

Summary of the ISIP Program

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INTRODUCTION

The Interfaith Summer Internship Program (ISIP) is a new initiative whose three-part mission is to train Princeton students in interfaith organizing through a hands-on summer internship in New York City, to partner with organizations that focus on underserved communities, and to develop greater public awareness about the role that interfaith can play in fostering an otherwise secular civil society. The students and their internships are at the center of this program, but their work intentionally connects communities or constituencies of secular organizations, grassroots religious leaders, and scholars.

Students will be placed in individual internships with different host organizations, and will also work and learn collectively through a week-long intensive program about religion and civic life, their own academic inquiry into the social role of religion, and take part in regular-peer group meetings.

BACKGROUND

Princeton University's Office of Religious Life (ORL) understands religious life as lived out through spiritual, liturgical, social, civic, moral, and intellectual life. In this way, through its Interfaith and Civil Society program, the ORL fosters student leadership and community building through programs oriented around religion and civic engagement widely understood. Interfaith, as the positive encounter of religious difference in the public sphere, is one important way this happens at Princeton.

ISIP is an important extension of this vision because it provides in-depth, imbedded, experiential training for students in an off-campus urban setting. It provides students with the opportunity to encounter local religious communities as they respond to the multitude of social problems they face, and as they interact with a secular public. It hopes to create a cohort of like-minded students on campus that will engender further programming and networks, as well as leading to long term reciprocal partnerships with religious communities, secular non-profit and city government agencies in New York.

Princeton's Pace Center for Civic Engagement has become increasingly aware of the importance of engaging religion for its mission of civic engagement: both in terms of the role religion plays in the lives of those Pace serves off campus, and in the moral role religion plays as a motivating factor for many students engaged in service through Pace. ISIP provides an opportunity for secular students to learn about the social moral role religion plays in the lives of those they serve and the lives of their fellow students, as an important aspect of their own civic and leadership development. It also provides an opportunity for Pace students who identify as religious to explore and express their religious identities as a motivating factor in their service interests, and to encounter religious difference as they engage in community service.

For the purposes of ISIP interfaith is the recognition and interaction of religious communities in the public sphere. In this way interfaith is a part of, and fosters, civil society. At its best, interfaith implies not only a diversity of religious traditions, but diversity within religions as well; it also includes a range of ways religion is practiced, how leadership is understood, how religious communities self organize, and their mutual recognition of secular partners. More directly related to ISIP, interfaith is a strategy to gather religiously diverse communities around issues of shared concern, as they inevitably learn about each other. When interfaith programs are directed toward shared social issues, as opposed to an exploration of each

other's religious identity, the range of participants is widened greatly beyond those who understand themselves as interested in interfaith. When this takes place in the public, it educates secular partners about the social moral role religion plays for the communities they serve.

Our understanding of interfaith has developed through hands on engagement in, and academic reflection on, the work itself.[1] This has included long-term relationship building with, and between, religious actors and communities, as well as creating interfaith programs for wide ranging religious and secular constituencies as a way of promoting social change and group learning. We understand ideas about interfaith and interfaith organizing as a work in progress that requires experimentation on the part of these constituencies.

OVERVIEW

Part 1: Orientation

Once students have been selected and accepted by their host site, they will meet with their supervisor to determine their precise internship description, and to begin thinking about their report topic. They will also identify a Princeton professor to serve as a reader for their report during this period. There will be three or four programs geared to orient and prepare student, including team building, an overview of the field-based seminar, a summary of the field based seminar, introduction to the report (through CBLI), and potentials other relevant sessions.

Part 2: Field-Based Seminar

ISIP The formal program will begin with a weeklong field-based seminar on religion and civic engagement. Each day will engage a particular religion (for example Buddhism or Islam) and the internal diversity to that religion (doctrinal and cultural, for example Burmese, Korean, and Chinese Buddhism; Shia and Sunni Islam). Students will learn about the social and civic role that religion plays for its community and the wider public, and the various ways religious leadership and religious communities self organize in response to social concerns.

