

2014 Atlantic Workshop Report

Title: Moving Beyond the University: How Research on Religious Diversity in Atlantic Canadian Scholars Can Make a Difference

Dates: May 20-21, 2014

Location: Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS

In efforts to build and strengthen a network of scholars from multiple disciplinary perspectives, the third workshop on the study of religion in Atlantic Canada focused on the professional development of graduate and undergraduate honours students. The workshop was organized by members of the Religion and Diversity Project team working in universities in Atlantic Canada: Cathy Holtmann and Nancy Nason-Clark from the University of New Brunswick; Paul Bowlby, from Saint Mary's University; and Ruby Ramji from Cape Breton University. Once again we benefited from a research assistantship in the Religious Studies Department at Saint Mary's University to support Trevor Murphy's contributions to the workshop organization. The primary grant for the Workshop came from the Religion and Diversity Project. For the second year Saint Mary's University matched the project grant. Additional funding was from the New England-Maritimes Region of the American Academy of Religion, the Sociology Department at the University of New Brunswick, and the Christianity and Culture Program at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Sam Reimer of Crandall University accepted the invitation to provide the keynote address for the workshop. The Call for Papers was distributed on January 6, 2014 to faculty throughout the region and posted to the workshop website. Abstracts were submitted by ten students, reviewed by Ruby Ramji and Cathy Holtmann and acceptance letters were sent to the students by early March. The students also received a list of seven professional development session options with brief descriptions and were asked to rank them in terms of their training needs. The following four were ranked the highest: preparing for field work in the study of religion; moving beyond the university walls: knowledge transfer and career opportunities; publishing: pitfalls and possibilities; and the application process: academic jobs and grants. A fifth session on preparing a research presentation was included in the schedule due to feedback from the 2013 workshop. Once the student choices were received, faculty from the region were invited to plan and facilitate the sessions.

Trevor issued a press release several weeks prior to the workshop and Eastlink TV expressed interest taping Sam Reimer's keynote address for a broadcast called Podium TV. Sam was interviewed by Rick Howe from Radio 95.7 in Halifax on the opening day.

Thirty people registered for the workshop including 16 students and 14 faculty members. This is the highest rate of participation of all three workshops and this year's cohort included people from ten universities in the region as well as one university in Ontario. Following registration the workshop began with a "get to know you" lunch. Alec Soucy brought greetings from the Religious Studies Department at Saint Mary's University which was followed by a round of introductions from the participants. The opening session on "Preparing a Research Presentation"

was facilitated by Diana Ginn, from the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University. After her presentation and a discussion, students whose abstracts had been accepted for presentation at the workshop were matched with faculty mentors not associated with their respective universities and given time to meet one-on-one. Not only did the students receive helpful feedback from faculty mentors on the papers they were to present the following day, but these relationships will help in forging future research partnerships. After a break, students chose to attend one of two concurrent professional development sessions. “Preparing for Field Work in the Study of Religion” was facilitated by Alec Soucy and the session “Moving Beyond the University Walls: Knowledge Transfer and Career Opportunities” included three presenters: Trevor Murphy, who spoke about his work experience beyond academia; Mary Hale from the Religious Studies Department at Saint Mary’s University who spoke about religion and public policy; and Esther Enns, the Dean of Arts who spoke about Saint Mary’s University’s efforts in helping students translate their academic skills into jobs after graduation. The keynote address, “Christian Congregations in Atlantic Canada: Still Relevant?” was the final event of the first day and was open to the public. The evening began with greetings from Saint Mary’s University president, Colin Dodds and Anne Marie Dalton introduced Sam Reimer who answered questions after his presentation.

The morning of the second day began with two more concurrent professional development sessions: “Publishing: Possibilities and Pitfalls” co-facilitated by Pat Sikes from Sheffield University (UK) and Ruby Ramji; and “The Application Process: Academic Jobs and Grants” co-facilitated by Nancy Nason-Clark and Christopher Austin from Dalhousie University. After a break the morning concluded with a Religious Leaders Panel that was put together by Paul Bowlby and included Swarna Weerasinghe (Buddhist), Allyson Marsh (Deepwater Church), Robin Arthur (spiritual diversity) and Syeadnan Hussain (Muslim). Each panelist gave a five minute presentation and this was followed by questions from the workshop participants. The panel presentations were video recorded.

The second afternoon was devoted to two sessions of student research presentations with four papers in each. Anne Marie Dalton convened the first session which included papers on Hindu widows in Newfoundland, women converts to Islam in New Brunswick, gaps in the literature on Muslim women and domestic violence, and contemplative education in the Shambhala school in Halifax. The second session was convened by David Michels, a graduate student from Dalhousie University and included papers on biblical exilic theology and colonialism, Buddhist environmental ethics in Nova Scotia, First Nations’ resistance to fracking in New Brunswick as spiritual practice, and religion and Nova Scotia’s museums.

Following the end of the presentations, participants made their way to a local restaurant in order to celebrate the success of the workshop.

Evaluation forms were completed by 19 participants (76% of participants not including the organizers) and they gave the highest marks for the workshop structure (schedule, number of sessions, time for socialization). In terms of written suggestions for structural improvements, 3 participants indicated that it was difficult to choose between concurrent professional development sessions and 2 participants felt that the student papers should be longer than 15 minutes or that the papers should be more spread out in the workshop schedule. Participants

who gave presentations evaluated the experience positively with a mean score of 4.2/5. The lowest mean score on the evaluations was for the religious leaders forum and how it related to their research (3.6/5). There were two written comments in which participants indicated that the religious leaders were not well-integrated into the workshop and that there were few questions from students during the forum.

According to the written comments, the overwhelming highlight for most participants was the professional development sessions. This was followed by positive remarks concerning the student presentations and the opportunity for individual mentoring of students by faculty. Given that the primary objective of this year's workshop was to provide professional development opportunities for Atlantic students, the organizers consider their efforts to have been successful. The organizers of this third workshop on the study of religion in Atlantic Canada are pleased to see a steady increase in participants over the years, an indication that networking among scholars of religion has improved. We also feel that we have created a solid structure for the workshop with a strong focus on student training with ample input from regional faculty. We are deeply grateful to the Religion and Diversity Project and the Religious Studies Department at Saint Mary's University for their ongoing support. With Paul Bowlby and Cathy Holtmann pulling back from their intense involvement in the organization of this event, more scholars in the region need to commit time and energy if it is to continue.

Submitted by Cathy Holtmann and Paul Bowlby
23 June 2014

Report Recipients:

The Religion and Diversity Project

Saint Mary's University

New England-Maritimes Region of the American Academy of Religion

Sociology Department at the University of New Brunswick

Christianity and Culture Program at the University of Prince Edward Island

Financial Statement

Income	
Remaining in account from 2013	\$1,072.00
Religion and Diversity Project grant	\$3000.00
Saint Mary's University	\$3000.00
New England-Maritimes Region of the American Academy of Religion	\$800.00
University of New Brunswick	\$500.00
UPEI Centre for Christianity and Culture	\$250.00
Registration fees (\$50/faculty; \$25/student)	\$875.00
Subtotal income	\$9,497.00
Expenses	
Miscellaneous	
Keynote honorarium	\$250.00
Saint Mary's residence accommodations	\$1,032.65
Saint Mary's University catering	\$2,131.53
The Blue Olive restaurant	\$316.25
Travel subsidies	\$2,527.19
Subtotal expenses	\$6257.62
Balance	\$3,239.38 ¹

¹ As of 20 June 2014.