Religious Studies and Study Abroad

Working through the Problems of Study Abroad Using the Methodologies of Religious Studies

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Abstract. After illustrating the joys of teaching religious studies abroad with an anecdote from my trip to China, I warn of some of its inherent pedagogical and ethical challenges. I argue that teaching some of the “new directions” in religious studies scholarship might address these challenges. These include a turning away from the abstract (texts, beliefs, theologies) and towards the concrete (bodies, places, rituals); moving away from teaching religions as unchanging, ancient verities and instead emphasizing the impact that colonialism, modernization, and secularism have had; moving from searching for authenticity to questioning it; and emphasizing methodological self-consciousness. Keeping these new directions in mind will help ensure the study abroad experience is educationally successful. This essay serves as an introduction to a series of six additional essays comprising a special section of the journal (see Teaching Theology and Religion 18:1, January 2015).

This essay argues that teaching religious studies abroad is on its face one of the most rewarding educational experiences for both professors and students. But it is not an endeavor to be embarked on lightly. This essay argues that developments in religious studies as applied to teaching study abroad would benefit not only religious studies professors thinking about teaching abroad, but also any conscientious professor leading study abroad trips. The issues raised should also be of interest to teachers of religious studies in the traditional classroom. Finally, this essay serves to introduce the five essays which follow it, each of which has a more specific focus. The concluding essay by John Barbour points out the cumulative lessons gleaned from this collection and well as issues that still need to be addressed.

In the summer of 2011, I led a group of students from my university on a three-week study tour of China, focusing on reading Chinese religious texts as well as looking at the role of religion in modern China. When later asked about the highlights of the trip, I mentioned rich educational experiences such as discussing Chinese classics and examining steles memorializing examination scores at a Confucian academy, reading the Heart Sutra out loud in the courtyard of a Buddhist temple, and learning about the religious-political sacred space of Beijing, including the feng shui of its North-South axis. Touristic highlights included exploring the hutongs (back alleys) and old city walls of Beijing, gawking at the one of the world’s largest Buddhist statues carved out of a single piece of wood, and strolling through Tiananmen Square. Social highlights included meeting a Canadian graduate student of Chinese Buddhism, and a Chinese graduate student studying TV production who took us out in the evening to a lively pedestrian street. Culinary highlights included local breakfast street foods, steamed dumplings with a variety of fillings, and lamb skewers and other traditional Chinese-Muslim delicacies.
Siegler

These highlights may indicate that our three-week trip was rewarding, but I should hasten to add that these experiences all occurred on our first day in China. The subsequent nineteen days were just as full. Compare that first day with the first day of teaching in a typical semester: I pass out the syllabus, warn my students against texting in class, and perhaps conduct some “icebreaker” introductions. Then the period is over and the students proceed to their next class, to lunch, or to their jobs. In other words, study abroad produces an undeniable and overwhelming experience that is both immediate and continuous, which the classroom experience cannot ever hope to match.1

And yet, that said, the most important point of this essay is that faculty must approach teaching religious studies abroad with their eyes open. First, there are practical issues to consider.2 Once those issues are taken into account, the thoughtful teacher will realize there are ethical and philosophical problems underlying the whole study abroad enterprise. These problems are not merely theoretical but present actual pedagogical challenges for students and teachers alike that any responsible religious studies professor should be aware of before deciding to design and implement a study abroad program.

The first hazard is that, like higher education in general, study abroad has been subject to unregulated growth and commercialization. In many ways, it has been a victim of its own success: it has been growing more or less steadily since the 1960s, when the government decided international education was a matter of national security. The Institute of International Education, in a 2010 report, writes that, in the 2008/2009 school year, some 246,000 American students studied in foreign countries. This represents roughly a 150 percent increase over just a decade ago. The speed at which universities have pushed globalization has meant that the study abroad programs on university campuses have not had the integrity we might hope or expect. Indeed international programs are often subcontracted to for-profit companies, leading one scholar to remark that study abroad has become not only “big business, but it is essentially an unregulated industry” (Nolan 2009, 275).3

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1 Though not the subject of these essays, it is important to note that there are also many practical reasons to teach study abroad. Leading a study abroad program is not only a travel opportunity, but, depending on your institution, a credit towards tenure. It can foster dynamic relationships with students that “can fuel extraordinary learning, growth, and development” for professors. Overall, the experience “can enhance your self-confidence, professional worth, and job marketability” (McCallon and Holmes 2010).