There will be reading assignments (about lived religion, civil society an social capital, secularism, and urbanization) but the syllabus will emphasize personal encounter and discussion with religious leaders themselves, combining site visits, field experiences, and interactive discussions. The basic pattern of each day will be to spend the morning in a house of worship, as our classroom and base, learning about the history of a particular community, its leadership structure, the rhythm of an ordinary day, and how it is locally situated. The second part of the day will introduce diverse leaders from the same religious tradition through panel and small group discussions, as well as opportunities to explore the neighborhood.

The goal of the seminar is to provide a basic orientation to religion, religious diversity, and a sense of the religious landscape of New York through the lens of how religions engage social issues and the public. The seminar will also provide tools for how to approach religion as a form of secular civic engagement. Because the seminar will introduce over twenty religious leaders, it will provide a small and informal interfaith network that will allow students to begin their work. Finally the seminar will include an orientation to good internship practices.

Part 3: Internship Placement

After the seminar, students will begin their placement with different secular organizations, each focused on a particular issue of social concern (including domestic violence, incarceration, immigration, and environmental justice, and education). The organizations differ in terms of size and type, as well as their history of engaging religious communities. Each organization understands civil society, the local public, and underserved communities, to be their constituency. While these institutions are secular, they understand religion to be an important part of civil society's fabric, and one that is under engaged.

In each case there will be a supervisor-mentor for the intern at the host organization.

Each internship will be designed with input from the student as it relates to the needs of the organization. While the aim is an internship focused on a student's learning and interests, this will be balanced with the organization's current needs. Interns are expected to work full time for the duration of their eight-week internship unless otherwise agreed upon. Interns may also occasionally be required or strongly encouraged to attend events or meetings on weekends or evenings. The interns will learn about the particular issues that are the organization's focus, and develop interfaith organizing knowledge and skills as they help their host organization better understand and engage with the religious diversity of the city in ways that complement their mission. In this way, the interns have the dual focus of learning about their host organizations' particular mission and interfaith organizing, and how the two intersect. An emphasis will be placed on the innovation and experimentation that is required to develop interfaith and faith-based programming. This emphasis will also be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Part 4: Weekly Peer Group Meetings

Once the internships begin, facilitated weekly peer group meetings will be held throughout the program. The weekly meetings will continue the learning experience begun in the seminar, and will help students learn from each others' experience. These informal sessions will provide an opportunity to share best practices and exchange new contacts for each others' work. It will also help students see the way religious leaders and communities respond to the multiplicity of issues that they, through their organizations, work on discretely.

A hope, but not a requirement, is that each organization that serves as an internship site could host one of these weekly meetings, and that someone from the organization could give a short presentation to the student group. There will be an opportunity for each student to lead one of the weekly sessions.

Complementing weekly sessions, there will be occasional opportunities for workshops and conversations with religious leaders and professionals in complementary fields, to continue learning from the weeklong seminar. Such opportunities may include a mediation skills training and conversations with foundation program officers, policy makers, and journalists.

Part 5: Report for Host Site

Students will also produce a report or white paper developed during their internship, using their host organization and the religious communities that they meet through their work as their field site. The report will be due before the fall semester begins. The report starts from the premise that religious communities are an important constituency for the organization, and that the role religion and religious actors play in tackling their particular problem or issue is not well understood and rarely engaged. Because the central purpose of the report is its usefulness to their host organization, the specific topic and set of research questions should be developed by the student in collaboration with the intern's supervisor. The exact design of the report will be negotiated. Students will then produce informal field notes on a bi-weekly basis as a way to share their progress during the weekly peer group meetings.

The report will also be read by a Princeton faculty member or affiliated scholar. Readers will meet at least once with the student, and will provide feedback when the report is finished. Depending on the nature of the report, the reader's feedback can be directed toward the academic substance of the report, or the student's potential academic use of the report at hand (for example, if the student were to build on their research for their senior thesis). Although ISIP is not a credit-granting internship, this process will help insure that papers are written in a way worthy of academic credit. ISIP will help students locate a reader, but securing a reader is a student requirement of the internship. Princeton's Community Based Learning Initiative will provide guidance to students on developing their research questions and paper.

