

2025-27 Faith and Health Campus Grants

Project Summaries

Fourteen campuses are poised to advance curricular innovation, community partnerships, and field shaping research at the intersection of faith and health.

Bethel University (MN)

Bethel University's Interfaith Initiative enhances interreligious competency within health focused social work education by redesigning undergraduate and graduate curricula to integrate religious pluralism as a social determinant of health. The project will embed interfaith learning into coursework, align competencies with CSWE standards, and develop an Interreligious Studies Certificate to support interdisciplinary engagement. New and expanded practicum placements will emphasize interfaith-informed practice, with funding allocated to compensate community partners who host students. Beyond curriculum changes, the initiative will strengthen the field through scholarship and convening. Faculty will organize a Spring 2027 Interreligious Symposium and disseminate research and conference presentations on interfaith social work practice, aiming to advance culturally and spiritually responsive care across health disciplines.

Project Team:

- **Dr. Eydie Dyke-Shypulski**, Department Chair and MSW Program Director, is an expert in global interreligious engagement focused on faith, health, trauma, and justice.
- **Prof. Nicholas Zeimet**, Director of Practicum Education and a leader in community-engaged learning across diverse racial, ethnic, and religious contexts.
- **Dr. DesAnne Hippe**, Professor at Bethel School of Theology a scholar integrating theology, ethics, mental health, and racial reconciliation.

Elon University

Elon University will create 6–8 video simulations and accompanying case studies to help health sciences and public health students develop skills for engaging patients from diverse faith backgrounds. These simulations will be informed by focus groups and consultations with local faith communities, ensuring scenarios reflect real-world multifaith experiences. The materials will support a new Core Curriculum course, *The Spirit of Health: Exploring Faith, Culture, and Care*, and will be publicly accessible for broader educational use. Research projects and public narrative initiatives including submission of a manuscript to peer-reviewed journals, screening and dialog events and a YouTube channel will serve as dissemination channels of the project and its findings.

Project Team:

- **Brian K. Pennington**, a historian of modern Indian religion and director of the Elon Center for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society.
- **Molly Green**, a public health scholar specializing in social determinants of health among MENA populations.
- **Jeanmarie Koonts**, a longtime maternal child nurse and founding faculty member of Elon's Nursing program.
- **Helen Orr**, a scholar of religious conflict and creator of the "Multifaith Literacy for Professional Environments" online certificate.

Grand Canyon University

Grand Canyon University's project embeds interfaith competencies into three health related courses—Neurobiology, Clinical Exercise Physiology Experience II, and Capstone—while extending learning into clinical placements and campus health settings. Through case studies, training modules, and applied experiences using tools such as HOPE and FICA, students will learn to incorporate spiritual and cultural considerations into patient care.

The initiative also fosters professional collaboration through an ACSM Special Interest Group and will share outcomes through publications and an open access curriculum toolkit.

Project Team:

- **Dr. Zach Zeigler**, Professor of Exercise Physiology, a researcher focused on health behaviors and faith-based wellness programs.
- **Dr. Randall Ordovich-Clarkson**, Instructor and physician specializing in preventive medicine and patient-centered care.
- **Dr. Michele Pasley**, a theology faculty member with expertise in spiritual formation and faith integration in nursing.

Hendrix College

Hendrix College's initiative, *Making the Invisible Visible*, advances religious diversity and health equity through three integrated components. First, the team will develop a Religious Literacy module for selected health sciences, religion, and psychology courses, along with a new course titled *Religion and Ethics in Caregiving Professions*. Second, a qualitative research project will examine the experiences of healthcare providers from minority religious backgrounds in Central Arkansas. Finally, the Campus Partner Learning Community (CPLC) will connect students, faculty,

and community health partners in quarterly collaborative meetings, internships, and community-based projects, culminating in a public symposium.

Project Team:

- **Dr. Emmy Corey**, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, examines religion as a social determinant of health in East Africa and Arkansas.
- **Dr. Bill Gorvine**, Professor of Religious Studies, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, health, and wellness.
- **Dr. Candice Thomas**, Assistant Professor of Biology, and member of the Health Sciences Program.
- **Dr. Laura MacDonald**, Associate Professor of Biology, a faculty development leader focused on inclusive pedagogy and student belonging.

