

2010 Regional Grant Application
Southeast Region
 Workshop for Instructors of Religion at Two-Year Institutions

1. Contact(s)

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2. Narrative Description

At any given moment, 46 percent of American college students are attending community and two-year colleges. While courses in world religions, introduction to religion, philosophy of religion, Bible, and even Islam are increasingly common in these settings (over 40 percent of community colleges now offer coursework in the field), few of the instructors — often burdened by high teaching loads and no travel support — are members of the AAR. By one accounting, of a total AAR membership of 11,000, only about 100 members are on the faculties of community colleges. In light of the rapid increase in the number of religious studies majors at state universities, it is safe to assume that community colleges provide the training ground for many majors in the field. For the subset of community college students who do not continue on to four-year institutions, their community-college education might provide their only formal opportunity to take courses in religious studies (As Steve Young has poignantly pointed out, this subset features a disproportionately large number of military personnel who will take their newfound knowledge of religion — or lack thereof — overseas to apply in real-world situations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locales). In many cases, contact, let alone coordination, between the faculties of four-year institutions and those of the “feeder” community colleges in their areas is all but non-existent. How can the discipline better coordinate efforts between community colleges and four-year institutions to educate students in religious studies and to provide greater access to the discipline? (“The Religion Major and Liberal Education – A White Paper” http://www.aarweb.org/Programs/Religion_Major_and_Liberal_Education/default.asp [accessed July 19, 2010]).

Instructors of religion at two-year institutions quite often face impediments to their participation at regional and annual meetings of the AAR. Since they teach four or five (or more!) sections a semester, their ability to be away from campus and the demands of their teaching schedule is limited. In addition, working within institutions that emphasize teaching, they may not receive the funding needed to undertake travel to attend academic meetings. Finally, many two-year institutions rely on contingent faculty to teach their courses. Part-time instructors face even more limits on their time and resources and therefore are less able to attend academic meetings. Clearly, there is a need to facilitate greater contact between instructors of religion at two-year institutions and the American Academy of Religion.

This project will generate greater participation in the AAR by instructors at two-year institutions. Drawing from the resources of the AAR, invitations will be sent to all members

who teach at two-year institutions in the Southeast Region and to the department/area chairs responsible for religion courses at those institutions (who will be asked to forward the invitations to all instructors of religion at their institutions) inviting them to attend an informal gathering during the 2010 AAR Annual Meeting in Atlanta. At this informal meeting, participants will share concerns and ideas related to the teaching of religion at a two-year institution. From this exchange, an agenda will be developed for a workshop to be held at the 2011 Southeast Region Annual Meeting in Louisville.

Dr. Steve Young has been invited to be the featured speaker at the workshop in Louisville. Dr. Young's experience as an instructor of religion at a two-year institution and his familiarity with the AAR – where he serves as a member of the Academic Relations Committee – make him an excellent resource for those attending the workshop. The workshop will continue the work started during the 2010 AAR Annual Meeting and the agenda created at that informal meeting. In addition, work on the task of crafting a justification for a special session to be held at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting will be undertaken. A call for papers for the special session at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting will also be drafted.

During the 2011 AAR Annual Meeting in San Francisco, another informal meeting will be held to complete plans for the special session to be held at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting. After the special session at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting, a business meeting will be held to finalize plans for proposing the addition of a permanent session dedicated to the teaching of religion at two-year institutions at annual meetings of the Southeast Region.

Since many instructors of religion at two-year institutions will not be able to travel to regional meetings of the AAR, it is imperative to provide an alternative mechanism for their inclusion. Following along the lines of the AAR's use of videoconferencing technology for other meetings (such as, for example, the American Academy of Religion/Emory University/Oxford University "New Scientific Approaches to the Study of Religious Experience" videoconference held at Emory University on May 22, 2009), this grant seeks support for simultaneous web-casting of the workshop at the 2011 Southeast Region Annual Meeting and the section proposed for the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting. Software packages such as Elluminate and Wimba provide affordable solutions enabling access to those who may attend and participate in meetings at a distance. Since getting to the meetings is a problem for many instructors at two-year institutions, web-cast access seems well-positioned as a workaround for this challenge.

If the project succeeds, the Southeast Region will have seen an increase in participation at its annual meetings by instructors of religion at two-year institutions. In addition, the groundwork will have been laid for continuing support via a session dedicated to teaching religion at two-year institutions. Finally, the work completed in this project may assist other regions in their efforts to reach out to members and potential members who teach at two-year institutions.

3. Outcomes for AAR Regional Members

The goal of the project is to establish a mechanism for communication and cooperation among AAR members in the Southeast Region who teach religious studies courses at two-year institutions. In addition, it is hoped a trial run for a new section within the Southeast Region annual meetings can be justified based on this project. If it is feasible, a section dedicated to the "Teaching of Religion at Two-Year Institutions" will be given a trial run in order to allow more instructors to join the AAR and participate in both regional and annual meetings.

4. Replicability to other AAR Regions

Once the Southeast Region explores various options for establishing a system of support for its members at two-year institutions, the results will be shared with members in other regions who may be able to benefit from the work generated by this project.

5. Detailed Budget (include other anticipated support)

Date	Item	Cost
March 2011	Honorarium for guest speaker	
March 2011	Travel and accommodations for guest speaker (2 nights)	
March 2011	Rent use of computer, web camera, microphone, speakers, projector, Internet access, and web-casting software	
March 2011	Room rental and refreshments	
March 2012	Rent use of computer, web camera, microphone, speakers, projector, Internet access, and web-casting software	
March 2012	Room rental and refreshments	
	TOTAL	

6. Schedule

- August - September 2010: Develop contact list of instructors of religion at two-year institutions within the Southeast Region and send out invitations to attend informal gathering during the AAR Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.
- October 29, 2010: Hold informal gathering for instructors of religion at two-year institutions in Atlanta.
- March 4-6, 2011: Convene workshop at 2011 Southeast Region Annual Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky. Develop topics for papers to be presented as a part of the formal meeting of the group at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting.
- April-May, 2011: Submit paper topics to Southeast Region to add as a special session for the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting call for papers.
- June 2011: Preliminary narrative report of the project submitted to the Committee on Regions and to the AAR Director of Finance and Administration.
- October 2012: Review paper submissions for special session at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting.
- November 19-22, 2011: Hold informal gathering of instructors at the AAR Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California.
- March 2012: Special session for instructors of religion at two-year colleges at the 2012 Southeast Region Annual Meeting.
- June 2012: Final narrative report of the project submitted to the Committee on Regions and to the AAR Director of Finance and Administration.