DI 610 Faith in the Neighborhood
An Introduction to America’s Religious Diversity
A Hartford Seminary course
meeting at
International Institute of Islamic Thought
Herndon, VA

3–7 April 2014

Instructor:
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Course Meeting Times:
9:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. on Monday

Course Description and Goals:
The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the scope of religious diversity in the United States, to provide you with foundational information about the belief and practices of a number of the world’s religions as part of the fabric of 21st-century America, and to help you become better aware of the multi-religious nature of Metropolitan Washington, DC. To these ends, we will explore the concepts, vocabulary, and practices of several religions sufficient for engagement in intelligent dialogue, and sufficient to enable you to be an informed visitor to their religious settings. This course aims as well to equip you with tools to think theologically about your own faith in the presence of persons of other faiths. Grounded in personal encounter, you will learn techniques for developing interfaith relationship leading to collaborative action. Methodologically, this course will combine lectures and “book-learning” with experiential and dialogical learning.

Be Prepared:
It is essential that all participants be present for all sessions. Do not plan evening activities on April 3–6. (We will be using the evenings!)

This course includes many site-visits. It includes evening sessions so that we will be able to visit houses of worship when “something is happening”, yet also have sufficient time for preparatory and follow-up lectures. This field work will take us to places such as an Orthodox church; a mosque; a synagogue; a Hindu mandir; a Jain mandir; a Buddhist temple or retreat center; a Sikh gurdwara; a Bahá’í center; perhaps even a Zoroastrian darbe mehr. Because the spaces we will be entering are sacred for a particular community, please keep this in mind as you decide what clothing to pack in your suitcase for your time in Herndon. Modest clothing is the norm
throughout the week: not too tight; not too revealing. Slacks are fine; shorts may be problematic. Occasionally, long sleeves will be necessary. Some houses of worship require that we remove our shoes or cover our head (or both). You will receive detailed instructions in advance.

Please read the three required books before the seminar begins. Doing so will enhance your experience during the course and allow the class to go deeper into the subject matter. As you read, consider making color-coded vocabulary/question cards (a different color for each religion). This is an efficient way to keep track of new information you’d like to remember, but also to organize points of confusion or curiosity you hope we can clarify during the seminar week.

Seminar schedule
A detailed schedule for our time together in Herndon, Virginia, and its environs, April 3–7, 2014, will be available by March 1, 2014. Please do not plan other activities for April 3–6; we will indeed finish by 3 PM on April 7th.

Required Reading


Course booklet. (This will be provided on the first day of class. If it includes anything you need to read before our first session, that item will be sent to you via email.)

Highly Recommended Reading
(This is a superb and comprehensive reference book, but it is very expensive. If you decide to purchase a used copy, please note that the 4th edition is the oldest you should consider.)

(This book is constructed dialogically. It is well written and interesting. It does not, however, include a “Christianity” unit.)

All of the items on the course bibliography below are, of course, “recommended reading”.

Assessment
Grades will be based on class participation and completion of written assignments.

Class participation [70%]
Because of the intensive nature of this course’s class time, students who participate fully in all sessions come expect a grade of no less than C- (or, for DMin students, “Low pass”).
1) “Full participation” begins with full attendance! Please note: absence from any session of this week-long seminar will affect one’s final grade.

2) “Full participation” includes completion of assessments and short written exercises during the seminar week itself. At the discretion of the instructor, this may include such items as an ungraded pre- and post-test of religious-diversity literacy or brief written reflections on particular experiences or topics.

3) “Full participation” also includes entry into class discussion—which will take place in plenary and in small break-out groups. For those of you who are “allergic” to asking questions or making comments aloud, a “question basket” will be provided; also cards on which you may write your questions/comments. They’ll be addressed.

Major written assignments [30%]

1) A short reflection paper (3 pages) summarizing your site-visit experiences. [10%]
Your reflections should include such things as what you found surprising, what questions these visits answered for you, and what questions remain for you. Your paper should make specific references to Eck’s A New Religious America, Patel’s Sacred Ground, and some other course material.

2) A project [20%]
Complete a major project on a topic of your choice (and which Dr Mosher has approved), using a method of your choice (which Dr Mosher has approved). See below for descriptions of these options. Your topic should have a clear relationship to the themes presented in this course. The written component of your project must make a clear connection to the experiences and materials presented during our time together in class and on site-visits. Particularly, your writing should include substantial reference to each item on the required reading list and to at least one book of your choice from the recommended reading list provided below. Almost definitely, you will need to read and refer to other sources of your choosing as well. Online resources may be used, but must be given proper credit. The finished project should be 18–20 pages (or the equivalent, if illustrations or a PowerPoint presentation are involved). The written component should accord with the standards for academic papers posted on the Hartford Seminary website.

Again, your choice of project must be approved by Dr. Mosher before you begin it. Here are descriptions of project suggestions:

a) Mapping Project: Explore a specific town or neighborhood, noting all religious institutions and other indications of the presence of specific religious traditions. Report this by pinpointing your findings on a map, with an accompanying explanatory essay which explains your research method, your findings, and your own reflections on your findings in conversation with the required reading for this course.

b) Book Review Essay: Select one of the books marked with an asterisk in the bibliography below. Your paper will provide a synopsis of your chosen book, and then will bring it into conversation with the required reading for this course, with reference to site-visits and lectures.
c) **Site Analysis:** Choose one of the places we visited as a group. Find a contrasting example from the same religion (e.g. two synagogues, or two Buddhist temples, or two whatever.) Investigate both sites in depth: when they were founded and by whom; who uses them; what happens there on a regular basis; what happens there occasionally. Your paper will report, compare, and reflect upon your findings.

d) **Interview:** Choose a practitioner of a religion of interest to you (perhaps one of the people met on a one of our site visits). Conduct a formal interview with that person (30-60 minutes). The interview should be recorded and transcribed. The accompanying paper describes your research and contextualizes your findings.

e) **PowerPoint or Prezi lesson (or instructional video):** Develop an oral presentation on a topic relevant to this course. Submit the script as well as the slide-illustrations or video. As with the previous options, you must make explicit connections to assigned course material, show evidence of further reading, and follow good academic style.

f) **Something else:** If you wish to do a project other than those mentioned above, I am happy to discuss this with you.

**Bibliography**

*Entries marked with an asterisk (*) are suitable options for a book review essay.*


