with Carol Bechtel that the goal of teaching is not just information retention, but formation and integration of the material, and that one the most effective ways to do this is to ask a "nettlesome question" (2002, 375). At this undergraduate institution we aim to encourage in students a sense of wonder at—or, at least, respect for—the Bible's depth and complexity, even if they do not view it as religiously authoritative. Awkward silence among students in response to a good question is, therefore, a good thing; a sign of real, System 2 thinking.

Introducing the land. Whether students realize it or not, they are receiving an introduction to the land of Israel/Palestine. Since the first day of the course, student have understood that the Hebrew Bible was written by the people of this particular land over a long period of time. We have discussed the concept of the "implied reader" in Genesis-Deuteronomy—that the text assumes its reader is a Hebrew speaker from the land. (For more an accessible introduction to this concept and uses of it in biblical studies, see Bockmuehl [2006].) However, since we have been following the canonical order of the books, this is the first time, apart from brief mentions in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that we begin to consider the nature of the land itself. In many ways, it is the land, more than any one person, which is most consistently responsible for the way the biblical text is authored (setting aside divine authorship). Like having English students read a few Shakespearean plays to become familiar with his language, cadence, and culture before taking time to introduce the person of Shakespeare, this day in my course deepens the students' relationship with a land and people they already thought they knew. One projected learning outcome of this method, then, is to communicate indirectly how much more there is for students to learn, even

in order to understand a small, fairly straightforward passage like Deuteronomy 34. Although giving geographic facts in a classroom may explain the ostensive meaning of such a passage, walking outside to make this introduction makes the Bible's origins more geographically bounded and less theoretical. For a moment, land is a thing we literally stand on and live with, not just a concept we discuss.

Symbolic learning. Throughout the rest of the class period as we walk around the campus (see below), this introduction to the land continues. Especially important are references to Palestine/Israel's specific topography and comparisons between the climate of Israel/Palestine and the climate of our area. In our case, there are a number of similarities, including temperature, agriculture, coastland, plains, hills, and mountains. Of the land's major features, only its desert (Negev) and perpetually snowcapped peak (Mt. Hermon) have no clear parallel near where I teach. I can describe the size of the Jordan river, for example, by comparing its flow and breadth to one nearby. Although this could be done in a classroom, saying it outdoors has a different effect. Even though we are not standing near the river while on campus, we are closer to geographic features in general, and remapping our view of the landscape with comparative land features in the Bible means our own environment becomes a *symbol* of the biblical one. Even if one teaches in a less topographically similar location, the diversity of Israel's landscape means Hebrew has names for a wide variety of topographical features and climatic experiences. Fortunately, this diverse topography also means professors who want to venture outdoors should be well-able to find their own points of symbolic contact with the topography of Palestine/Israel.

This symbolic approach is enacted in less topographical ways as well. As we continue our journey across campus, Outdoor Class Day allows the instructor to rename campus roads, walkways, and buildings as representations of biblical rivers, boundaries, or cities. Gardner describes this kind of symbolic learning as an important aspect of teaching navigation in some locations. Not unlike the "pebbles on the floor" of a Puluwat canoe house which are used as symbols to teach young sailors the configurations of the stars they will need to know for later voyages, students who encounter campus features during Outdoor Class Day have the opportunity to mentally join biblical landscapes and stories within them (Gardner 2011, 351). Students from my course even report that sometimes when they come across these campus features again later in their college careers, they are suddenly reminded of the biblical configuration imaginatively encountered during our class. Using the physical environment, the campus becomes layered with symbolic meaning and a means to continued reflection on the biblical text and world.

The "foreign" nature of the Bible. However, it is not only similarities in contexts (i.e., the land or climate) which might assist instruction in the outdoor setting, the differences can also be helpful. At opportune moments in an overall "tour of the land," instructors can point out features of the landscape that students assume are part of the Bible but, in point of fact, are not. For example, in my course, I point to the sky and ask students to look for vultures. At this, I mention how some American Christians like to quote Isaiah 40:31 ("they shall mount up with wings like eagles"), sometimes even depicting the verse in photographs and drawings with a bald eagle, sometimes alongside an American flag. The Hebrew in this verse, however, is perhaps better translated as "vulture" (cf. Hosea 8:1)! I suggest that the next time they look up at the sky they will give the vultures a little more respect, and when they look at their Bibles, they will remember that it was not actually written to Americans.

The Bible is a "strange" place (Barth 1978), not just in its literary and theological structures but in its setting. Viewing "the biblical world as a foreign country" is a central task of formational (or "transformative") biblical instruction and an emerging "threshold concept" in our field (Bechtel 2002, 370–1, 375; Van Maaren 2020, 67). By physically pointing out the similarities *and differences* between our land and the land of the Bible, students have a unique way to learn not just about the land of the Bible but about the foreignness of the Bible itself and the capacity for its otherness to point back at themselves. While it remains possible that students are "mapping the world onto the Bible" (less desirable) rather than "mapping the Bible onto their world," there is no clear way to measure the difference and anecdotal evidence suggests the latter. That probability increases, I would argue, when the layered landscape is infused with biblical narrative (see Conclusion).

Visual-spatial engagement and personal meaning in academic biblical study. Finally, in reflection on this first section, although the entire class session requires students to use their bodies and movement, there is a particularly visual-spatial quality to this way of introducing the biblical world. Ancient biblical authors looked at the world and saw and named its

creatures and conditions according to their language system. They then used these words to order and describe ancient Judean/Israelite life. The copyists and authors who followed them did the same. This process of seeing, identifying, and utilizing physical experience of place to perform a task is not dissimilar to some of the skills of hunter-gatherer cultures described by Gardner as "spatial" (2011, 211–14). Although this model does not reenact visual cues in order to train students to speak Hebrew or become scribes, it does remove barriers between students' own contemporary experience and those of the words of the ancient scribes they are reading (in translation). Unlike what happens in a classroom, where students have to imagine a vulture or temperature or trees or elevation in their mind's eye and then consider this abstraction as the same as yet another abstraction (the way someone in Israel sees and feels in that land), this form of teaching does something with the senses of vision and touch that equates that embodied experience with something in the land and its text. There is a direct visual-spatial epistemic parallel to the ancient writers of the biblical text. It thus effectively eliminates one layer of abstraction from the learning process. Some instructors may be able to invite students, as I do, to: "Feel the air. That's not unlike the temperature in Israel now." Or, "Look up. That's not unlike the animal the author is describing." Coming back to our initial biblical content, no matter the climate or fauna in their particular area, any teacher could invite their students outside to "look at the horizon" and consider how far they can see versus how far the Bible says Moses could. I am not convinced this kind of experience leads to, or benefits from, any special "*sensitivity to composition*," as Gardner claims (2011, 208, italics original), but it does take advantage of students' *experience* with "composition" and reminds them that the biblical text is rife with texture.

I finish my discussion of Moses with some selected quotes from Joshua 1, and we talk about the passing of leadership from one generation to another, then and now. "Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:6, 9) is a dictum many undergraduate students appreciate. Pointing out these kinds of correspondences helps students experience the Bible "as an asset for personal meaning-making" (Van Maaren 2020, 69). I am able to speak as "the Lord" to them as "Joshua" in a way that especially draws out correspondences between the text and students' experiences of and reflections on the transition from generation to generation.

Following the Ark by Tribes and the Power of Role-Play

No matter the particular biblical narrative, instructors who use outdoor instruction in the form of an Outdoor Class Day have the opportunity to enact stories in a way that is unrepeatable in the classroom setting. In my Joshua example, having firmly taken our place in the story with the character of Joshua, students gather in self-selected groups of three or four to create "tribes." I call out the names of the tribes, and within seconds, they are choosing which name sounds good to them. They do not realize it, but they are picking roles. Being well-known, one group always picks Levi, which is helpful for our continued reenactment. (Note: I continue this role-play in the classroom later in the course by having students recite their part in the blessings and curses of our reenactment of the Covenant Renewal Ceremony from Deuteronomy 27–28 in the role of the tribes they were part of on Outdoor Class Day.) They continue in these roles when the students playing Levi "take the ark of the covenant" out ahead of the rest of us "one thousand yards" (i.e., 2000 cubits, Joshua 3:4) and stop at the "banks of the Jordan," which is symbolically represented by an inner-campus road nearby. Invariably students think about how they want to transport their imaginary ark. Without prompting, they almost always recall and integrate information from previous lectures on the tabernacle—the Levites carried the ark (Numbers 4:15; Deuteronomy 31:9; 1 Chronicles 15:14–15)—and act that out, sometimes acting like they are carrying poles with the ark on it; sometimes just walking together in a formation. The "Levites" are instructed to count their steps out loud as they go. As the rest of us watch them go, I ask another "nettlesome question": "Why would the God of the Bible would instruct Joshua to have the ark so far ahead of them?" While they think, I ask the Levites how far they have gone (usually about one hundred yards). The other students as "tribes" continue our discussion, but now the actual distance of one thousand yards is more spatially and kinesthetically perceptible. Our conversation can continue with greater imaginative realism.

Narrative imagination. This role-playing is deepened as we catch up to the "Levites" standing at the "banks" (curb) of the "river" (road). It is my turn to be the actor. Shifting into a more explicit narrator mode, I recite selections of the book of Joshua's depiction of the tribes crossing the Jordan river: (a) the water standing "in a heap" "very far away" (3:16), drying up when Levites feet touch the edge of the water, (b) the entrance of the ark into the middle of the river, and (c) their crossing the river tribe by tribe, past the ark, on "dry land" (3:17). Switching back to (excited) commentator, I literally jump up and

down, shouting that this is an intentional parallel with Moses and the Exodus (Joshua 3:17//Exodus 14:21); it is central for seeing Joshua as the "new Moses" (cf. Joshua 1:16-18) and the people as the true inheritors of the Exodus generation (cf. Deuteronomy 5:3; 11:31). Whether or not the story in the text was a historical event (or whether other instructors are as animated as I am), its realistic narrative illocution dramatically connects readers with the events presented, and instructors can use the moment to communicate the intention of the text's presentation. Here again, students can be encouraged to make a second-person connection and weigh the personal relevance of the academic study of the Bible. I ask, "Standing here watching this miracle happen, imagining you are the Israelites, do you *feel* more encouraged?" Students connect to the emphases of the text, not just with their imagination, but also with their bodies. Whether they believe in God or the Bible as holy scripture, they have a better sense of the goals of the text and its effectiveness.

Multi-sensory learning and religious literacy. This sense of the goals of the biblical text is especially true when students walk past the "Levites" with the "ark." Much of the biblical (especially Priestly) literature is concerned with proximity to the holy. In the classroom, there is usually no way of connecting that repeated theme to students' own physical sense of proximity. Here, students are able to do that, even if it is only proximity to an imaginary version of something holy. This may be a place for further research. Given the positive results of others doing similar instruction (e.g. Shoval and Shulruf 2011), it is likely that this kind of multi-sensory experience of the text impacts students' retention of the information presented. Role-playing is an increasingly common form of instruction across a wide range of disciplines, and even though its impact is difficult to measure (Brummel et al. 2010; Culley and Polyakova-Norwood 2012; Jackson and Back 2011), biblical instructors who use such methods join a growing sustained reflection on this teaching method. Continued SoTL research should enable us to improve our methods (van Ments 1999).

Beyond these insights, note that an embodied (albeit pretended) respect for sacred space and sacred objects is an experience that not only benefits students' perception of and appreciation for the Bible, but for other religious traditions as well. A student who has read and enacted a specific way of being reverent toward something holy is arguably more capable of acting with similar deference and respect to the cultural and religious treasures of other nations and religions, and this kind of "religious literacy" is an increasingly important outcome for students in undergraduate general education courses (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 13–14). Perhaps someone who has been required to walk from a distance and then respectfully pass by a pretend "holy object" in role-play will be more likely to respect those who take off their shoes in a mosque or denounce the bombing of a temple in warfare. Outdoor education in biblical studies can arguably thus enhance students' sense of the relevance of academic study; convey concepts of proximity, the sacred, and the retention of those concepts; and grow religious literacy. All of these may be worth future qualitative study.

Performative teaching. Role-playing draws out not only the experience of the students but the professor as well. Although I may be more theatrical in my approach than other professors, all teaching is arguably the performance of a "teaching persona" (Parini 2005, 58; Killen and Gallagher 2013, 116). Others who want to try this technique will no doubt need to find their own way to perform texts in their own outdoor setting and with their own students, considering both the background, place, and expectations of the learners involved as well as the teacher's own approach to the text and comfort with the teaching style (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 10, 13, 15; Parini 2005, 58). My own sense is that outdoor education provides yet another venue for this persona to be played out, one that has range inaccessible to the indoor classroom setting.

Bodily-kinesthetic learning. In my Joshua example, our role-playing ends with one more reenactment. This time our focus is on the retrieval (by one person per "tribe") of memorial "stones" from the river (Joshua 4) and a discussion of how memory functions in Deuteronomy, Joshua, and our own lives. Acting out the activity of the characters of the Bible (here and above) is probably the most bodily-kinesthetic of all the teaching and learning that happens in this outdoor class period; Gardner explicitly cites "The Actor" as one of the "Performing Roles" that demonstrate proficiency in his "bodily-kinesthetic intelligence" (Garner 2011, 239–243). Although I am not training my students or myself to be actors, the "close link between the use of the body and the deployment of other cognitive powers" means that these reenacted moments carry the information and/or values of biblical stories deeper into the lives of my students (Gardner 2011, 220). Timing, sequence, position, and memory are critical to the theatrical performance, and all of them feature in biblical stories (Gardner 2001, 220–221). The parallels are striking and worth noting: biblical texts themselves were developed in an educational environment less static than our own with more emphasis on memory and the performance of tradition

(Niditch 1996; Carr 2005; van der Toorn 2007). Even if the Bible's scribal cultures never conducted role-play (except at Purim), teaching texts forged in performance may require more bodily engagement from our pedagogy than we currently give it.

Jericho and Balancing the Weight of *Herem*

The final part in my example of Outdoor Class Day begins by leading students to a set of wide steps (ours are in front of our columned, multistory athletic center). For the purposes of our reenactment, it has been pronounced a symbolic version of Jericho. Students seat themselves on the steps in the style of an outdoor amphitheater. In some ways, an amphitheater might suffice given the activity students will engage in; it is mostly sitting. Imagining being near the famous walls of Jericho continues the drama of our day. We review and discuss Joshua 5 and the preparation before the conquest of "Jericho" (i.e. Gibeath-haaraloth/"hill of the foreskins" and the first Passover in the land, including the ceasing of the manna). This section includes some intentional frivolity, inviting the men of the class to come up and huddle in a circle for a moment, pretend to groan in the agony of circumcision, and then limp back to their seats. The admitted silliness is still focused on the biblical story; it helps reinforce the ridiculousness of circumcision as preparation for battle and, similarly, the marching and trumpet playing in Joshua 6 as military strategy. "Everything in the story is done to undermine dependence on human power and instead to make the conquest a highly spiritualized and worship-oriented—not battle- or strength-oriented—event," I summarize. This alternation from playful reenactment to theological assessment of the text is, in effect, a miniature representation of the tenor of the whole day because what has preceded has been mostly light-hearted and encouraging, but what comes next is some of the heaviest material of the whole course. More by instinct than by planning, this later intensity is offset by the playfulness of the earlier part of the day. As Carol Bechtel argues, "If it helps people learn, it's worth it!" (2002, 374).

Teaching narratives eclectically. Most biblical narratives have comedic or fantastical elements alongside theologically rigorous ones, and here, the transition from walking a distance to stopping and sitting would not be possible indoors. The transition heightens the intentionality of the moment. For Joshua, the most intense theological challenge is our discussion of *herem,* and I use a handout prepared in advance. It lays out a discussion of the ethical problems of the so-called "conquest." It places special emphasis on Deuteronomy 7:1–5 and various translations of the imperative verb form of the word, *herem* (i.e., "destroy" or "ban"; cf. Moberly 2013, 60). It is complete with footnotes to competing scholarly perspectives. For my students, this is an important experience both in the "constructed nature of biblical understanding" (i.e., it requires close attention to the exact original term being used) and in the fact that, in biblical studies, like much of the humanities, "everything is an argument." Both are emerging threshold concepts in biblical studies ([Van Maaren 2020](#), 67–8). Unlike the earlier task of retelling plot lines, in this moment students need to think hard and reason ethically. The change in mode of instruction is intentional and based on the content. Often, "teaching the Bible . . . [requires being] both methodologically aware and, to some extent, eclectic" (Bechtel 2002, 370). In particular, students often need to be led into a slower consideration of the difficult moral decisions involved (e.g., not letting the Bible "off the hook" too quickly). Outdoor Class Day allows for a transition from students' blood literally pumping from the exercise of walking and reenacting only to have them stop and look the instructor in the eye, and together work through the arguments surrounding an intense subject. The class is able to pay attention to the discussion at hand because of the shift in tone and the balance of "fun and serious at the same time" (Bechtel 2002, 369). This balance extends to the final two bodily-kinesthetic reenactments: the "sin of Achan" in Joshua 6 and an exploration of biblical language about the Canaanite fertility cult. How we might assess the relative effectiveness of this outdoor-based balance in presenting biblical narrative vis-à-vis an indoor presentation is not yet clear to me, but teaching outdoors has made me more aware of this dynamic because of the way I have had to choreograph student movement during this session.

Place-based "storied" interpretation of biblical narrative. Before concluding, it is worth asking: What does Outdoor Class Day bring specifically to the discipline of biblical studies? Does it result in better interpretation of biblical narratives than interpretation in the classroom? I would argue that it does, but the level of perceived effectiveness might also depend on the instructor's epistemic goals. Recent research on outdoor "experiential learning" has led to sustained reflection on which of a discipline's epistemic goals are achieved through it, especially ontologically; how do they want students to see themselves and their reality differently after their outdoor education experience relative to their view before (see esp.

Allison and Pomeroy 2000; e.g., with increased "self-confidence" or "self-esteem," cf. Martin and Leberman 2005; D'Amato and Krasny 2011). This concern for self-growth is not an epistemic focus in biblical studies, but the relationship between a student's sense of reality and the Bible is central to what kind of interpretation is appropriate to biblical narrative, whether "historic" or "storied." Is biblical narrative properly interpreted when it is evaluated as historical evidence of past events and ideologies or when the reader joins into the biblical events and view of the world and allows them to "absorb" the reader's world? (For this distinction, see Frei 1974; see esp. Frei 1986.) Putting the question this way probably bifurcates the discussion too far into the recognizable camps of historical-critical versus theological and does not allow enough for the dynamic (even coercive) relationship *between* reader and text, but it helpfully focuses our attention on students in the learning environment. It is still worth asking: Does an *enacted* instruction of the biblical text cause an epistemic shift in students toward the historical or the storied? Indeed, there is likely a level of epistemic incongruity occurring when I have my class enact Joshua (perhaps more storied), but then sit and reconsider the multiple possible meanings of *herem* (perhaps more historical). Overall, students seem to have a greater chance of being absorbed by text rather than just appraising it, but again, further research and discussion is warranted. Whatever is happening, highlighting the classic question of critical versus empathetic engagement with the biblical text is a profitable lens for reconsidering the specific task of teaching biblical narratives and the possible advantages of doing so in an outdoor instructional environment.

Conclusion

This reflection on my teaching experience with Outdoor Class Day presents not only what I do (i.e., a teaching tip) but also looks at the pedagogical practice of outdoor instruction of the Hebrew Bible. We can summarize the above into four key aspects of this kind of instruction and a fifth that is less dependent on teaching outdoors but is arguably easier to do in that location.

1. Kinesthetic Teaching for Kinesthetic Learning, Not for Kinesthetic "Learners" or "Intelligence"

Despite what I may have thought I was doing when I started teaching this way (or what others think they are doing when they teach this way, contra Wolfe [2009]), the preponderance of research suggests that when we teach using outdoor activities, we are not actually helping visual-spatial or bodily-kinesthetic learners, about whom we should otherwise feel apologetic for leaving them stuck in their seats so many days of the semester. No research supports the idea that students actually learn better as result of being taught according to their preferred styles. They may like to be taught in certain ways—and maybe the comments we get are from especially grateful students who particularly like using their bodies to learn—but they do not need to be taught in this way (or even in a multiplicity of ways) in order for them to learn best (Nancekivell, Shah, and Gelman 2019; Willingham, Hughes, and Dobolyi 2015; Rogowsky, Calhoun, and Tallal 2014). Instead, their likely benefit is in receiving a diverse teaching approach which makes presentation of the content more engaging. Additionally, as we have seen (i.e., with role-playing proximity to holiness and the role of memory), particular styles of teaching may pair well with particular texts or concepts.

2. Outdoor Environment as Introduction to Geography's Impact on the Text of the Bible

To paraphrase G.K. Chesterton, biography is a good introduction into any subject (1933, xi); the story of a scholar and their situation often draws us further into the subject that scholar studies. With the Bible we have no single human author, and, as readers in the midst of the story, we are still getting to know the (arguably) divine one. Intuitively, I think, students are trying to get to know the Israelites. They have some sense of their values and concerns, but so much of the vocabulary and concepts of the text are based on the land. Through specific introduction to the geography, topography, flora, and fauna of the biblical world, students can meet this land in a more personal way, thus correlating their physical experiences with those which the biblical text assumes. This is not fully possible, of course, not being in the land itself, but this kind of outdoor teaching reduces the number of layers of abstraction normally present in classroom lectures. Whether

one performs this kind of outdoor teaching with Joshua or not, professors of the Bible will benefit from taking students outdoors as a way of associating their visual-spatial senses with the land of the Bible, a foreign country that they need to see for what it is in order to learn from it.

3. Using Space Outside the Classroom for Imaginative Reenactment

Given that research on how brain patterns and processes correspond with place and body movements (Waterhouse 2006, 211), it is no wonder that students respond strongly to connecting the movement of their bodies within the context of a course of instruction. For biblical teachers, this movement is perhaps best utilized when students connect their own movements in biblical role-play outdoors. Not only do they have more physical room to move and engage dynamics of space (especially with ideas of holiness, as shown), but they have conceptual room to imagine themselves as a member of a specific ancient Israelite tribe. Because of that role, students have an assigned perspective on the events taking place within the story and not just the perspective of their twenty-first century selves. Indeed, it is possible that movement and not just the static memorization of information was inherent in the way biblical texts were formed and transmitted. Given this, the experiment in outdoor instruction presented here suggests that, at minimum, movement ought to be a more significant concern in our instructional methods, especially for those in undergraduate contexts who are not only preparing scholars but also citizens (who could benefit from a sense of the relevance of biblical and religious texts).

4. Balancing the Impact of Content by Shifting Places and Modes of Instruction

Part of the benefit of instructing outside with alternating patterns of movement and seated listening is that students' attention can be refocused from place to place. Students respond to the variety of lighthearted and critical thinking tasks, not just for variety's sake, but because both teacher and students are clearly involved in the spaces, in the same tasks. We are in the same place in a significantly different way than we are when in the traditional classroom (Druffel and Lerash 2017). Physical changes in location make what instructors are doing clearer. As lecturers, we often make these transitions in the classroom, and we know when some (or sometimes most) of the class are not following the shift in train of thought; they are not intellectually "shifting gears" with us. Being outside provides help with this, especially with difficult or complicated arguments (like *herem*). On this last point, by alternating fun and seriousness, students digest the material in a way that helps them later reflect on the key points, rather than overwhelming them with complexity, possibility, and challenge to their religious commitments (with the potential for them to be "shut down" rather than formed by the material).

5. Shifting Power: Foolishness and Trust in the Instructor-Student Relationship

As a final note, Parker Palmer discussed the dangers of vulnerability that teachers undertake by exposing themselves to students' critique (1998, 17). Leaving aside whether he is right that one should avoid using a persona with students to protect ourselves (contra Parini 2005), Palmer is correct that the academic community is based on critique. Students of our current digital and consumer age arguably feel they have more right than ever to critique their professors and have more ability to "troll" them in course evaluations. Each professor will have their own way of doing this, but one of the subtler benefits of teaching outdoors is that my willingness to make a fool of myself seems to build trust with my students. In fact, in the classroom, students are as vulnerable (or more so) as teachers; teachers probably have greater power over students' futures than vice versa. By willingly making a fool of myself and being appropriately silly (within reason), students can tell that I am doing so because I care. I make myself vulnerable, not for the mere sake of their affirmation (as in a theatrical performance), but for the sake of their learning the content. I think students can tell, by the risks I am taking in teaching them in a different way, that I am willing to do almost anything to help them learn. Other professors will have different ways of being willing to "make a fool" of themselves, but being outdoors may create physical opportunities to do this in ways which might look contrived in the classroom. When we take risks in teaching in general, we are, I think, submitting ourselves in service to students—not wielding grades over them—and they can tell. They absolutely sense the "foolishness" of the thing we are doing, but they know that it is for their sake. I think they appreciate that, and it further

connects us to our students, not only for that class period but for the rest of the course; a benefit to the whole of the semester is granted by the risks undertaken in just one day. These risks are worth it in multiple ways, and we would do well to try them and consider if and how they work.

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About the author

Jonathan D. Parker is Assistant Professor of Religion at Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia, where he teaches Bible and theology and is coordinator for the biblical and Christian studies concentration. He has taught the Bible in academic and ecclesial settings for over twenty years in both the US and the UK.

ARTICLE

How Online Learning May Disadvantage Students from Some Cultures and What to Do About It in the Theology Classroom

Glenn Fluegge
Concordia University Irvine

ABSTRACT

Online learning is *not* a culturally neutral form of learning, but, like any educational approach, has been and continues to be shaped by significant sociohistorical and cultural forces. Not just what is taught, but also the means by which it is taught—the technological medium of online education—is influenced by culture and should be adapted and adjusted accordingly. With illustrations and examples pulled from the author's experience of teaching theology to students from throughout Africa and the United States, this essay explores four "dimensions of culture"—collectivist versus individualist, high versus low power distance, high- versus low-context, and oral versus literate preference—and analyzes how students from more collectivistic, high power distance, high-context, and oral preference societies may be disadvantaged by commonly used and accepted approaches to online learning. It then offers some practical suggestions for adjusting online theological education to be more culturally responsive.

KEYWORDS

online learning, theological education, culture, collectivism, power distance, high-context, orality

Introduction

Online learning provokes all sorts of emotions and reactions, ranging from wholehearted love to utter contempt (see, e.g., Dynarski 2018; Arkorful and Abaidoo 2015; Horodyskyj et al. 2018; Bettinger and Loeb 2017; Fain 2019) and, from my experience, all the more when applied to theology and particularly pastoral training. So, let me begin with a caveat: No matter where you fall on the spectrum of responses to online theological education, I am on your side. To underscore this point, let me share a bit of my own background. I was a residential student for all four years of my undergraduate studies as well as for three years of graduate seminary studies and I have a deep appreciation for my time as part of those two communities. For over ten years, I served as director and then academic dean of an international residential seminary in Togo, West Africa where every year, at considerable expense, we brought students (along with their families, if possible) to our campus to train them as pastors. After that, I taught for

three years at an international residential seminary in South Africa. However, I also earned an entire master's degree in education, without ever stepping foot on their campus or seeing any of my professors or fellow students. I went through a two-year comprehensive missionary training program taught via distance by mentors in the United States while I was deployed in Togo. And currently, I head up the Cross-cultural Ministry Center (CMC), a graduate-level seminary program at a liberal arts university that uses a hybrid approach[1] to online learning to offer pastoral and missionary training to students from our surrounding community in southern California and as far away as Hawaii, Minnesota, Mexico, and even China. So again, no matter where you fall on this issue, I am on your side.

