A STUDENT-FACULTY COLLABORATIVE JOURNEY TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR WORLDVIEW LITERACY

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Abstract

This article presents the process and results of an action research project conducted during collaboration between one professor and seven students as they worked on designing a course to help students at a religiously owned and sponsored university become "religiously literate" persons, as described by the American Academy of Religion. The new course has been designed to enhance students' public service, increase professional effectiveness, and enrich their private lives. Administrators, faculty, and students in similar contexts will hopefully see in this report how such efforts can create a transformative educational space that helps students become leaders in a world where religious diversity is understood, protected, and respected.

Keywords: religious education, religion studies, church related colleges, undergraduate student

Purposes in Context

A significant number of books and articles have been written at the outset of the 21st century on the need for all levels of education to include more courses and/or make significant revisions in the existing curriculum regarding religious and secular worldview literacy (also referred to as religious literacy, or worldview education), in order to better prepare students for citizenship in an ever-increasing religiously diverse global community (e.g. Kessler, 2000; McBain, 2003; Feinberg, 2006; Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2007; Valk, 2007; Nord, 2010; Lester, 2011; Alexander and Agbaria, 2012; Geiger and Gardner, 2012; Wertheimer, 2015; Gardner, Soules, and Valk, 2017; Wielzen and Ter Avest, 2017). Authors have articulated numerous reasons for this reformation and expressed various concerns about the negative social and civic results if we fail to make the recommended adjustments. Rowan Williams, former head of the Church of England, represented these concerns at the 2018 G20 Interfaith Forum in

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Argentina when he observed that world leaders appear to be getting worse, not better, at solving complex world problems: "What we see is not a movement toward greater justice…but greater fear, division, and inequality" (Dallas, 2018). An action research project conducted at a religiously-sponsored university in the United States during the Winter 2018 semester found that faculty and student collaboration in course design points to exciting possibilities for transformative learning in religious and secular worldview education that addresses these global challenges.

During the Winter 2018 term, the university where this research was conducted had a total campus enrollment (full-time and part-time) of 22,719 students. More than 99% of these students identify themselves as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. More than half (12,823) of these students reported being from Utah (a state where a majority of people are Latter-day Saints), Idaho, Washington, and California (states that have areas with significant Latter-day Saint populations). Another 1,262 students came from 103 countries around the world, primarily Canada (214), Mexico (149), and Brazil (72), countries which also have areas where there are thriving Latter-day Saint populations. While most students (except those from Utah) have come from states in the United States or other countries where Latter-day Saints are a minority, and where they might have at least had the opportunity to associate with those of other religions and worldviews, their four years on this religiously homogeneous campus do little to expose them to other religious or secular worldviews during this portion of their educational experience.

To receive a bachelor's degree from this university, all students are required to take 14 credits in religion (seven two-credit courses). These courses focus primarily on scripture, doctrine, and history of the Church of Jesus Christ, with the intent to fortify students within the faith tradition. The religious education department offers one course in World Religions, in which 242 students enrolled during the Winter 2018 term. Other departments on campus offer such courses as History of World Religions, Philosophy of Religion, Sociology and Religion, and Issues in Social Sciences: Religious Freedom. A review of the stated outcomes of these courses revealed that these courses were not focused on "religious literacy" *per se*, as described in the American Academy of Religion's "Guidelines for teaching about religion in K-12 public schools in the United States" (2010). According to the AAR guidelines, religious literacy includes three main premises about one's understanding of religion: 1) knowing that religions are internally diverse; 2) understanding that religions are dynamic and change over time; and 3) being able to see how religions are embedded in all aspects of culture rather than being isolated from them. For the purposes of this article, these criteria can, and should, be applied to understanding all worldviews, not just religious ones. While these guidelines purport to be for K-12 public schools, my involvement with Harvard Divinity School's research on religion courses offered in U.S. high schools through their Religious Literacy Project revealed how few public schools offer such courses. Thus, it seems appropriate to offer students in higher education what they likely missed in their previous educational experiences. Additionally, while the Sociology and Religion courses are designed, at least in part, to help students see how knowing about other people's religious or secular worldviews might affect their professional practice, none of the other courses seemed to have this specific focus.

Given the lack of religious diversity on campus and the absence of courses focused on religious and secular worldview literacy—including how that knowledge can help them in their careers and professions—it was deemed appropriate, with the full support of the department chair and college dean, to develop a course where students learn to:

- Integrate various definitions of and approaches to religious and secular worldviews that summarize major components of such worldviews.
- Describe and analyze examples of how religious and secular worldviews are internally diverse at both macro levels (sects and divisions within traditions) and micro levels (differences within specific communities).
- Describe and analyze examples of how religious and secular worldviews evolve and change over time as they interact with social, historical, political, and other religious influences.
- Describe and analyze examples of how religious and secular worldviews are embedded in all aspects of public and private human experience.
- Provide meaningful recommendations regarding the benefits of religious and secular worldview competency in their chosen fields/professions.

All administrators and faculty who have participated in discussions relative to the development of this course have unanimously and enthusiastically agreed that the implementation of this course would be a great benefit to students after they leave this campus and in complete harmony with one of the university's shared values: "real-world preparation."

