

7 Dialogue in a World of Difference: Turning Necessity Into Opportunity in Hartford Seminary's Master of Arts Program

Suendam Birinci, Heidi Hadsell and David Roozen

Editor's Introduction

"**Dialogue in a World of Difference**" is one of six cases studies from ***Pedagogies for Interfaith Dialogue***.¹ Volume II in the Hartford Seminary Series on Innovation in Theological Education.

The book, as its name and the series name suggests, is about teaching, interfaith dialogue and theological education. The core of the book: six critical case studies of seminary taught, degree courses in interfaith dialogue. The cases give expression to a broad range of dialogical pedagogies and course formats, and they include the courses' syllabi and bibliographies. Each case course includes an experience of dialogue as part of the course. This is definitive of the project, for reasons elaborated below.

By critical case we mean one that describes not only the context, content, methods and related goals and rationale of the course, but also presents an evaluation of the course and discussion of the implications of the evaluation for teaching interfaith dialogue in theological institutions. Our hope for the book: To create a practical literature and related conversation among theological educators on the role of interfaith dialogue in a seminary curriculum, and on the substantive and structural issues related to it.

The cases are first hand accounts, written by the teachers themselves -- all veteran theological educators. With the support of a

¹ David A. Roozen and Heidi Hadsell, eds. (Hartford Seminary, 2009).

grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to Hartford Seminary, the group gathered several times between February 2007 and September 2008. The initial times together were spent getting to know each other, discussing our experiences, our approaches to and philosophies about interfaith dialogue and the pedagogical resources that we use in teaching it, and developing a common sense of the kind of critical case the project desired. Beginning in September 2007, each person presented a first draft of their case based on a course they taught during the time of the project. Case presentations extended over several sessions of discussion, critique and deepening reflection on the nature and location of dialogue in theological education. Christy Lohr, whose integrative essay joins the cases in this volume, joined the case writer group during the case review period of the project.

With revised, final drafts in hand, the case writer group convened two meetings to discuss the cases with seminary faculty more broadly. The meetings took place in Berkeley and Chicago. Invitations were extended to all seminary faculty in the respective areas to engage two or three of the project cases, share the work they themselves were doing and engage each other in substantive conversation. The meetings intended and accomplished several purposes. Foremost was to begin to disseminate the results of the project in a way that both advocated a central role for interfaith dialogue within the theological curriculum and laid a foundation for ongoing critical engagement among seminary faculty of the theory, theology and the practice; and to do so in a dialogical way.

Our thanks to the sixty or so faculty who shared in our journey at the regional meetings. Thanks also to the Hartford Seminary faculty who indulged our interim reflections at several of their regular Wednesday Collegial Sharing luncheons along the way; and to Sheryl Wiggins and David Barrett for their general assistance. Most importantly, our deepest felt thanks to the case writers for their willingness to dialogue with us and with each other about a personal passion, and for their willingness to ultimately present their passion in published form to their peers; to the Wabash Center for their continuing support through the several interesting twists in the project's unfolding; to Alexa Lindauer who copy-edited the entire manuscript; and to the many, many students in the case courses. Dialogue is about mutuality. Thank you students for your gift to us.

Why this Book at this Time

September 11, 2001 got America's attention. Tragic – in so many ways. Earth shattering – in so many ways. World changing – in so many ways. Among the latter, as one of us shared at the annual meeting of the Religion News Writers Association less than two weeks later, the shift from an *Ecumenical to Interfaith Consciousness about America's Religious Diversity*.

Critical to the point is that this shift is about awareness and acknowledgement, not a sudden change in presence or numbers. Muslims have been in North America since the beginning of our history with slavery, and adherents of Islam and a variety of Asian religions have been increasing steadily since changes to immigration laws nearly 50 years ago. The relative lack of acknowledgement of the multi-faith reality in the United States prior to September 11 is suggested, for example, by the fact that a major survey of congregations in the U.S. conducted in 2000 found that while 45% of congregations were involvement in ecumenical Christian worship in the year prior to the survey, only 7% indicated involvement in interfaith worship (and much of this was Christian/Jewish).

The multi-faith character of American society would be, of course, no surprise to theological educators. Indeed, in an essay on "Globalization, World Religions and Theological Education" in the "Looking Toward the Future" section of the 1999 volume of *Theological Education* celebrating the conclusion of Association of Theological Education's decade of globalization (Vol 35, No 2, pp 143-153), M. Thangaraj explicitly recognizes that, "Dialogue across religious boundaries has become a daily activity in many people's lives." His conclusion and plead: an increased engagement with world religions is critical for Christian theological education for three reasons. A Christian minister cannot have an adequate theological grounding for his or her faith without a meaningful understanding of how it relates to other faith traditions. A minister cannot adequately address the everyday interfaith experience and practice of his or her laity. Public ministry in today's world is increasingly interfaith.

World and national events since September 2001 have only intensified awareness of Muslims and Islam in particular and multi-faith diversity more broadly in the United States. Public opinion polls suggest both encouraging and discouraging developments. American attitudes toward American Muslims are a bit more positive today than

nine years ago and American congregations' involvement in interfaith worship has more than doubled since the 2000. In contrast, American attitudes toward Islam as a religion are less positive today and the dominant approaches of congregations to interfaith issues appear to remain indifference and avoidance.

Against this background of increasing awareness, increased necessity (assuming tolerance across diversity is a good thing), and increased lay and congregational involvement in interfaith engagement, one might think that a subject like Interfaith Dialogue (as a vehicle for tolerance through enhanced understanding and connection) would be a hot-bed of interest in theological education, or at least a begrudging capitulation to reality. The evidence is, unfortunately, less compelling. For example, one will not find a single article in *Theological Education* about interfaith dialogue between September 2001 and January 2007, when the case authors in this volume first met; indeed, not since the conclusion of the ATS decade of globalization in 1999; and in fact, not since the journal's inception in 1964! Nor have there been any to date (through Vol 44, No 2, 2009). This is all the more ironic given the centrality of "diversity" to ATS priorities and, relatedly, to issues of *Theological Education*. Tellingly, the one article in *Theological Education* that contains "Dialogue" in its title is about black and latino theologies (Vol 38, No 2, 2002, p 87-109).

A survey of seminary deans and an online search of seminary catalogues done in fall, 2006 to help identify possible seminary courses for this book was only a little more dialogically-friendly than *Theological Education*. The good news is that we were able to find several courses that fit our criteria. The bad news was that there were only a few more than the five seminaries represented in the book that offered degree courses taught by regular faculty that included an experience of interfaith dialogue.

This certainly fit our impressions. As we looked out across theological education in the United States we found that although there seemed to be a lot of talk about and enthusiasm for interfaith dialogue, there was a paucity of courses related to interfaith dialogue in even the broadest sense, and very few places in which interfaith dialogue was actually happening. There was, from our vantage point, a curricular and pedagogical vacuum that badly needed to be filled.

More encouraging, at first glance, was our discovery of an entire section of syllabi listed under Interreligious Dialogue on the

Wabash Center Guide to Internet Resources For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Unfortunately, a quick perusal in June 2007 indicated that an actual conversation or encounter with a person of another faith tradition was not a goal of a single course listed; and that learning about the practice of putting persons from different faith traditions into conversation or dialogue with each other was a goal of, at most, one of the courses. Among other things this means that from among the half dozen or so different types of interreligious dialogue typical of the emerging literature on the subject, the cutting edge of university and seminary courses on dialogue listed on the Wabash site all narrowly focused on a single, and typically the most rudimentary, purpose. In terms of the following list of types of dialogue, for example, the Wabash site syllabi all fall into "Informational," although several move beyond basic comparative religions to also include the history of relations between two or more faith tradition.

