Living Religions of the World
2016-2017 Fieldwork Project Overview

The Living Religions Fieldwork Project (or "Sacred Beltway" project) is a multi-year study of religious diversity in the greater Washington metropolitan area. Each student will be part of a team of two people that will learn about a single religious organization or community in depth and publish its research on the web. This project offers students the opportunity to explore religions that interest them in a way that enables them to show innovative and independent understanding while making a valuable contribution to knowledge in the field.

We are creating a resource for religious studies scholars and other people who may not have firsthand access to the types of religions found in the Metro-DC area. We want them to be able to experience and to learn about these religions through our interactions with them. To that end, we need to write site visit reports, create photo galleries, and conduct interviews that are informative. We want to show what each community has in common with other communities within that religion, and we also want to show how that community is unique. We also need lists of bibliographic sources from both inside and outside each community. Here are the steps of the project:

1. **Reading some Fieldwork** *(to be completed as a class.)* COMPLETED IN CLASS
   After reading excerpts of some of the classic texts in religious studies, we will read an example of some more recent scholarship based on fieldwork research. This excerpt comes from Christian Smith's <u>Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of America's Teenagers,</u> in which he theorizes based on hundreds of interviews.

2. **Team Formation** *(to be completed as a class.)* COMPLETED IN CLASS
   We will survey the class to find out what kinds of religious communities each person might be interested in studying. This will help students to find partners for the project. Students should take into account logistical concerns (e.g., geographical proximity and schedule complementarity) as well as research interests when choosing a partner.

3. **Site Selection** *(To be completed as a team.)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   Each team will identify a religious community that has not been visited in the last year. Teachers will provide students with a list of sites that have been visited, and a list of sites that have yet to be visited. Students are also welcome to add to this list with the permission of the Religious Studies Department. There will be a sign up period, during which one person from each team will send an email to jmaaia@cathedral.org with the full names of both team members as well as the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and websites of their first and second choices of communities. Sites will be assigned according to the order in which they were received to this email box.

4. **Wise-Person Interview Report** *(To be completed by each student.)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   Ask an older "wise person" you know if you can interview them about their views on religion. This is a way to learn more about someone in your personal life, to expand your own thinking about religion, and to try out questions and interview techniques that you will use in later assignments.

5. **Annotated Bibliography** *(12 sources to be submitted as a team.)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   After deciding on a religious community, each team will locate six websites and six peer-edited sources (e.g., books, electronic journal articles) having to do with their religion. Each team will create a bibliography that includes an MLA citation of each source, a sentence evaluating the perspective from which the source was written, and one or two sentences summarizing the content and purpose of the source. These will provide valuable sources of background information during the rest of the project.

6. **Site Visit Report** *(To be completed by each individual student.)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   Each team will visit a public service at their chosen religious community. During this visit, students should pay close attention to every aspect of the experience. This report should include not only the sights, smells, sounds, and tastes experienced during the service, but also information about the neighborhood in which the building is located, the transportation used by members to reach the site, and the demographics of the congregation.

7. **Photographic Portfolio** *(To be completed by each individual student)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   Students can take pictures (20-30) of the site they visited. The subjects should be varied. Pictures might be taken of people (with their permission), the outside of the building, the inside of the worship space, art objects, and details of objects that are important to the service or that represent the community in some way. Students will write informative captions of each photograph in order to educate the viewer.

Each student can choose to complete #5 or #6.

8. **Interview Report** *(Two interviews, one by each individual student.)* SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL BY:
   While at the site visit, students should make contact with an official member of the community who can help them locate two members of the community who would be willing to be interviewed. These interviews should be conducted in a public space and should be attended by both group members. Each student will take the lead on one of the interviews and will write a report. Reports will use pseudonyms and take other measure to protect the identity of the interviewees, themselves, and their team members.

9. **Thank You Note** *(To be sent to each interviewee)* COMPLETED IN CLASS
   Write a short, formal but friendly, note to the people you interviewed thanking them for their time. The school will provide stationary and postage.

10. **The "Sacred Beltway" website:** *(To be completed by each team)* COMPLETED IN CLASS
    The Religious Studies Department has created a Google Map of the Washington Metropolitan area. Each team's religious community will have its own "pin" on that map. Linked to each pin will be a website where students will publish their site visit reports, interview reports, photographic portfolios, etc.

    The website will serve a number of purposes. First, it will facilitate the submission of the photographic portfolio, which is usually far too big to be submitted via email. Second, it will serve as a visual aid for the informal presentations given by each team at the end of the semester. Third, it will be an opportunity for students to learn how to create and publish their own content on the web. Lastly, it will be an ever-evolving resource for future students who wants to learn about these religions and worldviews.

Additionally, each assignment asks you for a "Required Supplementary Personal Reflection." This is a short paragraph (approximately 2-4 sentences) of your personal opinions and reflections about the assignment, such as what went right or wrong, what was challenging or frustrating, what was interesting, what could be improved upon, etc.