

Wabash Center Undergraduate Department Grants
Grant Project Title: "The World Religions Course and the Pedagogy of Site Visits"
Monmouth College
Project Summary

Presenting Question and Goals

How can we teach the World Religions course in a way that challenges students to encounter the embedded, particular instantiations of religion in the world around them, and make the site visits component of the course more impactful? Our project centered on three goals. First, to reconfigure our approach to the study of world religions so that it emphasizes particular traditions embedded in or otherwise relevant to our geographic and cultural context. Second, to develop and implement a pedagogy of site visits for our World Religions course and other relevant courses. Third, to foster relationships with leaders of religious communities in our region for the purposes of making site visits even more impactful for our students.

Overview of Project Activities

A. Course development:

The course was redesigned focusing on site visits and reducing the number of religious traditions addressed. The course now features three to four modules that focus on lived religions that can be found in our area. The primary writing assignments are papers that focus on an aspect of the site visited in each module.

B. Conferences and consultations:

We met and exchanged ideas with faculty from other Religious Studies programs in our area and were visited by several scholar consultants. Specifically, we hosted scholars of Judaism, Islam, and Mormonism who shared great resources and ideas with us about improving our site visits and the assignments associated with them. We had a final outside evaluator who helped us to pull together what we had learned.

C. *Building relationships with local religious leaders:*

We were able to build new relationships at two local sites that will be extremely valuable moving forward and we continued to strengthen connections at a third. Additionally, we received several suggestions of local contacts for modules that could be developed in the future.

Learning Abstract

The World Religions course at Monmouth College now emphasizes helping students to engage with world religions in the environment around them (western Illinois). The course is built on modules, focusing on only three or four religious traditions and moves students quickly from general overview to particular, embedded expressions of the tradition. The site visit becomes the center of student learning. Preparation for the site visit drives the content of the course. And reflection on the site visit is the primary location for assessing student learning. The site visits are also important opportunities for students to come in contact with practitioners of the faith traditions studied. Finding and fostering good partnerships with local religious leaders is key to the success of these visits and the interactions that students have.