

An Emerging *Phronetic* Framework in Interfaith and Interreligious Studies Courses in the United States: A Response to Jones and Meyer¹

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This article draws on the substantive work of Jones and Meyer to sketch a pedagogical framework for Interreligious and Interfaith Studies (IIS) curricular course design and learning as phronesis, or practical wisdom for everyday engagement in religiously diverse societies.

Keywords: curricular design, pedagogy, phronesis, wisdom

In “Interfaith and Interreligious Pedagogies,” Katherine Janiec Jones and Cassie Meyer identify seven dominant pedagogical themes emerging in Bachelor-level (undergraduate) courses in interreligious/ interfaith studies (IIS) in the United States. While each theme may not necessarily be unique on its own, we might ask whether, when considered collectively, they constitute a truly unique pedagogical approach. This article draws on the substantive work of Jones and Meyer to sketch a pedagogical framework for IIS curricular course design and learning as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom for everyday engagement in religiously diverse societies.

***Phronetic*-Oriented IIS Pedagogy**

Consider two potential assumptions operating at the foundational level for IIS instructors when discerning course design in the United States. First, an implicit affirmation of the observation articulated by David Roozen that “the dominant American attitude toward other faith traditions is indifference.”² Second, among the many proposed definitions of IIS,³ the civic-oriented and practitioner-approach of Eboo Patel, Kate McCarthy, and others receives significant traction at the undergraduate level in the United States. For Patel and Interfaith America (formerly known as the Interfaith Youth Core), IIS is an “an interdisciplinary field that examines the multiple dimensions of how people who orient around religion differently interact with one another, and

¹ This essay is part of a series of responses to the article by Katherine Janiec Jones and Cassie Meyer, “Interfaith and Interreligious Pedagogies: An Assessment,” in *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, no. 36 (May 2022): 9-34. To view the entire issue, visit <http://irstudies.org>.

² Michelle Boorstein, “Interfaith Movement Struggles to Adapt to Changing Religious Landscape,” *The Washington Post*, published Aug 16, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/interfaith-movement-struggles-to-adapt-to-nations-changing-religious-landscape/2013/08/16/6f59f026-050e-11e3-88d6-d5795fab4637_story.html.

³ Paul Hedges defines interreligious studies at the basic level as “studies involving two or more religious traditions or groups. See his “Interreligious Studies,” in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religion*, ed. A. Runehov and L. Ovideo (New York: Springer, 2012), 1077. Oddbjørn Leirvik suggests it “is something essentially relational in that it focuses on what takes place between religious traditions and their living representatives, on a scale from acute conflict to trustful dialogue.” See his “Interreligious Studies: A New Academic Discipline?” in *Contested Spaces, Common Ground: Spaces and Power Structures in Multireligious Societies*, eds. Ulrich Winkler, Lidia Rodriguez, and Oddbjørn Leirvik (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 37. I define interreligious studies as “an academic field of inquiry [that] examines, by one or several disciplinary methods, encounters that take place and relations that exist or exists, in the contemporary world or historically, between within, and among groups with significant difference in worldview or lifeway, including religious, nonreligious, and secular traditions.” See “Introduction,” in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, ed. Hans Gustafson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 4; see also Hans Gustafson, “Defining the Academic Field of Interreligious Studies,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 4, no. 2 (2020): 131–54.

the implications of these interactions for communities, civil society, and global politics.”⁴ Furthermore, for Patel, the “research agenda for a civic approach to interfaith studies focuses on how interactions among diverse orientations around religion—both in the lives of individuals and in the practices of institutions—impact civic space.”⁵ McCarthy underscores the function of IIS to serve “the public good by bringing its analysis to bear on practical approaches to issues in religiously diverse societies,”⁶ and consequently “must frame its values and goals in terms appropriate to the secular academy, aimed at the cultivation of civic rather than religious dispositions.”⁷ Marianne Moyaert recognizes that this approach is not unique to the United States but also shapes current trends in Europe, where “Universities increasingly agree that for students to become successful, responsible citizens of pluralized societies they need to acquire interfaith skills, to sensitively and effectively relate to people who believe and practice differently.”⁸

