

Interfaith Civics
University of Denver
First Year Seminar [Fall 2024]
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Course Description:

Chances are you don't share your religious neighbor's views and values. You might even find some of them offensive. So now what? In this course, we explore religious diversity within liberal pluralist democracies and the challenge of upholding religious freedom while preventing religious overstep. The course also helps students explore and refine personal habits and concrete best practices around interfaith bridge-building and ethical civic leadership—including the ability to listen to understand and dialogue across difference, as well as opportunities to participate in campus Spiritual Life projects cultivating interfaith literacy and religious inclusivity.

We engage political theory and challenging case studies. And we consider the “lived feel” of a healthy liberal democratic approach to neighborly coexistence: Is it about agreeing to disagree or finding our way to deep kinship? Is it about tolerance, respect, or something more (or less)? Is it about friendship or responsibility? And we ask these questions while cultivating a spirit of “hard hope,” an ability to stick up for what we believe in and work across difference without erasing— but also without necessarily embracing—the neighbors we like least.

The class is structured as an active learning lab where we work together to build and solve. We will host a Spiritual Supper Club, an exciting ConnectEffect event, and an award-winning documentary; we will get intergenerational and interconnector best practice training, and we will lead and join intergenerational conversations with fellow Denver-ites and local civic orgs. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to provide input, direction, and leadership in a number of Spiritual Life activities, including student-facing tip sheets and learning materials, a “spiritual storytelling” format, Holiday Hello information sheets, a Spiritual Shareout, labyrinth opportunities, and more.

FSEM Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students who complete FSEM will be able to:
- engage in critical inquiry in the examination of concepts, texts, or artifacts;
- effectively communicate the results of such inquiry;
- and access University resources.

Additionally, students completing this FSEM will be able to:

- Understand and apply theories of interfaith leadership and social/political coexistence
- Gain sense of and agency around building bridges across ages, religions, cultures, etc.

COURSE MATERIALS:

- No book purchases or other purchases; many readings have URL links but all readings are on e-reserve— access via Leganto on the Canvas site for the course

SCHEDULE, ASSIGNMENTS, GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

Grade Distribution (see details below):

- 15% | [Starting Reflections](#) (due weeks 3, 4, and one other week of your choosing) (250 word analysis, 250 words of notes, or 5 AI prompts/answers w/ 150 words of summary)
- 5% | [Project Plan](#) (due week 2)
- 30% | [Public service projects](#) + notes due weeks [5](#) and [7](#)

30% | Sustained Reflection (3-part submission of a final 1250 word essay, including at least one visit with Writing Center by Week 8; 500 word draft due Week 6; 1250 word draft due Week 8; final 1250 essay due during Finals Week)

20% | Engagement

- 10 for in-class work, weekly readings/writings as assigned, class projects
- 10 for non-distraction + respectful approach
- [Plus half-letter grade deductions per unexcused absence after 3 excused absences]

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Assignment Details:

Starting Reflections: Due weeks 3, 4, plus one more week of your choosing; each is a 250 word reflection on some topic from class using at least one outside resource (about 1 page, three submissions total) (5 points each = 15 points) | For the Starting Reflections, you start by deciding on which in-class topic you'd like to delve into further. You then consult at least one vetted outside source (it can be a website, a journal, a YouTube, a blog, a Pew Poll, etc.). For example, when we discuss freedom of religion in class, if you want to learn more about that, you can go to a .gov site about the Constitution or to a YouTube or podcast about the topic, or to an article in an Oxford reference guide or Encyclopedia entry, or you can check if there are any national polls related to this, etc.

And then, what you write can take one of three forms.

- **Form 1: Analysis** | Weave together an analysis based on some in-class topic and your outside resource and provide some in-depth thoughts, questions, commentaries (do not just summarize things). One way to do this is to compare and contrast something with something else you have learned in this class, another class, or elsewhere; or to compare and contrast—or just weave together—insights from separate days of class. Etc. Vibe: thoughtful op-ed, informed blog post, etc. Be sure you have a single main point and make sure you are clearly writing to that main point (since 250 words is not a lot of space!)
- **Form 2: Notes** | Another option is to write-up “learning notes” on any one important point or idea about which you'd like to learn more. But instead of writing an analysis, you can just write up notes in bullet-point form to help reflect your learning process (kind of like “showing your work” in math).
- **Form 3: AI** | You may also opt to engage ChatGPT or other AI tools—if so, ask at least 5 helpful prompts, and hand in (a) your prompts along with (b) the AI responses, and include (c) at least 125 words AT THE VERY TOP of your paper summarizing your key takeaways in your own words.

