



THE COUNCIL OF  
INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

# REL 202: WORLD RELIGIONS

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*In 2015, Dr. Kevin Minister 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>.*

## Course Description

This course offers a survey of the major world religious traditions, exploring their origins, basic teachings, and ritual practices.

## Course Foundation

Understanding world religions becomes more important everyday as globalization makes us increasingly aware of religious diversity in our local communities and around the world. Understanding our own responses to religion and relating to the religious experiences of family and friends requires basic knowledge about multiple religious traditions and compassionate consideration of how different religions influence individuals' identities, beliefs, and practices. Whether working in private business, the health professions, or performing arts, appreciation of the diverse world religions has become essential to cooperating with colleagues, serving clients, and developing relevant products. Living as part of political communities at the local, national, and international level demands that we publically address religious conflicts and work towards creating a world in which diverse religious communities can work together to address common problems.

This class aims to help students develop the skills and resources to successfully navigate personal, professional, and political situations with attentiveness to the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. As such, this class supports Shenandoah's goal of creating global citizens who think critically and live ethically. In order to meet this goal, students will investigate the histories, teachings and practices of multiple religions, explore different methods of understanding religion, and engage with the challenges of living as part of a religiously diverse world.

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<sup>1</sup> In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author's context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.

## Course Goals and Objectives

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- ▶ Display familiarity with the central concepts and practices of the major religions of the world.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Final Exam
- ▶ Display their understanding of the phenomenological approaches to religious studies.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Religious Ethnography Group Project Presentation
  - ▶ Indirect Measures: Engaging Religion Assignments
- ▶ Identify the moral relevance of specific behaviors, policies, and/or issues.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism
- ▶ Identify the way foundational moral values, grounded in philosophical or religious worldviews, shape perception and discernment.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism
- ▶ Articulate reasons for a course of action consistent with one's personal moral values.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism
- ▶ Analyze and explain a moral perspective different from one's own and provide reasoned responses to it.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism
- ▶ Describe a cultural viewpoint different from their own and discuss the advantages of a different cultural viewpoint.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Religious Ethnography Group Project
  - ▶ Indirect Measures: Engaging Religion Assignments
- ▶ Provide an example of interdependence and discuss a global issue from an interactive and interdependent perspective.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism
- ▶ Articulate the importance of developing a global perspective and identify resource options available for use in developing such a perspective.
  - ▶ Direct Measures: Engaging Religion Assignments

## Required Texts and Materials

- ▶ Stephen Prothero. *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010.
- ▶ Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley, eds. *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012.
- ▶ Electronic readings available on Canvas (the course website).

## Course Assignments and Assessment

- ▶ **Prepared and Engaged Participation (10%):** Because engaged participation in class is vital to the learning process in this class, each student will receive a grade for their prepared participation in class. Excessive absences will reduce this grade.
- ▶ **Engaging Religion Assignments (25%):** Throughout the semester the instructor will assign a variety of short, small scale assignments designed to promote critical engagement with the religions we study. These assignments will practice writing in response to the readings as a means to deepen the learning process begun with the assigned reading. The assignments will require students to employ and develop basic understandings from their readings, lectures, and class discussions. Stay up to date with Canvas in order to ensure you have completed any Engaging Religion assignments due before the start of class. *Engaging Religion assignments will not be accepted late.* Engaging Religion assignments are listed below in the course schedule.
- ▶ **2 Ethical Analysis of Case Studies in Religious Pluralism (35%):** Throughout the semester, the class will read case studies dealing with a real life situation addressing the challenges of living in a religiously diverse community. In response to the case studies, students will write a short (~1000-1200 word) ethical reflection paper *analyzing* the global issue of pluralism from an interactive and interdependent perspective. Students will workshop their papers in class (for a grade from their peers) as a way of working together to address the issues raised by the case studies and help each other develop their responses to these cases.
- ▶ **Religious Ethnography Group Project (20%):** Students will work in groups to visit and observe two regional religious communities from different religious traditions. Students will act as religious studies scholars, *recognizing* the relevant methods for understanding lived religion and applying them in this context. Students will give special attention to the experience of the religious community in relation to living in a diverse society. The groups will develop and present their observations to the class. The group presentations will be graded both by peer-evaluation and by the instructor. The instructor will provide detailed information about this project on Canvas and groups will be formed during the first week of class. Groups will also perform self-assessments for credit at the conclusion of the project. **See “Appendix I” at the end of this syllabus for a full description of the project.**
- ▶ **Final Exam (10%):** The final exam will be a short answer and essay test over key concepts in world religions given during the final exam period. In order to ensure good study habits and excellent preparation for the exam, half of the exam credit will be given for completing a well-developed study guide.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Introduction to the Study of Religions

