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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a curriculum for an undergraduate level cultural studies course. The first part of the paper describes the rationale for the course, noting the work of Diane Eck on the growing pluralism of American education. The paper then presents a syllabus for an undergraduate cultural studies course on the culture of India. The paper also presents a proposal for a new course on the ways in which people of different religious cultures and traditions attempt to communicate in spite of the impediments and obstacles that might thwart that communication. (RS)

Project for a Cultural Studies Course

Daniel Ross Chandler

1997

The purpose of this project is to develop a curriculum for a Cultural Studies Course.

I. Rationale

American education is characterized by a growing pluralism. As an illustration, Eck observed that when she started teaching the culture and religions at Harvard in the late 1970s, she never imagined that the religions that prompted her to study India's culture in that country would prompt her during the 1990s to study Indian religions that are developing in the United States. Eck explained that during the 1989-1990 academic year, she discovered that the number of students from India enrolled in her classes was increasing. However "they were not from India, but were Indian Americans, born and raised in San Antonio, Baltimore, or Cleveland. (p. 38)

These students were children born to the first generation of immigrants from India who settled in the United States after the 1965 immigration act was changed. This change in American immigration policy attempted to remove the restrictions that had virtually barred Asian immigrants from the United States for four decades. Eck commenced to recognize the effects from this new policy when her classes became filled with "Muslims from Providence, Hindus from Baltimore, Sikhs from Chicago, Jains from New Jersey" (p. 40). She concluded that they represented the emergence in the United States of a new cultural and religious diversity that Eck described as a new geopolitical and georeligious reality. This Harvard professor wrote: "Straddling two worlds, critically appropriating two cultures, they lived in perpetual inner dialogue between the distinctive cultures of their parents and grandparents and the forceful, multiple currents of American culture." (p. 40). Religious diversity shattered the traditional paradigm representing an America composed primarity with Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Eck observed that within four years, Harvard was transformed Eck indicated perceptively: "What has happened at Harvard has happened at major universities throughout the country. In the 1990s, universities have become the microcosms and laboratories of a new multicultural and multireligious America." (p. 40)

Eck explained that the Pluralism Project, conducted at Harvard, was a research initiative that sent students into their hometowns across the United States to analyze this proliferating pluralism. This research lasted for three years, These investigators attempted to discover who has arrived in the United States, how are their religious traditions change when they take root in American soil, and how America is changing as Americans embracing numerous religions commence to appropriate this emerging multicultural reality. She reported that "most of the new religious institutions are invisible" and that "many Americans, understandably, have remained quite unaware of these new communities." (pp. 41-42). In some instances, a striking new visible landscape has arisen, making a dramatic architectural imprint. The interpenetration of ancient civilizations and cultures into the contemporary United States, which is a hallmark that characterizes the late twentieth century, might be illustrated with Chicago, which has fifty mosques and almost a half-million Muslims. Eck concluded that the United States is now the most religiously diverse country on earth.

Eck emphasized that diversity itself does not constitute genuine pluralism. Pluralism is the energetic engagement with this diversity. Usually diversity has been the development of ghettoes without any connecting communication. Eck cautioned that diversity without engagement will become increasingly difficult and dangerous. Pluralism, she insisted, requires not simply tolerance but actively seeking understanding. She cautioned that tolerance is simply an inadequate foundation for a world containing enormous religious differences. Tolerance does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in placethe stereotype, the half truth, the fear that underlie old patterns of division and violence.

She states that a new paradigm of pluralism does not require persons to abandon their identities or forsake their commitments. Instead, pluralism is the encounter of commitments . Pluralism means holding one's deepest differences not in isolation, but in relationship. The popular Harvard professor indicates that the language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter. The current challenge is to shape societies, neighborhoods, universities, and nations "that now replicate and potentially may reconfigure the differences that have long divided humankind." (p. 44)

While Eck describes this growing religious diversity and encourages pluralism, Yoh developed a method for nurturing pluralism through classroon education.

Yoh, a visiting scholar at Indiana University, observed that unlike students in Great Britian, Australia, and other countries, American students do not take comprehensive courses in the study of religion. Under guidance from the Graduate Curiculum Committee, the School of Education, the State University of New York, Genesco, Yok constructed and taught a course for graduate education majors called "Religion and the Public Schools."