- 1) Informational: Acquiring of knowledge of the faith partner's religious history, founding, basic beliefs, scriptures, etc.
- 2) Confessional: Allowing the faith partners to speak for and define themselves in terms of what it means to live as an adherent.
- 3) Experiential: Dialogue with faith partners from within the partner's tradition, worship and ritual - entering into the feelings of one's partner and permitting that person's symbols and stories to guide.
- 4) Relational: Develop friendships with individual persons beyond the "business" of dialogue.
- 5) Practical: Collaborate to promote peace and justice. [http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/guidelines_interfaith.php#goals]

Such narrow and elementary approaches, we believe, cannot adequately address the three reasons set forth by Thangaraj almost a decade ago for why the increased engagement of interfaith issues is critical for theological education. Rather, we believe, theological education can only meet these challenges for its ministry students and related congregations and denominations by exposing students to the full range of dialogical purposes. Hence, our desire for the book to create a practical literature and related conversation among theological educators on the role of the practice of interfaith dialogue in a seminary

curriculum is driven by the related desire to be a constructive advocate for courses in Interfaith Dialogue using pedagogies that optimize the full range of dialogical purposes and practices. To use ATS outcome language: we want to enhance the capacity of seminaries to equip their students to engage the multi-faith reality of the American (and global) context in ways that advance mutual understanding and appreciative relationships across faith traditions.

The Cases

The desire to maximize the diversity of dialogical pedagogies, course formats, Christian traditions represented within the Association of Theological Schools, and regions of the country in a limited number of case courses at first struck us as rather daunting. One of the few positives of discovering that we really had a very limited number of courses from which to draw was that it made the selection process considerably easier. Eventually we gathered an experienced group of theological educators from three regions of the country that included professors from Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and ecumenical schools, as well as from three religious traditions – Christian, Jewish and Muslim.

The six case studies, along with a very brief summary of each, are listed below in the order they appear in the book. The cases are preceded in the book by an integrative essay that further comments on each case's distinctiveness and connects the cases to a broader examination of the issues and potential location of interfaith dialogue in North American theological education: ***Navigating the New Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in Theological Education***, Christy Lohr, Intersections Institute, Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries.

'Interreligious Dialogue' at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, James Redington, St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia

The *'Interreligious Dialogue'* course at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, combines a substantive course on the history of and current approaches to dialogue with in-class exercises in meditation and a required experience of dialogue. It includes sections on Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism,

emphasizing the latter two in the dialogue requirement. It appears first because it includes a succinct overview of the history of and current approaches to dialogue; it alerts the reader to the importance of spiritual practices for the experiential/relational practice of dialogue (a common thread across the courses), and uses, arguably, the simplest approach for students to be in dialogue – go find your own experience and then run it by the professor.

***World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the Context of the Overall Program of Theological Education at Perkins School of Theology*, Robert Hunt.**

The *World Religions and Christianity* case presents what we believe is the most typical current approach among seminaries for dealing with the challenge of interfaith dialogue – specifically grafting dialogue onto an existing course in world religions. Interfaith Dialogue’s tension with evangelical Christianity is a visible dynamic in the case. For the course’s required experience of dialogue, students are assigned to external Hindu, Jewish and Muslim organizations pre-arranged by the Professor. In addition to the course dynamic the case includes an insightful overview of the interfaith practice of a wide spectrum of religious organization in the Dallas area.

***Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary*, Yehezkel Landau**

The *Building Abrahamic Partnerships* case documents a very different kind of course than either of the first two. It is an eight-day intensive for which an equal number of degree and non-degree Christians, Jews and Muslims from around the US are recruited, with priority to Hartford Seminary students. The eight days are a continual experience of dialogue aimed at developing basic concepts and skills for leadership in building Abrahamic partnerships. The course and case are especially strong in the breadth of dialogical methods used and on the relational skills required of the course leadership.

***The Challenge of World Religions to Christian Faith and Practice at Drew University School of Theology*, S. Wesley Ariarajah**

The Challenge of World Religions case is more broadly about Drew’s three course curriculum addressing interfaith issues. The three courses include a heavily experiential world religions course with personal engagements with Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism; a relatively straight forward theology of religions course; and an international, cross-cultural immersion focused on interfaith encounter. Although the world religions course is highlighted in the case, the author’s reflection on the systemic inter-relationships among and distinctive contributions of each of the three courses is a unique contribution of the case. Another unique contribution is the treatment given to the international immersion course and how this popular course format can be adapted to addressing interfaith issues. Still another distinctive of the case is the extensive attention given to student reflections of their experiences.

***Theological Education for Interfaith Engagement: The Philadelphia Story*, J. Paul Rajashekar, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.**

The Philadelphia Story (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia), like the Drew case, strongly situates interfaith concerns within the overall curriculum. A distinctive feature of the case is the strong argument the author, who was dean during a recent curriculum revision and who is a systematic theologian, makes for the necessity of Christian theology to move from a “self-referential” to a “cross-referential” posture in its method, hermeneutic and articulation. The case then moves to its focal course concern with the required, Theory and Practice of Interfaith Dialogue. A distinctive strength of the case’s treatment of the course is its critical struggle with the pros and cons of having students “find and direct their own” dialogue experience.

***Dialogue in a World of Difference: Turning Necessity into Opportunity in Hartford Seminary’s Master of Arts Program*, Suendam Birinci, Heidi Hadsell, and David Roozen.**

The *Dialogue in a World of Difference* case is the only one about a course that is not a part of an MDiv curriculum. Rather, the course is an attempt to use a semester long experience of interfaith dialogue taken during a student’s first semester to socialize students into the relational and appreciative skills, capacities and preferences that will

help them maximize learning in the seminary's religiously and culturally diverse MA student body. Three distinctive features of the course/case are the near equal mix of international and US students in the class, the near equal mix of Christian and non-Christian students in the course; and the near equal mix of religious professionals and laity. The case also reports on a less than successful experiment with online dialogue.

About the Editors

Heidi Hadsell is President of Hartford Seminary and Professor of Social Ethics. She is former Director, The Ecumenical Institute of The World Council of Churches Bossey, Switzerland and former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary. She has served as a consultant to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – Roman Catholic Dialogue; consultant for institutional change towards the globalization of theological education, Pilot Immersion Project for the Globalization of Theological Education, and consultant for curriculum design and organizational structure, Pilot Master's degree program for Public Administrators, Institute for Technical and Economic Planning, Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil.

David Roozen is Director of the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research and Professor of Religion and Society. More widely recognized for his work in congregational studies and religious trends, Roozen also has an extensive record of research and publication on theological education, including, for example: *Changing The Way Seminaries Teach*. David A. Roozen, Alice Frazer Evans and Robert A. Evans (Plowshares Institute, 1996); *Interfaith FACT's: An Invitation to Dialogue*. Martin Bailey and David A. Roozen (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2003); "Patterns of Globalization: Six Case Studies," guest editor, *Theological Education* (Spring, 1991); and, *The Globalization of Theological Education*. Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans and David A. Roozen (eds) (Orbis Books, 1993).

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Hartford Seminary As Context for Interfaith Dialogue

Hartford Seminary (HS) is not your typical American theological school. Most immediately: it has not offered an MDiv since the early 1970s. Why then retain the "seminary" identity? Because of the Seminary's continuing, 175 year commitment to the education and shaping of religious leadership and, through its various academic programs and research, to enhancing the vitality of communities of faith. Accordingly, the Seminary offers a number of degree and non-degree tracks related to Christian ministry and religious leadership that are direct outgrowths of its early 1970s transformation, including: a DMin program grounded in congregational studies and practical theology, a Black Ministries Certificate Program, a Hispanic Ministries Certificate Program and a Women's Leadership Certificate Program. Long before HS staked a claim in the study and practice of "dialogue," it was intentionally seeking to become a "safe place" where differences could be engaged – racial/ethnic, sexual preference, and theological. Historically ecumenical Protestant in a predominantly Catholic area, the Seminary currently has a good mix of oldline Protestant and Catholic students, overlaid with racial/ethnic conservative Protestant students and Seeker/Wicca/Quantum spirituality students attracted by the Woman's Leadership programs.

A second HS distinctive is the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian Muslim relations. The contemporary Macdonald Center is the result of the evolution over many decades of the Seminary's Kennedy School of Missions, which trained Christians for

the mission field beginning in the latter part of the 19th century. One of its more notable doctoral graduates, Dr. Stanley Samartha, `51, from India, went on to become the founding director of the Interfaith Dialogue program of the World Council of Churches.