### WEEK 1

#### **Monday: What is religion? Why study religion?**

#### **Wednesday: What is pluralism and why is it a challenge?**

- ▶ Before class read: The Course Syllabus
- ▶ Before class read: Diana Eck, “From Diversity to Pluralism,” article available online: <http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges>
- ▶ Before class watch: “Sikh on the Street” (All 3 Parts total 23 min)
  - ▶ Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59j-lvo0g1s>
  - ▶ Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef0B-lqjOSU>
  - ▶ Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpF-HUImGq0>
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: in your own words, write a short description of how Eck understands the difference between “diversity” and “pluralism” and use an example from the “Sikh on the Street” video to illustrate the difference between “diversity” and “pluralism”. To enter your answer, click the “Submit Assignment” link in the upper right of the screen.

#### **Friday: Religious Difference and Interreligious Interaction**

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 1-13 (“Introduction”: Beginning – Different Problems, Different Goals)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignments: Explain why Prothero (the author) disagrees with the idea that “all religions are really the same.” What do you helpful or concerning about his argument?

### WEEK 2

#### **Monday: How to Study Religion**

- ▶ Before class submit: Resume of Religious Experience

In preparation for reflecting throughout this semester on different religious traditions and how we as individuals and a community relate to other religions, each member of the class needs to create a “Resume of Religious Experience”. A resume is document detailing the history of your relevant experiences in a particular area (e.g., educational experience, work experience, performance experience, etc.). Your Resume of Religious Experience will detail the history of your experiences with religion from your birth until today. This is only a historical assignment - this is not asking for what you believe about religion; the assignment only about historical experiences that have shaped your understanding about religion as a way of becoming more self aware about our own histories with lived religion. As a resume, your Resume of Religious Experience should identify relevant experiences with religion, the approximate date of that experience, and provide a very short description of how that experience influenced your experience of religion (note: you don't need to currently agree with everything you have experienced). The exact format of your Resume of Religious Experience will be up to you, but I encourage you to identify “Communities”, “People”, “Places”, “Events”, and “Texts/Movies/Images/Objects” that you have shaped your experience of religion. Please complete your Resume in a Microsoft Word document and upload it to complete this assignment.

- ▶ In Class: Beginning Group Project (Don't miss it!)

### **Wednesday: How to Study Religion**

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 13-24 (“Introduction”: Different Problems, Different Goals – end)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: “Prothero suggests that not all forms of religion are good. First, explain why Prothero argues that not all forms of religion are good. Then, in response to Prothero’s argument, answer this question “Do you think we can judge different forms of religion as good or bad? If not, why not?”

## **Case Studies in Religious Difference and Disagreement**

### **Friday: Case Study in Free Speech and Pluralism**

- ▶ Before class read: “Chalking Mohammad on Campus”, available on Canvas
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: What is the conflict in the case study? What beliefs, practices, or issues are at stake in this conflict? With whom do you initially feel sympathies or frustrations?

## **WEEK 3**

### **Monday: Islam**

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 25-37 (Ch 1 “Islam”: Beginning – Muhammad)
- ▶ Before class read and act out as you are able: “[How to Perform Wudu](#)”
- ▶ Before class read and act out as you are able: “[How to Perform to Salah](#)”
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: According to Prothero, the problem that Islam addresses is “pride” and the solution that Islam offers to the problem of pride is “submission”. In what ways is “pride” a problem for humans? What did you observe about the practices of Wudu and Salah that addresses the problem of pride?

