

Spirituality & the Higher Education Curriculum: The HERI Syllabi Project

HERI Spirituality Project Team

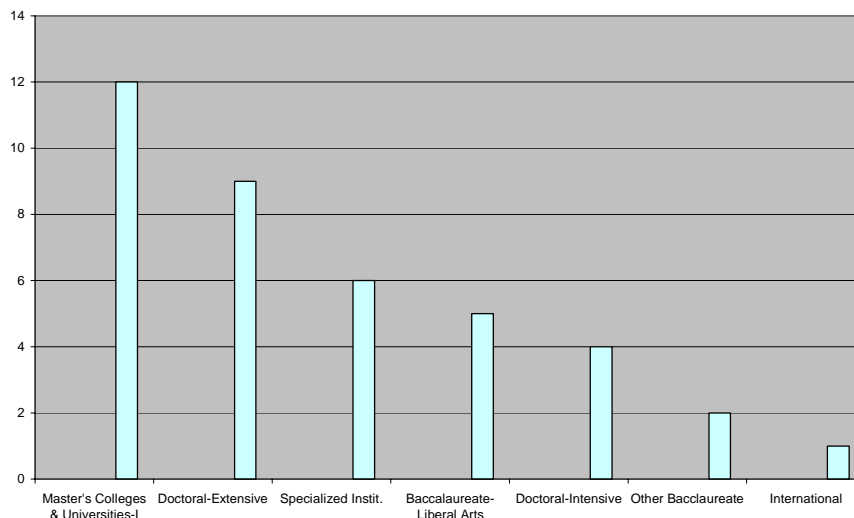
Three months ago, the HERI Spirituality Project team invited members of our readership to submit syllabi used within higher education classrooms that they considered to be “distinctly spiritual” in nature. From this initial solicitation, we received 39 syllabi representing a number of different disciplines, instructional approaches, and dimensions of spiritual or contemplative practice.

Given the substantial response to our invitation, we felt it was important to look critically at this collection of syllabi in order to gain a better sense of what we could learn from the submissions. The following represents a basic analysis of the syllabi we share with you in this issue:

Overview

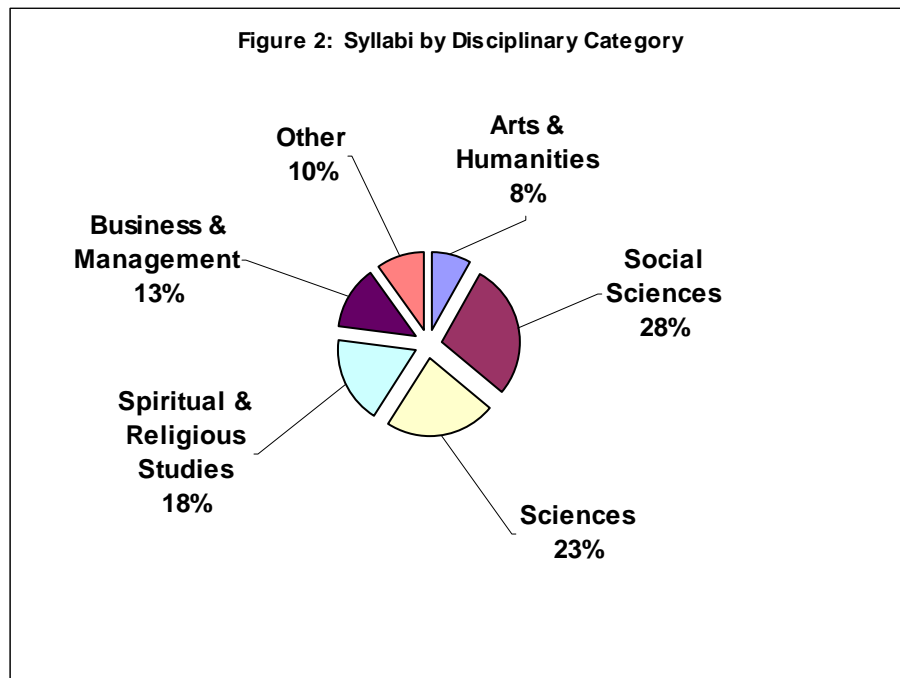
Of the 39 syllabi received, the majority (31%) came from faculty and administrators employed at Master’s Colleges & Universities-I, as based upon the 2000 Carnegie Classifications (See Figure 1). The second highest total (23%) came from Doctoral-Extensive universities, with Specialized Institutions following at 15%. Our collection also includes one overseas submission, from Dr. Enzo Giorgino at the University of Turin, Italy.