2 This is not the subject of these essays, but there are financial and professional reasons not to teach study abroad, summed up in the following report: “In addition to being instructors teaching their courses, faculty traveling with students also fill the roles of disciplinarian, tour director, conflict resolution expert, accountant, and substitute parent, usually for no or little compensation beyond what they would receive to teach in relative peace at home. Additionally, they sacrifice time with their families as well as progress on their own research agendas. From a purely economic standpoint, then, assuming the responsibilities of a faculty director does not make much sense, and from a personal and professional standpoint, may be even detrimental” (Chieffo and Griffiths, 370–371).

3 Adrian Shubert writes: “As it is conducted in the United States, study abroad in general is a business in which universities off load the organization of the international education experience to for-profit ‘service providers’ and charge their students hefty prices to participate” (2007, 198).
Working Through the Problems of Study Abroad

Of course, the following essays are not designed for full-time study abroad providers or for faculty who merely shunt their students off to a private tour operator. Rather, these essays are written by and for religious studies professors who have chosen to initiate, design, and lead their own study abroad trips.

Although faculty-directed trips will have higher academic standards than “big business” study abroad trips, that does not mean they are immune from similar problems. A former study abroad participant eloquently addresses these problems: as an undergraduate at Wesleyan, Talya Zemach-Bersin embarked on a semester abroad in India, Nepal, and Tibet. She returned with a damming critique of her study abroad experience. First, Zemach-Bersin felt that her pre-departure briefing had not prepared her to deal with questions of inequality. “Why had we not analyzed race, identity, and privilege when those factors were informing every one of our interactions?” she asks, “Why was there never a discussion about commodification when our relationships with host families were built on a commodified relationship?” (2008). The very parts of the world that we as religious studies professors would rightly consider the richest in terms of showing our students the vitality and diversity of religions – notably South and East Asia and the Middle East – signify to our students Orientalist adventures. As one critic of study abroad put it, “the experiences are seen predominantly as a means of exploring an ‘exotic’ location for purposes that demote the academic content to a secondary status” (Woolf 2006, 136). In other words, even the study abroad courses designed specifically to teach the academic study of religion will by necessity be marketed as catering to expectations of undergraduates.

In another publication, Zemach-Bersin decries the hypocrisy of marketing “global competence” (2009). Her analysis of the images and language used in the deluge of study abroad brochures, posters, and websites that inundate the typical American college campus reveals that what is really being sold is privilege and consumerism, as the whole world is offered for sale to young, mostly white Americans so they can feel even more self-empowered (Zemach-Bersin 2009). At my university, as at many schools, study abroad fairs are held periodically on campus. Students choose where to study – Bali? Rome? Russia? – as easily as picking up a brightly colored flyer. They arrive at their destination prepared to have their fleeting impressions and stereotypes confirmed.

These structural conditions are unlikely to change, and indeed have been around for since the beginning of organized study abroad in Prohibition-era America when, in 1923, eight juniors from the University of Delaware took a boat to France for a year’s study at the Sorbonne. As much as study abroad has been integrated into the aims of liberal arts education, it has also served as an occasion for displaying socio-economic privilege and for consuming the cultural “other.” Indeed, some historians have compared study abroad to an American version of the Grand Tour, a rite of passage for young wealthy Europeans “which began in seventeenth century England, where aristocratic young men were sent to European capitals to complete their classical education” and “visited private collections of art and public monuments of antiquity” (Levin 2009, xiv; see also Gore 2005).

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4 Universities are increasingly encouraging their faculty to do exactly that (see Fischer 2010).

5 Reports from the time show the students, living in Prohibition-era America, were both shocked and overjoyed when, beginning with the ocean voyage, their professors permitted or even encouraged wine-fueled socializing (Stearns 2009, 70).
Siegler

Anthony Ogden compares American study abroad participants (who he calls “colonial students”) to the functionaries of empire – hungry for adventure, yet wishing for the comforts of home; living in a new culture, yet isolated. He writes, “Like children of the empire, colonial students have a sense of entitlement, as if the world is theirs for discovery, if not for the taking. New cultures are experienced in just the same way as new commodities are coveted, purchased, and owned” (Ogden 2007, 38).

