

TGS Professional Development Grant Application

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Graduate Conference on “Religion and the Trans...”

The Department of Religious Studies considers it crucial to foster university-wide dialogue on pressing issues within the study of religion. Therefore, with the support of our faculty, the Religious Studies Graduate Student Association proposes a graduate student conference on “Religion and the Trans...” to be held at Northwestern University, March 30th through April 1st, 2012.

This conference on “Religion and the Trans...” seeks to create conversations on the crossing of geographic and conceptual borders, as well as “the trans” as a fertile space within lived religions. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have often studied borders as lines on a map that signify the limits between nations and beliefs. More recently, scholars in religious studies and other disciplines have begun to understand borders as sites of movement and flux, home to dynamic relationships involving conflict as well as collaboration. From the rise of religious terrorism that transcends or seeks to transform national identities to the migration of religious communities back, forth, and between cultural or political limits, to interfaith activism across the boundaries of belief, the traditional ways of imagining borders as stable and static are simply insufficient. A striking contemporary example of this was the “Arab Spring” of early 2011, wherein a series of protests and political transformations across the Middle East demonstrated clearly how divisions of faith, ethnicity and nationality can be conduits of change as much as limiting constraints. Our conference will focus on this new understanding of boundaries – whether they are geographic, political, social, or intellectual – as permeable and transformative. We will thus bring together scholars studying religion in relation to topics such as transnational communities, interfaith traditions, multi-cultural rituals, translatable customs, and transdisciplinary approaches to the questions that currently occupy religious studies.

Description and Event Details

The goal of the conference is to foster dialogue about the potential for understanding borders as more than just barriers. Without neglecting the traditional notion of borders as dividing lines, our conference will help Northwestern students and our guests explore the ways that movement across borders has been generative for the religions we study as well as the ways in which we study them. The intended impact of this event is both to stimulate an expansive, interdisciplinary conversation about cutting-edge ideas in the study of religion and to provide our graduate students with the crucial professional experience of running an academic conference.

The three-day conference will include three invited keynote speakers and seven to eight graduate student panels of approximately three papers each. We have secured commitments from noted scholars Thomas Tweed (University of Texas at Austin) and Yi-Fu Tuan (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and are pursuing an additional local speaker. We will open the conference on Friday evening with a keynote address and a light reception to provide participants the opportunity for further discussion. Saturday will include panel sessions throughout the day, followed by a second keynote address and reception. An additional panel session will follow early Sunday, and the third keynote speaker will give closing remarks at the end of the morning.

Students from the Department of Religious Studies will have the opportunity throughout the conference to accompany the speakers for meals, and every panel will include a graduate student moderator from the department. We estimate that approximately 75 graduate students from the Department of Religious Studies and related disciplines and from other universities nationwide will either attend or participate. In addition, we expect that members of the NU faculty and undergraduate student body will attend.

A committee of graduate students from the Religious Studies department is currently engaged in planning the conference with the full and extensive support of the department's faculty and staff. The committee includes Hayley Glaholt (7th year), Tina Howe (5th year), Kristi Woodward Bain (4th year), Brian Clites (4th year), Matthew Cressler (4th year), Stephanie Wolfe (4th year), Jennifer Callaghan (2nd year), Saralyn McKinnon-Crowley (2nd year), and Ariel Schwartz (2nd year).

Need

This conference seeks to meet two kinds of needs. The first is intellectual. It will foster a community of young scholars who can bridge the approaches of different disciplines, thereby acquainting students with people, approaches, and ideas outside of their own departments. Furthermore, since “Religion and the Trans...” is such a pertinent topic in our contemporary globalizing world, this conference will encourage our students to think about the world outside of the academy, broadening the scope of our vision by engaging the work of journalists, public policy makers, and community activists. Considering the significance of religion in the contemporary world, this conference will increase the religious literacy of all those involved and thus work to prepare people to be intelligent citizens of the world in whatever profession they choose to pursue.

Beyond the intellectual benefits of providing space and material for academic discussion, conceiving and planning a conference from start to finish will serve as a tremendous opportunity for graduate student professional development. In 2009, the Religious Studies Graduate Student Association successfully organized and hosted a conference on “Religion and Identity”. Hosting a similar conference in 2012 would allow a new generation of graduate students to develop the critical skills that hosting a conference entails. This proposal is the fruit of our conference committee’s careful discussions about ideal topics, scope, and format. We have already contacted keynote speakers and will be sending out the call for papers in October, vetting the submissions in January, advertising the conference (both through electronic media and physical notices around campus and across the country), and finding lodging for the invited attendees. The Director of Graduate Studies and other Religious Studies faculty members will support the students in all of these tasks. In addition, we will receive assistance from the Religious Studies GPA and WCAS with event planning (especially catering and facilities) and staffing. TGS assistance with internal advertising would also be helpful.

Budget*

Below is a summary of the budget for this event. If we receive the full \$2,000 TGS Professional Development Grant award, we will direct those funds toward hosting our keynote speakers. We would also be very grateful to receive partial funding for this event. Additionally, we have received a pledge of funds from the Department of Religious Studies and will be

* See attached spreadsheet for a more detailed, line-item budget.

applying for funding from the Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, the Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, and the Midwest Academy of American Religion.

<u>Keynote Speakers</u>	
Honoraria	
Airfare	
Food & Lodging	
Ground Transportation	
	Subtotal:
<u>Facilities & Catering</u>	
Facility Rental Fees	
Equipment Rental Fees	
Catering	
	Subtotal:
<u>Printed Materials</u>	
Subtotal:	
	TOTAL:

Interdisciplinarity

The field of religious studies builds on the convergence of many other academic disciplines. The conference thus incorporates contributions from students in a broad range of departments and encourages the expansion of collaboration on campus. The conference topic “Religion and the Trans...” was chosen in order to provoke complementary conversations dealing with a variety of borders as well as the acts by which these limits are transcended, transmitted, or transformed. This provides a fluid, dynamic concept that will allow for rich discussions across disciplinary lines. Designed to engage our community with ideas and approaches from other methodologies as well as other universities, the conference aims to open a dialogue between faculty and students from a number of departments and schools, including Anthropology, Geography, Gender Studies, History, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Political Science, Religious Studies, and Sociology in an interdisciplinary examination of topographical boundaries. The conference will challenge students to contemplate the perceived borders separating departments, exploring the intricacies of ideological and geographic boundaries but also interrogating the distinctions that separate academic disciplines from one another. Moreover, this intentionally interdisciplinary conference will benefit participants regardless of their eventual professions, fostering a collaborative approach to the production of knowledge that encourages one to think beyond the confines of a single perspective.

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