AAR Regional Development Grant

Public Scholarship for Public Education

Enhancing Opportunities for Collaboration Between Religious Studies Scholars and K-12 Educators

Project Leads

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Project Description

Religious studies scholars widely support enhancing education about religion in K-12 public schools and express encouragement for projects with that goal.The difficulty arises when translating this support into action. Scholars quickly encounter the complexity of U.S. public education and the challenges inherent in public scholarship. This project seeks to establish a community of practice dedicated to cultivating the public scholarship knowledge and skills necessary for religious studies scholars to collaborate with public secondary schools and educators.

We will bring together a group of graduate students and faculty to participate in a series of training sessions for best practices communicating for a non-academic audience and host several seminars about the current status of religion and public education in our region. To provide the participants with opportunities to put their skills into action, they will then be invited to present on their areas of expertise to current and aspiring educators and education researchers. We will coordinate to provide for workshop possibilities at regional education conferences (e.g. New England Educational Research Organization or the Northeast Regional Conference for Social Studies), school-based professional

development opportunities, and/or for pre-service teacher training. An online directory of scholars interested in working with K-12 educators will be made and maintained so that teachers up-to-date access to available academics. Participants will be the first scholars invited to contribute entries.

The AAR's renewed commitment to the public understanding of religion is encouraging to the community of scholars working at the intersections of religion and public education. We have seen enthusiasm among religious studies scholars considering how to improve education about religion at the K-12 level. We are also mindful of the obstacles in the way of possible collaborations between these sectors. Increased training in public scholarship is a first step, but through this program we hope to demystify the complex issues around religion and public education to help religious studies scholars better communicate their expertise in ways that will be valuable to K-12 educators, support increasing religious literacy, and develop valuable professional skills for the AAR members participating.

Recent research from the AAR and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has revealed the limited interactions between religious studies scholars and K-12 teachers.

> "Only 16% of religion departments reported any collaboration with K-12 teachers, compared to 43% across all disciplines. No humanities discipline had a lower percentage of such collaboration."

While this data does not reveal why religious studies departments do not collaborate with K-12 educators, we can surmise that a lack of knowledge about the contexts of K-12 schools and limited skills to communicate with this audience are significant factors.

This program will be organized and led by Dr. Kate Soules and Dr. Callid Keefe-Perry, the director and assistant director of the Religion & Education Collaborative (REC). The REC membership includes a diverse group of scholars and educators working in religious studies, education research, public and private school teaching, and other related fields. REC Members will be invited to share their expertise on public education and the intersections of religion and public schools with the participants of this project. Dr. Soules and Dr. Keefe-Perry are uniquely positioned to facilitate this program—they both have experience working in the field of education, as classroom teachers and as researchers, and in religious studies and theology.

Benefits to AAR Members

For participating AAR Members:

- Public scholarship training, specifically training aimed at developing the knowledge and skills needed to communicate about religious studies scholarship in ways that are useful to K-12 public schools.
- Development of a community of practice with others looking to better bridge the gap between academic religious studies and public school educators.
- Connections between graduate students and established scholars eager to work alongside one another in developing themselves as public scholars.
- Opportunities to practice applying skills and knowledge with educators and education researchers at regional conferences in multiple disciplines.
- Networking opportunities with educators and education researchers in the region and potentially develop future collaborations.

For Other Scholars in and beyond the Region:

- Best practices training materials made available online.
- Provide increased attention to the positive role that knowledge about religious studies can provide to an education in a pluralistic democracy.
- Cultivate increased understanding of the contemporary landscape of U.S. public education and profession of K-12 teaching.
- Development of an online resource for scholars and K-12 educators to connect.

Replicability Statement

This project has excellent potential for replication in other AAR regions. Because public schooling in the U.S. is primarily governed at the local level, convening a group of scholars from a specific region, rather than a national cohort, allows the project to attend to the specific cultures and needs of schools within that region. As the project is replicated in other regions, local scholars and educators can adapt the program to reflect the varying needs of different regions. The REC has members throughout North America and a number of them would be well-suited to serve as project leaders in other regions.

After the project has concluded and we have received participant evaluations and feedback from the teachers connected to the project, suggestions for future iterations can be made. As such, we suggest that additional regional events build on this pilot project, learning from the experience of this first trial.

Timeline

Oct. - Nov. 2021

Participant Applications and Selection — We aim to select up to 6 participants; 3 current graduate students and 3 early-mid career faculty members.

Nov. 2021 & December 2021

Finalize training materials and arrange sessions and opportunities with regional education conferences, schools of education, and local school districts.

Jan. 2022 - March 2022

4 Training sessions for participants (most likely via Zoom to reduce travel costs unless all participants are in the greater Boston area).

April 2022 - July 2022

Participants present at regional education conferences and/or school-based professional development opportunities

August 2022

Evaluation, feedback collection, final reporting, and suggestions for future iterations.

Budget

Item	Number	Cost
Participant Stipends - $250/each	Up to 6	$1,500
Conference Fees - $150/each	Up to 6	$900
Honorarium for Invited Public Scholarship Training	-	$1000
Organizer Stipends - $300/each	2	$600
TOTAL		**$4000**