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## **Inclusion and Expansion**

At our current juncture in history, we are in what some might call a transnational moment. More than ever, people are crossing borders and coming into contact with one another. As people, cultures, and ideas intersect, higher education cannot stand still but must adapt to the changing intercultural world. This brings new challenges but also new opportunities for teaching theology and religious studies. Attention to transnational movements, global cultures, and the history of cultural contact provide distinct types of opportunities our classrooms can embrace, as the authors in this issue demonstrate.

Most importantly, institutions in general and classrooms in particular must be conscious of their own diversity and provide a welcoming atmosphere for every student. In this Spotlight, our contributors highlight the issue of inclusive classrooms above all else. Rather than making assumptions about students' backgrounds, faculty must allow students to express their identities, share their voices, and affirm their experiences. Edwin David Aponte centers his essay on issues of inclusiveness, pointing to both a demographic and a cultural shift that brings to our classrooms students from diverse backgrounds, with diverse learning styles, different educational paths experienced before entering college, divergent aspirations, and even wide-ranging understandings about the value of higher education. He emphasizes that the university therefore needs to be more attentive than ever to inclusiveness in order to foster a true community of learning. This means incorporating a variety of teaching styles to make all students feel welcome.

Reflecting on the changing demographics of the United States as a whole, as revealed in the 2010 Census, Philip Wingeier-Rayo explores specific ways to create a welcoming atmosphere for Hispanic, Latina/o, and other minority student populations, whether by approaching students individually, initiating open-door policies for office hours, utilizing learning contracts, compiling ground rules for discussion, or advocating with university offices of admissions and student affairs. Anne Mocko incorporates the notion of our learning from our students' experiences and Grace Ji-Sun Kim provides suggestions for encouraging more inclusive attitudes among our students, using both methods and content to do so. Gregory Lee Cuéllar's and Jonathan Y. Tan's pieces suggest that higher education needs to be more inclusive in terms of how it organizes its archives and more inclusive — or at least expansive — in terms of suggested online resources for student research.

Pertaining to that expansion of resources, our globalized world offers numerous materials for our classrooms that were previously unavailable, and our methods should adjust to utilize those resources rather than ignoring them simply because our own educations did not utilize them. Numerous authors note the possibility of site visits and immersion trips to provide intercultural experiences and they further note that the pluralism of our current moment makes such opportunities available locally, whereas in the past they would have necessitated long journeys. In Mocko's case, the classroom itself is an intercultural opportunity. Following the notion of

welcoming each student and valuing his or her experience, we need to recognize that these students may and often do have expertise in religions traditionally dubbed “foreign.” It is quite likely that Muslim students will want to take a class on Islam and Buddhist students will want to take a class on Buddhism, and the like. Whether their motivations are to learn more about their own family background or even because they are under the assumption that this will be an easy course for them, their lived experience is a valuable resource present in the classroom — and is not to be dismissed.

Beyond site visits, local guests, and demographics in the classroom, technology can bring global cultures to our own doorsteps like never before. Wingeier-Rayo uses Skype to bring guests into his World Religions classroom, and Mocko finds rituals on YouTube that provide visual examples of lived religions. Cuéllar’s article on Western hegemony in the maintenance of archives similarly suggests that there are various types of materials available that we are often trained to overlook. Tan, finally, addresses the possibility of technology for research on a variety of religions as well as on transnational religion and globalized religion themselves. He provides an extensive bibliography of online resources to recommend to students for responsible research. Extensive as it is, he notes that these are only a beginning of what is available through our globalized communication system.

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