Addressing the Problems
If the reification of economic inequality and the fostering of a colonialist attitude towards the cultural other as an exotic and essentialized object can be said to constitute the main problems with study abroad programs, then these problems surely have no easy solutions, embedded as they are in the marketing of these programs. But I argue that by taking stock of current directions in religious studies, any given study abroad program, even short-term ones, will be able to ameliorate these problems or even turn them into a learning opportunity. Thus I list four directions that I have noticed religious studies heading in over the last few decades, all of which are related to what has been called “the cultural turn in religious studies.”6 (These directions should be seen as overlapping and idiosyncratic.)

1. From the abstract to the embodied: religious studies is moving away from looking at religion in the abstract (texts, beliefs, theologies, philosophies) and towards the embodied and the locative (senses, bodies, places, actions).  
2. From the timeless to the historicized: Another important turn in religious studies has been away from studying religions as unchanging, ancient verities and instead emphasizing the impact that overlapping, inescapable processes such as colonialism, modernization, globalization, and secularization have had on religions, their study, and their very definition.  
3. From searching for the authentic to questioning it: Religious studies has been moving away from a search for the essence or core of religion, whether found theologically, experientially, textually, historically, or archeologically, and towards a questioning of the concept of authenticity.  
4. From methodological invisibility to methodological self-consciousness: Religious studies, perhaps more than any other discipline, must teach its students methodological self-consciousness. And this imperative has manifested itself recently in attention paid to the scholar/practitioner and/or etic/emic debate, as well as to the ethics of religious studies fieldwork.7

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6 The “cultural turn has resulted in a shift from consciousness-based orientations to one that emphasizes the way in which something like religion may reside not within consciousness but instead within culture itself” (Waggoner 2009, 219).

7 Many others have thought about these issues as applied to study abroad. Questioning of authenticity is not the exclusive purview of religious studies, and indeed other study abroad professionals have already made this argument. As one essay put it, “rather than making the authentic its goal, perhaps we need to understand how selling authentic culture is part of the process of globalization […] We [study abroad professionals] need to jump full force into this mass culture and open up a space for students to think about how it functions” (Levin 2009, xvii). Similarly, religious studies is not the only discipline to make colonialism a desirable teaching concept and I am not the first to suggest it as a necessary part of study abroad. One essay by and for study abroad professionals holds that study abroad carries “a risk of...
Working Through the Problems of Study Abroad

These trends in our scholarship are also trends in what and how we teach religious studies (or they could and should be), and study abroad can serve as a laboratory for these trends. I believe all four of these trends can be robustly incorporated into any religious studies abroad class, but even more, any study abroad class can benefit from emphasizing these four directions. Here I show how these four trends in teaching religious studies can be applied to study abroad, using anecdotes from programs I have led.

1. From the Abstract to the Embodied: Embodying the Subject
For all our discipline’s concern with sacred space (theophany, axis mundi, and so forth), actual physical places have been neglected pedagogically. And for all the scholarship on the classification or ontological status of religious experience (mysticism, conversion, and so forth), we ignore its embodied dimensions. Paying attention to actual bodies in actual places will enrich our students’ education. As Richard Carp puts it, “material and bodily investigations of religion constantly remind students and teachers how our own bodies and sensory training are implicated in our ability to know and understand” (2007, 11). Students abroad will understand what a “sense of place” is easily, because that place is so different from their homes. Walking around Egypt or New Zealand, they viscerally understand the physical distance traveled to get where they are. They absorb the spatial layout of the cities and the temples, and note how differently they feel from the cities and the temples at home. The streets are narrower, and people stand closer. And we as teachers do not have to work hard to make them understand the connection between space and body. Students’ feelings of boredom or distraction, of being too hot or too cold, can be teachable moments if they understand how these bodily experiences can either impede or aid in ritual participation.

Ladakh, a Himalayan district with a rugged high desert landscape, is located in India’s northernmost state of Kashmir. Fortress-like Buddhist monasteries are built on hills so they tower over quiet towns. The twelve students I brought to Ladakh in 2009 learned more about a fifteenth century Gelugpa monastery from climbing up a huge set of steps before arriving at gigantic wooden double doors, than from reading about Ladakhi Buddhist history. This locative, experiential knowledge, and self-awareness thereof, can disabuse students who are expecting “cultural immersion” without getting their hands dirty. Indeed, new smells, tastes, and temperatures can produce the sense of epoche that Kerry Mitchell calls for in his contribution to this section. Even more, these sensory experiences can be used as theological justification for breaking down the resistance of conservative Christian students to other religions, as Calvin Mercer details in his essay.