Part 6: On Campus Events

ISIP will invite each of the host organizations to Princeton during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters as part of a series of conversations about religion and civil society. This will be a central way in which ISIP continues to build relationships between the Princeton community and our new partners outside of the summer period. It will also be a way for students to maintain relationships with their host

site and religious leaders they met. To this end, each event will focus on the work of a particular host site and their student's research. Each student will design and organize their event. The events can take a range of formats, and can include the reader and religious leaders the students worked with as well.

OBJECTIVES

1. To create a forum for Princeton students to develop interfaith organizing skills.
2. To do so by working with and for grassroots organizations and city government agencies that can, and should, intersect with religiously diverse communities.
3. Likewise, to do so by working with and for religious communities with the goal of having them better interact with each other and with secular organizations.
4. For students to engage in experiential service learning: about the role of religion, interfaith and civil society, and about the role of grassroots religious leaders and their communities.
5. To produce documentation and scholarship about the role of religion and interfaith in civil society and to recognize the complementary and reciprocal values of intellectual reflection with service learning.
6. To raise awareness about the social moral role religion plays in underserved communities and the value of interfaith in civic engagement for secular publics and agencies; to do so by developing knowledge and partnerships at Princeton and in the wider public.
7. To create a cohort of students at Princeton who are broadly interested in the intersection of interfaith and civil society through their particular interests.
8. For this cohort of students to be at the hub of overlapping communities (religious leaders, scholars, secular organizations) interested in interfaith.
9. To provide service and to serve as a resource to the secular host organizations and religious communities that students encounter.

EXPECTATIONS

Host Organizations

The host organizations will design a thoughtfully structured internship with quality supervision and mentorship for Princeton interns. With exceptions, the host organization is not expert on religion, but rather on their particular social issue of social concern. The expectation is that the intern will learn about that issue by working for their host organization, guided by an agreed upon supervisor. The basic parameters and description of work will be shaped by the host organization and ISIP with input by the student intern.

The internship should ideally be focused on an overarching project that: 1) is genuinely helpful to the host organization, 2) educates the student about the area of concern and the organizations strategy for addressing their issue, 3) provides an opportunity for the intern to engage religious diversity in New York, 4) connects to the report that they will write. The topic of the report should be developed by the intern and her supervisor, ideally before the internship begins. Finally, each host organization will be invited to host one of the weekly pier group meetings.

Student Interns

Within the scope of the internship itself, the expectation for students is to work full time (40 hours a week) or as guided by their supervisor. There maybe occasions or even regular commitments outside of regular working hours that are important for interns to attend, depending on the particular work of the organization (i.e. for an arts or community based organization programing may take place in the evening; for interns to reach religious leaders, they may need to make appointments on weekends or evenings).

While the student should expect their experience to be focused in the ways described above. They should also expect to do a certain amount of work for their host organizations' office that is not focused on their particular project or needs, as different needs of the office arise. In this way they are understood to be part of a team, and required to pitch in when need be.

Students are required to write a 20-page research paper and identify a scholar at Princeton who is willing to supervise and read their paper. They will be required to write a brief summary of their paper and present their findings at the fall half-day symposium.

Students will be encouraged to participate in the organizing of the speaker series (part 6).

Readers

We ask that the scholar who serves as a reader for an intern's research paper have a preliminary discussion—or several as time permits—to provide guidance. He or she should then to read and respond to the report before the fall semester begins. Because the report is primarily geared to be useful to the host organization, the reader's feedback can lead toward its implications for further academic research. Readers are encouraged to join the students on campus event as a respondent.

ISIP at Princeton

ISIP has the obligation of placing and funding interns, providing an orientation about good internship practices, training about religion and interfaith at the onset of

the summer, providing guidance during their internship, and being in contact with interns and the host organizations when needs arise.

