

“Teaching Religious Studies to Undergraduate Students in Health-Related Fields”  
Summary of Missouri State University Wabash Center Grant Project  
(text adapted from report by Stephen Berkwitz)

Presenting Question and Goals

The key pedagogical issue and question: **How can we build a capacity among Religious Studies faculty to meet the needs and interests of students going into health-related fields?** In order to pursue this objective, we set the following goals:

1. Discover what students in health-related fields want and need to learn about religion and health.
2. Demonstrate to students, faculty, and staff that teaching and learning about religion can be helpful to the cultural competence and professional goals of CHHS students.
3. Build the capacity of faculty in the Department of Religious Studies to understand and teach about the relationships between Religion and Health.
4. Increase the cultural competence of CHHS students in terms of their knowledge of religious diversity and the various intersections between Religion and Health.
5. Develop connections and collaborations between the faculty and students of Religious Studies and the College of Health and Human Services at Missouri State University in order to support and promote interdisciplinary learning.
6. Expand the Religious Studies curriculum to incorporate topics and issues related to Religion and Health to enhance the cultural competence and “religious literacy” of students in CHHS programs.

Project Activities

1. Focus Groups on Need Assessment (Jan.-Feb. 2016): We met with six groups of advisors, department heads, program directors, and students from the health fields to ask them questions about religion and spirituality.
2. Structured Conversations with Health Professionals (Mar-Apr. 2016): We interviewed local health professionals from a variety of fields about the same topics.
3. First Luncheon and Preparation of Initial Report (Apr. 2016): We composed preliminary report, presenting our findings to faculty and administrators.
4. Internship Consultation (Apr. 2016): Dr. Kendra Hotz from Rhodes College helped us think about internships.
5. Summer Curriculum Development Projects (May-Aug 2016): The development of courses related to religion and health took place over the summer of 2016. Six faculty members from Religious Studies and one from Psychology participated in this part of the grant.
6. Symposium on Religion & Health with Dr. Pamela Klassen (Oct. 2016): Our visiting expert scholar was Dr. Pamela Klassen from the University of Toronto, author of *Spirits of Protestantism: Medicine, Healing and Liberal Christianity*.
7. Symposium on Religion & Health with Dr. Wendy Cadge (Feb. 2017): The second symposium featured Dr. Wendy Cadge from Brandeis University, author of *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*.
8. Second Luncheon and Final Report (Apr. 2017): The grant’s final report was presented in condensed form to key stakeholders in the College of Health and Human Services and the university.

What We Learned About Our Question

Based on the feedback we have received from focus groups, faculty surveys, and student surveys, we can state with some confidence that our grant project has accomplished the goals with which we set out. We have built capacity among Religious Studies faculty to meet the needs and interests of students going into health-related fields. Our new and redesigned courses have helped to demonstrate that Religious Studies instruction is often conducive to enhancing the cultural competence of students. The project’s activities have enabled faculty to develop coursework that highlights the interrelations between religion and health. Students in these courses have acknowledged that their cultural competence and awareness of religious diversity have increased.