If these two premises hold water – that is, the dominant American attitude toward religion is indifference and that needs to change, and IIS at the undergraduate level is primarily about skill-building and practice in civil society – then it follows that a primary aim for instructors designing IIS courses at the Bachelor level in the United States is to assist students in developing or building practical “capacities” to prepare them for the problems they will face in their everyday lives, especially the “weighty matters” of resolving disputes with neighbors, partners, co-workers, and clients.⁹ How these capacities are described and labeled differs among instructors (e.g., leadership, skill, competency, wherewithal, literacy, craft). Jenn Lindsay argues that knowledge acquisition remains a primary or “front-line task,” even prior to the basic building blocks of developing attitude and skills, for the capacity-building project of developing students’ interreligious competence.¹⁰ Hence, there is increasing momentum and focus on primary, post-primary, and undergraduate curricula that builds students’ practical knowledge and wisdom (*phronesis*) of other religious traditions that includes know what (basic religious literacy), know who (empathetic lived engagement), know why (self-knowledge and awareness) and know-how (technical knowledge of dialogue and leadership). Given the dominant pedagogical themes and learning experiences identified by Jones and Meyer, coupled with existing currents in the approaches to undergraduate IIS course design in the United States, this article proposes *phronesis* as a holistic and promising model for the overall “capacity” aimed at in IIS courses.

⁴ Eboo Patel, “Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies,” *Liberal Education* 99, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 1–76, www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/toward-field-interfaith-studies

⁵ Eboo Patel, “A Civic Approach to Interfaith Studies,” in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches*, 30.

⁶ Kate McCarthy, “(Inter)Religious Studies: Making a Home in the Secular Academy” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*, eds. Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah Silverman (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), 12.

⁷ Kate McCarthy, “Secular Imperatives,” in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches*, 172.

⁸ Marianne Moyaert, “Interfaith Learning in Academic Spaces,” in *Pluralisation of Theologies at European Universities*, eds. Wolfram Weisse, Julia Ippgrave, Oddbjørn Leirvik, and Muna Tatari (Münster: Waxman, 2020), 35.

⁹ Robert J. Sternberg, “Where Have All the Flowers of Wisdom Gone? An Analysis of Teaching for Wisdom over the Years,” in *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 17.

¹⁰ Jenn Lindsay, “Growing Interreligious and Intercultural Competence in the Classroom,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 23 (2020): 17–33. Lindsay argues, “Rather than emphasizing a change in *attitude* first, we argue a different strategy for improving intercultural and in interreligious competence: *knowledge* of other cultures must come prior to the development of skills to interact with them, thereby paving the way, finally, for the area of competence most deep-seated in cognition and the most resistant to change: the attitude” (22, *emphasis* original).

The popular “cultural competence” model shares a kinship to the proposal here. The cultural competence framework develops individuals’ “ability to successfully interact with people of different backgrounds and recognize differences in experience.”¹¹ Similar to the proposal in this article—which offers *phronesis* as a model—cultural competence refers to “a continual process that involves an ongoing critical examination of one’s attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills in order to negotiate cross-cultural differences to complete tasks and/or create positive living, learning and working environments.”¹² In particular, the emphasis on awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills loosely maps on to the four-fold *phronetic* framework proposed here. Interreligious *phronesis* extends the cultural competency model to include—and emphasize—the role and context of religion (and religious identities) for flourishing in a religiously diverse world. Moreover, *phronesis* lends itself to cultivating leadership competencies. Barbara McGraw contends the leader ought to be sufficiently equipped not only with “a much more nuanced understanding of the particularities of constituents’ cultural perspectives,” but with sympathies for the ways “deep religious roots shape their perspectives, values, and customs, and the social assumptions and orientations that inform them.”¹³ McGraw argues that the new-genre transformational leader, by appealing to the intrinsic value-based needs of their constituents, not only accounts for the cross-cultural dimensions of individuals and teams, but is also equipped with (inter)religious knowledge “about the religious roots of those cultures.”¹⁴

According to Aristotle, *phronesis* (φρόνησις), often translated “practical wisdom,” guides virtuous behavior.¹⁵ *Phronesis* is not just wisdom for wisdom’s sake; rather, it emphasizes a particular practical and agency-based dimension. *Phronesis* is “concerned with action,”¹⁶ entails “the ability to deliberate”¹⁷ and act in a manner that is prudent,¹⁸ is “neither a pure science nor an art,”¹⁹ and carries the capacity for one to see what is good not only for themselves but for the common public good as well.²⁰ As a virtue, *phronesis* is developed and cultivated over a lifetime of practice, experience, education, and exposure. It is a practice, a craft, a skillset, an orientation, and more. The emerging framework for IIS pedagogy proposed here suggests that a chief aim emerging among several undergraduate IIS courses in the United States is to facilitate the process of students’ development of interreligious *phronesis*, or practical wisdom for everyday religiously complex contexts. In other words, Bachelor-level courses in the United States increasingly demonstrate a common mission to cultivate interreligious *phronesis* in students in multiple ways and through various learning experiences. They aim at, what I have referred to elsewhere referred to as, interreligious wherewithal, “that virtue of being aware of a potential tension or opportunity in (inter)religious complex situations and having the skill to do

