

RELIGIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY GROUP PROJECT

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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>.

About this Assignment

The following assignment was developed by Dr. Kevin Minister to use in his “[World Religions](#)” course at Shenandoah University (Winchester, PA) to help students engage with interfaith themes. Religious literacy, case study methodology, and ethical analysis are central components of this course. This particular tool is used to incorporate experiential learning by way of community site visits and interviews.

Assignment Instructions

► Project Description

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 1: 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.