This elective, experimental course attracted 13 graduate students. The objective of the course was "to model the best of our understanding regarding the fundamental principles of freedom of religion and expression and the principle of separation of church and state" (p. 235). The course was an attempt to scrutenize cherished beliefs and personal prejudices in an effort to prepare teachers to meet the religious diverity that shapes today's classrooms and the world. Yoh wrote: "Thw course was developed to give the students an idea of the array of practices and classroom approaches that might characteriuze the teaching of religious studies and to place these options firmly within their historical, philosophical, and legal contexts." (p. 235)

Recognizing the situation that Eck describes and accepting Yok's example as an incentive, this project was designed to develop a course - Culture Studies 101: The Culture of India - that might be used as an undergraduate course in a college or university This includes (1) constructing a syllabus and (2) developing a bibliography.

Bibliography

Eck, Diana L. (September, October, 1996). "Neighboring Faiths." Harvard Magazine, pp. 38-44.

Yoh, Iris M. (November, 1994). "Reflections on an Experimental Course: Religion and the Public Schools." Phi Delta Kappan, pp. 234-238.

Cultural Studies 101: The Culture of India
Three hours, three academic credits

Course Description

The rich cultural diversity that characterizes America provides an opportunity to study other people's history, religion, and leaders. The significance of this growing diversity is confirmed by the contributions that people from one culture make to another culture. The purpose of this course is to study the culture of India. An objective is to discover how persons from this culture, embracing different traditions, express themselves through their history, religion, and leadership. Among the questions raised during this course are: Does a particular culture remain the same when itcollides with a different culture? Does a new culture emerge and develop? To survive and endure, does a culture become transported and assimilated in a different culture through an exchange of contributions?

Methods

Readings in the assigned textbooks, classroom discussions amnd presentations, lectures by the teacher, use of audio and audio-visual cassettes, visits to public places such as the Chicago Art Institute and the "New India" community on Devon Street, are included in this course.

Assessment

The course grade will be assigned on the basis of the following:

1. Quality of class participation that indicates a clear understanding of the contents of the course.	10%
2. Panel discussion	10%
3. Written critiques of assigned readings	25%
4 Individual research paper and oral presentation of findings	30%
5. Final take-home examination	25%

Textbook and Selected Bibliography

Zimmer, Heinrich. (1974). The Philosophies of India. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
The Bhagavad-Gita. (1948) trans. S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
Radhakrishnan, S. (1985) Eastern Religions and Western Thought. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

References

Aurobindo. Foundations of Indian Culture. Pondicherry, India: Aurobindo Ashram.
Tagore, Rabindranath. (1961). The Religion of Man. Boston: Beacon Press.

New Course Proposal
Communication XXX
Proposed Title: Communication and Culture
3 academic credits

Proposed Course Description

The enormously rich cultural pluralism and religious diversity that characterize Chicago provides an almost unprecedented opportunity for studying intercultural communication. A particularly interesting dimension of this richness is evident in the "new" religions emerging not simply in Chicago, but apparently throughout the contemporary United States. Among these groups are Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Subud, Meher Baba's followers, Transcendental Meditation centers, Krishnamurti, the Vedanta movement, and humanistic mysticism. The significance of these groups and their powerful attraction is attested by the 1990 census, which confirms the tremensous scope of sweeping social change developing as people who embrace diverse traditions meet and interact.

The purpose of this course is to study the ways in which people of different religious cultures and traditions attempt to communicate in spite of the impediments and obstacles that might thwart that communication. Questions are raised: Does a particular religion remain the same when it collides with a different religion in another culture? Does a new religion emerge? To succeed or endure, must a new religion appearing in one culture be transported to another culture through intercultural communication?

Recommended Readings

Jacob Needleman The New Religions (New York: Crossroads, 1984).

Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. Understanding the New Religions (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

Additional Academic Resources

Diane Choquette, comp. New Religious Movements in the United States and Canada: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985).

Diane Choquette, comp. New Religious Movements Research Collection, Acquisition List, 1984-1989 (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union Library, 1991.

Teaching Methods

Readings in the assigned textbooks, visits to diverse groups such as the Vivekananda Vedanta Center and the Hare Krishna movement, lectures by the professor, use of audio and audio-visual cassettes, and dinner at an Indian restaurant should provide an unusually creative educational experience.

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