

Faith Community Service Learning Project Religion and Society/Winter 2010 Stephen Beck and Suzanne Simons, Faculty

A required part of the Religion and Society program is for each student to spend time an **average** of 2-4 hours a week throughout the quarter with a local faith community. Students should not be affiliated or a member of the faith communities they choose. The intent is to provide an opportunity to be a participant-observer in the life of a faith community in order to better understand how they operate and their relationships and intersections with secular life and institutions.

Your presence in the faith community has two objectives: 1) Gathering information through observation, formal and informal interviews, and text-based research and 2) serving the faith community in whatever needs **they** have (recording of congregation history through writing/photography/video, clerical, writing, editing, designing, researching, custodial, etc.)

Definition: For purposes of this project, a faith community:

- ❑ Has religion as its primary focus (as opposed to a community service group, such as Bread and Roses)
- ❑ Conducts worship services on a regularly scheduled basis (as opposed to ad hoc events)
- ❑ Operates through an organizational structure (as opposed to a bunch of people who get together over coffee)
- ❑ Is involved in social and/or political work on local, national and/or international levels

Project criteria:

- ❑ Work in pairs (or individually, if you choose)
- ❑ Choose a local faith community of which you are not a part of
- ❑ No more than one pair per faith community
- ❑ Time commitment to faith community: 2-4 hours per person per week, from weeks three through nine of winter quarter.
- ❑ Phone the organization's office and schedule an appointment to meet with the head of the group or a representative to discuss your assignment. Describe the class and the project. **Give them a copy of this handout, the program syllabus, and a service learning contract that faculty will provide you with.** Discuss what needs the faith community has that you might be able to help with and that fit with your skills/ interests (however, the community service work is primarily about serving THEIR needs). Ask questions about the faith community, its beliefs, events, etc. (you will get into more detail in these areas later on in the quarter).

If there is mutual interest between you and the faith community to embark on this joint project, ask the person if she/he is willing to be your field supervisor (which includes a phone conversation with faculty toward the end of the quarter to discuss his/her evaluation of your work with the faith community). If the person is not willing to be your field supervisor, but you would like to work with this faith community, ask if there is someone else who could be your field supervisor. You and the field supervisor sign contract and set up a weekly

schedule of when you will do your community service work and attend events.

Activities:

1. Faith community journal. One to three pages a week on assigned themes and your interactions with the faith community. These will be turned in to your seminar faculty each Wednesday from Jan. 13-March 3. Specific themes to address each week are described at the end of this handout.
2. In-class check-ins. This will happen periodically throughout the quarter, and is a time to raise questions, concerns, issues, pleasant (and unpleasant) surprises, joys, frustrations, etc. and do some collective brainstorming.
3. A 3-5 page paper on your faith community. Your faith community paper is to be thesis-driven, (1) advancing and supporting your own thesis about the faith community in relation to contemporary society as a whole and (2) support your thesis with examples from your faith community work. Thus, your paper is to be more than a simple factual report about the community; but rather to advance a position that can be illustrated by your faith community. The kind of position you advance is left quite open. You will develop your position as you explore the nature of the faith community in connection with your own interests. Continuing students: You are encouraged to draw upon your position paper from last quarter, if there are connections.
4. Final poster presentations and discussion of your findings. Posters will be displayed in our classroom and need to include the faith community you worked with and highlights from your paper that you will discuss in your presentation. Creativity in poster design encouraged! You will be responsible for inviting a member(s) of your faith community to attend and participate. Your friends and family members are also invited to the final presentations on Sat., March 6.

Faith Community Journal Themes and Due Dates

Regularly throughout the quarter you will turn in your faith community journal, documenting what learning you have done about your faith community, both through research and service learning. You may also want to make connections between your faith community work and program readings, lectures, etc.

Below is a list of topics and dates when you should be working on those projects and documenting them in your journals. Each week's journal entry should be 1-3 pages. Many themes will require you to interview members of the faith community. Other themes can be researched on the Web.

Should you have difficulty or questions regarding your faith community, please contact Stephen or Suzanne immediately so that we can help you problem solve. If you are working with a classmate in the same faith community, remember that she/he is also a resource.

Faith Community Journal Due Date	What's Due
Jan. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Description of research you did in selecting your faith community, why you selected that particular religion, and how it fits with your learning goals for Religion and Society ✚ Two local or regional news articles about the local faith community and/or its denomination or religion (attach copies to your journal)
Jan. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Signed contract with field supervisor, including projects/responsibilities of your service learning ✚ A brief history of the local faith community, and larger denomination or affiliation, if applicable. ✚ Biography of the group's clergy or lay leader
Jan. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Description of a worship service that you attended (handout of what to address to be provided)
Feb. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Organizational structure of the faith community- who leads it? How were they selected? What groups, sub-committees, classes, etc. are there? How is the faith community funded? What proportion come from members? Who are the outside funders? ✚ Demographics of the local congregation, e.g. number of members, age range, socio-economic class, ethnicity, etc. You can also include demographics for the larger larger denomination/religion ✚ Overview of official political and social policies – where would you place the faith community in the “culture wars” debate and why? ✚ Examples of community work, projects and issues the faith community is involved in ✚ Attend a project event or meeting and record observations
Feb. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Types, structure and curriculum of children and adult education programs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend a children's or adult education class in your faith community – what stood out to you as being important and why?
Feb. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion in war time. How does the congregation (clergy, lay leaders and members) address issues and concerns related to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere? Are there a diversity of views within the congregation? If so, how are they supported or not supported? What do members believe is/should be the faith community's role during times of war?
Feb. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is your faith community's religion reflected in the national or international mass media (find two articles and attach them to your journal)? How fairly do faith community members believe their group is portrayed? What would they like to see differently about their group in the media?
March 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What vision do members of your faith community have for the group's role in the future? What is the group doing in terms of community work that they believe is worthwhile continuing? What is less useful and could be changed or let go of?