Perspectives & Identifying Focus

Two distinct perspectives have guided this project. The first is rooted in the university's commitment to being "student-focused by design." Although I had completed my doctorate in curriculum and instruction and had been involved in several major curriculum writing and course design projects previous to this endeavor, a couple of experiences on this campus led me to reflect on the benefits of including students in designing this new religious literacy course. In 2013, Barbara Walvoord conducted training workshops for our faculty. In her book, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses* (2008), she analyzes extensive research to identify what she calls "the Great Divide" between student learning goals and faculty learning goals was intriguing. This "Great Divide" represents the disparity, or disconnect, between faculty learning goals—which tend to focus on knowledge and skills Walvoord associates with "critical thinking"—and student learning goals—which tend to focus on the development of their own beliefs and values. She does not propose that faculty should relinquish their influence in directing student learning toward outcomes that they may not know they need to achieve. Rather, Walvoord recommends that "faculty should be thoughtful about their goals, articulate them clearly for students, find out about student goals, and conduct a robust conversation in the classroom about goals" (p. 14). Sometime thereafter, a student shared with me his experience working with a professor and a team of students in designing a course on our campus on "social entrepreneurship." Involving students in course design sounded like one approach to bridge "the Great Divide" that Walvoord identified as a barrier to student learning. Thus, the first line of inquiry for this project is: *How might including students in the designing of a course on religious literacy help bridge "the Great Divide" between student learning goals and faculty learning goals and create a course that is engaging and relevant for students?*

The second perspective guiding this project comes from ongoing participation with the Religious Education Association, but it may be conveyed by an experience at the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) in Salt Lake City in 2015. One of the panel discussions was with a group of students from a mid-sized private liberal arts and sciences university in North Carolina. Another panel discussion was with students from a smaller, Christian university in Texas. Neither panel seemed to be aware of the other—the number of

sessions and presentations at the parliament was staggering! Most students on both panels self-identified as coming from evangelical, or even "fundamentalist," Christian backgrounds. One theme that emerged toward the end of both panels was how the experience of meeting people of other faiths face-to-face, had caused them to question various aspects of their Christian faith—such as, 'Is Jesus really the only way to salvation?' and 'Will everyone who doesn't accept Jesus as their Savior really burn in hell for all eternity?' In many instances, this questioning led students away from their Christian faith as they struggled to reconcile their Manichean worldview of heaven and hell with their new lived experience. This outcome appeared incongruent with the hope of Steven Vryhof, founder and director of Chicago's Daystar Center, that those who engaged in learning about other religious and secular worldviews could become "rooted cosmopolitans[who are] rooted in our families, our communities, our values, our faith, our worldview; but [who] also need to be cosmopolitan, able to understand, relate to, and respect, if not appreciate, any person from any place at any time." Rather than striving for an unsustainable straddling position between commitment to one's own worldview and openness to understanding (not necessarily accepting) the worldviews of others, Vryhof proposes that education supports students in being both "fiercely rooted *and* fiercely cosmopolitan" by "focus[ing] on both preserving and enhancing the values, faith, and worldview of the community of meaning as well as providing frequent and respectful exchanges and dialogues with people from other traditions. Such educational opportunities would be the true mark of a tolerant society" (2012, pp. 57-58). This didn't seem to be happening with these students at the PWR. Their reactions compelled me to contemplate more deeply how we might approach religious literacy, or worldview education, at a university where part of our mission is "to develop disciples of Jesus Christ."

Thus, part of the impetus for this course has involved significant reflection regarding the impact of core Latter-day Saint perspectives on how we approach religious and secular worldview literacy in our unique context. While a lengthy discussion of theological and soteriological beliefs of the Church is not feasible here, three examples of these premises will illustrate the point and may encourage others to consider foundational assumptions within their specific context. In 1978, the First Presidency of the Church (its highest governing body) issued a statement that included the following:

> Based upon ancient and modern revelation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gladly teaches and declares the Christian doctrine that all men and women are brothers and sisters, not only by blood relationship from mortal progenitors, but also as literal spirit children of an Eternal Father.
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> The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals. (Britsch, 1988, p. 48)

This articulates at least two theological assumptions that impact the way Latter-day Saints may approach worldview literacy: 1) the belief that all people are literal spirit children of God and descend from common progenitors (Adam and Eve) tends toward a greater sense of familial bonding with all people that enhances respect, love, kindness, etc.; 2) the belief that God is the author of all truth and communicates aspects of that truth to all people tends toward a willingness to see the good and the right in other religious or even non-religious

worldviews. Another core perspective for Latter-day Saints is found in one of the Church's Articles of Faith written by Joseph Smith in 1840: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may" (Pearl of Great Price, 2013, p. 61). A year later, the Nauvoo City Charter included this provision: "Be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Nauvoo, that the Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Latter-day Saints, Quakers, Episcopals, Universalists, Unitarians, Mohammedans [Muslims], and all other religious sects and denominations whatever, shall have free toleration, and equal privileges in this city" (Roberts, 1976, p. 306). This commitment to freedom of conscience encourages Latter-day Saints to approach other faiths with tolerance and respect. As a final example, Joseph Smith claimed to have a vision in 1832 revealing that nearly all people (with very few exceptions) will ultimately be saved in one of three heavenly kingdoms of glory, the least of which "surpasses all understanding". This profound soteriological assumption regarding the immense inclusiveness of salvation makes it possible for Latter-day Saints to respect the goodness of other worldviews, with which they may certainly disagree, without consigning their adherents to eternal punishment for their differing beliefs here in this life. These core values (along with others not mentioned here) led to the second line of inquiry for this project: *How does the unique perspective of Latter-day Saints allow, or encourage, students at this institution to learn about religious and secular worldviews other than their own with openness, respect, and tolerance—hopefully even appreciation and admiration—in a way that prepares them to become "rooted cosmopolitans" who can turn back the tide of divisiveness, incivility, persecution, oppression, and violence wherever they go in the world.*

