

RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

KHYATI Y. JOSHI

Syllabus Justification

THE SETTING

I will teach this course, Religion and Public Education, at the Sammartino School of Education at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Fall 2005. The largest private university in New Jersey, FDU is an independent, nonsectarian, coeducational, multicampus institution. There are approximately 10,000 full-time and part-time students at FDU. The School of Education is the largest School in University College (one of four colleges at FDU). The School of Education serves three different populations: 1) Undergraduate students who are pursuing a dual-degree program culminating in the award of B.A. and M.A.T. (Masters of Arts in Teaching) and designed to lead to a state teaching certificate; 2) Adults who have switched careers to teaching and are earning a M.A.T. and a teaching certificate so they can teach in public schools, and 3) Certified teachers who are returning to university to earn their Master of Arts in Teaching. These two populations of non-undergraduates are non-traditional students, *i.e.*, adult learners. Therefore, adult learning theories and pedagogies are part of my course design.

THE APPROACH

As a scholar-activist engaged in critical pedagogy, I usually approach the courses that I teach educators with the following over-arching philosophy: “What, so what, and now what.” I have designed this on a foundation of Multicultural Education theory and practice, meaning the content of the course is meant to help teachers develop culturally relevant pedagogy and to achieve the effective implementation of an equitable system of teaching and pedagogy that is affirming. Often when we think of “multicultural education,” topics related to race, gender, and socio-economic class come to mind. Religion has been left out of the Multicultural Education. I believe this has been done for two main reasons. 1) Scholars and activists have steered clear of religion because of the Marxist and other socialist political ideologies that first spurred the development of multicultural education and ethnic studies programs. To followers of these ideologies, religion is an “opiate of the masses,” ephemeral in nature and therefore not worthy of study. 2) The fear of dealing with religion due to lack of understanding of the “separation of church and state.” Educators are reticent when it comes to dealing with religious issues in the classroom because they often have an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of their legal obligations under, among other things, the First Amendment. An overwhelming desire not to “offend” or marginalize students of any given religious background, and a concern that discussing or addressing religious topics could be seen as an illegal “endorsement” of a particular religion or practice. The resulting silence is legally unnecessary and educationally insufficient in that it fails to address the role religion has played and continues to play in those subject areas taught in the classroom such as history, civics, and literature.

Teachers and soon-to-be teachers also don't always like theory and having philosophical conversations. They are often looking for "make and take items." The underpinning of this course is guided by the term *praxis*, action that is informed. Specifically, the development of knowledge and understanding and the intake of information should come about through dialogue. For the theory to translate into reality there must also be focus on situating educational activity in the lived experiences of participants and the practical tools that can accomplish that goal.

Having said this, teachers rarely have the time or forum to engage in dialogue about religion and education. And dialogue is what is precisely needed, so teachers can teach effectively particularly those topics are the primary targets of culture wars. Relatively few public school educators, however, have engaged in sustained dialogue toward understanding regarding the meaning of the Free Exercise and Establishment clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as they apply to public education.

Education is situated in the sociocultural and historical context. In this class, we will take at the situation of religion in American public schools over time. What does the Constitution say? What has that meant in the past? Does it mean the same thing now? What is constitutionally required? What is constitutionally forbidden? What is pedagogically sound? What should be taught about religion?

Also, living in highly litigious society, teachers are very scared to broach religion, often stating they wish for religion to remain outside of the classrooms. In reality, religion is already present in our public schools: in the beliefs and practices of teachers, administrators and students and in the very vocabulary of some educational materials. One of the first objectives of the course is to become aware and understand the ways religion – specifically Christianity – is already present in the structure and culture of American public schools. From there the course will launch into a historical perspective of religion in American public schools. What has been allowed, what has not, and what caused the change? After dealing with concepts of religious liberty, neutrality, gaining a historical understanding of religion in public education while simultaneously coming to and understanding on where they stand on related issues, particularly coming to terms with where they stand on the issue personally and is that different from what be done in their professional capacity. Approximately one third to one half of the semester deals with application of the knowledge.

RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS FALL 2005

Professor Khyati Y. Joshi

Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4pm (Sign up for appointment)

Office: Bancroft Hall Rm 312 Email: khyati@fdu.edu

Phone: 201-692-2826

OVERVIEW

Issues involving public schools and religion are perennial topics of heated debate. Legal doctrines like “separation of church and state” co-exist uneasily with an expectation that schools teach “values” as well as knowledge. America’s growing religious diversity, a result of Civil Rights Era immigration reform, creates challenges and opportunities when it encounters the continuing primacy of Christian ideas and social structures in the public square, including the public classroom. In recent years, all three branches of the federal government, as well as many state and local governments, have attempted (with varying degrees of success) to clarify the appropriate interplay between religion and public schools. Philosophical questions and practical inconsistencies remain, however, when it comes to public schools’ ability to “neither foster religion nor preclude it,” in the words of then-Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

This course will investigate the relationship between religion and public education in the United States with a focus on issues affecting classroom practice, curriculum, and pedagogy. Based in large part on legal decisions in the area and relying primarily on a discussion format, it will be a blend of three elements: a brief examination of the historic relationship of religion and education in the United States; an analysis of historic and current legal and public policy materials related to that relationship; and an exploration of ways of balancing the relationship in curricula so as to respect the religious rights and responsibilities of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the educational system in which they encounter each other.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

From this masters-level course for in-service and pre-service teachers, students will:

1. Develop an ability to be introspective, to examine their own religious backgrounds and reflect on how their religious and cultural identities and perspectives affects their world-view and may influence their practices.
2. Become attuned to the educator’s responsibilities toward religiously-diverse student populations.
3. Become aware of the variety of religious beliefs and practices within the U.S. population (and many classroom populations) and the practical impact of this diversity in the civic context.

4. Identify some of the complexities associated with religious diversity in a classroom that a teacher must acknowledge and embrace in order to teach effectively.
5. Articulate their own position within the kaleidoscope of American religious diversity and examine its likely consequences with reference to the “classroom society.”
6. Develop a practical strategy for achieving objectivity as among belief systems without marginalization of belief or practice as such.
7. Be sensitive to problems of using language that is inherently not neutral or not inclusive, and develop a student-age-appropriate inclusive vocabulary.
8. Empathize with the underlying rationale and necessity for educator neutrality.

At the end of the course, students will have (Outcomes):

1. A historical understanding of the relationship between religion and education in the United States;
2. An understanding of the legal complexities related to that relationship;
3. An appreciation of the impact of the educator-as-society’s-representative on the religious and moral self-understanding of students;
4. The basic tools necessary to engage the range of contemporary issues related to religion in the public schools in a manner consistent with current law, practical expectations, and students’ best interests; and
5. An ability to incorporate religion into culturally-relevant pedagogy in a manner consistent with the above concerns.

REQUIRED READING:

- Eck, D. L., & Harvard University. Pluralism Project. (1997). *On common ground: world religions in America* (Windows and Macintosh. ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Haynes, C., & Thomas, O. (2001). *Finding common ground: A guide to religious liberty in public schools*. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center.
PDF available at
<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=3979>
- Nord, W. A., & Haynes, C. C. (1998). *Taking religion seriously across the curriculum*. Alexandria, Va. Nashville, Tenn.: ASCD; First Amendment Center.
- Sears, J. T., & Carper, J. C. (1998). *Curriculum, religion, and public education: conversations for an enlarging public square*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Useful/Interesting websites to peruse:

www.teachingaboutreligion.org
www.teachingtolerance.org
www.islamproject.com

www.sikhcoalition.com
www.freedomforum.com

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSIGNMENTS:

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (20%)

Each member of the class shares the responsibility for creating a positive and challenging learning environment. Preparation, participation, and respect for the ideas of other will allow for in-depth exploration of complex issues and an examination of multi-perspectives. The comments, questions and insights of each student are needed to enhance the learning of all students.

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. Repeated absences and/or tardies will severely lower your grade. Should an emergency arise (illness, accidents, etc.) that prevents you from attending a session, it is your responsibility to contact the professor.

Class time provides opportunity for interaction and collaboration that cannot be easily “made up” in other ways. For this reason, there are no excused absences. If absence should become unavoidable, your responsibilities include the following:

- Contact me by phone or e-mail
- Arrange for a peer to obtain hand-outs, announcements, assignments, etc., from class. Check with your peer, **prior to the next class session** so you can prepare assignments on time.
- Arrange for assignments due on the date of absence to be delivered before class.

Different types of assignments will help you synthesize the readings with your own experiences. Students are expected to participate responsibly in the seminar discussions. Oral contributions in the course will be judged according to the following criteria:

- the degree to which they manifest genuine interest in, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

READING REFLECTIONS (20%)

For 10 classes you should prepare a 300-500 word written reflection on the class reading for that day. Some questions you might consider are: What was the reading about? How is it important? What did you get from it or what do you think you were supposed to get from it? Which of your own beliefs, opinions, values did it challenge or corroborate? How so? Will it affect your practices as an educator? Why or why not? For every class, you should prepare an index card with the following: At least two questions raised in your mind by the reading and a passage or line that you would like to discuss in class (include the page #).

