

Understanding Religious Literacy Content Creators and Providers in Education, Journalism and New Media

A Report for the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

August 2021



INCLUSIVE AMERICA PROJECT

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Background

The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations (AVDF) commissioned the **Aspen Institute Inclusive America Project (IAP)** to conduct a review of content providers and creators of religious literacy materials in the categories of new media, education, and journalism. IAP partnered with the **USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC)** to undertake the review, focusing on those three categories. This collaborative effort has two aims: to distill findings and recommendations that might inform an approach to building on content creators' current work; and to offer resources to funders as they explore opportunities to participate in this work.

The logo for The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, featuring the text "The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations" in a white, serif font on a black rectangular background.

*The Arthur
Vining Davis
Foundations*

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Overview

This report seeks to help practitioners, content creators, academics, and funders understand the landscape of religious literacy content being developed in education, new media, and journalism. Our hope is to

provide these individuals with a broader perspective on what has been created so that they can situate themselves within this landscape, find a community of fellow travelers with whom they can foster new collaborations, and learn and grow their own work. In doing so, they may contribute to a larger collective effort.

- 1 Constructing the category of what is and is not religion
- 2 Creating religious knowledge
- 3 Exploring values that connect with religious ideas
- 4 Fostering pluralism and interreligious understanding
- 5 Widening exposure for religious “others”

This report seeks to understand what is meant by religious literacy and proposes an alternative framing for these efforts under the broader banner of “advancing public knowledge about religions.” We also propose a finer parsing of the various elements and components that make religious literacy part of the work to foster and advance religious pluralism and civic health in the United States. The report includes a five-part categorization of content developed to foster religious literacy: 1) constructing the category of what is and is not religion, 2) creating religious knowledge, 3) exploring values that connect with religious ideas, 4) fostering pluralism and interreligious understanding, and 5) widening exposure for religious “others.” The report includes an analysis of the content developed in three categories: education, new media, and journalism, as well as a review of the Inclusive America Project’s efforts to bring academics and practitioners into a larger conversation with each other and build a network and community around this work.

Embedded in the report are recommendations and insights that may be useful to those seeking to contribute to and advance religious literacy efforts.¹ These recommendations are highlighted below:

Overall Recommendations

In our review of the current landscape of religious literacy content, we identified various trends in religious literacy content creation and consumption - across content categories - that impede increasing societal religious literacy. These include a too-narrow conceptualization of religious literacy, content creation strategies that inadequately accommodate religious literacy content searchers, and an insufficient focus on systems change as a vehicle for achieving social impact. With these trends in mind, we developed the following recommendations for the broad field(s) of religious literacy:

1 **Methodology**- CRCC reviewed AVDF’s funding priority areas to understand the Foundation’s philanthropic approach and goals. Then CRCC conducted research and selected representative examples of content creators and providers in the three priority categories identified for investment by AVDF’s board of directors: new media, education and journalism. Content from representative creators and providers was then logged, reviewed and compiled for analysis. In addition, CRCC reviewed the long-term outcomes that AVDF funding on religious literacy hopes to produce, then conducted searches for content providers that are working on materials to advance those outcomes and that might not have been uncovered through the religious literacy content searches and reviews. The Inclusive America Project at the Aspen Institute hosted a series of three meetings on religious literacy content that included a cohort of scholars who are working in this area. (A list of the meeting participants is included in Appendix A). Brie Loskota, executive director of CRCC and an IAP Fellow, participated in these meetings. CRCC also reviewed the transcripts from the meeting to glean important insights to inform this report. Finally, CRCC conducted interviews with leaders in the fields of new media, education and journalism to ground the analysis of the content within a larger perspective provided by experts.

- Broaden the approach beyond “religious literacy” to encompass the many ways that content creators, academics, and journalists work to advance public knowledge about religions.
- Broaden the understanding of the various thematic areas of content that contribute to a deeper understanding of religion, including: 1) constructing the category of what is and is not religion, 2) creating religious knowledge, 3) exploring values that connect with religious ideas, 4) fostering pluralism and interreligious understanding, and 5) widening exposure for religious “others” (people with whom we have religious differences) that helps to diversify the range of people with whom we interact.
- Fund research on the needs and drivers of information-seeking on the five thematic areas above. Take a user-centered approach to content creation rather than a creator-driven approach.
- Realign systems to be more equitable and religiously plural, rather than focusing on meeting individuals’ education and informational needs as a means to achieve social impact. Prioritize sector-level thinking in ways that change policies as well as institutional and organizational practices.
- Develop content in partnership with the users and systems/organizations, rather than *for* them, to ensure actual adoption.

Education Recommendations

Education is a formative content category, involving a diverse set of actors and stakeholders. In this category, our recommendations fall under three main headings: shifting school strategies, modeling inclusive action, and public dissemination of religious literacy content.

Shifting School Strategies

- Focus on equipping schools and districts with the skills and resources they need to serve a religiously plural student body and reduce bullying and instances of teacher and administrator-driven harassment.
- Bring education publishers into conversations with educators, administrators, school boards, and parents at the district level to examine how to include religions in existing curricula and identify gaps in current published materials.
- Reduce/stop funding one-off special curriculum development that has little chance of school adoption or implementation.
- Fund research and evaluation on existing school programs on religious literacy and world religions, especially studies of long-term outcomes, to build the evidence base for their potential value.
- Make evaluation tools publicly available across programs to help create a culture of evaluation and standardize evaluation so that comparisons and field-level learning can take place over time.
- Assess the impact of guidelines developed to foster religious literacy curricula at the high school and higher education levels. This is an area needing greater follow-up research and exploration. Recommendations alone do not lead to change, even though they are a valuable foundational contribution.

Modeling Inclusive Action

- Pay attention to the *how* and not just the *what* when underwriting program development. Modeling respectful engagement of diverse ideas and enabling thoughtful discussion may be a critical component of educational efforts that advance not just the acquisition of religious knowledge, but the skills of citizenship in a pluralistic democracy.

- Be careful about positioning teaching about religions as a cure-all for bullying, bias reduction, and the need for better citizenship. It may be a component of these things, but being knowledgeable about religions does not alone lead to tolerance, respect, or pluralism.
- Explore extra-curricular programs at universities - in addition to degree and certificate programs - that offer exposure to academic and professional careers that would benefit from greater religious competency.

Public Dissemination of Religious Literacy Content

- Research centers are a bridge between the academy and community, especially through research translation. They can be trusted places for knowledge about religious communities and sites for engagement between different sectors like government, foundations, researchers, and community/faith groups. Invest in them to foster deeper understanding and engagement.
- Build a community of practice comprised of scholars and practitioners (including those who have developed paraprofessional training programs) who have pioneered this work but have largely remained in small, individually constructed networks.

New Media Recommendations

New media is an emerging content category with significant potential to expand access to content creation and make religious literacy content widely available to the public. We identified three primary areas for change within new media - breaking down barriers to content creation, amplifying organic voices, and funding strategies to develop effective new media content creation.

Breaking Down Barriers to Content Creation

- Make mini-grants to cover start-up costs for promising podcasts and YouTube channels to include equipment, transcription (for access and educational purposes), and production costs. As podcasts develop a following, make larger grants for audience development, research assistance, and production.
- Push greater diversity in podcasting by highlighting voices of women and people of color. Podcasting has the ability to amplify voices that currently are not highlighted or are overlooked. Pay attention to racial, gender, and religious diversity to enrich the voices in podcasting.
- For new media initiatives generated out of the academy, position podcasts as a form of public scholarship, not academic service. Universities need to value and support these efforts, and grant money in humanities and humanistic social sciences is limited, so even relatively small grants for public scholarship send a big signal of value to the academy.

Amplifying Organic Voices

- Pay attention to organic, user-created content on newer platforms like TikTok, where people may be exposed to religious content or explore values, even if content creators are not deliberately or explicitly promoting religious literacy.
- Curate religious literacy playlists on YouTube of current available content from multiple channels.

Funding Strategies to Develop Effective New Media Content Creation

- Fund content creation on single faith-specific platforms and programs that promote religious literacy and religious pluralism. An example is a program that honestly explains the central teaching of one religion without critique, derision, or the impulse to convert, on a channel or program run by a religious group of a different faith. Another example could be to fund a theological exploration of how a particular faith group grapples with religious diversity on a program for that faith group. This approach essentially embeds religious literacy and pluralism within trusted content with which the adherents to one tradition are familiar.
- Fund a study of user behavior, drivers, and needs to better advise content-creators on marketing and content creation. Religious literacy might not be a term used by content creators or users/searchers. Explore the content in the five thematic areas above to understand the landscape of content and create ways to get that content in front of audiences.

Journalism Recommendations

News consumption remains a primary mode of public information gathering. However, many newsrooms are underfunded, and religion-related stories are rarely highlighted in mainstream news outlets. We recommend democratizing the newsroom and mainstreaming religious literacy, with the goal of making newsrooms more religiously diverse, making publications more widely accessible, and making religious content more easily understandable for the general public.

Democratizing the Newsroom

- Support efforts to diversify newsrooms with programs like Report for America. Include religion as a component of diversity in DEI efforts.
- Underwrite subscriptions by smaller market papers to Religion News Service's wire to expand the market for religion stories.
- Enable professional societies to make their member databases searchable (on an opt-in basis) for journalists looking to source stories

Mainstreaming Religious Literacy

- Teach academics how to write for public audiences through programs like Sacred Writes and other organizations that partner with media outlets. Link researchers with networks like Scholars Support Network that provide editorial and placement support for popular writing informed by scholarship.
- Help religion reporters find story angles and sources through timely news alerts on religion-related topics through services like ReligionLink.

What is Religious Literacy?

At its most basic level, religious literacy is understanding religions' central teachings, rituals, practices, and organizations. Stephen Prothero, author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't*, notes that religious literacy “refers to the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life.”² Diane Moore, faculty director of religion and public life at Harvard Divinity School, argues that “a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social, and cultural expressions across time and place.”³

As Moore’s definition suggests, a generalized understanding of religions or rote knowledge of the elements of a given religious tradition is not usually what academics and advocates mean when they talk about religious literacy. There is an ethical dimension to religious literacy as well. Religion scholar Alan Levinovitz argues that “...true religious literacy requires engagement with the enormous variety of beliefs, practices, and motivations found in different religious traditions, and, for that matter, within a single tradition, or even a single church...” If religious literacy is defined in terms of uncritical familiarity with a single tradition, it will never eradicate the bias and narrow-mindedness that lead many adherents to assume that “features of one’s own tradition are essential to ethical behavior.”

Implied in this definition is the understanding that religious literacy is connected to religious pluralism - in other words, religious literacy is about understanding religions other than one’s own, for purposes other than personal conversion or proselytizing others. Tolerance, therefore, is a practical aspect of religious literacy as an ethical undertaking. That is, religious literacy assumes that one is not engaging in a deepened understanding of a religious tradition in order to convert, undermine, isolate, kill, or exploit religious others. The ethical dimension of religious literacy thus becomes clear: “It has been suggested that low levels of religious literacy are associated with distorted or erroneous beliefs about the characteristics of people of religions other than one’s own, potentially increasing racism, discrimination, and violence.”⁴ Ideally, by learning about other traditions, one is learning to respect people who are different from oneself and, in so

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2 Prothero, Stephen R. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know - And Doesn't*. HarperSanFrancisco. 2007. p. 16-17

3 Moore, Diane. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2007.

4 Ferman, D.M., Reeve, K.F., Vladescu, J.C., Albright, L.K., Jennings, A.M. and Domanski, C. "Comparing Stimulus Equivalence-Based Instruction to a Video Lecture to Increase Religious Literacy in Middle-School Children." *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, vol. 13,2, 360-374. Published 2019 May 9. Accessed 2021 Jan 19.

doing, bringing out the best in one's own tradition or ethical worldview. In this way, religious literacy is seen as a means to promote greater religious tolerance, understanding, and appreciation in the context of a diverse world and pluralistic democracy in the United States.

That hopeful behavioral outcome is far from a foregone conclusion. For some, religious literacy is seen as a means to combat religious intolerance, fear, or hate, based on the assumption that we can root out prejudice

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and violence through education. However, "learning more about Islam doesn't make people less Islamophobic," notes Megan Goodwin of the Sacred Writes program and co-host of the religious studies theory podcast Keeping it 101. While dispelling misinformation and providing accurate knowledge are components of prejudice reduction, they are not a substitute for tackling the systems that produce and reproduce privileges, injustices, and inequalities. Nor are they a substitute for changing behavioral norms by changing representation in media, improving multi-faith engagement, or supporting hate-crime prevention efforts, for example.

Improving Public Understanding of Religion

It is easy to draw a bright circle around content that is explicitly marketed as religious literacy and exclude information that is packaged in other ways. Doing so, however, would overlook valuable contributions of content that is framed in broader terms. As a recommendation to funders and practitioners, we believe that using both a narrow lens focused on religious literacy material and a broader view that also

encompasses adjacent content might be the most beneficial strategy to capture the full range of religious literacy content that is available to consumers and learners.

