



# DEVELOPING INTERFAITH STUDIES AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Responding to an IFYC/Teagle Foundation Interfaith  
and Pre-Professional Course Sequence/Curricular  
Development RFP

## Abstract

A proposal for an Interdisciplinary Interfaith Studies Certificate Program that bridges knowledge and practice in the Humanities, Social and Applied Sciences, and Pre-Professional Social Work Programs coordinated by Jessica Lucero PhD (Social Work Program), Bonnie Glass-Coffin PhD (Anthropology/Religious Studies Programs), Steven Lucero PhD (Counseling & Psychological Services and the School of Veterinary Medicine) and Mary Leavitt MS, (Director, College of Humanities and Social Sciences Advising Center)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a religiously-diverse world, the ability to interact appreciatively with people who orient around religion differently is an increasingly marketable skill as well as a prerequisite for civic (and civil) engagement. In the Intermountain West, where religious diversity is extremely low, there is an especially urgent need to build this capacity in our students. The monies from this grant will support the development of a new interdisciplinary Interfaith Studies Certificate Program at Utah State University to address this need. It will be designed to broaden student abilities to interact in appreciative ways with those who orient around religion differently while supporting a culture of interfaith cooperation in the communities where students will likely live and work after graduation. The Certificate Program, designed through a partnership between Anthropology/Religious Studies and the Social Work Program by a team of faculty and professional staff from these disciplines as well as from Advising, Counseling and Psychological Services and the School of Veterinary Medicine, will bridge the classroom and the community, the humanities, a pre-professional program, and the applied sciences. Additionally, the proposed program will explicitly address our school's mission as a research intensive, land-grant university with strong agricultural roots.

Funds from the grant will be used to develop new courses and/or revise existing courses as well as to develop community-based practicum experiences. Three primary components will include (1) required foundations courses; (2) courses spanning four thematic areas including the History of Interfaith Cooperation, Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation, Appreciative Knowledge of Diverse Religious Traditions and Ethical Community Engagement; and (3) a required three credit practicum experience. Grant-funding will be redistributed to faculty who successfully compete for course-development/course-revision "mini-grants" in accordance with an RFP that is designed and adjudicated by the Interfaith Studies Certificate Planning Committee. Additionally, grant funds will be made available to offset costs associated with the development of practicum opportunities for students working at multiple sites in community settings with current as well as new community partners. High student interest is assured because of an already robust co-curricular set of events and activities at Utah State University that is coordinated by the USU Interfaith Initiative and that spans multiple departments and units on both the Academic and Student Services "sides" of the university. Funding this project will have both a wide impact on students from across the university and is the next logical step for institutionalizing university commitment to interfaith cooperation both on campus and in the surrounding community.

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

### ***Introduction and Vision Statement***

In an increasingly religiously-diverse world, the ability to facilitate positive dialogue and action among people who orient around religion differently is an increasingly marketable skill as well as a prerequisite for civic (and civil) engagement in our neighborhoods and communities, our nation, and the world. Students completing the proposed Certificate Program will learn to research effectively, reflect critically, share authentically, engage appreciatively, and to problem-solve—skills which will set them apart in their professional lives as educators, health and social service providers, community organizers, business leaders and agents for positive social change. The knowledge and skills gained through this Certificate Program will also prepare students to pursue further academic research in religion, the social sciences, and ancillary fields.

### ***Background***

Interfaith Studies, as an emerging academic field, “examines the multiple dimensions of how individuals and groups who orient around religion differently interact with one another, along with the implications of these interactions for communities, civil society, and global politics”<sup>1</sup> Interfaith studies creates conditions for appreciative understanding and for civic engagement between people of all religious and non-religious world-views in a world that is, as Eboo Patel has noted, “awash with religion.” It is about cultivating knowledge of the U.S. legacy of interfaith cooperation and the reasons that religious intolerance has sometimes surfaced both at home and abroad. It is about coming to understand how moral behavior and values have been construed and enacted in doctrinally diverse religious traditions—and how religious commitments create a space in which an appreciation of shared values can positively shape discourse and action. Interfaith Studies is about the lives of the “religious” rather than “religions” *per se*, and it is about creating capacity for behavior across perceived “faith-divides” that will create a climate where interfaith cooperation becomes the social norm within a generation.<sup>2</sup> Teaching interfaith studies on our public, land-grant campus dovetails well with the university’s mission of cultivating diversity of thought and culture as well as serving all people of Utah through learning, discovery and engagement<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Why Interfaith Studies is Urgently Needed at Utah State University***

