HCOL 86: Religion and Ways of Knowing  Spring 2017

Burlington Religious Communities Project

Library liaison: Patricia Mardeusz (patricia.mardeusz@uvm.edu). Pat is available for consultation on the research project. Research guide: http://researchguides.uvm.edu/hcol086kspring2017 This is a very helpful guide that Pat Mardeusz put together for this project. Consult it often!

For your final project, you will work in small groups (4-5 students per group) to examine the production, transmission, and experience of religious knowing in a religious community in the Burlington area. This project will involve research on the history and sources of authority for the community, observation of rituals, and interviews with community representatives. In addition to shorter, scaffolding assignments, there will be three major forums for the dissemination of your research:

- Formal group presentations of your research on April 12 and 19 (in plenary session time)
- Participation in the HCOL First-Year Research Symposium on April 26 (in plenary session time)
- Each student writes an independent essay about one inquiry related to the group project (due May 8, at noon)

The overarching questions that drive this project are:

- What is important for people in the religious community to know?
- How do they know what they know?
- How can we know about that community?

Under this large umbrella of basic questions about religious knowing and knowing religion, each group will develop a particular research question relevant to their community and to their particular interests. Some examples of issues that may indicate potential research trajectories:

- What is the role of ritual in creating, transmitting, and experiencing religious knowledge?
- What is the role of music in creating, transmitting, and experiencing religious knowledge?
- How are gender or racial or class differences dealt with in the community?
- Is there a leader who is an authoritative teacher? Are there alternative teachers?
- Are there authoritative texts that are believed to be the repository of the most significant knowledge? Are some people experts in knowing and interpreting the texts or are the texts understood to be commonly accessible?
- Are there practices where experiences of unmediated knowledge are cultivated?
- How are children schooled or formed to be knowledgeable members of the community? (Or are children not a part of the community?)
- Are there any current events or cultural issues that the community is dealing with?

Some considerations:
This project will most easily be pursued by selecting a readily recognizable, institutionalized religious community, not the kind of informal association of religious people practicing “under the radar” American religion that Sullivan describes. However, if you can identify such a group and feel confident that there is enough to go on, suggest it as a possibility. You cannot choose a virtual community whose only gathering is internet-based. (Those communities require different research techniques and questions. For this project, you need to focus on a community that you can observe in real time and space.)

This project includes research using human subjects, which involves ethical issues beyond those encountered in research using only published sources. IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval for exempt research will cover interviews with community representatives and observation of public rituals. Note: although you may pursue an inquiry about the religious formation of children, you may not interview children for this project.

Research tasks. Although these are listed below in a sequence with some due dates, the process will vary with what you discover. Research in published sources will be done throughout the project. You might decide that an additional interview is necessary; you might have different group members go to rituals on different days, etc. More details will be given on specific parts of the project as we go.

- **Wednesday, February 8.** Religious Communities in Burlington Wiki assignment due.
- **Friday, February 10.** In-class group work (15 minutes): choosing a religious community. Each student should come to class prepared to suggest one or two communities of particular interest. Your suggestions should be based on pre-existing interest in particular communities, logistics (can you easily get to the site for observations and interviews?), and preliminary research into those communities (e.g., most religious communities have websites!). During the group time, develop a ranked list of three site preferences for the group project. Submit list to me at the end of class, or send me the list by email by noon on Sunday, February 11.
- **Monday, February 13.** Site selections announced.
- **Wednesday, February 15.** Class will meet in the Library Instruction Classroom in Bailey/Howe Library. Before class, each student must complete the on-line tutorials for the Classic Library Catalogue and for Academic Search Premier (links below). At the end of each tutorial, send it to me (Anne.Clark@uvm.edu) and to Patricia Mardeusz (patricia.mardeusz@uvm.edu), the reference librarian and research liaison for our class.
  1. [http://library.uvm.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/classic-library-catalog-introduction](http://library.uvm.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/classic-library-catalog-introduction)
  2. [http://library.uvm.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/asp](http://library.uvm.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/asp)
- **Friday, February 24.** Independent research. Continue to work on individual research reports. Preliminary research is necessary to familiarize yourself with what is most important for you to know about the history and traditions of the community you are studying. It is imperative that you not go to the community ignorant about their religion! What you learn in interviews and through ritual
observation will resonate with (although sometimes in ambiguous or ambivalent ways) with the community’s historical tradition. This investigation should also be the starting point for developing specific research questions.

- **Monday, March 6.** Preliminary individual research reports due. Group work in class to develop the research topic for the project and individual contributions.
- **Friday, March 10.** Group research project description due. Each group must submit a description of the overall research project with the specific pieces that each person will contribute.
- **Friday, March 10.** *Recommended submission date for ritual observation report* (see below, March 29).
- **Wednesday, March 22.** Plenary session on creating the research poster and preparing the presentation.
- **Monday, March 27-Friday, April 7.** Continuing in-class group work with specific tasks assigned. Also, out of class work should involve continuing research, contacting an official representative of your community (e.g., rabbi, pastor, guru, etc.), setting up an appointment for an interview. To do this, the group will have had to create a protocol: develop interview questions, decide who will conduct the interview, decide how the results will be shared in the group, etc.).
- **Wednesday, March 29.** *Ritual observation reports due.* These reports are individual essays to be submitted by each group member. It will be a detailed report on your ritual observation with analytic reflection using theoretical materials from the course (e.g., Bell, Warner, Sharf, Prentiss, Orsi).
- **Friday, March 31.** Submit interview questions. In-class group work: drafting poster slide. I will spend 10 minutes with each group looking at the poster plans.
- **Monday, April 3, 5:00.** *Poster slide due.* Send to me by email.
- **Wednesday, April 5.** *Individual essay proposals due.*
- **Monday, April 10 and Wednesday, April 12.** Presentation rehearsals.
- **Wednesday, April 12.** First poster session. 5:05-6:20. Votey Hall 209.
- **Wednesday, April 19.** Second poster session. 5:05-6:20. Votey Hall 209.
- **Wednesday, April 26.** HCOL First-year research symposium. 5:05-6:20. Davis Center, room TBA.
- **Monday, May 8, noon.** *Individual essays due.*

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1 Exemption #2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior. EXCEPT when identifiers are recorded and any disclosure of the responses outside the research could place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. (Note: This exemption does not apply to research involving minors except for research involving educational tests or observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.)