

MISSION STATEMENT

Oakland University Center for Religious Understanding

Oakland University's Center for Religious Understanding (CRU) is an integral component of a metropolitan university located in the richly diverse area of Southeast Michigan. The Center promotes the importance of understanding the multiplicity of faith traditions and the ways of forging constructive linkages with them. CRU contributes to the distinctive educational experiences of OU students, furthers faculty and student research and scholarship, and is a partner with a variety of constituencies, both on-campus and throughout the region.

The mission of the Center for Religious Understanding is fourfold:

- *To collect and organize resources for the interdisciplinary exploration of religion in public life at Oakland University;
- *To investigate religious identity and its role in public life through inquiry in the social and natural sciences and humanities and through engagement with the creative and performing arts;
- *To facilitate dialogue around the interface of religion and public issues by establishing associations between the Center and its fellow academic units at Oakland, interested area interlocutor-collaborators, and individual religious communities; and
- *To expand religious literacy both on the Oakland University campus and in the wider community.

1

CRU will work to develop donor partnerships and pair financial resources with interdisciplinary research and creative expression at the intersection of religion and public life. The Center will organize grant writing workshops for students and faculty, provide advice on the construction of research programs, and oversee compliance with IRB guidelines. The Center has a particular interest in promoting collaboration in research and publication and creative endeavor between faculty members and between faculty and students across disciplines.

2

CRU's commitment to inquiry and engagement at the junction of religion and public life must begin with the basic question of personal identity. Identity names the complex relation that persons have with their communities and contexts, regarding: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, language, and religion. Understanding "who we are" when in public means navigating this confluence through the mediation of similarities and the taking seriously of differences.

The first research project undertaken by the Center will investigate the identity of students at Oakland University, with an emphasis on the manner in which religious commitments (or lack thereof) impact personal identification. Through the development, implementation, and analysis of surveys, CRU will work to provide insight about the impact of religion/spirituality at Oakland University on both student self-perception and the life that students share in common. CRU will publish this research and host collaborative conversations with faculty, students, and administrators, and the wider community. Findings will help refine course offerings and projects to enhance the relevancy of religious studies on campus.

3

CRU will endeavor to build partnerships between Oakland University, donors, public officials, community leaders, religious organizations, and faith communities. The Center will further this by: creating an advisory council constituted by members of the aforementioned groups; organizing events to promote dialogue about similarities, differences, and shared challenges; and fostering opportunities for cooperative action in the context of the major ethical and political issues of our day. With this broad agenda in mind, the Center explores specific insights for conflict resolution as well as an articulation of common human purposes through in-depth religious dialogue and inquiry.

4

CRU is committed to enhancing general religious literacy through the examination of historical, social, and cultural contexts of each religious tradition. The Center will complement Oakland University's academic courses, seminars, student projects, internships, and study abroad opportunities. The Center will promote literacy in the wider community by providing speakers, teachers and other resources upon request. Further, the center will facilitate dialogue among adherents of varying faith traditions.

The Center will sponsor and direct an annual theme, and will seek student, donor and community engagement. These themes can be incorporated into academic courses and in such public events as lectures, panel discussions, and film festivals, to name a few. Topics relevant to the study of religion are seemingly endless, and may include: Religion and Oppression; Justice; Non-violence; Inequality; Human Rights; Religion and Democracy; Religion and Sexuality; Religion and Science; the Environment; Human Origins; Religion and Healing; Religion and Identity; Harmony and Adversity; and more.

Finally, the Center will serve as a resource for mass media inquiries about religion. The Center's mission of religious literacy extends to the public sphere and active life through outreach.