In fact, the term "religious literacy" might be too narrow to capture the elements that contribute to the goals of this work. We propose instead that we expand the scope of our resource analysis and gather content - including material explicitly categorized as promoting religious literacy - under the heading of "improving public understanding of religions." Working to improve the public understanding of religions to promote tolerance in religiously plural societies means not only utilizing content about individual religions. It also means understanding the categories and theories that help demarcate religions and the roles they play in the world, as well as developing the skills necessary to undertake this work in a meaningful way. Such a strategy can help to foster the knowledge, skills, and values that lead to productive engagement within and between religious communities.

It is important to emphasize that information about religions that is available through new media, journalism, and formal educational instruction is useful in building knowledge that supports harmony in religiously plural societies. Yet the availability of information alone is not sufficient to build a society that is tolerant, equitable, and just. Increasing knowledge does not on its own positively change behavior. Increasing religious literacy in a given population does not guarantee that mistrust, bigotry, and antagonism will disappear. As American society becomes increasingly diverse, further religious tensions are likely to emerge.

The Value of Religious Literacy Content

Religious literacy education, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels, has been assumed to be a valuable element when working to avert conflict and promote harmony in the U.S. context. Beyond basic literacy in the religions practiced by one's neighbors and fellow citizens, some form of "civic education" is

essential as well. As Levinovitz puts it, in such an education, “believers and non-believers are forced to think through the coherence and implications of their views.” In this ideal state, religiously literate individuals engage in meaningful encounters between groups, with an understanding of their shared values (interfaith literacy), thus empowering individuals (believers and non-believers, religious and nonreligious) to “participate meaningfully in religious inflected public debates” (Prothero). The assumption is that pairing religious literacy with self-reflective civic-mindedness and substantive engagement across differences will counteract the forces of bigotry, factionalism, and entitlement that undermine social cohesion. Essentially, these definitions posit that knowledge will produce positive behavior change.

Whether religious literacy and civic education actually produce this optimal state of affairs is hard to assess. In the two decades since the events of September 11, 2001, projects promoting religious literacy have proliferated among a small pocket of organizations and funders. Yet religion is still largely off the radar when it comes to conversations about diversity. At the same time, open hostility to diversity and inclusion has also grown, as the prominence of white religio-political nationalism and the events of January 6, 2021 demonstrated. The extent to which religious literacy alone promotes tolerance and social cohesion is therefore ambiguous.

Religious knowledge among Americans is generally very limited. Youth and emerging adults are no exception; in fact, a recent study (based on multi-decade longitudinal research) showed that young people, regardless of how religiously committed they were, had difficulty expressing what they knew about *their own* religion. Over the course of the longitudinal project, young people never showed any improvement in being able to articulate their own, let alone others’ religious beliefs. The authors Richard Flory and Melinda Denton offer three reasons for what they call this “inarticulacy of beliefs.”⁵ Their informants’ religious education was limited, and an overriding individualism among emerging adults meant that what “knowledge they do have is tailored to their own interests and needs.” Second, religion “competes with other responsibilities and commitments in their lives, offering less opportunity for them to develop a bank of religious knowledge.” Finally, the young adults in the study “see no need to develop well-articulated beliefs because their beliefs are just an intuitive part of the world in which they have always lived.”⁶

The study found similarly ambivalent attitudes among emerging adults toward politics. “Regardless of how they choose to identify politically,” Denton and Flory observe, “the overriding theme among the emerging adults in our study is that they are not particularly interested in or connected to politics.”

Given these trends against religious literacy and civic-mindedness among emerging adults, **further research is needed in order to test the assumptions’ underlying claims about the efficacy of religious literacy programs: Does religious literacy education help students become more informed citizens? What changes in behaviors and actions, and not just attitudes and perspectives, does religious literacy bring about? Can self-reflection, civic mindedness and meaningful engagement with religious “others” be taught at scale? All of this requires serious social scientific research to explore and assess.** Alice Chan, Inclusive America Project Religious Freedom cohort member and director of The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, explores these questions in her 2021 book, *Teaching Religious Literacy to Combat Religious Bullying*.⁷

5 Flory, Richard and Lindquist Denton, Melinda. *Back Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford University Press. 2020. p. 229-230

6 *Ibid*, page 242.

7 Chan, Alice. *Teaching Religious Literacy to Combat Religious Bullying: Insights from North American Secondary Schools*. Routledge. 2021.

Creating Systemic Change

Concerns about the potential limitations of religious literacy efforts are not raised to disparage these efforts but instead to avoid obscuring their value by overloading them with a burden of unreasonable expectations. Programs that emphasize individual knowledge acquisition about religions are important components of broader efforts to promote tolerance and social cohesion in pluralistic societies. Such programs will fall short of achieving those goals if they are not augmented with other strategies for social change. **For these reasons, we propose a closer examination of the specific sectors within which religious literacy is used to produce, reproduce, or erode religious inequality and religious power. We further recommend a special interest in supporting monitoring and evaluation efforts within these specific systems. Three such sectors are health care, education, and disaster response. In each of these, efforts exist to address specific, measurable issues related to religious literacy.**

Examples of this kind of sector-level thinking can be found in the initiatives of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, which designs training and educational resources about religion that are tailored for specific social sectors (schools, health care facilities, corporate workplaces, and conflict resolution spaces, for example). The outcomes of these initiatives are measured by examining short-term behavior change objectives that contribute to inclusivity and equality within a particular sphere. For example, religious literacy in schools is designed to prevent religious bullying in the classroom (including helping teachers to create inclusive classrooms). This strategy echoes comments made by Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst, Professor of Religion at the University of Vermont⁸:

Can Muslims really not know about broad trends and Christianity? Can a Muslim living in the United States truly not know what Christmas is in the way that Christians are allowed or secular atheists are allowed to not know what Ramadan is in the United States? Illiteracy is power. We work with K-12 organizations pretty intimately as consultants and curriculum partners and we ask them to examine their school calendars. Whose holidays get celebrated, who makes it to the district-wide calendar? You need to know how to ask the question of who's missing. It's okay if you don't know anything about the Hindu calendar, because you can Google. But if you can look at the school calendar and see that the only holidays that students have off are Easter and Christmas, you could ask how that came to be, how you can change that and how you can push for better inclusion.⁹

This objective of creating greater inclusion at the K-12 education level is different from the objective of teaching of religious literacy as foundational element of good citizenship. In fact, the Institute for Social Policy Research notes that 30% of bullying incidents against Muslims in K-12 schools are carried out by teachers or administrators.¹⁰ This raises the pressing need to ensure that schools and classrooms are not sites of harm, and might raise the need to examine assumptions that see schools as institutions that are poised to deliver important content.

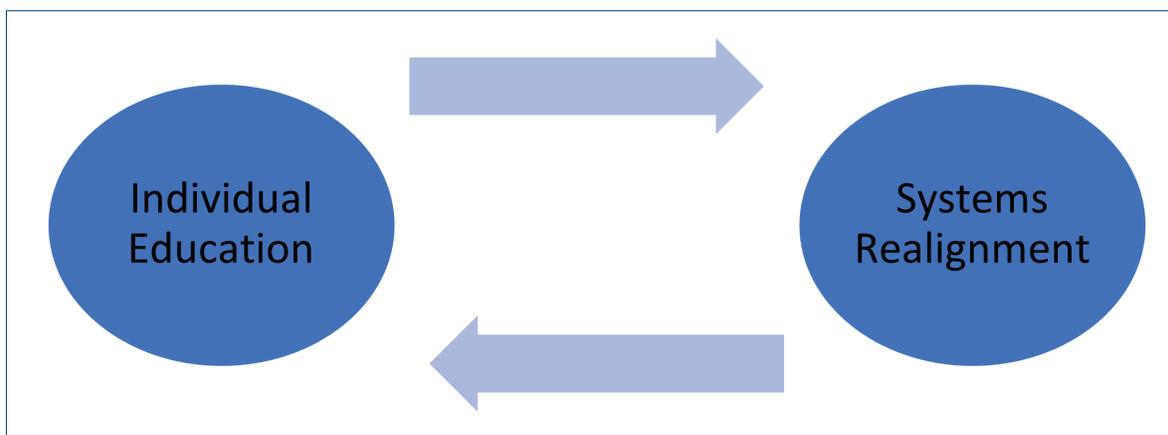
8 Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst is also an Inclusive America Project Religious Literacy cohort member. For more information on the list of cohort members, see appendix A.

9 Comments by Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Inclusive America Project, Aspen Institute, September 23, 2020.

10 Mogahed, Dalia and Ikramullah, Erum. "American Muslim Poll 2020: Amid Pandemic and Protest." *Institute for Social Policy Research and Understanding*. 1 Oct 2020.

Working in another arena, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture and the National Disaster Interfaith Network created educational and training materials to enable disaster and public safety officials to more optimally serve religious publics and to foster more diverse partnerships with religious communities (explored more fully in Appendix A). These materials fill a gap in public sector understanding of religions, which privileges Christian, white, and suburban congregations. Materials range from increasing public officials' understanding of how religious communities work and organize themselves, to practical information about serving populations from many different religious backgrounds or those who are humanist, atheist, or of no religion. It also includes guidance for government agencies on how to create effective partnerships with faith communities. Individual educational materials are available to help answer questions and empower individual actors with the knowledge they need to carry out their work effectively. The aim is to realign the system of disaster response to enable government and community collaboration to develop more equitably through planning, response, resource allocation, and strategies to serve the most impacted individuals and communities.

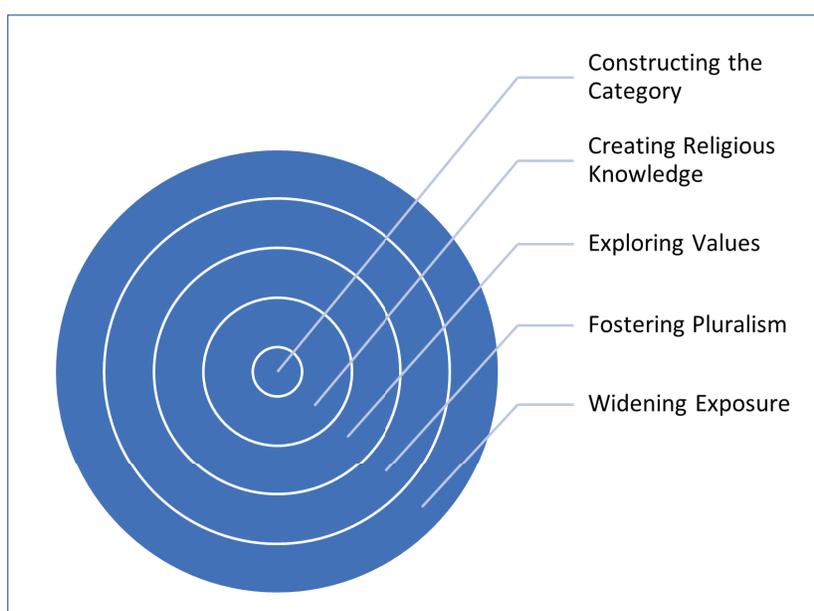
IMAGE A: ORGANIZATION



We advocate thinking about the ways in which we can make systems, organizations, and government policies more supportive of social cohesion in the context of a religiously diverse population. **This approach posits that sector-level-thinking needs to be prioritized in ways that change policies as well as institutional and organizational practices.** Within that larger process, individual knowledge acquisition is an important and reinforcing component. The two approaches amplify each other (see image A above) when they are within an organizational context. This stands in contrast to efforts in individual education to practice and strengthen the learning they have acquired. Those atomized or non-sector-focused efforts are likely to see reduced educational, attitudinal, and behavioral benefits than might otherwise be possible. This phenomenon is worth greater investigation, research, and evaluation.

Religious Literacy Content

Using a broader lens to understand the components that help religious literacy programs foster tolerance, understanding and mutual flourishing in the United States, we engaged in an extensive review of content and content producers in journalism, new media, and education to better understand the landscape. This exploration led to the need to develop thematic areas to help us understand the various elements of this work. Below we propose five thematic areas of content to illustrate how individual religious literacy, coupled with civic education that exposes individuals to the reality of religious pluralism, can help to promote social cohesion.



Constructing the Category: Content and producers working in this area aim to help people identify what religions are, the roles they play in the world, how to define them, and how to help others understand them. The podcast *Keeping it 101* is an example of religious literacy education content that enables people to cultivate a life-long appreciation for how adherents of religions inhabit the world. This is an essential prerequisite for improving public understanding of religion, providing an intellectual framework for engaging with people from diverse religious traditions, rather than focusing on abstract knowledge about particular sets of beliefs and practices.

Creating Religious Knowledge: There are podcasts, YouTube channels, apps, curricular materials, and online news sources that explicitly foster religious literacy. Examples such as the YouTube channel *Religion for Breakfast*, the *Disasters and Religions* app, programs such as those offered by the Tanenbaum Center, and outlets such as Religion News Service are explored in greater detail below. Content and producers working in this thematic area are focused on building materials for those who are looking for answers or guides to advance their religious knowledge. Many of the materials are explicitly packaged as religious literacy education. While this reservoir of content is well stocked, it is a relatively small niche within the larger ecology of online content and involves a relatively small constellation of content producers.