Johns Hopkins University

The Johns Hopkins Department of International Health will expand its work at the intersection of religion and global health by strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new collaborations with organizations that identify religion as a key social determinant of health. These partnerships, based in **Ethiopia, Uganda, and the United States**, will come together for a facilitated dialogue to explore opportunities for student engagement, faculty collaboration, and the development of faith aligned health promotion strategies.

A vital component of the project is experiential learning: **five graduate students** will complete internships with partner organizations in Ethiopia and Uganda, documenting their fieldwork through blogs and podcasts to highlight the practical realities of working with faith-based actors in global health. The department will also **develop one new course** and **revise an existing course** to deepen student understanding of the role faith plays in global health systems, community relationships, and public health implementation across diverse cultural settings.

The project team brings extensive interdisciplinary experience—from ethnography and public health leadership to ethics, international partnerships, and internship coordination—ensuring a cohesive, well-supported, and practice-oriented educational initiative.

Project Team:

- **Svea Closser, PhD**, Associate Professor; Chair, Education Strategy Committee (PI)
Conducts ethnographic research with faith healers in Nepal and Pakistan and collaborates with faith leaders in Northern Nigeria and Ethiopia.
- **Chris Dreisbach, PhD**, Associate Director, MS in Organizational Leadership; Episcopal Priest
Has taught in higher education since 1980 and brings expertise in ethics, leadership, and faith-based organizational contexts.

- **Caitlin Kennedy, PhD**, Associate Chair, Department of International Health
Award winning educator and mentor with decades of partnership experience in Uganda.
- **Melissa Marx, PhD**, Associate Professor; Member, Education Strategy Committee
Experienced global health educator working with partners in the U.S. and southern Africa; oversees course development and revision.
- **Youri Moleman, MPH**, Research Associate
Has supervised student internships with faith leaders in Ethiopia and will coordinate and oversee the internship program for this project.

Loyola University Chicago

Cura Personalis for a Multifaith World:

Loyola University Chicago will deepen integration of spirituality and health by launching a **Faith & Health** minor that links theology, bioethics, and health sciences, while also hosting a Jesuit network workshop series to build faculty capacity for teaching religion and health across disciplines. The minor emphasizes applied learning, including community partnerships, reflective practice, and case simulations centered on religious diversity in clinical contexts. Workshop outputs will include a teaching toolkit, evaluation rubrics, and a faculty community of practice to extend impact across Jesuit institutions.

Project Team:

- **Mara Brecht, PhD**, Associate Professor of Theology, minor architect, and faculty workshop lead;
- **Todd Ruppard, PhD, RN, FAAN**, Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean for Research and Scholarly Innovation
- **John Stys, PhD**, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Undergraduate Program Director for Healthcare Administration at the Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health bioethics and assessment lead.

Mercer University School of Medicine

The Mercer University project examines religion as a **social determinant of dying well in the US** healthcare system. The research, education, and public programming in this grant will center on questions of how religious communities prepare for death or provide support for members, how religion or spirituality impacts mental health at the end of life, what religious assets or resources might improve the experience of dying in the American healthcare system, and how leaders in religious communities and healthcare institutions might work together to better meet the needs of dying patients and their families. The curricular programming of the grant will include a new annual reading discussion group with medical students and undergraduate students interested in the health professions, as well as the continuation of the **Spiritual Needs and FICA training**

program for medical students. The grant will fund a **public, virtual lecture series** in Fall 2027, featuring local and national speakers, each focused in different ways on questions of religion in the death and dying process. Finally, the grant will fund four medical student summer research projects, two undergraduate summer research projects, and a faculty-led observation study in palliative and hospice care.

Project Team:

- **Dr. Paul Lewis**, Professor of Religion at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Mercer University.
- **Dr. Caroline Anglim**, Assistant Professor of Bioethics and Medical Humanities at the Mercer University School of Medicine.

