

2011 Regional Grant Application
South-Eastern Region

RELIGION IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE WORLD
A TRAINING SEMINAR FOR EAST TENNESSEE PROFESSIONALS

1. Contact(s)

Professor Rosalind I. J. Hackett (S.E. Region)
University of Tennessee
Department of Religious Studies
501 McClung Tower, Knoxville, TN 37996-0450
Tel: (865) 974-2466 Fax: (865) 974-0965
rhackett@utk.edu

2. Narrative Description

GOALS

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is seeking support for the development of a training seminar on religious beliefs and practices in the workplace for East Tennessee professionals. The project has three principal aims: a) to increase religious literacy for regional employers and managers; 2) to improve the standing of the department in terms of the campus and wider community following its near closure in 2009, and 3) to generate a timely and workable public understanding of religion initiative for other AAR members and their units.

RATIONALE

FIVE reasons can be identified for undertaking this project:

- 1) With global trends of religious revival and shifting immigration patterns, **American workplaces are becoming more religiously diverse**. This has led to a growing number of requests for religious accommodations, as well as conflicts over religious beliefs and practices at work. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission notes in 2007 that charges of religious discrimination have risen sharply in recent years. Corporate America is reaching out for advice on religious diversity issues in the workplace. A number of **programs** (such as “Combating Religious Discrimination and Protecting Religious Freedom” of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Center on Religion and the Professions at the University of Missouri, and the “Religion at Work: A (Human) Resource for Managers” of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding), **publications** (such as *God at Work* by David Miller, *Religion and the Workplace: Pluralism, Spirituality, Leadership* by Douglas A. Hicks), **speakers** (such as Dr. William Guillory on worklife balancing and meaning), and **websites** (e.g. <http://workplace.spirituality.info>) have sprung up in recent years.
- 2) There is a need to explore, analyze, and adapt some of this material for **our changing local environment in East Tennessee and the South-East more generally**. With a growing Hispanic community and the recent fracas over the Murfreesboro mosque

complex, religious diversity and co-existence--notably as they pertain to the workplace--have become even more pressing issues for public debate. As far as we can tell, there have been no professional training seminars on this topic in our region and the opportunities for public fora on religious diversity are extremely limited.

- 3) We believe that the **focus on religion in the workplace** is **feasible and relevant** (rather than religious diversity more generally or religion in relation to one specific profession). It also allows us to adapt the areas of concentration in the seminar (whether human resources, media, education, etc.) according to the needs of participants. We anticipate that participants will benefit from the cross-fertilization between the focus areas.
- 4) Most of the **scholarship on religion in the workplace** is emanating from business, journalism, and law schools, so this seminar would serve as a **stimulus to AAR members** in our department, region, and beyond to consider this emergent area as a topic for scholarly research and publication. Religion scholars have the range of skills required to analyze religious practice and the symbolic expression of religious identity in workplace locations, the religious beliefs that underpin requests for accommodation or exemption, and the balancing of individual religious needs and workplace statutes.
- 5) We have been looking for ways to **revitalize our department** following an attempt by our Dean to merge or dismember our department in spring 2009. We fought back and won but wanted to **develop a program suitable for a public university** that would demonstrate the significance of our knowledge and analytical skills for the public understanding of religion, thereby improving our standing on campus and in the wider community.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our target clientele will be managers and employers in the legal, healthcare, business, media, and human resources sectors. Selections will be made based on formal (online) applications to the program, supplemented as needed by telephone or personal interviews, and recommendations. Preference will be given to those who have direct responsibility for religious diversity issues and policy in the workplace.