¹¹ “Cultural Competence Toolkit,” Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity website, North Carolina State University, accessed Feb 9, 2022, <https://diversity.ncsu.edu/cultural-competence-toolkit/>.

¹² “Cultural Competence Toolkit.”

¹³ McGraw, “Cross-Cultural Leadership as Interfaith Leadership,” in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches*, 218.

¹⁴ McGraw, “Cross-Cultural Leadership as Interfaith Leadership,” 218.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Martin Ostwald (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), 1144b25.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b22.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a32.

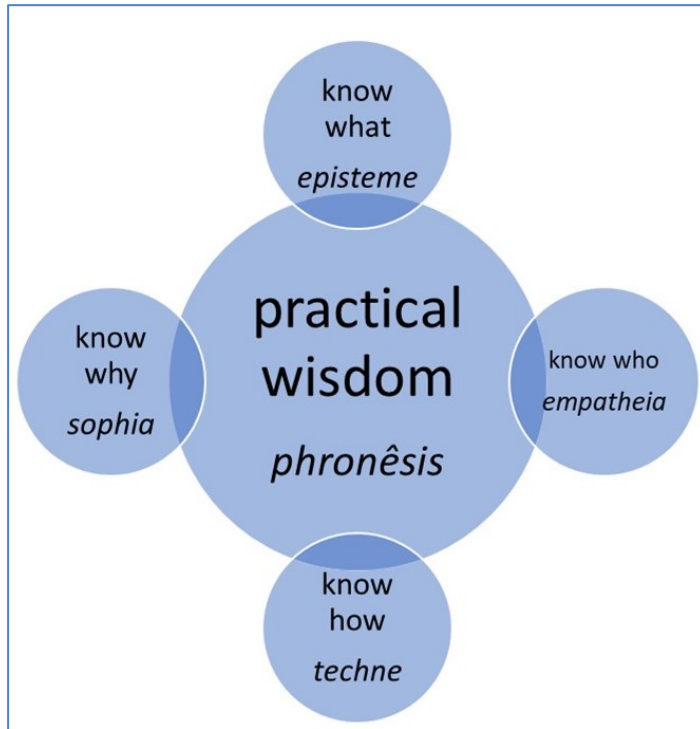
¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a8.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b7, 20.

something constructive about it through thoughtful action, leadership, and motivation of others.”²¹

The operative framework for learning proposed in this article develops students’ interreligious *phronesis*, under which four key pedagogical aims emerge (with corresponding themes identified by Jones and Meyer):



1) **Know What** (*episteme*): to convey or produce *epistemic* knowledge on various topics in various ways (that is, building “Interfaith Literacy and Religious Literacy”)

2) **Know Who** (*empathia*): to foster *empathetic* engagement with people across religious difference or with religious diversity, often through lived or experiential learning (that is, “Experiencing Religious Diversity”)

3) **Know Why** (*sophia*): to impart transcendent wisdom for a deeper understanding of self, world, and life (that is, “Students’ Personal Religious Journeys”)

4) **Know How** (*techne*): to cultivate the craft or technical skillset and competencies necessary for navigating and flourishing in complicated and religiously diverse contexts (that is, “Connecting to Professional Skills”)

Know What aims at conveying or producing *epistemic* knowledge about various topics in various ways. Jones and Meyer report, “among the courses we observed, one thing is constant: the ‘facts’ about religious traditions are considered important—vital even—but not as ends in themselves.”²² The pedagogical aim of “Know What” strongly corresponds to Jones’ and Meyer’s fourth theme “Interfaith Literacy and Religious Literacy.” Imparting basic vital facts, not as ends in themselves but as practical knowledge, is often framed as teaching basic religious literacy. Scholars continue to (re)shape what religious literacy entails and how to discern its value.