Pacific Lutheran University (WA)

Pacific Lutheran University will use this grant to integrate robust education on the role of religion in health into the **Partnership for Health Innovation**, an institutional initiative launched in 2024. Funds will support the piloting of core curricular offerings for a new **Global Health** program that leverages PLU's strengths across Nursing, Global Studies, and Religious Studies. A central feature of the program is **community engaged learning** with healthcare organizations that primarily serve immigrant and Indigenous communities across the Pacific Northwest. The grant will help deepen and expand these partnerships, supporting both relationship building and the development of structured learning experiences that allow students to apply classroom knowledge in real-world settings.

In addition to undergraduate coursework, faculty teams in Nursing, Global Studies, and Religious Studies will develop **Continuing Medical Education (CME)** modules designed for practicing nurses. These modules will highlight the significance of religion and spirituality in shaping health behaviors, patient decision-making, and wellness practices, strengthening workforce readiness to serve religiously diverse communities.

Project Team:

- **Mary Ellen Biggerstaff, DNP, ARNP, Associate Professor of Nursing & Family Nurse Practitioner**
Focuses on community-based primary care and health equity for marginalized populations.
- **Suzanne Crawford-O'Brien, PhD, Professor of Religion and Culture; Affiliated Faculty in Environmental Studies and Native American Studies**
Scholar of Native American religion and healing; author of *Coming Full Circle* and *Religion and Healing in Native America*.
- **Erik Hammerstrom, PhD, Professor of East Asian and Comparative Religion**
Specializes in East Asian Buddhism and is also trained as an interfaith chaplain.

- **Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, PhD**, Professor of Early and Medieval Christian History
Researches Byzantine healing traditions, suffering, charity, and is author of *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow*.
- **Ami V. Shah, PhD**, Program Director & Associate Professor of Global Studies; Chair of
Global and Cultural Studies
Works in critical international relations, critical development studies, and radical
pedagogy.
- **Sean Whalen, PhD**, Research Associate & Visiting Professor of Psychology
Serves as a community based mental health counselor focusing on holistic wellbeing.

Stanford University School of Medicine

Stanford University School of Medicine will develop and implement a scalable, faith-informed mental health curriculum that prepares students to design campus-ready **Muslim Mental Health Initiatives (MMHIs)** grounded in religious pluralism, cultural humility, and community partnership. The curriculum will draw on evidence based models from the Stanford Muslim Mental Health & Islamic Psychology Lab and align with emerging best practices for supporting faith diversity in university mental health systems.

The project emphasizes hands-on training, including implementation strategies, case studies, and partnerships with community organizations. Clinicians from **Maristan**, the lab's community partner and a recognized leader in faith integrated mental health care, will contribute real world models of culturally congruent practice. Through this collaboration, students will gain skills in program design, assessment, and campus engagement, ensuring they are prepared to launch or enhance MMHIs within higher education settings.

The initiative is designed to be **replicable** across institutions, producing a flexible curriculum package with learning modules, facilitator guides, evaluation tools, and implementation frameworks that other universities can adapt to. By bringing together clinical expertise, student development leadership, and community-based practice, the project seeks to transform how health professions education incorporates religious diversity into mental health training.

Project team:

- **Rania Awaad, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry; Director, Stanford Muslim Mental Health & Islamic Psychology Lab**
Provides clinical and research leadership, specializing in faith integrated mental health models and culturally responsive care.
- **Abiya Ahmed, PhD**, Interim Executive Director of CECL; Assistant Vice Provost of ICIL
Brings expertise in religious diversity, student development, and institutional transformation, ensuring alignment with campuswide equity goals.
- **Cassie Garcia Weisenberger, MEd**, Interim Associate Dean and Director, Markaz Resource Center

Leads student engagement and implementation strategy, drawing on extensive experience in student programming and cross campus collaboration.

University of Kansas

The University of Kansas project consists of four integrated components designed to strengthen religious literacy and spiritual care competencies across health related disciplines. First, KU will launch a new interdisciplinary **minor in Religion, Spirituality, and Healthcare** in Fall 2026, including two newly developed courses that equip students in the health professions with foundational skills in religious pluralism and spiritually informed care. Second, the project will build strong **community partnerships** with Lawrence Memorial Hospital, DCCA, and Justice Matters, creating applied learning opportunities where students can engage directly with healthcare settings and develop practical competencies related to spiritual assessment, ethical reflection, and culturally responsive care.

