

## Society for Values in Higher Education Project on Religion and Public Life Update

In June, 2008, following on the SVHE Wingspread Declaration on Religion and Public Life: Engaging Higher Education, SVHE sponsored a five-day Institute on Religion in Curriculum and Culture of Higher Education, as part of a Jessie Ball duPont-funded initiative to promote religious literacy among America's college students. During the week, representatives from ten diverse campuses across the United States explored and addressed the development of curricula and programs on their home campuses toward this goal.

Over the past year, teams have been involved in designing, advocating for, and implementing their programs. There have also been several dissemination activities around this project.

### Campus Project Updates

Many of the campuses' teams have been preparing and/or implementing their plans; some, such as the introduction of residence life programs, will begin this Fall. The current economic recession and other realities have served as challenges for some programs. Some sites have had to scale back and/or delay their initiatives. Progress made this year includes:

- The team from Berry College integrated lessons on religion into existing courses, particularly those in political science.
- Bethel University's representatives introduced interfaith dialogue with non-Christian faith traditions through modules in literature, philosophy and social work classes. Assessment of learning outcomes is being studied through student reflection journals and papers.
- The Colorado College team are in the process of proposing course modules on Environmental Stewardship for the 2010-11 academic year. Students would examine connections between academic environmental studies and work on behalf of the environment in community, faith, and environmental stewardship capacities. This elective in Environmental Sciences, would be cross-listed with the religion department. In the meantime, a team member intends to teach a Fall, 2009, course entitled: Spirit & Nature, Science, drawing upon ideas and materials generated at the Institute.
- An interdisciplinary team at Florida State University constructed mini-curricular module for introducing Islam and Islamicate civilizations in the context of a variety of courses. The Module on Islam is now in regular use in the World Religions course, a course on Islam in the Modern World, and will be used as part of a class on FSU's Spain campus this summer.
- At LaGuardia Community College in New York, team members are running concurrent Study Circle dialogues on religious diversity with LaGuardia faculty and staff, using readings to stimulate discussion. Program goals are to increase faculty awareness of faith traditions through academic scholarship and, in turn, to stimulate student reflection and skill in this area.
- The University of Missouri-Columbia has launched an on-line course on Religious Literacy for Professionals, which is currently in progress. About 24 students, including working professionals, are enrolled in the class. Assessment of learning outcomes is underway.

- This Fall, the University of the Pacific will open an undergraduate interfaith and social justice living-learning community. Learning activities have been designed and an initial learning outcomes plan has been developed. Progress has also been made on capacity building in intercultural dialogue and interaction, alternative spring break interfaith exploration trips, the creation of a sacred space and garden and an Interfaith Resource Center.

-Plans are underway for Portland State University to establish an interdisciplinary minor on Religious Studies and Urban Life, reflecting their institution's mission to engage with the city. This program would be jointly offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Urban and Public Affairs, and is tentatively scheduled to begin in Fall, 2010.

- Seton Hill University's team aimed to assess the effectiveness of university-wide articulated learning objectives in religion and spirituality. The team attended meetings with related committees and in the end decided that the assessment process already in place will suffice for their religion-related objectives. They also raised questions about some minor discrepancies between the university's core objectives and the curriculum, and called attention to the value of unpacking the language of university objectives. The team introduced the idea of developing rubrics to evaluate senior's self-assessment papers related to core objective in their Integrative Senior Seminar, which may go forward.

- Sewanee: The University of the South is creating a religious life learning community for first-year students. This community may be linked to several first-year classes, such as Introduction to Religion, The Responsible Self, Studies in Poetry, and Introduction to Philosophy. Relevant extra-curricular activities will be available to this community.

### **Dissemination:**

Over the year, there have been several successful opportunities to disseminate information about the project, Institute, and campus programs being undertaken. An on-line article, "Democratic Dialogue Skills Presented at Institute on Religion on Curriculum and Culture in Higher Education" appeared in the *National Issues Forums: News* in September, 2009.

Institute coordinators and participants have been actively presenting information at a number of national conferences and meetings. In 2008- 2009 sessions were led by Institute leaders and participants at the gatherings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), and the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AACU\_ Annual Meeting).

### **Looking Ahead**

We intend to continue documentation and dissemination of the range of campus programs in the coming months, including conference presentations and publications. However, funding from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund lasts only through the current calendar year (2009). Due to the current economic crisis and unexpected tight budgets for colleges and universities, most of which are going through severe cutbacks, start-up on several of the programs has been delayed and staffing reduced.

We are searching continued funding for this process during 2010. We need resources to support campus representatives in their documentation of programs and assessment of resulting learning, as well as the services of an administrator-editor to coordinate, collect, edit, and submit papers to appropriate publishers and journals. We have been in contact with a couple of funding agencies (Wabash, Luce), but have yet to secure sponsors.