²¹ Hans Gustafson, “Interreligious Wherewithal: Cultivating a Leadership Virtue,” *State of Formation*, published Nov. 16, 2017, <https://stateofformation.org/2017/11/interreligious-wherewithal-cultivating-a-leadership-virtue/>.

²² Katherine Janiec Jones and Cassie Meyer, “Interfaith and Interreligious Pedagogies: An Assessment,” in *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, no. 36 (May 2022), 14.

Thought leaders include Adam Dinham,²³ Benjamin Marcus,²⁴ Barbara McGraw,²⁵ Stephen Prothero,²⁶ Diane Moore and Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School (formerly the Religious Literacy Project),²⁷ and the American Academy of Religion.²⁸ Inviting students to acquire knowledge (basic religious literacy) entails reflecting on with whom authority lies with regards to measuring and determining the epistemologically correct or “right” ways of knowing about religion. This question is especially important in cases that involve actors with competing interests or divergent ultimate aims (ranging from respect, tolerance, and pluralism that strive for the common good to disrespect, exclusion, and fear that produce hate and division). A common thread running through several of the definitions of religious literacy proposed by the aforementioned thought leaders aligns with Kevin Minister’s pedagogical focus on “what he calls ‘operative knowledge;’”²⁹ that is, practical knowledge that contributes to the civic welfare of the individual and common good. For Prothero, a religiously literate person has “the ability to understand and use in one’s day-to-day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions—their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives.”³⁰ Marcus adds a layer of lived religion to basic religious literacy by arguing that literacy requires fluency and, as such, “religious fluency requires far more than knowledge of beliefs because religious identities are not necessarily belief-based.”³¹ In other words, it goes beyond basic textbook knowledge or a collection of facts, dates, definitions, and names. The religiously literate person is equipped to navigate the complicated, nuanced, and messy realities of what it means for people and communities to live their religious identities in the contemporary world. McGraw adds a layer of unknowing (epistemic humility) to religious literacy: “Religious literacy is not about knowing every religion—which is impossible—but being well-informed enough generally to know what one needs to find out to be effectively literate for the situation at hand.”³² Eboo Patel similarly references this ability to recognize what one does *not* know and the ability to find out as part of what it means to build “a radar screen for religious diversity.”³³ Religious literacy is not to be confused with the accumulation of information, but reflects comprehension of key underlying principles, facts, and concepts characteristic to the domain of action (in this case,

²³ Adam Dinham and Stephen H. Jones, “Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: An Analysis of Challenges of Religious Faith, and Resources for Meeting them, for University Leaders,” A Report from the Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education Programme (York, UK: 2010), <http://research.gold.ac.uk/3916/>; Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis, “Religious Literacy: Contesting an Idea and Practice,” in *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*, eds. Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2016).

²⁴ Benjamin P. Marcus, “Religious Literacy in American Education,” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Education*, ed. Michael D. Waggoner and Nathan C. Walker (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁵ Barbara A. McGraw, “Toward a Framework for Interfaith Leadership,” *Engaging Pedagogies in Catholic Higher Education* (EPiCHE) vol. 3 (2017), issue 1 of *Interfaith Opportunities for Catholic Higher Education*.

²⁶ Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t* (New York: HarperOne, 2007).

²⁷ Diane L. Moore, “What is Religious Literacy,” *Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School*, accessed Feb 9, 2022 <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/what-we-do/our-approach/what-religious-literacy>.

²⁸ “Religious Literacy Guidelines for College Students,” American Academy of Religion, accessed Dec 5, 2018, , <https://www.aarweb.org/about/religious-literacy-guidelines-for-college-students>.

²⁹ Kevin Minister, professor at Shenandoah University, in Jones and Meyer, 26.

³⁰ Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 15.

³¹ Marcus, “Religious Literacy in American Education,” 60.

³² McGraw, “Toward a Framework for Interfaith Leadership,” 6.

³³ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon, 2016), 135.

religiously diverse contexts).³⁴ All of these layers increasingly influence IIS instructors’ pedagogical approaches.

Some distinguish between religious literacy and interfaith/interreligious literacy, the former referencing a lived and textbook approach to religion, while the latter complementarily emphasizes the interaction between and among diverse religious communities and individuals. Hence, interreligious literacy resonates more with Minister’s “operative knowledge” than it does with basic religious literacy. Interreligious/interfaith literacy, one may argue, goes further to break down barriers and address the conflicts and misunderstandings that result from the reality of religious diversity.³⁵ Moyaert summarizes this sentiment, arguing that interreligious learning is “not focused on textbook knowledge about different religious traditions, but rather on promoting interreligious literacy. The goal is to equip students with the necessary competencies to address religious diversity.”³⁶ Fostering interreligious/interfaith literacy beyond religious literacy may stem from the common concern over the (in)efficacy of the latter³⁷ to operate constructively in professional settings, “bring social benefits or cure societal ills,”³⁸ or prove successful in cultivating engaged citizens working in service of the common public good.