Third, the team will leverage the **Religion in Kansas Project**, housed in KU's Department of Religious Studies, to document the two-year implementation process. This archival work will contribute to a broader academic understanding of how religion and spirituality can be effectively integrated into healthcare training. Finally, the project will share its insights with the academic community through a **conference paper** examining models for embedding healthcare competencies within Religious Studies curricula and strategies for collaborating meaningfully with community organizations.

Project Team:

- **Jacqueline Brinton, PhD**, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Religious Studies
Specializes in Islam and comparative religious ethics; her work examines modern religion, Islam, and media.
- **Nikia Smith Robert, PhD, MDiv**, Assistant Professor of Religious Ethics and Social Justice; Ordained AME Elder; Clinically Trained Healthcare Chaplain
A womanist abolitionist scholar focused on ethical and sociopolitical responses to the criminalization of Black motherhood.
- **Vincent Francisco, PhD**, Professor of Applied Behavioral Sciences; Kansas Health Foundation Professor of Community Leadership; Director, KU Center for Community Health and Development
Works on systems-level change, community mobilization, and initiatives to reduce health disparities.

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

The University of Michigan Medical School's Program on Health, Spirituality and Religion (HSR) proposes to strengthen medical student training in religious pluralism through the expansion and integration of four curricular initiatives. The project will broaden the existing **Health and Religion elective**, revive the **Healing Presence chaplaincy elective**, enhance the **required session on caring for religiously diverse patients**, and deepen the **longitudinal HSR student fellowship**. Together, these components aim to provide learners with a coherent set of skills for addressing spiritual needs, collaborating with chaplaincy, and navigating ethical and cultural complexities encountered in clinical care.

The expanded curriculum will incorporate case based learning, reflective practice, and interprofessional engagement with chaplains and community partners. Through these efforts, HSR seeks to prepare future physicians to deliver respectful, patient centered care that honors the spiritual and religious identities of the individuals and communities they serve. The project also includes dissemination efforts designed to share replicable curricular models with peer institutions.

Project Team:

- **Kristin Collier, MD, FACP**, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine; Director, Program on Health, Spirituality and Religion
A national leader in spirituality and medicine whose scholarship focuses on ethics and professional identity formation in clinical education.
- **Adam Baruch, MD**, Assistant Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology; Associate Director, HSR
Brings expertise in professional identity formation, narrative medicine, and spiritually informed approaches to reproductive health.
- **Ellery Sarosi, MD**, Clinical Assistant Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology; Director of Fellow Formation, HSR
Contributes clinical experience in OBGYN and scholarship on accompaniment and moral formation in surgical and clinical care.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health will expand its Faith & Public Health program through curricular expansion, which will include new courses that explore intersections between faith communities and public health practice, with an eventual goal of developing a certificate program accessible to both degree-seeking students and working professionals. A dedicated **Field Experience Fund** will support student immersions, practica, and short-term placements in faith-based health clinics, historically Black churches working on maternal health, and regional interfaith networks addressing mental health, chronic disease, and social support. Students will also participate in guest lectures and applied modules led by clergy, chaplains, and faith-based practitioners.

The program will establish an **Advisory Council** composed of faith leaders, health practitioners, and academic partners; host an annual **symposium series** spotlighting student work and statewide initiatives; and offer a **Faith & Health Speaker Series** that brings in national and regional experts. The initiative further contributes to the field through coordinated evaluation, multimedia storytelling, and scholarly dissemination. Outputs will include conference presentations, peer reviewed publications, and a digital **Faith & Public Health Resource Hub**.

Project Team:

- **Karl Johnson, PhD**, Assistant Professor at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, Department of Public Health Leadership and Practice.
- **Makala D. Carrington, MPH, MDiv**, is the Director of the Public Health and Faith Communities Initiative and an Adjunct Instructor at the UNC Gillings Department of Public Health Leadership and Practice.
- **Kim Ramsey-White, PhD**, is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health Leadership and Practice and serves as the Associate Dean for Wellbeing at the University of North Carolina's Gillings School of Global Public Health.