My intention in this essay is not to make a value judgment against or for online learning. The truth is that not only does online learning greatly increase our opportunity as professors to reach more students, but research has shown it to be quite effective, especially when done correctly. In any case, it is a reality and almost all of us have been or will be engaged in some form of it throughout our careers. Rather, my intention is to explore the very real existence of one aspect of online learning that, I believe, is often unintentionally overlooked or conveniently ignored—its cultural dimension.

I am intrigued by culture partly because I spent so many years working in an international setting far from my "home culture." "Once a missionary, always a missionary," as they say, so I ask the reader's indulgence as I bring in some admittedly anecdotal observations from my time living and working in two African countries, as well as the United States. Admittedly, the cultural disparities between the Moba people living in the remote village of Lokpano, Togo and the south Orange County suburban residents of Irvine, California may be much greater than those we might encounter in our average classroom (or not, depending on the classroom!). Nonetheless, some lessons learned from more apparent cultural differences on another continent are applicable to our classroom experiences here in the United States. At the very least, seeing these cultural differences will be an impetus for reflecting on how similar, yet perhaps less apparent, cultural differences and influences exist in our own classrooms.

My working thesis here is this: Not just what is taught, but also the means by which it is taught is influenced by culture and can be adapted accordingly. In other words, the technological medium of education—online learning—is as culturally influenced as the content itself, and therefore, it too should be adjusted to account for cultural differences.

The Problem of the Hiddenness of Culture

This thesis is not as self-evident as it might seem at first. First, despite some efforts over the last several years, there remains a dearth of in-depth quality research on this topic (see earlier complaint by Edmundson [2007]). The rising popularity of distance education via online learning has been linked to the rising popularity of the World Wide Web and, despite very rapid advances, it is still a rather recent phenomenon. Educational research in the field of online learning and culture is still in its beginning stages.

However, there is another reason why it is not so simple. Distance learning emerged originally from a Euro-American Western cultural context (for a detailed discussion, see Fluegge [2010]) and that context continues to influence online learning in profound ways.[2] In addition, until recently, most of the research on distance and online learning has come from that same Western context and has tended to assume that the medium of distance learning is generally culturally neutral. The underlying problem is that one's own culture is surprisingly difficult to detect. Why is that?

The late Paul Hiebert, a well-known Christian anthropologist, defined culture as "the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values, and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do" (1985, 30). The difficulty is that the deeper levels of culture—those

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1   We offer synchronous live interactive courses during the year and face-to-face three-week intensives during the summer. See our underlying rationale for this pedagogical approach below.

2   I view online learning as a subset or type of the more broadly understood category of distance learning. Although this essay focuses especially on online learning, I do occasionally refer to the broader category of distance education/learning to include other earlier modes of learning such as written correspondence or self-guided workbooks. Although there are obvious differences between older kinds of distance learning and today's online learning, there are also underlying similarities, including the sociocultural context that birthed them.

parts of culture that are particularly influential in organizing and shaping the way a person thinks—are not what one sees on the surface. What one immediately sees when encountering a different culture are simply the by-products of those very systems of ideas, feelings, and values that lay at the very core of a person. Anthropologist and long-time missionary Eugene Bunkowske (2002, 2012) created the "cultural onion" as a way of viewing and understanding culture as made up of layers, similar to those of an onion. The outside layers of culture—artifacts and behaviors—are immediately apparent and accessible. He calls these the "actualizing" layers of culture. Although they are what we first perceive during an initial cultural encounter, these outside layers are simply what one might call "surface symptoms" of much deeper layers of culture, such as feelings, values, and beliefs.[3] Bunkowske labels these the "evaluating" layers of culture. They are what enable us to make decisions about what is good, true, and enjoyable in life. They are embedded so deeply in our consciousness that we very often do not know or are not able to explain why we consider this good or deem that false or find this enjoyable rather than that. Nevertheless, even these layers are not as deeply buried, implicit, and unconscious as the "foundational" layers of culture. According to Bunkowske, a person's worldview and ultimate allegiance make up the core of culture. These layers provide the "perceptual basis and the mental mapping for the other levels of culture" (2002, 3). They cause, mold, and shape the evaluative conclusions regarding one's beliefs, values, and feelings, which in turn are actualized in day-to-day life through collecting certain things and doing certain activities.

Bunkowske's model of culture draws attention to the fact that when it comes to culture what one sees on the surface is not all there is. So, lowering myself, averting my eyes, and supporting my right arm with my left hand as I shake an elder's hand in northern Togo would be considered normal practice. This behavior (on the actualizing level) reflects a much deeper feeling of respect for elders and their value among the Moba people (on the evaluating level). Moreover, the underlying worldview (on the foundational level) that considers elders, similarly to ancestors, as liaisons with Yendu, the creator God, may also be shaping, influencing, and contributing to these outward visible behaviors. Additionally, in oral preference societies, wisdom and knowledge are not bound in books but must be preserved and passed on by the elders. This oral-aural preference is an integral part of worldview (again, on the foundational level of culture) that would seem to give inherent value to elders (cf. Cole and Scribner 1974, 125).

What I still find surprising is that although I could, at least to a certain extent, detect and analyze cultural influences among the Moba, to this day I still have great difficulty in detecting my own underlying cultural influences. This is mostly because I am continuously engaged in what sociologist Peter Berger (1967, 27) referred to as "cosmization"—the process whereby human beings intuitively deem their own culture as normative for, or at least a precise reflection of, the world as it actually is.[4] In other words, I tend to consider my own cultural influences as universally normal. "Culture hides much more than it reveals and, strangely enough," says one researcher, "what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (Hall 1998, 59). Culture causes us to have blind spots. I believe the tendency to see distance learning, and particularly online learning, as somehow culturally neutral and inclusive is precisely one of these blind spots (cf. Hannon and D'Netto 2007, 419; Jung 2014, 51).

An Analysis of Distance Learning and Culture

So, what is the intersect between online learning and culture? I first encountered this question while in Africa (see Fluegge 2010). Our seminary in Togo had a rather well-developed "theological education by extension" (TEE) distance learning program in addition to our residential program. Since the rural areas of Africa we served seldom had readily available internet access, groups of participants along with their leader were to work through a series of self-guided workbooks. The reality is that the TEE program never did very well. We were never able to get it going despite a significant investment of personnel, time, and money. To this day, I believe, there is a storeroom on the seminary campus filled with thousands of dollars of dusty unused TEE books, probably by now half devoured by rats and termites. No doubt, there are a number of reasons for this program's lack of success and we should be cautious in drawing any unwarranted conclusions; however,

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3   Bunkowske continued to develop the "cultural onion" throughout his life. He later described the "evaluating level" of culture as consisting of "associations, values, beliefs, and emotions" (2012).

4   Berger writes, "Every society is engaged in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world. Cosmization implies the identification of this humanly meaningful world with the world as such, the former now being grounded in the latter, reflecting it or being derived from it in its fundamental structures" (1967, 27).

in visiting other institutions, I realized that we were not the only seminary to confront this problem. I found similar failed programs in the seminaries of other church bodies in several other West African countries (e.g., Togo, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast) and in these same places centralized residential programs were faring quite well. Now, I do not mean to imply that there are no thriving distance learning theological education programs in Africa. There definitely are. Most notably, I might mention the South African Theological Seminary, a purely online seminary with students from all over Africa and the world. Nonetheless, I could not dismiss this tendency among my African comrades to favor residential centralized seminary programs—a preference which seemed to go deeper than a simple lack of familiarity with distance or online learning. Of course, we could identify any number of factors that may have contributed to this preference, some of them no doubt on a personal individual level, but I would like to focus on the cultural factor.

In the seventies and eighties, Geert Hofstede (1984) and his team of researchers identified what he called "dimensions of culture." In response to others who have critically examined his conclusions, Hofstede has further refined and bolstered his findings (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). In any case, they are still considered helpful in exploring cultural influences on learning (see Wang 2007). For the purposes of this study, I want to focus on two of these dimensions: Collectivism versus individualism and high versus low power distance. To these I wish to also add what David Livermore (2015, 116-119; 2009, 135-138) of the Cultural Intelligence Center and others (e.g., Gunawardena et al. 2003, 756) refer to as high-context versus low-context cultures and what I describe as oral preference versus literate preference. None of these "dimensions of culture" are meant to present an either/or situation. It is more helpful and accurate to view each as a continuum between two opposite poles with a certain culture tending to fall somewhere on the continuum, usually more toward one pole and less toward the other.

Collectivism Versus Individualism

The first cultural dimension, collectivism–individualism, is the "tendency of members of a society to act as individuals or members of groups" and the extent "to which a culture values individual or collective achievement or well-being" (Liu et al. 2010, 178). Generally speaking, European and perhaps especially Euro-American societies have traditionally favored individual achievement and uniqueness. In fact, it was a Swiss psychologist—Jean Piaget—who proposed that egocentrism was a natural part of every child's cognitive development. Since then, others (e.g., Driscoll 1994) have pointed out that his universal claims rested on observation of mostly European and some American children. Another group of researchers (Bruner et al. 1966) showed that Eskimo children display much less egocentrism than American or European children due in part to their need to work together as a group when hunting and fishing. Hofstede found that individualistic societies have an "I-consciousness" whereas collectivistic ones possess more of a "we-consciousness" (2011, 11). Hence, initiatives or activities that promote competition with the goal of individual success tend to flounder when they threaten the harmony of the whole group in collectivist societies (Westbrook 2014, 285).

Most Euro-Americans normally value individual uniqueness. Those from other cultures may value sameness. I recall a well-intentioned short-term mission team that gathered the children together from the villages they visited among the Moba people of northern Togo and presented a Bible lesson they had used for their vacation Bible school back in the United States. They taught the Moba children how God loves them so much that he made each of them unique and different from everyone else. There was no follow-up evaluation to go by, but I was unsure that the children saw that as evidence of God's love. The children enjoyed the team's visit, but from their reaction, the children did not really seem to get it.

Most African societies are community oriented and research has shown that this affects how one learns (Lephalala and Makoe 2012; Yang et al. 2010; Thompson 1998; Anakwe et al. 1999). Online learning, by its very nature of disseminating knowledge to students who live far apart, tends to be more individualistic. While it is true that great strides have been taken to create virtual learning communities, sociologists (e.g., Fukuyama 1999) tell us that such virtual communities remain fundamentally different than, for example, Moba face-to-face communities. Moba communities consist of a full network of relationships that are based on constant face-to-face contact and that touch every aspect of life, including family, work, and religion. There is little individual privacy. In the virtual community, relationships are less personal, more formal, and often long-distance (Fukuyama 1999). Individuals are not as dependent on one another and relationships are more compartmentalized. Students come together for educational purposes but do not really engage in other aspects

of each other's lives such as family, religion, and leisure activities. This means that even online virtual communities largely allow the individual to maintain his or her autonomy. Learning, even within such a virtual community, is much more individualistic than the traditional, collectivistic learning that takes place in Moba society or in many other societies throughout Africa. It is not surprising, then, that researchers find that those from individualist cultures tended to be more open to distance learning than those from more collectivist cultures (see Anakwe et al. 1999).

This is not meant to dissuade educators from using online learning when teaching students from more collectivistic cultures. Distance learning has changed and adapted as online learning technologies have continued to evolve. Perhaps even more importantly, socio-cultural tendencies have also changed and adapted to the widespread prevalence of the World Wide Web even in the farthest corners of the world. I would encourage all educators to engage in online learning but to do so with "eyes wide open" (cf. Livermore 2006), carefully considering this critically important question: How can we adjust our teaching in the online learning environment so as to engage more effectively those of our students who come from more collectivistic cultures?

High Versus Low Power Distance

The second cultural dimension, power distance, focuses on the "degree to which people accept the unequal distribution of power... in a society" (Gunawardena et al. 2003, 755). Societies that have a high power distance accept and even embrace the fact that certain individuals within those societies have greater influence and power, especially when it comes to communication. In these societies, this is a way of life endorsed and valued not only by the leaders, but also by the followers (Hofstede 2011, 9). By contrast, low power distance cultures value "leveling the playing field" and giving all individuals equal influence. We need only look at the Declaration of Independence of the United States and its opening statement on the God-given equality of all people to see that the United States is a low power distance culture. Paul Hiebert, in challenging American missionaries to examine their own cultural assumptions about equality, offers a rather jarring statement (at least, when viewed from a Euro-American perspective):

> This [Euro-American] emphasis on equality seems absurd to the majority of the world's cultures, in which hierarchy is seen as the reality and the norm for all forms of life. Just as humans are higher than animals and some kinds of animals higher than others, so some kinds of humans are higher than other kinds of humans. (1985, 128)

The egalitarian Euro-American culture of the United States contrasts rather sharply, for example, with many African societies, which are decidedly hierarchical. This is often evident in day-to-day behaviors and practices. When I began teaching at the seminary in Togo, I initially felt uncomfortable when students would run to meet me on my way to class, insist on carrying my books the rest of the way, and stand at attention when I entered the classroom. The greatest care was also taken to address others and myself with the proper titles. This contrasts rather sharply with my experience in southern California where never once as a university professor has a student carried my books to class (nor would it be expected) and where students sometimes relate to professors on a first name basis.

A glance at the history of the rise of distance education in the United States reveals that it emerged from a more progressive approach to education that is decidedly "learner-centered" rather than "teacher-reliant" (Fluegge 2010, 30-32; see also Moore 2004). This progressive approach to pedagogy was largely influenced by Deweyism, the philosophy of education expounded by John Dewey in his article "My Pedagogic Creed" at the end of the nineteenth century. Dewey writes, "the teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of a community to select influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences" (1897, n.p.). In this approach, learners are responsible for constructing their own knowledge and teachers are merely "facilitators" in that process rather than "transmitters" of knowledge. This idea has dominated the distance education field since its inception (Moore 2003; see Zhang and Kenny 2010, 20). In fact, it is quite common in online education today for the subject expert to be separate from what has come to be called the course facilitator who guides the students to construct their own knowledge and understanding as they go through the course. This progressive constructivist approach to distance education often assumes a much more egalitarian relation between the student and the teacher and the communication process is much more democratic.

Although laudable in Euro-American cultures, research indicates that this may disadvantage some from Chinese and certain African cultures that value the teacher as the giver of knowledge and the center of the learning process (Jung 2014, 18-19; Hofstede 2011, 9; see also Kang 2014). Students from these high power distance cultures tend to value feedback from the teacher more than their peers from more low power distance cultures do (Liu et al. 2010; Fang 2007; Thompson and Ku 2005) and they feel uncomfortable without the guiding presence of the teacher (Zhang and Kenny 2010). As one professor from Botswana put it: "[Our students] feel they can only learn when a teacher is teaching them" (Ojedokun n.d., 4). A Chinese student participating in a research study on this topic expressed similar sentiments: "It is like students are exploring an unknown territory in a forest. The instructor eventually comes out and leads to the right path. Because we think the teacher is an authority figure, we want to know what his thoughts are instead of discussing among ourselves blindly" (Thompson and Ku 2005, 42).

This high power distance tendency is evident in areas of the classroom outside of the teacher-student relation. We see it, for example, in the different approaches to plagiarism. My students at the seminary in Togo were often surprised when I dinged them for plagiarism. It took me a while to understand that in their eyes copying the work of an expert is to be lauded, not punished: "Altering the authority's words would be a sign of disrespect" (Jung 2014, 17). Similarly, peer evaluations can be problematic in cultures where the tasks of criticizing and assessing are reserved for those deemed to be in higher positions of authority (e.g., professor). Although team-based learning (TBL) would seem to jibe well with the group orientation of collectivistic cultures, when implementing a version of it (https://teambasedlearning.site-ym.com) in my Introduction to Pastoral Theology course with students from countries throughout West and Central Africa, I found they had a marked aversion to their teammates' peer evaluations that contributed to their final grade.[5] In their eyes, that task belonged to the professor alone. In the seminary program where I currently teach (in California) all students are required to carry out an internship during their theological and pastoral education. In addition to the evaluation filled out by their mentor pastors, we recently began requiring evaluations from other lay members of the congregation. While not a problem for any of our Euro-American students, one Chinese mentor pastor of a Chinese congregation expressed a concern. "I am concerned about this evaluation," he wrote, "because it will put [the intern] under the evaluator" (personal communication). His solution was providing a "third-party" evaluation from the senior pastor of the congregation. Since over half of our students in the seminary program come from high power distance societies, we have since decided to forego this requirement.

Again, this is not meant to discourage the use of online education among high power distance cultures. Culturally diverse learners can and have benefitted from the online classroom, even in ways that are less teacher reliant. For example, one researcher found that Chinese learners benefitted from the online discussion setting because it allowed them time to consider different answers, do the necessary research, and then formulate and edit their own responses (Zhang 2013). Online learning also situates the students within their own contexts where they can learn from local and more culturally-situated teachers, mentors, and elders, a benefit not necessarily found in residential education. Nevertheless, it remains important to recognize that distance education emerged from a western context and that context continues to influence its practice. The question before the responsible educator is: How can we adjust our teaching in the online learning environment so as to more effectively engage students who come from high power distance cultures?

High- Versus Low-Context

Since anthropologist Edward Hall (1976) introduced the distinction between high- and low-context cultures several decades ago, continued research has established it as an important framework for understanding cultural differences in communication patterns. So important, in fact, that one intercultural researcher has listed it as one of ten "cultural values" that a person must understand to be an effective culturally intelligent leader and communicator (Livermore 2015, 116-119).

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5   This version of TBL required that each member of the team evaluate the other members for their contribution to team activities as a way of holding each other accountable. In addition to constructive feedback, the peer evaluations also contributed to the students' final grades (see, e.g., Team-based Learning Collaborative 2021).

High- versus low-context refers to the "amount of information that is implied versus stated directly in a communication message" (Gunawardena 2003, 756). Those from high-context cultures, also referred to as "indirect" cultures, tend to rely on non-verbal and indirect cues that lie outside of the verbal or textual information itself. They pay as much attention to the unspoken context as to the spoken words themselves. Even when communicating verbally they tend to favor indirectness, often using stories and proverbs that would make little sense outside of their wider context. Those from low-context cultures, often referred to as "direct" cultures, expect the hearer to obtain the necessary information from the code of the text itself. Nonverbal and contextual cues are ignored or considered unimportant. Low-context culture members tend to communicate in much more direct ways; they value "saying it like it is," frowning upon what they would view as beating around the bush and sugarcoating things. Direct, low-context communicators tend to view indirect communication as disingenuous, vague, and at times deceptive. Their counterparts tend to view direct communicators as blunt, rude, and at times unnecessarily aggressive. Whereas many European and Euro-American societies tend toward low-context communication, other societies like those in Mexico, China, Japan, and many throughout Africa tend to favor high-context communication patterns (Gunawardena 2003, 756; Livermore 2015, 116-119; see also Westbrook 2014, 282-283).

It makes sense that communication is more easily reduced to writing in a low-context environment than in a high-context one. This tends to make it much easier for outsiders to enter low-context societies. An abundance of written signs give clear instructions about what to do and how to think (e.g., where to cross the street, how to drive, where to eat, where to find the bathroom, where to park, why one should refrain from feeding the animals). It is much more difficult to enter high-context cultures. Unfamiliar with nonverbal contexts, the newcomer simply cannot detect as much communication.

How does this effect online learning? Writing-based online learning, largely influenced by Western approaches to communication, tends to favor individuals from low-context cultures because it inevitably isolates the verbal and written text from its wider social context (Lustig and Koester 2006). High-context cultures value that missing social context and are at a disadvantage without it. Not surprisingly, one researcher found that students from high-context cultures viewed the lack of face-to-face contact in their asynchronous classroom as a challenge to learning and forming relationships, while their low-context counterparts believed it had no impact, negative or positive, on their learning (Morse 2003). One detects here a correlation between collectivism and high-context cultures (Westbrook 2014, 285). It makes sense that the extent to which one relies on context for communication would be directly related to the value one places on embeddedness within community.

Some preliminary research indicates that the problem may not lie as much with online education, per se, as with the low-context Western models and approaches often used in online education. In a fascinating study, Cho (2010) compared the Korean social network site, Cyworld, with its American counterpart, Facebook. Although Cyworld has become quite popular in South Korea and throughout much of Asia, it recently abandoned its initiative to expand internationally due to lack of response. The Cyworld interface differs significantly from that of Facebook. Whereas Facebook features an information-heavy, text-based interface that reads like a newspaper, Cyworld users create mini avatars called "miniMes," build and decorate miniHomes in which they can live, and establish communities with other Cyworld users. These very popular networking giants have chosen two very different approaches to online social presence—one that corresponds to the collectivistic, high-context Korean culture and another that corresponds to the individualistic, low-context American culture. Another researcher analyzed McDonalds websites from high-context and low-context international cultures and found differences that, again, corresponded to their high- or low-context orientation (Würtz 2006). For example, high-context sites tended to use more animation of people moving (such as employees bowing). She hypothesized that this may represent nonverbal communication.

Online education emerged from a Western context that favors low-context communication and individualistic values, which in turn, often affect the way we teach online. The question before the responsible educator is: How can we adjust our teaching in the online learning environment so as to engage more effectively those of our students who come from high-context cultures?

Oral Preference versus Literate Preference

The late Professor Walter Ong, a Jesuit priest from Saint Louis University, was a forerunner in the field of research often called "orality issues." He wrote profoundly and prolifically on this topic, including *The Presence of the Word* (1967) in which he traces historically the shift from a primarily oral and aural mode of communication to a literate and visual mode and draws out the deep and widespread effects this has had on other aspects of cognition and life in general. His most popular book is probably *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). Both are well worth reading. Many others have since taken up his interest, including missionaries who have had first-hand experience working and teaching in societies consisting almost exclusively of oral communicators. One example is the International Orality Network (2021). ION grew out of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism in 2004 and is an affiliation of Christian agencies and organizations working together to make God's Word available to oral communicators in culturally appropriate ways. According to ION, oral preference individuals "communicate primarily or exclusively through oral, not textual means" (2021).

There is debate over the extent to which the technological medium (speaking or writing) affects or even determines cognition (Chandler 1995). I am probably not as much of a "technological determinist" as Ong, but my years in Togo working with those from nonliterate societies throughout West and Central Africa has convinced me that much of what Ong hypothesized is in fact true. The differences between oral and literate societies extend far beyond the ability or inability to read and write. They influence the way in which we think and learn (Ong 1982; Slack 2000; Thompson 1998; Hiebert and Hiebert Meneses 1995, 131-132, 151-154). A few surface examples might prove helpful to illustrate this point. Due to the lack of printed resources, knowledge in oral societies must be repeated to avoid being lost (Slack 2000, 10), giving rise to an emphasis on repetition in learning. This method of learning is associated with what educators sometimes refer to as "rote memorization." In oral societies, one often finds the repetitive use of songs as a particularly useful learning tool (Hiebert and Hiebert Meneses 1995, 132). Hence, Koranic schools throughout West Africa arrange their curriculum around the repetition and memorization of the Koran in Arabic, despite few adults and even fewer children actually speaking Arabic (cf. Thompson 1998). Traditional education in many West African societies relies heavily on mentoring and modeling to conserve and transmit knowledge (Thompson 1998), leading to imitation as another important instructional method. Conceptual knowledge is often preserved and remembered by housing it in stories, legends, and myths which are transmitted to the next generation (Slack 2000, 12). These instructional methods (e.g., repetition, memorization, mentoring, modeling, stories) tend toward a behavioral teacher-centered approach to education rather than the more constructivist learner-centered approach that has dominated distance and online learning since its inception (Fluegge 2010).

In a study of the transfer of knowledge in West African societies, Southern Baptist missionary and linguist LaNette Thompson showed that in oral societies "knowledge's worth resides in the giver of knowledge" (1998, 3-4; cf. Hiebert and Hiebert Meneses 1995, 145). Knowledge has little validity or value apart from the one who disseminates that knowledge (i.e., teacher). It is not neutrally value ridden. In fact, many from historically oral societies in West Africa would view knowledge by itself as having no "intrinsic worth" (Thompson 1998, 3). Therefore, in many West African societies and in other oral societies around the world, education that is not closely associated with the giver of knowledge has little worth. Moreover, in many oral societies, knowledge is also valuable because it is limited and in short supply. In such a context, "knowledge is power, to be guarded and used when power is to be exhibited" (Thompson 1998, 3). Knowledge shared indiscriminately reduces its value.

This view of knowledge contrasts sharply with that of many European, Euro-American, and some Asian societies, for example, where the printed book disseminates knowledge haphazardly and inevitably creates a permanent disconnect between the giver of knowledge and its recipient. Perhaps even more problematic, online learning has traditionally separated and compartmentalized the education process into its constituent parts—the "subject expert" is different from the "course designer" who is different from the "course facilitator" who interacts with the students often only through a written medium (Fluegge 2010).

It seems inevitable that writing-based approaches to distance online learning are prone to hinder oral preference learners. The question before the responsible educator is: How can we adjust our teaching in the online learning environment so as to engage more effectively those of our students who come from more oral cultures?

Concluding Practical Suggestions

Many models already exist to help the educator design an intercultural and culturally responsive online course (e.g., Young 2009; Stephan and Stephan 2013). My intention here is not to delve into the abundance of literature on this topic, but rather to offer a few practical suggestions for how theological educators might begin adjusting their online classrooms and programs to account for the cultural dimensions explored above and more effectively engage diverse learners. The hope is that these will, in turn, serve as an impetus for continued research and exploration of more culturally responsive online learning practices.

First there is an underlying principle to consider. One's approach affects one's attitude which, in turn, affects the outcome. Homiletics professor Lisa Lamb from Fuller Theological Seminary advises that it is ultimately unhelpful to approach the diverse classroom as made up of students who possess a "set of challenges" that must be overcome (2019, 94). Such a "deficit pedagogy" that views students from certain cultures as inherently disadvantaged would seem to only perpetuate cultural hegemony and ultimately lead to further alienation. An "asset pedagogy," on the other hand, views the unique cultural traits of the diverse classroom as advantages. Such an approach leads the educator to adopt teaching methodologies that not only engage but also affirm the cultural values of diverse learners. Here are a few suggestions:

- Train faculty and staff in "cultural intelligence" (CQ) to create an environment that is intentionally and willingly responsive to cultural differences (cf. Westbrook 2014, 292). The learner support staff should be as culturally aware as the faculty. See, for example, the Cultural Intelligence Center (https://culturalq.com/), which offers research-based tools, training seminars, and helpful assessments. The Cultural Intelligence Center has partnered with faith-based churches and organizations, but also with businesses (e.g., Starbucks, McDonalds) and with universities (e.g., University of Michigan) to help participants develop cultural intelligence by going beyond mere knowledge and translating that knowledge into culturally aware and responsive action. This is only one among an array of other training resources.

- Strive to communicate with students in multiple ways—email, online chat, phone, and especially online video—about course content, but also regarding important course requirements, expectations, and guidelines. As a decidedly low-context professor, I have to admit a certain amount of frustration and even exasperation when students have repeatedly asked questions about course expectations that seem, at least to me, to be clearly covered in the syllabus. Yet theology professor Timothy Westbrook of the Center for Distance Education in Bible and Ministry at Harding University suggests that we might reconsider whether the low-context written syllabus is always an adequate means of communicating course expectations: "Instead, the low-context professor following Christ's incarnational model might recognize the limitations of low-context communication and find high-context ways to inform students from different backgrounds" (Westbrook 2014, 289-290). Online video apps such as Zoom, Facetime, or WhatsApp tend to be more high context than the written medium of the syllabus.

