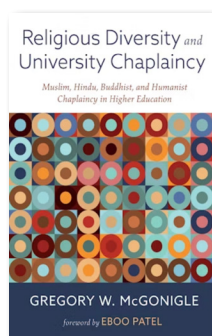


BOOK REVIEW

Religious Diversity and University Chaplaincy: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Humanist Chaplaincy in Higher Education. By Gregory W. McGonigle. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2024. xiv + 138. \$39.00 (hardcover); \$24.00 (paper); \$24.00 (ebook). ISBN 978-1-6667-3820-9.



Gregory W. McGonigle traces the emergence of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Humanist chaplaincies in higher education in the United States and provides the first systematic review of the contours of these programs while thinking about the facilitation of the multiplication of these chaplaincies in the future. An expansion of McGonigle’s Doctor of Ministry project at Boston University, the volume is a must-read for college and university chaplains committed to moving more fulsomely into a multifaith staffing model. McGonigle, an ordained Unitarian Universalist

minister, has been a pioneer in establishing and expanding multifaith chaplaincy staffing models at colleges and universities across the country for the past twenty years. While the volume leans into McGonigle’s extensive chaplaincy experience at Emory University, Tufts University, Oberlin College, and University of California, Davis, and as past president of the National Association of College and University Chaplains, the deep insights into the intricacies of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Humanist chaplaincies come from interviews conducted with a series of chaplaincy professionals in each of these traditions.

In a brief foreword, Eboo Patel establishes the shifting religious demographics of the United States, noting that there are now as many Muslims in the United States as ELCA Lutherans and twice as many Buddhists as Episcopalians. McGonigle’s volume is a response to the explosive growth of non-Christian religious traditions in the United States and the presence of adherents from these traditions increasingly present on college and university campuses and a desire for higher education institutions to provide real communities of belonging for practitioners of minoritized religious traditions.

The volume is organized with an introduction providing some of McGonigle's professional background and a brief survey of the higher education chaplaincy landscape, followed by individual chapters on Muslim chaplaincy, Hindu chaplaincy, Buddhist chaplaincy, and Humanist chaplaincy, and a conclusion looking to the future "as American higher education seeks to serve its changing demographics and all students" (122). Each chapter begins with a history of higher education chaplaincy in that tradition, often noting that the number of full-time professionals in these traditions across the country could be counted on one or both hands, and then puts at least three contemporary religious life professionals in the tradition in conversation with one another exploring professional preparation and formation, day-to-day rhythms and responsibilities distinct to chaplaincy in that tradition, and challenges particular to chaplaincy in the tradition, while also exploring visions for the future of chaplaincy in that tradition.

In the Muslim chaplaincy chapter, Omer Bajwa, Muslim Chaplain at Yale University; Celene Ibrahim, former Muslim Chaplain at Tufts University; and Nisa Muhammad, Assistant Dean of the Chapel at Howard University elucidate the unique opportunities chaplaincy facilitates for Muslim women for leadership within the American Muslim community and the important work that Muslim chaplaincy has done to combat anti-Muslim stereotypes both in the academy and in broader American public discourse since the events of September 11, 2001. McGonigle also pays particular attention to the emerging visions of Muslim chaplaincy for the future, especially as Pew projects that Muslims will outnumber Jews in the United States in the next twenty-five years.

In the Hindu chaplaincy chapter, Vineet Chander, Coordinator of Hindu Life at Princeton University; Vrajvihari Sharan, Director for Dharmic Life at Georgetown University; and Asha Shipman, Director of Hindu Life at Yale University reflect on their complex relationships with the notion of "Hindu chaplaincy" and the various ways in which their professional offices are constructed and described at different institutions to provide legibility of their roles to Hindu college and university constituencies. The formation of the North American Hindu Chaplains Association (NAHCA) in 2020 serves to facilitate ongoing conversations within the Hindu community of religious professionals about appropriate professional formation and relationships with other Dharmic communities—Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.

In the Buddhist chaplaincy chapter, John Bailes, Buddhist Chaplain at Wellesley College; Rod Owens, activist and author; Doyeon Park, Buddhist Advisor at Columbia University and New York University; and Upali Sraman, former Buddhist Chaplain at Tufts University discuss bringing

mindfulness practices to larger publics and the capacity for chaplaincy to inculcate resiliency in students and staff. The chapter also focuses on the unique challenges of shifting from communities of practice often adjacent to colleges and universities to having paid positions within the university community.

In the Humanist chaplaincy chapter, Ryan Bell, Humanist Advisor at University of Southern California; Vanessa Gomez Brake, Associate Dean of Religious Life at University of Southern California; Walker Bristol, former Humanist Chaplain at Tufts University; Greg Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Chris Stedman, former Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University and Yale University identify the exceptional challenges of seeking to serve a community of people who may not even recognize the language of “Humanist” for their own spiritual/religious orientation. McGonigle writes that “there is less of a traditional path toward professional Humanist chaplaincy than there is for any of the other traditions explored in this book” (90). That said, he provides significant exploration of the quirks and challenges of developing further Humanist chaplaincies and the difficulties in appropriately staffing these chaplaincies.

In his conclusion, McGonigle writes that the process of putting together the volume has been invaluable in his own work as a university chaplain and dean of religious life. Indeed, the volume’s greatest contribution is in mapping “the histories, the preparation, the responsibilities, the challenges, and the opportunities experienced by chaplains of traditions being added to multifaith teams” and identifying who a school might recruit for these roles and how these programs could be shaped (123). While the volume was clearly written with the guild of college and university chaplains in mind, it will prove useful to chaplains in other settings who are seeking to diversify traditionally Christian and Jewish chaplaincy staffs. In the broader landscape of interreligious leadership literature, McGonigle’s volume is an important contemporary case study of the continued challenges of working across lines of religious difference in chaplaincy at America’s selective liberal arts colleges and research universities.

Soren M. Hessler
Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Note: In Fall 2024 as preparation of this review was in progress, Hessler joined the faculty of Candler School of Theology at Emory University where McGonigle serves as Dean of Religious Life and University Chaplain.

RЯ

The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.