Methods & Processes

Despite previous experience in qualitative research and efforts to be a reflective practitioner, this was my first attempt at a formally organized action research project. My first memorable exposure to action research specifically was only a brief mention of the method in Glesne's *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* (2006). The purposes and processes of action research seem closely aligned with notions of professional reflection expounded by the likes of Argyris and Schön (1974). Although some other educational researchers only occasionally, if ever, use the term "action research," similar principles are found in the writings of Marzano (2003), Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2004), Blase and Blase (2004), and others. More detailed discussions of principles and models for action research in education have been produced by Sagor (2000), McNiff and Whitehead (2005), Koshy (2010), and Efron and Ravid (2013). The journal, *Educational Action Research*, provides ongoing discussions relative to this research method in the educational context. This approach seemed most appropriate given the direct focus on resolving a problem, or improving practice, directly relevant to me as an educational practitioner.[2]

For the purpose of this project, I have relied on a widely accepted model of action research developed by Kemmis and McTaggart in 1979 for their students at Deakin University in Australia (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, 2014). Having identified an area of focus for change or improvement (as outlined above), I was ready to implement the four steps

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[2] One legitimate criticism of action research, as identified by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), is "the prominence it gives to teachers' knowledge in comparison with other views of what is happening in schools," particularly that it neglects, or is disconnected from, other theoretical frameworks that should inform how problems and questions of practice are framed and researched. It is hoped that the review of relevant literature in this article is sufficient to mitigate somewhat this potential criticism of the action research method used in this article.

of their spiral model of action research: plan, act, observe, reflect. The planning phase emerged slowly over time and then gelled suddenly at the end of the Fall 2017 semester. Having talked with supportive and encouraging colleagues (at this institution and others) for a couple of years about my desire to create a religious literacy course for students on our campus, my regular teaching load and involvement with other campus and research projects prevented the project from coming to fruition—until I mentioned it one day to a couple of students.

They were immediately, and passionately, interested. Thus began the somewhat spontaneous effort to recruit a team of students who would enroll in a two-credit seminar in the Winter 2018 term for the purpose of designing this course to be taught on campus in the Fall 2018 semester. After meeting with more than a dozen interested students, seven students enrolled in the seminar. The team consisted of four female and three male students, mostly junior and seniors, with one sophomore. Each had a different major: history, history education, public policy, nursing, business, psychology, and dance. All students in the seminar were Latter-day Saints. By having students on the team from a variety of disciplines, we hoped to make the course appealing to a broader population of students.

Once these seven students were enrolled in the seminar, I had to consider what would be most useful to accomplish with these students and what we could reasonably accomplish in the semester-long seminar. In preliminary discussions with these students, we decided on two main areas of focus: 1) *curriculum*, including course learning outcomes, course materials and resources, learning activities, and assessments; and 2) *marketing*, meaning how to best package, or advertise, the course so that other students would know what it was about and be encouraged to enroll. Although we divided the team into two sub-groups to oversee the work in each of these areas, all students collaborated on projects in both areas. We wanted to produce three main deliverables by the end of the semester: 1) a course proposal for the committee in our department who approves courses on special topics; 2) a course syllabus— or at least a good draft of one; and 3) the beginnings of an outline for the course in our campus learning management system. Thanks to the valiant efforts of the students, we were able to satisfactorily produce all three documents.

With this basic plan in place, we began to act in the Winter 2018 term. The collaborative process throughout the seminar is illustrated by the process we followed in developing the course learning outcomes. Knowing the importance of beginning with the end in mind (Ford, 2002), we first needed to determine the course learning outcomes. Given that one major emphasis of this project was to find ways to bridge "the Great Divide" between faculty learning goals and student learning goals, this was an especially important aspect of the course design in which to have unfiltered student input. Although I had looked at course learning outcomes for other worldview education and religious literacy courses, the best course of action seemed to get the students to express what they would be most interested in learning without being initially influenced by what adult practitioners or professors thought. Two weeks before our first seminar meeting, I extended our first assignment.