Development of a Certificate Program in Interfaith Studies will benefit from high levels of student interest in the topic of religion as well as their interest in how religious worldviews inform life experience. At USU, student interest in religion is very high.<sup>4</sup> However, in spite of this apparent exposure to religious diversity, church-affiliated mission activity does not necessarily translate to high religious literacy and/or a religiously pluralist orientation to the world. Additionally, diversity on campus<sup>5</sup> and in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2013/fall/patel>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/Interfaith%20Cooperation%20101.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usu.edu/about/at-a-glance/>

<sup>4</sup> In the recent IDEALS survey of more than 1700 freshmen, a USU-specific question we added to this nation-wide protocol revealed that 72% of these *want* more discussion of religious/non-religious world-views in the classroom. This is even higher than what Astin, Astin and Lundholm report in their 2010 book, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students’ Inner Lives*, (Jossey-Bass). This may be reflected in the fact that as many as 30% of the 70% of students who self identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have done missions for their church in 189 of the world’s 224 countries (<https://theboard.byu.edu/questions/72034/>).

<sup>5</sup> In the IDEALS survey administered on campus during Oct. 2015, it was learned that 70% of students self-identify as LDS (Mormon), 6% identified as “other Christian, less than 3% identified as “other religious,” and about 20% identified as “nones” (including Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual, Non-religious or “other world view.”

the surrounding community is very low,<sup>6</sup> and the lack of daily contact with those of other religious backgrounds creates a kind of “knowledge vacuum” in our region that often contributes to assumptions and stereotypes about those of other religious/non-religious worldviews.<sup>7</sup> This situation is particularly dangerous in a time where the hateful rhetoric and poisonous speech that are endemic to current media portrayals contribute to religious “othering.” For all these reasons, development of interfaith studies curricula is urgently needed here at Utah State University.

### ***Evidence of Institutional and Community Commitment to Date***

Currently, interfaith studies curricula at USU are mostly embedded in classes with other learning objectives and subject matter. As suggested above, our students are hungry for classes that more explicitly deal with religious themes because of their experiences as missionaries and/or their participation in their own faith traditions. For example, when Eboo Patel came to campus in Fall 2014, his lecture was attended by over 1200 students, faculty, staff, and community members<sup>8</sup>.

Much of our current work in this area is already cross-disciplinary. For example, the Spirituality in Social Work course, which is offered annually to students across the regional campuses of the state of Utah through an online format, is taught by a psychologist dually appointed at USU Counseling and Psychological Services (within the Division of Student Services) as well as the School of Veterinary Medicine, housed in the college of Agriculture. About half of the courses in Religious Studies Program (a Major and a Minor housed in the History Department) are offered by faculty from other disciplines. A few of the other courses that touch upon themes of interest to an Interfaith Studies curriculum include Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology of Religion, and Evolution of Religion, (in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology), and several courses in Philosophy, Art History, History, Languages, Global Communications, Environmental Studies, Biology and Physics. Opportunities for community engagement are also very inter-disciplinary. An undergraduate Collaborative Anthropology Research Lab provides students the opportunity to do research on religious identities and how these impact role expectations and behaviors among USU students. The Social Work Program integrates religion and spirituality in numerous courses and practicum experiences. Students who are completing their required senior year practicum already attend to spiritual and religious aspects of social work practice at sites ranging from LDS Family Services to hospice, all three local school districts, regional hospitals in the area, and a variety of corrections and mental health related sites.

We also have a very robust campus-wide Interfaith Initiative that has, over the last three years, created a consciousness about the importance of interfaith cooperation on our campus and in the surrounding community. As part of the USU Interfaith Initiative,<sup>9</sup> we have built relationships with faith-leaders from multiple congregations in the community (and we have created an interfaith directory of religious organizations),<sup>10</sup> we have a permanent seat on our local community interfaith council, we have created a stand-alone three hour training program that teaches appreciative knowledge and builds capacity for positive interaction between those who orient around religion differently (and that has been attended by more than 170 staff, students, faculty, administrators, staff and community partners to date). Additionally, we have developed an active Interfaith Student Association<sup>11</sup> that has held

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<sup>6</sup> Cf <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/10/map-of-religious-diversity-in-america/>