Popular learning experiences utilized by IIS instructors include site visits to places of worship, religious communities, and sites of sacred significance. Some instructors cleverly require students to visit multiple sites or communities affiliated with the same religious tradition to expose the complexity and internal diversity evident in that tradition. Several instructors invite guest speakers from various traditions into their classrooms to provide a lived religious approach to building their students’ (inter)religious literacy. Other learning experiences identified by Jones and Meyer that contribute to cultivating “Know What” include inviting students to participate in religious practices (as appropriate), to complete ethnographic and interview projects, and to analyze case-studies as “content sieves” or filter tools to “to sift through the information that students will need to learn in order to understand the dynamics of the case study.”³⁹

Know Who aims to foster *empathetic* engagement with real people across religious difference or with religious diversity, often through lived or experiential learning. This aim aligns well with the first theme identified by Jones and Meyer: “Experiencing Religious Diversity,” or inviting students to “directly engage with or experience religious diversity first-hand.”⁴⁰ Similarly,

³⁴ Michael D. Mumford, Stephen J. Zaccaro, Francis D. Harding, T. Own Jacobs, and Edwin A. Fleishman, “Leadership Skills for a Changing World: Solving Complex Social Problems,” *Leadership Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2000): 20.

³⁵ However, there are claims that teaching religious literacy in secondary schools promotes understanding and tolerance while influencing religious bullying, positively and negatively. See W.Y. Alice Chan, *Teaching Religious Literacy to Combat Religious Bullying: Insights from North American Secondary Schools* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

³⁶ Marianne Moyaert, “On the Role of Ritual in Interfaith Education,” *Religious Education* 113, no. 1 (2018): 59.

³⁷ See Tenzan Eaghll’s challenge to the “cliché” (or false platitude) that “learning about religion leads to tolerance” in “Learning about Religion Leads to Tolerance,” in *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* eds. Bard Stoddard and Craig Martin (London: Bloomsburg, 2017). See also Johannes C. Wolfart, “‘Religious Literacy’: Some Considerations and Reservations,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (2022): 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-bja10074>.

³⁸ Johannes C. Wolfart, “‘Religious Literacy’: Some Considerations and Reservations,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (2022): abstract, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-bja10074>.

³⁹ Jones and Meyer, 23.

⁴⁰ Jones and Meyer, 15.

“Know Who” aligns with the third and seventh themes: “Dialogue and Deliberation, In and Out of the Classroom,” and “Personal Reflection and /or Self-Disclosure from the Instructor.” Common learning experiences utilized by instructors include site visits, guest speakers, participation in religious practices, role-playing, dialogue training and exercises, and ethnographic projects and interviews. Some instructors devise site visit assignments or ethnographic engagement projects that require students to return to the same site or community multiple times over the course of the semester in order to develop deeper ties, commitment, practices, and relationships with the host community. For instance, if the same student attends the local Zen Meditation Center on a regular basis throughout the semester, deeper learning and relationships are likely to result and, in turn, one hopes, greater empathetic engagement. Rose Aslan, an instructor showcased in Jones’ and Meyer’s study, successfully devised role-playing exercises to “reflect real interreligious conflict” such as “taking on characters and positions around the Park 51 Muslim Community Center.”⁴¹ Such an exercise aims to build empathy, a common theme found in the study. Jones and Meyers remarked that empathy and improved communication skills were two among three central foci that most of the instructors continually emphasized. This was most evident in Deanna Womack’s course, which stressed “knowing how to love your Muslim neighbor” over “knowing about Islam.”⁴² Dialogue exercises, similar to role-playing, invite students into empathetic communication experiences in real time and with real people. These dialogue exercises may be complemented well by mini-trainings in various dialogue methods (e.g., Nonviolent Communication, Sid Brown’s “Careful Conversations”⁴³). For example, periodically I assign students to complete Soliya Global Connect,⁴⁴ an eight-week live online program in which students are placed in small groups with university students all over the world to engage in facilitated dialogue about various contemporary global and cultural issues. Students are trained in the basics of the Nonviolent Communication method prior to their Global Connect sessions, thus providing a tool to utilize in the dialogue experience. Ethnographic projects, immersive participatory exercises, role-playing games, modeling dialogue techniques, and interviews all involve direct interaction with real people. They offer optimal opportunities for empathetically engaging with real people in the pursuit of “Know Who.”