We were each assigned to come to class with 4-6 course learning outcomes. They were instructed to write each outcome on two different notecards. They could use any resources they could find to create their outcomes. On the first night of class, we took the stacks of notecards, divided the team into their sub-groups (curriculum and marketing), and told them to sort the cards into outcomes that seemed similar and then select their top 4-6 outcomes by the end of the session. The ensuing dialogue in the two groups was energetic and exciting. The students shared ideas, challenged each other, and built consensus. Over the next week, I evaluated their top outcomes and presented the ones that would best achieve the

overall objective of the course—to increase students' religious literacy, as previously defined by the AAR Guidelines. Perhaps surprisingly—but perhaps not—all our preferred outcomes were quite similar, and it was relatively easy to agree on them. Although we continued to refine the wording in the course learning outcomes throughout the semester (especially after a serendipitous campus visit from Dr. Jill Kern, of Eastern Washington University, to conduct faculty workshops on writing effective student learning outcomes at the end of February 2018), eventually the aforementioned course learning outcomes were set.

The great work done by these students throughout the rest of the semester followed this same basic pattern. Members of the curriculum group reviewed several different possible textbooks, presented their reviews to the rest of the team for discussion, and then I selected a textbook for the course. They followed this same pattern in the creation of various learning activities and assessments, including group presentations on worldviews to be studied in the course, discussion boards, reading quizzes, case studies, and poster presentations.

To get some ideas for how best to market the course to other students, the marketing group conducted a campus-wide survey of over 300 students.[3] Two of them, who already had experience doing on-campus surveys, helped write the proposal for the university IRB, constructed survey questions (which were discussed and approved by the entire group), designed the survey in Qualtrics, and helped analyze the data from the survey. While we were not particularly surprised by the level of student interest (approximately 2/3 of students said they would be interested in taking the course), several eye-opening bits of information came from this survey that had an impact on our thinking as we designed the course. For example, it became quickly apparent that students on campus generally have little understanding of terms like "religious literacy" or "worldview." Knowing this had a significant impact on the name of the course. While professors in the field might simply call the course "religious literacy" or "worldview education," these terms are unfamiliar to students and do not inherently convey to them what the class is about. Thus, the students decided that the course title, "Navigating religious and secular beliefs in the 21st century," would be more likely to draw students into the course as they browsed the course catalogue during registration. Asking students in the survey about which of the course outcomes they would be most interested in was also helpful. Students showed more immediate interest in seeing the connections between religion, culture, and politics than knowing how an understanding of others' worldviews could enhance their professional effectiveness. Because this team of student designers had some more knowledge and experience with the importance of religious literacy in their chosen fields, this motivated them to consider innovative ideas that would help students taking the course explore meaningful ways that "rooted cosmopolitans" could make more positive contributions in their careers and communities.

Working with these bright, passionate, engaged students was a joy and incredibly insightful. It was not just that having more eyes on the design of this course was helpful for considering the course from multiple perspectives, but it was having *their* eyes on the project that will undoubtedly make it more engaging and relevant for students who will take this course in the future and help me to remember what religious literacy means to 21st century young adults and why it matters to them.

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[3] Administrators in the university's research office showed significant interest in this survey and granted permission to survey 1,200 students—four times the usual number allowed. The survey was very brief and focused solely on collecting data for how to best market the course. No questions on the survey aimed at measuring the religious literacy of students, only their familiarity with related terms and interest in proposed outcomes.

Data Sources/Evidence

      Having acted on our plan, it was now time for the formal observing phase of this action research project. Although many informal conversations throughout the semester gave me some idea of the impact of this faculty-student collaboration, more formal evidence was needed. About three weeks before our last class meeting, I sent a questionnaire to the six members of our student design team (unfortunately, one member of the team had to leave the seminar halfway through the term for personal reasons) and invited them to write as much as they wanted in response to the questions and prompts listed below. Questions marked with an * were derived from specific areas of Walvoord's research that she identified as representing the largest gaps between faculty learning goals and student learning goals (2008, pp. 15-18). I have rearranged the questions and prompts below to correspond to the two primary lines of inquiry mentioned in the "Perspectives" section above. However, it should be noted that questions 4-7 in "the Great Divide" section also have connection to and implications for the "rooted cosmopolitan" section.

Bridging "the Great Divide" through student-faculty collaboration
1. Overall, describe your experience working with the faculty member on developing this course.
2. Overall, describe your experience working with other students on developing this course.
3. How important do you think it is that students in this course learn to develop general intellectual skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing? How do you think this course will help students develop these skills?*
4. How important do you think it is that this course will help students take action for a better world? How do you think this course will help students achieve this outcome?*
5. How important do you think it is that this course will help students develop moral and ethical values? How do you think this course will help students achieve this outcome?*
6. How important do you think it is that this course helps students develop their own religious beliefs and/or spiritual practices? How might this course help students achieve this outcome?*
7. How important do you think it is that this course helps students consider or strengthen their commitment to Latter-day Saint beliefs? How might this course help students achieve this outcome?*

Helping students become "rooted cosmopolitans" who make a positive impact in the world
8. Why were you interested in becoming involved in this project? Why were you drawn to it?
9. What vital need do you think the course fills? Why do you feel strongly about helping others become more religiously literate? What advantage do you think religious and secular worldview literacy (RSWL) gives to this university's students?
10. Why is it so important that college students at this institution become global citizens? And what does a course on RSWL have to do with that?
11. Why do you think RSWL is so important in your particular field/profession?
12. How has your experience developing this course changed your view of the need for more RSWL training? Or how has developing this course been transformative for you in any other way?

All six remaining members of the student design team submitted responses to this questionnaire. Their responses were then collated by question and analyzed. The recentness and ongoing nature of this action research project has limited the coding of this data to some extent, but some important themes and patterns have emerged.