<sup>7</sup> cf *New York Times* article of March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, “The Middle East Came to Idaho State: It Wasn’t the Best Fit,” ([http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/us/a-middle-eastern-tension-point-pocatello-idaho.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/us/a-middle-eastern-tension-point-pocatello-idaho.html?_r=0))

<sup>8</sup> [http://1560811.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media/0\\_yjwnczie](http://1560811.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media/0_yjwnczie)

<sup>9</sup> <https://anthropology.usu.edu/htm/people/interfaith-initiative>

<sup>10</sup> [http://religiousstudies.usu.edu/files/uploads/Interfaith\\_Initiative/Interfaith\\_Directory.pdf](http://religiousstudies.usu.edu/files/uploads/Interfaith_Initiative/Interfaith_Directory.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.usu.edu/accesscenter/interfaith/>

numerous events to increase appreciative knowledge and to build capacity for students to become interfaith leaders on our campus, and we have an Interfaith Advisory Council that coordinates interfaith activities on our campus that has representatives from multiple campus offices and programs as well as student and community interfaith leaders.

**Overview of and justification for the Proposed Course Sequence**

The Interfaith Certificate Program we envision will provide a broad base of study that addresses intersecting issues of religion, diversity, and practical career experience to provide greater flexibility and interdisciplinarity in pursuit of student academic and career goals. It will combine classroom learning with practicum experiences at community sites and will give students the opportunity to apply their critical thinking abilities across cluster themes in potential work settings. Interacting with professionals in the fields they will one day be working will give Interfaith Certificate completing students the opportunity to creatively learn and practice the skills valuable for eventual graduate school, career, and personal life success in a religiously complex world. Many of the courses that have been identified for possible inclusion in the proposed sequence also count toward completion of general University Studies credits, pre-requisites and requirements for a variety of majors, minors, and certificates in other areas.

To complete the Interfaith Studies Certificate Program, students will successfully complete at least 21 credit hours, across multiple topic areas. Our proposed course sequence begins with completion of two foundation courses (6 hours) including an Introduction to Interfaith Studies (to be developed) and either ANTH 3160 (Anthropology of Religion) or RELS 1010 (Introduction to Religious Studies). Next, students will take at least one course from each of four clusters: History of Interfaith Cooperation, Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation, Appreciative Knowledge of Diverse Religious Traditions and Ethics of Community Engagement (12 credit hours). Finally, at least one practicum experience (3 hours) will provide students with the opportunity to apply the appreciative knowledge and skill-sets they gain in the classroom to a practical experience in the community. While the exact courses offered as part of the Interfaith Certificate Program will vary according to faculty interest in modifying these courses to contain interfaith-specific content, a review of the Utah State University Course Catalog suggests that the following courses might be adapted, depending on faculty interest. These courses also give us a starting-point for reaching-out to specific instructors with our encouragement that they consider applying for a grant-supported “mini-grant” to add appropriate content to their courses.

Foundation Courses (6 credit hours):

- ANTH 1XXX: Introduction to Interfaith Studies (to be developed) AND EITHER:
- ANTH 3160 (RELS 3160): Anthropology of Religion (OR)
- RELS 1010: Introduction to Religious Studies

Clusters (12 hours including at least 3 hours of course work in each cluster). Possible courses for inclusion include the following (subject to instructor interest in developing appropriate interfaith related content).

