COURSE SYLLABUS

Building Abrahamic Partnerships (BAP)  
(DI-650)  
June 7-June 14, 2015

BAP Program Director:  **Prof. Yehezkel Landau**, Associate Professor of Interfaith Relations  
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Course Faculty:  Prof. Yehezkel Landau, Prof. Najib Awad, Prof. David Roozen,  
Dr. Homayra Ziad, Imam Sohaib Sultan, Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith, and Rabbi Debra Cantor

Course Overview:  Hartford Seminary, building on its strengths as an interfaith, dialogical school of practical theology, has designed this innovative program to be a practical resource for Jews, Christians, and Muslims who seek a solid foundation in interfaith ministry.  The format is an 8-day intensive training program, beginning with an informal dinner on June 7 and concluding with a dinner on June 14.

Course Rationale and Objectives:  Our society needs a new kind of religious leadership, grounded in a particular tradition and, at the same time, able to interact effectively with other faith communities.  This is especially true given the prevalence of fear and mutual suspicion, exacerbated by violence committed by religious extremists.  
We need to develop educational strategies to overcome the ignorance that leads to prejudice, which in turn leads to dehumanizing contempt, which in turn breeds violence.  
The goals of the course are fourfold:

- Educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions
- Creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries
- Helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith ministry
- Developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in our pluralistic society

Course Content:  Topics for discussion and shared experiences will include:

- Presentations clarifying the tenets and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Historical overviews of the three traditions and how they have interacted in history
- Shared text study using source material from all three traditions
- Visits to a mosque, a synagogue, and a church for worship and subsequent discussion of those liturgical experiences
- Demographic and sociological data on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in America
- Skills and sensitivities needed to establish and sustain effective interfaith partnerships
- The role of the media in creating images of one another, and strategies to counter negative media stereotypes
- Developing ideas for joint interfaith projects in local communities

Methods of Delivery: Lectures, panel discussions, small-group text study, artistic exercises, sacred music, facilitated discussions, interpersonal exchanges in small groups, extended exercise (over several days) in deep listening and honest dialogue, visits to houses of worship, shared meals

Attendance Policy: Participants are expected to attend all course sessions, unless other arrangements have been made with the BAP Program Director.

Email Policy: All communications with students will be via their Hartford Seminary email accounts. Any participant who does not have such an account should contact Dr. Landau so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Methods of Assessment: For those taking the course for credit, class participation will count for 20% of the course grade; a daily journal of one’s reflections on the experience will count for an additional 30% of the grade; and a final paper approximating 15 double-spaced pages will count for 50% of the grade. The paper and the journal reflections are due by August 1, 2015. The final paper should relate to one or both of the two themes addressed by the course: (1) theoretical approaches to improving interfaith relations, and (2) practical strategies or initiatives aimed at promoting Abrahamic partnerships. It is recommended that a student consult with one or more of the course faculty before writing the final paper, to get input on how to approach the intended topic and what resources to use in researching it.

Course Schedule and Readings

(Note: there are five assigned books, which are required of credit-seeking students, by Firestone, Woodhead, Ward, Mattson, and Nasr; some essays or book chapters may be placed on reserve in the library or disseminated as PDF attachments; the “Suggested Readings” below are optional and are meant primarily for those seeking additional resources for course papers).

Sunday, June 7: Informal opening dinner, 6:30 p.m., in the Budd Interfaith Building meeting room at 60 Lorraine Street, where all course sessions will be held. Preliminary introductions and general overview of the course program; an interfaith exercise as a way of engaging one another; distribution of course materials. “Before” questionnaires will be handed out for completion that evening and/or sent via e-mail in advance.
Monday, June 8: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Welcome by course faculty; explanation of course objectives and requirements; ground rules for interreligious conversation for adoption by the group


An introduction to Jewish identity, beliefs and practices (Shabbat and prayer); Written and Oral Torahs, TaNaKh and Talmud; contemporary Judaism in its different forms (Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Debra Cantor)


Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Introduction to Jewish tradition, continued: Holiness in Time: Jewish holy days; Holiness in space: the Land and State of Israel; Women in Jewish life; Tikkun Olam (Jewish ethics) (Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Debra Cantor)

First of three “fishbowls,” with Jewish participants speaking and Christian and Muslim participants listening deeply without interruption or comment.