- Create assignments early in the course with the express goal of building up community and social presence. Although this may be considered an online best practice in general, it is of paramount importance for learners from collectivistic, high-context cultures that tend to view life holistically. As a task-oriented American, it took me a while when we first arrived in Togo to learn the value of the prolonged traditional Moba greetings inquiring about the previous night's sleep, the wife, the children, the household, the village, the crops, the livestock, and so forth. I soon realized that this ritual was more than a mere nicety. It laid the foundation for more authentic communication. My experience in Togo parallels that of Melinda Thompson and Meri MacLeod of Abilene Christian University when they first began interacting with West African Ghanaian students in their online Master's program. The students' written correspondence often included rather lengthy greetings and inquiries about family and health that seemingly had little to do with the content of the course. Yet viewed from a more holistic perspective, they had everything to do with the course. And they were much more than just common courtesies. "While these introductory items seemed superfluous to the American recipients—possibly even intrusive into one's personal life—they formed the backbone of relationship building for the Ghanaian students" (Thompson and MacLeod 2015, 121). Community building and social presence are of paramount importance in the online diverse classroom. It may be helpful, for example, to give an initial discussion board assignment asking students to introduce themselves

in some detail, if they so desire, and then have them respond to pointed questions that give them opportunity to share background cultural information for the purposes of building up the classroom community (Woodley et al. 2017, 472-473).

- For similar reasons, many educators suggest making use of online classroom/meeting software for regular synchronous online class sessions throughout the course or, at least, early in the term (Woodley et al. 2017, 475-476; Uzuner 2009, 12; Westbrook 2014, 292; Fluegge 2010, 41; cf. Lamb 2019, 100). This real-time connection can help establish social presence. In our online seminary program, students "go to class" together via Zoom where they can see each other and communicate in real time via mic, chat, or other signals (e.g., raise hand) and emojis. I am always encouraged to see students from such a wide diversity of backgrounds using the chat bar before class to greet one another and inquire about personal matters, and when I see the Hispanic and Anglo students bantering good-naturedly in Spanish. I am not suggesting that synchronous live video is superior to asynchronous activities such as discussion forums. Each has its place and its advantages and disadvantages. However, I would suggest that gathering together online can provide a foundation for more effective asynchronous work later on, especially in the culturally-diverse classroom. If synchronous live video class sessions are not possible, another idea is to schedule a phone call with each student early in the term. The point is to establish a real-time connection. Some institutions may require that an entire degree be possible to achieve asynchronously. In these cases, one could give students the option of connecting synchronously or submitting an equivalent written assignment (Lamb 2019, 100).

- If possible, design required times of face-to-face community building into the program curriculum at regular intervals (Fluegge 2010, 41; Uzuner 2009, 12). This may already be a common best practice in many online programs, but I emphasize it here for two reasons. First, students from more collectivistic, high-context, and oral cultures may find this helpful for cultural reasons, not just because of personal learning preferences. Secondly, the goal of these face-to-face gatherings ought to go beyond classroom learning and purposefully include in-person community building. Few programs are better suited to do this than the seminary program—specifically designed as it is to train spiritual, as well as theological, leaders for the church. This common desire to shape the heart (spiritual) as well as the head (theological) would seem to provide a fitting context for building up authentic camaraderie. We have found, for example, that integrating required three-week "Summer Community Gatherings" into the curriculum of our seminary program has given rise to a marked increase in our students' sense of close community, and all the more so because of the wide diversity of cultures represented. These gatherings are much more than opportunities to attend intensive face-to-face classes. A coordinator plans corporate activities that intentionally bridge cultures and build community. Students attend chapel services and worship together, pray together, share meals together, and share life together in the dorms.

- Design ways for students to pray for and spiritually care for one another in and out of class. My own tendency is to compartmentalize my life. I normally expect academic classes to occupy one part of my life and assign spiritual care to another. Some of this seems to come from my tendency towards a more individualistic approach to life. What would it look like to bring them together in a more collectivistic way? The seminary program context provides a unique opportunity to do precisely this. One homiletics professor has her students post an introductory video the first week of class and encourages them to share a prayer request if they are comfortable doing so (Lamb 2019, 100). In our seminary program we make a concerted effort to share individual prayer requests regularly with the wider online community via email and a bi-monthly newsletter. During our face-to-face summer gatherings, we have a formal ritual—a sending ceremony—during which we pray over those who will be graduating during the coming year and send them into the mission field where they will be called to carry out their ministries. Formal and informal rituals are often neglected in the online environment due to lack of proximity, but also due to the spirit of anti-ritualism that influences much of American culture (Kleinig 1998).[6] This is unfortunate because formal rituals are essential in some cultures that have a strong collectivistic and oral approach to life. For this reason, the sending ceremony has become an expected part of our summer face-to-face gatherings. We close the sending

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6   Kleinig (1998) gives an intriguing description of his experiences teaching and interacting with the Australian Aborigines who deeply value ritual. The Aborigines are an example of a primarily oral, collectivistic culture.

ceremony with a prolonged time of prayer over each graduating student and then over each other as we gather together afterwards. Students have expressed how meaningful this event is for them. Many reasons could be cited. One could make a theological case for the need to pray together but there is also a cultural case to be made. For students coming from collectivistic cultures, the ceremony breaks down the artificial compartmentalization of our academic and spiritual lives.

- Collaborate with local churches so that students serve as interns under the mentorship of well-trained role models or mentors. This has long been considered a best practice, even in face-to-face programs. But, for logistical reasons, classroom learning is most often separated from the internship experience, thus reinforcing in the student's mind an artificial separation between theory and practice. The online classroom can avoid this tendency by leveraging one of its distinct advantages—learning is situated or embedded in a natural, communal, local context rather than the artificial environment of the face-to-face classroom. One way to fully leverage this advantage is to require that students serve as interns while they are taking courses throughout the entire program. Many online seminary programs already do this, regardless of the cultural makeup of their students. I mention it here as a culturally responsive best practice, however, because of its potential to especially benefit learners from more collectivistic, high-context, high power, oral cultures. Such cultures tend to place great value on role modeling and mentoring as key elements in the learning process, much more so than other cultures. Moreover, interns placed in their own cultural milieu benefit from learning at the feet of respected leaders, mentors, and elders from their respective cultures, even as they continue learning from their classes. In fact, to fully maximize the distinct advantage of online "embedded" learning, one ought to increase the overlap and interaction between academic courses and the practical internship experience (whether formal or informal). In the face-to-face classroom, this interaction is often imagined: "How would you respond to a church member who says that the ecumenical creeds are old-fashioned statements with little value for the Christian today?" In the online classroom the interaction can go beyond simulation to engage real life ministry: "Interview and interact with two people from your church about their thoughts regarding the use and value of the ecumenical creeds today. Summarize your conversation with each of them and explain how you were able to emphasize the enduring importance and value of the ancient creeds." The simulated environment of the face-to-face classroom can sometimes prove to be a hindrance especially for the culturally diverse student. I recall one African American student struggling to preach in front of the class during a face-to-face homiletics course. He seemed to falter and lose momentum, struggling to smoothly transition from one point to another. In conversations afterwards, we discovered the problem—the lack of interactive responses from the audience was throwing the student off his game. He was used to preaching to an African American congregation where vocal responses and physical reactions to the sermon were not just normal, but an expected dynamic. One homiletics professor at Fuller Theological Seminary not only allows but requires students to preach sermons in a local context, preferably in their own congregations. Sermons are evaluated by several members of the congregation, while a recording is evaluated by the professor and other students in class. She remarks, "I have been struck by the way Puerto Ricans sound more like Puerto Ricans, and African Americans sound more like African Americans" (Lamb 2019, 93).

- Consider adjusting teaching methods to reach oral communicators more effectively. This includes the use of "contextual Bible storying." Training seminars are available through such organizations as Living Water International (https://www.water.cc/orality) and the International Orality Network (https://orality.net/events/). Here is an example to whet the appetite. During the last few terms, I have experimented with "storying" in my basic theology course and have been pleasantly surprised at the results. During a synchronous live video class session on Law and Gospel, I ask students to close their Bibles while I tell (not read) the story of "Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler" (Luke 18:18-27). I tell it four times7 before placing students in online groups to respond to four questions: (1) What did Jesus say that made the rich man very sad? (2) Why do you think Jesus said this to him? (3) What did Jesus say to those who asked him afterwards, "Then who can be saved?" (4) Why does Jesus reply differently to those afterwards than to the rich man? I am always amazed at the depth of our ensuing discussion, especially as they wrestle with that final question and what it says about "Law and Gospel." Although not the case for every student, the oral telling of the story helps many students to concentrate more effectively on its details and reflect more

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7 Another option before moving on with the exercise is to have one or two students retell the story back to the rest of the class.

deeply about its meaning. Oral learners favor hearing rather than reading. For this reason, educators of diverse classrooms might consider integrating the option of using cell phones as an oral means, for example, to memorize the Greek alphabet/vocabulary and to listen to the professor's feedback (Thompson and MacLeod 2015, 120).

- Finally, ensure that students clearly understand what constitutes plagiarism. Many graduate level seminary programs make this information available to students and inform them about the use of plagiarism detection tools. But this is more of a passive approach. For the culturally-diverse program, a more active approach would be helpful in preventing future misunderstandings and disappointment on the part of student and professor alike. One suggestion is to have students complete an assignment early in the course (or program) in which they identify various kinds of plagiarism. Throughout, students should be encouraged to borrow and build on the ideas of others as long as they honor the giver of knowledge with a proper citation.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting to conclude with a few disclaimers. This essay has inevitably dealt with generalities. That is the nature of studying cultures and it can be one of the challenges of doing so. We know from research that culture does influence the learning process and its outcomes, but this reality is delimited by two factors that must also be kept in mind (see Gunawardena et al. 2003, 764). On the one side, universal principles of learning common to all human beings do exist across all cultures and pedagogical decisions should build on these principles. On the other side, individuals also have unique learning style preferences. It is important to avoid the fallacies of homogeneity and monolithic identity, whereby we ignore the individual differences among members of a cultural group and assume there are no "differential identities" (e.g., Gunawardena et al. 2003, 771). It is also true that limiting learning activities and assessment choices may helpfully push "students to expand their learning comfort zones and to successfully process information and acquire skills in a variety of formats" (Gunawarden et al 2003, 768).

Moreover, the increasingly multicultural and intercultural reality of the United States and our own classrooms is not neat and tidy like we might want it to be. "Culture is dynamic and ever changing" (Jung 2014, 18). Students immigrating to the United States accommodate and assimilate. The children of those immigrants—the second generation—have feet in both worlds. Some, such as the prescient Walter Ong (1982), have even hypothesized that the rise of radio and television and more recently computer technologies, digital/audio books, and especially smart phones has generally given rise to certain "post-literate" oral tendencies on a wide scale in the West. In short, detecting cultural influences and adapting accordingly is often a complex and difficult undertaking. Nonetheless, as professors and educators, ignoring the cultural dimension and its influence on our online teaching practices is far more perilous, especially in light of the increasingly multicultural milieu in which we now live and work.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Glenn Fluegge currently serves as professor of theology at Concordia University Irvine in southern California and also director of the Cross-cultural Ministry Center, a seminary program that forms missionary pastors for culture-crossing ministries in the United States and throughout the world. Previously, he served for fourteen years as lecturer and director of the Centre Luthérien d'Etudes Théologiques, an international seminary in Togo, West Africa, and as lecturer at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in South Africa.

ARTICLE

Lemons into Lemonade: Interfaith and Contextualized Pedagogy as Adaptation to Twenty-first Century Higher Education

Ann W. Duncan
Goucher College

ABSTRACT

In response to shifting demographics, financial strain, and an existential crisis about their value and place in the twenty-first century world, small liberal arts colleges are changing—some choosing to close while others make drastic changes to curricular and programmatic offerings to demonstrate innovation and adaptation. This paper will present a case study of these tensions and responses through discussion of one college's simultaneous commitment to interfaith engagement and discontinuance of the religion major and minor. This reality crystalizes the tension and disconnect between the curricular and civic projects of interreligious studies and interfaith engagement. This article explores a pragmatic solution that intentionally integrates these two in a manner that promises to provide both an effective response to a budget-driven problem and a potential new paradigm for curricular and co-curricular integration and a contextualized approach to the study of religion.

KEYWORDS

interfaith, interreligious engagement, cities, immigration, community-based learning, curriculum

As the field of interfaith and interreligious studies has grown within the academy (as chronicled by Peace [2013]), so too has resistance from within the field of religious studies.[1] Recognition of the need to prepare students for an increasingly pluralistic world and the particular possibility of the college environment for such skill building

and community creation finds friction against fears of the ways in which anything smacking of devotionalism might soften the intellectual rigor of religious studies as a field. Recent annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion have showcased both this growth and resistance.

Though the challenges to the field of religious studies at a time when higher education is in crisis are very real, such critiques speak more to anxieties within the field than they do accurate or well-reasoned arguments for caution. In a time when college budgets are in the red, enrollments are down, and religious studies programs are often understaffed and struggling to justify their existences, such territorialism should not be surprising. Moves toward vocational skills, professional training, and marketable majors have put religious studies scholars in a defensive posture relative to both administrators and each other. What the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2019) has termed the "Looming Enrollment Crisis" (with a special data and case study driven report) has led to experimentation, rapid change, and fear throughout academia.

In some ways that defensiveness is warranted. The race to capture the declining enrollments has led many colleges to embrace enrollment strategies that shift higher education in troubling ways. The focus on cultivating a learning experience that builds on all the latest psychological research for retention or even the shift to interdisciplinary and problem-based learning has the potential to weaken not only the integrity of the field of religious studies but of all disciplines. With shrinking budgets, programs such as religious studies that struggle to articulate a clearly defined and lucrative career path risk facing reduced resources and marginalization. With challenges coming from these many sides, maintaining the integrity of the discipline remains key.

And yet, what I want to suggest here is that some openness to these new pedagogies and focus on skills makes it easier for religious studies programs to clarify their value proposition and creates new ways for our students to connect with the material of our discipline in a way that is transformative and lasting. This essay is a defense of the continued conversation and mutual fertilization between the academic field of religious studies and the emerging field of interfaith and interreligious dialogue and engagement. Moreover and more specifically, it argues that interfaith pedagogy utilized in the study of religion in context offers students grounded religious literacy combined with practical skills that are more useful than ever in an increasingly diverse and fractured world.

This argument emerges from a very particular context with very particular challenges: a small liberal arts college where the reality means sustaining majors in programs of sometimes one or two faculty members, teaching well beyond our expertise, and often teaching classes mostly full of students for whom the class will be their one and only academic exposure to religion. In this context, we are not usually preparing our students for PhD programs in religious studies. We are preparing students to be school teachers, nurses, nonprofit workers, and the like. And we have the potential to teach them the skills and knowledge they need to be able to communicate and cooperate across religious difference. In this way, the integration of interfaith pedagogies and contextualized study of religion into religious studies courses is both good teaching and an inevitable means of adaptation in times of austerity.

These skills need not be taught in a course with that explicit and singular focus. Rather, they can be integrated into a variety of topics that introduce rigorous content and increase religious literacy. What follows is an engagement with the current debate in the field through presentation of one such course—a course that grew out of necessity in a time of financial strain and program discontinuance. This course utilizes the very techniques, pedagogical strategies, and intellectual and moral commitments that characterize the growing field of interfaith and interreligious studies. While these ideas are not mine alone and are supported by a growing literature on pedagogy and innovation in the emerging field of interfaith and interreligious studies, my case study provides a unique context for application in a small liberal arts college facing difficult programmatic cuts (see, for example, Patel, Peace, and Silverman 2018; Wertheimer 2015; Peace, Rose, and Mobley 2012; Larson and Shady 2016). Moreover, this case study will offer practical advice for how other religious studies faculty might engage with these themes in their classrooms. It is a call for a more rigorous engagement with students' religious identities and the lived religion that surrounds us, not only in our cities but in our classrooms, as essential to truly beginning to bridge religious difference and graduate students who are more likely to embody and enact the values our institutions espouse.

A Tale of Too Many Courses

To explore the possibilities of interfaith and interreligious pedagogies in religious studies broadly, I turn now to the very particular context of my academic journey and specific institutional context. While not shared by all, my experiences in two very different institutional contexts and over a decade of adaptation and program development touch on many of the evolving issues in higher education in terms of the pressures of recruitment, enrollment, employment preparation, financial strain, and the demand for applicability. These experiences also highlight the importance of flexibility and adaptability on the job during these turbulent times in higher education.

Coming out of graduate school, I understood the field of religious studies to be made up of scholars trained with relatively narrow expertise and slightly broader teaching scope. Part of my training involved serving as a teaching assistant in a variety of courses, many outside my sub-discipline of American religious history. My first teaching assistantship involved dense material that students had a hard time approaching. I quickly found the utility of my role as synthesizer and explainer and was able to fulfill this role by staying even just one step ahead of my students. This gave me a confidence to teach more broadly that I carried well beyond graduate school. Needing to find employment wherever I could in my final years of graduate school, I taught even more broadly still in a local community college and in my university's adult education program.

Upon beginning my first tenure-track position, I balanced that understanding of the field with a pragmatic understanding of the need for flexibility. Moving from a school with a religious studies program of nearly thirty faculty to a religion program of two at Goucher College required quite a shift in perspective. While both programs offered a major and minor in religion or religious studies, these programs were understandably very different. Because I was a new hire and not a replacement, I understood my role as not only teaching courses already on the books but as someone who would add to the curriculum and broaden the major. I broadened and broadened and developed new courses each semester out of a sense of obligation to serve our students with as wide a curriculum as possible. Without knowing any different, I could not imagine a religion major without something like the breadth of offerings I enjoyed as an undergraduate and graduate student. That is how this historian of American religion ended up teaching Introduction to Islamic Thought, Theories of Religion, and New Testament and Early Christianity. Hindsight is twenty-twenty but it is hard now not to marvel at my naivety in thinking the work of thirty might be done by two.

Personal fatigue, strong advice from the Provost following my pre-tenure review, and sage advice from an external review of our program suggested that an extended course rotation and plentiful offerings were not the best use of our time. It not only stretched us too thin but made it impossible to regularly repeat courses—something necessary for word of mouth to help populate our courses with new students and for current students to predict and benefit from a regular two-year rotation. We rewrote the major yet again with a narrower scope. Our major would be rewritten twice more in the subsequent years to allow for more interdisciplinary inquiry (for example, integrating courses outside religion as a way to ease our course burden and expand student choice) and to reflect a college-wide move from 3-credit to 4-credit courses.

As my course rotation narrowed and I worked to include courses that more directly reflected my training and research interests, I slowly developed a different pedagogical perspective. Coming to terms with the reality that most of our students would not enjoy the breadth of courses I did as a student, I knew they did enjoy smaller class sizes and closer mentorship relationships with our faculty than most students at large institutions experience. For those not in the major or minor, the smaller course offerings mattered little as they would likely only take one or two religion courses in their life. The focus moved from coverage of content toward mentorship and the development of skills that could be applied to new contexts, new knowledge, and that will allow them to fill in any missing areas independently, as they are motivated to do so.

The shift from discrete knowledge to skills has been much theorized in this era of smart phones and instant knowledge.[2] While interfaith engagement is easier to integrate in some ways into an Introduction to Religion or Introduction to World Religions classroom than a class on biology or psychology, for example, the integration is very much possible. And, if you

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2 This reality of contemporary teaching has often been mentioned by Goucher's former president José Bowen who oversaw the curricular change chronicled above and has written and spoken extensively on the new landscape of higher education. His techniques for teaching in this new environment are chronicled in his book (Bowen 2012).

are hoping to advance interfaith initiatives on a small liberal arts campus where there are few religious studies faculty and courses, this is not only possible but necessary. Much of that work for other disciplines can come less from the content of the course and more from the framing of class discussions and assignments. No matter the topic, people approach the material with particular worldviews, with particular life circumstances, and with particular predispositions that shape their engagement with the course. This is true not just in relation to religious worldview but also to their gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and so forth. And, whereas faculty have traditionally lectured in a one-size-fits-all format, classes in a small liberal arts college are small and structured such that individual personalities are able to emerge and those distinct worldviews come clear.

In this context, the challenge for the professor is to create an environment in which individuals feel comfortable bringing those identities to the table without having to compartmentalize. Faculty can also communicate to students that not only is it not detrimental to learning and class discussion for students to bring their full selves but it enhances the learning and the engagement—not just for that student but for the entire classroom. Indeed, in discussions about diversifying college admissions and thereby college student bodies and faculty, one of the primary goals is not just equal access and civil rights but also a realization that *all* students benefit when there are diverse perspectives and backgrounds in the classroom. The religion student benefits from there being a variety of Muslim students in a class on Islam and the pre-med student will benefit from having Jehovah's Witnesses in a class on patient care. But, as Interfaith Youth Core's Eboo Patel (2016) notes, diversity is just a description; it is only active and thoughtful engagement with diversity that leads to pluralism rather than factionalism.[3] In the case of the classroom, it is one thing to know that the diversity exists. It is another to actively engage and integrate that diversity into the learning environment. Without that active engagement, students may feel isolated or alienated in their difference or, at the least, may compartmentalize and leave those parts of themselves at the door when they enter the classroom.

These commitments manifest in unique ways in the context of a small program at a small liberal arts college at a time when religion frequently serves as the root of injustice and the motivation behind fights for justice the world over. Religious illiteracy and religiously-motivated bigotry divide communities and result in personal and institutional violence at home and abroad. At my small liberal arts college I am not training students for a long career in academia. In my career I may have only a handful of students who go on from my classes to graduate school in religious studies. Instead, I have the vital role of preparing students to engage with religious diversity in whatever field they choose and as citizens of the world. These future nonprofit workers, teachers, and nurses will encounter religious diversity in their daily work, in friendships, and at the grocery store. They will encounter religious texts and rituals and hear horror stories related to religious difference on the news. I can give them the skills to engage with that news critically, encounter the other charitably, and build bridges in their daily lives.

As I began to integrate this perspective into my courses through direct discussion of interreligious dialogue and infusion of geographical, historical, and cultural context and social justice into every class, changes at my institution further encouraged these efforts. I had the pleasure of attending an Interfaith Youth Core Interfaith Leadership Institute (2015) in Chicago with Goucher's Chaplain, Director of Hillel, and several students. Soon thereafter, we participated in a multiyear IFYC grant to assess Goucher's current interfaith resources and to develop a plan for the future. Under the mentorship of our Chaplain, Goucher students started an Interfaith Council that led discussions and held a variety of events. Our administration recognized the value of this work in fostering community and encouraging the growing religiously-diverse population on campus by announcing plans to build an Interfaith Center connected to the Chapel (Goucher 2021d). Fundraising efforts began and plans developed for the design and use of this space—practical and needed for the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, but also symbolic in its location at the center of the small campus. While some faculty colleagues questioned why I, a faculty member, was partnering with Student Affairs in this way, most understood and supported this move to recognize students as whole beings who bring their identities to the classroom and learn in a variety of contexts during their college careers. Several colleagues participated in faculty workshops I designed to encourage interreligious engagement in a variety of disciplines. Campus partners grew in numbers as our student body continued to diversify. The momentum was moving in the right direction.

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3 This understanding of the differences between diversity as description and interfaith dialogue and pluralism as positive engagement with difference is at the heart of Eboo Patel's book *Interfaith Leadership* (2016).

A Pragmatic Response to a Painful Loss

Even as my pedagogy and course offerings increasingly built on a strong engagement with the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and excitement about growing religious diversity on campus and institutional commitment to engaging religious diversity as a site for learning and growth, the college was undergoing extensive change. With new leadership came a new general education curriculum and reorganization of academic departments into interdisciplinary centers.[4] Building projects combined with declining enrollment to create a financial strain that was partly addressed through a process of "program prioritization." After the creation of rubrics, crafting of narratives, and examination of admissions, financial, and enrollment data, this process resulted in the discontinuation of several majors and minors, religion included. These cuts were covered by local and national media, including this *Inside Higher Ed* article (Flaherty 2018b).

As happens in times of disruption, several faculty and staff left voluntarily, and such was the case in the religion program. After remaining alive through the use of visiting professorships, the discontinuation left me the only religion professor on campus. Though I no longer had a major or minor in my discipline, I was able to retain my job thanks to the protections of tenure and the continued utility of my classes to other programs. Thankfully, though the particular metrics of the program prioritization process rendered the religion major no longer necessary, the institution recognized that religion remained an important subject for study, if primarily in the context of other disciplines. My tenure home moved to American studies, in keeping with the American focus of my research and teaching, though I retained "religion" in my title as well, to reflect my training and professional commitments.

The loss of my program has taken time to absorb and I continue to believe strongly in the importance of religion as a driver of culture, social justice, and identity and the vitality of this study to a liberal arts education. In part due to a desire to see the thick dust of change settle and in part due to my own need to dramatically reorient my understanding of my role at Goucher, it took over a year before I was able to regroup and imagine what the study of religion might look like post program prioritization. After mourning what was lost, I chose to focus on these changes as a catalyst for a change already underway in my courses. I am trying, you might say, to make lemonade out of lemons and, much as my institution has on a campus-wide level, I have been trying to use this unfortunate turn of events as motivation to more fully implement innovative and nontraditional pedagogies for religious studies.

Without a major and minor to defend and sustain—and I say defend because, as all religious studies academics know, such programs are often small, are not career focused or outcome driven, and thus are often under fire—I had an opportunity to teach more freely the courses for which I was trained and in ways that fit the needs of my students and this historical moment. As a (discontinued) program of one at an institution ready for innovation in response to contemporary challenges, I felt supported to change and adapt my curriculum, even if the original impetus for this quick adaptation was negative. What resulted was an opportunity to engage in interfaith pedagogy more directly and to focus on classes that put religion in geographical, historical, and cultural context, and that reflected my own research interests and particular training.

This shift began in earlier courses but has been more fully implemented in a course first offered in fall 2019: Religions of Baltimore. This course is offered in American studies and replaced Introduction to World Religions, which was a foundational course of the religion major. The course's most basic goal remains same—religious literacy—but it adds context and additional learning objectives. The course objectives are as follows:

> Throughout the semester, students will encounter world religions from historical, sociological, and theological perspectives. These encounters will reveal the family resemblances, commonalities, and disjunctures between these religions and how these characteristics match or challenge the religious paradigms of the Western world. Particular attention to how these religions arrived in Baltimore, developed over time, and manifest today will lead to exploration of immigration (forced and voluntary), redlining and other forms of discrimination, and faith-inspired social justice work around immigrants and refugees. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

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4 For an *Inside Higher Ed* profile of the changes, see Flaherty (2018a). For information on the curriculum itself, see Goucher College (2021b). For information on Goucher's Academic Centers see Goucher College (2021a).

1. Describe the worldviews under study and their basic beliefs, rituals, and organizing structures.

2. Explore how these religions have found a home in the Baltimore area and identify the contributing factors to various types of differences, inequalities, and power structures.

3. Analyze how the characteristics of each worldview allow it to find welcome or resistance in the U.S. generally and Baltimore specifically, and what this suggests about religious privilege and assumptions in this country and city.

4. Use primary sources from a variety of religious traditions to explore belief systems and current societal engagement.

5. Plan a community event to facilitate dialogue amongst community groups engaging directly with religion and immigration.

Below, I narrate three of the pedagogical shifts that manifest in this course: engagement with identity in the classroom, presenting religion as always contextualized, and direct discussion of social justice as frustrated by and forwarded by religion. I will discuss each concept in turn, followed by discussion of concrete ways in which these emphases manifest in my classroom.