### **Wednesday: Islam**

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 38-50 (Ch 1 “Islam”: Muhammad – Sunni and Shia)
- ▶ Before class read: [96th Surat of the Quran \(Al-`Alaq or The Clot\)](#)
- ▶ Before class download and use a free app (like “Muslim Pro”) to alert you to the five times of prayer in a row and at each time of prayer read the [First Surat of the Quran \(Al-Fatihah or The Opener\)](#)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: What do you observe about the 96th Surat of the Quran, the first Surat of the Quran, and the rhythm of Muslim daily prayer? How is the life of Muhammad reflected in the reading of the Quran and Muslim daily prayer?

### **Friday: Islam**

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 50-63 (Ch 1 “Islam”: Sunni and Shia – end)
- ▶ Before class look at the interactive charts and maps: “[Mapping the Global Muslim Population](#)”
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Today, Islam includes a diversity of different traditions, sects and movements around the world. How do these different traditions, sects or movements differ from one another? What do you notice about the distribution of Muslims around the world and where different traditions or sects are most populous?

## WEEK 4

### Monday: Atheism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 317-329, (all of Ch 9 “A Brief Coda on Atheism”)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Prothero makes a distinction between “angry atheists” and “friendly atheists.” How are these two types of atheists different and why might it be important to discuss them in a class on World Religions?

### Wednesday: Practicing Free Speech in a Religiously Diverse World

- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment

In class, we have been discussing the challenge and responsibility of using free speech well in a religiously diverse community. Now it is time for you to practice using free speech/expression well in a religiously diverse community. For this assignment, you need to come up with a way to use your own free speech well in the context in which you live (remember that, as with all free speech acts, you bear responsibility for what ever you do). You may do this assignment on your own or you may do it in collaboration with others, but either way you need to write your own report about the assignment. Here are the steps I expect you to follow for this assignment:

- ▶ **Plan with a Purpose**

Develop an idea for how you will use free speech/expression well in your context with a clear reasoning for why this is a good use of free speech in a religiously diverse world.

- ▶ **Perform your Plan**

You need to carry out your plan with attentiveness to how you and those who observe you respond

- ▶ **Write a Report**

You should write a 200-300 word report in a MicrosoftWord document and submit it to this assignment. Here is what should be included in the report:

- Explain your "Plan" for how to use free speech/expression well
- Explain your "Purpose" by giving your reasons for why your plan uses free speech/expression well in a religiously diverse context
- Reflect on your "Performance" by describing what actually happened, how it was similar or different to your plan, and how you and those around you experienced it
- Based on your performance explain what you think it takes to "Use Free Speech Well" in a religiously diverse context

### Friday: Muslim and Atheist Experiences in Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Kecia Ali, “Belief-O-Matic and Me”, 83-85
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Najeeba Syeed-Miller, “The State of the Heart in Interfaith Relationships,” 109-111
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Eboo Patel, “The Heroes I Was Looking For,” 243-248
- ▶ Before class listen to: [“Atheism, Humanism, and Interfaith \(with Chris Stedman\),”](#) *Common Knowledge Podcast*
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Each of the three essays is written by a Muslim scholar of religion and the podcast interviews an atheist about experiences they have had that shapes how they think about the relationship between their faith and the faith of others. Compare and contrast how these four people think about the relationship between their tradition and other religions.

## WEEK 5

### Monday: Workshop Ethical Analysis of Free Speech and Pluralism Papers

- ▶ Due before class: First Draft of Ethical Analysis of Case Study in Free Speech and Pluralism
- ▶ In class: Workshop Ethical Analysis Paper (for a grade)

### Wednesday: Reflection on Free Speech and Pluralism

- ▶ Due before class: Final Draft of Ethical Analysis of Case Study in Free Speech and Pluralism

### Friday: Case Study in Religious Exclusivity and Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: “Fliers at the Peace Parade,” available on canvas
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: What is the conflict in the case study? What beliefs, practices, or issues are at stake in this conflict? With whom do you initially feel sympathies or frustrations?