2. From the Timeless to the Historicized: Foregrounding Change
In the classroom, it is difficult not to fall back on old patterns when teaching world religions. We give our students lists of Jewish values, Buddhist beliefs, and Hindu myths and even if our textbooks emphasize living religions or religion today, it is those timeless and abstracted beliefs and myths that our students use as a yardstick to measure the genuineness of whatever religious phenomena they are investigating. Abroad, students visit religious institutions, take part in rituals, or receive religious instruction, all of

perpetuating highly inequitable practices and relationships” and that this can be mitigated by “understanding theories of postcolonialism and privilege” (Che 2009, 110).
which may be constantly changing, adapting to those very forces of modernity (neocolonialism, advanced capitalism, and so forth) that have made the students’ visit possible in the first place.

In Ladakh, Vajrayana Buddhist monasteries are home to the world’s most important Tantric murals, some dating from the tenth century. And yet what impacted my students more was that in the densely populated tourist areas in the Ladakhi capital of Leh, the western traveler’s needs are targeted with a smorgasbord of classes for the spiritual consumer: yoga, ayurvedic massage, tai chi, Fa Lun Gong, and most interestingly, Vipassana meditation, a practice deriving from South East Asian (Theravada) Buddhism, the most visible form of Buddhism for travelers to this Vajrayana region. Rather than disdainfully ignoring these as aberrations of the “unchanging” Ladakhi religion, we focused much of the academic content on tourism, modernization, and globalization. Students read narratives by and about Europeans and Americans on spiritual quests, studies of Israeli tourists in India, and histories of Buddhist modernism. The final assignment asked not for an explication of the doctrines of Tantric Buddhism, but for an informed yet speculative prediction on how globalization and socio-economic development, including the role of tourism, would shape the future of religion in Ladakh. (In her essay in the following pages, Wendy Wiseman notes that the “complexity and lived dynamism of these issues require intensive study and critique of imperial culture” and suggests readings that will complexify these notions for our students.) In other words, students abroad will not have reconfirmed their mental picture of pure, exotic spirituality. Rather they will learn to question how that picture formed in the first place. Which leads to my next point.

3. From Searching for the Authentic to Questioning It

If I had the power to choose one piece of advice to sear in the brains of teachers of religious studies abroad as well as to all study abroad professionals, it would be these six words: Don’t look for authenticity, question it. This suggestion is not as easy to follow as it seems, for one of the most attractive aspects of studying abroad, for both students and faculty, is that it seems to make for a more “authentic” learning experience.8

Here is an example from a guide for faculty leading study abroad programs: “The experiential component of learning allows your students to have their hands on the culture and learn from a fresh perspective. Sitting in a U.S. classroom looking at slides of Monet’s work is hardly the same as strolling through the Musee D’Orsay to see the real thing” (McCallon and Holmes 2010). This assertion of “seeing the real thing” abroad extends easily to our own discipline. We might reasonably think that “sitting in a U.S. classroom looking at slides of Hindu temples is hardly the same as strolling through Benares to see the real thing!” And yet this line of reasoning is quite problematic in many ways. Norris Palmer, in his contribution in these pages, elaborates on why visiting temples in India is not simply a more “real” version of visiting Hindu temples in California, and where the differences lie.

I feel strongly that the real pedagogical reason to teach religious studies abroad is not because it gives your students a more authentic picture of the religious tradition you are

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8 This is true of studying religion in general; professors claim to teach (and students are keen to learn) the real Daoism, Tantra, Vodou, and so forth. For an example of how teaching one particular tradition—in this case Daoism—can be a tool to teach about the construction of authenticity, see Miller and Siegler (2007).
teaching, but rather because it calls into question such preconceived notions of authenticity. The students of my 2011 China trip were embedded in a larger tour of Western practitioners of taiji and qigong, most of whom had a New Age spiritual bent. One of my students, a twenty-one year old religious studies and anthropology major, told me she “realized what ‘spiritual tourists’ think and feel when they perform their practices.” She continued: “It was an eye-opening experience, and I hadn’t realized how closed-minded I was before then. It also opened up a lot of new questions about what could be considered authentic and sacred.”