Results & Discussion

This section will reflect on themes and patterns from the student responses to the questions on the questionnaire, using the exact words of students as much as possible. Overall, students reported that their experience working with the faculty was "great" and "interesting." One student reported that it was both "unique" and "rocky." This was because he was surprised, as were most students, to find out that "our instructor was not there to give us assignments and instruction, but rather to facilitate our own work on the project." Once he figured this out, his participation on the team went "much smoother." One of unintended positive outcomes of the project was the autonomy that students developed during the seminar. In response to the first question on the questionnaire, the students described the role of the professor in several interesting ways that seemed to contribute to the development of this autonomy:

> While he helped to point us in the right direction, offering suggestions and guidance, as well as being the deciding figure, he allowed us students to pursue all angles and opportunities. We were essentially on equal footing with him… It's a hard effort to coordinate many students with different backgrounds and different values…[but the professor] was able to steer conversation and give out specific assignments so that everything came together.

> …he really has had to trust us as students who in all reality are inexperienced and have no idea how to write course outcomes. Our professor became more of a guide which was important to allowing us to really close that gap between what [teachers] expect and what students expect from course outcomes.

This has caused me to reflect on how I can implement these same principles of equality, steering/guiding, and trusting in all my courses to facilitate students taking greater responsibility for their own learning.

Responses to Question #2 show that although students sometimes found it difficult to work with other students with different majors, backgrounds, personalities, and perspectives, throughout the seminar they came to appreciate each other's hard work, passion, intelligence, and insights, and had a "positive experience" overall. One student described it as "a microcosm of literacy for myself… Rather than instantly trying to prove [other students] wrong and somehow install my opinion as, 'correct,' I learned to understand and accept." They especially came to see "how all of our personalities were able to come together and create this course," even "a much more well-rounded course," because of their diverse ideas and attitudes. Again, while this was certainly not one of the overt purposes of this seminar, it reinforced how important it is to facilitate these kinds of interactions in all courses to help students develop the "soft skills" that more college graduates need to make them better collaborators in their families, congregations, workplaces, and communities.

The next several questions (#3-#5) deal with specific aspects of Walvoord's "Great Divide." Not surprisingly, faculty seem more interested in helping students develop general intellectual skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing, as indicated in Question

#3. However, student responses in this study show that, far from not being interested in these skills, students think these skills are "essential" and "lead to real improvement." Students offered several interesting insights on the importance of developing these skills in relation to religious and secular worldview literacy, in general:

> Learning religious literacy and learning those general intellectual skills are inseparable. As you learn about religious literacy it gives you the ability…to look outside of yourself and put your mind in different contextual lenses.
> Without being able to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize, a student cannot truly understand another worldview. This course will help students to not only learn the surface level facts of different worldviews, but truly think about and begin to understand them.

They also felt that this particular course would develop these skills and be a great benefit to students beyond just acquiring information about other worldviews:

> Hard work is the engine in success, but intellectual skills are the gears. People work so hard in life but go nowhere because the hard work isn't well placed. When students learn to properly analyze situations, they can do so much more. These skills help students be able to take the principles they learn in class and be able to apply them to all the other situations they may encounter.
> …if students do not develop these skills they will not be able to fully appreciate and learn what this course is offering. This course is meant to stretch the students and to broaden their perspective of the world. We have developed several assignments that will help students develop these skills, including presentations on the religions covered, case studies, etc.

While it may be true that faculty are more interested in these intellectual goals during the study of religions and worldviews, I would quickly add that students also see the need and value of developing these skills—but it isn't all they are interested in. Faculty need not give up their emphasis on these kinds of learning goals; indeed, students would be disappointed if they did. However, faculty and students will benefit from transparent conversations about these goals, as Walvoord recommends and John Hattie (2012) confirms. Faculty may also decide to broaden their focus to include other learning goals, about which students feel equally passionate.

Students on the design team for this course conveyed a real desire for their education to empower them to make a positive impact in the world. They seemed to know *a priori* that a significant contributing factor to the incivility, discord, and disharmony in the world is founded in ignorance, intolerance, and disrespect for others' worldviews. They collectively felt, as one student explained in response to Question #4, "A class that doesn't translate into some sort of action is a waste." Another student related his disappointment in the attitudes and behaviors of some of his peers:

I have been a personal witness to returned LDS missionaries[4] who are still ignorant to the beliefs of those whom they taught on their missions. I have heard derogatory comments made of those of other faiths, both in a comical sentiment as well as cutting, cruel and insensitive rhetoric. If we are truly trying to be like Jesus, would we mock the faith of others? A brief look into the roots of our history shows that we were once and still are victims of religious prejudice. We can all strive to be like the man we profess to follow [Jesus Christ] and be a little more kind, a little more tolerant… I hope that we would never hate or be cruel towards someone else because of what they believe.

Other responses to Question #4 expressed hope that this new course would correct some of these problems and help members of the Church to which they belonged be more tolerant, respectful, and collaborative with those of other faiths:

This [course] can help [students] as they work with others in their professional or private lives, as well as to have a better knowledge of how events around the world effect themselves and those around them. Taking this course is one of the first steps in helping ourselves to be better global citizens in our futures.