Identity in the Classroom

Goucher College has a long history of religious diversity and a commitment to welcoming such diversity in its student body. Founded by John Goucher as Baltimore Woman's College in 1885 to provide higher education for the women of Baltimore who were not allowed to attend Johns Hopkins University, Goucher has long had a substantial Jewish population—currently between one quarter and one third of the population. The college now attracts an eclectic mix of students, many of whom are progressive and few of whom are actively religious. Though we have increasing numbers of students who identify as Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh, the majority of our students do not identify with a particular religion but instead might describe themselves as atheists, agnostics, spiritual but not religious, or spiritual seekers. As a result, the building of an Interfaith Center or the framing of events as Interfaith engagements have the potential to alienate many of our students.

In our early interfaith programming on campus, we have tried a number of strategies to address this issue. For example, we designed discussions to allow for multiple voices. In an interfaith dialogue organized by Chaplain Cynthia Terry, a variety of faculty picked texts from different religious traditions on a common theme. In one case, that theme was "suffering." The handout did not identify the texts by tradition or by faculty member. The faculty provided no introduction or context for them but jumped right into reading the texts in turn and reacting. Though some texts were clearly drawn from a particular tradition, this method allowed all students an opportunity to respond to a common text. It removed the layers of power and hierarchy that can often stifle conversation by eliminating the authority in the room (the faculty member or the representative of the religion under question). We were all addressing the text from the same starting point and responding strictly to what we read. Moving through the texts, we all began to see disjunctures and connections that reveal the commonalities of the human experience of suffering and the varieties of philosophical and theological responses to it.

Engaging the nonreligious in interfaith dialogue is a pragmatic necessity, not only on a college campus with a significant nonreligious population, but also in a world in which the number of unaffiliated is rising steadily, particularly amongst the young adults. It is also necessary because these voices are an important part of the conversation. In his memoir *Faithiest*, Chris Stedman (2012) makes a compelling case for the importance of atheist engagement in interfaith. In contrast to the New Atheists who are often bent on ending religion, he sees his engagement not as anti-religious but as a means of connecting with his fellow human beings. Underlying this is a belief that interfaith engagement is really the key solution to many of the world's problems.

One of the reasons that Stedman sees both the promise of interfaith engagement and a real sense that interfaith engagement needs atheism just as atheism needs interfaith engagement is the current climate. As he writes, "In a culture

that increasingly asks us to check our religious and nonreligious identities at the door—to silence the values and stories we hold most dear—the 'New Atheist' brand of secularism isn't helping" (Stedman 2012, 13). Interfaith engagements suggest that each individual needs to own their identity—racial, ethnic, religious, nonreligious—in order to be affirmed as an individual with integrity and value, but also as an avenue towards open conversation. When interfaith engagement excludes the nonreligious, it is silencing voices and limiting the conversation. Though we might not all be actively religious, we all have religious perspectives, histories, and identities that shape our prejudices, assumptions, and religious literacy.

I see this in my classes. With a largely nonreligious population, were I to poll my students, very few would see themselves as firmly affiliating with one religious tradition or another. Most are a combination of identities, spiritual but not religious, or only culturally connected to the religion of their birth. However, they have complex and multifaceted religious identities if we consider not their affiliation but the ways in which they relate to religion and have seen it inform their childhoods, development, and identity. They have attended religious schools, been raised by devoutly religious grandparents, grown up in multifaith households, and have had their identities supported and rejected by religious communities with whom they may have only marginal association. These experiences shape perspective even when the individual in question abstains from direct affiliation.

This fundamentally means that no one is completely objective on this subject, regardless of affiliation. In academia, this presents a particular challenge as we are trained to view human phenomena as detached, objective observers. And yet, we do not check our identities at the door when we enter the hallowed halls of academia. We may nuance and complicate those identities and learn enough additional knowledge to speak on subjects without bringing in our personal perspectives and experiences, but those remain the lenses through which we see and experience all things. However, we still hold on to that guise of objectivity. As Chris Stedman writes of his academic experience, "it became easy to disconnect myself from the corporeal body of religion and understand it as merely a problematic concept" (2012, 102). We see the violence caused, the textual contradictions, and historical contexts, and yet, without attention to the messiness and beauty of lived experience—of our subjects and even ourselves—that knowledge and understanding is only so deep. In my classroom, I began to notice just such a tendency, especially among the unaffiliated. Nonreligious students, those "nones" profiled in the Pew Research Center's report (2012) as unaffiliated with religious institutions but sometimes with religious convictions and spiritual lives, assumed a kind of objectivity they did not see in their religious classmates. However, I also recognized, as a teacher, the ways in which past experiences, past prejudices, and positive and negative associations and emotions deeply affect how generous or judgmental students might be about a text, a historical figure, a religious movement, or even a classmate with a different worldview.

As a result, I began to integrate activities that led students through an exercise in acknowledging their own position in relation to the subject of study. Through the writing of religious or spiritual autobiographies in my Introduction to World Religions class, students recognized that even if they did not affiliate with a certain religion today or even positively affirm any type of religious or spiritual belief, their lives were shaped by the religion of their grandparents, parents, friends, events in the news, affiliations of their schools, experiences of joy and loss and all the rest. Without compromising student confidentiality, we were able to survey the breadth of their backgrounds using tools such as word clouds or culled lists, and through these recognize a richness and complexity the students did not expect in the class or in themselves. I integrated a version of this activity into my Religions of Baltimore class by asking students to reflect not only on religious autobiography but also on how immigration had shaped their family's history. Whether they were international students or sixth-generation American, this personalized the material and showcased a variety of diversities within the class.

These engagements with personal stories led to discussion of how we might safely, truthfully, and productively address these identities in the classroom. Students first wrote on and then shared in small groups the anxieties they felt in contemplating the discussion of religion in a religiously diverse classroom. These small groups then developed class guidelines for discussion to help students openly discuss the class material and feel safe bringing their own experiences and perspectives to the conversation if appropriate and if they so desired. As a class, we reconvened to share those anxieties and then find strategies and guidelines that might allay those concerns and address the inevitable offenses, ignorance, and conflict that would arise.

With this groundwork in place, we were able to move into the meat of the course with a framework for our discussion, a sense of self-awareness, and a very straightforward and honest approach to the fact that this material is not objective and to assume that it is requires a kind of charade on the part of the nonreligious or not-clearly-identified student or faculty. To name that position allows the student, the scholar, the professor, to manage the influence of that positionality honestly and clearly, and be attuned to the ways in which it might create blind spots, presumptions, or judgments.

Religion as Always Contextualized

Discussion of personal identity and collaborative efforts to spell out guidelines for discussion give students a stable framework from which to explore; they also set the stage for a particular approach to religion that is unique to this new course. Whereas many Introduction to World Religions courses approach religions as essentialized belief systems, disembodied from particular geographic, historical, or socioeconomic contexts, I consciously designed Religions of Baltimore to always present religion in context. When students begin the study of religion with a keen awareness of their own histories and potentialities, they are ready to learn about religions in a similar kind of embeddedness in the lives of individuals and the particularities of geographic locations. In Religions of Baltimore, students encounter five of the major world religions in the context of their arrival and development in the Baltimore area, and through the lens of immigration (forced and voluntary) and the ways in which power exercised through politics, economy, housing, and access to other resources have shaped the geographical, numerical, demographic, and socioeconomic reality of these religions today.

In the course, students read general overviews of the history, development, belief, and practice of these religions, but the majority of our class discussion is about how that belief and practice finds expression in a particular context. Students read about the history of redlining in Baltimore, the role of immigration in shaping the city, and explore the webpages and publications of religiously-affiliated organizations in the city working on the frontlines to advocate for and support immigrants and refugees. Class discussions focus on drawing connections between the basics of a religion's beliefs and practice and the lived expressions of that religion in Baltimore's history and present moment. For example, students use their knowledge of Jewish theology to understand why concern for immigrants is so prominent. Students use their understanding of Muslim practice to help explain why masjids are located in particular areas of the city and use their understanding of the rise of Islamophobia to explain why such communities are not as visible as the many Christian churches lining the most prominent streets in the city.

Contextualization happened outside of the classroom as well, through field trips, a student-organized campus event, and an interactive map installation. Students visited local religious communities and were asked to notice locations, visibility, size and make up of congregations. They met practitioners and asked informed questions about immigrant populations within the congregation as well as activism and community engagement. Students worked together to plan and execute two on-campus events including an interfaith panel discussion amongst three leaders of religious organizations on the frontline of support for immigrants and refugees in the city. Discussions about finding balance in perspective, designing questions for the panel, and framing of the event for effective publicity all deepened students' awareness of how the topics from within our class manifested in the broader campus and city community. Students designed and installed a world map in the lobby of our main campus dining hall, labeled it "*E Pluribus Unum,*" and encouraged students to mark their geographical places of connection with a pin, to underscore the diversity of our own community.

While this course is a work in progress and will evolve in future iterations (most notably by replacing the panel with sustained community-based learning with a Baltimore organization working directly with immigrant and refugee populations), the purpose of these activities will remain the same—to give students opportunities for personal encounter with practitioners of these religions and for personal experience in the discomfort and joy that can come from being welcomed as an outsider in the sacred space of another. Such experiences combine with carefully curated readings to encourage a view of religion as always contextualized by the geographic, historical, and cultural particularities in which it lives.

Frank and Informed Dialogue about Social Justice

By situating religion as always contextualized by geography, culture, history, economics, and power dynamics, questions of social justice inevitably arise. In Religions of Baltimore, our examination of the world religions as shaped by immigration (forced and voluntary) allowed us to dive into discussions of redlining, discrimination, and power. Indeed, the course fulfills one component of the college's Race, Power, and Perspective requirement by centralizing these themes in the study of religions in the Baltimore area. With the careful work on dialogue and identity at the beginning of the course, students from Baltimore or other cities with similar dynamics spoke frankly about their own experiences and called each other out for assumptions and stereotypes. Students hopefully left the class with an awareness that alignments of power have histories that are often shaped by inequities justified by race, religion, ethnicity, and class.

Conversations on such topics—especially when students have been encouraged to bring their own identities to the table—are not easy and can end badly if not carefully moderated by faculty and, assuming prior discussions of community guidelines, by the students themselves. To speak of religions abstractly does allow everyone a level of separation and objectivity from the material though it also limits the depth of learning, leaving contextualization and application of this knowledge to the student. How to make a variety of students comfortable in our classrooms such that they push and stretch their boundaries while also feeling safe to express their perspectives and live into their identities is a concern on all contemporary liberal arts college campuses and indeed on all college and university campuses. The question is how to balance that commitment to openness with protection of our students through trigger warnings and limitations on the types of speech allowed and the ways in which students can express publicly particularly deeply religious and or conservative viewpoints.[5]

Opening space to all viewpoints became particularly tricky for many faculty in the political climate leading up to and following the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. As questions about religious tests for American citizenship, travel bans, a "war on Christmas," and other concerns rose to the political fore, faculty, staff, and administrators have been forced to weigh the question of what is ideological and what is political, what is a reflection of the basic philosophy of the college and what is a liberal agenda of the faculty as a whole. The lines are unclear and faculty are negotiating these challenges on a daily basis as they set course objectives, and balance their deep historical and cultural knowledge with students' ideological perspectives in a way that maintains the integrity of the curriculum and class but also leaves space open for students to express themselves and to engage across difference in meaningful ways.

My students know from the beginning that a major learning objective for my course is to not only improve religious literacy but to encourage empathy, understanding, and dialogue across difference. In this day and time, that is a political stance in a way it might not have otherwise been. Discussing immigration legislation, in particular, was difficult to balance. Students recognized the tendency of those religious institutions engaging this issue to be liberal, in other words, to be organizing to support immigrants and refugees rather than increase restrictions. I encouraged students to find examples of other political viewpoints and though they found written statements, they did not find mobilized activist groups. We engaged in important discussions about why that might be and what it might mean about the multiplicity of arguments at work in, for example, Christian lawmakers supporting immigration restrictions. This opened up generative discussion about American identity and the role of religion and race in that paradigm.

The stakes are particularly high in a time when boards of trustees and senior administration deal with the bottom line of student retention, admissions yields, and the quest for the full-paying student (who is, by the numbers, often from a more socially and politically conservative family), as well as a desire to maintain institutional goals such as exposure to diverse perspectives and a commitment to social justice, and a desire to maintain the rigor and integrity of the academic division. And yet, individual courses are places in which such balances can be explored and in which such difficult conversations take place.

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5 An example of this perspective can be seen in the book *Living with Difference*, which argues that the move towards trigger warnings and the erasure of certain types of identity from many college campuses is destructive to attempts at interreligious, interpolitical or interhuman understanding (Seligman, Wasserfall, and Montgomery 2015). The authors point to schools like Bowdoin and Vanderbilt where a "liberal agenda" has been used to erase religious identification (2015, 112). Not only does this move preference no religion over religion, it also creates new problems. In their words, "removing competing claims to the Good really does more to displace the problem than to solve it" (2015, 142).

To return to the question of an interfaith theology that collapses differences for the sake of connection, there is a middle ground. In her self-reflective essay, Jennifer Howe Peace (2015) writes of coming to the realization that the differences are real and important, and that interfaith engagement should not be based on trying to find the common denominator or massaging away difference. Rather, for her, it is based on the idea that "God is greater than my experience. God is greater than any of our experience" (Peace 2015, 29). Such a sentiment lies at the center of a variety of new popular press books increasingly used in the college classroom such as Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World* (2010).

Few would dispute the power of religion in the modern world to unite and divide and students will undoubtedly encounter religious difference not only in their dorm room and classroom but also in their workplace upon graduation. The questions that follow are many: What responsibility does a college have to encourage or celebrate those differences and provide students with opportunities to learn and practice skills for engagement across that difference? If colleges do have such a responsibility, does this fall with student affairs staff or with academic faculty? If the latter, how does such skill building fit within the traditional study of religion at the college level? Can such integration happen without weakening or fundamentally altering the nature of religious studies? While some colleges have preemptively addressed and answered these questions through interfaith studies programs or interfaith initiatives directed by religious and spiritual life staff, most other institutions are fumbling their way forward, addressing student and global need while grappling with limited budgets, understaffing, and undertraining. Though limited in resources and small in scope, religious studies at small liberal arts colleges might be uniquely positioned to provide a pragmatic solution to these timely and consequential concerns.

Conclusion

In the months since first drafting this article, Goucher College has welcomed a new president, new provost, and the faculty continue to work to stabilize and rebuild after the process of program prioritization. The work described here in relation to this single course has rippled outward in collaboration with other colleagues doing work, broadly speaking, at the intersection of religion and social justice. Out of these intersections, my colleague in philosophy, Dr. Martin Shuster and I have launched a new religion and justice minor ([Goucher College 2021c](#)) that is entirely interdisciplinary and made up of courses across the college in disciplines ranging from anthropology to psychology, from political science to philosophy. The courses in this minor examine religion in context, and our signature introductory and capstone courses allow students to knit these experiences together to understand religion as a driver of justice and injustice through history and in the contemporary world. This minor is completely different in tone and content from the religion minor that was discontinued several years ago, in that it focuses on religion in context, explicitly integrates interfaith pedagogy, and addresses the ways in which students reckon with their own identities and engage across difference in their own work for justice.

This new growth at Goucher fits the particular mission and pedagogical character of the institution. Certainly, not all institutions are the same and not all teachers of religious studies approach the field or their pedagogy the same way. Nor should there be uniformity in this. The variety of methods and variety of context within which students can learn about the broad spectrum of religions, religious experiences, and religious communities speaks to the breadth and interdisciplinarity of the field and the wide array of educational opportunities available to students today. The biggest contextual difference will be between the large research university with a religious studies faculty of thirty and small programs of one or two people in small liberal arts colleges. Those curricula cannot be the same and different outcomes are to be expected from those different contexts. What is recommended for the academy as a whole and what is particularly for those teaching in small liberal arts college programs?

For the field as a whole, we must meet students where they are even as we stretch them beyond borders they do not yet know exist. Whether that is through in-depth discussion of medieval Christian mystics or the ubiquitous Introduction to World Religions course, there are ways of asking our students to be self-reflective as a means of recognizing their own subjectivity in the study of religion and the ways in which their own beliefs as well as their past experiences shape their approach to religious difference—whether that difference is historical, theological, geographical, or otherwise. We can also bring to the fore the ways in which our classes prepare students for the world they must encounter in their chosen

vocation. They will encounter individuals in business, in the classroom, and in everyday activities that come from different worldviews and reflect a variety perspectives. They need to recognize the ways in which they can work together with these individuals, not just despite difference, but even because of difference.

In small liberal arts college religion programs, faculty have the opportunity to dramatically rethink our work as scholars and teachers in religious studies. Admittedly, as in my case, this is often forced upon us by institutional change. But the motivation for the change need not undercut its importance or validity. We cannot offer the breadth of courses that a large research institution might offer. Our majors will never be as broad or offer as many possible avenues for students to pursue. Yet, there are some distinctive things we can offer. We have small classes, smaller advising loads, and the opportunity to develop close working relationships with our students—whether they are in one class or are religion majors. We can not only push students to be self-reflective but work with them over the course of a semester or a college career to continue that reflectiveness and turn it into action. We can take students off campus, do close readings with them, hear their voices, and foster situations where they engage with each other across religious difference.

As higher education changes in response to the needs of the market, the meaning and purpose of higher education must adjust as well. Though the content of our courses continues to be important as we maintain the integrity of our disciplines and fields of study, students increasingly need particular skills as they learn how to learn, how to think creatively, and how to engage with others different from themselves. These skills are no longer just reading, writing, and arithmetic. They are not even just critical thinking, writing, and oral expression. These skills involve moderating and balancing one's own identity with more objective fields of knowledge and understanding. They involve active listening and the willingness to have one's own assumptions questioned and unsettled. And these are skills our students need now more than ever.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ann W. Duncan is Associate Professor of American Studies and Religion at Goucher College in Baltimore, MD. Her research and teaching focus on intersections of religion and public life including religion and motherhood, religion and politics, new religious movements, and the spiritual but not religious.

ARTICLE

Integrating Workforce Competencies into Introductory Religion Writing Assignments: A Suggestion for Addressing a Pedagogical Challenge

Scott C. Ryan
Claflin University

ABSTRACT

Taking up the suggestions made by Eugene V. Gallagher and Joanne Maguire in their article, "Teaching Religion to Undergraduates in the 2020s: A Preliminary Reconnaissance" (2020), this essay addresses one means of thinking about writing assignments in introductory religion courses at the undergraduate level with "broad goals" and "institutional mission" in mind. The essay begins with a description of the institutional context and then describes an argument-analysis writing assignment for a general education religion course that attempts to draw out the "workforce competencies" developed in the exercise. Framing assignments explicitly in terms of the workforce skills students will hone offers teachers the ability to display the transferrable skills they help students develop and provides an avenue to connect assignments to the institution's mission statement.

KEYWORDS

assignment design, institutional mission, workforce competencies, writing in introductory courses, writing in general education courses

Introduction

During a recent undergraduate commencement ceremony, the student receiving the outstanding graduate award for the highest overall GPA gave a speech in which she lamented the "pointless assignments" students had to endure in university classes, as her classmates cheered in response. I was crushed. I have no doubt that students view many assignments across the university curriculum as little more than busy work. But I also suspect that the teachers who assigned the activities had specific goals in mind. I suspect those teachers desired students to come away with a new understanding of an issue, to hone skills that will benefit their students beyond the course, and to

assist students in becoming better informed citizens regardless of the vocations they pursue. Perhaps one problem is that we, professors in religious studies, are not always clear about the skills we want students to develop in our assignments and instead lean into discipline-specific language that fails to connect to students' vocational goals.

In their essay, "Teaching Religion to Undergraduates in the 2020s: A Preliminary Reconnaissance," Eugene V. Gallagher and Joanne Maguire utilize L. Dee Fink's subcategories of situational factors to be considered in the backward design of course curriculum (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 9–10; cf. Fink 2003, 63). They draw attention to the need for teachers of religion to design courses that are "mission-sensitive" or "mission-aware" and take seriously the implicit and explicit promises universities make to their students (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 15). In what follows, I describe a writing assignment for an introductory general education religion course that I redesigned at the insistence of the university administration to focus on workforce competencies across the curriculum. The result of this redesign, I suggest, offers one way of addressing Gallagher and Maguire's encouragement to devise religion courses with broad goals and institutional mission in mind, and addresses how the skills learned in the course connect to potential vocations outside of religion.

Institutional Context

I serve on the faculty at Claflin University, an historically Black university in South Carolina that has always been a place of inclusion and opportunity, especially for underserved populations. The university was founded as a liberal arts institution where anyone, regardless of race, gender, or creed, would be welcomed to receive an education. The institution stood firm during the Reconstruction and Civil Rights Eras to become a place "dedicated to providing a student-centered, liberal arts education grounded in cutting-edge research, experiential learning, state-of-the-art technology, community service, and life-long personal and professional fulfillment" (Claflin University 2021).

Like many institutions of higher learning, Claflin faces the challenge of students who desire to major in what they deem "marketable" areas of study (Davidson 2017, 136). Parents of students also desire to see their children attain well-paying jobs and to see a return on their investment in education; thus, a number of parents encourage students to major in STEM-related fields (see Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 10–11; cf. Donaghue 2018).[1] Gallagher and Maguire categorize these kinds of pressures as "external factors" facing higher education institutions. As the authors state, parents, students, and the general public bring their own expectations to the teaching and learning process, and universities feel the need to respond and demonstrate the benefits of their degree programs (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 10).

Because Claflin is an "access" institution, a number of students arrive on campus with a need to develop their reading and writing skills. General education courses in religion present prime opportunities for students to exercise their abilities to read and understand arguments, make judgments based on evidence, and formulate those judgments in a clear and coherent manner—all of which are skills necessary to excel in a variety of vocations. Religion courses are not often viewed as prime places for developing workforce competencies that prepare students for a competitive job market. Religion faculty thus have the opportunity to think about how to frame the skills students cultivate in their courses in ways that address external expectations of various parties and help students see the benefits of the study of religion beyond content alone (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 12).

Workforce Competencies and Writing in Religion

Many institutions of higher learning and departments of religion include as part of their mission statements the goal of developing people who are globally engaged, effective leaders, and productive and informed members of society. Yet often the forms, the specific assignments, and the skills necessary to achieve these goals remain unstated and are left to individual professors to determine. What is more, universities are trying to meet their objectives in a shifting landscape in which students expect their courses to "prepare [them] for the world beyond the academy" and have their own ideas about

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1   For recent trends in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred and fields of study from 2005–2016, see the National Center for Education Statistics (2018).

what that means (Davidson 2017; cf. Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 10; Yamada 2020). In religious studies, we often speak in terms of helping students in general education courses develop transferrable skills, such as critical thinking, making judgments, clearly expressing thought in oral and written forms, understanding and empathy, and so forth; however, the connection between the content, the skills learned, and how those skills benefit a person in a competitive job market beyond graduation tends to be implicit rather than explicit.

For instance, the university at which I serve publishes student learning outcomes in five primary areas with skills and content specified under each area (Claflin University 2018):

1. Communication and Literacy

    • Oral, written, and communication skills

    • Digital literacy

2. Knowledge Acquisition

    • Arts, literature, and fine arts

    • World civilization

    • Natural sciences

    • Quantitative studies

    • Social sciences

    • Individual disciplines

3. Intellectual Acumen

    • Critical thinking

    • Rational reasoning

    • Quantitative literacy

    • Synthesis and integration of knowledge

4. Leadership and Life Skills

    • Civic engagement

    • Ethical reasoning

    • Collaboration/teamwork

    • Community service

    • Engaging difference

    • Entrepreneurship

    • Financial literacy

    • Soft skills and professional development

5. Global Citizenship

    • Cultural sensitivity and awareness

    • Sustainability

    • Awareness of global issues

    • Social justice

The institution communicates these learning outcomes through literature and its website; however, these objectives are rarely matched directly with learning goals in specific courses. Connecting such broad outcomes with more narrow and specific goals in each class and each assignment, as suggested by Gallagher and Maguire, offers an opportunity to connect the dots.

As an institution affiliated with mainline Protestant denomination, the university's education curriculum requires students to take two religion courses. Students have a list of classes from which they can choose to fulfill this requirement; many of them elect to take Introduction to Biblical Literature, which I teach regularly. Each fall and spring semester I teach at least

two sections of Introduction to Biblical Literature, a class that serves, according to the university catalog, as "An academic study of the Bible (Old and New Testaments) from a literary, historical, and contemporary perspective." Each section routinely has thirty to thirty-five students enrolled.

The vast majority of students I encounter in this course do not plan to major in religion (or even in the humanities). Yet, as many in the guild will affirm, all students need to learn how to assess arguments and evidence, make sound judgments, read carefully, and express their views in writing. In a 2013 study conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), researchers aimed to discover "the most essential skills for the twenty-first century workforce" (Burrus et al. 2013, 1). Of the fifteen components studied, five skills rose to the top as the most prominent indicators of success:

1. problem solving (judgment and decision making; complex problem solving)

2. fluid intelligence (information ordering; mathematical reasoning)

3. teamwork (cooperation; concern for others)

4. achievement/innovation (innovation; originality)

5. communication skills (oral expression; written comprehension) (Burrus et. al. 2013, 27–29)

Arguably, each of these, with perhaps the exception of "fluid intelligence," are skills students develop in religion courses. In particular, deficiencies of communication skills among students in general education classes demand that teachers take time to assist students in developing proficiencies in this area (see Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 13; cf. Arum and Roksa 2011).

Over the past few years, I made attempts to revise writing assignments to address the goal of pushing students towards processing complex information, solving problems, and expressing their ideas on the page. I have assigned short reflection papers on passages of primary texts based on a prompt; asked students to write creatively as a character in a narrative or in the context of the ancient audience hearing the text (see Ryan, 2019); required students to craft an essay on how a text or issue from the course intersects with a current event in the news; and assigned more traditional textual analyses of primary documents. With a growing interest at the university on infusing workforce competencies into general education courses, I rethought my approach to writing assignments yet again. This time, I took steps to frame assignments in terms of workforce skills to help students see the benefits of assignments as transformational tasks and to help them understand how assignments can translate into other fields and vocational endeavors.

The following quote from Gallagher and Maguire offers a key text that captures the emphasis of my approach:

> If we know that our goals for students are, above all, to teach them how to navigate a complex world as responsible citizens, then our focus in the classroom should be on fostering those skills involved in such navigation. This will require a shift for many teachers, who will have to revise their courses around skills rather than content and think deeply and carefully about the broader implications of what they are actually teaching. (2020, 17)

In an attempt to revise an assignment "around skills rather than content," I devised an argument-analysis paper. Students in the course are assigned a scholarly article to read and analyze. I choose an article each semester that I deem more accessible to introductory readers and ask them to determine the thesis statement/main point of the argument, the significant pieces of evidence the author marshals in support of the thesis, the strength of the argument, and finally how the article might connect to our discussions in the course.

I provide a handout early in the semester with step-by-step instructions, a grading rubric, and the goals of the assignment. I make the document available online in the LMS and distribute hard copies in class. We spend several entire class sessions – spaced over several weeks of the course – analyzing the scholarly piece together, discussing the mechanics of writing essays, and walking through the parameters and expectations of the assignment. I find it is best to go over the instructions

with students early in the semester so that the broad objectives and goals of the course (found in the syllabus) are fresh in their minds and more easily paired with the assignment. Using the goals listed below, we talk through the importance of developing skills that can be applied in different disciplines and vocations:

1. To become proficient in reading and understanding complex arguments

2. To understand proper uses of evidence to support an argument

3. To determine the merits and demerits of arguments

4. To consider differing viewpoints charitably and sympathetically

5. To formulate ideas and express a position cogently in writing

Expressing the goals for an assignment provides space for teachers to connect the work in the class to the mission statement of the university, as Gallagher and Maguire suggest. In addition, the students and I take time to imagine how the goals of the paper might convert to their own fields of study or the jobs they hope to land post-graduation. This exercise offers a forum for students to make connections to workforce competencies that often remain unstated in religion courses.

