

PLURALISM IN THE REAL WORLD: PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

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In 2015, Dr. Suzanne Henderson participated in a Teaching Interfaith Understanding faculty development seminar, run in partnership between the Council of Independent Colleges and Interfaith Youth Core, and generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. For information on future seminars, and to access more resources created by seminar alumni, visit <https://www.ifyc.org/content/ifyc-cic-resources>.

ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT

The following assignment was developed by Dr. Suzanne Watts Henderson for use in her “[Religion in a Global Context Course](#)” course at Queens University of Charlotte (Charlotte, NC) to help students engage with interfaith themes. Students are expected to read academic texts about diverse religious traditions, visit places of worship, and submit journal entries throughout the course. In this particular assignment, students conduct interviews within a social network of their choice about the relevance or importance of religious diversity.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

Objective: This assignment explores the real-life application of our course, across a range of sectors in society.

Here are the steps you’ll take as you engage this question:

Proposal:

1. Choose a “social network” in your life that features some religious diversity and that functions together as a unit toward some wider purpose. This could be a workplace, a neighborhood, a social or political organization, a club, etc. You must be able to interview ten representatives of the network to complete the assignment.
2. Write a 300-500 word detailed description of the group that documents its diversity and its shared mission. Include a brief description of your initial impression of the role religious diversity plays in the group.
3. Create your own survey of about ten questions that explore the following general topics:

- ▶ Members' awareness of religious diversity within the group
- ▶ Members' assumptions (preconceived views) of others' (different) religious views
- ▶ Any meaningful interaction about religion that's taken place
- ▶ Any problems created by religious difference within the network
- ▶ Any strategies or systems or codes of behavior in place that address religious diversity
- ▶ Members' interest in gaining knowledge and skills related to interfaith relationships

Mid-Term Check In:

1. Summarize your progress on identifying a focus group. Include any shifts/changes in plan that you've had along the way. At this point, you should be poised to begin interviewing, if you haven't already.
2. Provide details about the where/when/how of your interviewing process. This can be a description of what you've already done or a specific plan (with dates) about how you'll proceed.
3. In addition to the common questions listed above, include at least three questions that are specific to your focus group. Your questions should avoid simply re-stating the common questions. Think carefully about the specific environment/community and the value and/or obstacles inherent in interfaith interactions.

Final Project:

Provide a profile of your interviewees. Do NOT share names or personal information that identifies them; instead use details that capture their life situation.

1. Write a three- to five-page synopsis of your findings that identifies important themes that emerge about both the value and obstacles to interfaith literacy and interaction in the setting you explored. Conclude with one to three recommendations for "next steps" in this group.
2. Include a one-page reflection on your own growth through this experience. What did you have to overcome? How did you do so? What did you gain?