4. From Methodological Invisibility to Methodological Self-Consciousness: Reflecting Self-Consciously

According to JZ Smith: “the student of religion . . . must be relentlessly self-conscious. Indeed, this self-consciousness constitutes his primary expertise, his foremost object of study” (1982, ix). In the classroom this concept can seem rather abstract and difficult to teach. But abroad, such meta-analysis of our own positionality comes naturally: Who are we? Are we tourists? Students? Pilgrims? Asking students their reasons for enrolling in this particular study abroad class while talking about these various categories might be a productive exercise as part of the pre-departure preparations.

Secular students may bridle at being referred to as pilgrims but exploring this category may lead to a more reflective experience. Religious studies professor Jennifer Oldstone-Moore did this when she lead students on the traditional Buddhist pilgrimage circumnavigating the Japanese island of Shikoku (2009). John Barbour has reflected on how using the categories of pilgrim and tourist in his teaching abroad provoked ethical self-reflection in his students (2010).

As we have seen, many critics of study abroad bemoan the fact that it functions as either the privileged leisurely pursuit of the exotic or as a fast-paced hedonistic romp (see Woolf 2006; Gore 2005). In either case, the worry is that the student is nothing but a tourist. Rather than simply exhorting students to “not be tourists” and “to blend in” or “act like locals” (which is what Talya Zemach-Bersin claims she was told at her pre-departure briefings, and then, arriving in the Himalayas, was left to her own devices [2009]), the self-aware study abroad teacher should recognize this discourse merely reinforces our students’ identities as tourists.

Instead, we should play with this dichotomy between tourist and student: what is the difference? Why do we not want to be tourists? How can we act like students? As Oldstone-Moore put it, “In the overseas experience, issues of identity and ethics arise as one must grapple with the tension between being a tourist and being a student” (2009, 114). Tourism, as a product of modernity, finds authenticity in the cultural other (the mystic east, the exotic, the primitive, the ancient, and so forth). But, so the analysis goes, because the authentic is always being staged and recontextualized at a remove from the traveler, tourism is ultimately unsatisfactory. This unsatisfactoriness may be one reason for tourism’s self-disavowal, what the noted theorist of tourism Dean MacCannell calls the touristic critique of tourism (1999). In other words, travelers never want to be called tourists, and disdain places that are too “touristy.”

There are many ways to put tourism under the religious studies gaze as part of the study abroad experience. John Barbour recommends exposing students to readings in tourist studies: “There is a growing literature about tourism . . . that can help students think critically about their involvement in the places they visit” (2006). More specifi-
Siegler

cally, using readings from the small but growing subfield of tourism and religion (see Stauber 2011) may help to self-consciously draw focus to the tension in our identity as study abroad participants. (And of course this self-consciousness can be operationalized in specific course work. Andrew Irvine, in his essay for this issue, describes his students' final assignment as an active deconstruction of the "opposition between knower and known.")

The title of this essay begins with the phrase "working through" because I wish to emphasize both the provisional and the practical nature of this series of essays. All of the essays which follow present practical advice, provisionally offered, but each is filtered through the unique experiences and theoretical training of its author. All seven of us have gained much from designing and leading study abroad programs in religious studies. And all of us believe our students gained much from traveling with us.

Bibliography


Working Through the Problems of Study Abroad


Thomas Pearson, Editor

If you are looking for the book reviews, they have been moved to the Wabash Center’s new, free access, online site, Reflective Teaching (http://bit.ly/1vFxK6K).

The Wabash Center is excited to be launching this new web publication. In the months and years to come you can return again and again for short, accessible, and thoughtful reflections on teaching by and for faculty teaching theology and religion in higher education – including the book reviews which until this issue we have produced for this Wiley published journal, Teaching Theology and Religion.

We will of course continue our work with Wiley to publish Teaching Theology and Religion – the long-form, peer-reviewed, scholarship of teaching and learning that has been the hallmark of this publication for more than fifteen years. Moving the book reviews onto the Wabash Center’s website will open up additional space in this journal for more articles and other new essay forms.