I also scaffolded the assignment in several smaller submissions to help students read and understand the assigned article and work on smaller pieces of the essay. For instance, in the first submission I ask students to read the introductory and concluding sections of the article and decide what they see as the thesis; students then write only an opening paragraph for their essay that introduces the article and states what they see as the thesis based on their reading thus far. About two weeks prior to the submission of the introductory paragraph, we spend an entire class session talking about the main argument of the scholarly piece and how to construct a strong introduction to an essay.

Delimiting the initial reading to the beginning and end of the piece helps students locate the thesis without getting overwhelmed with the evidence used throughout the article. When entering students must read and understand a full scholarly piece, some become confused about the main point when they get into the weeds of evidence and when authors bring in conversation partners with whom they agree or disagree. Starting with the introduction and conclusion of the scholarly essay allows students to focus on the main point the author makes before proceeding further. Additionally, this initial step alerts students to an effective way of approaching complex arguments and offers a strategy for reading in other courses. After submitting the introductory paragraph, students receive feedback on this portion of the essay and have the chance to revise prior to turning in the next stage of the scaffolded assignment.

Armed with an idea about the main point of the article, students move on to investigate how the author supports the thesis with evidence. Students next read the remaining parts of the article at this point, outline the argument, and submit the body paragraphs for their essay, which elucidate the most significant points of evidence used to support the thesis. Prior to turning in this second part of the assignment, we again spend time in class in a workshop format discussing the article and how to write in a structured manner with transitions in our own essays. Students again receive feedback on this second stage before moving to the third step in which they combine the introduction and body together in the final draft with a conclusion.

In this last stage, we again spend class time workshopping the essays, discussing how to write effective conclusions and draw pieces of the arguments together. Students then turn in the completed assignment—an essay that analyzes a scholarly argument with an introduction, body, and conclusion. In the concluding section, I encourage learners to offer their thoughts on the merits and demerits of the argument and the strength of the evidence they noted in the body of their essay. I also invite students at this point to place the piece in conversation with what we have discussed in the course.

To be sure, such an assignment on a single article requires that I sacrifice breadth of content and discipline-specific issues in favor of more depth and time spent on one topic. In this case, less is indeed more (see Galindo 2019). Editing the course content to devote time to a single writing assignment is indeed a challenge, because I have a number of topics

and texts that I deem important and helpful for students to learn. Yet I also find that the skills developed in the project are worth class time and hold potential to foster workforce competencies that show students the benefit of a religion course beyond learning content alone. Students tend to respond more positively to the task when we discuss the reasons for assigning the project and how it might apply to their vocational pursuits. Further, students come away with a sense of accomplishment that they read, understood, and wrote about a sophisticated scholarly argument.

Conclusion

Gallagher and Maguire rightly note that "the task for teachers of religious studies is not to induct students into the ins and outs of a discipline that very few of them will ever participate in at an advanced level"; rather, the task is "to show them and help them practice some of the characteristic modes of thought and analysis that the discipline of the academic study of religion can bring to bear on virtually any topic" (Gallagher and Maguire 2020, 17). The argument-analysis paper described above offers one example of an assignment that teaches transferrable workforce skills and provides opportunity to align an assignment explicitly with the institutional mission. For those teachers who have dedicated their lives to the study of religion, showing restraint with our material is a difficult task. But with a focus on course design that takes seriously the implicit and explicit promises made in mission statements and considers ways to foster workforce competencies, religion courses can build the bridges Gallagher and Maguire suggest "between the goals which general education courses are purported to serve and the design of courses to fulfill such goals" (2020, 16).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott C. Ryan serves as Assistant Professor of Religion and Biblical Studies at Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC. He is the author of *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior: Listening to Romans and Other Jewish Voices*, and has published articles in *New Testament Studies*, *Perspective in Religious Studies*, and *Baptist History and Heritage Journal*.

TEACHING TACTIC

Graphic Insight: Hands-on Biblical Reception History

Allison Gray
St. Mary's University

The context

I used this assignment in a 3000-level biblical studies class on the gospel of John and the Johannine epistles. All undergraduates at our private, Catholic university are required to take an upper-level theology course, so the class included a mix of majors, minors, and students from other fields. In the final weeks of the semester, we discussed biblical reception history and spent a class session examining fine art inspired by the Gospel. Students completed this follow-up task as a low-stakes homework assignment and posted their work to an online discussion board, where classmates could view and comment on each other's submissions.

The pedagogical purpose

Students are encouraged to think about how various artifacts of textual reception history reflect the cultural context in which they were created. Students also consider how art may be tailored to communicate with a specific intended audience.

Description of the strategy

Students analyze a text, identify a key message and argue its relevance for a contemporary audience of college students, work creatively in a visual medium, and write about their creative experience.

Each student designs their own graphic representing some theological concept or teaching from one of the Johannine epistles and provides a short commentary. A student may create their graphic using digital tools or basic art supplies. While creativity is encouraged, students are welcome to use stick figures or clip art if they are not confident in their artistic skills. The assignment was originally inspired by a series of posters created by artist Jim LePage.

The short commentary (approximately 250 words) submitted alongside the resulting image must explain the following:

1. which biblical verses inspired the graphic,

2. what teaching from those verses the graphic captures,

3. what the components of the graphic signify, and

4. why the focal teaching is important for contemporary college-aged readers of the text.

This low-stakes assignment receives a completion grade and written feedback.

Why it is effective

Working first in a visual medium, students identify links between familiar symbols and new course content, which generates unexpected insights. The open-ended invitation to explain why some biblical teaching might matter for a group of the student's peers allows those from disciplines outside theology to connect course content to their own areas of interest. A digital gallery of graphics on the course site allows students to appreciate their classmates' creativity.

TEACHING TACTIC

Talking Heads: Crafting Digital Media-Based Research Projects

Rob O'Lynn
Kentucky Christian University

The context

An undergraduate course on Psalms, which is offered as a general Bible elective for non-Bible majors and is required for our degrees in Advanced Biblical Studies and Bible and Worship.

The pedagogical purpose

To help students develop competency in theological research, project organization, and cultural engagement. In addition to developing communication skills, this approach familiarizes students with contemporary platforms for idea exchange, content engagement, digital journalism, and social and professional networking, as well as moving them past "opinion essays."

Description of the strategy

The media assignment has a standard set of project and grading criteria. In terms of general guidelines, the video can be no longer than three minutes, must communicate a tightly composed theological message, and must follow a pre-approved production schedule. All of this is communicated through a proposal submitted through our learning management system (LMS). The proposal requires a biblical text for discussion, a theme for the video's message format, and a production schedule for filming and editing the video. A grading rubric is provided so students know how they will be evaluated.

Students are asked to develop a video demonstrating their ability to conduct exegesis on a selected psalm. Students can work in pairs if willing to accept a shared grade. Research focuses on analysis of a passage, which can be clearly and logically articulated in the time allotted. Clarity and professionalism is expected, and examples of past projects are provided on the course resources page. Finally, students must share their completed work with their peers on social media, as a form of informal peer editing.

Why it is effective

The project is quite popular with students. It challenges students to be both concise and resourceful in their research. By requiring a proposal that must be approved and having the grading rubric in advance, students shift away from traditional research papers and embrace multimedia research—research that requires significant analysis and must be communicated succinctly. According to grade analysis, grades are higher for this project as compared to traditional research papers in a similar course.

Challenging students to conceptualize and communicate research material within the video format rather than a written report. This aligns with the rise of the "podcast culture," where information research and analytic data is communicated in real time. Students comment that this project helped them see biblical research as relevant to their lives. Making them public reinforces standards of excellence because students' peers see their work.

TEACHING TACTIC

Creating Digital Tours of Sacred Spaces

Benjamin Zeller
Lake Forrest College

The context

I incorporate visual and spatial analysis into many courses, but especially into a course I teach on sacred spaces in Chicago. My students, undergraduates at a national liberal arts college who generally take my courses as part of the general education curriculum, enter with little knowledge of religious spaces or traditions.

The pedagogical purpose

I teach students to analyze spaces on a macro level (e.g. architectural style) as well as micro (e.g. specific objects). To help students more deeply learn about these spaces, I charge them with creating educational digital tours wherein they need to highlight and explain different elements of the space. This requires students to engage symbolic, iconographic, liturgical, architectural, historical, and artistic features.

Description of the strategy

My students have little if any experience creating digital tours. I therefore have chosen relatively easy to use software and hardware (Panotour **and** Ricoh Theta cameras; Panotour has been discontinued, but Pano2VR makes a good replacement). I train them on the use of these tools in a single class session. Throughout the semester we study sacred space as a category, as well as studying specific examples in the classroom and in the field. During a three-hour class session in the last three weeks of the semester we visit a new sacred site, and I set students loose with cameras and notebooks to learn about the space. I help with the technology where I need to. Back on campus, students do more research and decide which elements of the space to feature. Students choose photos and write descriptions. If they are comfortable learning the software, they help put the tour together, otherwise I take their work and create a tour from the various features they have studied.

Why it is effective

The scholarship of teaching and learning has demonstrated that needing to teach about a subject helps students gain deeper and fuller understanding. This project takes that basic approach into the digital world. I happen to use 360° hardware and software for this project, but it works in other media too. The important thing is charging students to independently learn about the elements of a sacred space and then collectively put it together. Students become experts on the space as they discuss what to highlight in our digital tour. They learn about a religious tradition as embodied in the practices that occur in its sacred spaces. They access the lived religious context as well as the specific historical and cultural contexts of a particular community of faith.

TEACHING TACTIC

The Class Masterpiece

John M. Thompson
Christopher Newport University

The context

First week of a lower-level Introduction to the Study of Religion (small classes or large lectures with discussion sections).

The pedagogical purpose(s)

To help students see "religions" as dynamic processes developing through time, highlight how religion may be internally incoherent, and to encourage creative interaction.

Description of the strategy

I start by drawing a simple house (rectangle surmounted by a triangle) on the board and suggest that we view any religion as a creative, communal enterprise. Handing the marker to a student, I ask them to add something appropriate (door, windows, etc.) and then to pass the marker to their neighbor to add something else, until everyone has a turn. While the drawing develops, I turn to other topics slated for that day while keeping an eye on the drawing process. When everyone has drawn, I call attention to the class masterpiece, noting how it morphed from a sketch to an elaborate scene, pointing out that we can still discern the original.

Besides being easy to draw, a house is a familiar, commonplace object. On a deeper level, a house provides the setting for much of daily life, can be altered or remodeled when the need arises, and often engenders emotional attachment. And of course, various religions employ the metaphor (a temple is the House of God, Muslims speak of the House of Islam, etc.). Students get a sense of how, like the drawing, a religion develops more associatively than logically; this provides fodder for class discussion. For example, some features (like flowers blooming next to a snowman) may clash with each other yet still make sense in that they depict things we associate with a house (landscaping, signs of kids living there, etc.). Similarly, religions may teach that eternal life should be our paramount concern while encouraging this-worldly practices (offerings to support the clergy and earn merit, etc.). In addition, some features may reflect current events; for example, a student once drew a hurricane that was approaching our campus. Such elements can spark reflection on how certain features of a religion (like prophecies of persecution) are rooted in very specific historical circumstances. To what extent are certain things essential (versus accidental) to a religion?

Students enjoy this exercise. It permits them to be funny or to show off their artistic skills and it also sets up a reflection paper (1-2 pages) about how they anticipate the course changing their understanding of religion. Instructors can shorten this exercise by asking for volunteers or randomly picking students (8-10). This saves time but the drawings are simpler and the point about the creative and communal nature of religious development can get lost. It's also less fun!

Image 1

Image 2

Why it is effective

This assignment gets students involved in a shared endeavor directly connected to an abstract and theoretical idea and adds a playful aspect to what many consider a dry subject. Most importantly, it vividly illustrates aspects of religion that are easy to overlook: religions change over time, often through the accretion of details that may have little relation to the original situation.

TEACHING TACTIC

Using Visuals as an Entry Point to Theological Conversation

Mary DeBroeck
Strake Jesuit College Preparatory

The context

This activity was used in introductory courses in theology at a Catholic institution, with class sizes ranging from eighteen to twenty-five. The strategy can be used for a discussion portion of a class or for an entire session.

The pedagogical purpose

The goal of this activity is to encourage students to engage critically with several texts of a theological tradition, to recognize varying perspectives and genres in the history of theology, and to compare different texts constructively in small groups through analysis of an image. It is intended to elicit theological conversation rather than a more conventional critical analysis of the chosen image, although a scholarly reading on an interpretation of the image could be a fruitful follow-up to the discussion.

Description of the strategy

Disseminate several different readings on a topic for students to read for the intended class session. These readings can represent different genres (Biblical exegesis, Patristic texts, Scholastic theology, and so forth), a single corpus of one author, or various Christian traditions. In class divide students into groups based on an equal distribution of texts, so that every text is represented in each group and each group receives the visual image without comment. Many options are possible in the selection of what image is used: a classic or contemporary work of art, a drawing, a map or diagram, or architectural designs, to name a few. Two examples of images which have been successful are a map of Dante's Inferno in a discussion on the nature of sin and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling in the context of the human person and the Fall. Students are then challenged to interpret this image theologically in light of their assigned reading, considering questions such as: How can this image be theologically interpreted? What would "your" author say regarding this image? What themes from the reading are in harmony or in conflict with this image? A similar strategy can be arranged by organizing groups according to the same text and presenting their analysis to the class before a discussion.

Why it is effective

The visual representation evokes curiosity and becomes a useful entry-point to a theological discussion especially when the readings or topic are intimidatingly dense. With the image as the center of discussion, it allows the instructor then to navigate the class as novices toward a deeper appreciation not only for theological interpretation of images, but also for theological nuance and development, the diversity of the tradition, the limitedness of single perspectives, and the strengths and weaknesses of different theological genres in conveying theological truths.

TEACHING TACTIC

The Accountability for Daily Readings Quiz

Roshan Iqbal
Agnes Scott College

The context

Introductory religious studies courses that also aim to develop critical reading and writing skills.

The pedagogical purpose

This tactic creates accountability for reading. It is hard to make students read the assigned material but if students don't read class discussions and student writing suffer. In my introductory level classes, I combat this by assigning quizzes at the start of each class session. Since quizzes are worth sixty percent of their grade, they have to read or their grades suffer. I do drop the two lowest scores of the quiz.

Description of the strategy

I design quizzes around ideas I would like to discuss in class. They become a map of the most important points in the reading, or put differently, my lesson plan. The quizzes are open book which brings the anxiety down but I only allot ten minutes, so if they haven't read, they won't do well. The ten to fifteen questions on the quiz will be of three types: true and false, select the right answer, and fill in the blank. I start the class with the quiz. Once students have attempted it, we discuss the answers. Along with my being able to bring up the essential points in the reading, the quiz also alerts the students to gaps in their knowledge, given that they find out right away which things they do not know or misunderstood. These daily quizzes create a lot of grading work for me. Though, I think the reward of having students who have attempted the readings in my class is worth all the hours spent grading and recording the grade.

Why it is effective

The daily quiz routine is beneficial in four ways. They force students to do the readings. Studies have shown a positive correlation between compliance in reading and quizzes (Hoeft 2012, Marcel 2008, Maurer and Longfield 2015). The quizzes bring students into the classroom. Taking the quiz helps students focus. Finally, they identify student progress immediately, from class to class. The daily quiz motivates most students, most of the time, to do their reading.

BOOK REVIEW

Geeky Pedagogy: A Guide for Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds Who Want to Be Effective Teachers

Jessamyn Neuhaus

Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2019
(xi + 249 pages, ISBN 978-1-949199-06-2, $21.50)

Reviewed By

Hans Wiersma

Augsburg University

Attention: Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds! Do you want to be an effective teacher? If so, *Geeky Pedagogy* offers some highly useful and engaging guidance for you. The author, history professor Jessamyn Neuhaus, understands that terms like geek, nerd, and introvert are *not* pejoratives. Indeed, she numbers herself among those (of us) who identify as "academic nerds and scholarly geeks," who love "to be alone with our thoughts," and who are, after all, "the *experts* in our fields" (10; italics in the original). In short, Neuhaus offers "an overview of the teaching and learning rollercoaster, written with my own tribe of brainy, introverted academic nerds and scholars in mind" (18).

Geeky Pedagogy contains five core chapters: Awareness, Preparation, Reflection, Support, and Practice. Neuhaus cleverly introduces and concludes each chapter with quotations from geek pop culture, from Sherlock to SpongeBob, Tolkien to Star Trek, Harry Potter to Black Panther. But Neuhaus's take on effective pedagogy is not so much about geek-cred as it is about giving potential Poindexters a state-of-the-art application of the best ideas from the Scholarship of Teaching in Learning (SoTL). In other words, she cites Dr. Stephen Brookfield (quoted often) more than she cites Dr. Who (mentioned but once, and then only in an endnote).

The author's ode to educators who identify as Geeks, Introverts, and Nerds (collectively dubbed "GINS") starts with an admonishment to be aware of their intended audience, namely, students. Neuhaus explains why student identities matter, why learning can be so difficult, and why GINS ought to make like Socrates and "Know Thyself." *Geeky Pedagogy* then moves to the theme of preparedness. Introverted eggheadedness can (apparently) cause GINS to appear uncaring, inaccessible, detached, and inscrutable to students. Neuhaus elaborates here on what it means to "put on your professor pants" and act the part: not only working on standard SoTL concerns such as learning outcomes, course design, and relevant assignments and assessment, but also on what can seem like a tall order for GINS – relying less on PowerPoint and more on activities that help build rapport with and between students.

I found the chapter titled "Reflection" to be the most challenging and the most poignant. Neuhaus points out that even the most beloved professor can recall "every wounding word" (94) of a negative Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). *Geeky Pedagogy* doesn't promise that GINS will be able to avoid that painful, overly harsh insult anonymously rendered by that disgruntled student at the end of the term. But it does contend that soliciting student feedback throughout the term will help students give honest, fair, and useful feedback along the way. Neuhaus is not the inventor of this strategy, of course. However, she offers gentle correction and spot-on guidance for those (of us) prone to discounting student input.

"Some consistently ineffective college teachers with decades of teaching behind them have convinced themselves that student learning is not their responsibility but rather entirely the students' problem" (146). Such a description is unlikely to apply to any Geek, Introvert, or Nerd interested in reading up on effective teaching and learning. Neuhaus's final two chapters nevertheless exhort GINS to do what is somewhat against their (our) nature: seek and secure support for their pedagogical development and then practice, practice, practice.

As Yoda might say, "Appreciate this book, you will."

BOOK REVIEW

When Getting Along Is Not Enough: Reconstructing Race in Our Lives and Relationships

Maureen Walker

Teachers College Press: New York, 2020
(xiii + 135 pages, ISBN 978-0-8077-6337-7, $31.95)

Reviewed By

Anne-Marie Ellithorpe

Vancouver School of Theology

The events of 2020 have stunned many out of the complacency of, at best, just "getting along." As I write this review, the intertwined crises of racialized hostilities, socio-political injustice, and COVID-19 are provoking not only widespread attention, but a desire on the part of many to be part of the solution, rather than the problem. Yet many remain uncertain as to how to engage in authentic connection. In *When Getting Along Is Not Enough*, Maureen Walker addresses this need, as she offers relational practices with potential to transform our cultural ways of being and relating. Thus, this profound and insightful book is essential reading for those of us who seek an end to the soul-scarring suffering provoked by "chronic racialized disconnection" (6).

Walker builds on Jean Baker Miller's "self-in-relation" model, with its recognition that disconnection provokes human suffering. Yet while chronic disconnection is typically conceptualized as interpersonal disruption associated with dysfunction within family relationships, Walker explores culture as the agent of chronic disconnection (3). Race is recognized as cultural ideology in action, impacting how we design and execute those systems that shape life within community, whether commercial or political, as well as "how we embody our relationships with each other" (2). Nevertheless, Walker assures us that, despite our having learned to use race as a mechanism of disconnection, we can unlearn those cultural habits. A legacy of stratification has negatively impacted all of society by thwarting our "hardwired yearning" for relationality and authentic connection (115). Yet as we engage in authentic connection, our social imagination is extended, and our vision of who we can be in the world is enlarged.

When Getting Along Is Not Enough is an essentially hopeful book, promoting healthy connections within which "all participants have an opportunity to grow" (3, 83). Initially, Walker wanted to call this book *Revolutionary Hope*, recognizing that to practice hope is to resist, and to subvert alienating and fear-promoting "power-over practices" (9). The book is shaped by the question: "How do we create and sustain healthy connections in a culture marred by chronic disconnection?" (3) We need to ask: "Who, together, might we become?" (6), and to call each other into "fuller experience of our shared humanity" (135). We are encouraged to "intentionally cultivate communities of differentiated allies" (130).

The first half of the book explains race as a cultural organizing dynamic that impacts our everyday interactions and ways of relating. The practice of racial stratification is identified as an ordering of human worth that simultaneously shapes both "implicit associations and explicit behaviors" (4). Issues of belonging, safety, power-over, and social pain are acknowledged and discussed.

The second half of the book focuses on relational skills with the potential to promote both personal transformation and cultural healing. Walker advocates for the skills of disruptive empathy, mindful authenticity, and dynamic mutuality. She challenges race-card games and silencing strategies that suppress authentic conversation. Nine skills for promoting engagement and countering withdrawal and disconnection are articulated.

As theological and religious studies educators, we are well placed to explore and challenge constricting narratives and norms with students, and to foster new narratives and ways of being. We will benefit from engaging with Walker as a conversation partner with the potential to guide us through life-giving conflict that includes shedding our own metaphorical shoes in order to walk in the shoes of another (134). While Walker focuses on American contexts, her insights are valid beyond the United States. The invitation and pathway to transformation is relevant within any context that remains shaped by disconnection.

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching about Race and Racism in the College Classroom: Notes from a White Teacher

Cyndi Kernahan

*Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2019
(xii + 238 pages, ISBN 978-1-949199-24-9, $24.99)*

Reviewed By

Matthew Maruggi

Augsburg University

In the beginning pages of *Teaching about Race and Racism in the College Classroom: Notes from a White Teacher*, Cyndi Kernahan states the purpose of her book: "This book is about teaching race and racism in a way that is not blaming or shaming, a way that is compassionate but also relentlessly honest… confront[ing] the realities of racism without being confrontational" (5). Utilizing the latest research from the scholarship of teaching and learning and her field of social psychology, Kernahan delivers a compelling volume useful for both those teaching courses specifically about race and racism and for instructors whose fields will inevitably encounter racial themes.

In the introduction, the author poses the question, "Why Is It So Hard?" to teach about race and racism. She names the emotional and cognitive complexity involved in the subject and how it can challenge a student's sense of identity. While acknowledging that these forces are at play in the classroom, she is clear in her understanding that her mandate as a teacher is to assist students in developing a more nuanced and complicated understanding of the subject matter, not necessarily to compel behavior change.

The following six chapters are organized in a similar fashion, exploring a specific topic related to teaching about racism, followed by recommendations and suggestions, developed through thorough research as well as her own experiences in the classroom. The topics of these chapters include an examination of how students can move from a personalized understanding of racism to one that incorporates an understanding of systemic forces, student resistance to course content and ideas for moving students beyond resistance, and how to develop a secure teacher identity when teaching about racism. Additionally, she details how to create belonging in the classroom, the process of creating ground rules that encourage a growth mindset, and strategies for teaching difficult course content. Kernahan concludes with a succinct summary of seven overarching ideas and an appendix of sources useful in understanding the historical context of racism.

This volume is thoughtful, impeccably researched, and full of useful examples

drawing on her own years of experience as well as insights from her colleagues in the field. Throughout the book, Kernahan maintains her commitment to honest, evidence-based teaching on the issue of race and compassion towards students as they navigate the disturbing history and contemporary reality of systemic racism. While the author is clear in her focus on how one educates about race, her book covers topics that are useful to university faculty who find themselves teaching about any number of polarizing issues. Especially insightful is her treatment of student resistance and creating belonging in the classroom. The book is not without its limitations, which Kernahan readily admits. From the beginning, she is clear about her limited perspective; she teaches small classes to overwhelmingly white students. She also notes that limited research has been done on the concerns of students of color in courses on race and even less on white instructors teaching in classrooms where the majority of the students are people of color. While more research is urgently needed in these areas, her work is still immensely helpful and insightful, providing best practices that can serve to create a transformative learning environment around a difficult topic.

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching about Genocide: Insights and Advice from Secondary Teachers and Professors, Volume 1

Samuel Totten, editor
Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2018
(xi + 195 pages, ISBN 978-1-4758-2547-3, $32.00)

Reviewed By

Lisa J. Cleath

George Fox University

For instructors of theology and religion, it is essential to thoughtfully address conversations on difficult social justice and ethical topics from multiple angles. *Teaching about Genocide* offers a collection of twenty-two very readable, short chapters by secondary and university-level teachers. On the whole, the pedagogical frameworks and activities in the book are easy to adapt to bachelor's and master's level courses, either in confessional contexts or beyond. Since each chapter is composed by a different author, their priorities vary; most of the authors clarify their student demographics and particulars of their teaching contexts, recognizing the need for every instructor to adapt any course for their given institution and students. Although it is unlikely to become a classic pedagogical text, the sheer diversity of this volume is its strength.

Across the chapters, two primary questions arise as concerns for the authors: what patterns of individual and collective actions lead to genocide, and how can understanding the phenomenon of genocide form students into reflective and active members of society? Even if one does not teach courses solely on the topic of genocide, these questions lead directly to a number of theological and religious issues, including discussions of human nature, systemic and cross-generational sin, religious social responsibility, and transformation of our world into a place of wholeness and health.

Of the twenty-two chapters, I highlight several that struck me as the most useful. A few chapters focused on classroom activities establishing student knowledge. Chapter 1 starts the book off with a concise and clear description of a cluster activity that assesses the depth of student knowledge via individual and collaborative components. Chapter 11 encourages classes to think about the purpose of defining terms through an anonymous collective activity.

A few chapters detail assignments encouraging students to engage in self-reflection and take social action. Chapter 3 culminates in a list of specific ways in which students can take action in response to what they have learned. Chapter 10 provides tools that facilitate student reflection on their personal reactions to different genocides, so that they might consider why or why not they would be stirred morally or ethically to act in response. Chapter 16 outlines "A Letter-Writing Assignment to Combat Psychic Numbing," which looks to be an effective self-reflective response that may even be sent to individual survivors of violence. As described, this activity has the potential to develop empathetic, pastoral action in student response to injustice while validating survivors' experiences.

Finally, some chapters explore pedagogical approaches to personally challenging topics. Chapter 8 is a very thoughtful discussion of how secondary teachers (and likewise college professors) might teach about sexual violence. This chapter is especially strong in nuancing how online teaching venues and student demographics will influence pedagogical choices for this sensitive but important topic. Chapter 17 features a series of ethical questions that an instructor should consider before implementing simulation or role-play pedagogy.

As a professor of biblical studies, I prioritize planning courses that focus on Christian social justice and ethics. This book catalyzed the creation of my "Social Justice and the Bible" syllabus for this coming academic year, in terms of thinking about outcomes, philosophical frameworks, course schedule and assignments, and specific classroom exercises. I believe that other instructors will also be able to effectively apply the detailed contextual conclusions in this varied volume.

