



Hartford International
UNIVERSITY FOR RELIGION & PEACE

Iden

IP-613 Identity and Otherness in Religious Communities

Hartford International University Fall 2026

Course Modality and Meeting:	F2F Sept. 2, 23, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, 18 9:00 am – 4:00 pm Location: Room 205
Instructor contact information:	Email: anorton@hartfordinternational.edu Message or WhatsApp (text only): 626-399-5128 Course Q+A Discussion (posted in” Introductory” module) Office: 80 Sherman Street, second floor Office hours: 30 minutes after all class sessions and by appointment

Course Description

There is a tendency within individuals and societies to organize and collectively define themselves along dimensions of difference and sameness. This course uses the framework of “otherness” and “belonging” to explore how othering becomes structured and embedded within religious communities. In other words, what are the dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality within our own religious communities? We will use an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and dialogical approach to examine essential concepts such as individual and group identity formation, expression, and boundaries; the dual sides of social cohesion and internal conflict; prejudice and power within religious communities; dealing with the emotional and social costs of leading justice-oriented change; and how identity, power, and privilege varies across contexts. In addition to investigating these forces that contribute to othering, we will also identify the interventions that may mitigate some of these forces, turning toward sustainable solutions that address othering through the use of case studies and structured reading groups.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Investigate the dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality within religious communities.
2. Evaluate how religions help people promote peace or harm, both within and between communities.

3. Construct case studies that 1) investigate how othering becomes structured and embedded in religious communities and 2) identify interventions that may mitigate these forces, using intersectional, interdisciplinary, and dialogical approaches.
4. Develop the willingness and capacity to critique the traditions and movements one is a part of, including shared stances toward the other.
5. Assess how their social location influences their motivations, mindsets, biases, and reactions.

Program Requirements and Learning Outcomes

Overall Program Mission: To foster the creativity and agency of emerging peacebuilders. To equip them to use religion as a catalyst for peacebuilding and to pursue peaceful change in religious and interreligious settings.

Program Learning Outcomes:

1. Develop the willingness and capacity to critique the traditions and movements one is a part of, including shared stances toward the other. (MAP)
2. Illustrate how religions help people promote peace or harm, both within and between communities.(MAP)
3. Investigate your own inner world, including your motivations for participating in peacebuilding work, the mindsets you bring to conflict, your loyalties and biases, your reactions to complexity and ambiguity, and important components of your identity. (MAP)
4. Assess how your faith tradition and culture influence your motivations, mindsets, biases, and reactions. (MAP) / Articulate ways in which one's feelings, attitudes, values, and assumptions affect professional practice. (MAC)
5. Be introduced to the interdisciplinary study of contemporary religious communities analyzing the impact of local, social and political contexts on beliefs and practices. (MAIRS)
6. Articulate a conceptual understanding of group dynamics and organizational behavior. (MAC)

Course Reading

Required Texts

powell, john a, and Rachelle Galloway-Popotas. 2024. *The power of bridging : how to build a world where we all belong*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True Inc.

Choose one:

Ahmed, Nawaaz. 2021. *Radiant fugitives : a novel*. First hardcover edition. Berkeley, California: Counterpoint.

Brooks, Geraldine. 2011. *Caleb's crossing*. New York: Viking.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2004. *Purple hibiscus : a novel*. London and New York: Fourth Estate.

All other required reading will be available for download and/or viewing in Canvas.

Recommended Texts

See weekly Canvas modules “Explore” sections

Course Expectations

The basic assumption of this course is that learning results from a continuing process of discourse. Within the course, there are both opportunities and responsibilities. In this course, you have the opportunity to learn. Your responsibilities are to maximize your learning from the course, to maximize and assist in the learning of your classmates, and to apply what you learn to your context and setting. To take advantage of the opportunity and to meet your responsibilities, you are to:

1. Prepare thoroughly for each week in accordance with the course calendar and instructor’s request—come to live lectures or forum discussions having completed reading and other assignments and ready to learn, asking/answering questions and participating in discussions;
2. Adhere to deadlines and timetables established by the instructor;
3. Participate fully and constructively in all course activities and discussions as scheduled;
4. Display appropriate courtesy to all involved in the course (courteous behavior specifically entails communicating in a manner that respects, and is sensitive to, the cultural and other individual differences at Hartford International University) including giving each person who is speaking or each forum posting your undivided attention; and
5. Provide constructive feedback to the instructor regarding the course. I want to know how things are going for you in this class. If something is not working, tell me! I value your feedback and want to make this both an enjoyable and challenging learning experience.