For individuals, a search for religious literacy content might grow from a desire to develop greater understanding of:

- 1) your own religious tradition;
- 2) a tradition you do not adhere to that you might want to explore or join;
- 3) ways to help religious “others” understand your tradition better:
 - a) so that they can join,
 - b) to decrease misunderstanding/hate/violence and increase acceptance and the religious freedoms your group is entitled to; or
- 4) a tradition that is not your own and that you have no interest in joining, which could be driven by:
 - a) personal relationships you have,
 - b) a place you work or that has professional significance,
 - c) the context in which you live,
 - d) external need, e.g., an event, a political occurrence, something that happens in culture, etc., or
 - e) general curiosity/desire to learn.

It is hard to assess how large or small each of these drivers is, how intensely the needs are felt, and what impact the drivers of religious literacy have on whether people actually become more religiously literate. One might assume that the profusion of religious literacy content is driven by market forces, but that may not be the case. Instead, the growth of religious literacy content may be driven by creators’ desires rather than consumers’ needs. For example, after 9/11, promoting religious literacy among the non-Muslim majority in the U.S. was seen as a way to foster greater acceptance of Muslims and other religious minorities in order to reduce the potential for violence and increase diverse religious actors’ engagement in the public sphere as equal participants.

Unlike market-driven content creators, many of the providers of religious literacy material see the lack of a market for religious literacy material as a problem to be solved rather than a deterrent to their ambitions. **The supply-demand forces in the religious literacy market merit further research in order for all stakeholders to understand what motivates people to seek religious literacy content, what terms they use when they undertake such a search, and the accuracy and usefulness of the information they encounter when they do.** It would also be valuable to learn whether - and under what circumstances - this type of information-seeking leads to broader and deeper engagement with religions. Such engagement might include efforts to change organizations and policies to be more religiously inclusive, or efforts to seek out or deepen relationships with people from different religious traditions.

Exploring Values: The 3rd rung of these explicitly labeled religious literacy materials is a larger universe of content that explores religious themes - particularly personal journeys of religious belief and belonging. These offerings include content from producers like SoulPancake on YouTube and news reports in legacy media that cover religious topics. These mainstream producers are often commercial enterprises rather than non-profits, which dominate the inner rings of religious literacy material production.

There are also materials that explore the values that undergird religious literacy--tolerance, mutuality, religious freedom, and equality, for example. Other materials explore the prosocial actions that religious literacy may encourage, including building strong democratic institutions, reducing hate crimes, and fostering empathy. There is a host of content in this thematic area, from commercial media outlets and niche, non-

profit creators like Krista Tippett, whose *On Being* forum has moved away from explicitly religious content to explore broader values and experiences that connect all people.

Fostering Respectful Pluralism: Some content supports interreligious activities and religious pluralism. These materials often have religious literacy components embedded within them, though in a larger context that focuses on shared action, mutual understanding, and relationship-building. This work represents an intersection between “values-exploration” and “religious literacy” materials. Programs and content in this area include interfaith programs for school-age students, like Los Angeles’s NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, which nurtures cross-school collaborations between Muslim and Jewish parochial schools as well as high school groups. College students are served by programs offered through offices of religious life or national networks like the well-known Interfaith Youth Core, based in Chicago. These programs include religious knowledge, breaking down barriers, skill-building, and leadership components. They often extend their efforts into media, like the “Two Faiths; One Prayer” YouTube viral video, which has more than 281,000 views. They also include programmatic and curricular works, and media that showcase interreligious engagement.

Widening Exposure: On the periphery are materials that explore religious themes or highlight beliefs, practices, and communities in ways that are ancillary to the central subject or story. Examples are podcasts like *Serial*, which made Adnan Syed and Rabia Chaudry household names for millions of listeners and that explored Muslim-ness in the context of a show that was about the injustice of the justice system. These “exposure” resources can also include educational materials that normalize the existence of religious minorities, like textbooks that feature Sikh or Jewish families when discussing non-religion-related topics. The light touch of these materials should not be discounted as they serve as an important normalizing force to advance public understanding of religions.

Content Provider Reviews

In the section below we offer a review of content providers in the three categories explored in this project.¹¹ CRCC researchers explored the categories of education, new media, and journalism, looking at who is producing content and the issues that the content addresses, with an eye toward leveraging this work to foster deeper understanding of religions and religious pluralism. Each section includes analysis and recommendations for furthering this work. A detailed list of content providers is available in Appendix B.

I. Education

Educational efforts to advance religious literacy run a broad spectrum from K-12 educational programs aimed at equipping school children with a foundational understanding of religions, university-based programs, courses, extracurricular activities, and research centers, along with professional development programs for specific industries to enable better work in a religiously plural context. These programs and organizations represent a serious investment in advancing religious literacy education, though most of them are individual efforts by single organizations or individuals within a larger setting. These efforts have limited connections to each other. Many of these efforts spring from their originators’ passion to fill an essential knowledge gap through their creative energy and often limited resources and investments. While these efforts run the gamut of the five thematic areas of religious literacy content outlined above, content providers in the K-12 space place a greater emphasis on fostering pluralism and exploring values through social-emotional learning. By contrast, higher education coursework and research programs stress category-construction and the creation of religious knowledge, with a lesser emphasis on fostering pluralism. Higher education extra-curricular activities tend to emphasize fostering pluralism, while paraprofessional programs center on the creation of religious knowledge.

¹¹ These three categories were noted as philanthropic priorities for the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

K-12 Education: Educational efforts include curricular development and teacher training to enable competent classroom engagement of supplemental social studies curricula that include world religions. In addition, there are also programs to train administrators, principals, and teachers in how to educate a religiously plural population and reduce incidents of religiously motivated bullying, prejudice, and violence. Grounded in the 1963 *Schempp v. Murray* Case in the United States Supreme Court, the common approach is to teach about religions rather than to teach people to be religious. According to Justice Tom Clark, writing for the court: “[I]t might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.”¹²

While the examples listed in the appendix are programs in the United States, the desire to increase tolerance through teaching religions in schools is a global phenomenon. "In the wake of 9/11, the 2002 and 2005 Bali attacks and the 2005 London bombings, there is a widely shared sense of urgency about promoting religious harmony and understanding through education. For example, the Council of Europe began to advocate the teaching of religious diversity in intercultural education across Europe as a direct response to 9/11."¹³ The United Nations General Assembly warns of rising religious extremism (UN General Assembly 2000), and UNESCO highlights schools as essential venues for educational initiatives to prevent religious intolerance.¹⁴

The most notable example of a K-12 intervention is detailed in Linda Wertheimer’s book *Faith Ed: Teaching about Religion in an Age of Intolerance*, which looks at a required world religions course in a Modesto, CA high school. This course was implemented after an outcry regarding LGBT bullying at schools that may have had its roots in conservative religious teachings. Under the banner of creating “safer schools,” the school board, community leaders, teachers, parents, academics from a local university, and outside consultants built a nine-week course that marries teaching about religions with civic education and respectful discussion. It may be hard to replicate a transformation at this scale across the country, especially given the context in which it was developed and the multi-layered approach - including a 30-hour teacher training - but the program is noteworthy nonetheless for its two-decade long run.

Higher Education: This field includes curricula like general education and introductory-level survey courses on world (or regional) religions as well as upper-division college courses that examine religious pluralism, such as a Stanford University seminar titled “Interfaith Dialogue on Campus: Religion, Diversity and Higher Education” or USC’s “Religion in LA” lower-division general education course that introduces students to religious diversity in a specific geographic area. There is also the stand-out program at the University of Vermont that hosts an innovative undergraduate certificate program in religious literacy. Unfortunately, UVM’s Department of Religion may be dissolved by the university’s administration as a cost-cutting measure. Again, these programs are not limited to U.S.-based institutions. Carleton University in Canada offers an M.A. in religion and public life which offers “the opportunity to examine the social, cultural and political aspects of religion in a variety of historical contexts from antiquity to the 21st century.”¹⁵ Sapienza University in Rome offers religious coexistence degree programs through the King Hamad Chair in Inter-Faith Dialogue and Coexistence and a similarly named center. The University of Washington’s Jackson School of International Affairs hosts a graduate certificate program on cross-cultural religious literacy that seeks to infuse an understanding of and competency with religious traditions for future global affairs leaders.

12 Poe, Marshall. "Colleges Should Teach Religion to Their Students." *The Atlantic*. 7 Mar 2014.

13 Tan, Charlene. "The Teaching of Religious Knowledge in a Plural Society: The Case for Singapore." *International Review of Education*. Vol. 54(2) 175-191. 2008. Accessed 19 Jan 2021.

14 Tan, "The Teaching of Religious Knowledge."

15 Carleton University (no author). "Religion in Public Life." (n.d.). Accessed 24 Feb 2021.

Higher education is not limited to formal courses in degree programs. There are also university-backed classes available to the general public or for a more tailored audience. These include Boston University's School of Theology lifelong learning program which offers online mini-courses for faith-based professionals. Yale University also offers two courses through the Open Yale portal on religious studies, HarvardX hosts several available through the EdX.org platform. Coursera, a large fee-based platform, has 2,149 course options available under the heading of religion from universities around the globe.

Higher education also houses co-curricular activities like the Comparison Project under the leadership of Timothy Knepper, a professor of philosophy at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. This public program weaves together photo-documentation, a lecture series, a youth leadership camp, and an Iowa-wide interfaith college conference. There are also offices of religious and spiritual life organized under the umbrella of the Association for College and University Religious Affairs (ACURA). Universities have begun to evolve chaplaincy offices that serve the student body into offices of religious and spiritual life. This shift began in the mid-1990s and has grown dramatically over the past two-and-a-half decades to accommodate and serve religiously plural student bodies. While much of the work of these offices is to serve the religious needs of adherents to particular religions, the offices often coordinate interreligious leadership councils made up of students, and occasionally faculty and staff. In addition, there is an implicit message of interreligious tolerance and pluralism when these offices are organized to regard each religious group that operates on campuses with a spirit of inclusion rather than to offer preferential treatment to a particular group.

Higher education includes a number of interdisciplinary research and training centers that tackle ongoing projects outside of traditional departmental boundaries to advance public understanding of religions and foster pluralism. Examples include the Harvard Pluralism Project, which began in 1991; the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, which began in 1994; and the Pew Centers of Excellence program, which funded and organized research centers on religions at prominent universities across the United States. It would be worth a post-funding review of this groundbreaking Pew program to glean learnings from this significant investment in university-based research centers 20 years after funding began (in 2002). The Boniuk Institute of Religious Tolerance at Rice University hosts a religious literacy curricular project that "promotes diversity and inclusivity education to help meet the demands of a global citizenry in a pluralistic democracy where mutual respect and tolerance are key to civility and participation."¹⁶ Many of these academic centers are a bridge between universities and their larger communities, serving as sites of engagement and translation in ways that traditional academic departments are not able to.

Paraprofessional training programs: These programs include groups like the Tannenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, which hosts training programs to promote a pro-social understand religious diversity and end religious bias as a form of workplace discrimination. The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation works to ensure that businesses are "faith-friendly" by providing tools, training, consultations, and certification to businesses. Also in this category are the training materials created by the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture and National Disaster Interfaith Network aimed at supporting the religious literacy and competency of disaster, public health, and crisis responders. Many of these materials were created in partnership with emergency responders and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure a wide distribution and adoption within the targeted user population and are part of an Emergency Management Institute course.

Discussion

While education efforts - from K-12 programs through higher education and paraprofessional programs - provide a solid foundation for more religious literacy programs, there has been little systematic analysis of their impact. Kate Soules, a researcher focusing on religious education, proposes a five-part evaluation tool for

16 Boniuk Institute (no author). "Religious Literacy, Tolerance, and Secondary Outreach: An Interview with Dr. Gayle Lasater Pagnoni." *Boniuk Institute for Religious Tolerance at Rice University*. 27 May 2020.

supporting the evaluation of school-based religious literacy efforts. The five parts include 1) Civic and Legal Literacy; 2) Religious Studies Knowledge; 3) Instructional Approaches; 4) Cultural Responsiveness; and 5) Self-Reflection. Evaluations using Soules' tool are not currently available, so it is unclear whether the materials mentioned above have produced the outcomes hoped for by funders and religious literacy proponents in this area (e.g. greater religious knowledge, increased religious tolerance, a more informed citizenry, strengthening of pluralistic democracy).