The Kennedy School's early interest and expertise in Islamic history and theology, Arabic, and the historical and contemporary relations between Islam and Christianity evolved into the Center for the Study of Islam and for Muslim Christian relations during the Seminary's 1970's makeover. Today, two of the 12 core senior faculty at HS are Muslim (Ingrid Mattson and Yahya Michot) and there are two full time Muslim Faculty Associates. The Islamic Chaplaincy Program and MA concentration in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations are among the Seminary's largest. And, Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations are two of the three concentrations in the Seminary's international Ph.D. program.

The Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program consists of a 48-credit Master of Arts degree with a concentration in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations and a 24-credit Graduate Certificate. Together they meet the accrediting requirements of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) for its equivalent of a Master of Divinity degree.

The Macdonald Center is also home to *The Muslim World* journal, sponsored by Hartford Seminary since 1938. The scholarly journal, which reaches subscribers in 65 countries, is dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of scholarly research on Islam and Muslim societies and on historical and current aspects of Christian-Muslim relations.

Related to the Macdonald Center, but also to the Seminary as a whole, is the recently established, International Peacemaking Program. It is a certificate program for young Christian and Muslim leaders from around the world who are involved in peacemaking between Muslims and Christians in the religious communities in their home countries. Participants in the program are placed in local congregations where they learn the life and culture of local Christian and Muslim communities, and where they contribute to congregations through sharing their own experiences and leadership skills. To date, participants in this program have come from Indonesia, Nigeria, Iran, Burma, Bulgaria, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Lebanon.

A third distinctive element of HS is the hiring of a Jewish professor in 2002 to create the Building Abrahamic Partners program (the subject of another case study in this volume). The program made the Seminary one of the few in the U.S. with a major commitment to learning and relationships between the three Abrahamic faiths. It also brought into the faculty mix a Jewish specialist in dialogue and the practice of peacemaking, who joined others on the faculty such as Jane Smith (*Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, Oxford Press, 2007) and Heidi Hadsell (the Seminary's president and former president, Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, Bossey, Switzerland) as faculty anchors of institutional commitment to dialogue.

Interfaith relations, as hinted at above, are not the only legacy of bridging difference in the Seminary's history. It was the first theological school to admit women into degree programs and as an outgrowth of involvement in the Social Gospel Movement, it was the first seminary to hire a full-time professor in the sociology. The latter provided an American cross cultural and contextual specialization that complemented the more anthropologically oriented contextual studies of the Kennedy School. The Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research continues its now one hundred year commitment to a sociologically informed practical theology. Its largest program, the Faith Communities Today series of national surveys of American congregations, with its cooperative Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Baha'i sponsorship, provides an especially unique and contemporary blend of historical Seminary commitments.

Hartford Seminary is located in the liberal, cosmopolitan and increasingly post-Christian Northeast, in Connecticut. Euro-settled by Congregationalists and religiously established until well into the 1800's, succeeding waves of immigration elevated Catholicism to the region's largest Christian denomination today. Evangelical denominations have never established a strong presence, but as elsewhere in the North America, and indeed throughout the world, New England has a growing Pentecostal population. In the immediate Hartford area there is also a strong Jewish presence (the area's first synagogue founded in 1843), a growing Muslim population with five mosques in the area, and an emerging Hindu population. With the exception of Hindus, each of these religious communities is represented on the Seminary's Board of Trustees. More importantly for present purposes, and again with the exception of Hindus, each of these groups is represented in the

Seminary's student body in general and the Dialogue in a World of Difference course in particular.

Thus the immediate demographic context of the Dialogue in a World of Difference course is critical to the course's design and practice because of the Seminary's distinctive commitment to engage the religious diversity of its region, and the Seminary's increasingly diverse international constituency, in the critical, contextual study of religion and in the practical study of interfaith relations. As historical commitments and constituencies have merged with the more immediate geographic context, dialogue has become a formally recognized and foundational focus of HS explicitly stated in the Seminary's board and faculty adopted mission statement. But more than this, given the diversity of the student body – local and international, dialogue is both a practical necessity (to get along with the incredible diversity of students who will be in one's classes) and a pedagogical opportunity (a capacity that a student can use to learn from the diversity of one's peers). HS is one school whose logo tag line cuts to its core educational experience: *Exploring Differences, Deepening Faith*.

Dialogue in a World of Difference: The Course Structure

The Dialogue in a World of Difference course is required of all Master's level students at the Seminary, regardless of area of concentration. Offered every fall, students are strongly encouraged to take it in their first year. However, while many students are able to fit the course into their programs as suggested, many others cannot and end up taking it later in their course of study. We note this here because, as we will

return to in our evaluation, it can be a significant source of unevenness in students' experience in the class. The course typically has an enrollment of 20-30.

A team of faculty leads the course, usually three faculty though sometimes two faculty and one doctoral student. The ideal is one leader from each of the Abrahamic traditions, but most typically the three course leaders are from the two traditions most represented at the Seminary – Muslims and Christians. Leader faculty always include male and female, and have always included at least two senior professors. The three lead faculty for the 2007 offering, which is the

focus of this case study, included the Seminary's president (female, Protestant, social), the director of the Seminary's Institute for Religion Research (male, Protestant, sociology of religion, author of several pieces on the globalization of theological education) and a Seminary Ph.D. student (female, Muslim..

The course meets once a week for three hours for 10 weeks. Across the semester, the lead faculty are joined by guest presenters for between six and eight of the sessions. The majority of guest presenters are Seminary faculty. Others include visiting faculty and local religious leaders. The mix of guest faculty for the 2007 course is typical (see appendix). In addition to lecture and class discussion, guest appearances also typically include some opportunity for dialogue with one or more of the lead faculty. Every effort is made to include at least one experience in which guests from different faith traditions are specifically invited to dialogue with each other around the topic for the day. In the 2007 course it was for the session on worship.

Student diversity at HS is not only an underlying rationale for the course, but also a determinative factor in the course's dynamic. While it will vary some each academic year, the broad strokes of the diversity have remained generally constant since the course's inception in 2001. The 2007 class had 20 students. Half of the students were Muslim, some in the Muslim chaplaincy program and others pursuing other academic tracks. The other half of the students were composed of one or two Catholics, a number of UCC and other oldline Protestants and students from traditionally Black churches, along with several with no firm religious affiliation. No student currently expressed a Jewish religious preference although two were raised in a Jewish context. The majority of the students were North American, but the class included Muslims and Christians from Burma, Syria, Turkey, Indonesia, Singapore, Lebanon and Latin America. Typical of HS Master students, internationals tended to be full-time, while Americans tended to be part-time, commuters. Students included clergy and lay persons, with the 2007 class having a comparatively high number of educators. Student ages ranged from twenties to sixties.

Course descriptions are occasionally vaguely prosaic or provocatively pretentious. The Dialogue course description is, in point of fact, essentially descriptive:

Students and faculty in a collegial setting will learn about the practice and models of interfaith dialogue; be

introduced to critical substantive issues related to interfaith relations in today's globalized context; and appreciatively encounter the diversity of Hartford Seminary's student body through an ongoing experience of dialogical listening and conversation. . .

But, this is more than a course about dialogue. It is an invitation to engage in the practice of dialogue in a structured setting and thereby to develop the appreciative capacities that, among other things, will enable you to take maximum advantage of the diversity of students you will have in classes throughout your Hartford Seminary experience.

Course Goals

The course has five goals. One is to introduce new students to academic life at the Seminary. Indeed, it is very intentionally constructed to socialize students into the culture of Hartford Seminary. The substantive centrality of interfaith dialogue to the Seminary's identity and program has already been noted and is reiterated below. Additionally, students get to hear and interact with a majority of Seminary faculty during any given year's course, and thereby come to know something about the disciplines, approaches, and particular interests of the faculty: scripture, sociology of religion, spirituality, ethics and theology, interfaith relations, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. They also begin to know other centers of study: the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, and the Center for Faith and Practice, and understand how each center pursues its own work and both interacts with and contributes to the other centers.

