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Many of us come to the site visit through the “back door,” so to speak; that is, through necessity or contingency rather than through conscious pedagogical choice. For example, when I moved to Northridge from Toronto in 1997, I was preassigned a teaching schedule for my first semester, since the schedule had to be printed before I was hired. The time given to my Islam course was Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 12:00 to 12:50 PM. Normally, this would be a good time slot for an upper-division course. However, many observant Muslims could not take this class, as it conflicted with the time for the Friday afternoon congregational prayer. To try and accommodate them, I arranged site visits to the local mosque on Fridays as part of the course. I may not have chosen to include site visits that first semester had the circumstances of the timing of the course been different.

I had first been involved in site visits a few years earlier as a teaching assistant to a world religions class at the University of Toronto, conducted magisterially by Peter Beyer. It was a large course, divided into several tutorial groups, and each of us assistants would take our groups on a couple of site visits (mine were to a Taoist temple). In that course, Peter did all the work making arrangements. I simply had to show up with the students at the appropriate time and place. Now at Northridge, teaching my own courses, it was my turn to do the work.

With time to plan ahead, including timings for courses, there are many mundane and not-so-mundane issues that need to be carefully thought through. One must decide ahead of

time not only where the class will visit, but what the students will examine when they get there and why, and whether they will be encouraged to participate or observe. That first semester, I brought students to the mosque on two successive Fridays. In order to do this, I exposed my Southern California students to another novel tradition: the car pool, which allowed people (like me) who did not own a car to get a ride to the mosque, about two miles away. We got to the mosque before the rush of people coming for the Friday prayers. This allowed me a few minutes to point out some of its basic features. Those Muslim students who wanted to pray were then excused from the trip and allowed to pray. In this particular mosque there are separate rooms, on the same level, for men and women to pray. I stayed with the male students in the male area, while a Muslim female student accompanied female students to the women's area. We stayed for the prayer and for part of the *khutba* (sermon, which was given in English) before it was time to leave. The second Friday, I participated in the prayer and allowed the students to observe on their own. For these two visits, I did not ask the students to write anything about their experiences, but we did discuss them in class the following Mondays.

The dynamics of site visits will change according to whether or not the person leading the students is a member of the community. When I went to the Taoist temple, for example, it was my first visit to such a site. However, because I am a Muslim as well as someone who teaches courses on Islam, things were somewhat easier for me, I suspect, when I took classes to the mosque. I knew the mosque closest to my university, had prayed there, and had met the Imam. I did not need to rely on an informant, for I could explain to my students what they were witnessing when they watched the Friday prayer.

Site visits raise many ethical and legal issues. After my initial site visits to the mosque, I discovered that I had violated my university's policies by not getting the appropriate clearances from my department chair and college dean for a class to meet off-campus. That's just one of the many issues associated with a site visit to a mosque. First, make sure you know the appropriate rules and regulations at your university. Sometimes there are institutional "risk management" issues with field trips. Second, you need to locate a mosque, make contact with the Imam, and get permission to bring visitors. Third, you need to decide when you want to attend. Do you want to show students a mosque that might be empty? Do you want to show a mosque at a time when few people are praying? Do you want to take students for the Friday afternoon prayer when the mosque is full? Some mosques may, in fact, discourage visitors on Fridays and instead ask that visitors attend a mosque open house. This, of course, gives a very different "feel" to the site visit. Fourth, as with any site visit, you need to work out the logistics as to how you will get students to and from the site, and what you expect them to do while they are there.