Know Why aims to impart transcendent wisdom (*sophia*) for a deeper understanding of self, world, and life. This aim strongly aligns with the sixth theme identified by Jones and Meyer: “Students’ Personal Religious Journeys.” The second, third, and seventh themes—“Case Studies Snapshots,” “Dialogue and Deliberation,” and “Personal Reflection”—also significantly contribute to the aim of developing “Know Why.” Commonly utilized learning experiences include storytelling, spiritual autobiography,⁴⁵ vocational discernment and meaningful work reflection exercises,⁴⁶ and journaling, but also the previously mentioned site visits, lived

⁴¹ Jones and Meyer, 19.

⁴² Jones and Meyer, 27.

⁴³ Jones and Meyer, 21.

⁴⁴ Soliya Global Connect is “an online cross-cultural education program integrated into existing post-secondary curricula in more than 200 universities across 35 nations, providing a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others on important socio-political issues and crucial 21st Century skills, including critical thinking, communication, and digital media literacy” (“Connect Program,” *Soliya.net*, accessed Oct 5, 202, <https://soliya.net/connect-program>).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Matthew Maruggi and Martha E. Stortz, “Teaching the ‘Most Beautiful Stories’: Narrative Reflection as a Signature Pedagogy for Interfaith Studies,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies*, 85–97.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Hans Gustafson, “Interreligious Studies and Personal Changemaking Pedagogy for Leadership and the Common Good: The My Story Assignment,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 24 (2021): 42-48.

encounter, dialogue, and ethnographic studies. They all significantly address common student learning outcomes identified by instructors under the rubric of developing students’ ability to reflect on personal worldviews and ways of living. Jones and Meyers report consistency among the courses they observed in the professors’ acknowledgment of the importance of IIS pedagogy to provide students the opportunity to reflect on their own social location, intersecting identities and influences, and their own attitudes about religion.⁴⁷ Rationale for inviting students into self-exploration, self-knowledge⁴⁸ and self-discovery includes, in-part, the value of these learning experiences as foundational aspects for effective leadership development⁴⁹ for community, civic, and professional environments. The greater degree to which a student is self-aware, the more equipped they will be able to leverage their strengths, avoid their shortcomings, and lead others. To “know thyself”—about which Aristotle alleged serves as the beginning of wisdom (*sophia*)—in such a manner is facilitated not only through self-reflective autobiographical personal inventorying⁵⁰ and storytelling exercises, but also—and perhaps more vitally—through lived encounter and dialogue with others who constructively illuminate and reflect one’s selfhood back to them (e.g., see Hickey and Suárez, “Meeting Others, Seeing Myself”).⁵¹ Hence, Jones and Meyer discovered that students in the courses they examined “articulated the purpose or value of site visits primarily in terms of an opportunity for their own self-discovery.”⁵²

Know How aims to cultivate the craft or technical skillset and competencies necessary for navigating and flourishing in complicated and religiously diverse contexts. This aim aligns with the fifth theme identified by Jones and Meyer, “Connecting to Professional Skills,” and is most significantly developed by the second and third themes, “Case Studies Snapshots” and “Dialogue and Deliberation” respectively. Moyaert observes, “Whether one becomes a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, or a businesswoman working for a multinational, the added value of knowing how to navigate culturally and religiously diverse worlds is clear and employers are looking for people who have experience of solving ‘problems with people whose views differ from their own.’”⁵³ Patel, in an interview about his personal vocation and interfaith vision, suggests that the organization he founded and directs, the Interfaith Youth Core, is “not about opening your dairy

⁴⁷ Jones and Meyer, 23.

⁴⁸ Jenn Lindsay argues “cultivation of self-awareness also falls into the ‘knowledge’ pursuit of intercultural and interreligious competence, as increased self-awareness is also knowledge-building process, focus inwardly” (Lindsay, “Growing Interreligious and Intercultural Competence in the Classroom,” 27).

⁴⁹ For example, “Authentic Leadership,” is among the several emerging leadership models and theories of the past two decades that “draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self development.” See F. Luthans and B.J. Avolio, “Authentic leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach,” in *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, eds. K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, and R. E. Quinn (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), 243.