The full archive of past book reviews will remain available in the Wiley online archive of TTR (http://bit.ly/1Giu5Zn). But our new book reviews will be available in a more timely and accessible form – without subscription and posted weekly on the Wabash Center’s website. Go check it out. And keep coming back as we continue to add fresh book reviews and other content tailored to the web environment in support of teachers of theology and religion in higher education.

In this first issue of Teaching Theology and Religion fully dedicated to articles and essays, an implicit theme becomes evident uniting nearly all of the manuscripts gathered here: teaching and learning outside of the formal classroom environment.

Molly Hadley Jensen’s article, “Cultivating a Sense of Place in Religious Studies,” describes an innovative course design that has students journaling about class time spent in the community garden and other natural spaces. Jennifer Reed-Bouley and Eric Kyle’s article, “Challenging Racism and White Privilege in Undergraduate Theology Contexts,” provides a superlative bibliographic review of both service learning and teaching about racism and white privilege. They name four risks that threaten these challenging pedagogies, and provide several pedagogical principles and specific teaching strategies that help avoid or alleviate these risks.

We have a special “(Not) In The Classroom” section in this issue, dedicated to exploring a host of challenges and opportunities that arise when an undergraduate college or university study abroad program includes significant content on the study of religion. Elijah Siegler first envisaged this topic as deserving of fuller treatment than a single essay could provide. He inspired colleagues to form a panel at the 2011 meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Then he organized them to send edited versions to our journal where they went through the normal blind peer-review process, were sent back to the authors for further revisions, and are now gathered here as a set.

Service learning, place-based pedagogies, and study abroad – each of these are important and emerging pedagogical movements across a wide range of academic disciplines and departments of undergraduate and theological education. These articles illustrate how the discipline(s) of religion and theology contribute an important element that heightens the educational value of these three innovative educational methods.
Editor's Note

For example, within religious studies academic discourse “place” has become a trope to locate and interpret people's experience of the sacred. Religious scholars have developed a rich vocabulary to analyze this form of religious experience for academic audiences. Readers will appreciate how Molly Hadley Jensen’s course leverages students' experience of place and their concerns about the environment to raise their interest in the analytical language she provides them to understand a variety of others’ religious experience and expressions.

Notably, the sacrality of place hardly figures in the seven study abroad articles featured in the “(Not) In the Classroom” section. Each of these essays analyzes what happens when students move to a new and foreign place to study religion. Instead of reveling in academic analysis of the sacrality of place, these essays turn a somewhat jaundiced and critical eye toward the production of the “authentic” and the “touristic” – especially as attributed to religious and cultural expressions. Each of these essays illustrates how the field of religious studies, when combined with a careful analysis of the learner’s experience in a distant and alien culture, provides students with a sophisticated understanding of the production of religious and cultural expressions and experiences.

And finally, the notion of service learning takes on interesting religious permutations when conducted in a Catholic university context. Catholic social justice theory provides a rich moral framework to analyze racial injustice – providing the possibility of a much more normatively inflected classroom than secular undergraduate religious studies curricula would normally admit to. Indeed, it is not difficult for theological approaches to construe “service” as a religious practice. So what is the significance of service in a religious studies service learning course? It is a provocative thought indeed to construe the undergraduate religious studies classroom as a site for religious practice – even for faculty who do not worry that academic credentials are threatened by religious thought in the liberal arts classroom.

These are surprising and provocative turns that the field of religion and theology provides for the pedagogies of place, study abroad, and service learning.

As always, there are several one-page “Teaching Tactics” in the Classroom section of the journal. And I hope we will see you at the Wabash Center’s website where you can download the book reviews for free.
Teaching Theology & Religion

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Overview

Good teaching and learning are essential for the vitality and effectiveness of departments and institutions of higher education engaged in the study of religion and theology. Teaching Theology & Religion sustains a new international discourse among faculty members about teaching and learning in the several sub-disciplines in the study of religion. The level of discourse and the quality of the journal are establishing teaching and learning as an equal partner in scholarly publication.

