IPI 5/717 (3) Spiritual, Religious, Secular: Living in a Pluralistic Society

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Office hours: by appointment via zoom

Purpose: This course offers an opportunity to prepare for, attend, and reflect on VST’s on-line Inter-Religious Conference on the theme “Religious, Spiritual, Secular: Living in a Pluralistic Culture.” At the conference, which will be a real-time, online event, accessed through Zoom and Canvas, presenters will explore the following theme:

Seventy-five percent of Canadians identify as religious or spiritual. What role do religion and spirituality play in public life, popular culture, and personal formation today? How do they strengthen our communal life? Or challenge it? Does political secularism support the flourishing of multiple traditions and belief systems? Can dissonances be addressed through public education, informed debate, and supportive policy? How do spiritual leaders and caregivers speak into this dynamic, pluralistic, sometimes individualistic culture? How do various cultures, traditions, and countries navigate these tensions? What is the future of an inclusive approach to faith?

Conference Page Link: https://vst.edu/inter-religious-studies-program/conference/

Competence Objectives:

Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- Articulate informed definitions of “secularism” and “pluralism”
- Describe issues relating to pluralism in our historical and communal context
- Respond to these issues from a spiritual, theological, historical, psychological, sociological or philosophical perspective
- Describe teachings about pluralism from at least two traditions’ perspectives
- Reflect on your own understanding of the ideas of religion, spirituality, pluralism, and secularism, and their role in your leadership and scholarship
- Offer objective summary and critical assessment of scholarly papers

Format: Summer term 2020, 30 hours total.

- Attendance at Inter-religious Studies Conference (all via Zoom):
  o May 24 (7:00-9:00 pm)
  o May 25 (8:30 am – 4:30 pm; 6:30-8:00 pm)
  o May 26 (8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

- Pre- and Post- conference class sessions (all via Zoom):
  o Fri May 22 (10am – 3 pm)
  o Fri May 29 (10am – 4 pm)
  o Individual 1-hour meeting with instructor, scheduled before June 25
Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

Required reading:

Available on Canvas beginning April 1:

General course reading due May 22 (6 essays):


Selected papers presented at the conference: reading due May 29

Posted as they arrive.

Assignments:

For all students:

(1) Full attendance at all events, as described above in “format.” Attendance should be in accordance with VST policies; thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion, course activities, and conference.

(2) Completion of assigned readings.

(3) A written 1000 word personal reflection articulating the interaction of your spirituality with Canada’s pluralistic religious environment, making reference to two or more of the assigned pre-readings. Due in class on May 22.

(4) A 10-minute in-class oral presentation in response to a selected conference paper presentation. Due in class on May 29. (In class on May 22, we will decide who comments on which paper.)
In this paper response, please address the following points:

- What is the main idea of the paper?
- How does the author present or develop it?
- What relevant background knowledge of the topic do you bring to it?
- What new idea, insight, or information do you receive from it?
- Explain one thing you agree with, or feel positively about in the paper, and why.
- Explain one thing you disagree with, feel negatively about, or would like to criticize in the paper, and why?
- What further research questions into the topic would you like to see the author pursue?

(5) A 20-minute oral presentation, offered individually to the instructor, followed by discussion. Developed on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating at least two of the course competencies, and referencing at least 5 sources (including both conference paper, and other sources). To be scheduled at a mutually convenient time between May 29 and June 25.

**Prerequisites:** None.

**Bibliography:** To be posted.