Curricular materials are often developed with an implicit understanding that “the more knowledge the better, without much of a framework for understanding what knowledge do different audiences need.”¹⁷ While there are curricular materials created for various educational levels from kindergarten through 12th grade, they would benefit from an increased dialogue between teachers, religious studies scholars, the state standards which govern many teaching choices, and the content providers/publishers of educational curricular materials. The American Academy of Religion worked to bridge this gap in 2010 with their Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools. These guidelines were adopted by the National Council for Social Studies in 2017¹⁸ as part of the Framework for Social Studies, which includes a “Religious Studies Companion Document.”¹⁹

These important initiatives have not included collaboration with the curriculum publishing world, which is an important component of the equation in the effort to scale-up religious literacy instruction. Curriculum publishers were not part of that working group and they have many cautions about the ability of curricula on religions to reach scale. David Weiner - CEO of Social Studies Services, Inc. - stressed that there is plenty of content that deals with religions in geography and history, and many skills and social-emotional learning opportunities for younger children that might contribute to the goal of fostering greater pluralism. He notes educational materials in individual K-12 level programs need to be standardized at the district and state levels. Current programs are largely targeted to high school students, but Kate Soules - the education researcher and curriculum developer - notes that many of the state standards would standardize this to the junior high level. Wiener cautions that adding another set of standards and assessments that are focused on building religious literacy may be a hard sell in an already crowded educational space.

Teaching about religions is particularly difficult for teachers, as Weiner points out. While there are efforts at social studies conferences to help teachers to teach religions better, it remains a precarious endeavor. Many teachers worry that one wrong lesson could derail a career. Teachers are accountable to standards, testing, parents, administrators, school boards, students, and their peers in the profession. Each group has its own concerns and priorities, which makes adding additional content challenging, especially when it can be controversial or where there are varied perspectives among the groups, which reinforces a prevailing reluctance to teach about religions. Understanding teacher concerns and barriers to teaching about religions is worth further exploration and research. These controversies are detailed in the above-referenced book *Faith Ed*.

Rather than underwriting disparate, ad-hoc initiatives or curriculum-development that may never be implemented by school districts, it would be better to **connect publishers with teachers, academics and education policy makers to highlight the gaps in existing religious literacy education standards, create a meta-catalogue of materials in different publishers' religious literacy catalogues, and make recommendations to publishers directly**. Weiner recommended a working group to engage with publishers toward these ends would leverage a collective desire to “get it right, and to do no harm” when it comes to deepening religious understanding.

17 Kate Soules, interview

18 National Council for the Social Studies (no author). "College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History." *National Council for the Social Studies*. (n.d.) Accessed 4 Mar 2021.

19 American Academy of Religion (no author). "Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States." *American Academy of Religion* (n.d.). Accessed 4 Mar 2021.

The American Academy of Religion in 2019 published guidelines to help institutions of higher education get it right when it comes to equipping graduates with the knowledge of how religion shapes the world and of how people shape religions.²⁰ The guidelines were developed by an impressive panel of experts co-led by Connecticut College's Eugene V. Gallagher and Harvard University's Diane Moore. **With the guidelines in place, it will be worth following how institutions of higher education respond, what changes are made, and what strategies might ensure wider adoption. This is an area needing greater follow-up research and exploration. As noted previously, recommendations alone do not lead to change, even though they are a valuable foundational contribution.**

Many of the activities in religious literacy curriculum development and research take place at private universities, with the certificate programs at the University of Washington and the University of Vermont being two notable exceptions (though, as noted above, the UVM religion department is currently facing possible dissolution). Private, non-sectarian universities may be better positioned to take up the mantle of building scholarship and teaching around religious literacy. The Pew Centers of Excellence program largely targeted private universities for its efforts in 2002. Private, religiously affiliated institutions may have their own barriers and assets when approaching this topic, while public institutions may face unique obstacles in this arena. Strategies tailored for each of these three types of institutions should be developed. Furthermore, not all private universities are amenable to teaching about religion. For example, a battle over religion in general education embroiled Harvard University in 2010.²¹

In addition to these considerations, the comparative impact of direct teaching vs. institutional realignment around inclusivity merits further research. As proposed earlier, the two strategies may reinforce each other, which would argue for a more holistic approach to religious literacy interventions in K-12 schools and higher educational settings. It may also be worth investigating whether teaching about religions is, in itself, an effective means of achieving the desired social changes that religious literacy proponents hope to advance.

It is also worth exploring whether initiatives to promote religious literacy in schools (K-12 or higher education) should prioritize training teachers and administrators on how to effectively teach and serve a religiously plural student body. As noted earlier, teachers and administrators can be the source of student bullying, thus raising concerns about their overall ability to serve a diverse student body and teach socially sensitive topics like religion. Training teachers and administrators to serve a religiously plural population might have a greater impact on how schools handle bullying, general ignorance, or even open hostility toward religious "others."

Teaching about religions should not be a substitute for other efforts to reduce bias, create tolerance, or foster respectful pluralism and discussion. Violence, bigotry, and ingroup/outgroup behaviors are not simply born of illiteracy, and efforts to increase knowledge on their own may fall short of changing attitudes - let alone behavior. As articulated by the Inclusive America Project's model of religious pluralism, greater exploration of the drivers of bigotry, intolerance, and violence are needed so that teaching religions can succeed in solving this complex set of individual, group, and cultural phenomena. A study of the Modesto School District's mandatory world religions course observed increases in tolerance, greater support for those being bullied, and a decreased likelihood that students would engage in negative behaviors toward members of other groups. While some of the increases were modest, and it is unclear whether the course will have a longer-term impact, the researchers theorized that the respectful engagement and discussion modeled in the classroom may be part of the key to producing these pro-social outcomes. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge about religion may be secondary to the practice of fostering respectful pluralism and discussion in a classroom as a means of advancing civic values.²²

20 This was funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

21 Miller, Lisa. "Harvard's Crisis of Faith: Can a Secular University Embrace Religion Without Sacrificing Its Soul?" *Newsweek*. 22 Feb 2010.

22 Lester, Emlie and Roberts, Patrick S. "Learning about World Religions in Modesto, California: The Promise of Teaching Tolerance in Public Schools." *Politics and Religion*. Vol 4(02). Aug 2011.

Finally, these efforts at religious literacy education are largely disconnected from each other. An important near-term step will be to help these groups coalesce into a field or a community of practice that contributes to like-minded efforts while promoting research, evaluation, best practices, and collaborative learning among practitioners. The work of the Inclusive America Project at the Aspen Institute is an early step toward this goal, but much remains to be done, which is explored later in this report.

II. New Media

With the democratization of media content development and ease of creation and distribution of materials, individuals shifted from being content consumers to also being content creators.²³ New media formats - including podcasts, YouTube channels, and social media platforms like TikTok - enable user-created content to compete with corporate, educational, and non-profit content.²⁴

Podcasts: Podcasts, a portmanteau of “iPod” and “broadcast,” are digital audio files made available for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically. Examples include podcasts created by traditional media companies looking to expand their formats, subject matter, and audiences. For instance, the “In Our Time” podcast by BBC Radio began as part of a weekly “In Our Time” radio series in 1998 and pivoted to include a podcast format in 2004 and deals with special topics on religion. Other podcasts are produced by creators who find a niche market for their unique contributions and reflections. It is hard to determine the measure of podcast success, especially in niche markets. One measure is reach; however, podcast numbers are not publicly available. The genre-defining podcast *Serial* had 250 million downloads for its first two seasons by 2017.²⁵ While not religious literacy content per se, *Serial*’s work falls into the thematic area of *Widening Exposure* for its story centering the potential wrongful conviction of a young American Muslim kid of Pakistani heritage from Baltimore and his advocate, Rabia Chaudry. Among niche podcasts exploring values-themes, there are podcasts like *Philosophize This!* which expound on religion-related ideas, falling into the *Constructing the Category* content area. *Keeping It 101* explores similar ideas and special topics within religious studies. A key measure of *Keeping It 101*’s success is the use of material from the podcast in college religion courses. *Keeping it 101* is similar to the *Classical Ideas* podcast hosted by Greg Soden, who delves into religious studies topics with a broad spectrum of scholars and religious figures.

YouTube Channels: Organizations or individuals can create a personalized channel where content they produce can be uploaded, curated, searched, and reviewed by other YouTube users. It also is a way to monetize content creation through the popularity of channels and individual videos. However, building and growing a regular following can be difficult without the time and energy to put into planning, research, and professionalization. As with podcasts, both traditional media companies as well as individual and non-profit content creators use the YouTube platform for their content. *SoulPancake* embeds religious themes in some of their content, which falls under *Exploring Values*, *Widening Exposure* and *Fostering Pluralism*, depending on the episode. Their 3.5 million subscriber base, actor Rainn Wilson’s fame, and the backing of Participant Media enables high-production quality for an audience that might not be explicitly searching for religious literacy content but find it nonetheless through this vehicle. *Jubilee*’s YouTube channel has 6.2 million subscribers and juxtaposes people with diverse opinions in conversation with each other. Their content might be more about *Exploring Values*, *Widening Exposure*, or *Fostering Pluralism*, depending on the episode, than about *Creating Religious Knowledge* - though, as noted in the Modesto study above, the modeling of respectful discussion across

23 Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. NYU Press. 2008.

24 It should be noted that there is plenty of religious content on new media that is focused on believers or aimed at proselytizing. These types of content might work against the aims of education and knowledge for non-proselytizing purposes and serve as a sort of competitor to religious literacy types of new media sources.

25 Spangler, Todd. "The 'Serial' Team's New Podcast, 'S-Town,' Tops 10 Million Downloads in Four Days." *Variety*. 31 Mar 2017.

disagreement may have a positive impact on reducing bias and creating tolerance and prosocial behaviors. Other YouTube channels like those in the TED series (TED, TEDx, TED-Ed) are rich with material on religions, spirituality, and questions of morality, ethics, and pluralism.

TikTok: a personal video sharing platform for short videos (initially they were limited to 15 seconds because of music licensing restrictions, though now they are no longer than one minute, with a three-minute upper limit being explored). Many of the videos are lighthearted entertainment fodder for influencers, but there is a surprising amount of content that offers a glimpse into content-creators' religious lives. While much of the religion content on TikTok is for confessional or conversionary purposes, there is also a sub-genre of videos that help demystify religions, such as Toiby Hayes' @toibycontinued (54.3K followers), produced by a 24-year-old Orthodox Jewish woman to offer "this sneak peek into what it's like to be Orthodox" and correct misconceptions.²⁶ TikTok content tends to fall into the area of *Widening Exposure*, offering brief windows into users' lives.

Discussion:

Across new media platforms, much of the religious literacy content is fleeting. That may be because there is a disconnect between those who would like people to be more religiously literate and the populations who have only limited interest in the topics. Many religious literacy new media efforts, including podcasts and YouTube channels, fail after the first season and flounder in terms of professionalism and regularizing content uploads and format. Some are only single videos with limited reach, and a few make it to virality, which is measured by the swiftness with which a video reaches a certain number of views and shares within a given week. Audience numbers are not a proxy for impact or value, though they tell a partial story about the market for a particular channel, program, or podcast. **Capturing how educators use these materials in their teaching is an important component of understanding their impact, possibly extending their audience reach numbers exponentially while demonstrating scholarly and educational value.**

The media environment is saturated with podcasts, so content may have a hard time finding audience traction, especially in light of the uncertainties detailed above. High-quality new media requires funding for better production values, audience development, and cross-promotion activities. Content creators like the two professors behind *Keeping It 101* are able to leverage active social media engagement to drive audiences to their new projects. In addition, as an educational tool, podcasts need to have accompanying transcription so that educators can use them as part of their syllabi. Resources are needed so that promising podcasts and YouTube channels can develop their material, professionalize their production, and grow their audiences through high-quality content and marketing.

Podcasting and YouTube success often amplify voices of white men content creators and hosts. There are many new media creations by women and people of color, as the start-up costs are relatively inexpensive compared to other platforms. But these voices need support in order to gain traction and a following, let alone have the time to devote to content creation and professionalization.

A lot of new media content is religious-literacy adjacent, but is not framed as such, falling into the categories of *Exploring Values*, *Fostering Pluralism*, and *Widening Exposure*, rather than into more explicitly religious areas like *Constructing the Category* and *Creating Religious Knowledge*. There is a lot of religious literacy content buried in non-religious literacy marketed shows, podcasts, and videos. **Using a broader understanding of content that advances public knowledge about religions--like the five thematic areas proposed in this report, rather than a strict definition of religious literacy--would enable funders and content producers to create a larger reservoir of materials that advance these goals. These materials could include media that encourage religious tolerance, empathy, open-mindedness, and pluralism.**

26 Jaradat, Maya. "Can TikTok Bring Gen Z into the Fold?" *Deseret News*. 21 Nov 2020. Accessed 19 Jan 2021.

Religious groups develop a significant amount of content, primarily for their own following, but also to help demystify their groups to outsiders. Podcasts like Mormon Stories are first and foremost about enabling members of the LDS church to understand themselves better. They might have a secondary function of enabling outsiders to gain an understanding of the LDS church from the perspective of insiders. Other religious podcasts like Reclaiming my Theology and #YourTorah are aimed at helping the faithful expand their understanding of their religious tradition by offering counter-narratives that upend the hegemonic and traditional teaching or expand the voices of women and people of color in areas of theology and religious study. While these fall outside the scope of religious literacy work because they are aimed at fostering personal religiosity or conversion, it is important to note the role they play in diversifying the landscape and understanding of religions.