Aims and Scope

Teaching Theology & Religion is divided into two subsections:

1. Articles

Manuscripts range from 4,000 to 7,000 words, or longer (15 to 25 pages, double-spaced). These articles raise a specific pedagogical issue and demonstrate its relevance to higher education religion or theology classrooms or institutions. Articles may describe teaching practices that address a particular pedagogical challenge. It is often important to provide and analyze evidence of various forms gathered from the classroom. Strong submissions will place the issue within a wider field of scholarship on teaching, and will display a careful self-critical reflection on the various pedagogical choices a teacher has made as well as evidence of the results. Articles are subject to blind peer-review.
Hi Elijah,

I've got an outside blind peer review of your study abroad essays. I'm in the middle of 4 back-to-back summer workshops, so I'll be quick here but I wanted to get these reviews back to all of you while there was still time this summer to make final revisions. I'm going to send essentially this same email to each of the authors, asking them to please revise one more time in response to the review and give each some specific instructions to focus the comments in the peer review according to the concerns of the editors.

We're very pleased with how this project is shaping up and we want to move toward publication of the entire set in a special section of the In the Classroom section of the journal dedicated to this issue -- which will probably appear in the January, April or July issues of TTR in 2014. We have a bit of a backlog which makes it an awkward moment to have an entire section spoken for (with no space to slip in an additional manuscript that we've been holding too long). But this is a GOOD problem, right? -- too much content.

I've received the response essay from John Barbour which I think is good to go as is (see attached). It might have been awkward that he wrote in response to the penultimate version of these essays, but I don't see anything in what he's written that would need to be changed due to the final revisions I'm expecting from the authors.

I've pasted below the paragraph review of the entire set and the paragraph on your essay. Here are our instructions:
1. We're accepting this for publication.
2. We recommend you tighten and reorganize the 1st section ("literature review") as the reviewer suggests – pay attention to being consistent with terms and sorting the issues more clearly.
3. It's ok if you don't expand your review of each of the essays – you don't really have space.
4. The reviewer doesn't mention this, but we'd like to see you more explicitly state the transition from trends in RS to pedagogy (page 8). Something like: "trends in our scholarship are also trends in what and how we TEACH religious studies (or they should be), and study abroad offers help in doing this."
5. Add a brief conclusion.
6. Please resubmit with a brief statement about the changes you made, and didn't make, and why.

Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I'd be happy to discuss this further with you.

best regards,
Tom

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of teaching religious studies while abroad make it an appropriate topic for the journal. Previous collections of essays in AAR’s *Focus on Teaching* (October 2004 on Site Visits and October 2009 on Intercultural and Transnational Pedagogies) have touched on issues germane to this collection of essays, but to the extent that study abroad experiences can combine and intensify the embodied experiences of site visits and developing intercultural competencies, this set of essays continues and extends the conversation. It might strengthen the set of essays, however, if they can be placed even more self-consciously in the context of this larger conversation (the introductory essay already does this but these links could be highlighted even more).

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**Peer Review of Siegler**

The strength of this essay is found in the section where the author addresses four “new directions” in religious studies as they are applied to study abroad. These directions are succinctly summarized and their value in leveraging a study abroad experience for students is helpful. Prior to this section, the author attempts to situate teaching religious studies abroad within the wider context of study abroad in higher education. This section of the paper is less helpful as a number of different issues and problems about study abroad are conflated. For example, there is a wide variety of study abroad types of experiences ranging along a continuum from educational tours to cultural integration with their concomitant learning objectives (see the IHE article referenced in my comments). In listing prior critiques of poorly constructed study abroad experiences, however, the author makes no distinction between the different programs and the problems associated with each. Some of the critiques specifically target marketing and the business side of offering study abroad which raises questions about their relevance to a set of essays about teaching and learning (unless it is to offer a cautionary tale to faculty seeking out partners to help with study abroad). More focus could be brought to this section by carefully defining terms (a wide variety of terminology is used, often interchangeably, with global, international, and study abroad) and spelling out the types of experiences and articulating appropriate learning outcomes for each. More clarity here will also help in situating the essays that follow. As the introductory essay to the set, I would encourage the offer to comment more explicitly on each essay that ends up being included in the journal and how they fit together as a set (some passing comments are made in the second section about the four new dimensions about the essays which follow — I would make these more explicit and connect the essays not just to this discussion of religious studies but to the wider issues of study abroad since the collection addresses both). Finally, the essay needs a more developed conclusion. As it now stands, it simply ends with little attempt at wrapping up. That said, this is a helpful essay and can be strengthened to introduce the remaining set.