Evening session, 7 to 9 p.m.
Small-group sharing of encounters with the sacred or transcendent, followed by a panel discussion on “What Do We Mean by Spirituality?” co-led by Prof. Yehezkel Landau, Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith, and Imam Sohaib Sultan. Relevant topics include: comparative mysticism; language as a medium of spiritual devotion, including gender-specific references to the Divine; silence, meditation, chanting, and body movement as alternative modes; liturgical commonalities and differences in styles of prayer; how prayers in one tradition are heard/experienced by adherents of another, especially prayers that refer to the Other.

Tuesday, June 9: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

An overview of the origins and history of Christianity, including denominational patterns, and an exploration of Christian theological constructs, including Incarnation, Atonement, and the Trinity (Prof. Najib Awad and Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith)

ASSIGNED READINGS:


**Learning lunch**, 12 noon to 1:30 p.m.
Presentation and discussion facilitated by Prof. David Roozen on three topics: “Motivations for Participating in Interfaith Dialogue,” “The Nature and Sources of Prejudice” and “Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Congregations in America: Current Trends”

**ASSIGNED READING**: *Meet Your Neighbors: Interfaith Facts* booklet, Faith Communities Today/Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011 (distributed Sunday evening)


**Afternoon session**, 1:45 to 4:45 p.m.
A discussion of the Christian practices related to worship and the daily walk of faith, including Word and Sacrament, hymnody, and prayer (*Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith*)

Second of three “fishbowls,” with Christian participants speaking and Jewish and Muslim participants listening deeply without interruption or comment.


**Tuesday evening**: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST
**Wednesday, June 10: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**

An introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices, with attention given to cultural variety within the Islamic *umma*/global community (*Imam Sohaib Sultan*)

**ASSIGNED READINGS:**


**ASSIGNED READINGS:**


SUGGESTED READINGS:  

**Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.**

Presentation and discussion on stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Islam, including rights and opportunities for women and the Greater and Lesser *Jihad* (*Dr. Homayra Ziad, Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies, Baltimore*)

**ASSIGNED READING:**  

Third of three “fishbowl” exercises, with Muslim participants speaking and Jews and Christians listening deeply without interruption or comment.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:**  

Wednesday evening: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST

Thursday, June 11: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon
Interfaith text study: understanding the ambivalence of sacred texts—the exclusive as well as inclusive dimensions, the messages that seem peaceful and those that seem intolerant or violent—using selected passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Qur’an. Morning session devoted to Jewish texts, led by Prof. Yehezkel Landau


Afternoon session, 1:45 to 4:45
Continuation of interfaith text study: inclusive and exclusive passages from the Christian tradition, led by Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith

Evening session, 7 to 9:30 p.m.: Sensitivities and Skills for Interfaith Partnerships
Processing the three “fishbowl” exercises and people’s reactions, leading to a general discussion: What kinds of communication skills are required for establishing and sustaining
interfaith relationships? How can we listen more compassionately and speak with sensitivity to the Other’s situation? To what should we give attention in reaching out to or hosting someone from another faith community?—e.g., language that honors the Other, sacred calendars, prayer times, dietary restrictions, etc. (discussion facilitated by Imam Sohaib Sultan, Prof. Yehezkel Landau, and Rev. Dr. Karen Nell Smith)

**Friday, June 12: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**
Continuation of interfaith text study: inclusive and exclusive passages from the Islamic tradition, examining the principles and methodologies for Qur’anic exegesis (tafsir), led by Imam Sohaib Sultan.

**Mid-day:** Visit to one of two local mosques in Hartford, followed by lunch and discussion at the Seminary.

**Evening:** Optional Shabbat evening prayers, followed by refreshments

**Saturday, June 13:** Visit to one of three synagogues for Shabbat morning prayers, followed by lunch and discussion at the Seminary.

**Remainder of Saturday:** OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST

**Sunday, June 14:** Visit to one of three churches for Sunday worship, followed by lunch and discussion at the Seminary.

**Late afternoon, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.:** Creative exercise and closure on the week’s experience. “After” questionnaires will be distributed for completion before departure.

*SHALOM, SALAMAT, PEACE*