The instructor will:

1. Provide course content that is pertinent and based on sound research and theology;
2. Provide consultation, advisement, and/or problem-solving time for students;
3. Provide clear instructions regarding assignments and expectations;
4. Honor and respect students;
5. Provide and consider constructive evaluations and feedback; and
6. Return assignments in a timely manner (usually within one week).

Course Requirements, Assignments, and Means of Assessment

Group Case Study (25%)

Each student will participate in a group with 3-4 others to create and present a case study for discussion. The case study itself should provide a “problem” that relates to religious communities and belonging/othering. Students will use Maire Dugan’s “Nested Concept of Theory” as a framework for constructing the case. The case study content is due **3 days before** the scheduled group presentation.

Students will meet in their groups in Week One to begin to discuss ideas for choosing the topic and construction of their case study.

Each case study will include the following components:

- 1) The write-up of the case study (~900 words) that includes the following components (20% of the grade):
 - a. A timeline of events
 - b. A summary of the case, that includes the following:
 - i. A summary of the case that clearly identifies the boundaries between insiders/outsiders and the criteria for full belonging
 - ii. Identification of the key stakeholders
 - iii. Analysis of the issues driving the conflict, using the nested theory approach:
 1. Relational conflict
 2. Subsystem level structural conflict
 3. System-level structural Conflict
 - c. At least 3 discussion questions arising from the case, with at least one question focused on formulating inclusive ways of negotiating conflict to promote or lead toward greater belonging.
- 2) Accompanying background materials needed to better understand the context (i.e. demographic and historical summaries, videos on the situation, press coverage of the events, etc.).
- 3) A brief presentation of the case study to the class (10 minutes) and leading the discussion on the case's identified questions (40 minutes) (10% of the grade)

Participation (30%)

The participation grade will be determined based on the combined instructor and student self-evaluations; at the end of the course, students will evaluate their own participation and preparation for learning.

Quizzes

The class will include several low-stakes quizzes to help students and the professor identify what they know and where they may need to put more focused attention.

Case Study Discussions

Each case study presentation will include two online discussion forums. The initial discussion is for general Questions and Answers (Q+A) about the context and setting of the case and the second discussion will provide a chance for small groups to formulate possible actions in response to the case. The final in-class discussion will build on these initial online discussions.

Structured Readings Groups:

Each classroom session will include 45-60 minutes of discussion in structured discussion groups. In the reading groups, students will have a specified role that engages with the required course

content for that week (readings, videos, and other media). The structured reading groups are a central component of the course, designed to facilitate and inspire deep learning. Each student will be given a different role in the discussion, which will rotate weekly.

Structured Reading Group Roles:

Discussion Leader

- Develop 2-3 questions that highlight the main points of the assigned texts, to help group members understand and think critically about the main points of the text/media.
- Facilitate group discussion: keep the discussion on track and make sure everyone participates.
- *Discussion Post:* your questions for the group, along with your own answers to the questions

Passage Analyst

- Choose and summarize several passages or excerpts that you consider particularly insightful, compelling, or challenging. These passages may give key information, back up the information given, or summarize key information. They may also be passages that are controversial, contradictory with other material, or just be something you find interesting.
- Create a plan to discuss and analyze these passages with the group.
- Play a key role in encouraging others to engage the text meaningfully.
- *Discussion Post:* include the passage/excerpts page numbers and a brief summary of these passages. Also identify what you found particularly insightful.

Concept Mapper

- Read through the discussion posts and look up any concepts or ideas that group members found unfamiliar and then explain them to the group.
- *Discussion Post:* Free Week! You do not need to post in advance this week.

Creative Connector

- Make at least one connection between the reading group material and other social, cultural, political, or economic ideas related to peacebuilding. These outside ideas include, but are not limited to, articles from credible media sources; TV shows; literature; movies; artwork; or a cultural, social, political, or economic idea from another course.
- *Discussion Post:* Identify the connections you are making, giving background information for those who may be unfamiliar with the source and context of your connection idea. Demonstrate how you find relevance between the course reading and the outside idea.

Intersectional Activist

- Think critically about systems of oppression (such as sexism, racism, xenophobia, etc.) and explore the relationships between the week's content and justice, working toward becoming co-creators of a more just and peaceful world.
- *Discussion Post:* 1) Identify areas where the content of the week relates to and is sharpened by attention to intersectionality (including identifying gaps), and 2) Contemplate how the week's content may help one might take small yet courageous steps to foster concrete practices for social transformation in your own communities.

Novel Reflection Paper (15%)

This assignment is a written reflection paper where the student applies key course concepts and learning through reflection and analysis of a novel. Based on the student's chosen novel (see required reading), they will join a reading group with 3-4 other students to explore course themes through engagement with a novel, cultivating a sociological perspective through engagement with a fictional story that relates to the course themes of belonging, othering, and religion. The reading groups will meet twice during the course during the weekly session (Module 3 and Module 4). The discussions will provide the foundation for the written assignment that is due Week 5 (1,000 word paper).