This class will help students feel greater empathy for others and help them be able to have more effective conversations. By learning that differences may not just lie in belief but in core values you can put yourself in their frame of mind and can then better explain your point of view or be able to see the flaws in it. I feel that it will allow them to be more loving and accepting toward others outside their religion. It will also allow them to be more understanding. Love, acceptance, and understanding help [there] to be less conflict and people are willing to listen to each other more.

… as students…learn about the diversity of religions and [about] diversity within religions and secular views they will be able to facilitate and participate in discussion that will be influential and allow others to work together despite their differences…by using different methods of studying religion, functional case studies and discussion, as well as class discussion that include the different facets of life.

While students showed more of an interest in this goal in Walvoord's study than faculty did, surely this is a learning goal that faculty (and administrators) and students can come together on in the realm of higher education. This begins with deliberately and thoughtfully designed institutional learning outcomes, which then must be deliberately filtered down to college-level outcomes, program-level outcomes, department-level

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[4] As a world-renowned proselyting Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had approximately 67,000 full-time missionaries serving around the world when this article was written. Over one million men and women have served in this capacity since the founding of the Church in 1830. When the eligible age for missionary service was lowered from 21 to 19 for young adult women, and from 19 to 18 for young adult men, one result was that many more students at BYU-Idaho have served 18-month (for women) or 24-month (for men) missions. They are often referred to as "returned missionaries."

outcomes, course-level outcomes, and lesson-level outcomes. Facilitating necessary changes would hopefully involve students' voices at each of these levels.

As articulated by one team member in response to Question #5, "A big part of being able to work well with others is having a solid foundation of morals and ethics." The consensus view of the students was that this course would indeed strengthen the moral and ethical foundation of students. Specifically, a couple of them noted that seeing the "good" in other worldviews would contribute to this moral and ethical development:

> …students will find good principles in the religions they study that will help them want to become better people. When I took my cultural psychology class, we learned about different cultures and religions, and I wanted to adopt some of their beliefs into my life because they made someone a better person. By learning about different beliefs and practices, students can also be influenced by the other religions' good beliefs. I think it will help them realize that those good things are closely related to their beliefs.

> …this course will help students further develop moral and ethical values as they see other religions and secular views…as their view of different religions broadens, their morals and ethics will grow and deepen as they learn about the world around them. This course gives students the opportunity to gain diverse knowledge about religious and secular views as well as the opportunity for them to see and understand their morals and ethics (many of which will differ from their own), allowing them to truly understand on a deeper level…

Students seem to believe that seeing the positive moral and ethical values in other religions or worldviews would strengthen students' commitment to what they then perceive as a more worldwide code of human ethics and moral behavior. As mentioned earlier in this paper, this perspective may be rooted in the LDS belief that all people are part of a great global family and that God can, and does, reveal "moral truths" to people of various backgrounds and worldviews. This course on religious and secular worldview literacy is not designed to boil all religions down to an ecumenical code of ethics; rather it takes seriously religious differences (Prothero, 2010). However, developing moral courage and strengthened commitment to ethical behavior may occur as students learn about some similarities between various religious and secular worldviews.

Questions #6 & #7 address a gap between faculty learning goals and student learning goals that will have to be handled appropriately based on the specific context in which any course dealing with religion is taught. Public institutions of higher education will need to evaluate whether, or if, such considerations have a place in their curriculum. In context of the religiously-sponsored institution where this research was conducted, faculty and students are not only allowed but directly encouraged to pursue such learning goals. The questions themselves may seem to be redundant. However, in the context of Walvoord's study, they were designed to probe the attitudes and learning goals of the growing number of religiously unaffiliated students who view personal religious/spiritual beliefs and practices as separate from, or even independent of, beliefs and practices as defined by a particular religion or tradition. It might not have made sense to ask them of students who were designing this course on such a religiously-oriented campus. However, throughout our experience, we frequently discussed the fact that although most students taking the course would be Latter-day Saints, and we cannot neglect or ignore the Church-sponsored context of the university,

there might be some students from other faiths or worldviews who would enroll as well. We wanted to design the course so that students from diverse backgrounds would be comfortable taking the course without it infringing on their personal worldview and associated beliefs and practices. This will undoubtedly be a challenge that will need to be addressed and navigated as the course moves forward, but it was a consideration during the inception of the course. However, this was not something that students noted explicitly in their responses on this questionnaire at the end of the seminar.

The main themes and patterns emerging from student responses to these particular questions form somewhat of a segue between the line of inquiry regarding "the Great Divide" and the line of inquiry about the course's objective to help students become "rooted cosmopolitans." For example, one student's response to Question #6 typifies the consensus on how this course would help students develop their own personal beliefs and practices in a general sense:

> This course will allow students to evaluate their own religion in a way that they might not have previously. It is always good to try and work on developing your own religious beliefs and this class is another possible avenue to do so. By looking at how others view their religions and live their beliefs, you evaluate your own life, beliefs, and grow in understanding.

