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Title

Local Religion Project: Faith based Secondary Education and Religious Diversity

Statement of the Problem: Context

The Local Religion Project continues to develop at a modest pace. Over the past two years we have made progress in documenting local sites, developing undergraduate research, integrating LRP into courses, establishing relationships with local community leaders, and sponsoring events on campus. Two new pieces emerged this academic year: 1) grant applications (Riley has been given course releases to work on grant applications; the Summer/Fall Ford Foundation application was not successful, but work on other funding sources continues), and 2) research projects. This funding request involves the latter.

Based on experience and conversations with various individuals interested in the Local Religion Project, I have created several research projects on religion in the Silicon Valley. My initial thinking is that each project will have these elements:

- It is a response to faculty and/or student interest and energy on a specific question;
- It studies how those questions play out in the south bay area;
- It will capitalize on LRP's undergraduate research program;
- As it matures, it will come to involve collaboration among faculty at SCU, local institutions, and community leaders.

Two of these projects are at a stage where all four elements are operative: a comparative study of contemplative practices in the Valley, and religious diversity and faith-based secondary education. The first project just received a grant through the Bannan Institute. This proposal seeks funding for the second project, to carry out the first of three phases: documentation, interviews and observations at select high schools in the region, and a literature review on the overall topic.

Statement of the Problem: Content

This research project's overall goal is to study the impact of the region's growing cultural and religious diversity on the nature of religious education in the faith-based high schools in Silicon Valley. Faith-based secondary education is itself in transition—where such schools were in the last century predominantly Roman Catholic with smaller numbers of Protestant and Jewish institutions, we now find that “conservative Christian schools” as a percentage of total private K-12 schools has increased by half, whereas the relative percentage of Catholic schools has declined. (National Center for Educational Statistics). Turning to the local scene, in addition to the new Christian schools, we find other faith traditions entering the market, a good example being Santa Clara's Grenada Islamic School, which was founded as a primary school in 1988 and is now developing a full K-12 program. And the Catholic schools themselves are experiencing significant changes in their demographics, and among the results are a shift from a near-exclusively Catholic student body to the point where as many as 40% of students at some Bay Area schools are non-Catholic.

Our interest is to investigate how religious diversity plays out in the varied secondary education landscape of the bay area. Among our questions are, What varieties of religiously based schools do we have in the Valley? What is the nature of the student population in these schools, particularly in terms of religious affiliation? How do these various schools create frameworks for the religiously-grounded education for their students? How is religious diversity—both among the student bodies but of the region, nation, and world as well represented in the curriculum and extra-curricular programs?

Methods and Timetable

The project ad currently envisioned has three phases; we are seeking funding for the first.

1. documentation, development of the research questions, and six school visits (September 2005-August 2006). Like other LRP *documentation* efforts, our first step is to identify and obtain base line (location, size, history, denominational ties) information on faith-based high schools in the region. We estimate this could include as many as 30 institutions. We will develop the research question by three means: literature review in education as well as religious studies contexts; a presentation in March at the American Academy of Religion Western regional meeting; and an analysis of six school visits (interviews with administrators and teachers, surveys, observation of at least one relevant school program, classroom observation). Schools who have agreed to participate in the study so far are Notre Dame High School, Kings Academy, St. Francis High School, and Bishop O'Dowd (in Concord).
2. expansion to include additional study sites and publication (September 2006-March 2007). Based on the first phase, including a refined set of research questions, we will expand our base of study sites up to as many as 18 schools. At the same time, we will write up our research and preliminary results for publication as a journal article.
3. expansion to survey and interview students (March 2007-December 2007). We hope to have advanced our study to the point where we can include interviews and surveys of students at our study sites in order to learn more about

Relevance to past and future teaching and research

I began working on the Local Religion Project in January 2003, in the middle of a sabbatical leave. I have sharpened its focus at the theoretical level along two lines: LRP concentrates on the intersection of religion with two distinctive dynamics of the Silicon Valley region—immigration and civic engagement—and am developing long term writing projects to ground this perspective in current research literature, and to propose ways other figures (Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, Wilfred Cantwell Smith) enrich the question. My proposal to present (with undergraduate students) on LRP at the American Academy of Religion Western Region meeting in March of 2004 has been accepted and I am exploring venues to publish that paper. A related research project, analyzing how the study of religion is institutionalized in autonomous research centers like those mentioned above is planned for next summer.

RSOC 009, Ways of Understanding Religion, is the primary locus for this project. Tentative plans for the 2004-2005 academic year include an advanced level religious studies seminar using LRP for more in depth work with communities as well as exploring its theoretical underpinnings. Contacts

with religious studies faculty through this project should additional courses using LRP in the 2004-05 academic year.

Grants and fellowships received during the past three years; reports and the like

In spring 2003 I received funding from the CML and TSC to develop the Local Religion Project web site for use in my RSOC 9 class this fall and to pilot collaboration with a local high school to utilize LRP resources for curriculum development. In addition, LRP was the focus of a FS-RAP grant I received in summer of 2003. These grants do not close until the end of the current academic year. I have submitted a research scholar proposal to the Center for Science, Technology and Society that draws on LRP, and I am preparing a request to the Bannan Foundation for a summer 2004 project with local high school teachers.

Itemized Budget

Please send an e-mail to priley@scu.edu to see the itemized budget.

Conclusion

The Local Religion Project is a good idea. LRP will support curriculum and pedagogical development, undergraduate research, faculty research, and community engagement. Indeed, it is an ideal teaching scholar project for a University drawing on Kolvenbach's "whole person of solidarity in the real world" for its educational vision. Implementing the plans outlined in this proposal will give us experience with key features of LRP, positively engage faculty and students in religious studies during Winter and Spring Quarters 2004, and move us closer to our long term goal of major foundation support.