Sustained Reflection: Your Sustained Reflection is an essay (of either 500 or 1250 words; see below) due in three stages from weeks 6 through Finals week (see schedule below); for each writeup, you need to focus on a topic from the class and integrate 1-2 outside resources that allow you to go deeper on that topic. The writeup due Week 8 additionally requires a visit to the Writing Center; and the writeups due Weeks 8 and during Finals must also include a connection to one of the projects you've worked on as part of the class.

- **Week 6:** 500 word reflection due using at least 2 approved outside sources (consult with professor to approve resources) (10 points)
- **Week 8:** Building off of your 500-word reflection from Week 6 and professor feedback, submit a draft 1250-word analysis using at least 2 additional outside approved sources; be sure to include reflections on at least one project you've worked on (about 5 double-spaced pages). ALSO: you must schedule time with the Writing Center to learn more about this great resource in general—and to help this draft be even better! (10 points)

- **Finals week:** Building off of your 500-word reflection from Week 8 and professor feedback, submit a final version of that 1250-word analysis (including connection to at least one project you've worked on) (10 points) (You may but need not work further with the Writing Center for this submission)

Your Sustained Reflection takes the form of an “Analysis” (i.e. the first of the 3 writing formats for the class). However, it can also include an interview or some other creative approach (e.g. original poetry or music or art) as part of the project. While the majority of the 1250 words should be analysis, consult with professor about possibly trading in 250 words for a different creative format (e.g. you would write a 750 word analysis, plus you would write a poem or make an artwork or create 10 Instagram squares for a public service announcement, etc.; consult with prof.)

ENGAGEMENT

No one will be marked down for being shy or quiet. That said, everyone is expected to be ‘in it’ (and if you’re having an off day, consider using one of your free absences, or speak in advance with the prof). Engagement includes a variety of elements, including completing small readings/writings as assigned, participating in in-class projects and small-group pair-and-shares (and other formats), attending events and class projects, not being distracted, and engaging classmates and prof respectfully and with charity—especially as we need to model the difficult work of upholding one another’s rights to free expression while also holding ourselves accountable to creating an environment in which we all feel like we are welcome; on these latter two points:

- **Non-Distraction:** While there is no ‘phone jail’ and while the professor will use tech at front of room, with the exception of occasional planned in-class tech- exercises (for which students will be reminded in advance to bring laptops or devices), this classroom is generally a ‘no tech’ zone. You can glance at your phone, but the expectation is that you are not doing non-class things during class—including reading/writing for other classes, or other non-class stuff.
- **A SPIRIT OF “BELONGING AND EXPRESSION,” INCLUSIVITY, GENEROSITY, AND VULNERABLE LEARNING:** Participants commit to upholding a spirit of “Belonging and Expression” which upholds values of free expression and working individually and as members of a group to create a sense of inclusion and belonging for all members of this class. Participants also agree to uphold a spirit of generosity and vulnerability in their learning in this class, including upholding a “principle of charity”: when someone says something you might find offensive, you commit to pausing to consider whether you misunderstood what they said, whether their comment was based on ignorance as opposed to malicious intent, or whether they have different lived experiences. While voicing disagreement is supported where students disagree, participants commit to a tone of respect and a spirit of generosity in relation to their neighbors’ comments, including in relation to the views of classmates and the instructor. Students seeking guidance on how to share critical views respectfully or students concerned about some of the points of view being shared in the classroom should consult with the instructor.
- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND DU HONOR CODE:** It is critically important to adhere to the [University of Denver's Honor Code and Academic Integrity](#) policies. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course; you are expected to produce original work at all times. Students must read and follow the plagiarism and academic conduct policy. Locate this policy in your student handbook.
- **[PLAGIARISM CHECKER:** DU uses Turnitin, an online tool integrated into Canvas, to assess students’ written assignments for originality. Turnitin provides originality checking to prevent plagiarism and encourage best practices for using and citing other people's written material. Turnitin compares student submissions to a global repository of student work and other resources on the web. Visit the Office of Teaching and Learning's [Turnitin Knowledge Base](#) to access more information about Turnitin, including how to interpret and view originality reports.]