The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education

Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share
Boston, MA: Brill Sense, 2019
(xvii + 126 pages, ISBN 900440452X, $30.00)

Reviewed By

Eric Fehr
Northwest Seminary and College

For those interested in learning how to evaluate media and decipher fact from fiction, this book is a helpful resource. *The Critical Media Literacy Guide* addresses critical media literacy, ideology and power of media, race and racism, sexuality, environmental justice, and how to teach critical media literacy (CML). The authors state that they wrote this book "to promote critical media literacy as a theoretical framework and practical pedagogy in order to enhance individual sovereignty vis-à-vis media culture, empowering people to critically read, write, and create a better world" (xi). The authors accomplish their stated aim in the introduction. With the ubiquitous use of social media and polarizing views and news online, this book addresses a current lack of resources in theological education on this subject.

A cursory Google Scholar search on CML in theological education reveals a gap in scholarship of the last twenty years. Although not written from a theological perspective, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide* offers some important points religious educators ought to be aware of and implement in their classrooms and pedagogy. For educators in liberal arts subjects, such as English, media, and sciences, it includes teaching examples for the classroom.

The examples, aimed at K-12 subjects and educators, are informative. A graduate instructor could incorporate these examples into a course across various disciplines. The issues of sexism, gender stereotyping, and power dynamics of media, would be a welcome addition to a Christianity and culture course. CML addresses how one engages thoughtfully with all forms of media to discern what is false and uncover the ideological message of the medium. According to Kellner and Share, media is not neutral: often media is racist, sexist, and biased towards one view of gender identity and sexuality. Ironically, in their quest to bring awareness to bias in media, the authors come across as dismissive of other viewpoints, particularly religious ones. In addition, the book makes absolute claims about truth and gender identity that some theological educators may find offensive.

Nevertheless*, The Critical Media Literacy Guide* is a valuable resource for those who want to know how to engage with media in the classroom. This volume is a welcome contribution: it treats a timely subject with clear writing and raises awareness of critical issues. The current media landscape is fraught with contradictions, polarized viewpoints, and outrageous claims that have life and death consequences. This book helps readers discern truth from fiction. Further, the authors challenge their readers to discover the message behind the media and not be passive consumers of media in any form.

Teachers, Teaching, and Media

Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder, editors
Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2019
(xvi + 213 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-39809-5, $54.00)

Reviewed By

Steven C. Ibbotson

Prairie Colleges

Teachers, Teaching, and Media compiles fifteen essays discussing how educators are presented in popular American television and movies. Each essay interacts with these media forms suggesting ways they reflect or challenge cultural understandings of educators and the school context. In each analysis, the authors demonstrate the editors' thesis that viewers accept various stereotypical representations of teachers without giving critical attention to the ideological underpinnings.

Most of the essays focus on stereotypes regarding gender and race, specifically, on male characters as administrators and female characters as teachers, often in an adversarial role with superiors. In terms of race, teachers function either as agents reinforcing ideas of identity and power or as agents challenging cultural expectations. Jill Ewing Flynn's essay recounting her experiences teaching a post-secondary course on the book's topic provides the broadest overview of the various ideas discussed. In fact, an argument could be made that it should have been the opening essay of the book (rather than the fifth essay), because it provides an overview and introduction to the other examples.

Throughout many essays, the writers note the stereotyping of gender roles in education, the objectification of females, and the racial interactions between students and teachers, as well as among teachers and administrators. Chad E. Harris' commentary about the HBO program *Vice Principles* and Naeemah Clark's discussion of HBO's *Insecure* focus specifically on these issues. Network television shows like *Saved by the Bell* and *The Wonder Years* are also examined with these themes in mind. Kristy Liles Crawley looks at these stereotypes in movies and television, comparing the depiction of educators in community colleges and universities. Andrew Wirth's interaction with gender assumptions in "Rethinking Student-Teacher Relationship Intimacy as Attachment" was challenging to read, given the reviewers' unfamiliarity with the movie *Detachment* or queer theory.

Another commonly discussed theme is the "teacher as hero" narrative. The book's first essay by Steve Benton's shows how the educator-hero story actually functions contrary to the original concepts of education held by America's founding fathers. Roslin Smith's essay explains how the character Q from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* also reflects the teacher as hero narrative. Other essays noted above also touch on this hero theme. Not surprisingly, in the book's final essay, Dalton explores the related concept of the "good teacher" as well as the gender and racial stereotypes discussed earlier.

Other essays interact with other media, examining additional themes. Stephanie Schroder takes an interesting look at the depiction of teachers in the first two seasons of *The West Wing*, contrasting them with the socio-political milieu of the time. Another essay compares George Miller's teacher-like role in *Saving Private Ryan* and demonstrates the interesting parallelism of language between two seemingly different contexts: education and the military. Not unlike Steve Benton's opening essay, Gary Kenton's work shows how the anti-authority message of rock n' roll and rap music consistently undermines the value of education and the profession of teachers. Likewise, Elizabeth Currin examines the unique context and storylines in the show *Bob's Burgers,* considering the various interpretations of the concept *in loco parentis*.

The inclusion of pictures with many of the essays was helpful in jogging one's memory of the film or television show. Likewise, the essays generally demonstrate good interaction with both the literature published on the media under discussion as well as with other theoretical knowledge.

Some essays demonstrated book's thesis – film and television both challenge and reflect society's view of education – more strongly than others. A good portion of the essays attempted to interact with media that depicted normal everyday life in an American educational setting. However, a few essays seemed focussed on situations beyond the ordinary context of education, and thus were not beneficial in accomplishing the purpose (*Star Trek*, *Saving Private Ryan*).

While the book might be interesting for a college class relating to popular culture or media and education, this reviewer suspects the range of examples, the varying quality of analysis, and of course, the ever changing examples in today's popular culture, would render this book to be of minimal value as a textbook. Recognizing that the editors did not write with a particular faith perspective in mind, the book, while interesting, does not seem to this reviewer to be of specific value to faculty involved in teaching religion or theology.

BOOK REVIEW

Going Alt-Ac: A Guide to Alternative Academic Careers

Kathryn E. Linder, Kevin Kelly, and Thomas J. Tobin
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2020
(241 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-831-2, $32.95)

Reviewed By

Annette Stott

University of Denver

In a climate of shrinking tenure-track jobs, where most new PhDs in theological and religious studies will not enter the professoriate right out of graduate school, a mini-industry has been emerging that provides advice and support for those who want to turn that PhD into an alternative career. Since the publication in 2001 of *"So What Are You Going to Do with That?"* (Basalla and Debelius, Farrar, Straus and Giroux), more books, articles, webinars, websites, and workshops have appeared, dedicated to alternative career paths for PhDs. *Going Alt-*Ac is the latest addition to this genre.

Like its earlier counterparts, it is not specific to theology or religious studies, but it is filled with practical advice and resources that will aid PhDs in these fields to move intentionally and productively toward a wide range of career options. As its subtitle suggests, *Going Alt-Ac* focuses on non-professorial careers within the academy, only briefly addressing external options. Other books, such as *Succeeding Outside the Academy* (Baker and Fruscine, University Press of Kansas, 2018) and *Building a Career Outside Academia* (Brown and Linver, American Psychological Association, 2018), are better choices for those seeking to leave academic settings entirely. *Going Alt-Ac* is highly relevant for anyone in religious studies or theology who wants to broaden their horizons within the academy and it will help graduate advisors better mentor students with diverse goals.

One of the many strengths of this book is its consideration for people at every stage of their career and in varied circumstances, including an entire chapter on life partners seeking careers together in academia (87-95). Recognizing that people not only begin the search for alt-ac while in graduate school, but they leave alt-ac positions to accept faculty roles, move from faculty to alternative careers, combine roles, retire into alt-ac, and more, the authors include a chart advising the reader where to dive into the book, based on current career stage and goals (xiv-xvi).

Another strength is the abundance of resources in the form of lists and links. For example, there are lists of places to hear interviews with alt-acs (41-42) and lists of professional associations for various alt-ac careers (154-156). Readers are prompted to use *Going Alt-Ac* as a workbook to create their own lists, including skills they have (50), need (51), or want (52) as they build a personal career profile. There are also lists of other career coaching websites and job-seeking tools (8-9). Although not mentioned, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) provide similar tools to their members, and AAR's Applied Religious Studies Committee hosts panels and workshops on alt-ac careers each year at the AAR/SBL meeting.

Going Alt-Ac not only addresses benefits, such as avoiding publish-or-perish stress, but challenges of alt-ac, such as competition from PhD holders in many disciplines. Chapter 16 discusses the importance of connecting disciplinary knowledge, both directly and indirectly, to specific alt-ac roles. Theologians and religious studies scholars must think about the unique skills and knowledge sets they bring to the academy, translate them to new situations, and seek jobs accordingly. Real-life alt-ac success stories provide inspiration throughout the book.

All three authors have PhDs, expertise in distance learning and educational technology, and experience in university alt-ac careers. Although they wrote this book pre-pandemic, their advice is perfect for our times. Whatever higher education looks like post-pandemic, *Going Alt-Ac* will be a valuable guide.

The Creative Classroom: Innovative Teaching for 21st-Century Learners

Keith Sawyer

New York, NY: Teachers College Press
(xx + 115 pages, ISBN 978-0807763049, $31.95)

Reviewed By

Matthew D. Campbell
University of North Alabama

Those wishing to foster student creativity should consult Keith Sawyer's *The Creative Classroom*. Dually a "how-to" guide for enacting fresh pedagogy and a thorough rebuke of traditional, teacher-centered classrooms, Sawyer has assembled a highly-accessible text that will challenge even the most innovative instructors. Sawyer's experiences in jazz, improvised theater, and learning science render a nuanced, practical guide for improving classroom teaching in the twenty-first century.

Marked by a lecture-heavy environment, traditional classrooms have long been the dominant paradigm in American education. These environments encourage the transmission of shallow, surface-level knowledge and fail to germinate students' creativity or proficiency in meaningful content. Thus, students shuffle between classrooms, briefly remembering isolated facts before jettisoning them for more of the same. As a result, students recall only a fraction of what has been taught and are inhibited from achieving transformational learning experiences.

Sawyer's vision is radically different. Instead of this disjointed portrait, he advocates for imbuing classrooms (and schools) with creativity. This does not mean simply offering additional coursework in creative fields; as Sawyer notes, creativity is domain-specific and cannot be attuned in isolation. The pursuit of imaginative instruction begins with establishing creative habits of mind within all contexts, including the values of playfulness and accepting failure. The most overarching of these virtues, a concept termed guided improvisation, receives significant attention throughout multiple chapters in the text.

As an ethic, guided improvisation undergirds any creative classroom and requires teachers to blend structure and choice into all aspects of education. Instead of focusing exclusively on what content will be delivered, creative teachers plan opportunities for students to uncover mastery through independent and group exploration. Guided improvisation shifts teachers' attention from attempting to control every moment of class to cultivating an environment rich in opportunities for students to make meaning of key concepts. Naturally, this arrangement repositions an instructor from serving as the "sage on the stage" to the more helpful "guide on the side." Implicit in this shift is an instructor's ability to probe understanding in real time based on student responses. The text closes by addressing a school's responsibility in enabling creative pedagogy, including its culture, organizational structure, and assessment practices.

For faculty members in theological education or religious studies in a liberal arts setting, this text should prove immediately valuable. Beset with capacious amounts of information to cover, faculty members can over-rely on lecturing or direct instruction

at the expense of other methods of instruction. Consequently, students focus on memorizing isolated facts at the expense of cultivating rich stores of meaningful knowledge. Especially within these disciplines, it is not enough for students to grasp brittle fragments of knowledge. Instead, students should be empowered to connect seemingly disparate information into a powerful, cohesive whole. Refreshingly, Sawyer does not offer a checklist of tasks or recommended activities for achieving this outcome. Instead, *The Creative Classroom* convincingly argues for a more authentic, student-facing pedagogy that equips all learners to succeed.

BOOK REVIEW

33 Simple Strategies for Faculty: A Week-By-Week Resource for Teaching First-Year and First-Generation Students

Lisa M. Nunn
Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019
(144 pages, ISBN 978-0-8135-9947-2, $19.95)

Reviewed By

Andrea Janelle Dickens
Arizona State University, Tempe

Faculty and students often discover that the student transition from high school to college can be challenging. In this book, Lisa Nunn provides a week-by-week outline to guide teachers in thinking about their syllabi, assessment strategies, and pedagogical methods in light of the first-generation college student experience. The book provides small, easily-integrated steps to help students navigate the expectations of college-level work and reinforce faculty support for students.

She begins by exploring the range of preparation, skills, and confidence that first-gen students often bring to campus when they arrive. She bases this on her own research study involving students over their first two years at a public "most selective" university and a private "more selective" one. What emerges is a set of short lessons that help instructors become more reflective of inclusion in their classrooms, based on the words of the students themselves.

Nunn divides up her book into fifteen weeks designed to guide us through the pace of a semester, probing various aspects of experiencing college that correlate with what the student is experiencing at that point in the semester. For instance, week six mentions sharing stress-management strategies with students, at a time when they are probably experiencing their first college midterms.

Each week, Nunn presents a couple of strategies that require no more than fifteen minutes. The introductory chapter gives overall strategies, and the week-by-week chapters give strategies focused on the particular moment of a semester, with emphases on what the students experience at the beginning, middle, and end. Each of these weeks puts their strategies in the context of the first year and first-gen experience, and also provides a short list for further reading or development of particular tools. The emphasis is on student-centered learning, and the book's brief nature allows us to take these kernels and adapt them as needed into our own college or theological school context.

While many of the strategies can be adopted "on the fly"—such as asking students who come to office hours about how their roommates are doing—the book would serve faculty best as a quick read between semesters. Some of the strategies require pre-term preparation, like having a mini-midterm in week two to allow students to check if their study habits are sufficient for a class.

While this book is meant for any college teacher who has first-year or first-gen students, it is a fresh reminder for us to consider the context we teach in; it will certainly resonate for any of us who teach courses that introduce students to ideas outside their experience, including many of our religious studies and philosophy classes and especially our 100-level intro courses.

Nunn begins by reminding teachers to put ourselves in students' shoes and see our courses anew, and to think through what a student needs to succeed in our classes in terms of skills, knowledge, and assessment. Ultimately, the strategies shared in this book are intended to make the instructor, the course design, and the topics taught more approachable to a wider variety of students. What really shines through in this book is that when teachers spend the time to consider class design and classroom experience in light of student-centered learning, we often find ourselves more supportive of the many diverse communities which we seek to engage.

BOOK REVIEW

Community Colleges as Incubators of Innovation

Rebecca A. Corbin and Ron Thomas, editors

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2019

(xii + 189 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-863-3, $35.00)

Reviewed By

Nathan Womack

Victor Valley College

Community Colleges as Incubators of Innovation, edited by Rebecca A. Corbin and Ron Thomas, explores how community colleges in the United States are implementing entrepreneurial learning environments in order to better prepare students to thrive in the constantly evolving workforce. Entrepreneurship is more than an academic discipline within a business department. It is a culture that needs to be woven into all aspects of the college from the top leadership down to the various stakeholders in the community. Forming entrepreneurial environments is an interdisciplinary endeavor and stimulates students to think critically, be creative, take risks, and develop new solutions to problems. The editors and each contributing author demonstrate how community colleges are positioned to equip students to hone these skills and implement them in their local communities.

Each contributor focuses on aspects of program development, designing curriculum, and how to build programs that engage the community. Some use their executive experience as college presidents or administrators to explain how to integrate entrepreneurial culture into the life of the college. They identify how to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that explores how to utilize assets and use those assets to bridge the school with community partners in order to build stronger communities. Other contributors argue that the changing economy in the US needs a workforce that is prepared for continuously evolving employment environments. Each contributor emphasizes how community colleges and students need to maintain workforce relevancy in order to build strong local communities.

One particular strength of the *Community Colleges as Incubators of Innovation* is the discussion about moving entrepreneurship away from a strictly business concept. Bree Langemo explains how the concept needs be broadened to signify where people are able to see "opportunity when others see none" (15). Teaching students to seize opportunities to affect changes in their personal lives and in their communities is a mindset and skill that can be cultivated across disciplines. Another strength of the book are the numerous data points and statistics that the contributors present to support their arguments. Contributors Christopher Mullin and Doan Winkel present a particularly critical statistic projecting that half of the workforce in the US will be part of the gig economy by 2020 (61). Students who are equipped to work creatively and independently are more prepared to integrate into a workforce that has become driven by independent contractors and self-employment.

How do the disciplines of religion and theology engage with or implement entrepreneurial environments to help prepare students for work and life beyond college? In many ways, these disciplines already participate in fostering this environment by sharpening critical thinking skills and developing original ideas through the study of ethics, leadership, and decision-making. Entrepreneurial pedagogy builds upon these activities and encourages religious and theological educators to implement a backwards design approach in their course development to better mold students who see and take new opportunities when others see none. Although the book is tailored for community colleges, institutes and departments focusing on religious and theological studies in any capacity ought to think about how they can prepare their students for the new realities of the workforce so they can best use their education to be creative and relevant contributors in their local communities.

BOOK REVIEW

The Art of World Learning: Community Engagement for A Sustainable Planet

Richard Slimbach

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing 2020
(xii + 251 pages, ISBN 1-57922-966-5, $27.50)

Reviewed By

Barbara Blodgett

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

The at-a-glance profiles featured on college and university websites often advertise how many of their students study abroad. Publicizing these numbers proves that schools perceive global learning to be a selling point. I had never thought of this aspect of higher education as a commodity whose value could be exploited, but reading *The Art of World Learning* by Richard Slimbach opened my eyes.

Slimbach directs the Global Learning Term at Azusa Pacific University, so he clearly has experience in creating such programs. He is both a critic of the dominant model of international programming within higher education and an advocate for an alternative that would unite global education and civic engagement.

I found his critique compelling. Slimbach has watched higher education champion study-abroad semesters, travel seminars, intercultural immersions, international research, and the like, and does not shy away from naming the moral ambiguity: "Educational travel has ambiguous effects: It can either encourage learners to extract personal pleasures *from* the world, or it can support them in constructing a competent and caring response *to* the world" (171, italics in original). Too often it serves students' (and parents') desires for "life-changing experiences" that they can put on their résumés. Educational organizations compete for consumers, so "they often feel intense pressure to sign up any live body," while field organizations "agree to host foreign workers without raising some fundamental questions" about what value those workers will bring (170).

Slimbach goes on to point out that within higher education, international study and community engagement generally occupy separate silos. His alternative model would correct this, and thereby address the moral problems of global learning that is not service oriented. He outlines a vision of world learning that would transform both the world and individual learners. In six chapters he sketches out the Why? What? How? Where? For Whom? and For What? of educational travel. It should ultimately serve the greater good, not merely the self-enlargement of students or institutions. It should aspire to provide a global liberal arts, integrating intellectual, moral, and intercultural competencies. It should employ a worldly pedagogy, stressing meaningful social interaction between guests and hosts along with guided introduction to new ideas so that students learn with both heart and head. It should redraw "the field," so that students' learning about the world starts at their doorsteps and only later takes them abroad. It should balance the benefits accrued by students and the communities they visit and study. And finally, it should strive to make the journey worth it, so that returning students come home with new skills, attitudes, and outlooks to continue changing the world.

I wish that, given his experience, Slimbach had offered more direct and practical advice for teachers and administrators on how to design such programs. Slimbach's writing tends to migrate into discussions about threats our planet faces, such as climate change. But other books accomplish that. Shifting educational paradigms is hard, and concrete illustrations and examples help. The book does, however, stimulate the reader's thinking about the purpose and design of global learning in higher education.

Exploring Pedagogic Frailty and Resilience: Case Studies of Academic Narrative

Ian M. Kinchin and Naomi E. Winstone, editors

Boston, MA: Brill Sense, 2018
(xx + 220 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-38896-3, $55.00)

Reviewed By

Barbara A. Fears
Howard University School of Divinity

Evaluating teacher effectiveness is essential in assessing student learning, professor development, and institutional growth. This book offers insight for these evaluative purposes. Twelve contributors from a United Kingdom university apply the frailty model to their respective disciplines to evaluate the efficacy and widespread applicability of this model for reflecting upon the teaching and learning experiences of students and educators in higher education. The book provides a structural framework with which academicians can evaluate select attributes of educating believed to be common across disciplines. For editors Ian Kinchin and Naomi Winstone, the model is also suggestive of teacher resilience.

Exploring Pedagogic Frailty and Resilience measures four dimensions of the educative process: values (regulative discourse), theories versus practices (pedagogy and discipline), instructor focus (research-teaching nexus), and agency (locus of control). In this applied research, University of Surrey faculty and administrators from twelve departments (including chemistry, law, business, politics, acting, and learning development) provide written reflection upon a map-mediated interview. After each discipline-specific chapter, the editors provide a brief commentary highlighting points of interest relevant to educational research. The editors conclude the book by reiterating benefits of the model and noting implications of the research that include the following:

- concept mapping is a useful tool for surfacing values and beliefs as it offers structure and stimulus for reflection regarding regulative discourse (215);

- shifts in the pedagogy and discipline dimension from technical competence towards scholarly expertise necessitates a multidimensional package that goes beyond content knowledge (216);

- academic research may be pure or applied, which influences the ways it can be related to teaching (217); and

- with regard to locus of control, the regulation of teaching can be viewed as something done by others to restrict teaching or something teachers can engage in order to shape the development of the discipline (217).

While none of the contributors to this study are in religious studies, the insights shared from these award-winning scholars, teaching fellows, and administrators provide a range of thoughts and experiences beneficial to theological educators with responsibilities for assessing program requirements, deciding classroom assignments, creating syllabi, and determining tenure. Therefore, this book may prove helpful to post doctorates, junior faculty, curriculum developers, assessment specialists, and administrators in religious education settings in evaluating the effectiveness of curricular objectives of the institution as well as in reflecting upon one's teaching philosophy, deciding one's scholarly agenda, and assessing faculty or staff promotability. Moreover, the frailty model and the personal reflections on it are consistent with the evaluative recommendations of other education scholars including Parker Palmer who says we teach who we are; Stephen Brookfield who encourages critical reflection through the eyes of students, colleagues, theory, and personal experience; and bell hooks and Paulo Freire who advocate for teacher and student agency. Familiarity with the pedagogic frailty concept is helpful before engaging this text, which does provide tremendous insight on the practical application of the model. I recommend this book for faculty and administrators in religious education with course and personnel evaluative responsibilities.

BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of Research on Instructional Systems and Educational Technology

Terry Kidd and Lonnie R. Morris, Jr., editors
Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017
(xxxi + 493 pages, ISBN 9781522524007, $117.50)

Reviewed By

Matthew Bingley
Georgia State University

The *Handbook of Research on Instructional Systems and Educational Technology* is a timely collection of articles for educational institutions incorporating more distance and blended education courses into coming terms. It is a compilation of research articles surveying current trends, theories, and practices in the use of technology in education. The articles vary from literature reviews, to research studies, to overviews of practice and theory in particular areas. The book addresses a breadth of topics, from distance education to blended learning and flipped classrooms; from mobile learning to gamified learning. A handful of articles address the intersection of technology and social justice, while others deal with the hows and whys of implementing game-based learning.

The book's organization makes it approachable for faculty who may be unfamiliar with current research trends in educational technology. The editors summarize the articles in the preface and give rationales for the inclusion of each. The table of contents includes the abstracts for each article and many of the articles include glossaries of significant concepts.

Online education gets considerable attention, and rightly so. Chapter 2 defines distance education, while chapter 3 summarizes its pros and cons. Chapter 7 addresses faculty resistance to distance education. A number of articles deal with online instructional design, since it a cornerstone of distance education. Chapters 8 and 10 address issues of assessing needs before course design. Chapter 18 explains how to build learning objects for a course while chapter 20 offers guidance on modular course design, a key topic for structuring an online course.

As with any broad work, the quality is uneven. For example, this collection leads off with a limited study of traditional college students' attitudes toward educational technology. Some other important topics in educational technology, such as theories involving online presence, receive scarce mention. Another significant omission is the lack of articles on Open Educational Resources and related topics like open licensing.

A few sundry articles stand out. Chapter 14 discusses of the challenges of reading digitized texts and presents ways to address these concerns. Among the articles on technology and social justice, chapter 23 addresses how technology can be used to reduce sexual violence on campus. Chapter 29 addresses the importance of computational thinking as an approach to educational technology and how to implement this in professional development training. Chapter 31 captures the trend in Personal Learning Environments with a discussion of how curated RSS feeds can enhance education.

BOOK REVIEW

Designing Instruction for Open Sharing

Shalin Hai-Jew, editor
Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019
(xxiv + 516 pages, ISBN 978-3-030-02712-4, $109.99)

Reviewed By

Khalaf Mohamed Abdellatif

Cairo University
Hiroshima University

Educational technology contributes to facilitating learning and promoting lifelong learning by utilizing technological resources. Accordingly, open online courses have become important because they significantly improve access to higher education; provide an affordable alternative to formal education; and offer opportunities to have a flexible learning schedule. Designing learning for open sharing is different from designing learning for closed contexts. Courses' designers consider various factors, such as intellectual property and copyrights, information architecture, learner's privacy, media, pedagogical strategies, technologies in use, individual differences, and others. They also take linguistic and cultural diversity into account. *Designing Instruction for Open Sharing* addresses these issues by providing the use of a disciplined approach to assure quality education. In this book, Hai-Jew draws on her long experience in working with, designing, and developing online learning materials. She sets out her book's framework on highlighting the history of open-shared learning online, providing the open-shared learning resources development sequence, and highlighting the dimensions and approaches of learner profiling.

This textbook includes eleven chapters organized into four parts according to the process of designing and sharing any course. Part 1, "The Open Sharing Ecosystem," introduces the topic and discusses the importance of addressing learners' needs. Part 2, "Building to Standards" explains the differences between models, frameworks, and heuristics. It also discusses some legal and ethical aspects of the online sharing process, focusing on the concepts of originality, accessibility, and factuality. Consequently, Part 3, "Design, Development, and Testing" discusses the process of designing, prototyping, and documentation and explains development-based assessment. The discourse on soft and hard launching is foregrounded in the final part, "Launching to an Open-shared Future." (A "soft launch" is the process of sharing the learning materials to a smaller target group while a "hard launch" is about reaching a wider audience, sharing to the broad general public.)

This textbook provides arguments on the intersections between theory and practice; for example, the concluding chapter discusses some prospects for open sharing. Hai-Jew proposes four possible scenarios, varying from the most optimistic (popularity of open-shared learning as the main provider of academic e-texts), to the least (commercial platforms to start charging fees for the usage of learning resources). *Designing Instruction for Open Sharing* has a few limitations. For instance, pedagogical quality receives less attention than expected. Additionally, discourse on funding open sharing and attracting financial investments is absent.

The book follows a process-based organization, from designing courses to online sharing; the reader should, therefore, follow the order. The book assumes the reader to have no specific experience, but a content-expert reader is needed to grasp the book's message. Beginners in the field might find it interesting in introducing the theory and practice of developing open-shared learning resources. Overall, *Designing Instruction for Open Sharing* is recommended as an important reference for designers and developers of open-shared learning resources.

BOOK REVIEW

#HipHopEd: The Compilation on Hip-hop Education

Christopher Emdin and Edmund Adjapong, editors
Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018
(iix + 180 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-37187-3, $126.00)

Reviewed By

Matthew R. Kubacki
Wagner College

In *#HipHopEd: The Compilation on Hip-hop Education*, editors Christopher Emdin and Edmund Adjapong have brought together a thought provoking and valuable collection of essays on a timely topic. They premise their volume on the idea that hip-hop – as a music, yes, though more so as a global cultural way of experiencing the world – can inform pedagogy and can effectively be utilized as a way to address and engage students. Especially for students who have been traditionally marginalized in American school systems, *#HipHopEd* seeks to reframe hip-hop in ways that can speak to understanding, critiquing, and overcoming what the variety of authors view as a historically oppressive culture.