STRUCTURE

In order to tie into in-service training needs, we plan to structure the day with sections focused on a particular professional sector (e.g. business and human resources, legal, education, media, healthcare). There will be a series of presentations by faculty and lecturers, with discussion and dialogue groups (these will be important for revealing the types of problems the various professional sectors are currently encountering). The lectures will be tailored to professional needs through related literature and case studies, as well as address general concerns about religious diversity and literacy--using Stephen Prothero's *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know -- and Doesn't* as a core text. In addition to the special emphasis sections, there will also be general open sessions on: 1) regional/US/global religious pluralization and diversification; 2) impact of these trends on the workplace, accommodating new requests for religious observances and attire, and dealing with disputes and discrimination; 3) broader issues of religious diversity and tolerance in politics and civil society.

ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

- Develop closer working ties with our Board of Visitors
- Strengthen our interdisciplinary contributions by working with colleagues in Law, Business Ethics, Global Management Studies, Nursing, Institutional Anthropology, etc.
- Provide new opportunity for growing numbers of lecturers in our department to contribute to the field
- Enhance reputation of department and individual faculty through publicity, website, and eventual publications generated by the project

RESOURCES

Project lecturing staff will come primarily from UT's Department of Religious Studies (faculty + lecturers). All of our tenure-line faculty lecture regularly in the community on their research or religious issues of public concern. For example, Rosalind Hackett works on and with the media and has served two terms on the AAR's Public Understanding of Religion committee. She is a faculty associate at the Howard H. Baker Center for Public Policy at UT and has worked closely with colleagues in the Colleges of Law and Nursing on various projects. She is also involved with service-learning initiatives on campus. Gilya Schmidt is extremely active in the community through her successful Judaic Studies Program, and Tina Shepardson is in high demand to lecture on the politics of biblical interpretation. Mark Hulsether publishes regularly in *Religion Dispatches* and often gives talks to local groups on US religion and politics.

We plan to invite speakers from related departments (e.g. Law, Business, Philosophy, Education, and Nursing). Program participants will be supplied with a book (Prothero), a readings packet, as well as online resources via the program website.

LOGISTICS

The program will take place on a Friday in early to mid-May 2011, right after the semester ends. We are considering as possible campus locations the McClung Museum, the College of Business, the Howard Baker Center for Public Policy, and/or the College of Law. We are aiming at an audience of approximately 50.

PUBLICITY

We will work closely with Dr. Lynn Champion, Director of Academic Outreach, UT College of Arts and Sciences and UT's Creative Communications unit to ensure optimum publicity and outreach. We consider this dimension to be crucial to the success of the project.

3. Outcomes for AAR Regional Members

- Establish new forum for religion scholars in the region to reflect and collaborate on the relevance of their profession in a globalizing environment, notably the under-researched area of the workplace

- Provide a new, workable model of how AAR members can interact more productively with other units on their campus and the wider community

4. Replicability to other AAR Regions

This project would be easily replicable in other AAR Regions with some adjustments depending on religious demographics and the diversity climate. As stated at the outset, the need for more knowledge on religion in the workplace is motivated by national and international trends.

5. Detailed Budget (prioritized)

Note: These expenses reflect our concern to put on a successful seminar for professionals in a professional way. We also want to attract participation by our best faculty. Finally, we would like to repeat and expand the seminar in subsequent years. The website would serve as an important continuity tool in that regard.

- Publicity: (press announcements \$; poster/flyer design/printing \$; website development \$) \$
- Book purchase for participants: 50 x \$ = \$
- Honoraria for speakers and discussion leaders: 10 x \$ = \$
- Refreshments (continental breakfast, lunch, tea/coffee for 50, reception following event): \$ [we might be able to get some help with this if needed from department and/or college funds]
- Photocopying, office materials: \$ [our dept. could absorb these costs if necessary]
- AV/technical assistance during seminar: \$ [could seek volunteer assistance if need be]

TOTAL: \$

6. Schedule

The plan is to hold a day-long seminar in mid-May 2011. If successful, we would like to make this an annual event and possibly expand the program in terms of content and outreach. We are considering holding the event on a Friday so that participants have the option of taking the weekend in the Smokies or surrounding region. (Note: this strategy is used by Knoxville's Race Relations Institute in their programming).