⁵⁰ Similarly, Jenn Lindsay reports the utility of learning experiences in religious studies classes to “help students live a ‘life examined’ as they determine their own personality types, rate their own empathy tendencies and levels of personal resiliency, assess their moral foundation and attachment styles, and understand their personal approach to conflict. Knowledge of self and these theoretical tools lays a foundation for the broadening of Skills and Attitudes” (Lindsay, “Growing Interreligious and Intercultural Competence in the Classroom,” 29).

⁵¹ For example, Wakoh Shannon Hickey and Margarita M. W. Suárez, “Meeting Other, Seeing Myself: Experimental Pedagogies in Interfaith Studies,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies*, 108–23.

⁵² Jones and Meyer, 15.

⁵³ Moyaert, “Interfaith Learning in Academic Spaces,” 38, citing Hart Research Associates, “Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success,” *Association of American Colleges and Universities* (2015), 4, www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf.

to the world ... [rather it,] like learning how to play jazz or do surgery, is about becoming very very good at a particular craft, which takes a great deal of study.”⁵⁴ Developing one’s craft requires time, study, practice, and experience. It involves developing technical skills and building interreligious competencies. It takes practice, study, experience, and exposure. For Patel, craft is among “those seemingly intangible qualities that separate excellent interfaith leaders from one.”⁵⁵ It “is not just about commitment to a particular endeavor; it’s about knowing the things – big and little – you need to focus on to achieve excellence.”⁵⁶ Jones and Meyer assert, “If interfaith and interreligious studies has something like a ‘signature’ pedagogy, the case study method is arguably it.”⁵⁷ Influenced by the accessible and well written interreligious case studies designed as a “signature pedagogy” of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University,⁵⁸ several IIS instructors utilize them to offer real-world scenarios, promote agency, and develop practical skills and decision making. The case-study method, according to the Harvard Business School, rests on the premise that “the best way to learn a skill is to practice in a simulation-type process.”⁵⁹ Case-method pedagogical approaches are also common in the study of law with an eye to forming moral judgement and practical wisdom.⁶⁰ Case study exercises invite students to personally reflect on to respond to real-world complex situations for which there are often few good solutions (only bad and worse options), and determine what assets, strengths, and skills they bring to the situation in working towards an outcome. The cases demand action for situations in which sitting neutrally on the sidelines is not an option. They promote agency to respond to messy problems for which even having all the relevant facts and figures remains insufficient. Unlike multiple-choice or short-answer problems for which formulae exist to calculate the proper outcome or “where the correct answer is obtained by a well-structured path to solution and is unique among all of the possible answers,” case studies present ill-structured problems that involve arbitrating among competing interests, have no clear path to solution, and can only be resolved through the application of practical wisdom (*phronesis*).⁶¹ Case studies not only promote the development of practical skills, but also develop a civic orientation in service of the common public good, an attitude proclaimed by Jones and Meyer with respect to what they observed with instructors utilizing case studies. For these instructors, case studies are “not ‘just’ about skills and action, but are also about the kinds of analysis, critical thinking, and development of a civic orientation that are arguably central to the project of liberal education.”⁶² Among the many pedagogical approaches and learning experiences discussed in this article, case study analyses (and direct interreligious encounter) contribute most directly to the development of *phronesis*, which, according to Timothy Furlan, “is primarily about performing a particular social practice well such as being a good friend, parent, doctor, teacher, or citizen and that means figuring out the right way to do the right thing in a concrete set of circumstances, with a particular person, at

⁵⁴ Eboo Patel, interviewed by Erin Van Laningham and Hannah Schell, “Charisma and Craft: A Conversation with Eboo Patel,” *Callings*, podcast audio, Jan 28, 2021, 00:45:00, <https://netvue.buzzsprout.com/1282658/7518523-charisma-and-craft-a-conversation-with-eboo-patel>.

⁵⁵ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 156.

⁵⁶ Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 162.

⁵⁷ Jones and Meyer, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Ellie Pierce, “Using the Case Studies Method in Interfaith Studies Classrooms,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies*, 84.

⁵⁹ Pierce, “Using the Case Studies Method in Interfaith Studies Classrooms,” 77.

⁶⁰ For example, Barry Schwartz and Kenneth E. Sharpe, “Putting the Judgement Back into Judging” and “The Ethical Lawyer,” in *Practical Wisdom: The Way to Do the Right Thing* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 235–51.

