

**SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY**  
Preliminary Proposal to  
**THE FORD FOUNDATION**  
**Difficult Dialogues: Promoting Pluralism and Academic Freedom on Campus**

**What is the nature of the problem you are confronting? What is the need on your campus?**

Negotiation of religious difference is a challenge on many fronts. France's response in 2004 with legislation on religious symbols in schools attracted international attention. Public policy experts in universities and foundations like the *First Amendment Center* debate the significance of religious diversity in America's public squares; and their counterparts in the fields of religious studies offer a range of views on the correlation between constructions of religious identity and intolerance of other religions globally. According to a 2004 Harris Poll, Americans find religious difference to be a main obstacle to world peace. Alexander Astin's *Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI)* recent study of college students demonstrates the issue surfaces on college campuses.

This proposal makes the claim that civil public discussions (what this Ford initiative means by *Difficult Dialogues*) about religious difference and conflict do not occur very often nor very well on the Santa Clara University (SCU) campus. Three lacunae tied to broader cultural dynamics support this claim. Lack of Religious Diversity. The Catholic background of the majority of SCU students and our mission make sure religion is present in students' lives; but the religious homogeneity and Catholic dominance in the campus' symbolic life obscures the religious diversity that increasingly defines communities in California. At its best, religious difference among our community receives benign acknowledgment in the form of administrative emails about Ramadan or Yom Kippur. Lack of Public Language for Religion. The *HERI* study of college students' spiritual lives confirms what scholars and commentators on religion in America—as varied as Robert Bellah and Stephen Carter—have long said: religion is largely a private affair, held captive by a therapeutic language ill-equipped for discourse in the public square. When language does move beyond the therapeutic, it finds religious difference as an impediment to common ground, or threatens to level the differences between faiths. Lack of Critical Approach to Images. Television media and internet representations of religion—the way in which religion is increasingly processed in public—reduce religion to images and “sound bites” that undermine dialogue between religious persons and impede intellectual inquiry into religious differences.

The academic study of religion labors to overcome lacunae like these in religious studies programs across the country. At SCU we have begun an initiative, the Local Religion Project (LRP), to address this. Focusing on religious diversity, immigration, regional identity, and civic engagement where we live, LRP is developing teaching and scholarly resources for the study of religion in Silicon Valley. For this project we propose to leverage those resources to intensify the reality of religious diversity in today's communities for the campus community and to elevate the level of our discussions.

**What are the goals and principal activities envisioned?**

The goal of this initiative is to change campus culture to help students discourse intelligently and responsibly about what is clearly a central dimension of local, national, and global life—religious difference. A necessary condition for realizing this goal is to highlight and confront the university community with religious diversity. LRP will help realize this goal and fulfill this condition through collaborations on and off campus. LRP's interdisciplinary method allows it to engage teaching scholars from across the humanities and social sciences; and its ties to the region's diverse religious congregations allows it to draw on the community to bring religious diversity to the center of campus. Leveraging the structures and relationships LRP has begun to establish, activities will unfold over the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years in three steps:

**1. Groundwork (January 2006-June 2006)** The LRP Director with the aid of select University faculty will cultivate connections and secure commitment on and off campus to SCU's this initiative, which we are tentatively calling “*Difficult Dialogue: Representing Religious Diversity in Public*”:

- a. Community Partners. LRP will use existing—or build new—relationships with leaders in local religious communities, organizations, and civic groups to lay the groundwork for putting religious difference on the campus agenda (the activities described in the two next stages). Organizations include: the Silicon Valley chapters of NCCJ (National Conference of Community and Justice) and Facing History and Ourselves; ING (Islamic Networks Group); the Garrison-Martineau Project (promoting dialogue between believers and unbelievers); Interfaith Council on Religion, Race, and Social and Economic Justice; and the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations. Congregations come from the Valley's faith communities—Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, as well as Christian—with a particular focus on those where immigration and ethnic identity inform religious identity. The primary interests are the internship program, inter-faith and other faith celebrations, the Valley of the Gods (II) lecture series, and an academic/community conference.
- b. University Partners. Faculty are essential to fostering a culture of greater public intellectual discourse about religion, so time needs to be devoted to recruiting faculty participation in activities described in the two next stages—principally the courses for a university-wide institute and the academic/community conference. In order to recruit the student interns and peer educators who will contribute to the institute, we will work with the leadership of campus programs, e.g., residential learning communities whose integrating theme includes diversity, and student organizations, e.g., Santa Clara Community Action Program with ties to multiple community organizations.

In the course of making these contacts, we will build awareness of the program and interest in its activities in the university and local communities, as well as the local media.