There is a surprising amount of content that advances public understanding of religion on TikTok and other social media platforms,²⁷ driven by individual influencers seeking to explain their religions and experiences to their audiences. If TikTok is providing some level of exposure to religious issues, themes, beliefs, or practices, it would be worth further analysis to understand this phenomenon. If there are particular TikTok influencers whose religious content is high quality and developing a following, it may be valuable to think about other existing platforms, including podcasts and YouTube channels, where they can be featured to bring their audiences richer content that deepens their religious literacy.

This points toward another area for investigation: **Content creators and funders need to know more about individuals' religious literacy needs, searches, content consumption, and other issues. Understanding whether individuals have religious literacy needs at all, if they do, who are they and what do they need, if the needs lead to other searches**

or investigations, may help develop content not out of a desire to teach what content creators view as important but what content consumers are eager to know. This lack of knowledge about what drives the search for religious literacy content may make it seem as though the quality content that is being created is ignored because of a lack of interest in religions. That may not be the case. It could be that content searchers do not find content that is available because they use different search terms to try to find it. Or they may have episodic needs rather than a stable interest in religious literacy. Knowing more about these consumer dynamics could drive content production that is user-centered rather than creator-centered.

Academics who use new media, including social media, to advance public understanding of religions do so often at great personal and professional risk, especially if they are women, people of color, or adherents to religions other than Christianity. Developing materials for public consumption or participating in public discussions in online forums can lead to death threats, harassment, and pressure on universities to curtail the voices of these public figures. It is important to remember that not only do these academics create valuable content at great personal risk, but also that this type of public engagement may not lead to recognition by universities for the purposes of tenure or professional advancement. **Universities, professional societies, and funders need to support public scholarship, especially through these new media outlets by mitigating the risks to those who engage in the work and by rewarding outstanding contributions.** Until they do so, this work will remain under-leveraged in terms of its potential impact.

Using a broader understanding of content that advances public knowledge about religions--like the five thematic areas proposed in this report, rather than a strict definition of religious literacy--would enable funders and content producers to create a larger reservoir of materials that advance these goals. These materials could include media that encourage religious tolerance, empathy, open-mindedness, and pluralism.

²⁷ Jaradat, Maya. "Can TikTok Bring Gen Z into the Fold?"

III. Reporting/Journalism

The successes and challenges of religion coverage in American news media are well documented in both popular and scholarly literature. A good resource for understand the history of reporting across an array of religious traditions is the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*, edited by Diane Winston, Knight Chair in Media and Religion at USC and a former program officer who spearheaded the Pew Centers for Excellence program (mentioned above in the higher education section).

Foremost among the challenges of religion reporting is the imperative to write stories that invoke strong emotions like anger, shock, or fear in audiences - if it bleeds, it leads. This kind of reporting can literally distort reality for news audiences, as had become abundantly apparent during the Trump presidency and especially after the assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Nick Street, a senior writer at CRCC, explored this phenomenon for Nieman Reports in the aftermath of the San Bernardino shootings in 2015.²⁸ News media coverage of the actions of the two Muslim shooters dramatically overshadowed coverage of the 1,000 Muslims who gathered on the steps of Los Angeles City Hall to protest the shootings a week later. This distortion in coverage of American Muslims reinforced a broader media narrative that magnifies the sensational actions of a tiny minority and largely obscures the peaceful lives of the vast majority.

Offering a corrective to this kind of distortion in media coverage of religion is one aspect of the mission of Religion News Service (RNS).²⁹ In addition to reporting and commentary, RNS provides a syndicated wire to enable smaller news outlets with limited reporting staff to use RNS stories. **Helping RNS expand its subscriber base is a funding opportunity for philanthropies, which could underwrite subscriptions to the RNS wire for cash-strapped outlets, thereby broadening the audience for RNS's religion reporting. As journalism seeks to revive and revamp local news outlets, philanthropy might help build audiences for religion-related news by underwriting the subscription costs for RNS's service so that local outlets and RNS can mutually strengthen each other.** This type of local audience cultivation could also be paired with Report for America, which places journalists in local news outlets.³⁰ In addition, RNS could be a location for internships on religion reporting for younger journalists as well as seasoned journalists who would like to expand their reporting repertoire.

There is a need to diversify newsrooms across the country, which includes not only racial and gender diversity but also a diversity of religious identities and knowledge about religions, which would enrich the analysis and broaden the types of subjects that get covered. The push for greater diversity, including religion, could be fostered by philanthropic efforts to create pathways for underrepresented groups to gain access to early career opportunities and internships. Enabling a more diverse newsroom could also create a richer and more nuanced picture of how religions show up in the public square, people's lives, and in a broader array of news stories.

While on-the-job training opportunities are important, ensuring religious literacy and religious diversity could begin earlier in journalism programs, where the ins and outs of religion reporting could be embedded in general coursework as well as in specialty courses that include field reporting. This was something attempted by the Pew Centers of Excellence funding of University of Missouri's Center for Religions, the Professions, and the Public under the leadership of Debra Mason. This is also what the Knight Chair program of the Knight Foundation pursued in endowing a chair at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School. There are also other notable locations producing excellence in the field like The Scripps Howard Program in Religion, Journalism, and the Spiritual Life at Columbia University headed by Ari Goldman.

28 Street, Nick S. "The Invisible Muslims." *Nieman Reports*. (n.d.)

29 It would be worth conducting a review of the religion content of news media, magazines, and online content. That was beyond the scope of this report. It should be noted that there are many excellent examples of mainstream journalism covering religion topics and subjects. There are also blogs and religion-focused niche magazines and digital resources dedicated to advancing the public understanding of religion.

30 Kille, Sam. "Report for America Announces More Than 300 Reporter Positions in 2021." *Report for America*. 8 Dec 2020.

When journalists write great stories that include religion, that reporting should get its own spotlight, building on the AAR's recognition of outstanding journalism through its \$1,000 award for excellence in reporting. Creating the equivalent to a Pulitzer Prize in religion reporting (which Pulitzer itself could be encouraged to create) would demonstrate the value in the field of journalism of religion reporting. A prize of this caliber would also help newsrooms develop a pipeline of stories and invest the resources needed to create higher-quality religion reporting, especially at legacy media outlets. While less well-known, the Wilbur Awards from the Religion Communicators Council "recognizes the work of individuals, production companies and agencies as they communicate about religious issues, values and themes with professionalism, fairness, respect and honesty" since it was first inaugurated in 1949.³¹

Journalists are only one side of the story for improved coverage. Academics who study religions remain largely under-tapped, both as potential interpreters of religion stories and as op-ed writers. Professional societies like the American Academy of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion³² could create searchable databases of their memberships and other journalistic resources to connect academic research and scholarship with the journalists who might benefit from easier access to these experts.

There have been several attempts to harness the knowledge of academics for broader audiences, including training programs to enable scholars to engage in public scholarship and media more effectively. Publications like *The Conversation*, which opened its US offices in 2014, are outlets for scholars to do public scholarship and translate their research for popular audiences. Scholars need support in order to make this transition from traditional publication to work in the public square. It is important, therefore, to **train scholars on how to engage in research translation and in public scholarship through programs like Sacred Writes at Northeastern University**. Sacred Writes "funds collaborations between media outlets interested in producing more nuanced content on religion, and scholars committed to communicating more clearly with non-specialists." These partnerships can take a number of forms, including (but not limited to): journalist/scholar co-reporting; scholars providing research and context for an investigative reporting series; or scholars producing original pieces for the media outlet in their area of expertise.³³ Another option for scholars engaged in public scholarship are groups like Scholars Strategy Network, which works with researchers on topics of civic importance, including religion, to shape and place their work in newspapers and magazines. These efforts help public scholarship and research translation find a larger platform and wider audience reach.

As another bridge between the academy and journalists, Religion Link sends timely source alerts about topics and potential experts on religion-related stories to journalists and media. Expanding and underwriting Religion Link's ability to do this would vastly improve reporting on tough, timely religion-related stories.

These efforts collectively would benefit from greater investment so they can scale services, diversify newsrooms and reporting, cultivate religion audiences in local papers, and enable a better bridge between academics and journalists.

31 Religion Communicators Council (no author). "Wilbur Awards." *Religion Communicators Council*. (n.d.)

32 Brie Loskota, one of the authors of this report, is an elected member of the SSSR Council and chair of the communications committee.

33 Sacred Writes (no author). "Media Partnerships." *Sacred Writes: Public Scholarship on Religion*. (n.d.). Accessed 4 Mar 2021.

Moving from Networking to Collaboration: The Work of the Aspen Institute's Inclusive America Project

All the work detailed above represents significant energy and creativity aimed at advancing the public's understanding of religions. These individual efforts are contributions to the Inclusive American Project (IAP) at the Aspen Institute's understanding of religious literacy. Religious literacy itself is one of several interdependent systems of work that enable religious pluralism.



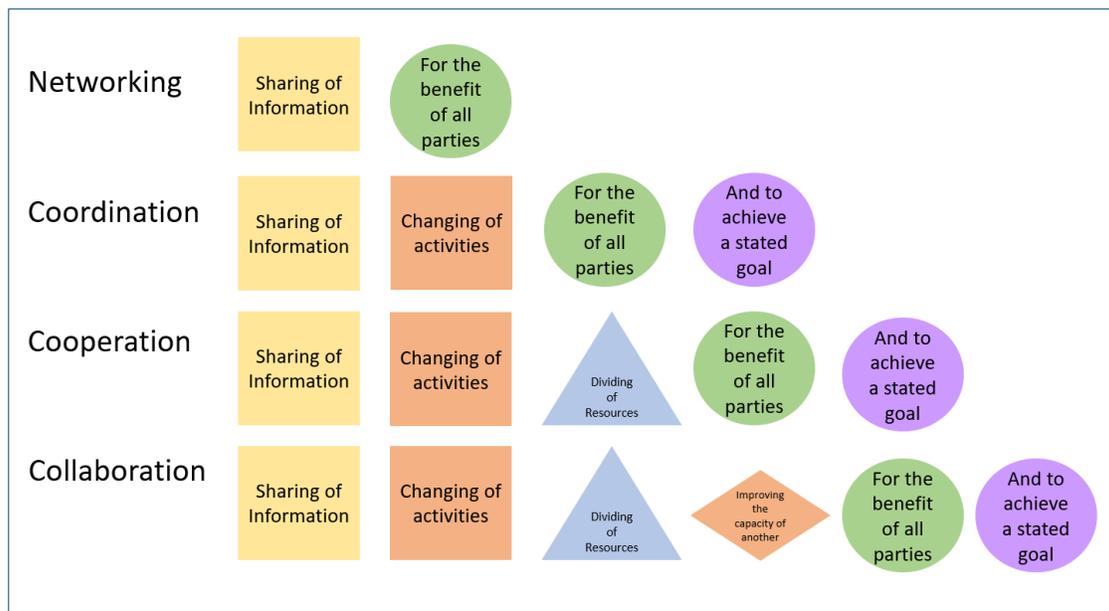
1 IAP's description of the system of religious pluralism encompassing seven related but distinct fields of work.

As noted in the IAP primer, *Many People, Many Faiths, One Nation: A Primer on Religious Pluralism*, “religious pluralism is a vision of the world where diverse religious communities and non-believers engage with each other in beneficial ways, maintain their distinct identities, and thrive and defend each other’s right to thrive.” Literacy is linked to this goal, insofar as “religious pluralism relies on individuals’ having a basic understanding of religions, which allows citizens to engage more effectively and find common values with people of all faiths and no faith.” The primer further notes, “It is everyone’s responsibility to have a certain level of religious literacy or knowledge about the basic tenets of the world’s major religious traditions.”

However, as noted above, having information alone does not change behavior. Further, individuals alone do not change cultural and societal norms, which must happen in order to arrive at a vision of pluralism. The Inclusive America Project is working systematically to build strong, diverse, and connected networks of leaders in each of the component systems of religious pluralism, including religious literacy.

In fall of 2020, the Inclusive America Project convened a series on “Mapping the Field(s) of Religious Literacy,” meant to bring greater coherence to the many efforts being undertaken by academics and other religious literacy content producers. This convening brought together 40 leaders from academia, the nonprofit sector and philanthropy from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom - all of whom were leading efforts to foster religious literacy and competency among a wide variety of audiences (see Appendix A). These attendees made up the second cohort of IAP’s Powering Pluralism Network. A full accounting of the convenings is in Appendix B.

Prior to the IAP meetings, the attendees each had smaller personal networks with some of the group members. The IAP meetings helped lay the foundation for these individual communities of colleagues and friends to widen into a larger professional community of shared interest. During the convenings, there was a clear appetite to move from a set of individualized networks into a larger network encompassing all the parties. It also became clear that while networking was an attractive first step toward greater impact, IAP could facilitate even deeper coordination, cooperation, and ultimately collaboration on several projects. The graphic below represents a visual depiction of the spectrum of collaborative engagement. On the most basic level, networking focuses on sharing information to benefit the members of the group. Each subsequent level requires greater commitment from participation, culminating in collaboration, which entails a capacity-building and enriching component.