⁶¹ Sternberg, “Where Have All the Flowers of Wisdom Gone?” 3–4.

⁶² Jones and Meyer, 19.

a particular time, and so on.”⁶³ Jones’ and Meyer’s fifth theme emerges clearly here: “Connecting to Professional Skills.” Developing practical wisdom through case study analysis and simulation is “not musing about how someone else in a hypothetical situation ought to act. It is about ‘what am I to do?’ right here and now, with this person. A practically wise person doesn’t merely speculate or theorize about what is proper, crucially, he or she actually does it.”⁶⁴ Such a view, one may argue, provides a proper aim for which the Bachelor-level IIS course might aim.

Interreligious Practical Wisdom for Everyday Living and Engagement

IIS pedagogues will continue to debate and improve the precision of language to describe the essential aims of their pedagogy. Among the live issues is the question of articulating the ultimate aims of an IIS curricular program. Possibilities that enjoy contemporary currency include interfaith leadership, interreligious skillset, interfaith literacy, interfaith craft, interreligious competency, interreligious wherewithal, and so on. This article proposes *phronesis*—interfaith *phronesis*—as a possibility. Put more directly, this article points to the significant trend of IIS courses to develop interreligious practical wisdom as a virtue for everyday living and engagement.

Nonetheless, in addition to the insights and questions posed by Jones and Meyer, several further questions and unresolved tensions remain. For one, ought the tension between activist and descriptive approaches to IIS pedagogy and research be resolved, or is there benefit to living with the tension it produces?⁶⁵ Related to this is the question of acknowledging the reasonable hesitancy among several instructors, especially those teaching at public secular universities, to include any curricular experiences involving “leadership” and “vocational” development that may be interpreted as religious (Christian), spiritual, theological, or confessional training. For similar reasons, hesitancy also surfaces in the caution among instructors to fully embrace the sixth theme identified by Jones and Meyer, “Students’ Personal Religious Journeys.” Meaningful work,⁶⁶ and professional skill and competency development may be adequate alternative depending on the academic context of the institution, program, and course. Jones’ and Meyer’s study focuses predominantly on Bachelor level courses (with one exception), however several of its themes apply to professional Masters and Certificate programs. Only a handful of such programs currently exist, however there may be a proliferating boom on the horizon of institutions offering professional certificates to working professionals to update, or fill-in-the-gaps of, their (inter)religious literacy and leadership competencies for the increasingly religiously diverse workplaces of tomorrow. Finally, what are the limitations and shortcomings of the *phronesis* model in its reliance on Aristotelian virtue ethics as a framework for learning? Does the framework import any concepts or terms fraught with counterproductive baggage? Does its categories and concepts limit the broader scope of IIS courses and instructors? Does it create suffocating blind spots that shield obstacles and block innovation?

⁶³ Timothy J. Furlan, “Cultivating Practical Wisdom,” *Harvard Medical School Bioethics Journal*, published January 1, 2020, <https://bioethics.hms.harvard.edu/journal/furlan-editors-letter>.

⁶⁴ Furlan, “Cultivating Practical Wisdom.”

⁶⁵ See Hans Gustafson, “Sparring with Spider Silk: Models for the Relationship between Interreligious Studies and the Interfaith Movement,” in *The Georgetown Companion to Interreligious Studies*, ed. Lucinda Mosher (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2022), 32–40.

⁶⁶ Christopher Michaelson, “Teaching Meaningful Work,” *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 6 (2009):43-67.

Since European and American universities are, as Moyaert observes, undergoing “an interreligious turn” in their embrace of IIS curricula, whether they emphasize curricular interreligious competency development and interreligious studies or cocurricular interfaith engagement programming, both Theology and Religious Studies departments are undergoing transformation as well. Slowly blurring, combining, and sometimes discarding the entrenched partition between the study of religion and theology, IIS programs and curricula, especially those that emphasize professional and civic skillsets, “help to transcend the boundaries between religious and theology, which prevailed under pressure of a secularist ethic.”⁶⁷ If faculty increasingly agree that a primary aim of IIS curricula is to equip students to become flourishing, responsible, and civically-minded citizens with the skills and competencies to sensitively navigate religious diversity, then might the framework proposed here complement existing pedagogical models to serve the students of tomorrow?



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⁶⁷ Moyaert, “Interfaith Learning in Academic Spaces,” 41.