The social and cultural diversity of HS students has already been noted. Equally important -- although the HS student body is comparatively small -- the Seminary does have a comparatively large number of very distinct programs. Students therefore come with an sizable range of interests, academic background and shaping -- some more theological, some more social scientific; some more academic, some more practical; some religious practitioners, some community practitioners, some secular professionals, some religious seekers; some with considerable experience in congregational ministry, some in chaplaincy, and so forth. The course tries to draw upon and use all the

different academic gifts and life experiences the students bring with them. Dialogue is not limited to differences in faith.

A primary course goal is, of course, to introduce students to HS's commitment and approach to dialogue. The commitment unites all participants in the institution. Students will find it present in a variety of ways both in the classroom and the less formal encounters of sharing meals and class breaks, hallways, lounges and parking lots. In this context 'dialogue' involves a number of things. First, it means substantive, mutually appreciative, but critically probing conversation across religious lines, particularly across the religious lines of Christianity, Islam and Judaism which make up our faculty and the vast majority of our students. The course teaches some of the basics of interfaith dialogue. Perhaps more importantly, especially from the perspective of being the HS socialization course, it gives students the chance to practice such dialogue and to reflect on one's practice.

Second, the class examines the micro and macro issues of interfaith dialogue. Dialogical encounter takes place at all different levels of society -- personal and intimate among friends, in neighborhoods, among clergy or scholars across religious traditions, in formal, official national and international gatherings and in political affairs both local and global. One of the challenges in the course design is how to achieve a workable balance across the range of possible subjects in a 10 session course, and do so while also trying to play to the strengths of faculty guests and still maintain some sense of continuity and integration. Three guiding principles ease the negotiation. Five of the sessions are relatively fixed -- the beginning introduction/overview and getting acquainted session; a session on theologies of religion; a session on models of and approaches to dialogue; a session on worship (related to the course's required comparative observation of worship services), and the concluding session's mix of fellowship/celebration, reflection on student's experience and more formal evaluation.

Further structuring the course outline, the course always seeks at least two "practically" focused sessions, one pastoral and a second dealing with an international conflict. For example, considerations of women's rights always provoke an energetic exchange among Christians and Muslims, and there is no shortage of political conflicts around the world in which religion is implicated. Our experience suggests that the pastoral session works well late in the first half of the course as a first opportunity to really get personal in the course's dialogue groups. Our experience also suggests that the conflict session

works best toward the end of the course when students have had a chance to get comfortable confronting deeply felt differences, especially if the conflict chosen is situated in the Middle East.

A final structuring guideline is to include at least one session on theological interpretation and one session on approaches to scripture. Although the practical sessions typically have the most affect on the students – both on their understanding of their own perspectives, feelings and comfort with dialogue, the session on scripture almost always is the most intellectually and theologically revealing, especially for the Christian students.

A key substantive question confronted early in the course's evolution was whether or not to do a session on each of the Abrahamic traditions, or assume that students' representation of their traditions and supplemental readings were sufficient. The former approach was used the first few times the course was offered, but the latter has become the operative model. Although the HS faculty remain somewhat divided on the subject, the dominant view is that since an hour or so attempt to teach a tradition is at best superficial, since a key principle of dialogue is self-representation and response, and since there are other places in the curriculum to obtain a disciplined understanding of a variety of faith traditions, why further constrain an already ambitious course?

Another early debate in the emergence of the course was whether the focus was dialogue across difference broadly understood, or dialogue more specifically across interfaith differences. The reader will recall that the Seminary retains a strong commitment to being a safe place for the engagement of social diversity of all kinds, most particularly racial/ethnic, gender, and theological and sexual preference. The first few times the course was offered it tried the broader focus. But adding in the wonderfully important and critical issue of how and why appreciative engagement across a various kinds of difference were similar and different, and how to best to untangle the inevitably multilayered factors of any encounter with the other proved too much of a stretch given the other goals of the course. So in appreciation for the uniquely multi-faith student body at the Seminary, the focus was shifted to interfaith, clearly recognizing that any such encounter was always conflated with other layers of difference.

As one would expect, especially given the wide diversity of HS students, some students are drawn to one kind of conversation more

than to another. Some most enjoy and consider most worthwhile the intimate theological conversations between peoples of different faiths. Others find the implicit and explicit dialogue between religious communities, or within them, much more compelling. Some prefer the intellectual challenge, while still others prefer the common activities that bring religions together. The course intends to provide a broad overview so that each student acquires a basic exposure to and knowledge of the various levels and kinds of interfaith dialogue, while hopefully finding at least one avenue that stimulates one's appetite for deeper exploration during their course of study.

But beyond engagement across social and particularly religious differences, 'dialogue' at HS means and intends other things as well. For example, it is an approach to pedagogy – teaching and learning, which is dialogical – taking seriously the questions and experience students and faculty bring to the texts and other materials presented in class. By 'dialogue' is meant an approach to academic disciplines that understands each as a distinct form of inquiry, but also and importantly is in dialogue with the others across disciplinary lines. By 'dialogue' is meant conversation about and across methodological lines in research and approaches to academic fields, dialogue between theory and practice, and between religion and culture.

In the course, each student, whether primarily interested in interfaith dialogue or not, discovers the many ways in which the study of another tradition not only builds respect for that tradition, but also enhances and enriches understanding of one's own tradition. One way this discovery is facilitated is the requirement that each student observe two worship/prayer services – the first in the student's own tradition and the second in another tradition. Before the visits the students receive a primer in ethnographic observation. Afterward, students write up their observations. Often, students in the class invite their peers to their own places of worship, which adds another dimension to the exercise.

A third of the course's primary goals is to provide a way for students to get to know each other personally. Most students commute, some long distances from all over New England. In contrast, the international students tend to live together on campus in large houses where they engage in constant and intense dialogue in their daily lives. (Visa requirements dictate international students have to be fulltime.) The Seminary has learned that if students are not brought together intentionally, it becomes difficult for commuting students to find the

time to get to know each other, or to get to know the many international students. In the Dialogue class the combination of lecture, class discussions led by faculty, dialogue groups and experiences outside the classroom students study together and converse with each other in formal and informal ways across all their social and cultural differences. For many, this is the first time they have had the opportunity for sustained encounter with people they identify as “the other.”

A fourth course goal is more institutionally than student focused. The Dialogue course gives and is intended to give HS faculty a chance to work and think together, and especially to develop a common language which then facilitates subsequent teaching and learning through the various academic programs and cooperative research. Students are invited to acquire this language, to look at it, pay attention to assumptions that it carries, and also to contribute to its development. During the 2007 course, seven of the Seminary’s twelve core faculty participated, and to date every core faculty member has participated in the course at some point. The faculty leaders obviously work most intensely together, but each guest faculty is engaged in at least three ways by the lead faculty. There is the initial negotiation about the guest’s contribution and how it fits the course dynamic. Then there is always guest-core leader discussion of the guest presentation. Sometimes this is merely reaction and connection to other themes in the course. Sometimes it is a mini-dialogue. And sometimes the old habits of traditional academic debate issue forth. What is telling about the latter is that the students inevitably notice and comment upon how this seems out of character with the thrust of the course. Finally, there is feedback from the core leaders to the guest’s based on student evaluations. Faculty leadership rotates, typically on a staggered two or three-year basis, the staggered rotation intended to blend continuity with new experience.

The course provides a forum for faculty sharing, both about the substance and pedagogy of dialogue. Similarly, students are invited to think about the way learning happens and to pay attention to different ways of learning. This is important because not only do people learn differently, but often what counts as learning is at least partly determined by both culture and religion. Some students arrive assuming that only formal lectures provide real academic learning. For others, learning is best done through active doing, trying out ideas and

playing with them. And there are those for whom learning is more relational, and so forth.