<p><b>History of Interfaith Cooperation</b>          HIST 1060: Introduction to Islamic Civilization          HIST 3170 (CLAS 3170): Descent and Return: Ancient Views of Hades and the Afterlife          HIST 3220 (RELS 3220): Medieval European Civilization          HIST 3270 (RELS 3270): The Crusades</p>	<p><b>Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation</b>          ANTH 1010: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology          ANTH 3110: North American Indian Cultures          ANTH 4800 Evolution of Religion          ARTH 3770: American Apocalypse: Disaster and Dystopia in Hollywood Film          ARTH 5740: Art and Religion: Topics in Sacred Art</p>
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<p>HIST 3482 (RELS 3482) Ancient China to 1800  HIST 3620: History of Colonial Latin America  HIST 4230 (RELS 4230): History of Christianity in the West  HIST 4251: The Tudors, 1485:1603  HIST 4350 (RELS 4350): Greek Intellectual History  HIST 4565 (RELS 4565): Early Islamic History  HIST 4230: The History of Christianity in the West  RELS 2050: The Historical Jesus in a First Century Jewish Context  RELS 3120 (PHIL 3210): Early Modern Philosophy  RELS 3482: Ancient China to 1800  RELS 4230: The History of Christianity in the West  RELS 4790: American Religious History</p>	<p>ARTH 6620: Byzantine Art  BIOL 3010: Evolution  BIOL 3040: Plants and Civilization  ENGL 1070: Introduction to Native American Literature and Philosophy  ENVS 1200: Native Americans and the Environment  GEOG 1400: Human Geography  PHYS 1040: Astronomy  PHYS 1080: Intelligent Life in the Universe  PHYS 3030: The Universe  RELS 2060: Religion &amp; Science: Examining a Complex History of Interaction  RELS 3040: Religion, Evil and Human Suffering</p>
<p><b>Ethics of Community Engagement</b>  JCOM 4020: Mass Media and Society  PSYC 4240: Multicultural Psychology  RELS 3990: Theory and Method in Religious Studies  SOC 1020: Social Problems  SOC 2400: Human Behavior in the Social Environment  SOC 3010: Social Inequality  SW 3850: Spirituality and Social Work  SOC 4160: Community Practice  SOC 6420: Gender and Social Inequality</p>	<p><b>Appreciative Knowledge of Diverse Religious Traditions</b>  ANTH 3090 (RELS 3090): Introduction to Shamanism  ARBC 3030 (HIST 3030/RELS 3030): Introduction to Islam  HIST 4560 (RELS 4560): Women in Islam  PHIL 3600: Philosophy of Religion  PHIL 3710: Philosophies of East Asia  RELS 3010 (HIST 3010): Introduction to Buddhism  RELS 3020 (HIST 3020): Introduction to Hinduism  RELS 3050 (HIST 3050): Introduction to Christianity  RELS 3060 Introduction to Judaism  RELS 3820: Hindu Sacred Texts</p>

Note: all courses are currently listed in the course catalog and have been approved by our institution's curriculum committee with the exception of those listed as "to be developed:"

Practica (3 hours) which could include any of the following courses:

- ANTH 5130: Ethnographic Field School
- ANTH 5190: Applied Anthropology Practicum
- PSYC 4920: Practicum
- SOC 4720: Effective Community Engagement
- SW 4XXX: Community Engaged Approaches for Interfaith Practice (to be developed)

By the end of the grant period, an Interfaith Certificate Program proposal for "approval of new programs" (R401) will be completed and submitted for institutional approval according to published guidelines.<sup>12</sup> Practicum sites around Cache Valley will be identified and developed for Certificate seeking students. Once all approvals have been obtained (this may extend beyond the end of the grant period), the Certificate Program will be advertised on campus via promotional materials provided to both Departments and professional advisers. A program requirement sheet will be developed and disseminated. Administration of the Certificate Program will be determined (a new Dean and a new

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic\\_programs/program\\_proposals/](http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/program_proposals/)

Department Head, both of whom begin after July 1, 2016 make it difficult to identify which academic unit will administer this Certificate Program but several units including the Religious Studies Program in the Department of History and the Anthropology Program in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology have expressed interest). Once the Certificate Program is formalized, religious organizations and clubs will also be made aware of the Certificate and will be enlisted to encourage fellow students to consider pursuing the certificate.

The Interfaith Certificate's initial goals will include bringing relevant stakeholders to the table to propose class offerings that contribute to the proposed course sequence structure, enlisting support from Colleges, Departments, and Student Services offices, submitting the R401, and having advertising materials in place to begin promoting the program. One measure of success, once the Certificate goes "live" will be a steady increase in the total number of students who enroll in the Certificate Program, which we will track as one measure of Program assessment.

We expect that the USU Interfaith Studies Certificate will enhance student retention among those with career interests where appreciative knowledge about religious difference brings a "value-added" component to the workplace. This heterogeneous group of careers includes private, non-profit, and public sectors across all industries. The grant will also help supplement other interfaith opportunities across campus for students wanting to build capacity for greater connection to their peers and to the communities in which they work and live. Like other interdisciplinary certificate programs, minors and majors, the "value-added" component certificate programs add to courses tends to be offset by the the fact that courses generally increase in *size* as a result of doing "double-duty" for majors *and* for those taking the same courses for other reasons. But, this is a system-wide problem in higher education and is more than offset by the positive impact of this value-added content for students.