Visualization by Sharon M. Wasco (2018).³⁴

During the convening series, cohort members identified several gaps in the field and started ongoing working groups to address them.

Project #1: Mental Health Resource Hub

Cohort members identified the field of mental health as an area for which religious literacy resources are needed. Project leads Dr. Melissa Borja and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt are collecting a set of resources that will be made available to the public on IAP’s website and potentially via mental health professional associations.

34 Vaca, Sara. "CP TIG Week: Commitment to Collaboration by Sharon Wasco." *American Evaluation Association*. 25 Jul 2018.

Inadequate religious literacy is a hindrance in providing efficient mental health care where specific religio-cultural issues may be at hand. Dr. Borja uncovered the case of a Hindu refugee who was a strict vegetarian and who was set up to work a job in a meat processing plant. Given his refugee circumstances, he couldn't turn down the job. The work was profoundly spiritually upsetting for the man, and the resettlement sponsors sent him to a psychiatrist. None of them realized that he was upset because the work violated his religious beliefs. Such instances clearly indicate a need for a hub for religious literacy resources for mental health professionals.

Although there are an increasing number of resources about mental health targeted at faith leaders, there are few religious literacy resources for mental health professionals. Brandeis University's Chaplaincy Innovation Lab has initiated one project training geriatrics practitioners in spiritual care for the elderly and another preparing chaplains to tackle mental health challenges faced by college students, but do not exactly address the specific challenge of religious literacy. This proposed resource hub will fill that gap.

Project #2: Evaluation Tools

Given the reality noted at the start of this report that religious literacy has been burdened with expectations of broad, cultural behavior change, it is not surprising that the topic of impact evaluation came up multiple times over the course of the convening series. IAP members asked questions such as "Does more knowledge actually decrease violence?" and "How are we making sure that our religious literacy efforts are actually working in the world?" Members identified monitoring and evaluation as an underdeveloped yet critically important subject area within religious literacy. Project leads Dr. Mark Fowler and Dr. Kate Soules are researching some of these questions and will provide a concise set of recommendations that would advance the fields of religious literacy.

The project is identifying a baseline understanding of what the field looks like today by taking the original survey responses about impact evaluation from the Inclusive America Project's autumn 2019 convening as a snapshot of some of the leading views and approaches to religious literacy in the U.S., and adding a set of case studies. The project will write a set of recommendations to better integrate monitoring and evaluation within religious literacy efforts.

The audience for this evaluation research report will be practitioners in the diverse fields of religious literacy. This could include:

- University professors who lead religious literacy certificate programs for undergraduate students;
- Nonprofit leaders who work with K-12 teachers to build religious literacy among young students; and
- Grassroots organizers who are organizing religious literacy initiatives in their local communities.

Precisely because religious literacy is often tasked with broad cultural outcomes, the need for standards of goals, monitoring, and evaluation in this field is urgent. This project, stewarded by the Inclusive America Project, has the potential for significant impact on the field itself.

From Collaboration to Field-building

These efforts portend a positive future in which greater impact might be achieved. One way to think about these efforts are as the foundational work of building a field. The Bridgespan group was asked by the James Irvine Foundation to articulate an approach to assessing the strengths and needs of a field. They developed the Strong Field Framework, which is designed explain the various components that are needed to develop a field and to help "improve the overall infrastructure of a field, enabling the organizations within it to achieve greater social impact. The rising tide—in the form of support for weaker organizations, filled gaps in service,

enhanced understanding of peers working towards the same or similar goals, and improved communication and coordination throughout—lifts all boats. Importantly, however, the goal of field-building is not to make each organization follow the same strategy or approach; rather, it is to enable a variety of organizations to operate and collaborate more effectively, whether their efforts center on specific aspects of the field or are more broadly focused.”³⁵

The Strong Field Framework explains how individual efforts can be coalesced into something larger than the sum of its constituent parts, in line with the work of the Inclusive America Project to create networks, increase member capacity, and steward collaboration. A shared identity is necessary and serves as a way to orient the field to shared values and purposes. The field requires codification and standardization of practice as well as a knowledge and evidence base collected and available across and beyond the field. Leadership, constituency building, funding support, and public policy that will facilitate this work and remove barriers to its implementation are also important. When applied to the work of religious literacy, each of these areas is in their early stage of development. A strategic plan, sustained leadership, and funding support are required to build a robust field on the foundations laid by the current IAP cohort of religious literacy leaders.

Shared Identity
Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values

Standards of Practice	Knowledge Base	Leadership and Grassroots Support	Funding and Supporting Policy
Codification of standards of practice Exemplary models and resources (e.g., how-to guides) Available resources to support implementation (e.g., technical assistance) Respected credentialing/ ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders	Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes Community of researchers to study and advance practice Vehicles to collect, analyze, debate, and disseminate knowledge	Influential leaders and exemplary organizations across key segments of the field (e.g., practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers) Broad base of support from major constituencies	Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices Organized funding streams from public, philanthropic, and corporate sources of support

³⁵ The Bridgespan Group (no author). "The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact." *The Bridgespan Group*. 8 Jul 2009.

Conclusion

The recommendations embedded within the report above focus on the opportunity to move religious literacy efforts by individual creators to a more connected body of work that understands the needs and drivers of potential users, seeks to realign systems and organizations rather than meet individual educational/informational needs, and creates structures of support across a spectrum of content production in education, new media, and journalism.

Whether these efforts will coalesce into a field remains to be seen and depends on continued investment of time and resources. Field-building is a long-term strategic investment requiring a willing group of organizational and individual collaborators, funding to underwrite the efforts, and political capital to push for the necessary changes and remove the barriers that inhibit the work. It requires funders working to advance the field and bring other funders to the table, enabling them to see the intersections with their work and creating an environment of abundance and cooperation, rather than scarcity and competition, among grantees.

Appendix A

Religious Literacy Meeting Participants



Nicole Bibbins Sedaca
Professor of the Practice of International Affairs
Georgetown University

Prof. Bibbins Sedaca serves as the Deputy Director of Georgetown University's Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) program. She also serves as the Co-Chair for the Global Politics and Security Concentration and is a Professor in the Practice of International Affairs in MSFS.



Melissa Borja
Assistant Professor, American Culture
University of Michigan

Dr. Borja is Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan, where she teaches and researches about Asian American life, especially in relation to religious pluralism and church-state relations in the United States.



Wendy Cadge
Professor of Sociology, Director
Brandeis University Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab supports research, teaching, and the provision of spiritual care in a range of settings. The Lab fosters research and its practical application to improve the provision of spiritual care for all. They host a wealth of data on the profession, provide practical tools, and offer educational resources to advance the important work of spiritual care providers.



Meghan Campbell
Program Associate
Fetzer Institute

Meghan Campbell is a Program Associate for the Fetzer Institute's Spiritual Transformation team. Her work includes projects collaborating with those who are bridging differences within American democracy, religious communities, innovative forms of spiritual community and practice, among others.



W.Y. Alice Chan
Executive Director, Co-Founder
The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy

W. Y. Alice Chan, PhD, is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy. To learn more about her and her work, visit <https://ccrl-clrc.ca/alice-chan>.



John Churchill
Director of Programs
Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

Dr. John Churchill leads the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations' grantmaking activity spanning the five Program Areas of Private Higher Education, Public Media, Interfaith Leadership and Religious Literacy, Palliative Care, and Environmental Engagement, Stewardship, and Solutions.

**Joyce Dubensky***CEO Emerita, Senior Strategic Advisor***Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding**

Tanenbaum's CEO Emerita, Joyce Dubensky, Esq., has directed its dramatic expansion, adding new initiatives to each of Tanenbaum's core programs. As CEO for 18 years, her dynamic leadership transformed Tanenbaum from a well-regarded U.S. institution to an internationally recognized thought leader.

**Mark Fowler***CEO***Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding**

Rev. Mark Fowler is responsible for the fulfillment of Tanenbaum's mission to combat religious prejudice, promote justice, and build respect for religious difference. Rev. Fowler is a sought-after keynote speaker and facilitator in all of Tanenbaum's core areas, and has addressed organizations globally on issues of equity in religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

**Tim Gaydos***President***Together Washington**

A native of the Pacific Northwest, Tim is passionate about serving the City of Seattle and building meaningful relationships with people in this great city. Tim is the co-founder of Together Washington, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization.

**Mary Ellen Giess***Vice President of Strategic Initiatives***Interfaith Youth Core**

Mary Ellen Giess is Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at Interfaith Youth Core. Over the course of her twelve-year tenure, Mary Ellen's work has included partnering with the Obama administration on the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, managing a historic research collaboration exploring religious diversity on college campuses, and co-editing a book on religious diversity in student affairs.

**Susan Hayward***Senior Advisor***United States Institute of Peace**

The US Institute of Peace is an independent federal institution that produces research, tools, and supports direct action to prevent and resolve violent conflict. For over 30 years, USIP's Religion program has sought to understand the religious dimensions of conflict and peace and provide tools and resources to better enable effective and inclusive religious engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

**Shirah Hecht***Research Manager***Chaplaincy Innovation Lab**

Shirah Hecht, Research Manager at CIL, is a sociologist of religion, applied researcher, and teacher in the topic areas of Jewish life, non-profit work, research methods, and program evaluation. At one time she created a multi-faith conference on women in American religion (May 2000) and she has explored many sides of conventional and new developments in religious organizational life.

**Shirley Hoogstra***President***Council for Christian Colleges & Universities**

The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities is the leading national voice in advancing the work of Christian higher education. They seek to advance the common good through the influence and witness of faith and academic study.

Dennis Hoover

Editor

The Review of Faith & International Affairs

**Timothy Knepper**

Professor of Philosophy, Director

Drake University Comparison Project

The Comparison Project is a set of initiatives at Drake University (Des Moines, IA) in the practice of comparative philosophy of religion, the understanding of local lived religion, and the cultivation of interfaith literacy and leadership.

**Farhan Latif**

President

El-Hibri Foundation

Farhan Latif is the President of the El-Hibri Foundation, focused on cross sector approaches to foster inclusion across religious and political divides. His work focuses on investing in Muslim leaders in partnership with allies to build capacity and resilience.

**Brie Loskota**

Executive Director, IAP Fellow

USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture

Brie Loskota directs the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture. Her research focuses on how religions change and make change in the world. She is also the co-founder and senior advisor to the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute and serves as the implementation partner for the United States Institute of Peace's Generation Change program.

**Benjamin Marcus**

Fellow

Freedom Forum

Benjamin P. Marcus is a Freedom Forum fellow. From 2017-2020 he served as the religious literacy specialist with the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum, where he developed religious literacy programs for public schools, universities, businesses, and government organizations.

**Bruce McEver**

President

The Foundation for Religious Literacy

H. Bruce McEver is President and Co-founder of The Foundation for Religious Literacy and Chairman and Founder of Berkshire Global Advisors. Bruce funded Harvard University's Business Across Religious Traditions program (BART), and he has worked on Religious Literacy initiatives with Harvard Divinity School and between Georgia Tech and Emory University.

**Mahan Mirza**

Executive Director, Teaching Professor

University of Notre Dame Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion

Established in 2017 and inaugurated in 2018, the Rafat and Zoreen Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion is dedicated to studying, learning from, and collaborating with religious communities worldwide. A vital part of the University of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs, the Ansari Institute's wide-ranging work includes research, teaching, outreach, and interaction with religious communities, faith and civic leaders, academics and journalists, and the general public.



Mohammed Mohammed
Senior Program Officer
Fetzer Institute

Mohammed works to advance reconnaissance and probe the unknown in the course of the Fetzer Institute's programs and partnerships, which can span various topics from civic virtues and American democracy to social teachings of the faith traditions and social transformation.



Scot Montrey
Senior Advisor
United States Agency for International Development



Diane L. Moore
Director, Religious Literacy Project
Harvard Divinity School

Diane L. Moore is the founding director of the Religious Literacy Project, a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of World Religions, and a Faculty Affiliate of the Middle East Initiative. She focuses her research on enhancing the public understanding of religion through education from the lens of critical theory.



Steve Moore
Executive Director
M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust

Steve is the chief executive officer of the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust. He is responsible for all programs and activities of the Trust. Steve joined the Trust in 2006 after serving in senior leadership positions at Asbury Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Seattle Pacific University, Texas Tech University, and Texas Tech Wesley Foundation. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and is a widely published author and frequent speaker at colleges, universities and conferences.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst
Associate Professor of Religion, Associate Director, UVM Humanities Center
University of Vermont

Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Ph.D., is an associate professor of religion at the University of Vermont, where she teaches and researches about Islam, race/racialization, and the history of religion. She has authored or edited numerous books, articles, and essays and hosts the Keeping It 101: A Killjoy's Introduction to Religion Podcast.



Michael Murray
President
Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

Michael is the President and CEO of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and Senior Visiting Scholar in Philosophy at Franklin and Marshall College.