We invite students to think about the ways they have learned academically, what they think counts as learning, and then to experience not only one way but other ways of learning as well, as the semester unfolds. Students find too that different professors have their own assumptions about learning. One assumption in a school committed to dialogue that is common, is that learning is an active enterprise which requires the active participation of each student, and each is asked to bring to the classroom open and questioning minds.

Similarly, in any dialogue, and in every class at Hartford Seminary, students find that their peers have different ways of expressing themselves. One cannot engage in dialogue if one thinks that his or her way is the only valid way to think or to express oneself. Some people are most comfortable expressing themselves theoretically, with abstract ideas that may seem far removed from them as individuals. Others talk more confessionally, directly from within a religious tradition. Still others thrive on the strategic challenges of linking thinking and acting.

Finally, there are rules for the road without which the dialogue would not be dialogue, and which are basic principles for study at HS. Exposure of and to these principles is the fifth major goal of the course. These guidelines are much akin to general guidelines for inter-religious dialogue. They include respect for the other persons in the room, their ideas, their experiences, their religious traditions, and the like, and the expectation that one will receive the same respect; the ability to listen to the other actively and patiently, to let others express themselves and to be willing also to do so. Active learning requires participation. A key principle of dialogue is appreciative listening. But an equally important principle is active sharing of one’s own beliefs, awareness and experience. And complicating the appreciative and personal predispositions of dialogue is the further demand to hold them in creative tension and balance with the critical.

Pedagogy

Toward these goals many of the course’s pedagogical moves have already been noted or discussed. Each three-hour session in the 2007 course typically was divided into two 1½ hour blocks. The first block was typically devoted to faculty presentation and discussion, the second

block to dialogue groups guided by questions related to the faculty presentation and always concluding with a plenary debriefing of the dialogue group discussion. The latter always included sharing both about key substantive points and about the groups experience with being in dialogue.

The session on worship provides an interesting example of what this mix and flow entailed. The guest presenters were a Christian and Muslim team, the Christian a HS professor in practical theology and experienced pastor, the Muslim a practicing Imam. They had a double assignment, both related to the student's worship observation assignment (the assignment's paper guidelines are appended at the end of the course syllabus). The practical theologian had a strong background in congregational studies, and began with a brief discussion of a handout on general ethnographic guidelines on participant observation at worship events. The team's second task was to highlight things one might want to pay special attention to in Christian or Muslim worship/prayer. Their approach: dialogue with each other about two questions. First: Imagine you are inviting guests from other faith traditions to worship/prayer in your tradition. What would you like them to know, what assurances might/should you give, and what would you tell them is the most special part of the worship to you personally? Second: Tell of a time you attended a religious ritual event outside your faith tradition – special challenges, surprises, reactions, etc? It probably goes without saying that these two questions then became the focus of the student dialogue groups in the second part of the session. In this instance the guest presenters provided the integrating link for the two halves of the session, with the faculty leader's primary role being guiding the debriefing of the dialogue groups. Implicit in the latter was the decision of the faculty leaders not to sit in on the dialogue groups beyond the first session or two. This was an experiment in allowing the groups to claim and struggle with their own capacity to dialogue. It is also why the dialogue group debriefing always pushed for reflection on the process or practice of dialogue as well as substantive insights.

The session on dialogue and conflict presents a contrasting approach to the integration of the two halves of a course session. Egyptian Imam Mustafa Khattab spent the fall of 2007 in Connecticut as a part of The Fulbright Interfaith Community Action Program. He is an articulate and passionate speaker about Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt and, given the continuing cycling of conflict throughout the

history of these relationships, he was an ideal guest for the course session on interfaith conflicts. But in this instance, and largely because he was from outside the immediate HS context, the faculty leaders designed the dialogue group questions and then in their invitation asked him to be attentive to what we were asking the students to talk about in the dialogue groups, particularly the tangling contribution of theology, land, family and power in interfaith, political conflicts. The specific questions to guide the student dialogue groups included:

1. What kinds of conflict having to do with religion do you experience in the town you live in, in your own religious community, in your country of origin?
2. What are the specifically religious elements in the conflict?
3. How might they be addressed? By whom?
4. Are there elements in the conflict which are not religious? How do they feed the conflict? How might they be addressed?
5. What mitigates the religious conflict? What are factors that help resolve it?
6. What responsibility do YOU in particular take for the conflict or its resolution?

One course writing assignment was the reflection paper on a student's worship observation. The second writing assignment was to keep a weekly journal based on the week's reading and class session, not to exceed five typed, single-spaced pages. Each weekly entry was to include:

- Major points about the reading and class
 - That confirmed/reinforced your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
 - That challenged/contradicted your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
 - Entirely new insights and perspectives.
- Personal reactions: questions, affirmations, *feelings* and connections to one's life.

Brevity was, obviously, a necessity. Bulleted, semi-outline form was encouraged for the "Major points" section; narrative form was encouraged for the "Personal reactions" section.

The journal practice evolved for a variety of reasons. One was to encourage, as well as to provide a check on, the extent to which students were keeping up with reading assignments. In a discussion and dialogue class, this has to be a priority. Second, it afforded the faculty leaders the regular and early opportunity to check on the English proficiency of international students; to check on general level of comprehension of the students, many of whom were returning to graduate study after many years away from the class room; to check on student's capacity to balance appreciative and critical reflection; and to check on the extent to which students were able to balance the intellectual and the personal engagement required by the course. Third, it afforded more introverted students and students not yet fully comfortable with thinking and conversing in English the opportunity to process reactions prior to coming to class. Finally, it afforded students the regular opportunity to provide evaluative feedback to the faculty leaders, one of the most important sensitivities being to if a student was experiencing more confrontation than openness in exchanges with another student.

A new experiment with the journaling assignment for the 2007 class was to post one's weekly journal entry online to one's dialogue group, and then to post responses to the journal entries of those in one's dialogue group. Recall: this was well before twittering and most other forms of social networking were just beginning to be noticed. It was only the second year that MA students at the Seminary were required to have online capacity, most HS courses did not include any electronic component and only a few HS faculty had taught (or taken) an electronic course. Beyond the possible efficacy of submitting one's journal entries electronically, the faculty leaders of the 2007 course were intrigued by the question of whether the level of appreciative, mutual engagement the course strove for could be achieved online.

Dialogue in a World of Difference: Outcomes and Student Evaluations

In addition to the standard forms of evaluation used in the Dialogue course – evaluative dialogue as a part of the final session; and standard HS course evaluation form -- the 2007 students received a special email survey, a sample of students were interviewed personally, and the external evaluator who conducted the survey and interviews

also observed several sessions including the final session.² The net results: overall positive, but with two strong caveats. The two primary points of concern included the online weekly journal postings and when in a student's course of study the course is taken. We begin with the concerns.

New Student/Experienced Student Differences

Dialogue in a World of Difference is the only required course for HS Master students; it is intended as an introduction to and socialization into the distinct educational ethos at the Seminary and, accordingly, it is strongly recommended that it be taken in the fall of a student's first year (which would presumably be a student's first semester). As already noted, this does not always happen, nor can it be assumed that HS students begin their course work with the fall semester. For example, many international students begin during the Seminary's June semester of intensive courses. And, it is not unusual for commuter students to take one or two courses as non-matriculated students before formally enrolling in a degree program. For the 2007 offering of the course the pattern was consistent with prior experience, but no less frustrating. Students enrolled in the course in the first semester of their education reported enjoying and benefiting from the course to a much greater extent, and reported a much more consistently positive experience than students who took the course later in their programs. The general concern of the latter group was that they were already familiar with some of the materials and activities of the course. By experiencing the rich interfaith environment Hartford Seminary offers through other classes they had taken and events in which they had participated, these students felt they were already immersed in, comfortable with, and enthusiastic about the diversity of HS students and opportunity for peer learning this afforded. They would have preferred a more advanced experience.

The tension between the positive contributions of the socialization of new students on the one hand, and the logistics and economies of scale of either offering the course every semester or redesigning the course with two, occasionally connecting tracks on the other hand,

² Adair Lummis, Research Associate at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research served as external evaluator. This section on outcomes and student evaluations is heavily indebted, with our great appreciation, to her report.

make this a vexing, institutional issue. That being said, it is also true that any relationally intense course, especially ones with the diversity of students typical of the Seminary's Dialogue course, takes on a somewhat unique character. New student/experienced student differences within the Dialogue course are always present, but it was especially strong in the 2007 class. Although the reason(s) for this are not entirely clear, one factor appears to be a comparatively high percentage of students who had previously taken courses at the Seminary and who resided on campus.

Although the majority of HS Masters students are commuters, international students are encouraged to live in the Seminary's on-campus housing. This was the case for roughly a half of the 2007 Dialogue students, most of whom had been at the Seminary since at least the previous June. By the time of the course these students had developed a high level of familiarity with one another, particularly through exchanging information about their backgrounds, families, cultures, and religions. On the positive side and given that this was a multi-faith group, their strong familiarity based on ordinary daily interaction portrayed a well-established interfaith unit and served as an encouragement for the class members who had not met or interacted with people outside of their own traditions and cultures. On the negative side, the existing familiarity among the on-campus students made it more difficult for the off-campus students to find a place in an already well-knit mosaic. Further, it is not surprising that some of the campus residents found the course's dialogue experience a bit elementary. Indeed, a few even questioned its necessity. For them dialogue was "naturally happening" in every corner of the Seminary, through interactions with their roommates or next-door neighbors, and they found structured class activities to be somewhat artificial. Most of the campus students, however, agreed that the course helped them to view their raw experience through an academic perspective, yet they maintained their preference to have been challenged more in the class.

Weekly Journal Postings on Blackboard

The weekly, online journal postings and responses were clearly the least helpful aspect of the class, more frustrating than supportive for both students and professors. The clumsiness of the Blackboard software bore a good bit of the ire. How justified this was is impossible for Luddites to judge, but everyone agreed that the online interaction

just wasn't very conversational. This shortcoming in the online experience was amplified by the students' positive experience of the in-person, in-class dialogue groups. The online interaction just paled in comparison to the students' strong sense of their in-class experience as dynamic and engaging (and likely more familiar and comfortable).

Further complicating the matter, several students ran into technical difficulties accessing the online site, and a few did not initially have regular access to a computer or lacked basic computer skills. In the time it took to solve these issues, affected students missed anywhere from two to five weeks of online participation. Not only did this cause these students to fall behind, but since the online groups were the same as the in-class dialogue groups, missing one or two member's online input affected the entire group.

One final frustration about the online component of the course expressed by some students was the lead faculty's decision not to interact in the online conversation. The intention was to allow the students the freedom and responsibility to construct their own interaction. Faculty did monitor the online exchanges and time was given during class to de-brief and reflect on the students' online dialogue. But it is clear that many students would have preferred regular, posted responses from faculty; indeed, some would have preferred faculty posts to peer posts.

In-Class Dialogue Groups

As just noted, the students' experience of the in-class dialogue groups was overwhelmingly positive. But it was not without one strong point of ambivalence. Students were put into five groups with consideration for diversity of faith, gender, nationality, and ethnicity. Every session except the opening and closing weeks included at least an hour for dialogue group discussion followed by returning to the main group for collective reflection.

In contrast to prior Dialogue class' practice of rotating membership in small groups, the 2007 faculty decided to maintain the group memberships for the duration of the semester. The intent was to move beyond comfortable familiarity to the deeper bonds of openness and trust that only extended interaction could provide. In the course evaluations, whenever students were asked their preference in regard to consistent or changing group membership, they universally expressed

the ambivalence of a trade off. While valuing the growing level of familiarity, trust, and comfort through consistent membership, they felt it came at the cost of better knowing the members of the other groups. Many agreed that consistent membership allowed them to move on and have deeper conversations, and that through changing membership, conversations would have stayed more on the surface. Most importantly, in the course evaluations all students reported that the dialogue groups were the major factor in their 'greater ability to engage in interfaith and multi-cultural conversations.'

In the course evaluations, a few students shared their discomfort with certain individuals in their groups who would either dominate the conversation or make judgmental or disrespectful comments. As part of the students' learning process, it was important to deal with such commonly occurring challenges of dialogue. Instructors maintained their positions as facilitators outside the groups, addressing such challenges faced by the students during plenary reflection periods and providing helpful advice for dealing with the situations. Additionally, faculty did feel compelled to make one or two private interventions to help one or another student better understand the nature and spirit of dialogue and that communication was an interaction between sender and receiver.

Several students suggested that more icebreaking exercises during the early dialogue group discussions would have been helpful. The faculty agree. Indeed, this is standard practice. But for better or worse the normal structure of the first session of the 2007 class was altered significantly to afford students the opportunity to attend a special lecture that day, "Jesus and Muhammad: New Convergences," by Timothy J. Winter, University Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, England.

The main goals of the dialogue group discussions were integration and interaction. They were meant to provide an opportunity for students to practice theories they learned in class and gain experience in dialogically interacting with people from different traditions and cultures. Within the groups, students had occasion to set their ground rules, establish friendships with one another, and test their own limits in intra or interfaith conversations.

The small groups were also intended to help new students' integration into the Seminary community, and from course evaluations it is clear they did. Particularly, international students needing to

express their view in a different language than their native tongue felt more secure to speak up in their small groups rather than to the class as a whole. A student shared the following during a personal interview: "The small group is more comfortable for us to speak up our ideas. In the larger group because of my English, I cannot participate very well although I have some ideas to discuss about." Some groups kept in touch after the end of class, accomplishing one of the aims intended by the formation of the groups.

Giving a voice to every member of the class is crucial for this particular course. Class discussions helped empower voices that may have otherwise gone unheard. As part of the dialogue group guidelines, students were asked to be careful in terms of sharing their time equally; kindly warning those who dominated the conversation and encouraging those who tended to stay silent.

In order to share, and if necessary respond to insights, questions and concerns from the dialogue groups, the last period of each session was a plenary of reports and reflection. Volunteers reported the highlights of their individual group discussion, and anything else a group wanted to bring to the class's attention. While a few students thought that this activity was a "waste of time" and conversations seemed disintegrated, the majority of students reported enjoying hearing the voices of class members other than those in their groups. A student interviewed shared the following:

(The three instructors) did a terrific job in debriefing the small group dialogue exercise. They made sure it went around and everybody spoke from their groups. You started to develop the sense of what other people were like, who these people were even if you were not in direct face-to-face conversation with them.

Who "everybody" is in the HS experience provides both the necessity and the unique opportunity for the Seminary to require a course like this. Indeed, it is a rare seminary that has such diversity within its student body. But the pervasiveness and extensiveness of diversity is always humbling. Asian religious traditions are generally absent in the HS student body, and consequently the Dialogue course. And as much as we try, we frequently are void a Jewish presence in our classes. But there is another theological dimension that oldline Protestants tend not to notice and that, especially, the Muslim students reminded us is minimal in our degree classes and, relatedly the

Dialogue class. HS faculty and students are predominantly affiliated with Christianity and Islam. The dialogue class is fertile host for exchanges between Christians and Muslims. Indeed, the cross-religious dialogue leads many students to wonder about and taste the potential richness of intra-religious dialogue. While not necessarily identifying themselves as traditional, the majority of our Muslim students, particularly our international students, would be considered traditional. The majority of Christians, in contrast, would be considered liberal. What is interesting to note is that both conservative Christians and traditional Muslims in the Dialogue class expressed concern about the under representation of a stronger, conservative Christian representation in the class with whom to be in dialogue.

Lectures from Faculty and Guests

Data collected from the students shows an appreciation for what was gained from the three lead faculty. From the students' perspective, belonging to different traditions and academic disciplines, the instructors helpfully took center-stage as participants of an active dialogue with one another as they team-taught and hosted their colleagues as guest lecturers.