## WEEK 6

### Monday: Christianity

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 65-73 (Ch 2 “Christianity”: Beginning – 2.2 Billion Saved)
- ▶ Before class read: “Nicene Creed” (on Canvas)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: According to Prothero's chapter, the problem that Christianity address is “Sin” and the solution Christianity offers is “Salvation” and the person named Jesus is the central figure in moving people from sin to salvation. According to Prothero's chapter, who is Jesus and what important stories do Christians tell about Jesus? In your own words, what specifically does the Nicene Creed from 325 CE have to say about Jesus?

### Wednesday: Christianity

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 74-86 (Ch 2 “Christianity”: 2.2 Billion Saved – The Pentecostal Century)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: This reading discusses the expansion of Christianity around the globe and the many divisions between different Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, Evangelical, etc). What makes these different Christian traditions different from one another?

### Friday: Christianity

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 87-99 (Ch 2 “Christianity”: Pentecostal Century - end)
- ▶ Before class look at: [“Global Religious Landscape: Christians”](#)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: This reading examines the changes that have occurred in Christianity both in the United States and around the world over the past 100 years. What are some of the significant changes in Christianity over the past 100 years? As a result of these changes, what do you observe about the distribution of Christians living around the world today?

## WEEK 7

### Monday: Sikhism

- ▶ Before class read: "[Introduction to Sikhism](#)"
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: For each of the religions we read about in Prothero's book, Prothero identified a human "problem" to which the religion was responding and a "solution" the religion offered to that problem (Islam responds to the problem of "pride" with the solution of "submission;" Christianity responds to the problem of "sin" with the solution of "salvation"). Today's reading on Sikhism was not written by Prothero and so it does not explicitly identify a "problem" or "solution" in Sikhism. Based on your reading through the "Introduction to Sikhism," I want you to identify and explain what "problem" you see Sikhism responding to and what "solution" you see it offering to that problem. Be sure to use evidence from the reading to defend what you see as the "problem" and "solution" of Sikhism.

### Friday: Christian and Sikh Experiences in Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Jim Wallis, "Test of Faith," 264-266
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Jennifer Howe Peace, "God is Greater," 25-29
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Rubin Habito, "A Christian Confronts a Zen Koan," 165-171
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Valarie Kaur, "Double-Edged Daggars," 172-176
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Each of the three essays is written by a Christian or Sikh scholar of religion about experiences they have had that shapes how they think about the relationship between their faith and the faith of others. Compare and contrast how these four people think about the relationship between their religious tradition and other religions.

## WEEK 8

### Monday: Fall Break, No Class

### Wednesday: Out-Narrating the Secular Order

- ▶ Due before class: First Draft of Ethical Analysis Paper in the Case Study of Religious Disagreement and Difference  
Articulate, explain, and defend your answer to the question, "How should we as individuals and communities express our disagreements and differences in a religiously diverse world?" in response to either the case study "Chalking Muhammad on Campus OR in response to the case study "Fliers at the Peace Parade" - choose only one case study.
- ▶ In class: Workshop Ethical Analysis Paper  
You must bring 3 printed copies of your paper to class with you to workshop. Your peers will grade your first draft for credit. Your first draft should be approximately 1000 words (minus footnotes) to receive full credit.

### Group Presentations on Religious Ethnographies

### Friday: Group Presentations

- ▶ At the start of class all groups should be prepared to present

## WEEK 9

### Monday: Group Presentations

- ▶ Due before class: Final Draft of Ethical Analysis Paper in the Case Study of Religious Exclusivity and Pluralism

### Wednesday: Reflections on Religious Difference and Pluralism

- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: First, articulate your own beliefs, practices, and commitment in relationship to religion and why those beliefs, practices, and commitments are important to you (even not being religious still involves beliefs, practices and commitments in relation to religion). Second, articulate how you think about and relate to the different religious communities that the groups presented on in class—how do you think about your relationship to such different and diverse communities with which you cannot possibly agree with all of them? Why do you think about and relate to these communities in this way?