Tentative Schedule

I. Religious Inclusivity

Weeks 1-2: Religious Freedom and the Tensions of Democracy

Jumping into religious inclusivity, we work as a class to formulate some campus guidelines and toolkits to help students in residence halls open productive conversations in cases where they don't share prayer practices (or religious backgrounds) with roommates and other suite mates. We spend some time with DU's "belonging and expression" framework, including questions of "temperature" options when it comes to coexistence goals, as well as questions about "face, place, pace" when it comes to civic outcomes on campus and beyond. As part of this work, we conduct a close reading and analysis of DU's freedom of expression document, and we discuss First Amendment rights. And we get started on plans for DU's upcoming Spiritual Supper Club, Spiritual Shareout on Driscoll Bridges (Sept. 16-18@11-1), and some community labyrinth opportunities!

Readings:

- DU Freedom of Expression document (2017)
- Reading from First Amendment- from US Congress' "Constitution Annotated,"
<https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/amendment-1/#:~:text=First%20Amendment%20Fundamental%20Freedom,for%20a%20redress%20of%20grievances.>
- Title 6 information overview; read this short 2-page PDF:
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-title-vi-fact-sheet.pdf>

Weeks 3-4: Religious Freedom and the Tensions of Democracy, cont'd!

We consider some of the prickly political implications of religious inclusivity as we explore principles of religious freedom, free speech, hate speech, and unlawful discrimination. We consider interfaith leadership insights from the founder and executive director of Interfaith America, Eboo Patel. And in preparation for some of our upcoming community engagement, we also have a special guest lecture about intergenerational civil discourse.

Readings:

- Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon, 2016)
 - "Introduction: What is Interfaith Leadership," 1-16
 - Chapter 4: "The Vision of Interfaith Leadership," 89ff
 - John D. Inazu, "Hope Without A Common Good," in *Out of Many Faiths: Religious Diversity and the American Promise* by Eboo Patel, 133-150 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018)

Weeks 5-8: Interfaith Civics Lab! (Oct. 8-31)

Drawing on discussions so far, and taking up our individual project plans, we roll up our sleeves and create interfaith, intergenerational opportunities for connection centering on three events co-sponsored by campus and civic orgs: Spiritual Supper Club (Oct. 15) featuring foods from Diwali, Rosh Hashana, Feast of St Teresa of Avila, and Dia de Los Muertos; the one-hour [ConnectEffect](#) event (Oct. 22; co-sponsored with Undergraduate Student Government); and the screening of award-winning film "[Join or Die](#)" about the importance for democracy of joining more clubs with more neighbors (Oct. 30; co-sponsored with Depts of Anthropology and History). Project ideas include creating "[Holiday Hello](#)" sheets, table tents with info, and social media interviews. See [Spiritual Life website](#) and consult with prof for more ideas. [And we will register for Winter courses!]

Weeks 9-10: Applied case studies + Civic takeaways

We round off the course considering an interfaith exercise in city-planning, and the CO "Masterpiece Cakeshop" case at the intersection of religious rights, LGBTG+ rights, civil discourse, pluralism, and democracy. And we have a visit with the Debate Across the Curriculum team! We also consider religious freedom from the Right and from

the Left as we spend some time reflecting on ways we might contribute to a religiously inclusive, pluralist society on campus and beyond.

- Heather Miller Rubens, Homayra Ziad, and Benjamin Sax, “Toward an Interreligious City: A Case Study,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*, edited by Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman, 209-219 (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018)
- Overview of Masterpiece Cakeshop case
 - <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2017/16-111>
 - [Pessin PDF]
 - Prompt 1: What features of the Cake Case stand out for you and why. And what questions might this raise for the policies and vibe we are aiming for on campus? (As part of your answer, integrate in at least one point from the First Amendment and/or Title 6)
 - Prompt 2: Formulate 1-3 questions that you would like to pose to fellow students regarding religious overstep and anti-religious overstep or related questions about religious pluralism, how religious pluralism fits with other civil rights, and how we elevate free expression while avoiding Title 6 violations and supporting campus-wide belonging.
- Religious liberty, view from the Right: “Religious Freedom: What’s at Stake If We Lose It?” The Heritage Foundation; <https://www.heritage.org/religious-liberty/heritage-explains/religious-freedom-whats-stake-if-we-lose-it>
- Religious liberty, view From the Left: Columbia University’s Law, Rights, and Religion Project:
- Excerpts from: “Whose Faith Matters? The Fight for Religious Liberty Beyond the Christian Right,” Columbia Law School’s Law, Rights, and Religion Project; <https://lawrightsreligion.law.columbia.edu/>