

Reynolds, Frank E. and Sheryl Burkhalter, eds. *Beyond the Classics? Essays in Religious Studies and Liberal Education*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

Juergensmeyer, Mark, ed. *Teaching the Introductory Course in Religious Studies: A Sourcebook*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991.

Carman, John B. and Steven P. Hopkins, eds. *Tracing Common Themes: Comparative Courses in the Study of Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991.

Between 1985 and 1989 the National Endowment for the Humanities funded three prominent educational institutions to conduct a series of summer institutes to examine the teaching of world religions within a liberal arts curriculum. Participants in these workshops produced these three volumes of essays. The essays contain theoretical discussion of the goals and objectives for teaching religious studies courses within a global context and provide examples of ways to organize and teach such courses. Far better, most of the essays explore the integral connection between pedagogical theory and praxis. *Beyond the Classics?* contains essays that emerged from the Institute at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1986. Essays in this volume contain sophisticated theoretical statements about the centrality of teaching world religions within a liberal arts context.

Coherently organized by such scholar/teachers as Lawrence Sullivan, Judith Berling, and Charles Long, this volume of essays has been enormously helpful to me in articulating and understanding why religious studies courses are so important in the context of a liberal art education.

The essays in this volume also provided me with cogent arguments to defend our discipline when budgets got tight at my university. I also found the intellectual framework in these essays helpful when my religious studies and anthropology colleagues and I recently conceived and developed a Comparative Cultures major at Alfred University.

The theoretical thrust of most of the essays in this volume has significantly contributed to my thoughts about pedagogical practice. To give one example, James Foard's "Writing across the Curriculum: A Religious Studies Contribution" helped me to understand not only why religious studies courses can significantly contribute to our students ability to interpret and evaluate human activity, but also how specific short writing assignments could be structured to maximize these goals, even in courses with large numbers of students. (For my use and modification of Foard's writing assignments, see my Introduction to World Religions Course at the [AAR Syllabus Project website](#)

.) Participants at the Institute at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley wrote many of the essays in

*Teaching the Introductory Course in Religious Studies*

. This volume contains thirty-seven essays by twenty-two scholar/teachers, including such recognized names as Karen McCarthy Brown, Jonathan Z. Smith, Huston Smith, and Ninian Smart. Essays in this volume not only explore the introductory course in religion. In addition seventeen essays of unusually high quality discuss introductory courses to specific religious traditions, ranging from Islam and Hinduism to Sikhism and Aboriginal religion. Eight essays in a final section on "The Classroom Experience" detail specific and concrete suggestions about our teaching. I found three essays particularly important in revising and developing my own courses: Susan Henking's discussion of bringing women's and minorities' concerns into religious studies courses and Richard Carp's exploration of teaching material culture and using audio-visual resources.

*Tracing Common Themes* emerged from the Institute at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. The theoretical question about how to compare religious traditions undergirds most of the twenty-one essays in this volume. Essays here suggest using a thematic approach to make comparisons — e.g., pilgrimage, healing, sacrifice, art, ethics, gender etc. Each essay highlights an actual course that the scholar/teacher has taught. Significantly each essay discusses pedagogical and theoretical issues that relate to the course. I found the essays in this volume helped me to make several concrete suggestions about developing a model for the syllabi project when it was discussed in the AAR Standing Committee on Teaching and Learning — especially the goals of having teachers provide specific syllabi and also discuss theoretical and pedagogical issues related to teaching them. I also have found significant ways to revise some of my syllabi and to choose texts that engage students from reading these essays.

I turn to these three volumes frequently as I think about ways to revise my syllabi and try new ways to engage students in learning. Since pedagogy is not just "tricks of the trade," I particularly like the theoretical rationale that undergirds specific suggestions about praxis.