Chris Seiple
Senior Fellow for Comparative Religion, Principal Advisor
University of Washington, Templeton Religion Trust

Dr. Seiple is the Senior Fellow for Comparative Religion at the Jackson School of International Studies. He is widely known and sought after for his decades of experience and expertise regarding issues at the intersection of geopolitics, US foreign policy, Asia, conflict resolution, human rights and religion. He has pioneered innovative solutions in the U.S. Marine Corps, at the U.S. State Department, the Templeton Religion Trust, and as the president of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE).

**Neelima Shukla-Bhatt**

Professor, South Asia Studies
Wellesley College

Neelima Shukla-Bhatt is a Professor of South Asia Studies at Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, who teaches courses on religions and cultures of South Asia. She has worked extensively with institutions and organizations focusing on religious pluralism, religious literacy, and interfaith dialogue in USA, in Jerusalem, and in India.

**Simran Jeet Singh**

Visiting Professor, Columnist
Union Seminary, Religion News Service

Simran Jeet Singh is a Visiting Professor at Union Seminary, Senior Fellow for the Sikh Coalition, and a columnist for Religion News Service. He is a 2020 Soros Equality Fellow and author of the new children's book, "Fauja Singh Keeps Going."

**Michael Skaggs**

Director of Programs
Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab brings chaplaincy leaders, theological educators, clinical educators, and social scientists into a research-based conversation about the state of chaplaincy and spiritual care.

**Hugo Slim**

Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict
Oxford University

The Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) is part of the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. They explore if and how we can research the relevance of beliefs of all kinds in the conduct of war and humanitarian action.

**Kate Soules**

Director
Religion & Education Collaborative

Dr. Kate E. Soules is an education researcher and curriculum developer specializing in religious literacy and teacher education.

**Roy Speckhardt**

Executive Director
American Humanist Association

Roy leads and is author of the primer for the largest humanist organization in the nation, representing those who strive to be good without a god by emphasizing empathy and reason and the compassion and egalitarianism that flow from them. While educating its members on many aspects of humanism, his organization advocates for humanists in the courts, legislature, government agencies and the general public.

**Laura Tavares**

Program Director, Organizational Learning and Thought Leadership
Facing History and Ourselves

Facing History and Ourselves is a global education non-profit. We use lessons of history to challenge teachers and students to stand up to bigotry and hate. Our approach to humanities education helps young people become more equitable, engaged and responsible decision-makers who will build more just and inclusive societies.

**Hicham Tiflati**

Regional Director (Quebec)
The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy

Hicham is a researcher and a practitioner who has been working with the Muslim community for over a decade. He is a humanities professor at John Abbott College and a chargé de cours at Bishops University. He has taught Arabic and Islamic studies for many years, and has been working closely with families and close friends of Canadians who joined ISIS.

**Asma Uddin**

Fellow
Inclusive America Project

Asma T. Uddin is a religious liberty lawyer and scholar working for the protection of religious expression for people of all faiths in the U.S. and abroad. Uddin has worked on religious liberty cases at the U.S. Supreme Court, federal appellate courts, and federal trial courts.

**Amanda Vigneaud**

Policy and Research Specialist
United States Agency for International Development

**Nathan Walker**

Managing Director
The Foundation for Religious Literacy

Rev. Dr. Nathan C. Walker is the executive director of 1791 Delegates, managing director of The Foundation for Religious Literacy, and founder of ReligionAndPublicLife.org. He has published five books, including The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Education, and he teaches First Amendment and human rights law at Rutgers Honors College.

**James Walters**

Senior Lecturer in Practice, Department of International Relations
London School of Economics

James Walters is founding director of the LSE Faith Centre and LSE Religion and Global Society. Since opening in 2014, the center has developed programs to promote religious literacy, interfaith leadership and a better understanding of religion-related conflict among the LSE's diverse student body, in government and among wider global publics.

**James Wellman**

Professor and Chair, Comparative Religion Program
University of Washington

James Wellman is Professor and Chair of the Comparative Religion Program in the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. In 2017, he received a Five-Year Term Professorship in Global Christianity; this professorship supports his recent initiative to create a Center of Global Christian Studies in the Jackson School. He is also the director the new Carnegie grant on Cross Cultural Religious Literacy. His areas of expertise are in American religious culture, history, and politics. He also works on and teaches in religion and global issues, particularly related to religious violence, human security and US foreign policy.

Appendix B

Religious Literacy Content Creators

Education

K-12

American Academy of Religion- Created a working group and guidelines for teaching about religion in K-12 public schools in 2010. <https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/Teaching-and-Learning-/Teaching-about-Religion-in-K-12-Public-Schools.aspx> These contributed to the NCSS adoption of guidelines for social studies (see NCSS entry below).

Religious Freedom Center- sponsored several state-level 3Rs (Rights, Responsibility and Respect) Project. One in California and one in Georgia's 3Rs. The CA project was active in 2007 though when it began is unclear. The <http://ca3rsproject.org/> website remains live. The Religious Freedom Center website features the Georgia 3Rs program <https://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/programs/educators/the-georgia-3rs-project/>. *These 3Rs projects are not to be confused with the 3Rs Project (Rights, Respect, Responsibility) from Advocates for Youth which teaches honest, accurate information about sexual health for all grade levels. <http://3rs.org/3rs-curriculum/about-3rs/>

Modesto Unified School District's required 9th grade world religions course which began in 2000. The only such course in the US. It was created in response to a serve bullying incident which helped to galvanize support for the course under the idea of creating safer schools. This course has been evaluated by Professor Emile Lester (College of William and Mary), the subject of academic research by Patrick Roberts (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) and documented by Linda K. Wertheimer in her book *Faith Ed: Teaching about Religion in an Age of Intolerance*.

National Council for the Social Studies- (NCSS) strongly encourages that the study of religions should be included as an essential part of the social studies curriculum. NCSS recommends that every public school district adopt clear First Amendment policies on teaching about religions, and parents and students should be informed about why the **school** is teaching about religions, how it will be done, and its importance. In 2017, NCSS adopted guidelines for teaching about religions in schools which were developed out of a teach-led initiative at Prospect High School in Illinois, and supported by the Religious Freedom Center and the American Academy of Religion. <https://www.socialstudies.org/about/academic-study-religion-added-social-studies-guidelines>

Higher Education

Course Work, Specializations, and Certificates

The American Academy of Religion- created religious literacy guidelines for what two- and four- year college students ought to have learned in their college studies about religions. <https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/Teaching-and-Learning-/AAR-Religious-Literacy-Guidelines.aspx>

Harvard Divinity School and Harvard Extension School- sponsor a Religious Studies and Education certificate program consisting of five courses taken through HDS or Harvard Extension School. <https://hds.harvard.edu/academics/nondegree-programs/religious-studies-and-education-certificate>

Stanford University EDUC 436: *Interfaith Dialogue on Campus: Religion, Diversity, and Higher Education* <https://explorecourses.stanford.edu/search?view=catalog&filter-coursestatus-Active=on&q=EDUC%20436:%20Interfaith%20Dialogue%20on%20Campus:%20Religion,%20Diversity,%20and%20Higher%20Education&academicYear=20182019>

University of Southern California REL 141g *Global Religions in LA*- this course is a lower division general education course that is also an on-ramp to the religion major. It orients the students to religious diversity in the context of a global city.

University of Vermont- offers an undergraduate certificate in religious literacy for professions consisting of three 100 level courses, including REL 105 "Religious Literacy" <https://www.uvm.edu/cas/religion/certificate-religious-literacy-professions>

University of Washington- hosts a graduate certificate in cross-cultural religious literacy in their Jackson School of International Studies consisting of three courses and a capstone policy proposal strategy memo. <https://jsis.washington.edu/religion/international-policy-institute/>

Co-curricular/extra-curricular higher education programs- Programs at institutions of higher education that engage students and the larger public in topics to expand religious knowledge and understanding.

The Comparison Project- Under the leadership of Timothy Knepper, a professor of philosophy at Drake University, this public program brings weaves together photo-documentation, a lecture series, a youth leadership camp, and an Iowa-wide interfaith college conference.

Souljourn; Interfaith Council and Scholars- are projects of the USC Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. Souljourn takes USC students on experiential visits to the religiously diverse congregations surrounding the USC campus. The Interfaith Council is a body of student representatives of religious groups on campus that engage in leadership and interreligious learning.

Interfaith Youth Core- works primarily on college campuses to build interfaith leadership of today's American students so that they can become tomorrow's interfaith leaders. Their view is to build interreligious cooperation as a norm, a generally accepted way of operating, for religious individuals and groups in the US. They work with students, faculty, and administrators, and have an increasingly large online media presence with their Interfaith America series.

Interfaith Council of Vanderbilt University <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/religiouslife/programs-revised/interfaith-and-non-sectarian-connection/interfaith-council/> An example of how higher education offices of religious and spiritual life (see below) organize activities to foster interfaith connection on campus. Many universities have similar structures.

Offices of Religious and Spiritual Life- Organized under the umbrella of ACURA, Universities have begun to shift chaplain offices that serve the student body to offices of religious/spiritual life. This shift began in the mid-1990s and has grown dramatically over the past two and a half decades to accommodate and serve religiously plural student bodies. While much of the work of these offices is to serve the religious needs of adherents to particular religions, the offices often coordinate interreligious leadership councils made of up students, and occasionally faculty and staff. In addition, there is an implicit message of interreligious tolerance and pluralism when these offices are organized to treat each religious group that operates on campuses in a spirit of inclusion rather than preferential treatment for a particular group.

The Leadership and Multifaith Program (LAMP)- is a collaborative effort of The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts at Georgia Institute of Technology and Chandler School of Theology at Emory University. Focusing on encounters in local, regional, and global spaces, this initiative focuses on the complexities of life, work, and leadership in a

world where many faith traditions converge dynamically in the geopolitical realm. While the Candler School of Theology contributes expertise in Christian encounters with diverse religious traditions, The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts brings expertise in robust cross-disciplinary and cross-arena engagements. Both institutions have shared goals of **interrogating critical elements related to leadership, civic engagements**, and the intersections of faith through various curricular programming and multifaith public events.

Research Centers and Programs

Center for Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Understanding at Queens College- is a diversity education center at Queens College that provides nonviolent communications tools to undo bias, find common ground, move forward with personal growth, and work with others to effect positive social change.

Pluralism Project- Housed at Harvard University, the Pluralism Project studies and interprets the changing religious landscape of the United States. Since 1991, they have conducted research in collaboration with students and individuals in the field as well as in partnership with religious communities and interfaith organizations. Current research initiatives include case studies, interfaith infrastructure, and mapping Boston. The Pluralism Project also creates media and websites to facilitate engaged learning about religious diversity and interfaith relations, and hosts symposiums and gatherings to connect scholars, activists, and communities.

Harvard Program on Religion and the Professions (formerly the Program on Religious Literacy)- The Religious Literacy Project, created at Harvard Divinity School, has a mission of advancing the public understanding of religion with special attention placed on power, peace, and conflict. Partaking in various resources and training vehicles for educators and other professionals, they explore the complex roles that religions play in society. Their various projects focus on the training of secondary and community college educators, how mass media and entertainment shape public understanding of religion, the complex role of religion in the Middle East, and the investigation of ideas that shape society.

The Pew Centers of Excellence Program- while no longer in operation, in 2003, the Pew Charitable Trusts engaged in an ambitious funding program to create or expand centers on religion at universities throughout the US. Pew funded ten research centers including NYU's Center for Religion and Media, USC's Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Missouri's Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public, Emory's Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion, Yale's Center for Religion and American Life, Penn's Center for Research on Religion and Urban Society, Princeton's Center for the Study of Religion, University of Virginia's Center on Religion and Democracy, Notre Dame's Erasmus Institute, and Boston University's Institute of Religion and World Affairs. Some of the centers are no longer operational. The University of Missouri created a Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public in 2003 with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts. In 2007, it changed its name to the Center on Religion and the Professions. According to a post on their name change- "the Center's multidisciplinary outreach programs support the philosophy that as America grows more religiously diverse, professionals in all fields need to better understand the religious traditions and beliefs of the public they serve." It was part of the Pew Centers of Excellence program and there may be lessons worth noting about that program for future funding focusing on higher education centers and research institutes.

The Polis Center, IUPUI has a long-running interest in the intersections of religion and culture in America. The center created a series of curricular materials that can be adapted for various grade levels about the ways in which religion has influenced American society; core concepts in religion like sacred space, memory, texts; and a high school documentary project about the roles of religion in Broad Ripple, Indiana.

Religion and Public Life Program, Rice University <https://rplp.nice.edu/> - A research center at Rice University focusing on using social science to engage in rigorous research about religions, and to use that knowledge to break down barriers and build collaborations across religious differences. The program also hosted the Religion Unmuted podcast.

Paraprofessional training- These programs work to help specific disciplines or job functions that are considered critical for serving people of all religious backgrounds with the skills and understandings necessary to do so equitably.

Tannenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding- programs for understanding religious diversity and ending religious bias in the workplace discrimination. In addition, they have a specialization on equipping health care professionals to serve a religiously diverse patient population through consultations, a SimClinic, and educational materials.