Figure 1: Submissions by Carnegie Classification



The greatest representation among syllabi submitted comes from the social sciences (28%), encompassing such varied topics as anthropology, sociology, education, and urban studies (see Figure 2). An additional 23 percent come from the sciences, including nursing, environmental sciences, and medical fields.

There were a number of syllabi (10%) within our collection that fell outside conventional disciplinary definition. This was because they were either interdisciplinary in nature, or because they represented such topical specificity that they could be appropriated under any number of categories. Examples include titles such as “Theoretical Research” and “Critical Thinking and Writing” offered by Dr. Jorge N. Ferrer of the California Institute for Integral Studies.



Applications of Spirituality within the Higher Education Classroom

One of the most interesting aspects to this inquiry was identifying the various ways in which spirituality, in all of its connotations, was expressed through individual syllabi. While we specified in our invitation that we sought “distinctly spiritual” submissions, we refrained from actually defining the term in hopes that a more refined understanding might surface through the final collection received.

So what have we learned about spirituality from this endeavor? In reviewing each syllabus, we found some consistency in how spirituality was introduced and/or applied within the higher education classroom. Through our analysis,

three major categories were devised reflecting the varied uses of spirituality and spiritual practice within the classroom:

- *Spirituality as a means of enhancing disciplinary or field knowledge:* This category includes all courses in which spirituality operates as a complement to existing content within a field or discipline. Based upon our collection of syllabi, this is by far the most common application of spirituality, representing 69% of all submissions within this particular category. One example is a syllabus by Dr. John Hochheimer of Ithaca College entitled, "Communication and the Human Spirit." This course, a senior capstone for television/radio and journalism majors, offers opportunities for students to explore the potential effects that communication and media have upon human action, and by extension, the human spirit. Another example is provided by Br. Keith Douglass Warner of Santa Clara University. Br. Warner's "Environmental Justice Practicum" explores how theology might enhance understanding of environmental justice by highlighting the religious and spiritual connections found within existing discourse.
- *Spirituality as a new paradigmatic lens for everyday life:* Syllabi found within this category often serve to highlight the varied ways in which spirituality is manifest within our everyday existence. While many of the syllabi falling within this category are conventionally understood as religious or spiritual studies courses, there are a fair number of syllabi representing a range of other disciplines and fields. Examples include the Ignatian Residential College's Elizabeth Dreyer, who submitted a syllabus entitled, "Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday (and University Life)" as well as Matthew Cobb's submission from Kansas State titled, "Spirituality and Leadership." In total, we found that 46% of all syllabi fell within this category.
- *Spirituality as pedagogy:* Our final category, comprising 15% of all submissions, could be defined as the application of spirituality as a pedagogical technique. By this, we mean the use of reflection, meditation, journaling, and the like as a way to enhance the dimensional quality of in-class proceedings. This category also includes submissions that incorporate implicit spiritual references as a means of positioning the class as, perhaps, a spiritual endeavor, yet not explicitly framing the class as such. Some representative examples within this category include Bucknell University's Dr. Chris Boyatzis who submitted a senior capstone syllabus entitled, "Religious & Spiritual Development" in which students maintain reflective journals throughout the semester and in which classroom "scribes" take down notes for purposes of enhancing in-class thinking and reflection. Similarly, Dr. Jeremy P. Hunter from the Peter Drucker School of Management, Claremont Graduate University incorporates mindfulness exercises that offer structure to students' outside work in support of the class. Students are posed a series of questions soliciting introspection and reflection which are submitted each

week in the form of a log. Numerous other examples can be found throughout the collection

In summary, what we present to you is a varied, rich set of texts that offer tremendous insight into the spiritual work found in higher education classrooms across the country (and beyond!). This analysis serves as a somewhat cursory introduction to the many fruits which lie therein. We hope you enjoy surveying these materials as much as we have!