

NEH/TBR Summer Summit  
Islamic Center of Tennessee  
July 28, 2016

**Bridging Cultures and  
Educating for Democracy  
at Jackson State  
Community College**



# **Building Cultures**

**National Endowment for the  
Humanities:**

**Building Community and Cultural  
Understanding Through the Study of  
Religion and Civil Society**

## How This Began for Us



- National Endowment for the Humanities grant, Bridging Cultures
- Involves Cleveland State, Jackson State and MTSU
- Mission: Engage students in an understanding of the relationships among culture, community and civic commitment

# Bridging Cultures (grant from NEH)

in July 2015, a weeklong conference on campus of MTSU on building community and cultural understanding through the study of religion and civil society

mid-year event in January, 2016, regarding ways to connect various means of civic engagement to the discussion of religious pluralism

ongoing faculty learning communities at both Cleveland State and Jackson State

In June, 2016, a group of five representing both campuses attended and presented at the CDLE conference in Indianapolis.

Today: sharing our progress and experiences in hopes of supporting our colleagues on other campuses in their similar efforts

# Our Hope

Underlying the individual course initiatives, projects, and campus activities we are undertaking is a deep commitment to encouraging students to recognize their abilities to understand others' experiences as well as to embrace their potential to affect their communities.

We also want to continue our faculty learning communities and to grow those communities and these experiences on our own campuses.





# Examples from the JSCC Classroom

**Tony Rafalowski**, English, “Writing Diversity in the Composition Classroom”

**Dr. Mechel Camp**, English, Dean of Communication and Humanities, “Composing a New Narrative: Exploring Religious and Cultural Diversity”

**Will Shull**, History and also Dual Enrollment Representative for High School Initiatives and Student Recruitment, “The Complexity of the Past: Complicating History and Challenging Student Assumptions”

**Dr. Mantri Sivananda**, History, Jackson State Community College and the University of Memphis

**Kim Warren-Cox**, Communication, “The New Global Relationship: Understanding and Adapting to Diverse Listeners”

**Dr. Nell Senter**, Philosophy, Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences, “Examining the Ideas of *Religious Diversity* and *the Common Good*”



**Tony Rafalowski, English,**

**“Writing Diversity in the  
Composition Classroom”**

- **Dr. Mechel Camp, English, Dean of Communication and Humanities, “Composing a New Narrative: Exploring Diversity, Community, Civic Engagement, and Civic Responsibility” in First-Year Writing**
- In Albert W. Dzur’s essay, “The Democratic Roots of Academic Professionalism,” Dzur writes that “democracy is counternormative on today’s campus.”



# FIRST-YEAR WRITING

**“Our work is clearly grounded in an assumption that, in order for democracy to flourish and for citizens to be capable of effectively identifying, expressing, and pursuing values and goals that are meaningful to them in the public arena, they ought to be at least moderately well-informed and engaged” (Colby 6).**

Colby, Anne, et al. *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, n.d.

COMP I: What do I believe? What is important to me?  
What is my political identity?

# FIRST-YEAR WRITING

- COMP II: Social Issues Project – Literature / Interview
- Ibsen's *A Doll House*:
  - What constitutes power in a relationship, and is there a difference between women's power and men's power? Can women be seen as powerful in Ibsen's culture or our own if their power is confined to the household?
  - What does feminism mean for today's culture? Is it different for the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it was for the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
  - Is reducing ideas to male/female too limiting? How does this affect us with regard to life in our community?
- Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*:
  - In what ways does our past racial history inform our present?
  - In what ways is racism unspoken/institutional? How did it limit opportunities for people of color in the time during which the play takes place (1930s)? Does it continue today, and if so, in what ways?
  - How does generational poverty affect goals and dreams? What are some of the causes, as illustrated in the play, and how do we break them? How do we help others break free, and how does that impact our larger community?
  - What impact does violence have on family and community?