Each of the three lead faculty delivered lectures in the early sessions of the class. They served as conveners for the following sessions, continuing to present key materials and lead class discussions while hosting guest lecturers. Students appreciated that both lead faculty and guest faculty actually represented their different backgrounds and personal expertise in their lectures. Students particularly noted how this helped them gain insight in comprehending different aspects of and perspectives on interfaith dialogue. But students most appreciated the professors' modeling "how to dialogue." Among their favorites: the presentations on "dialoguing effectively" and on scriptural interpretation. Students were especially enthusiastic about the latter and impressed with the presenters ability to be at the same time challenging in his presentation of his own stance, yet open to "be argued with," thus encouraging students to express their agreement or disagreement with his presentation and materials.

The pattern of having three lead faculty and guest lecturers was strongly affirmed by students as central to the design and success of the course. New students also appreciated having a glimpse of prospective professors and their varying teaching styles. Surprisingly for a class

that included a parade of guest presenters, no students expressed concern about a disjointedness or unevenness.

Assigned Reading

Wesley Ariarajah's *Not without My Neighbor*, provided the single textual touchstone across the course's 10 sessions. Students new to interfaith dialogue deeply appreciated the book for its international, experiential and narratively conveyed real life examples, and practitioner insight and analysis. Students coming from a strong interfaith background tended to find the book "less valuable." Concerns included that it was published pre 9/11 and required an update, and its focus on the World Council of Churches was too limited, particularly in its minimum treatment of Christian-Muslim or Abrahamic dialogue.

The rest of the course reading consisted of different chapters and articles assigned by the core and guest faculty, specifics of which are contained in the appended course syllabus. While students found some more engaging than others depending on a student's interests and background, the overwhelming sentiment was that they were both "interesting" and "provocative." Roughly a fourth of the class indicated that their primary interest was in the practical aspect of dialogue and they would have preferred more readings on putting theory into practice and on instruction in initiating dialogue. But on the whole, students found a balance between theory and practice offered through a combination of readings, lectures, discussions, and worship experiences; and there was a consensus among students that reading materials for the course make an important contribution to this.

Worship Observation and Reflection Papers

Students were required to observe two prayer/worship services, first at a place of worship/prayer affiliated with their own tradition and then at a worship/prayer service outside of their own tradition. They were asked to write a comparative and reflective essay based on guidelines given by the instructors, and early in the semester students were provided with instructions on how to observe their own tradition through the lenses of an outsider and how to visit a church, mosque, or a place of worship with which they were unfamiliar.

Students could do their visits alone or in groups, and while students were on their own to organize their visits the lead faculty aided students in finding sites who needed help. Some students went with the members of their dialogue groups and reported that the group experience was positive.

An interesting affirmation of the exercise was that several students criticized the course for only requiring two visits, not more. Some students would have preferred requiring group visits rather than an individual option (which was, in fact, the norm); a few expressed their interest in making the visits as a whole class. The goal of the instructors was to build self-confidence and courage among participants to initiate dialogue and interaction. As evidenced in the students' reflection papers, this seemed to work well at many levels.

Visits provided new insights for students and topics to pursue in their dialogue groups. The worship observation was students' most favorable part of the class experience. Without exception, students valued the experience and found the comparative writing assignment helpful, allowing them to not only gain insight to other traditions in their surrounding communities, but turning back and looking at the ways their tradition would be seen by outsiders. Students went to great length to note that and how the observation experience increased their awareness of themselves and their partners in dialogue.

Concluding Reflections

The student evaluations highlight the positive outcomes of the Dialogue course. Students clearly felt that:

- their experiences, both in and out of class, provided them with a greater understanding of and appreciation for the importance of dialogue;
- they had gained a solid, initial exposure to the intellectual underpinnings of and issues at stake in interfaith dialogue;
- their interfaith conversations had been personally enriching and deepened self-awareness;
- they had increased confidence in their ability to approach someone 'other' via dialogical methods;

- they had made many new friends within the HS student body; and
- they appreciated the opportunity to "preview" a wide spectrum of HS faculty.

Both in regard to "interfaith dialogue" and as socialization into the HS ethos, the course works, and continues as the front door into the Seminary's Master of Arts program. But the course evaluations also identify several areas of challenge that would seemingly make the course work better. The evaluations also point to a few of the experiments' specific to the 2007 course offering that required reconsideration. We turn to these in conclusion.

The course works especially well in introducing new students to HS. That is, of course, its intent, and why it is offered each fall. Unfortunately, HS students are anything but "typical" and that includes their journeys into and through our degree programs. As we've seen, the course works less well for students already well into their degree programs. The size of the Seminary and considerations of optimal class size for the Dialogue course preclude offering it more than once a year. So if the course is to better accommodate the respective needs of new and experienced students, it needs to happen within the current once-a-year offering. An option yet to be tried would be to use the small group component of the course and the multi-faculty leadership of the course as an opportunity for special attention to the diverse needs of not only experienced students, but also other interests or needs – e.g., practitioner track vs academic track; American vs international. Caution would have to be taken to not overly compromise the power of the whole, but this appears imaginable.

How much leadership faculty should provide to small discussion groups is always open to debate, especially when one of the purposes of the group is to help student's learn how to lead groups. For the 2007 course, the lead faculty experimented with one extreme, basically absenting themselves from the groups, but leading the plenary process reflections after the small group sessions. Sounds better in theory than it worked, especially given that substance as well as process is a stake in the small group experiences. Upon the recommendation of the 2007 lead faculty, the next year's class used a three-dialogue group model. One group was led by each lead faculty person, with the faculty person moving more and more from "leader" to "participant" over the first half of the course of the semester, and with the appointment of a student

“leader” on a rotating basis during the second half of the course. This didn’t solve the tension between depth-with-one-group vs becoming-familiar-with-everyone experienced by students in the 2007 class; but it did allow professors to provide more instantaneous feedback to students, which was another concern expressed by some students.

The journal assignments have been retained and students continue to have the option of submitting them online. But the requirement of online posting and response within one’s dialogue group has been abandoned. Students are now welcome to create a course blog or two, but we’re not aware that this has happened to any substantive extent in the ensuing offerings of the course.

Some students in the 2007 class expressed a desire for more readings and discussion about what dialogue looks like in practice. The publication of Jane Smith’s book, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue* helps fill this void. Select chapters from Robert Wuthnow’s, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, 2005), also have become a regular part of the course reading list, especially his chapters on how congregations approach (or avoid) interfaith encounters, and why interfaith efforts fail and succeed. Two additional benefits of the Wuthnow reading are they provide interesting portraits of how Evangelical pastors and congregations think about interfaith issues (a concern raised by the 2007 students), and of the typically circuitous route between a pastors’ beliefs and their leadership of congregational responses to the multi-faith reality in their immediate social context (always a comforting experience to the non-systematic laypersons among us).

Several years ago HS began surveying new graduates about their educational experience. One series of questions asks graduates to assess how much “knowledge and understanding” they acquired in each of the core areas of the institution’s educational outcomes document – interfaith dialogue being one of these. Two of a range of check-off responses include, “More than I expected/hoped” and “More than I Wanted.” The final question in the section switches from the particular to the whole and asks graduates how they would “grade” their overall educational experience at the Seminary with “B” being, “More than I expected or hoped” and “A” being, “Met my highest expectations/hopes.” Sixty-five percent of graduates taking the survey responded “More than I expected/hoped” to the question on Interfaith Dialogue. We take this as a good thing! More importantly, our students do too. Only one has ever responded that their exposure to interfaith

dialogue at the Seminary turned out to be “More than I Wanted.” And, graduates whose exposure to interfaith dialogue was more than they initially expected or hoped were also more likely than other students to say that their overall educational experience at HS turned out to be more than they expected or hoped. We can’t document it, but the hard evidence is certainly consistent with our belief, and the rationale for the Dialogue in a World Difference course, that early socialization into the Seminary’s dialogical preference enhances the opportunity of students to take advantage of the unique interfaith diversity they encounter among their peers.

Fall 2007

Dialogue in a World of Difference (MA-530)

Suendam Birinci
David Roozen

Heidi Hadsell

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Students and faculty in a collegial setting will learn about the practice and models of interfaith dialogue; be introduced to critical substantive issues related to interfaith relations in today’s globalized context; and appreciatively encounter the diversity of Hartford Seminary’s student body through an ongoing experience of dialogical listening and conversation.