Religious Freedom and Business Foundation- works to ensure that businesses are “faith-friendly” by providing tools, training, consultations, and certification to businesses. They offer a pledge to protect workplace religious freedom and expression, and a workplace religious literacy training program.

University of Southern California Center for Religion and Civic Culture and National Disaster Interfaiths Network- created a series of materials to support the religious literacy and competency of disaster, public health, and crisis responders. They include tip sheets, a field guide, a primer, classroom education, a Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency course (EMI IS-505), and the Disasters and Religions free app available on Google Play and the Apple App Store. The backbone of disaster response in the United States is religious communities who play a role in organized disaster planning, response and recovery through their non-profit disaster human services organizations, volunteers, and local congregations. The sector is largely made up of Christian organizations organized under the umbrella of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, though efforts at increasing the diversity of NVOAD members organizations to include American religious minorities has been underway and show great promise. However, these organizations and the public-sector emergency responders do not receive any training or support to serve and partner with a religiously plural population or with peer organizations within the NVOAD umbrella. These materials were created in partnership with emergency responders and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure a wide distribution and adoption within the targeted user population.

II. New Media

Podcasts

The Classical Ideas Podcast https://twitter.com/Classical_Ideas

- Greg Soden.

Essential Conversations with Rabbi Rami

<https://www.spiritualityhealth.com/podcasts/essential-conversations>

- Rabbi Rami Shapiro.
- Interviews spiritual teachers, health experts and others from Spirituality & Health Magazine.

Everything Happens Podcast <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/>

- Kate Bowler.
- Discusses the hardships of life and talks to guest speakers about what they've learned in their trials and tribulations of unfortunate situations they've been in. She discusses lessons learned from these events.

In Our Time: Religion <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01gvqjg>

- World Religions has uploaded episodes since February 1999 and has continued to upload several episodes a year.

Interfaith Matters <https://interfaithcenter.org/podcast/>

- AJ DeBonis.

Keeping it 101 keepingit101.com

- Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst and Megan Goodwin.

The Ministry of Ideas <https://www.ministryofideas.org/episodes>

- An initiative of the Harvard religious literacy project, is a podcast dedicated to spotlighting and investigating ideas that shape society.
- Each 15-30 minute long episode traces the history and development of one idea, and its contemporary implications.
- Ideas that have been featured include cannibalism, transhumanism, and secular salvations.

Multi-Faith Matters <https://www.multifaithmatters.org/podcast>

- A Christian podcast about multifaith engagement.

Oh No, Ross and Carrie! <https://ohnopodcast.com/>

- Ross Blocher and Carrie Poppy.
- Began in 2011 exploring extraordinary claims of mainstream and new religious movements and spiritualities.

On Being <https://onbeing.org/series/podcast/>

- Krista Tippett.

Philosophize This! <https://www.philosophizethis.org/>

- Stephen West.

Religion Unmuted <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/religion-unmuted/id1531024320>

- Elaine Howard Ecklund and Pamela Prickett.
- Focuses on women, religion and public life and launched in 2020.

The Religious Studies Project <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/>

- Sharing scholarly research and perspectives on religious studies since 2012 in over 300 episodes released weekly.

The Spiritual Edge <https://spiritualedge.org/>

- Julie Silber.
- New podcast in partnership with KALW San Francisco, and sponsored in part by the Templeton Religion Trust and USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture.

Straight White American Jesus <https://anchor.fm/straightwhiteamericanjesu/support>

- Bradly Onishi and Daniel Miller.
- Explores how evangelical Christianity operates in the US cultural and political landscape.

Theology Matters <https://www.ctinquiry.org/podcast>

- Josh Mauldin.

Unholier than Thou https://crooked.com/podcast-series/unholier-than-thou/?fbclid=IwAR2wtSvj1OBBRdEoquSiSI_FZmMhpDcAsxHumSdibSCfh_ka6G3e58MeG9Y

- Phillip Picardi.
- Explores how religions and spirituality intersect with timely topics.

World Religions, Cults and The Occult – Audio <https://www.audible.com/pd/World-Religions-Cults-and-The-Occult-Audio-Podcast/B08JJMKL3F>

- Billy Crone.

YouTube Channels

Jubilee

- Jubilee has over 600 videos and has been consistently uploading videos since January 2010.
- Subscriber Count: 5.69M subscribers
- Apr. 5, 2019: Do All Christians Think the Same? | Spectrum
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQHMB7V9LtE>
- Dec. 16, 2018: Can Scientists and Religious Leaders See Eye to Eye? | Middle Ground
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3fBWRol7Fs>
- Jul. 7, 2019: Do All Muslims Think The Same? | Spectrum
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sABZy7OwRI>

Religion for Breakfast

- Religion for Breakfast is an educational channel that consistently uploads videos to promote religious literacy to the general public.
- 2-3 videos are uploaded per month, still uploading videos consistently right now.
- Subscriber Count: 178K subscribers
June 21, 2016: Gospel of Judas: What Does It Really Say? 1.8M views
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Tv2vY3ga3g

SoulPancake

- SoulPancake has over 1500 videos and has been consistently uploading videos since August 2008.
- Subscriber Count: 3.37M subscribers
- Aug. 12, 2019: Muslim Americans Bust Myths About Their Faith | Truth or Myth
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBN_SJMdErc
- Aug. 14, 2017: Would You Date Someone From A Different Religion? | Tell My Story
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QQ0Lv4_--4
- Oct. 16, 2020: Can Religion + Science Agree on Anything? | Big Questions Small Spaces
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRtmNOBPnJ4>

TED, TED-Ed and TEDx Talks

- TED has 19.2m, TED-Ed has 13.6m and TEDxTalks has 30.5 million subscribers to their YouTube Channels.
- TED started in 2006. TED-Ed has nearly 1,800 videos and began on YouTube in 2011. TEDx created a YouTube Channel in 2009 and features content from TEDx events around the globe. They have 5.5billion views for their videos.
- July 21, 2015: What Islam Really Says About Women, Alaa Murabit via TED, 3.2m views
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEtryXmpDl8&t=47s>
- Nov. 14, 2013: The Five Major World Religions, John Bellaimy via TED-Ed, 7.8m views
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6dCxo7t_aE&t=37s
- December 19, 2012 The Roots of Religion, Genevieve Von Petzinger via TEDx, 789,978 views
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Zgwz_m7sRs

III. Journalism

100 Questions and Answers About Muslim Americans <https://www.amazon.com/Questions-Answers-Americans-Islamic-Holidays-ebook/dp/B00PUW3W58/> This is a guide designed by the Michigan State University School of Journalism to replace stereotypes and bias with factual and clear information about Islam and Muslim Americans. It addresses common questions about culture, language, social norms, politics, and religious practices that individuals and groups may have. Some examples include “Who is Allah?”, “What does Islam say about Jesus?”, and “Is the Nation of Islam the same as Islam?”

The Conversation <https://theconversation.com> – An online magazine that works with scholars at universities to translate their research to a public audience. They include editorial support and solicit publications on timely topics, as well as accept unsolicited submissions. They have publication partnerships with other popular outlets that pick up pieces from the Conversation and republish them for even broader readership.

GetReligion <https://www.getreligion.org/> GetReligion is a blog dedicated to improving the quality of religion coverage in news by focusing on how mainstream press covers religion in politics, entertainment, business, and sport.

Religious Communicators Council (RCC) <https://religioncommunicators.org/religious-literacy/> - began to make religious literacy a priority at the 2015 Alexandria Convention. RCC is an association that recognizes the prominence of religion in everyday life and they utilize its interfaith members to help the secular media understand diverse faith dynamics. They make a continuous effort to provide resources to their own members so they understand other faith traditions besides ones they are familiar with. They also house the Wilbur Awards for reporting on religion.

Religion Dispatches <https://religiondispatches.org/> Religion Dispatches is a digital magazine that covers critical issues at the intersection of religion, politics, and culture. They make an effort to emphasize the difference between “covering” religion and promoting, preaching, or practicing it.

ReligionLink www.religionlink.com - Provides news alerts with links to experts who could serve as sources for Journalists on religion topics.

Religion News Service - provides high - quality religion-focused journalism

Religion Unplugged is part of TheMediaProject.org and is a non-profit online magazine featuring religion stories, commentary, and reporting.

Scholars Strategy Network <https://scholars.org/> - is a network that connects journalists, policymakers and civic leaders with researchers to improve policy and contribute ideas to the public square that strengthen democracy.

SacredWrites <https://www.sacred-writes.org> – A program out of Northeastern University funded by the Henry Luce Foundation that equips religious scholars with the skills to do public scholarship for popular press and other media outlets.

World Religious News <https://www.worldreligionnews.com> Daily religious news updates regarding a wide range of religion. Blog posts, videos, photos, and opinions are posted daily covering 24 different religious groups.

News coverage also highlights religions around religious events and celebrations including NBC News' coverage of the Hajj during Covid19 where Muslims used face masks and experienced a scaled down version of the pilgrimage. <https://www.nbcnews.com/video/muslims-arrive-in-mecca-for-annual-hajj-pilgrimage-amid-coronavirus-restrictions-88511557864>

There is a large focus on religion-related topics in the niche area of foreign affairs and international relations, in particular on Islam and Muslims. Foreign Affairs has three such stories “Islamist Foreign Policy in Sudan: Between Radicalism and the Search for Survival” Sharfi details Sudanese foreign policy during the past 30 years, focusing on the first decade of the Islamist regime that came to power in 1989. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2020-08-11/islamist-foreign-policy-sudan-between-radicalism-and-search> “The Pandemic Tips the Balance Between Mosque and State”

For Saudi Arabia and Egypt, a pretext to crack down. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-08-13/pandemic-tips-balance-between-mosque-and-state> and “The Mosque, the Dam, and Erdogan’s Widening Culture War” The battles over two cultural sites show Erdogan’s commitment to pugilistic nationalism. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2020-07-31/mosque-dam-and-erdogans-widening-culture-war>

Domestic coverage also highlights contentious issues in religion, particularly in light of Church/State legal battles, again most recently related to Covid19. For example, this story by NBC News “U.S. Supreme Court denies Nevada church’s appeal of coronavirus restrictions” where Calvary Chapel Dayton Valley argued that the 50-person cap on worship services amid the pandemic was unconstitutional. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-supreme-court-denies-nevada-church-s-appeal-coronavirus-n1234913>

Other

[Public Campaigns/Celebrations](#)

Charter for Compassion <https://charterforcompassion.org/> (Golden Rule Day; Cities of Compassion) - The Charter for Compassion is an organization that aims to establish and sustain cultures of compassion locally and globally through a wide and diverse range of sectors, including business, education, and healthcare. Mainly, the organization works with cities to identify issues that may be making their communities uncomfortable places to live, and supplies resources and information to create more compassionate spaces. The organization also helps to coordinate Golden Rule Day, a celebration on April 5 of the “Golden Rule”: treat others and the planet as you would like to be treated. On Golden Rule Day, people from around the world address how people, organizations, and governments can use this principle to create a better world for everyone. Since Golden Rule Day was officially declared by URI-Africa and Interfaith Peace-building Initiative in 2007, about 700 organizations in 165 countries have joined in proclaiming the Day.

The Day of Religious Pluralism <http://www.dayofreligiouspluralism.org/> (Los Angeles, Atlanta)- The Day of Religious Pluralism celebrates the diversity that strengthens religious communities. It recognizes that many communities derive their values and their desires for uplifting all of humanity from various faith traditions, spiritual practices, and other moral teachings. First conceived by a group of leaders committed to upholding the shared ideals and

virtues that guide and strengthen societies around the globe, these shared values are able to reflect compassion, service, cooperation, and help to strengthen religious and social identities. Religious pluralism encourages dialogue to alleviate fear, hostility, and divisiveness arising from ignorance. This group of leaders work across various forms of religion, civil society, government, and philanthropy, collaborating to articulate the values underpinning religious pluralism and develop a specific methodology for bringing this work to cities.

Spirit and Place Festival <http://www.spiritandplace.org/> - Spirit in Place is an annual festival in Indiana that supports conversations about religion, values, meaning, and the human condition. Through a jury-selected process, groups submit ideas for events, exhibits, and other explorations to the festival for inclusion. Annually the festival reaches 20,000 people. It is an example of an ongoing program that has religious pluralism baked into its DNA.

Youth Programs

Cub Scouts Coexist <https://tfrl.org/grantees/scouts/>

The Boy Scout of American Greater New York Councils (GNYC), The Foundation for Religious Literacy, and 1791 Delegates have partnered to develop the nation's first Cub Scouts Coexist program to address the widespread problem of illiteracy about religion and the law. This program was intentionally designed to teach leadership skills by preparing scouts to be leaders in diverse school and work environments, character building by teaching tolerance and mutual understanding, and the development of social skills by learning to relate with people with a wide range of religious and non-religious identities. With the mission of teaching scouts to serve others in the spirit of recognizing shared rights, Cub Scouts Coexist promotes the spirit of citizenship and takes on the responsibility to protect those rights for people outside of themselves.



INCLUSIVE AMERICA PROJECT

 THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

www.aspeninstitute.org/IAP