Your reading reflections will receive a √+, √, a √-, or an NC (no credit).

√+ papers provide an integrated and accurate summary of all of the readings as well as some personal reflection on and/or analysis of the reading.

√ papers provide an accurate summary of all of the readings.

√- papers provide a mostly accurate summary of most of the readings.

NC Will you really write a paper this bad in a graduate class??

MIDTERM EXAM (20%)

Exam covers material from Session 1 to Session 4

SEMINAR CURRICULUM SMALL GROUP PRESENTATIONS (20%)

Students will present on one of the curriculum chapters in the book, *Religion Across the Curriculum*. Students will choose a chapter from among chapters 3 through 10 that is of interest to them and present the material to the class as well as facilitate a discussion on that particular topic.

Leading Discussions

As the discussion leader(s), you should be prepared to engage your classmates in a discussion of your assigned reading. To assist you in doing this, prepare a 2-3 page synopsis of your assigned reading and distribute it to the class on the day of your discussion. Please note that this exercise is not intended to be only a summary of the reading, but you should also consider the following points:

- a. What is the problem being addressed by the author?
- b. What is the historical and immediate background of the problem according to the author?
- c. What is the author's primary argument/point?
- d. What sources of evidence/data are used to support the argument/point?
- e. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence/data?
- f. Are the author's analyses and conclusions appropriate?
- g. What are the educational/policy implications of the conclusions drawn by the author?
- h. How does this reading compare/relate to other readings?

FINAL PAPER/PROJECT (20%)

Students may choose between a research paper (paper to be approved) or a curricular project. The paper should be a traditional research-based examination of an issue (with requisite thesis, evidence, and conclusion). The project should be a detailed plan for introducing religion into a public school's curriculum. This project may contain audio/visual aids, but must have a textual component. Greater detail about both possibilities will be provided in class.

Introduction (1)

1. Introduction to the Course, Requirements, and Procedures

Religion, Education, and American Democracy (3)

2. What is religion?
http://www.teachingaboutreligion.org/WhitePapers/Larue_whatisreligion.htm
FCG Chapter 1: From Battle Ground to Common Ground
Teaching Controversial Issues
Mary E. M. Moore, "The Myth of Objectivity in Public Education," Religious Education 90, no. 2, (Spring 1995).
3. Sears Chapter 1: History, Religion, and Schooling: A Context for Conversation
FCG Chapter 3
Nord and Haynes Chapter 1

- 4 FCG Chapter 2: A History of Religious Liberty in American Public Life
Sears, Chapter 2: Encounters in Law, Ethics, Religion and Education
FCG Chapter 5
- 5 Mid-term Exam
Trip to Library to meet with Research Librarian
6. Sears Chapter 3: Crossing Boundaries and Becoming the Other: Voices across
Borders
Sears Chapter 4: Dialogue, Religion, and Tolerance: How to Talk To People, Who
Are Wrong About (Almost) Everything,

What? Why? How? (and How Not!) to Teach about Religions in Public Schools (4)

7. FCG Chapter 6: A Teachers Guide to Religion in the Public Schools
Nord and Haynes Chapter 2: The Educational Framework
Nieto Chapter 10
"Encountering Religious Diversity," Historical Perspectives Section of *On Common
Ground*
8. FCG Chapter 7 Religion in the Public School Curriculum
Sears Chapter 5 and 6: Textbooks: What stories are to be told?
Nord and Haynes Chapter 3 Elementary Education
9. Sears Chapter 7 and 8: Values in the Public Schools: What and whose values should
be taught?
Nord and Haynes Chapter 4 History
10. Resources: *On Common Ground*: "Encountering Religious Diversity"
Sears Chapter 9 and 10 Sexuality Education: What does Teaching Responsibility
Mean?
Nord and Haynes Chapter 6 Language Arts and Literature
11. Sears Chapter 11 and 12: Outcome-Based Education: Who should set the
standards?
12. Sears 13 and 14 Science: Who and What are We?
Nord and Haynes – Chapter 7 The Sciences
13. FCG Chapter 8: Religious Holidays in the Public Schools
FCG Chapter 9: Student Religious Clubs
Case Study: "Isn't the Christmas Tree a Christian Symbol?"
14. FCG Chapter 10: Student Religious Expression in Public Schools: US Dept of Ed
guidelines

FCG Chapter 11: Student Religious Practices

FCG Chapter 12: A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools

Case Study: "My persuasive essay is 'Why we should follow Jesus'"

Case Study: Planning for Religious Diversity: Special Needs of Muslim Students

15. Class Paper and Project Presentations