

AAR WESTERN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION  
**CONFERENCE ON CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES**

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**Abstract**

This project involves organizing, convening, and hosting a conference on Contemplative Studies at the University of San Diego on the Thursday and Friday before the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. The conference will bring together AAR members who might not otherwise have an opportunity for intensive, collaborative discussion on research and education related to contemplative practice and experience in higher education.

**Description**

The Conference on Contemplative Studies will be a symposium on Contemplative Studies, the emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience. This event will gather prominent national and international scholars for a day and a half conference on the campus of the University of San Diego (USD), which will bring significant positive attention to the American Academy of Religion, and its Western Region in particular.

The conference will be convened on the Thursday and Friday (November 20-21, 2014) before the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL). This is a rare opportunity for the University of San Diego to host this symposium because the AAR/SBL will meet in San Diego in 2014. Given this auspicious confluence of events, we will be able to invite major scholars who will be attending AAR/SBL, and who might not otherwise attend without travel expenses and honorariums provided.

As currently scheduled, the conference on Contemplative Studies will consist of six panels, consisting of a presider and three scholars each. The tentative panel topics are as follows: (1) Contemplative Studies; (2) Critical Subjectivity; (3) Contemplative Pedagogy; (4) Tradition-based and Religiously-Committed Contemplative Practice; (5) Contemplative Psychology and Neuroscience; and (6) Interdisciplinary Perspectives. As one of the leaders in the emerging interdisciplinary field and as Co-chair of the AAR Contemplatives Studies Group, I have designed this conference not only to express a distinctive vision for the field, but also to address key issues and potential approaches. That is, this event will be an inclusive, interdisciplinary, and sophisticated meeting about contemplative practice and contemplative experience from an academic perspective.

Given the increasing interest in Contemplative Studies throughout AAR and the larger academy, among faculty, staff, and students, and given that many members of the AAR Contemplative Studies Group will attend this conference, I imagine a great deal of interest in

this event. In addition, I am in the process of reaching out to various colleagues, departments, and centers. Specifically, in terms of USD, the Center for Christian Spirituality, Center for Educational Excellence, Center for Inclusion and Diversity, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Office of the Dean, and Office of the Provost have expressed interest in the event. I am also working to develop potential collaboration with and support from the Center for Catholic Thought and Culture (CCTC), Franciscan School of Theology, Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (KIPJ), Office of University Ministry, and the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES). In addition, as the Conference on Contemplative Studies will meet in conjunction with AAR/SBL, there will be a great deal of interest from its members, and this will increase recognition of the academic reputation of the AAR Western Region in general and the University of San Diego in particular. I especially envision interest from not only USD students, faculty, and staff, but also scholars from San Diego State University's Department of Religious Studies, the AAR Contemplative Studies Group, and the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality (SSCS), which meets in conjunction with AAR/SBL. In fact, some members of the latter group will participate in our conference, and the SSCS is organizing a comparative panel on spirituality that may meet immediately after our conference.

Another dimension of this event will involve a celebration of my forthcoming edited volume titled *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer*. This book is now under contract with the State University of New York Press (SUNY), with the final manuscript having been submitted on June 1, 2014. Although the book will not be in print by the time of our conference, I expect to have a typeset mock-up. In addition to the contributors, many of whom are well-known scholars, I also plan to invite SUNY and other publishers to attend.

At present, the following prominent national and international scholars have already accepted the invitation to participate and present papers: Han DeWit (Shambhala Europe), Donnalee Dox (Texas A&M University), Jorge Ferrer (California Institute of Integral Studies), Andrew Fort (Texas Christian University), Fran Grace (University of Redlands), Anne Klein (Rice University), Beverly Lanzetta (Community of a New Monastic Way), William Meninger (St. Benedict's Monastery), Jacob Sherman (California Institute of Integral Studies), Judith Simmer-Brown (Naropa University), and Emilee Whitehurst (Rothko Chapel).

As detailed in the attached budget, I am requesting \$ of funding from AAR. This money will be used to help cover the conference costs, specifically food for attendees and travel for participants without institutional funding. If my other funding requests from USD are approved, I will use the AAR funding to supply small honorariums (approx. \$ per participant) in order to offset additional hotel hosts. As the conference is scheduled for Thursday and Friday, participants will need to stay in San Diego for two additional nights.

In sum, this conference promises to be an exciting and ground-breaking event on the emerging interdisciplinary field of Contemplative Studies.

## **Potential Contribution and Adaptation**

The Conference on Contemplative Studies has grown out of my work as Co-chair of the Contemplative Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion and my facilitation of various workshops on Contemplative Studies, some of which have been supported by the AAR Southwest Region (Andrew Fort) and the Wabash Center. As presented in my recurring public lecture “Imagining the Contemplative University,” I have outlined the development of Contemplative Studies programs as follows:

### **Phase 1**

Personal inquiry  
Informal conversations  
Guest lectures  
Workshops/seminars  
Meditation group

### **Phase 2**

Discussion/reading group  
Professional Learning Community (PLC)  
Workshops/seminars  
Faculty lectures  
Course development

### **Phase 3**

Living Learning Community (LLC)  
“Clusters”  
Campus events  
Additional courses

### **Phase 4**

Interdisciplinary minor/major  
Contemplative space/classroom  
Conferences

### **Phase 5**

Contemplative Studies program

In addition to supporting work to establish Contemplative Studies programs at the home-institutions of participants, my proposed event may serve as a model for other, similar invitational conferences and seminars. Alternatively, it could be utilized by others to organize workshops and/or programs in Contemplative Studies. In fact, I continue to work to supply resources and to facilitate workshops on this topic throughout the country, including through the Contemplative Studies website ([www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplativestudies](http://www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplativestudies)). I would welcome future opportunities to dialogue with and support other members of the AAR Western Region.

## Proposed Budget

Venue: MRH Warren Auditorium: \$

Rotunda for Thursday night reception: 5-6:30pm: \$

Printing (badges, placards, programs): \$

Food:

Lunch for panelists on Thursday: 30 people: \$/person (La Gran Terraza): \$

Reception on Thursday night hors d'oeuvre: \$

Reception on Thursday open bar: 125 people (\$/person + \$/bartender [2]): \$

Reception on Thursday night non-alcoholic beverages (tea, coffee, sodas) for students:  
\$ (40 students?)

Elite Guard (students): \$ (per hour)

Lunch for panelists on Friday: 30 people: \$/person (La Gran Terraza): \$

Old Town Tram: 6:45-10:15am (every 30 mins): Free

3:30-7:30pm (every 30 mins): Free

Friday afternoon: Single trip: \$

Airfare for Han DeWit (independent Dutch scholar): \$

Additional night's lodging: \$

Airfare for William Meninger (Catholic monk): \$

Additional night's lodging: \$

Farewell Dinner with hosts: \$

**Estimated Total: \$**