## **2. *Engagement and Development (July 2006-September 2006)***

- a. Faculty Development: We will target faculty who will most contribute to the institute and conference for summer workshop and curriculum development grants. A primary focus will be on pedagogy and multimedia related to religious conflict and difference. We will also draw on staff and resources of the local organization partners noted above, and help faculty develop community-based materials for their courses.
- b. Student Leadership: The LRP internship program places up to eight students with the lead community partner organizations noted above. A condition of the paid internship is leadership of on campus, e.g., Residential Learning Community, student discussions and events in Fall 2006, and service as peer educators in courses in the Winter 2007 institute.

**3. *Programs, Integration and Dissemination (October 2006-December 2007)*** The heart of the initiative will be four sequenced activities staged during the 2006-07 academic year. Each utilizes community-university partnerships to promote engagement with religious diversity in public places. Dissemination will focus on those activities judged most successful and most transferable to universities in other parts of the country.

Fall 2006: Valley of the Gods: Religious Encounters in the Bay Area (II). A series of presentations by leaders of the area's religious communities and organizations describing their experiences—positive and negative—with public representation of religious difference. This is modeled on the Spring 2005 lecture series currently underway. Interns will support integration of the lectures in courses and campus programs, and will help develop a multimedia background on participating communities.

Winter 2007: University Institute. For more than twenty years Santa Clara University has sponsored institutes that link academic courses together and integrated programs (lectures, art exhibits, films) to explore a theme in depth. The most recent was a year-long institute on globalization in 2003 that drew on over fifty courses by faculty and a slate of speakers and conferences; other institutes have focused on war, poverty, technology, and the family. A center piece of our imitative will be a similar but smaller institute in Winter Quarter 2007 on the topic of engaging religious diversity in public. Students and faculty will participate through a series of courses, events, and discussions during the 10 week quarter. Select faculty will be provided course releases to develop “signature” courses on the theme that will ground various events and include community-based learning

experiences with our community partners; other faculty will be supported in efforts to include the theme in existing courses and utilize campus programs; and the previous summer's interns will serve as peer educators to help integrate courses and programs and keep the topic in focus for their peers. The net effect of the institute will be an intensive, ongoing campus engagement.

Spring 2007: Academic/Community Conference (and dissemination). Two nationally known keynote speakers with expertise on religious diversity in the public square, e.g., Martin Marty, Robert Orsi, Diana Eck, Azizah Y. Al Hibri, will anchor a two day conference on the theme of the initiative. The conference program will include scholarly presentations and work sessions to develop regional approaches to representations of religion in public; and civic discourse on religion workshops led by teams comprising SCU faculty and local civic and religious leaders. Dissemination will take two forms: an edited conference proceedings of keynote and scholarly presentations; and "best-practices" and multimedia curriculum materials from the scholarly work sessions and civic discourse workshops—suitable for secondary and university level courses, and civic groups. Dissemination should be complete by December 2007.

Spring 2007: Community Religious Diversity on campus. Every December the University partners with a local Catholic parish to stage a theatre production of the Virgin of Guadalupe that is directed by a local playwright and draws on university and community members for its cast. This public representation of religion can draw as many as 1000 people. We propose to expand these community partnerships with local religious congregations to host on campus similarly powerful events that will bring religious diversity to campus. Tentative plans include an event in the spring—working with the more than 50 Buddhist communities in the region to host on campus a community-wide Vesak (Buddha's birthday) celebration; collaboration with local mosques on a series of campus events related to aspects—worship, art, history—of importance to the local Muslim community for public dialogues and worship on campus is also under review.

#### **Who are the project leaders and which units are involved?**

Local Religion Project Director Philip Boo Riley will lead the initiative. Professor Riley's growing expertise in local religions is complemented by 10 years of College and University level administration. He will work with an advisory group of SCU faculty, including Bernard J. Hanley Professor of Religious Studies, Catherine Bell; Diane Jonte-Pace, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Professor of Religious Studies; and two community organization representatives—one from a partner organization or congregation, another from the media. Professor Riley will apply for additional administrative support, primarily with the Institute.

#### **If the project expands or builds on a previous effort, how would you describe those results?**

The community collaboration model adopted for this initiative is based on nationally recognized campus-community partnerships, community-based learning, and faculty development. The initiative strategy builds off the successes of the Local Religion Project at this stage of its development—connections with local organizations and congregations, emerging scholarly and curriculum resources, and the Valley of the Gods lecture series.

#### **Potential impact of the program for higher education more broadly.**

We believe this initiative can become a model for campuses supporting scholarly and engaged discussion of religion. The scholarly contribution to current discussions of religious diversity in the public square will address the larger Academy; and the models and multimedia materials we plan to develop will help other colleges and universities collaborate with their local community organizations and congregations to advance the study and discussion of religious diversity.

#### **Budget.**

We anticipate five components for a budget: Faculty development (summer workshop and related support); Institute and Conference; Community collaboration (on campus events and participation in faculty development); student internships and peer educator program; and administration. Initial projections for the two year period take us to the grant maximum of \$100,000.