Rather than limit its reach to using hip-hop text in the perhaps traditional ways of analyzing song lyrics in an English or language arts class, *#HipHopEd* seeks to address the oppression it sees through such varied lenses as education, sociology, anthropology, African American studies, philosophy, race, and feminism. In one related link to education research, *#HipHopEd* connects with Obioma Nnaemeka's "Nego-feminism" in exploring the limitations of Western individualism, stressing African communal life (2004, "Nego-Feminism," *Signs* 29 [2]: 357-85). Nnaemeka shows the dichotomy of Western and African belief systems in terms of visual senses (Western) versus auditory senses (African) (in Fennell and Arnot, 2004, "Decentring Hegemonic Gender Theory," *Compare* 38 [5]: 531). Within its essays, *#HipHopEd* expands education's reach by inhering to the classroom values of community and the auditory that in many ways have been ignored or themselves marginalized historically in the systems of American education.

Gloria Ladson-Billings's essay, "From Big Homie the O.G., to GLB: Hip-hop and the Reinvention of a Pedagogue," underlines that sense of community, while still retaining the value of each student's lived experiences. Her pedagogy is to practice "the skill and facility to help students recognize and appreciate their culture of origin while also learning to develop fluency in at least one other culture" (22). Providing such an understanding, a teacher can empower a student not only to understand and be proud of his or her culture, but also to embrace the creation and development of an identity with that understanding as a foundation.

Identity creation and development is a strong and vibrant thread in *#HipHopEd*, and is centered on teachers as well as students. Matthew R. Morris and Lauren Leigh Kelly each focus on their personal journeys as individuals and teachers in their respective essays, moving from experiences of oppression and identity concealment to embracing his and her own culture and developing personal identities that inform and become elements of their own teaching practice.

Emdin in his "Introduction" lays out *#HipHopEd*'s clear goal of "[r]evealing well hidden truths about schools and their role as training facilities for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth" (5), and throughout the book essays address examples of teaching and learning in the traditional classroom that can fall short of addressing the needs of students. Pointedly, these authors and this collection provide ideas and solutions as well, bringing *#HipHopEd* from a theoretical framework to a practical guide.

BOOK REVIEW

Out on Waters: The Religious Life and Learning of Young Catholics Beyond the Church

James Michael Nagle

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020

(v + 130 pages, ISBN 978-1-7252-5579-1, $20.00)

Reviewed By

Susanna L. Cantu Gregory

Clarke University

James Michael Nagle's *Out on Waters* challenges religion and theology teachers to perform acts of "theological humility" and radical hospitality for student learning, especially if their learning compels them to leave the church. At the "intersection of preservation and revelation" in religious educational institutions, teachers should not see disaffiliation with church belonging as rejection or loss. Instead Nagle asks them to step "out on waters" and better communicate about disaffiliation as a graced process. For introductory courses in faith development or pastoral ministry, Nagle's book offers an easy-to-read collection of faith and "non-normative religious identity" stories featuring themes of growth, conversion, integration of beliefs, and loving service.

Fifth in the *Horizons in Religious Education* series from Pickwick Books, Nagle's text centers on six interviews and participant-observations he conducted among high school religion and theology teachers and their young adult former students. Most of the latter moved away from or never took on ecclesial identity but retain some ways of thinking inspired by Catholic Social Teaching or the charisms of religious congregations. After chapter 1's introductory material, a longer section follows on teacher-student relationships, entitled "Portraits from the Edge of Affiliation" (chapters 2-4). Nagle's interpretive arguments follow in a shorter section titled "The Edge that Is a Place" (chapters 5 and 6).

In interviews, Nagle inquires about "alternatives to affiliation within the church" in a way that is caring and curious, just as he hopes readers will be in their classrooms. He finds an increase in instructors who may identify or empathize with their students' "critique, disinterest, and departure" (85) and who may share this in class. Additionally, he argues teachers should emphasize perennial questions and an ongoing process of discernment rather than an expectation of future ecclesial belonging. Nagle points to an urgency for dialogical spaces where the "hidden teaching and learning narratives" can be shared.

Treatment of the impact of religious communities in students' faith development could have been more prominent in the book. It would have been helpful to hear more from former students who stayed in the church and about students who ended up more affiliated than their teachers. In addition, one wonders about the book's potential alignment with a consumer model of Christian education. Are there limits on how selective we want our students to be about Christian traditions and ways of life? Are discernment and fidelity equal values? Would goals for student learning rooted in mission or scripture be as welcome as student goals rooted in exploration and self-knowledge?

This book fits well with the work of Kaya Oakes, Christian Smith, Kevin Ahern, and Tricia Bruce. We need to be reminded that our students may critique unjust systems intertwined with our schools or churches, or seek out life-giving practices that place them outside religious affiliation or our hopes for them. Valuing students' unique spiritual paths is just the beginning. *Out on Waters'* best contribution is pricking teachers' consciences about whether our hospitality can be felt by the ones we serve.

Theology as a Way of Life: On Teaching and Learning the Christian Faith

Adam Neder

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2019
(xi +158 pages, ISBN 978-0-8010-9878-9, $18.99)

Reviewed By

Daniel Orlando Álvarez
Pentecostal Theological Seminary

Adam Neder's book is a refreshing look at theological education by a systematic theologian. As someone who teaches systematic theology, this book is appealing. I have wrestled with questions about how this academic pursuit shapes and forms the students I teach. This is a very approachable and easy-to-read book that asks questions that challenge our notions of formation in the theological discipline. Being in my early career in teaching, I find this book to be welcome as I am developing how I view my career, pedagogy, and theological vocation. As a Latinx theologian, I also appreciate Neder's inclusion of relatable examples and illustrations, such as Andrés Iniesta and FC Barcelona (although I am a Real Madrid fan).

Neder's book consists of an introduction and five chapters. In the introduction, Neder gives some details about his own journey of how he encountered good pedagogy and bad pedagogy in his training. He also shares about his experiences teaching at a university for sixteen years. This book is a result of Neder's struggle to formulate a theological and spiritual understanding of teaching (1). This is an important task as there are many books about teaching and liberal arts education, but there are few from contemporary theologians about the art of teaching Christian theology (2). For him, one must have a theological vision of what it means to teach Christian theology well.

In the next five chapters Neder develops his vision using five themes: Identity, Knowledge, Ethos, Danger, and Conversation. These themes are important foundational ideas about the pedagogical task, especially as related to formation. In the chapter on Identity Neder describes how every student is essentially defined by God's love for them in Christ and not by their opposition to God's love. Pedagogy is relational and reconciliatory. This allows the classroom to take on a unique dynamic. The chapter on Knowledge wrestles with what it means to know God. The tension here is about mere head knowledge versus integrating that knowledge into one's life. In the following chapter, Ethos, Neder explores a theologian's credibility and how theologians can build a rapport with her or his students. In the penultimate chapter, Danger, Neder discusses how theology is a safe but dangerous discipline for students. The final chapter, Conversation, Neder encourages the reader to cultivate conversations in the classroom to create a dialogical culture.

Although a bit heavy on content from Barth (Neder's specialization), I think this text does good for teachers of religion in both undergraduate Christian universities and seminaries. I think educators across religious disciplines will benefit from reading this text. It may prod some to leave their comfort zones. For others, it may confirm a hunch they have had about their vocation. Although it is firmly from a Christian point of view, those of other religions may also benefit from it as they may face similar dynamics within their own traditions.

(Re)Considering What We Know: Learning Thresholds in Writing, Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy

Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, editors

Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2019

(ix + 341 pages, ISBN 978-1-60732-931-2, $39.95)

Reviewed By

Beverley McGuire

University of North Carolina Wilmington

This book is a follow-up to the volume *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2013), in which they articulated a provisional list of threshold concepts for writing studies. These include: writing is a social and rhetorical activity; writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms; writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies; all writers have more to learn; and writing is a cognitive activity. Threshold concepts, as theorized by Jan Meyer and Ray Land (2006), enable learners to participate in a discipline or community of practice; they are transformative, probably irreversible, integrative, potentially troublesome to pre-existing knowledge, and bounded, or associated with a specific discipline.

This volume explores challenges to Adler-Kassner and Wardle's earlier work (2013): that threshold concepts reify boundaries between disciplines, that they attempt to impose an order that favors the past, that they privilege particular viewpoints and omit others, and that they are not revolutionary or cutting edge. The editors productively engage such critiques in their first chapter, where they suggest that threshold concepts provide a starting point for interdisciplinary work because they shed light on concepts considered so foundational within a field that they have become almost invisible or unconsciously accepted. They acknowledge the contingent, contextual, and provisional nature of threshold concepts, and they admit that there are sites in need of further work to push the paradigm and broaden those boundaries. For example, they concede that writing only occurs within accessible conditions (26-27), that writing assessment must be ethical (28-29), and that writing is world building (29-30). The first part examines threshold concepts that might emerge in regards to literacy, first-year writing, creative writing, journalism, rhetoric, deep reading, and everyday writing, while the second part demonstrates ways they have been used in various writing courses and programs including community college, first-year programs, and tutor education.

Religion and theology faculty will be interested in Patrick Sullivan's chapter on deep reading, as students similarly engage with uncertainty and ill-structured problems when they encounter religious texts. He shares prompts designed to foster critical thinking that one could adapt for theological or religious studies assignments. Those who work with first-year students might enjoy Cassandra Phillips, Holy Sassel, Jennifer Heinert, Joanne Baird Giordano, and Katie Kalish's chapter on "Thinking Like a Writer" where they propose threshold concepts for first-year writing: Writing can be taught and learned; writers write for different purposes and audiences, often using genres with predictable conventions; reading and writing are interconnected activities; and writing processes are individualized, require readers, and require revision.

The volume may also stimulate further thought about threshold concepts within our own disciplines, as well as the larger fields of theology and religious studies. As the editors point out, threshold concepts can provide useful frameworks for conversations both within and across disciplines. The January 2020 edition of the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* explored potential threshold concepts in the undergraduate biblical studies classroom, and it might be useful for us to consider what those unnamed but largely accepted foundational concepts might be in our own fields.

BOOK REVIEW

The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You about College Teaching

David Gooblar

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019
(260 pages, ISBN 978-0-674-98441-7, $29.95)

Reviewed By

Bernadette McNary-Zak

Rhodes College

The Missing Course offers an extended treatment of the benefits of active learning strategies for students and instructors of all disciplines across higher education. David Gooblar draws deeply from a sizable body of research on pedagogy as well as from his "Pedagogy Unbound" column found in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. By contextualizing the practice of teaching in current theory about active learning, Gooblar's work expands on existing studies and offers a useful guidebook to new and seasoned instructors regardless of specialization. Readers will appreciate the holistic approach and practical application of the strategies discussed.

Clearly organized, timely, and relevant, this book is grounded firmly in theory and in application; as a result, readers are invited to evaluate with the author a relationship between strategies and outcomes that may apply to their own courses and contexts. "The Students are the Material" introduces the rationale for the book as the author recounts graduate school and early career teaching experiences that validate the significance of the contemporary turn from content- to student-centered pedagogy. Subsequent chapters engage key topics related to the cultivation of a transparent, process-centered, skills-prioritized approach to teaching and learning. Chapter 1, "Helping Students Revise Themselves," attends to using active learning strategies effectively in familiar practices including lecture and class participation. Chapter 2 turns to empowering student ownership of a course through involvement in syllabus construction, use of technology, and goal setting. Chapter 3, "Building a Better Course," tackles assignments and centers well on reading, writing, and testing practices. Chapter 4, "Teaching the Students in the Room," discusses student accessibility and classroom community by focusing on student demographics and diversity. Chapter 5, "Assessment Isn't Just Assessment," presents a useful range of formative and summative practices. Chapter 6 offers strategies for creating a process-centered teaching and learning environment. Chapter 7, "Teaching in Tumultuous Times," explores inclusive pedagogy, implicit bias, and information literacy.

Whereas scholars of religious studies and theology will find those sections of the book aligned with their specific concerns most useful, the reminders issued in the final chapter, "Revise Your Teaching," are universally appropriate. Here, the author considers strategies for critical reflection on teaching as a consistent practice. By cultivating habits of improvement, instructors engage in the types of learning, growth, and development that directly informs their teaching.

The Productive Online and Offline Professor: A Practical Guide

Bonni Stachowiak

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2020
(xx + 270 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-730-8, $22.50)

Reviewed By

Zachary Wooten

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

When *The Productive Online and Offline Professor: A Practical Guide* arrived on our virtual bookshelves in early 2020, few practitioners imagined how relevant this book would become in a matter of months. For many educators, the possibilities of thriving and being productive seemed to drift farther away as they scrambled, with varying degrees of success, to move their courses online in the middle of a semester. Due to preference or limited opportunity, some of these teachers had never taught online before. Some hoped never to do it again. However, as new semesters approach, pedagogues are likely gearing up for online or hybrid courses, and those teachers might again wonder if a thriving and productive semester is possible. Teaching and learning expert, Bonni Stachowiak, argues that indeed it is.

Divided into five parts, the book identifies the meaning of productivity, communication strategies, methods for sharing knowledge, resources for grading and other online teaching tasks, and strategies for increasing relevance of the material. Practicing what she preaches about building community and focusing on learners, Stachowiak provides an appendix of helpful tools and has a consolidated list of tools on the book's website, https://teachinginhighered.com/productivity-tools/.

This book serves as a complement to *Thrive Online* by Shannon Riggs (Stylus, 2020). Whereas *Thrive Online* sets the foundation for new and experienced instructors to become committed to confident delivery of quality online instruction, *The Productive Online and Offline Professor: A Practical Guide* focuses on how instructors can manage their personal productivity.

Significantly, Stachowiak does not frame pursuing productivity as a means of appeasing the never-ending appetite of competitive academia, but rather, defines the goal of productivity, online and offline, as presence. To pursue productivity in this sense is to find meaning in one's work by being aware of one's priorities, acquiring flexibility for inevitable changes, and implementing systems to optimize time spent on work. Stachowiak acknowledges that the focus of human relationships should not be efficiency, but believes that attending to workflow and equipping oneself with a sampling of new tools can assist teachers in creating meaningful learning experiences.

With instructors facing limited time and stressful circumstances, this book offers highly practical ways to improve online instruction. Whether teaching synchronously or asynchronously, fully online or hybrid, or even in person, this book provides accessible explanations of tools to assist educators in their essential functions. By design, the author notes that not all of these tools should be taken on by one instructor, but rather that the book offers a useful table of contents that enables the reader to peruse and pursue their most pressing issues. Stachowiak presents over a hundred helpful tips for increasing productivity, and subsequently for cultivating presence, meaning, and trust between teachers and learners.

Student-Driven Learning Strategies for the 21st Century Classroom

Nor Aziah Alias and Johan Eddy Luaran, editors
Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017
(xxiii + 434 pages, ISBN 1522516891, $102.00)

Reviewed By

S. Brian Stratton
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

The essays collected in this book grew out of the editors' experience running a 2015 symposium on learner-driven learning. As with most edited volumes, the reader will find essays of differing quality and relevance; obtaining a copy from a library to gauge its usefulness would be preferable to purchasing the book.

The preface distinguishes "student-driven" learning from student learning and self-directed learning for it "requires the motivation, the internal drive to initiate and to propel one's learning into a more personalized space at a personal pace" (xix). Whether this is a real distinction with a difference is not clear to this reviewer, but it does at least allow one to place the book within a broader scholarly context on pedagogy. The target audience is higher-learning educators and it is intended for reading and reference, though it is probably best suited for use as a reference work.

The diversity of topics treated is impressive. The chapters are comprehensive and treat higher education from undergraduate to doctoral levels. Essays discuss classroom, blended, and online class environments. Individual and collaborative learning are both addressed. Traditional and non-traditional students receive attention as do universities and community colleges. The book strongly represents global perspectives with many institutions from around the world being the subject of the essays. Suggestions for improving learning across an impressive array of academic disciplines are made. The essays dealing with STEM education are strong, and many of the essays contain helpful ways for integrating multiple types of student-driven learning into the classroom. However, despite the impressive inclusiveness of the book no essays treat issues of gender, race, sexuality, or students with special needs.

The book presents twenty-two chapters in three main sections. The first section discusses the parameters for the design of student-driven learning, the second strategies and approaches in student-driven learning, and the third supporting student-driven learning. Useful information is found in all three sections, but the third may be of most interest to those involved in actual practice of teaching since three of the chapters are written with the teacher's role in mind. The final chapter addresses an often-overlooked subject that is frequently on students' minds, if not on educators' – career forecasting. The author makes a good case for including this skill within the education curriculum.

The book could benefit from more careful editing and proofreading as it contains several typographical errors and subject-verbs that do not agree. In addition, educational jargon is heavily used so some readers may find some essays very technical to read. Still this book will be useful to those interested in the specific topics the essays address.

BOOK REVIEW

Academic Growth in Higher Education: Questions and Answers

Helena Pedrosa-de-Jesus and Mike Watts, editors
Boston, MA: Brill, 2019
(xvii + 234 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-38932-8, $55.00)

Reviewed By

Rebecca L. Copeland
Boston University School of Theology

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 and ensuing protocols focus on promoting the quality of teaching and uniformity of standards for higher education in Europe. This collection of eighteen essays reflects advancements made in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and the rewards and challenges of transitioning to student-centered learning in higher education.

The academic growth mentioned in the title of this book refers to the promotion of academics' "knowledge related to teaching, learning, assessment, and feedback practices" (186-7). In a combination of critical reviews of current literature and novel case studies, the authors address issues raised by student-centered learning, including: conflicting ideas about the purposes of teaching, the changing demographics of university students, the differential impacts of research and teaching on academic careers, how universities can support academics through collaboration with SoTL researchers, and a number of teaching strategies and suggestions for how to train students to become lifelong learners.

The first part of the book examines recent issues in teaching and learning, including the impact a move towards universal higher education has on "opportunities of access" for nontraditional students (13), the political tensions involved in defining higher education as both "a human right and. . . a commercial service" (25), and the development of SoTL as a field in and of itself. The second part examines pedagogical issues and experiments undertaken in Portugal, the United Kingdom, Qatar, and Japan, focusing on fostering student question-generation for learning, improving assessment techniques, and the roles of student cognitive styles in learning. The last part of the book reports the results of the Aveiro Project, "research endeavors from 2000-2015 at University of Aveiro, Portugal" (145). One of the few longitudinal studies in SoTL, these final chapters provide resources for considering both the challenges and benefits of undertaking the task of academic growth in higher education.

Although primarily focused on undergraduate education, and more specifically on the sciences, the chapters provide useful insights into teachers' own reflective practices (chapters 12 through 17), techniques for training students in appropriate question-generation (chapters 6, 9, 10, and 13), and different approaches to assessment (chapters 11 and 16). All of these are applicable or adaptable to theological education. Because these essays involve collaboration between academics and SoTL researchers, this volume would be most useful for administrators considering ways to enhance teacher effectiveness in their own institutions. The authors are transparent about the costs to academics of adopting many of the innovations described and the need for university support in the form of both amended expectations for career reviews and the support of departments that can provide SoTL expertise and assistance to academics in various fields.

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching Religion in a Changing Public University

Sandi L. Gravett

Chicago, IL: American Theological Library Association, 2018
(194 pages, ISBN 978-0986331091, $25.00)

Reviewed By

Eugene V. Gallagher
Connecticut College

Taking advantage of a variety of survey data and adopting an historical perspective on the development of religious studies programs wherever possible, Gravett examines the institutional contexts in which the study of religion in American higher education has developed, different kinds of syllabi in their curricular contexts, issues raised by the advent of online and hybrid forms of teaching, forms of structural and curricular diversity, and changing models of higher education. Although she focuses on teaching religion in public universities, Gravett also draws on examples from various other institutions. In fact, the diversity of examples she provides is one of the strengths of the book; it provides a compelling account of the practice of the study of religion in the first part of the twenty-first century.

Although she issues appropriate cautions about the precision and reliability of survey data, Gravett paints a picture of a general decline in the number of students pursuing the study of religion across a range of institutions. She traces some of that decline to the mounting call, particularly by politicians, for state (and other) institutions to prepare their students for immediate employment. Rather than simply decrying that situation, she proposes some specific suggestions. She challenges religious studies faculties, for example, "to rethink the classroom and map traditional learning goals and objectives into new instructional initiatives relevant to learners as well as useful and comprehensible to evaluators and other publics" (136). Responding to the justifications for the academic study of religion that frequently make observations that religion is a significant part of human life that shapes many different endeavors from politics to health care to the arts, Gravett urges religious studies to engage vigorously with their local, national, and international communities. In her view, that does not mean abandoning traditional scholarly pursuits, but taking more seriously how those interests can be brought to bear on contemporary interests.

Over the entire book lies the shadow of the incessant need to justify the very existence of programs in religious studies through a variety of administratively devised "metrics," particularly the generation of student credit hours and the number of majors graduated each year. Gravett has sensible things to say about programs working to fit what they do into their institutions' missions, about how online teaching can become an opportunity for creative re-thinking of both pedagogy and course content, and about how programs can contribute in multiple ways to campus discussions and actions concerning diversity.

This book should claim the attention of anyone involved in teaching about religion in higher education. It offers a helpful synthesis of various data, multiple interesting brief characterizations of different programs in the study of religion, and analyses and suggestions that even if they provoke disagreement remain valuable to think with. Its easy availability makes it all the more useful.

BOOK REVIEW

Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2019
(260 pages, ISBN 978-1-4214-02946-5, $29.95)

Reviewed By

Steven C. Ibbotson

Prairie Colleges

In this stimulating book, Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues the university can and should be the context where the critical ability to engage in generous thinking is modelled and supported—for the students and the communities that universities serve (5). Thus, in the opening pages she clearly defines generous thinking as "a mode of engagement that emphasizes listening over speaking, community over individualism, collaboration over competition, and lingering with ideas that are in front of us rather than continually pressing forward to where we want to go" (4). While this lofty goal and definition may seem idealistic, Fitzpatrick does a good job of consistently and pointedly addressing the personal and institutional challenges individual faculty members and universities face in aligning their policies and practices to the stated mission.

Interacting with a range of literature in each area, she describes the multifaceted challenges. Being generous in listening means not reacting or preparing a response to what is said, but paying attention, asking probing questions to hear further, and understanding values. Generous reading includes sharing texts both for pleasure and for learning, combining ethical engagement and empathy. In both listening and reading, mutuality must be present for true generosity—and thus learning—to happen. Sharing information generously has become increasingly more possible in the past three decades. Despite the various ways in which research and results have become more public, significant challenges remain in actually making information access equitable for the marginalized, whether socially, financially, or otherwise.

Yet listening, reading, and sharing information must be done in a way that does not foster competitiveness and elitism. In many ways each of these challenges are attitudinal, and yet within academia they have become a means of showing power. In discussing what it means to be "critical," the motivation for reading, and translation of content, Fitzpatrick exemplifies the generous thinking she proposes. She asserts a radical paradigm shift, contending "the university should focus less energy on educating for leadership and more on educating for community" (213). Fitzpatrick does not shy away from potential arguments against her proposals. Rather, she acknowledges legitimate concerns and confronts the self-defeating result of many contentions.

For teachers of theology and religion, the Fitzpatrick's ideas are directly relevant because the ability to share expertise on various matters of faith in the public square is not only valuable in and of itself, but can build bridges to future students and supportive constituents, both in the immediate community and beyond. The concepts discussed bring to mind the example of my colleague who shares her academic work on Hebrew literature and presents tidbits in a short weekly YouTube feature. As discussed in this book, others use blogs or social media to share academic research in public-friendly language and formats, beyond historic "preaching" opportunities.

Generous Thinking would be useful for faculty at any school, no matter its size, for a faculty retreat or for administrator/faculty dialogue as part of strategic planning or community engagement discussions.

BOOK REVIEW

The Soul of Higher Education: Contemplative Pedagogy, Research, and Institutional Life for the Twenty-First Century (Advances in Workplace Spirituality: Theory, Research, and Application)

Margaret Benefiel and Bo Karen Lee, editors
Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2019
(xvi + 157 pages, ISBN 978-1-64113-696-9, $30.00)

Reviewed By

Patricia O'Connell Killen
Pacific Lutheran University

Benefiel and Lee assembled this volume to advance a newer thread of conversation in the field of contemplative studies: the attempt to move beyond its privileging of Buddhism and Western science. Their own experience as scholars of Christian spirituality who attended meetings of the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education and of the Contemplative Studies Unit of the American Academy of Religion confirmed for them the importance of this newer direction of conversation, which they credit Louis Komjathy with initiating. The editors' approach is to "present Eastern and Western perspectives together, to let those with different perspectives inhabit the same territory, and perhaps begin to speak to one another and learn from one another" (xiii). The result is an intriguing collection of essays. Authors write from Buddhist, Christian, and naturalistic perspectives. Chapters variously address university and seminary research, teaching, and organizational process, and key philosophical issues at stake in the contemplative studies movement. The overall result is a provocative collection in which scholars unapologetically acknowledge the value-based assumptions behind all of their work and, by so doing, shed light on the profoundly human character of the entire enterprise of higher education.

The chapters on contemplative pedagogy may be the most immediately relevant to faculty. Barbara Newman's and Stephanie Paulsell's are masterful presentations of pedagogical approaches to reading, thinking, and conversing that are both rooted within the western Christian tradition and embody a deep understanding of the dynamics of learning. Lee describes using explicitly Christian spiritual practices in a seminary classroom. And Dan Barbezat, one of the best-known figures in the field of contemplative pedagogy, details his work with students so that they see the profoundly human stakes in the study of economics.

One of the most provocative chapters is Mary Frohlich's on scholarly method, the "conscious choice of one's grounding assumptions, sources, research techniques, and evaluative criteria for what constitutes good results" (13). She poses the question: "Is it possible that some of the fundamental issues that challenge many disciplines are also questions of spirituality, at least to some degree?" (13-14). Her response roots research in fundamental movements of human consciousness. Even readers allergic to all things spiritual may be intrigued by her project.

Benefiel's opening chapter and Jacob Holsinger Sherman's chapter orient readers to the emergence of contemplative studies as a field and to some of the philosophical issues at its center. Sherman's is a particularly lucid presentation of the critique of western materialistic epistemology that draws on Harold Roth's critique of cognitive imperialism.

Various of the essays in this volume will be of interest to teachers and scholars of religion. Those engaged in the scholarly conversation in contemplative studies will find the collection as a whole stimulating and some of its chapters worthy of sustained engagement. Those in leadership may find the two chapters on contemplative organizational structures thought provoking, though they reveal how much less well developed this dimension of contemplative studies is than others. Andrew Delbecq's chapter on research about how graduate professional students transfer contemplative practices to their workplaces may prove more helpful.

By gathering chapters written from acknowledged and diverse value perspectives, and informed by serious scholarship on teaching and learning, the editors have succeeded in stimulating conversation in a way that only comparison can. Anyone who takes the time to read this slim collection in its entirety will find serious food for thought about teaching, scholarship, and leadership, presented against a backdrop of honesty about the larger purposes of higher education and how much the current enterprise works, largely unconsciously, against achieving those purposes.