Several students seemed to indicate that the mere study of other religions would stimulate self-reflection that would cultivate religious and/or spiritual development. Whether this actually takes place would require further study. If it does take place, then faculty and students might discuss whether it is necessary to make this an explicit outcome of the course. For example, faculty at public higher education institutions where such an explicitly stated outcome may not be appropriate might encourage students to journal on their own about how their learning experiences in the course are impacting their personal religious/spiritual beliefs and practices, but this would not be part of their academic progress in the course. Students who want to explore this on their own would be free, even encouraged, to do so; while other students would experience no compunction if they chose not to do so. This would be one possible way to navigate this gap in "the Great Divide" for students who wanted their experience to be personally meaningful in this sense.

Responses to Questions #6 & #7 also demonstrated that students involved in designing this course felt that learning about other religious and secular worldviews indeed contributed to the "rooted" side of becoming "rooted cosmopolitans":

> The most essential unofficial outcome of this course is helping students develop their own testimonies of Jesus Christ, I would argue. The course is designed to show that inspiration behind each religion and to assist in understanding that the Savior has inspired people of all backgrounds from all periods of time.

> I think that if done right students will see growth in their personal testimonies of their beliefs, faiths, and spiritual practices. I think as they see the beauty in other religions and their practices they will be able to see the beauty and significance of their own practices and what they mean to them personally.

> I think it will testify [of] the love of Heavenly Father. When I read the Gita I felt like I was reading the Hindu version of the Bible and realized that Heavenly Father taught all of His children His gospel, but that it just was mixed with different cultures and religions over the time. It will show the love that God has for all of his children…

One student acknowledged, however, that this could be potentially problematic for some students, but also expressing his hope for a positive outcome in the end:

> I think this class may be a bit of a double-edged sword. I think for most it will be a great learning experience that will surely strengthen their belief…I imagine there are a few, however, who have grown up their whole life being told other religions have it completely wrong and that they are essentially stupid for thinking what they do. When you learn about other religions it makes you realize that many of them aren't all that different and on the other hand there are some things about other religions that may arouse questions about the LDS Church in juxtaposition. I do think that the positive influence would certainly [be] dominant though, and this negative reaction would be a very small group of students.

Overall, students felt confident that they were designing a course with the potential to help students experience meaningful personal growth that would lead them to broaden their academic, intellectual, moral, and/or spiritual horizons while simultaneously becoming more deeply anchored in their own faith. Whether this ambition is realized remains to be seen.

Responses to Questions #8-10 and Question #12 generally touched on or revisited themes found in their responses to questions #3-7. Although none of these six students had any particular training or experience in religious literacy education, one particularly noteworthy response captured the overall reason that most students were drawn to the course, the vital need they imagined it would fill, and the advantages that would accrue for students who take it:

> While it is a massive blessing for students to be able to come to [this university] and participate in an affordable, Gospel-centered education, it is not without flaws. A downside to being a student [on this campus] is the insular nature of the school. While not a purposeful result of the environment, [the town in which the university is located] has become rather like an echo chamber. Students who attend the school are surrounded by a majority of students who are from similar places and similar backgrounds. Attempts to diversify and add other cultures to the student population have been admirable, but largely have not had an effect on the overall culture of the school. A course that makes an effort to teach students that worldviews and perspectives beyond their own not only exist, but have merit themselves is something that [this university], and I would venture to say almost every university in the nation, is sorely in need of.

Another student reiterated the need for courses such as this, especially on religiously homogeneous campuses, to help students become "rooted cosmopolitans":

This is especially important for [our] students who are surrounded by their religion every day. It is easy to forget that there are other religions in the world, and easy to believe that there is no need to understand them. However, if there is no understanding between religions then there is a greater chance at offense. Having an understanding and appreciation for other religions and their beliefs allows a person to develop a broader perspective of the world without weakening or threatening their own beliefs.

The student views expressed here reveal a conscious recognition of the need for direct instruction in secular and worldview literacy, not just for the sake of taking an interesting elective course, but for the sake of their own well-being and for the well-being of society. They also seem to echo Vryhof's hope that people who engage in religious and secular worldview education can become "fiercely rooted *and* fiercely cosmopolitan."

Question #11 invited students to share how they thought religious and secular worldview literacy would enhance their effectiveness in their specific field or profession. While most students on campus who took the aforementioned survey did not see this as a compelling reason for taking the course, this was one of the most innovate aspects of the course that students on the design team were excited about and felt would be one of the most practically relevant aspects of the course. They designed a capstone project that requires students to present posters at the school's Research & Creative Works Conference (held every semester) that would convey well-researched meaningful suggestions for ways that religious and secular worldview literacy could enhance a student's professional effectiveness in his or her chosen field. Some of their responses convey their own ideas about what they learned as they investigated and designed this aspect of the course:

I am debating between going into museums and archives or a historian…Working in museums requires that I understand the exhibits that are being mounted and how they affect the public. If the exhibit is religious in nature, you want to make sure that you do the religion and its community justice – this requires that I have an understanding and foundational knowledge of the subject. This is just a small example of the different ways that it can impact this profession. Being a religious historian requires even more in-depth understanding of a religion, as well as being able to interact with members of different faiths.