# LOOKING AHEAD

Interviews for both Comp I and Comp II

Foster greater communication between student and community (including family) and between students in the classroom (enacting democracy through an exchange of ideas)

Requiring a Service Learning Component

# Will Shull, History & Recruitment/High School Initiatives Officer, JSCC

Will Shull, “The Complexity of the Past:  
Complicating History and Challenging Student  
Assumptions”

American History 2, World Civilizations 2

# Assignments

- Bi-weekly Journal Entries
  - Civil Rights
  - Presidential preferences
  - Benefits/difficulties of Imperialism
  - Community development
- Oral History Assignment
  - Using personal experience for historical understanding
  - Considering and valuing others' experiences as informative sources and significant

# Future Development

- Incorporating more religious diversity
- Exploring options for more in-class activities branching from journal entries
- Utilizing guest speakers or out-of-class activities to familiarize students with other cultures/religions



# Dr. Mantri Sivananda, History, U of Memphis, JSCC

- Direct learning experience
- Western and non-Western religions
- Wide exposure
- Different Aesthetic
- Enriched understanding of Hinduism

## Lord Ganesha son of Lord Shiva



# Quan Am Monastery

- Applying the FLC-CLCE method
- Visiting places of worship in Memphis
- Understanding the traditional caste system in India
- Traditional place of women in non-Western society.



# Muslim Society of Memphis



# Bridging Cultures

## Learning Objectives

- Learning to be responsible citizens in a democracy
- Civic engagement in challenging times
- Understanding and appreciating unity in diversity
- Belonging to the cultural melting pot of America



Kim Warren-Cox, Communication, “The New  
Global Relationship: Understanding and Adapting  
to Diverse Listeners”

Interpersonal Communication Course

# Classroom Approaches to Religious Pluralism and Cultural Diversity

- Text, readings
- Research, assignments, video
- Guest speaker, Sajedah Alghunaim



“Before Sajedah came and talked to our class, I would get a little nervous when I saw an Islam (sic) person. I wouldn’t change my actions or speak on it verbally, but in my mind I would think I should stay aware of my surroundings... She was full of life ... I feel like now I should never draw conclusions about someone I don’t know personally... In class we discussed other cultures, and all of them should be given proper respect without judgment.”

“I thought the guest speaker was so interesting and a lucky opportunity we had as a class. We are never really taught about Muslim traditions and their faith, so having her to come in and share with us the ideas that her religion hold and how it is similar and different from Christianity was super neat. She was an absolute sweetheart, and it is a shame that people throw hate speech towards Muslims despite not knowing the facts and really knowing the person.”

“Before I heard her speak to our class, I believed that all Islamic people were out to bring death and to terrorize the United States. She has opened my eyes to see the bigger picture ...Radical Islamic groups such as ISIS have brought their culture down...I would love for the mass media to show how good these people are instead of the savages they choose to show. I am very thankful and blessed that she opened her arms and her life to us to prove that the world is getting the wrong image... She was a very sweet and amazing woman.”

- What I learned: Things that Worked
  - Network
  - Classroom is best.
  - Later is better.
- What I learned: Things to Improve
  - More opportunity #1
  - More opportunity #2

# Bridging Cultures Learning Goal

The Question:

*How can thinking and experience help connect us across our differences and why does it matter in a democracy that we share a sense of community and civic life?*

Dr. Nell Senter, Philosophy

Dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences

# Introduction to Philosophy course

## Bridging Cultures through valuing religious diversity

– Philosophy of Religion



## Civic Engagement through discussing The Common Good

– Social & Political Philosophy





# Philosophy of Religion-- bridging cultures essay

- **“Write a short essay on some religion other than your own.”**
- **Research the religion including interviews with practitioners and if possible attend a service or ritual.**

# Hindu Dewali Celebration—Fall 2015



- Several students volunteered to help with the banquet & celebration
- Reported they had learned how much Hinduism like most faiths is a *community of families* coming together to honor a sense of the sacred; a culture that includes food, clothing & care for one another