CURRENT INTERNSHIP PLACEMENTS

CONNECT (a domestic violence advocacy and education organization)

Founded in 1993, CONNECT is a leading, non-profit training, educational and advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention and elimination of interpersonal violence in New York City. CONNECT was founded by several veterans of the domestic violence movement who recognized that among domestic violence services, prevention work was virtually non-existent and that while the availability of direct services for survivors had improved over the years, the prevalence of domestic violence had not diminished. Today, we've created programs to work on three levels: individual, community, and systemic.

www.connectnyc.org

Fourth Arts Block (a civically oriented arts collective)

Fourth Arts Block (FAB) is a non-profit organization founded in 2001 by cultural and community groups to establish and advance the East 4th Street Cultural District, between 2nd Avenue and Bowery. FAB provides a variety of services to its member organizations including leading the development and conversion of 100,000 square feet of cultural space, marketing and promotion of the district, as well as offering discount ticketing and other community events and programs. Home to more than a dozen arts groups, 10 cultural facilities and 17 performances and rehearsal venues, the East 4th Street Cultural District attracts an annual audience of 250,000, serves 1,500 artists and provides more square feet of active cultural use than any other block in New York.

fabnyc.org

Harlem Community Justice Center

The Harlem Community Justice Center seeks to solve neighborhood problems—including youth crime, landlord-tenant disputes, and the challenges faced by parolees—in East and Central Harlem. As a multi-jurisdictional civil and family court, Harlem is unique among community courts. Among the many non-traditional services the Justice Center has assembled under one roof are: programs to help local landlords and tenants resolve conflicts and access financial support; programs for at-risk youth, including a youth court; and reentry programs for both juvenile and adult ex-offenders returning to the community. Ultimately, the project's long-term goal is to test the extent to which a court can work together with a community to spur neighborhood renewal.

www.courtinnovation.org/project/harlem-community-justice-center

Interfaith Center of New York

The Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY) seeks to make New York City and the world safe for religious differences by increasing respect and mutual understanding among people of different faith, ethnic, and cultural traditions and by fostering cooperation among religious communities and civic organizations to solve common social problems. We define interfaith as the positive awareness of religious diversity, and the intention or actual practice of engaging people of different faiths for the betterment of society as a whole. For our purposes social change is defined as the integrated effect of changing attitudes and social patterns towards other religious communities while at the same time improving the social well-being of one's own community and the community at large.

interfaithcenter.org

West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT)

West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT for Environmental Justice) is a Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. As a result of our ongoing work to educate and mobilize the more than 630,000 residents of Northern Manhattan on environmental issues affecting their quality of life, WE ACT has become a leader in the nationwide movement for environmental justice, influencing the creation of federal, state and local policies affecting the environment.

www.weact.org

Mentoring in Medicine

Mentoring In Medicine is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that works with students in disadvantaged areas from 3rd grade through health professional schools. We ignite, cultivate, and prepare students to become health care professionals by allowing prospective students to interact with established expert health care professionals around the country.

www.medicalmentor.org

Word UP

Word Up is a multi-language, general-interest community bookshop and arts space in Washington Heights, committed to preserving and building a neighborhood in which all residents help each other to live better informed and more expressive lives, using books as an instrument of reciprocal education and exchange, empowering not only themselves, but their community. By hosting literary readings, music concerts, film screenings, theater productions, art openings, workshops, community meetings and talks, language salons, and other activities for kids and adults, we do our best to support and fortify the creative spirit unique to our diverse, uptown community.

wordupbooks.wordpress.com

SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

ISIP is being developed by the Office of Religious Life and the Pace Center at Princeton University.

[1] Much of the interfaith methodology implied here was developed at the Interfaith Center of New York. For an in depth analysis of how interfaith shapes civil society through grassroots religious communities in New York see Matthew Weiner *Interfaith in the City: Religious Pluralism and Civil Society in New York*, PhD Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary 2008.