### ***Identifying and assessing student learning outcomes***

Assessment of student learning outcomes will be initiated though a student pre-test of knowledge about the history, theology and ethics of interfaith cooperation, appreciative understanding of religious traditions, and the ethics of community engagement as well as post-testing of core-competencies covered in foundations classes, clusters, and the practicum experience. Testing will also include questions about student satisfaction with learning outcomes. Tests will be designed to demonstrate change in knowledge/skills and open-ended questions about Certificate strengths and weaknesses will be used to make changes to the Certificate program over time as consistent patterns are identified.

### ***Co-Curricular elements that may be integrated into the course sequence***

The "Better Together Interfaith Ally Training" program will be used to help build appreciative knowledge among faculty interested in participating in this grant opportunity<sup>13</sup>. Other co-curricular elements include "Speed-Faithing" and "Talk-Better-Together" activities, incorporation of IDEALS survey data about our campus culture and climate and experiential learning opportunities coincident with the many activities executed each year by the USU Interfaith Initiative.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://religiousstudies.usu.edu/htm/about/news/articleID=28296>

### ONE-PAGE PROJECT TIMELINE

Date	Proposed Tasks
7/16-9/16	Draft, revise, and disseminate advertisements/RFP for faculty mini-grants
10/16	Faculty mini-grants are due
11/16	Faculty RFPs are reviewed by planning committee and disseminated
12/16	Disseminate funds for faculty mini-grants for use in Spring '17
1/17-5/17	Draft, revise, and submit R401 Approval of New Programs Form for Interfaith Certificate
3/17-4/17	Identify potential community partner practicum sites and initiate first contact
4/17-5/17	Setup practicum site expectations and guidelines
6/17-8/17	Conduct meetings with practicum sites to discuss expectations and guidelines
9/17-10/17	Create, order, and disseminate advertising materials
11/17-12/17	Draft and revise initial assessment materials
1/1-8/17	Review and modify final Certificate program plans for Spring 2018 initiation
1/18-ongoing	Initiate first Certificate program enrollees into course sequence



## ONE-PAGE ROSTER OF PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Bonnie Glass-Coffin, PhD (Principal project contact)  
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Role in the project: Professor Glass-Coffin will serve as principal project contact as well as Chairing the planning committee. With the committee, she will coordinate the 2016-2017 “mini-grants” RFP by recruiting faculty to add interfaith relevant content to existing courses, help prepare the Interfaith Studies Certificate Program requirement sheet, and take a lead role in preparing and submitting the necessary university paperwork (R401 documents) for approval of the Interfaith Studies course sequence as a USU Certificate of Proficiency. Additionally, she will offer “Better Together Interfaith Ally” training workshops to faculty who participate in the Certificate Program to share information about the basics of interfaith knowledge and practice as faculty prepare to deliver appropriate course content.

Steven Lucero, PhD  
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Role in the project: Professor Steven Lucero serves as a planning committee member, taking a lead role in the preparation of the proposal during Spring 2016. He will teach one of the courses for the program, assist in the coordination of the 2016-2017 “mini-grants” RFP, and help collate existing and new courses into a coherent frame for the Interfaith Studies Certificate Program. He will help raise awareness about the value of this Certificate Program to students from all around campus in his role as Chair of the USU Diversity Council.

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Role in the project: Professor Jessica Lucero serves as a planning committee member and as the liaison between the Interfaith Studies Program Development Committee and the Social Work Program. She will help coordinate the 2016-2017 “mini-grants” RFP. Additionally, she will help coordinate the identification and expansion of community engagement opportunities for students enrolled in the Certificate Program. During 2017-2018, specifically, she will build capacity for Social Work students who are enrolled in the Certificate program as they participate in her “Transforming Communities Initiative.” These students will engage in community-based research with Cache Valley religious leaders in an effort to bridge the social service community and religious communities.

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Role in the project: Ms. Leavitt serves as a member of the planning committee and has extensive knowledge of other Certificate programs at USU as well as of the courses currently being offered from all around the university that comes from her more than 35 years of employment at USU. She currently advises the Religious Studies Major and has been instrumental in raising awareness about USU Interfaith programs and opportunities to students from all across the university. She is helping our team to design the structure of the proposed interdisciplinary Certificate program based on her deep knowledge of “what works” and what excites students on our campus. Her office will have primary responsibility for marketing the Interfaith Studies Certificate program to students.