BOOK REVIEW

Degrees that Matter: Moving Higher Education to a Learning Systems Paradigm

Natasha A. Jankowski and David W. Marshall
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017
(xiii + 202 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-464-2, $35.00)

Reviewed By

Laura Rodgers Levens
Baptist Seminary of Kentucky

In *Degrees that Matter*, Natasha Jankowski and David Marshall frame their learning systems paradigm within a paradigm shift over the purpose of higher education. Jankowski and Marshall are the director and senior scholar, respectively, of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Their research is devoted to trying "to determine how we know whether university students are learning." The authors bemoan debates about whether the purpose of higher education is economic ends, civic engagement, or personal fulfillment; in reality higher education provides for all three. Experiences of strangers claiming "I didn't learn anything in college!" frustrate the authors, because alumni "fail to see how their college or university experience developed the abilities or skills that have enabled them to be successful with their work lives" (4-5). Rejecting an end-process framework like the debaters and deniers, the authors argue for paying more attention to higher education's strength of process in the development of students as self-aware, life-long learners.

Jankowski and Marshall propose a "praxis-oriented exploration" around the question: "How is what students are learning in higher education *aligned* with these three needs motivating higher education?" (6). They delineate the evaluation cycle emerging from this question, including the further cascade of questions prompted by the "how," necessary internal and external conversation partners, drafting of learning program outcomes, and alignment of these program outcomes with classroom assignments. For the newcomer to higher education assessment, Jankowski and Marshall's explanations of the process are well-organized, include examples from multiple contexts, and are well-cited with references for further learning. The authors' choice to reference the various steps of the Tuning and Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) studied by NILOA without an appendix diagraming them was one drawback. Fortunately, the DQP offers online help to further understand the paradigm, with more specialized attention to associate and masters level programs than the book offers (www.degreeprofile.org).

For teachers, *Degrees that Matter* is a refreshing read because it aligns assessment with the task of professional teachers to train students in content, skills, and an appreciation for learning that transfers outside the institution. It prioritizes the formation of learners in contextually relevant and appropriate ways at an institutional level. It calls for transparency through processes that develop relationships, resources, and buy-in from potential employers, administration, faculty, support staff, and students as well. Jankowski and Marshall further demonstrate that transparent communication is of critical benefit to historically underserved student populations, who suffer when institutional assumptions are not articulated.

Jankowski and Marshall understand that administrators and faculty experience assessment and accreditation as burdens. The authors make a solid case for the viability of their paradigm process because it is aligned and integrated with the work of teaching. As an institutional assessment structure, the learning systems paradigm seeks the best in the institution, desires to resource it, and also joins in faculty passion for student-oriented learning. The paradigm is conversational and iterative, and can be tackled in many different ways according to the institution's interest in safeguarding assessment time and effort. Through the learning systems paradigm process, the school communicates to students that they are co-learners, co-assessors, and co-sharers of goals and benefits. By including students in the exploration of the "how," *Degrees that Matter* aims for students to affirm that their degree matters because they understand the alignment between higher education and life, and they can perform their learning in a multitude of environments.

BOOK REVIEW

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn: Engaging Students in the Classroom and Online

Janet Salmons
Sterling, VA: Stylus Press, 2019
(xix + 148 pages, ISBN 978-1-620368053, $29.95)

Reviewed By

Beverley McGuire
University of North Carolina Wilmington

The National Association of Colleges and Employers identifies collaboration – building collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints; working with teams; and managing conflict – as one of eight competencies associated with career readiness ("Career Readiness Defined," [2019], https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/). In *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*, Elizabeth Barkley, K. Patricia Cross, and Claire Howell Major identify three essential features of collaborative learning: intentional designing of carefully structured group activities, engaging all students in working together towards stated objectives, and deepening understanding of the course curriculum ([Jossey-Bass, 2014], 4). With collaborative learning techniques, individual success is linked to group success, students actively help and support each other, there is individual and group accountability, students develop teamwork skills, and they engage in group processing where they evaluate their group productivity (Smith, "Cooperative Learning," in *Using Active Learning in College Classes,* eds. Sutherland and Bonwell, [Jossey-Bass, 1996] 74-76). Research has shown how learning happens in social contexts, and collaboration can facilitate a student's sense of belonging, but unless collaborative activities are well-designed, they can lead to a "divide and conquer" mentality among students (Eyler, *How Humans Learn,* [West Virginia, 2018], 93) and run the risk of unequal participation and student loafers (Barkley, Cross, and Major, *Collaborative Learning Techniques,* [2014], 32). To avoid such pitfalls, instructors must carefully design the task, orient students to the goals and purposes of collaborative learning, make decisions about the size, duration, and operation of the learning groups, assign the task in ways that support efficient accomplishment, assure active and constructive participation, and assess and evaluate learning (Barkley, Cross, and Major, *Collaborative Learning Techniques,* [2014], 37).

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn focuses on the theoretical foundations for collaborative learning (constructivism, social constructivism, theories of collaborative advantage, social network theory, and theory of discourse and collaboration), and it presents a taxonomy of collaboration with three components: collaborative processes, levels of collaboration, and a trust continuum (12). The processes include individual reflection, dialogue, and mutual critique through review; the levels offer ways that tasks, roles, and outcomes can be organized by collaborative partners; and the trust continuum shows the development of trust among collaborative partners and the commitment to the collaborative process. Participants can organize tasks as parallel collaboration (allocating tasks among participants in parallel way), sequential collaboration (completing them in multiple steps over time), or synergistic collaboration (where they synthesize their ideas and work together through all stages) (13). Salmons recommends beginning with a small, ungraded activity or assignment to encourage participants to take risks and begin collaborating, and then having students generate a work agreement in which they clearly define roles and expectations, stating how they will proceed with the assignment and how they will be accountable to each other (47).

Theological and religious studies educators will likely find chapter 5 the most helpful, as it focuses on instructional design and includes questions to gauge students' previous experience with collaboration (82), questions to consider when generating an agreement about the expectations of and for the group (92), examples of such agreements (93-94), and checklists that groups might use to ensure that they complete their tasks (95-96). Chapter 6 presents useful templates for self-assessment (110-111) and formative assessment (124).

BOOK REVIEW

Building Resilience Through Contemplative Practice: A Field Manual for Helping Professionals and Volunteers

Bobbi Patterson
New York, NY: Routledge, 2020
(xxii + 184 pages, ISBN 978-0-367-13377-1, $39.95)

Reviewed By

Carolyn B. Helsel
*Austin Presbyterian
Theological Seminary*

From experienced practitioner of social work and a longtime educator, Bobbi Patterson, this book offers seminary and social work students a wealth of spiritual resources to support the long journey of a life in service. One of the key points Patterson makes is that the experience of burnout should be seen as a natural and expected part of service, rather than a sign of failure. This insight comes from Adaptive Resilience Theory, which is based on a life systems and social systems model that views periodic breakdowns as part of the life cycle of individuals and institutions. To see burnout not as a shameful or an avoidable experience, but rather as a catalyst for necessary change and adaptation, is to retell the story of service, which is how Patterson titles her first chapter: "Rewriting the Story of Service and Burnout."

What is the story of service and burnout that needs to be rewritten? For ministry students and persons who are studying to enter service professions, there is often an unspoken assumption that persistence and perseverance is a necessary virtue. Such persons go into the service sector because they have a sense of duty or compassion that steers them towards vocations that tend to the spiritual and material needs of others. For many entering service professions, the work is also one's identity. The image of oneself that enables a person to declare "I am a minister," or "I am a social worker," centers an individual's identity on the work that one does in service to others. For that person to experience burnout, or to consider quitting the work, is to consider oneself a failure. To stop serving others is to fail at being the person who says he or she "is" a social worker or a minister.

On the other hand, to rewrite the story of burnout and service is to focus on the opportunities available in the breakdowns we experience. Patterson notes the many ways that breakdowns reveal to us patterns of unsustainability, of unmatched expectations, of mistaken ideas about individuality and independence within a field of work that is communal and interdependent. Key to understanding burnout in this new way is to let go of our self-judgment. Patterson writes: "Self-denigration dulls. It fosters empty preoccupations with trying to be someone you're not while giving to others" (21). If we focus too much on our own failures or sense of dissatisfaction with ourselves, we lose precious energy that could be devoted to reimagining the next steps we need to take. The deep acceptance necessary for moving forward beyond our experiences of burnout requires that we see burnout as part of the process, and not an end point.

Patterson's book weaves wisdom from the Christian contemplative tradition together with that from Buddhist meditation, in order to offer concrete and practical strategies for students and practitioners to move towards this acceptance. Each chapter draws from Patterson's own experiences in service, showing examples of how frequently challenges occur within service settings that can lead us to the edge of burnout. At those edges, by shifting our frame of mind through these contemplative practices, we can begin to see our situation and the experiences of others in a new way. Patterson's book is a welcome guide for persons preparing for service or currently in positions of service who want to approach their work with renewed energy and attention. Professors at seminaries as well as those teaching undergraduates preparing for service can use this book to provide students with supportive techniques for engaging their work thoughtfully and sustainably.

Reviewed By

Carolyn M. Jones Medine
University of Georgia

The Essential Department Chair is a comprehensive look at the various elements that come into play in chairing a department, large or small. The book includes sections on departmental management and policies; the chair's role in faculty matters; mentoring, which includes insights on addressing conflict; faculty development; assessment; and budget and planning, with resources. The "Epilogue" discusses seven qualities of effective department chairs. For example, the essential department chair is one who "combines excellent interpersonal skills with effectiveness in seeing projects through" (457). Important in this "checklist," is self-care: maintaining a healthy work-life balance and getting out of the office on a regular basis (458).

One might not read this volume cover-to-cover, Buller suggests (xvi). One might dip into it for information on a particular issue. As a new institute director, I found the final checklist and the first section, "The Chair's Role and Career Path," strategically important. The first section points out that most people who become chairs are scholars and teachers who, usually, have no formal training in the administrative duties that become a significant part of daily routine and responsibility, and that "most chairs learn their job by observing what other chairs do and by trial and error" (4). Since the department chair leads, manages, and represents the unit, she has a strong impact. Therefore, particularly in these trying times, trial and error can be costly. To help, Buller suggests essential reading for department chairs, including publications, like *Academic Leader*, and resources, like web-based materials, and even consultants, to aid in ongoing development. He suggests that department chairs should seek mentors and take on strategic committee work to gain experience. Continued growth, he is suggesting, is important in doing effective work. Buller reminds us that a department chair is both a leader and a manager. One should know what kind of leader one is, and he offers a personal assessment instrument for thinking this through. Then Buller offers management insights on multiple practical tasks.

One very useful element of this book are the scenario analyses. These are tools that allow chairs "to develop and critique their skills as administrators, consider alternative ways of solving difficult problems, and prepare for challenging situations (75)" Each scenario involves a case study, considerations that offer questions for assessing one's initial response, and suggestions. The scenarios include issues like departmental management and politics, hiring and firing, faculty development, evaluation and assessment, strategic budgeting and planning, and others.

Jeffrey Buller is the author of many books on the arc of career of the professor. *The Essential Department Chair* is one piece of his larger, ongoing project, and a very helpful, almost encyclopedic, one. As someone entering into her first administrative role, it gave me much to think about and much to reassess. Buller focuses, helpfully, not on building grand theory, but on "proven solutions," on "what you need to know right now" (xvi) to work efficiently and fairly with others while maintaining care of the self.

The Department Chair Primer: What Chairs Need to Know and Do to Make a Difference

Don Chu
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012
(144 pages, ISBN 978-1-118-07744-3, $20.05)

Reviewed By

Rachel Moquin
*Washington University
School of Medicine*

In *The Department Chair Primer*, Don Chu tackles the role of department chair by focusing on two elements: what new department chairs need to know about their role and how they might go about effectively doing this work. Chu tailors his book to department chairs who want to be "change agents" within their institutions or learn the ins and outs of this role. In the second edition, Chu has made the information he presents more accessible with tangible examples, organized lists, clear steps to processes, and questions to explore. One of the key points he makes is that a department chair's time is precious, and because he is keenly aware of that fact, he presents information concisely and pairs it with clear takeaways and action items. New chairs will find that this book reads like a "how-to" manual for the first few weeks on the job. One could opt to read the book in its entirety, or use it more like a reference book. Utilizing the index, a new or seasoned department chair could find any topic and be immediately directed to Chu's valuable insights about that topic as well as relevant information and practical suggestions to implement.

The book is divided into two parts: what new chairs need to know and getting started – how to make a difference. The first section provides a useful framework for how to think about the job and how to navigate this new opportunity. Chu breathes life and optimism into the role, leaving his readers feeling empowered. The second part functions as a template to prepare department chairs for success in their new role. These sections are followed by a resource list that would be helpful for those wishing to pursue more in-depth coverage of this topic. Chu intentionally delves into the practical, reserving much of the explanations of the theoretical underpinnings of his work to be explored by his readers on their own if they so choose. This will no doubt be refreshing to new chairs who want tangible strategies and practices to employ.

To that end, chapter fourteen stands out as being particularly practical. This chapter lists questions that a new department chair should seek to answer as they take on this new responsibility. This comprehensive list provides a strong foundation for any new chair, as it helps them gain information about important institutional context, budgeting, and faculty workloads and scheduling. This background knowledge, Chu suggests, is crucial for early decision-making and relationship-building within the department.

Presenting this book to new department chairs would be an efficient way to jumpstart their work and help them gain confidence as they navigate the ins and outs of their new responsibilities. As Chu emphasizes throughout the text, the work of a department chair is distinctly different from that of a professor, but much can be quickly gleaned by reading this accessible, concise primer. New department chairs who utilize the tools provided in this book will be setting themselves and their departments up for early success. The intended audience for this book is certainly those who are new to the department chair role, although veteran department chairs who are in need of fresh ideas or new strategies may find information within this work useful as well.

BOOK REVIEW

Games and Education: Designs in and for Learning

Hans Christian Arnseth, Thorkild Hanghoj, Thomas Duus Henriksen, Morten Misfeldt, Robert Ramberg, and Staffan Selander, editors

Boston, MA: Brill Sense, 2019
(xx + 224 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-38880-2, $49.00)

Reviewed By

Christina Sebastian
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Educators are striving to assist learners in developing critical thinking skills that nurture innovative creativity in order to prepare them for the challenges and problems of life. In *Games and Education: Designs in and for Learning,* editors have assembled a masterful work to equip teachers with games and strategies to transform learning from boring and rigid to engaging and dynamic. The text was compiled by Scandinavian researchers seeking to guide readers on an expedition from theory to implementation in an effort to aide teachers with "designing new learning environments" which utilize "digital games across a wide range of settings and subjects" (xi). Editors arranged *Games and Education* into two sections, "Designs in Learning" and "Designs for Learning," in order to present an innovative pedagogy of game-based learning through the use of digital games, simulations, and gamification.

Contributors to the "Designs in Learning" section focus on how developing and supporting learner transformation over time occurs within a framework of social interaction. Researchers present findings on design perspective, broadening of game-based learning ideology, participant organization of their learning environments, and increasing complexity of participant educational practices. Johanna Oberg opines game-informed design by role-play to be a viable means to promote critical thinking and active participation among students. She discovered students, when given the opportunity to be co-researchers, "gained experience in finding and expressing opinions, analyzing results, and engaging in decision-making" preparing them for future challenges (9). As detailed in the forward, emotionally-charged memories become long-term memories which can lead to patterns of learning important for a successful future (vii). A unique aspect of this type of learning is the transfer of power from teacher to pupil leading to an increase in learning responsibility by the student (85).

The "Designs for Learning" section includes chapters written by researchers covering topics regarding environmental shaping, tools for learning, active teacher roles and group dynamics within game-based education, and student development of games as a source of learning. Christian Arnseth, Thorkild Hanghoj, and Kenneth Silseth created a dialogic pedagogy as a means for educators to make learning increasingly relevant and interesting through game-based and play-oriented teaching. They discuss the importance of the teacher's role in game-based learning, covering numerous essential topics from planning to teaching to evaluating (137). In this review, I have provided a look into the vast array of topics covered in *Games and Education,* choosing to highlight chapters focusing on the two extremes of student and teacher power in game-based learning.

Professors at undergraduate and graduate levels will find *Games and Education: Designs in and for Learning* a thorough asset to their understanding and implementation of game-based learning. The authors provide practical tools to aid teachers in navigating the world of digital games, enabling them to choose, execute, and analyze game-oriented learning designs that match the educational level of their students. Researchers hypothesize that game-based learning instills essential critical thinking skills and creativity, preparing participants to navigate the complex problems and challenges of today's world.

BOOK REVIEW

Gaming Innovations in Higher Education: Emerging Research and Opportunities

Robert Costello
Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018
(x + 178 pages, ISBN 9781522529811, $118.21)

Reviewed By

Eric Fehr
Northwest Baptist Seminary

Gaming Innovations explores using game mechanics and concepts (gamification) in higher education. In five succinct chapters, the book explains gamification theory and its application in the classroom. The book stresses that a fun and safe learning environment for students is essential for implementating gamification. This environment enhances learning and stimulates social activity. The book describes how gaming concepts, such as levels and peer interaction, connect to theories of learning, pedagogy, and curriculum design that are engaging for learners. The final chapter discusses how Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) might be used in the classroom with gamification.

I recommend *Gaming Innovations* as a good introductory book on gamification and how to incorporate this method in the classroom. The book is well written and accessible to a wide audience and those with no gaming expertise. I have three main criticisms and two positive observations. A first criticism is the lack of examples of a curriculum plan or class syllabus for reference. My second critique relates to the idea of "fun" as a vital factor for quality education. Can one use gamification if it isn't fun? Third, the book does not mention any potential drawbacks of using gamification in the classroom. Despite a few criticisms, *Gaming Innovations* accomplishes its purpose for readers. A first benefit of gamification the book highlights is improved learner growth. Gamification includes an environment of peer review, community support, and direct feedback that engages learners in ways familiar to students. Second, technology combined with gamification could potentially remove barriers to learning.

Gaming Innovations is a worthwhile introduction to this engaging topic. Each chapter includes bibliographies helpful for further reading. The book explains a subject that may seem strange to some in higher education and in a seminary classroom. Yet, there is room for adapting existing curriculum to rejuvenate the seminary classroom experience for today's learners. *Gaming Innovations* provides a great starting point for this subject.

The Handbook of Dewey's Educational Theory and Practice

Charles L. Lowery and Patrick M. Jenlink, editors
Boston, MA: Brill Sense, 2019
(ix + 367 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-40530-1, $60.00)

Reviewed By

Scott Gregory

Fort Hays State University

Editors Charles L. Lowery and Patrick M. Jenlink endeavor to provide a comprehensive resource about the thought, influence, and educational practice inspired by John Dewey. The book is divided in three parts with the first one aiming to provide the reader with an in-depth look behind Dewey's concept of democratic education in American society. Notable selections by Patrick Jenlink and Elizabeth Meadows outline Dewey's philosophy and extend them to contemporary education. Greenwalt and Nguyen's piece is the most religiously themed of the contributions, attempting to link Buddhist-inspired mindfulness and the practice of education as espoused by Dewey. The connection is tenuous at best, falling short of establishing a solid link through primary evidence. Maura Striano highlights critical thinking convincingly as she explores Dewey's thoughts related to inquiry and reflective thinking. The remaining selections provide strong critical theory analysis, with less discussion of Dewey's ideas.

Part two focuses on the theme of Dewey and educational practice. The Jenlink and Embry-Jenlink entry, along with Burdick-Shepherd's, are well written and provide an in-depth analysis of Deweyan thought on democracy and student teaching in practice. Taysum's work on moral democracy is limited in scope, attempting to create a social justice framework borrowing from Dewey's pragmatist philosophy. Like other entries, this article relegates Deweyan thought to the periphery in favor of a contemporary critical theory lens that unfortunately crowds out the focus of the book.

The final section focuses on Dewey's concept of the practitioner scholar and its implications for the present day. Problematic additions include Chenath Gautam's writing on organic pedagogy, which attempts to connect the perspectives of Dewey and Foucault. The post-secondary classroom inspiration for this article leads the topic onto a rocky path that only becomes disjointed in trying to connect the two philosophies. Lance Mason's chapter on digital media borrows too much from contemporary politics and relies disproportionately on a discussion of fake news that is biased and discounts entirely the opinions of those who distrust the media. This section does have some stellar writing however. Robert Karaba's piece, along with Charles Lowery and Conner J. Fewell's article regarding civic efficiency, are not to be missed. Both draw extensively on Dewey's writings and make a convincing case for their continued relevance. Monica Hatfield Price's discussion of the Dewey-Lippmann debate is rich in context and provides an illuminating analysis through which we may view the role of experts in the media, and in our democracy. As a body of work this book is a strong critical-theory-oriented addition that takes select Deweyian ideas and projects them forward. As a handbook of Deweyian ideas proper, it is limited in scope.

Reviewed By
Elizabeth Yomantas
Pepperdine University

Reclaiming Accountability in Teacher Education is the winner of both the 2019 Society of Professors of Education Outstanding Book Award and the 2018 AESA Critic's Choice Award. After reading this book, it is obvious why *Reclaiming Accountability in Teacher Education* was honored with these prestigious awards. The book is an exemplary blend of history in the era of education reform, current accountability measures, and hopeful possibilities for reimagining accountability in teacher education.

From the beginning of the book, the authors make their aim clear – to call for an approach to teacher education that is built upon foundations of strong democracy and strong equity. Their purpose is to rescue accountability for democratic liberation which prepares students for democratic deliberation and for the work of eradicating structural and systematic equality. This book speaks back to the dominant accountability paradigm, and challenges readers to consider new ways of conceptualizing accountability in teacher education.

The book is divided into three sections that seamlessly build upon each other. The first section provides a historical overview of accountability in the era of education reform and introduces an eight-dimension framework for analyzing accountability. The second section focuses on the problems with the current accountability paradigm by analyzing four case studies including federal involvement, CAEP, NCTQ, and EdTPA. In this section, the authors thoroughly analyze each case study through the lens of the eight-dimension framework to understand the foundations of accountability, the problems of teacher education, and the power of relationships in accountability. After analyzing these four case studies, the third section of the book details the hope and possibility for reclaiming accountability in teacher education. In this section, the authors reimagine equity and propose an alternative structure to the accountability status quo. The authors propose the democratic approach to teacher education that promotes civic participation, seeks the common good, and actively challenges systems that perpetuate inequality. The democratic approach to teacher education believes the dominance of the accountability paradigm is a major problem in teacher education, argues that power should be shared across stakeholders, and claims that teacher education should "prepare teachers who have the capacity and commitment to enact deliberative and critical democratic education" (155). The book ends with a call to action to implement these ideas in order to transform teacher education and consequently education for all.

For teacher educators, this book provides a strong, comprehensive historical overview and a rich context of accountability in the era of education reform. It also challenges readers to think beyond the current structures and imagine the possibilities for what can be in teacher education. As a teacher educator, this book challenged me to ask myself what decisions I am actively making to prepare preservice teachers to participate in society as democratic citizens. It inspired me to think about how I can best prepare them for civic participation, encourage them to pursue the common good, and equip them with strategies to challenge inequality.

BOOK REVIEW

Applying the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Beyond the Individual Classroom

Jennifer Friberg and Kathleen McKinney, editors
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019
(ix + 218 pages, ISBN 978-0-253-042835, $35.00)

Reviewed By

Courtney Pace

Equity for Women in the Church, Memphis, TN

Applying the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Beyond the Individual Classroom offers several examples of faculty using methods of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) to improve not only their courses, but also curriculum design, degree programs, and general education learning objectives for students across their campuses. Engaging undergraduate and graduate contexts, this volume offers readers the opportunity to consider courses from a variety of disciplines, engaging course structures; components and assignments; and assessment of student learning, student engagement, student learning objectives, and of overall curriculum.

Most faculty are well-trained in their disciplines and poorly trained, if at all, in the administrative aspects of higher education. Accreditation and internal assessment processes offer faculty the opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of what they do in the classroom so that they can continually tweak courses to best serve students according to their curricular and degree needs, the very stuff of SoTL. The skillset required to do this is massive, and Friberg and McKinney offer a glimpse into not only introductory SoTL, but also nine faculty projects engaging these dynamics and analyzing their findings.

This volume would be helpful to faculty engaged in committees and special assignments related to accreditation or to new faculty who have not learned how to think about course design in terms of student learning outcomes within larger degree plan objectives. For example, chapter 4 examines common reading programs through SoTL and how various academic units, including individual courses, engaged with the campus-wide effort to boost student retention and success. Alternatively, the following chapter uses the tools of SoTL to determine necessary skills for preschool educators so that degree programs can better serve their students in preparation for real-world contexts. As faculty seek to integrate digital media into their courses, particularly as more theological higher education moves toward online learning, chapters 1 and 2 offer examples of using nontraditional pedagogies like photography and flipped classrooms to improve student outcomes.

While readers may not progress through this volume cover to cover, it offers a helpful conversation partner to those seeking to freshen their courses. Readers with questions like *Are my students learning what I want them to learn? Can I offer a better assignment to assess student learning?* or *How does my class prepare students for what they'll face in ministry contexts?* will find helpful ideas and templates in Fribert and McKinney to help them assess their own work. Rather than seeing SoTL as something external imposed upon faculty, this volume invites educators to consider how SoTL can enrich not only the individual classroom but the entire university or seminary experience and students' real-world experience during and beyond academia.

BOOK REVIEW

Inspired Learning: 50 Insights from Personal Transformative Learning Journeys

Jeanetta D. Sims, Ed Cunliff, and Anna Doré, editors
Edmond, OK: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 2019
(iii + 221 pages, ISBN 9781086834277, $14.99)

Reviewed By

Timothy W. Rothhaar

Marquette University

Inspired Learning is a collection of essays on the journeys that professors at the University of Central Oklahoma experienced on the way to becoming lifelong learners, inspiring their students to do the same. Each professor is the recipient of the university's teacher of the year award. The book focuses on their personal transformative pedagogies, an approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes inner development through a personal engagement with course material, leading students to a change in character. Hence, the book is situated in the larger context of student-centered learning with an emphasis on story (Tarrant, *A Practical Guide to Using Storyline Across the Curriculum*, Routledge, 2018).

The book is broken down into three parts. Part I details a no-excuses mentality to learning, where professors share stories of how they overcame personal adversity in their private and professional lives. Part II relates how mentor relationships contributed to their learning experiences and professional development. Part III explores new models of classroom learning and how they affect student-teacher relationships. Given the range of applications, teachers will find this text most helpful in the area of teaching advice, broad strokes for how to cope with problematic areas of work-life drama, and an overall sense of community with other scholars. The narratives themselves are helpful for expressing triumph over setbacks. Busy scholars will find quick implementable tips in what is perhaps the best part of the book, the appendix, which summarizes key points from each chapter. New faculty will find this book an encouragement on their professorial journeys in the face of overwhelming responsibilities and high demands.

There is not any material particularly suited for religion and theology teachers in *Inspired Learning*, except for some indirect ideas on how to present theology in narrative form. For instance, chapter 20, "On Being a Cross-Cultural Learner in Poland," explicates mass media teacher J. Kole Kleeman's experience of being an American in post-Communist Poland on Fulbright scholarship. His basic idea is that adapting to another culture changes one internally for the better. Theologians could relate this premise to the cultural interactions of the Roman Empire and ancient Israel, using analogies to explain differences in practice and theory. In this way, religious educators use story—the book's main pedagogical base—to generate transformative learning opportunities. Interesting chapters include lessons on service learning (chapter 1), learning as a process (chapter 5), the welcoming of human encounters (chapter 10), the importance of staying healthy (chapter 11), and empowering students in addressing their needs (chapter 18).

Overall, *Inspired Learning* would serve faculty looking for insights into basic transformative pedagogy without the technicality of a regular educational handbook. These stories remind us we are human with frailties, excellences, and all. We share these realities with our students, encouraging them down the roads we once traversed, hoping they will also find joy as lifelong learners.