University of San Francisco

The University of San Francisco will design an undergraduate elective that positions **spirituality as a core social determinant of health**, preparing nursing and public health students to understand how faith, meaning making, and spiritual identity influence wellbeing across diverse communities. The course will build students' interfaith competencies and strengthen culturally attuned, patient-centered care. At the graduate level, the project will redesign master's level nursing and public health leadership courses to incorporate modules that apply **Jesuit values**—including human dignity, discernment, and service to the marginalized—to leadership development and professional formation.

A key component of the initiative is a partnership with **St. Anthony's Foundation**, a longstanding San Francisco social services agency serving individuals experiencing homelessness, poverty, addiction, and complex health challenges. Through this collaboration, students will engage in community based learning and apply faith informed leadership and care models within a real world context. The initiative aims to build a sustainable bridge between academic learning, Jesuit mission integration, and community health practice.

Project Team:

- **Erin Grinshteyn, PhD**, Associate Dean for Health Professions; Professor of Public Health Researches violence related health disparities and advances Jesuit informed public health leadership and pedagogy.
- **Nancy Taquino, PhD, RN**, Associate Professor of Nursing; Lead Champion for Curriculum Transformation

Brings 35 years of clinical leadership and expertise in competency based education, Ignatian pedagogy, and reflective practice.

- **Rev. Tim Godfrey, SJ, DNP, RN**, Associate Professor of Nursing; Jesuit Priest
Combines priestly ministry and advanced nursing practice with specialization in immigrant, refugee, and global health; experienced leader of interfaith initiatives.
- **Sara Horton Deutsch, PhD, RN, PMHCNS, FAAN**, Professor of Nursing; Director, USF–Kaiser Permanente Partnership
Psychiatric/mental health nurse scholar focused on reflective practice, Caring Science, and Caritas leadership.
- **Laura Chyu, PhD**, Associate Professor of Public Health; Director, Undergraduate Public Health Program
Studies social factors and chronic stressors shaping women’s health and integrates Jesuit pedagogy into public health leadership training.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is advancing the integration of religion, spirituality, and health through two interconnected projects designed to strengthen curricular offerings, support student innovation, and foster generative dialogue among clinicians and humanities scholars. The first effort expands the university’s existing **Health Humanities minor** by working with faculty and practicing clinicians to develop new courses at the intersection of spirituality, religious diversity, and healthcare. These courses will introduce students to frameworks for understanding how meaning, belief, ritual, and community shape experiences of illness, healing, and care.

The second project, developed in collaboration with **VCU Health**, brings together clinicians from diverse faith backgrounds with scholars in the humanities for a series of structured conversations exploring suffering, transcendence, moral discernment, and spiritually informed medical care. These dialogues will engage questions central to practice in a religiously pluralistic society, creating a space where theoretical insight and clinical experience enrich one another. Students will have opportunities to observe, participate, or produce related scholarship, linking the initiative to wider academic and professional development.

Both efforts reflect and build on the work of the **Spirituality, Care, and Culture Lab**, jointly supported by the Humanities Research Center and the Center for the Study of Global Religions and Spirituality. Together, these projects aim to strengthen interdisciplinary teaching, elevate student-led inquiry, and foster more holistic, spiritually attentive approaches to healthcare education and practice at VCU.

Project team:

- **Andrew Crislip, PhD, Professor of Religious Studies**
Scholar of religion, healing, emotion, and spirituality in early Christianity.

- **Adin Lears, PhD, Associate Professor of English**
Researches medieval and contemporary literature, with work exploring vulnerability, need, and care in modern health contexts.
- **Sachi Shimomura, PhD, Associate Professor of English; Coordinator, Health Humanities Minor**
Teaches medieval literature and mythology and developed a new Body and Culture course with faculty in Family Medicine and Population Health.
- **Margaret Wardlaw, MD, PhD, Pediatrician; Writer; Medical Humanities Scholar**
Focuses on spirituality, childbirth, sleep medicine, and pediatric end of life care.
- **Mimi Winick, PhD, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies**
Studies spirituality, creativity, and spiritual seeking in 19th century to contemporary Anglophone literature.