## Case Studies in Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism

### Friday: Case Study in Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: “Sharing Sacred Seasons”, available on Canvas
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: What is the conflict in the case study? What beliefs, practices, or issues are at stake in this conflict? With whom do you initially feel sympathies or frustrations?

## WEEK 10

### Monday: Judaism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 243-253 (“Judaism”: Beginning—Exile and Return)
- ▶ Before class read: [D'varim \(Deuteronomy\) Chapter 6: Verses 1-25](#)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: In the reading, Prothero discusses the significance of Torah in the Jewish tradition. What are the different forms of Torah Prothero describes and how is the reading from D'varim (Deuteronomy) a part of Torah?

### Wednesday: Judaism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 253-267 (“Judaism”: Exile and Return—Reform, Conservative, Orthodox)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: In this reading, Prothero discusses the Exile (the problem) and Return (the solution) in greater detail. Much like Torah, Exile and Return has many layers of meaning. What are the different layers of meaning of Exile and Return discussed in the reading?

### Friday: Judaism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 267-278 (“Judaism”: Reform, Conservative, Orthodox - end)
- ▶ Before class look at the charts and maps: [“Israel and US are Home to More than Four-Fifths of the World’s Jews”](#)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: In this reading, Prothero discusses the different branches of modern Judaism. What are the different branches of Judaism and what makes each unique? What do you observe about the distribution of different Jewish traditions around the world?

## WEEK 11

### Monday: Hinduism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 131-150 (Ch 4 “Hinduism”: Beginning—Devotional Hinduism)
- ▶ Before class read: “Indra and Shibi”
- ▶ Before class read: “Indra and the Asura King”
- ▶ In class read: Rig-Veda, Book 10, Hymn 90
- ▶ In class read: “Kena Upanishad”
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: in the reading, Prothero identifies the problem of Hinduism as “samsara” and the solution as “moksha.” Explain the difference between samsara and moksha and identify how you observe either samsara or moksha at work in the two stories.

### Wednesday: Hinduism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 150-168 (Ch 4 “Hinduism”: Devotional Hinduism - end)
- ▶ Before class read: “Krishna”
- ▶ Before class look at the charts and maps: “[Hindu Population by Country](#)”
- ▶ In class read: “Bhagavad Gita: Book 12 Excerpt”
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: In this reading, Prothero describes developments of “Devotional Hinduism” and “Modern Hinduism.” Explain what distinguishes these developments and how the story of Krishna is part of these developments?

### Friday: Another Case Study in Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: “A Question of Membership,” available on Canvas
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: What is the conflict in the case study? What beliefs, practices, or issues are at stake in this conflict? With whom do you initially feel sympathies or frustrations?

## WEEK 12

### Monday: Buddhism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 169-186 (Ch 5 “Buddhism”: Beginning—Theravada and Mahayana)
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: This reading details the life of the Buddha. What was the most important part of the Buddha's life for shaping the Buddhist religion? Why?

### Wednesday: Buddhism

- ▶ Before class read: Prothero, 186-201 (Ch 5 “Buddhism”: Theravada and Mahayana – end)
- ▶ Before class view: “[Buddhists](#)”
- ▶ In class read: The Bodhisattva Vow
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: In this reading Prothero discusses the two largest Buddhist traditions, Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, as well as two prominent sects of Mahayana Buddhism (Vajrayana and Zen). What is the difference between these different forms of Buddhism? What do you observe about the distribution of Buddhists around the world?