# Understanding the “other”

- **Students wrote:**
- **“Hinduism understands and accepts other cultures ... out of respect”**
- **“When you take a closer look into Islamic beliefs you will find similarities to Christianity that will most likely surprise you, as they did me. Having a true understanding of another religion gives you an educated and unbiased outlook on another culture, bringing a new meaning to the world around us.”**

# Shinto to Hinduism, Cherokee to Judaism

- “Indigenous religions... such as Cherokee spirituality believe life should be honored and the Creator deserves our affection ... everything is connected with nature and the earth.”
- (Hindu student writing about Islam) “I visited Masjid Ar-Rahman the Islamic Association of Greater Memphis... there was a class for kids to learn Arabic and read the Quran and a class for those who cannot speak English with a professor teaching how to read and write in English.”

# Social & Political Philosophy

bridging cultures essay --‘the Common Good’

- **Which political philosophy we have studied best serves the Common Good?**
  - Define ‘common good’



*common good: Plato's idea of social harmony or Rawls' idea of justice as fairness to all?*

- Some students agreed with Plato that the common good is best served by “*staying in your place*” and doing what you do best as a worker, a soldier/manager (guardian) or as a philosopher-leader
- Some students agreed with John Rawls that “inequalities are just only if they can be said to be to the benefit of all: a scholarship open to engineering students to enter graduate study for instance.”





*essay option on the common good-- you are or you imagine yourself as a member of an immigrant family*

- **One student used his experience as an Hispanic-American to discuss “the value to all of making use of skilled and unskilled immigrant workers who increasingly support a US economy from which we all benefit.”**



# Continuing thoughts

- The classroom is only one place where we provide opportunities for encountering other cultures and traditions.



~FREE Community Event~  
The Spanish Club & International Education of Jackson State are pleased to present

## DUITIANO

Thursday, March 28  
6:30 p.m.  
JSCC Ayers Auditorium

An evening of Spanish Classical Guitar, and Piano by world-class musicians

Duo Guitiano, comprised of

- Colombian-American guitarist Carlos Castilla
- Cuban-American pianist Amanda Virelles

Free Refreshments at Intermission

Donations to the JSCC Foundation to benefit the Spanish Travel/Study Abroad Fund would be greatly appreciated.



Jackson State Community College  
Jackson State Community College, a Tennessee Board of Regents school, is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution.


### Free Latin Dance Lessons

with Sra. Lynn Hoover

Open to JSCC students, staff and faculty!

Wednesday, February 20  
2:30 p.m.  
PE #7  
Free refreshments!

Come and learn basic steps of Salsa and Merengue and beat those winter blues courtesy of JSCC Spanish Club.




Jackson State Community College



**Brock McGuire Band in Concert**

# College-wide Collaboration

- Those of us involved in this do not limit our efforts to the projects we've shared or the particular courses we've talked about.
- Our students often are encountering these ideas for the first time. We came to understand that many of them were unaware that they also have a culture – that their experiences and beliefs are not universal. This is a more basic place to start than what many of us had anticipated.

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- As we've reflected upon our experiences, we've come to believe that, while traditional classroom experiences involving thinking and writing can be meaningful, the most profoundly meaningful insights came to our students as a result of direct experience.
  - Providing direct experience can be challenging in terms of logistics:
    - Dual enrollment
    - Distance classes
    - Student schedules

# But ...

- We are more committed now than at the beginning of this project.
  - We believe this effort is critical to effective public discourse.
  - We found particular experiences significant to both our students and to us.
  - We are planning more ways to provide opportunities for these meaningful experiences.



“We merely want to live in peace with all the world, to trade with them, to commune with them, to learn from their culture as they may learn from ours, so that the products of our toil may be used for our schools and our roads and our churches and not for guns and planes and tanks and ships of war.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower