

Interfaith and Civic Engagement (RS-634)

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Class Location and Time

Monday, June 24 through Friday, June 28, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Location: TBD

Description

Interfaith, as an art of association, is a practice that transforms individuals, communities and public life. In all such senses, it can be deeply political. *Interfaith and Civic Engagement* examines the often-overlooked political dynamics of interreligious work. Focusing on case studies – gleaned from students’ experiences, class discussions and assigned readings – this intensive seminar facilitates an academic and practical exploration of interfaith engagement as a civic and personal practice.

Texts

- 1) Sarah Sayeed, “Moving from Walls to Bridges: Finding Common Ground for Community Transformation,” keynote address delivered at the 31st Annual Mayor’s Interfaith Prayer Breakfast, Lincoln, NE, April 30, 2015 [transcript available at <http://interfaithcenter.org/archives/9053> and, as a PDF, in CANVAS]
- 2) Andrea Smith, “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity,” from Andrea Smith and Audra Simpson, eds., *Theorizing Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 207-234 [e-book available via DTL/Hartford Seminary Library website; PDF copy of Smith’s chapter posted in CANVAS]
- 3) William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, 2005) [e-book available via DTL/HartSem Library website]
- 4) Matthew Weiner, *Interfaith in the City: Religious Pluralism and Civil Society in New York City*, PhD Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 2008 [posed in CANVAS]

Please email yuskaev@hartsem.edu if you are having any difficulty accessing the texts.

Coursework and Assessment

- Each student will be required to read **all the assigned material before the first day** of the course.
- By the end of the day on **Thursday, June 20**, each student will submit the following **three documents**:

1) **Reading notes** on Matt Weiner’s dissertation, *Interfaith in the City: Religious Pluralism and Civil Society in New York*. The notes should be three to four pages long.

2) **A two-page reflection** on William E. Connolly’s *Pluralism*.

Please focus on one or at most two of Connolly’s insights. Reflect on how this might be pertinent to your work, or to how you approach or think about interfaith.

Feel free to weave into your reflection a line, quote or a question from Smith and/or Sayeed’s texts.

Note that Connolly’s book is not an easy read. It helps to focus on the stories he tells. Read closely his “Prelude,” “Interlude,” Chapter 4, and “Postlude.” If you are running out of time, you may *skim* some chapters. But remember that “skim” does not mean “skip.”

3) **A free-style reflection** that answers the question “Why interfaith?”

This assignment is a warm-up before the intensive seminar, an exercise in honing your practical and analytical skills.

The question “Why interfaith?” is purposefully general. Your answer must not be generic.

Try to make this exercise relevant to what you already do – or plan to do or, perhaps, study. One way to make your answer focused is to build up on “why interfaith” and ask, “Why does interfaith matters in my work?” Or, in case you are unsure if your work is “interfaith,” you might want to direct the question of “why interfaith” to a case study or a dilemma highlighted in one of our readings. (For example, why – or, perhaps, how – does interfaith matter in the work of the Buddhist monk, or any other character, in Weiner’s dissertation? Or “why interfaith” for Sayeed? Or, if you are into dilemmas, you may want to work with Smith’s text.)... Or you can select another focus, another question that retains the free-flowing, yet practical – including analytically practical – spirit of this assignment.

The length -- and format and genre – of this reflection does not matter. But please don’t make it too long. Anything between one to five pages should work.

Please email the three documents (reading notes and two reflections) as attachments to yuskaev@hartsem.edu

- Attendance and active participation in each class are required. Because this is an intensive class, we will have a **zero-tolerance policy towards absenteeism**.
- Each student will do one formal (or semi-formal) **presentation** during the week.

- For the **final assignment**, due on July 31, 2019, each student will have a choice of submitting either a **final paper**, 10-12 pages in length, or a **comparable final project** that demonstrates a practical engagement with the course material. Logistics to be discussed in class.
- **Grading criteria for the course:**
 - Preliminary submissions (book notes and two reflections): 30%
 - One class presentation: 10%
 - Class participation: 20%
 - Final essay or project: 40% – due on **July 31, 2019**.

Learning Outcomes

- To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views (MARS #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity (MARS #4)
- To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion's communities exist (MARS #5)
- Develop an appreciation of living in a pluralistic world and dialogical skills needed to work in multi-faith and diverse settings (ICP #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge of the larger social and cultural dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry setting (DMin #1)
- To share the transformed consciousness of one's own spirituality in ways beneficial to the wider world (MATLS #3)
- To acquire a comprehensive knowledge in Islamic Studies, Christian-Muslim Relations, and Interreligious Engagement/Interfaith Dialogue (PhD #1)
- To develop the competence to produce original research and written works to advance the scholarship on Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations for the benefit of religious communities, academy, and society (PhD #2)

Schedule*

*The structure of each day will fluctuate to facilitate the discussion based on the students' experiences and interests. Accordingly, some minimal additional readings might be assigned, as well as, potentially, some site visits and conversations with guest speakers.

Preliminary submissions due on Thursday, June 20

Monday, June 24

- William Connolly, *Pluralism*

We will utilize Connolly's text throughout the week. The first day's focus on *Pluralism* will serve to open up the discussion centered on the experiences of the seminar participants. Each day in the course will include reflections interweaving your stories and experiences with our readings and

collectively generated insights. Such reflections will be carried out in a variety of formats, such as group discussions, brief essays, and spoken presentations.

Be ready to discuss your two preliminary written submissions, the reflection on *Pluralism* and “Why Interfaith?”

Tuesday, June 25

- Andrea Smith, “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity,” from Andrea Smith and Audra Simpson, eds., *Theorizing Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 207-234
- “Introduction: Interfaith Habits,” Chapter 1, “A Buddhist and Muslim Case Study,” and Chapter 2, “Toward Public Interfaith,” from Weiner, *Interfaith in the City*, pp. 2-160

Wednesday, June 26

- Chapter 3, “A Jewish and Buddhist Case Study,” and Chapter 3, “Interfaith, Citizenship, and Interfaith as Improvisation,” from Weiner, *Interfaith in the City*, pp. 161-237

Thursday, June 27

- Sarah Sayeed, “Moving From Walls to Bridges: Finding Common Ground for Community Transformation,” keynote address delivered at the 31st Annual Mayor’s Interfaith Prayer Breakfast, Lincoln, NE, April 30, 2015, <http://interfaithcenter.org/archives/9053>
- Chapter 5, “A Buddhist and Christian Case Study,” and Chapter 6, “Interfaith as Association and Social Capital,” from Weiner, *Interfaith in the City*, pp. 238-333
- Revisit Chapter 4, “Pluralism and Time” from Connolly, *Pluralism*, pp. 97-131

Friday, June 28

- “Conclusion: Interfaith Changes Civil Society,” from Weiner, *Interfaith in the City*, pp. 334-366

Final paper/project due on July 31, 2019.