### Friday: Group Project Work Day

## WEEK 13

### Monday: Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist Experiences in Pluralism

- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Arthur Green, "A Monk's Gift," 62-67
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Anantanand Rambachan, "The Ambiguities of Liberation and Oppression," 154-158
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: Varun Soni, "Under the Bodhi Tree," 182-184
- ▶ Before class read: *My Neighbor's Faith*: John Makransky, "What Mast Ram Baba Dropped into My Bowl," 197-203
- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Each of the three essays is written by a Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist scholar of religion about experiences they have had that shapes how they think about the relationship between their faith and the faith of others. Compare and contrast how these six people think about the relationship between their religious tradition and other religions.

### Wednesday: Workshop Ethical Analysis of Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism

- ▶ Due before class: First Draft of Ethical Analysis Paper in the Case Study in Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism  
Articulate, explain, and defend your answer to the question, "How should we as individuals and communities cooperate with different religious persons and groups to develop pluralism?" in response to either the case study "Sharing Sacred Seasons" OR the case study "A Question of Membership"
- ▶ In class: Workshop Ethical Analysis Paper  
You must bring 3 printed copies of your paper to class with you to workshop. Your peers will grade your first draft for credit. Your first draft should be approximately 1000 words (minus footnotes) to receive full credit.

## Group Presentations on Religious Ethnographies

### Friday: Group Project Presentations

- ▶ All groups must be ready to present at the beginning of class

## WEEK 14

### Monday: Group Project Presentations

- ▶ Due before class: Final Draft of Ethical Analysis Paper in the Case Study in Interreligious Cooperation and Pluralism

### Wednesday: Reflection on Religious Cooperation and Pluralism

- ▶ Engaging Religion Assignment: Imagine that when over winter break a friend or family member asks you, "Why is it important to understand global religious diversity?" How would you answer them? What 2 resources would you identify as being the most valuable to you in developing your understanding of global religious diversity?

### Friday December 11: Final Exam Preparation

## WEEK 15

### Final Exam Period TBD

# APPENDIX 1

## Religious Ethnography Group Project

### **Description of the Project**

Perform a case study with your group on a particular religious community, with an eye to understanding how the various dimensions of religion interact in a local environment and how the community lives as part of a religiously diverse world.

### **Step One: Pick a Religious Community**

Each group will work together to select a religious community in our region that represents a different tradition from any of the members in the group. Each group member will need to share what religion/denomination/tradition/congregation they feel like they know the most about. Then, the group needs to select a nearby community that does not fall into any of the group members' primary experience. You can select any community in the region. You must notify and receive permission from the instructor via email or in writing when you have selected a community.

### **Step Two: Contact the Community and Prepare for Visit**

The group will contact a leader from the community prior to visiting to share your assignment with them, receive permission to attend their service, and inquire as to any special instructions they might have for you as visitors. Most communities will be glad to welcome you, but if a community says that they are uncomfortable with you attending, please graciously accept their position and choose another community. Before visiting, I encourage your group to do a little research online to learn about what you might expect to happen during your visit. This research will prepare you to interact appropriately with the community during your visit.

### **Step Three: Visit Community and Interviews**

The group must visit this community for a primary gathering to observe the community's worship. When you visit, be sure to arrive early so you can observe how the community gathers and organizes itself. The group needs to work together to ensure that all members can attend. Many of you will have lots of commitments throughout the semester, so make sure to plan early so that your entire group can visit. Individuals should feel free to participate in the worship service to whatever extent they are comfortable and is acceptable to the worshipping community. You will need to interview at least 2 members of the community to ask question about their understanding of their religious community and their experience of religious diversity.

### **Step Four: Group Presentation for Class**

Based on your observations during your visit, you will put together a group presentation for the class. Your presentation should last around 10 minutes (not more than 12 min), involve all the group members, and will be followed by questions from the class/instructor. The presentation should include at minimum (there is no maximum!):

1. Details about where/what community you visited and your observations of the community,
2. Analysis of religion in the community you visited using the tools for studying religion (i.e., texts, objects, ethics, doctrines, identities, rituals, power relations).
3. Description of the community's experience of diversity and outlook on pluralism,
4. Identification of what you found helpful about their perspective on diversity and pluralism and what questions it raised for you, and
5. An engaging presentation that fits within the allotted timeframe.