UNDERLYING COURSE ASSUMPTION: This is more than a course about dialogue.

It is an invitation to engage in the practice of dialogue in a structured setting and thereby to develop the appreciative capacities that, among other things, will enable you to take maximum advantage of the diversity of students you will have in classes throughout your Hartford Seminary experience. Course outcomes focus on what is learned in the process.

OUTCOMES:

- A sense of collegiality and community across religious, cultural, gender lines
- An experientially grounded understanding of the principles of interfaith dialogue
- The ability to participate meaningfully and constructively in multi-cultural and interfaith conversations and learning
- The critical, intellectual capacity to address substantive issues from a dialogically appreciate perspective
- A familiarity with a broad spectrum of Hartford Seminary faculty

EXPECTATIONS:

- Complete assigned reading in preparation for the class session for which it is assigned
- Participate fully in class discussions and activities. Timely and regular attendance is especially important, as is familiarity with the assigned reading
- The nature and quality of classroom discussion is critical. Expectations include:
 - Sharing openly and respectfully
 - Empathetic listening (listening with an intention of hearing and understanding the others' perspectives)
 - Creating and sustaining a safe space for open and beneficial conversations, including respecting the confidentiality of what is said in class and posted on the online discussion board!
- Attend and observe two worship services, first a worship at your regular place of worship in the U.S., and second, a worship in a faith tradition other than your own.
- Timely and regular posting of the journaling assignments; and timely submission of your worship reflection paper.

THE GRADE FOR THE COURSE WILL BE PASS OR FAIL

COURSE READING

Primary course readings will consist of papers, book chapters and excerpts assigned by guest faculty for their respective sessions. These will either be available online or available in the library reserve section to be copied. Additionally, you should purchase ***Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations* (S. Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999)**. We will read it in its entirety, with specific chapters assigned to different class sessions as we move through the course.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

1) WEEKLY JOURNAL: Each student will write and post to the online course discussion board weekly journal entries based on the week's reading and class session, not to exceed 5, typed, single-spaced pages. Each student will be clustered with four other course participants with whom one's journal postings will be shared, and to whose journal postings one will respond. These responses will offer careful reading, comments, ideas, and reactions to the journal postings. Typically, the reading and class session journal postings will be posted immediately after class; and responses during the ensuing week. Course professors will peruse the postings and responses both to track the timeliness of participation and to assess the course materials' engagement with students.

Each weekly entry should include:

- Session date, topic and reading assignment.
- Major points:
 - Which confirmed/reinforced your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
 - Which challenged/contradicted your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
 - Entirely new insights and perspectives.
- Personal reactions to the readings: questions, affirmations, ***feelings*** and connections to one's life.

Material must, obviously, be brief. Therefore a bulleted, semi-outline form is OK. For "Major points" section. The "Personal reactions" section should be in narrative form.

Access information and a brief introduction to the course discussion board will be provided during the September 18 class session.

2) REFLECTION PAPER ON WORSHIP OBSERVATION: A five-to-seven page, comparative reflection on your worship visits. You will receive a worship observation guide and briefing during the October 2 class session, and you will receive an outline for your comparative reflection paper. The reflection paper is due at the last class session, at which we will debrief your worship experience.

SESSION OUTLINE

Session One: September 11 – Why Dialogue? Why Me?

Heidi Hadsell – Introduction to Interfaith Dialogue

Attend Bijlefeld Lecture: “***Jesus and Muhammad: New Convergences,***” Timothy J. Winter, *University Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, England.*

Session Two: September 18 – Religious Typologies and Theologies

David Roozen – Theologies of Religion

Reading Handouts:

Other Religions Are False Paths That Mislead Their Followers, *Ajith Fernando*

Other Religions Are Implicit forms of our Own Religion, *Karl Rahner*

Other Religions Are Equally Valid Ways to the Same Truth, *John Hick*

Other Religions Speak of Different but Equally Valid Truths, *John b. Cobb Jr*

Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition? *Paul F. Knitter* Islam and Pluralism, *Ashgar Ali Engineer*

Not Without My Neighbor, Chapter 1

Session Three: September 25 – Models and Practices of Dialogue

Suendam Birinci – Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue

Guest Faculty: Jane Smith

Reading Handouts:

Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue, Leonard Swidler

Encountering Each Other, Jane I. Smith

When Dialogue Goes Wrong, Jane I. Smith

Not Without My Neighbor, Chapter 2

Session Four: October 2 – Worship and Dialogue

Guest Faculty: James Nieman & Sohaib Nazeer Sultan

Reading Handouts:

Mapping the Field of Ritual, Ronald L Grimes

Not Without My Neighbor, Chapters 3 & 7

Session Five: October 9 – Personal and Pastoral Issues in Interfaith Encounter

Guest Faculty: Ingrid Mattson

Reading Handouts: To Be Announced

Not Without My Neighbor, Chapters 4 & 6

Session Six: October 16 – History of (Dialogue or?) Christian-Muslim Relations

Guest Faculty: Ibrahim Abu-Rabi

Reading: To Be Announced

Session Seven: October 23 – Scripture and Dialogue

Guest Faculty: Uriah Kim

Reading:

Genesis 37-50; Surah XII (Surat Yusuf) of the Qur'an

Entire issue (only 35 pages long) of *The Student Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* (Vol. 1, No. 1, October

2006): **Online at --**

<http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/abraham/sjsr/issues/volume1/number1/index.html>

Session Eight: October 30 – Comparative Theological Concepts

Guest Faculty: Kelton Cobb

Reading: To Be Announced

Session Nine: November 6 – Dialogue and Conflict: A Case Study

Guest Faculty: Mustafa Khattab

Reading: To Be Announced

Not Without My Neighbor, Chapters 5

Session Ten: November 13 – Conclusion: Prayers of Supplication and Thanksgiving

Debriefing of Worship Experiences

Potluck Dinner: Sharing a Meal

Guidelines for Your Worship Reflection Paper

Due at the last class session, at which we will debrief your worship experience.

Date Due – Nov 13; 2,500 Words Maximum; 1 ½ Line Spacing

I. Your tradition (about 2 pages):

- Name, location and date of worship in your own tradition
- Paragraph description of the worship space and people in attendance
- Major points of observation:
 - o Your sense of what appeared to be the high points of the service for the participants; the low points.

- o The personal or theological “meanings” attributed to worship events in any conversations you had with participants
- o Things about the worship that you experienced in a new way from your perspective of observer rather than a worshipping participant.
- Personal reactions, feelings, questions:
 - o Regarding trying to be an observer rather than a worshipping participant
 - o New insights, thoughts, questions about your past or future participation as a worshipper.

II. Tradition other than your own (about 2 pages):

- Name, location and date of worship in a tradition other than your own
- Paragraph description of your preparation for the worship, your arrival at the worship building, and your entrance into the worship space
- Paragraph description of the worship space and people in attendance
- Major points of observation:
 - o Your sense of what appeared to be the high points of the service for the participants
 - o Aspects of the worship that you anticipated being present and/or seemed familiar.
 - o Aspects of the worship that surprised you and/or were unfamiliar to you.
 - o The personal or theological “meanings” attributed to worship events in any conversations you had with participants
- Personal reactions, feelings, questions:
 - o Regarding being present in a worship of a tradition other than your own

- Regarding an observer of a worship in a tradition other than your own
- Other reactions

III. Comparative reflection (about 2 pages)

- New insights and perspectives gained through these visits
- Things that stood out as similar or significantly different
 - Questions you would like to ask someone from that tradition about what you observed or felt during the worship of a tradition other than your own
 - Things that you think someone from another tradition observing the worship service in your tradition would have a hard time understanding unless someone from within your tradition explained it to them.
 - New questions or feelings you now have about your own worship participation
 - Any other reflections, comments, questions or concerns.

IV. Reflect on the benefits of these visits. If you do not find them beneficial elaborate on why.