I had the opportunity to speak with several professionals on how religious literacy could be advantageous for them and their colleagues. One…a general surgeon wished that he, and his immediate staff, were more well versed in the beliefs of Muslim, Roman Catholic, and even Native Alaskans so that they could provide more wholesome and comforting treatment and care. Another…a history teacher and cross-country coach, simply wished that he did not have to correct so many misinformed notions of his students concerning virtually every major world religion.

Planning to go into Public Policy and Administration and having already had experiences in that field has shown me already the importance of literacy in the workplace. I currently work in an office where even though the majority of employees come from the same background and worldview, there are slight

differences between every employee in the way that they interpret their own worldviews. Additionally, the majority of customers that come in to the office are from different worldviews than the employees. Frequently I see arguments and disagreements arise because of a lack of understanding between the two people…It's shown me just how important it is for worldview literacy to be implemented.

Psychology is all about understanding what drives a person, and religion is one of those things. Having even a basic understanding about someone's religion can help the psychologist understand why that person is the way they are and allow them to create a therapy that would help them.

…the basis for the nursing practice is holistic care…In giving actual care the knowledge of religion and beliefs is essential and taught over and over again in my current nursing program. There are many situations where care is different based on religious belief. Taking a class like this increases this knowledge of the many different things that can be implemented in the nursing practice just by understanding where their traditions come from.

This aspect of the course will provide students with a way to explore immediately practical ways that religious and secular worldview literacy can help them become "rooted cosmopolitans" who can benefit society through informed, sensitive, respectful, and caring service.

While each student emerged from this student-faculty collaborative course design experience with unique, personally transformative, insights and lessons learned, two responses capture what is really at the heart of what this experience did for all of us:

This course has shown me how important it is to listen to understand, not to listen to speak. When we listen to opposing worldviews with the intent to quickly [form a] rebuttal and speak our own opinions, we inevitably collapse into chaotic arguments. When we listen to understand each other, and seek the good and inspiration in those we disagree with, we begin to see them as God sees them.

…disagreement doesn't need to [be] forceful or mean, but it can be done in a way that shows understanding that other people have other ideas. This class has transformed…my own religious practice in the sense of loving everyone. Although I know I could love everyone before this class, this class showed me another way to do it, and that is to be curious and truly learn about others' backgrounds and where they come from—this leads to a greater respect for their differences.

Whether students who enroll in this course in the future achieve the outcomes for which it has been designed cannot be predicted with certainty. And while this data comes from only six students in a religiously and geographically nuanced setting, these students' voices constitute strong evidence that our seminar, at least, became the kind of space described by Reverend Victor H. Kazanjian's, a space that "transforms students into global citizens…where diverse identities and points of view are brought together in a common task

of deepening understanding of self, other, and the World that leads to positive social relations" (Wielzen & Ter Avest, 2017, p. vii).

Significance & Conclusion

This action research project documents whether a student-faculty collaborative project to design a course in religious and secular worldview literacy could make verifiable progress toward achieving two main objectives: 1) bridge "the Great Divide" between faculty learning goals and student learning goals in religiously oriented courses; and 2) help students become "rooted cosmopolitans" who can turn back the tide of divisiveness, incivility, persecution, oppression, and violence wherever they go in the world. The analysis of the student responses collected during this phase of the project indicate that involving students in a robust conversation regarding course outcomes, learning activities, etc. helped students see the value of those goals deemed most valuable by faculty. It is also hoped that the student voices presented herein might convince faculty of the value of student learning goals, so they can explore ways to incorporate these goals in their courses, as appropriate in their contexts. Whether or not the course itself will help future students become "rooted cosmopolitans" will require future research. But for the six students who participated in designing this course, their own words suggest that they exemplify central aspects of this university's mission and shared values by becoming "disciples of Jesus Christ" who are receiving "real-world preparation." The nuanced situatedness of this research project may make some aspects of the results more relevant and applicable in other religiously affiliated and/or sponsored institutions than in public or secularly oriented private institutions. However, it is hoped that many of the principles demonstrated here may be useful for bridging "the Great Divide" in other contexts so that faculty and students can work more collaboratively toward truly meaningful and transformative learning.

In addition to the progress made toward achieving the two main goals of the project, it is hoped that an inadvertent, but welcome, possible outcome of this report may be the validation of the action research method as an important research model for connecting the academic and research realm of education with practitioners. This is one of the major aims of action research. Without a meaningful connection to practitioners, academic research and writing remains a phantasmal "ivory tower" that will continue to have little real impact on improving education for students in actual classrooms. Without a meaningful connection to academic research and writing, practitioners sometimes remain buried "in the trenches" where they lack a workable knowledge of the surrounding landscape and a vision of the grand objectives for which they toil every day. Collaborative action research projects that involve active participation of both academics and practitioners have the potential to bridge an even "Greater Divide" that could unlock the potential for many more students at all levels of education to experience transformative learning.

Since all true action research is cyclical by nature, I conclude with two questions to ponder as I consider plans for moving forward with the religious and secular worldview literacy course that I had the great privilege of working with six bright, passionate, energetic students to develop: (1) How can we replicate (or communicate), in some meaningful way, the robust conversations about learning goals with future students in this course to promote a more collaborative learning experience where students feel a greater sense of ownership for their learning?, and (2) How can we assess whether students who take this course are becoming "rooted cosmopolitans" who feel empowered and motivated to make a positive difference in the world?

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