

The Academic Relations Committee began a three-year sequence of workshops exploring the implications of the Teagle/AAR White Paper “The Religion Major and Liberal Education” at the Annual Meeting in Montréal. The daylong workshop, “Three Religion Majors Meet in a Café: What Do They Have in Common?”, had a registration of 49 participants and speakers. Participants explored the five common characteristics of religious studies majors identified in the White Paper — intercultural and comparative, multidisciplinary, critical, integrative, and creative and constructive — and discussed the presence of these characteristics in the design of the majors in their different institutional contexts (small public, large public, private, and theological).

Eugene Gallagher opened the workshop with a discussion titled “The Convergent Characteristics of the Religious Studies Major: Findings of the Teagle Working Group.” Gallagher, the Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies at Connecticut College and founding director of the Mankoff Center for Teaching and Learning, was a member of that working group. “When our committee generated the topic for the workshop last spring, there was unanimous agreement that Gene’s participation would be crucial to its success,” said Fred Glennon, Chair of the Academic Relations Committee. “We immediately called him from the room in which we were meeting and he graciously accepted our invitation. The positive response from attendees to his presentation and presence reaffirmed our decision.”

Panelists from different institutional contexts then discussed, “How is this constellation of characteristics present in the design of your major?” The panelists included: Darryl Catherine, Le Moyne College; Paul Bowlby, St. Mary’s University; and Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Vanderbilt University). Participants were then divided into groups according to institutional type to discuss the ways these characteristics of religion majors were present or the obstacles to them. “In every leadership workshop we sponsor, the Academic Relations Committee seeks to enable participants from similar contexts to speak to each other,” says Fred Glennon. “For most attendees, this is a key reason for coming each year.”

Patricia Killen, Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies at Pacific Lutheran University and editor of *Teaching Theology and Religion*, then engaged participants interactively around the question, “How do we address the five characteristics in ways attentive to our students and the reasons they are there?” “Anyone interesting in addressing questions about teaching and student learning in our discipline knows Patricia’s work,” says Fred Glennon. “Responses by attendees confirm that we were fortunate to have her involved in the workshop.” Following a break-out session among participants, the workshop concluded with a plenary on “What have we learned?” led by Eugene Gallagher.

The Academic Relations Committee plans on following up this successful workshop related to the religion major by exploring the implications for curriculum, hiring, assessment, and student careers. The Committee plans the Leadership Workshops for the Annual Meeting: Fred Glennon, chair; L. DeAne Lagerquist; Steve Young; Rosetta Ross; Edwin David Aponte; Joseph Favazza, and Jack Fitzmier, AAR staff liaison.