MAP Capstone Positionality Statement or Positionality Reflection (15%)

Each student will revise their capstone project's positionality statement or a positionality reflection paper in light of their primary work and context (for non-MAP students), in light of the discussions and learnings from the course (1000-2500 words).

Reflective Journal (15%)

Students will submit 3 reflective journal papers, each about 400 words, responding to the specific topics and themes from each course module. Students will reflect on how the material covered in this class material helps you make meaning of your own experiences with belonging, identity, and otherness and within the communities to whom you are accountable.

Reflective practice is a habit of master learners. Those who do not critique their own performances regularly, evaluating and re-evaluating how their daily actions are shaped by their values, preferences, and perspectives will never be aware of their own strengths (so as to capitalize on these), weaknesses (so as to improve), or interests (so as to sustain themselves). Reflection gives meaning to experience; it turns experience into practice, links past and present experiences, and prepares the individual for future practice.

Each journal entry should reflect on at least 3 of the following, related to the module topics:

- describe your experience/action with the module theme
- evaluate your actions in light of the learnings/research from the course
- identify the motivations, values, or assumptions that drive your own action or the action of others;
- place your choices in context of some larger theory or pattern;
- conceive how your judgment/actions in the future might be affected by this theme and reflection.

Course Calendar

Module One (August 31-September 23): Religion, Otherness, and Belonging: A Socio-Psychological Understanding

Reading + Content:

- Content in Canvas Module One
- <http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/the-problem-of-othering/>
- Yukich: Boundary Work in Inclusive Religious Groups
- Dugan's "Nested Theory of Conflict"
- Powell + Galloway Popotas: preface, Chp 1-5
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2004. "Is Religion the Problem?" *The Hedgehog Review* 6 (1): 21-33.
- Wellman, James K., and Kyoko Tokuno. 2004. "Is Religious Violence Inevitable?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43.
- Read first third of chosen novel
 - *Radiant Fugitives* pp. 1-122
 - *Caleb's Crossing* Part 1
 - *Purple Hibiscus* pp. 1-107

Assignments:

- Meet for class September 2, 9am -12pm, 1pm-4pm
- Engage Reading + Content
- Review Maire Dugan's *Nested Theory of Conflict* and complete the Quiz #1 (due January 29)
- Prepare for Novel Reading Group Activities
- Prepare for Structured Reading Group role
- Meet for class September 23, 9am -12pm, 1pm-4pm

Module Two (September 24-October 7): Intergroup contact theory, Group threat theory, and Discrimination

Reading + Content:

- Content in Canvas Module 2
- Kanol, Eylem. 2021. "Explaining Unfavorable Attitudes Toward Religious Out-Groups Among Three Major Religions." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 60 (3): 590-610.
- Review Case Study #1 Materials
- Read second third of chosen novel
 - *Radiant Fugitives* pp. 123-247
 - *Caleb's Crossing* Part 2
 - *Purple Hibiscus* pp. 108-207

Assignments:

February 25

- Prepare for Novel Reading Group Activities
- Prepare for Structured Reading Group role
- Meet for class October 7, 9am -12 pm, 1pm-4pm

Module Three (October 8-November 4): Bias, privilege, difference, and the reality of power

Reading + Content:

- [Racism and the Narrative of Biological Inevitability](#)
- [Complete Harvard's Implicit Association Test](#)
- Powell + Galloway Popotas: Chp 6, Chp 7, Chp 8
- Review Case Study #2 Materials
- Complete reading chosen novel
 - *Radiant Fugitives* pp. 248-368
 - *Caleb's Crossing* Part 3
 - *Purple Hibiscus* pp. 208-307

Assignments:

October 19

- Case Study #1: Group Submit Case Materials + Presentation (video)

October 26

- Case Study #1: Context Discussion Forum

November 2

- Case Study #1: Small Group Recommendations Discussion Forum
- Submit Reflection Paper #2

November 4

- Meet for class November 4, 9am -12pm, 1pm-4pm (guest lecture: Grego Pena Camprubi)
- Case Study #1 Group Discussion (in class)
- Prepare for Structured Reading Group role
- Prepare for Novel Reading Group Activities

Module Four (November 5-18): Systems of privilege and religion

Reading + Content:

- Content in Module 4
- Powell + Galloway Popotas: Chp. 9

Assignments

November 9

- Case Study #2: Group Submit Case Materials and Presentation

November 12

- Case Study #2: Context Discussion Forum

November 16

- Case Study #2: Small Group Recommendations Discussion Forum

November 18

- Meet for class November 18, 9am -12pm, 1pm-4pm

Module Five (November 19-December 16): Final Assignments

Assignments:

November 20

- Submit Novel Reflection Paper

December 3

- Submit Positionality Statement (due) d

December 10

- Submit Reflection Paper #3
- Submit Participation self-assessment quiz

Academic Policies and Grading

Accommodations

For students who could benefit from writing assistance, or to request accommodations, please contact Eamon Ormseth, the Student Services Coordinator (eormseth@hartfordinternational.edu).

Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.

Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Faculty will report all instances of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean will then collect documented details of the case and advance any recommendations for further action to the Academic Policy Committee. Through this process the situation will be reviewed and any additional penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.

For clarity as to what constitutes plagiarism, the following description is provided:

1. Word for word plagiarism:

- a. the submission of another person's work as one's own;
 - b. the submission of a commercially prepared paper;
 - c. the submission of work from a source which is not acknowledged by a footnote or other specific reference in the paper itself;
 - d. the submission of any part of another person's work without proper use of quotation marks.
2. Plagiarism by paraphrase:
 - a. mere re-arrangement of another person's works and phrases does not make them your own and also constitutes plagiarism;
 - b. paraphrasing another person's words, ideas, and information without acknowledging the original source from which you took them is also plagiarism.
3. See Part II of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (7th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007) for an explanation of the proper ways to acknowledge the work of others and to avoid plagiarism.
4. Reuse of your own work: Coursework submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course. While technically not plagiarism, this type of infraction will be treated in the same manner as plagiarism and will be subject to the same penalties. If you are using small amounts of material from a previous submitted work, that work should be referenced appropriately. When a student is writing their final program requirement (paper, project or thesis) it may be appropriate, with their advisor's permission, to include portions of previously submitted materials if properly referenced.
5. You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty. Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways will receive a failing grade and will need to be resubmitted. The use of generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) is permitted in this course for the following activities:
 - Brainstorming and refining your ideas;
 - Fine tuning your research questions;
 - Finding information on your topic;
 - Drafting an outline to organize your thoughts; and
 - Checking grammar and style (e.g. using grammarly)
 - Using machine translation of text (e.g. using DeepL).

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Impersonating you in classroom contexts, such as by using the tool to compose discussion board prompts assigned to you or content that you put into a Zoom chat.
 - Completing group work that your group has assigned to you, unless it is mutually agreed upon that you may utilize the tool.
 - Writing a draft of a writing assignment.
- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments.

When in doubt about permitted AI query usage, please ask for clarification.

Add/Drop Deadline

Students can drop the course without academic or financial penalty if they drop the course before the drop deadline.

General University Policies

Student Handbook can be found at <https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/student-affairs/student-resources/student-handbook>

Attendance policy

For **online courses**—3 or more weeks without posts equal 3 class absences without a serious reason are an automatic failure “without explanation or permission.”

Inclusive language

Inclusive language is encouraged when the writing is the student’s own. In general, do not use the terms “man” or “mankind” for human beings; use instead “human beings,” “humans,” “persons,” “people,” “individuals,” “humanity,” “humankind,” “figures,” etc.

– Pronouns: generally, use the non-binary pronouns “they/them/their” when referring to people whose gender/gender preference is unknown or unrelated to the context, or when the preference is expressed as non-binary.

– Avoid using the third person singular masculine or feminine, unless you are certain that the person referred to is male or female or expresses as male or female exclusively. For example, revise a sentence like: “A student must ask questions if he expects to learn” to something like: “Students must ask questions if they expect to learn,” or “A student must ask questions if they expect to learn.”

– When a source you quote uses exclusive language, you may quote it as it appears, or substitute/add bracketed words, e.g., “[humanity]” – unless to do so would, in the judgment of the student, defeat the purpose of the quotation or violate the integrity of the student.

– Students who prefer to use male pronouns for the deity should consult with their professor/advisor on a case-by-case basis.

Email Policy

The instructor will use the official HIU student email address for all course communications. Students should check their hartsem.edu email account regularly.

Classroom etiquette

Student etiquette and interactions are specified by the Student Handbook :

<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/student-affairs/student-resources/student-handbook>

MA and PhD HIU Grading Scale

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|------------|---|
| A (95-100) | Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course. |
| A- (90-94) | Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course. |
| B+(87-89) | Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course. |

B (83-86)	Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B-(80-82)	Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
C+(77-79)	Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76)	Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
F (below 70)	Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Please note: A+'s and C-'s are not part of the grading system.

MAP Grading Scale

High Pass (4.00), Pass (3.00), and Fail (0.00)