

Harvard Extension School
RELI E-1525 (243255)

Spring Term: April 17-19, 2015
Location: One Brattle Square

World Religions Face the Climate Crisis

Active Learning Weekend April 17-19, 2015

Instructor: *Dr. Christopher Queen*, Lecturer in Extension
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SYLLABUS

In this interactive weekend course, students, faculty, and local religious leaders engage in a real-time simulation of the Parliament of World Religions. The task is to draft international protocols that address the climate crisis. Racing a deadline of Earth Day, April 22, 2015, the delegates must uphold the beliefs and practices of designated faith traditions—Buddhist, Christian, Confucian/Daoist, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim,—while crafting policy guidelines for governments and their assigned denominations. Delegates will work in small groups and larger plenary sessions to negotiate issues of technology, theology, culture, politics, economics and ethics. (2 credits)

Prerequisite(s): A sincere interest in the roles that faith communities may play in addressing climate change, and a willingness to explore these roles through reading, writing and real-time enactment. Previous courses in religion, earth science or ecology and/or personal experience in addressing climate change are desirable but not required.

Class times: Friday, April 17, 5-8 pm; Saturday, April 18, 9 am-5 pm; Sunday, April 19, 9 am-1 pm. Final papers due May 3.

THE CHALLENGE

Scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, NASA and other agencies have predicted that if current emissions of carbon gases continue unabated, ecosystems supporting many life forms on Earth will collapse in the coming decades. This will be preceded by rapid increases of violent weather, disease, drought, disappearance of glaciers and ice caps, acidification and rise of the seas, coastal and inland flooding, toxic air, food chain collapse, population displacement and resource wars.

In 2015 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is seeking international consensus and cooperation on mitigating the causes and effects of global climate change in preparation for the resumption of UN climate talks in Paris next year.

In response, Harvard Extension School will convene virtual meetings of the Parliament of World Religions to prepare Articles for Action addressed to religious communities and national governments. These meetings will be held on the weekend preceding Earth Day 2015, April 22, the date on which the UNFCCC has requested specific input from the world's faith communities.

Delegates to the Parliament will present their credentials and attend a series of panel discussions, working groups and plenary sessions at One Brattle Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the consultation of Harvard faculty and visiting representatives of six faith traditions: Christian, Confucian/Daoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim. Delegates will submit draft Press Releases on May 3, in care of the Harvard Extension School.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Friday, April 17

5:00 Sign-in, One Brattle Square, Case Study Room

5:15 Plenary -- Welcome and Introduction of Delegates and Guests

Orientation to Weekend Parliament Meetings -- Dr. Christopher Queen

6:00 - 7:00 [Opening Address: "Dimensions of the Climate Crisis"](#) Dr. Timothy Wieskel

7:00 - 8:00 First caucus meetings by religious tradition -- Classroom

Saturday, April 18

9:00 - 11:00 Plenary Session: Panel Presentation by Faith Leaders -- Classroom all day

11:00 - 12:00 Caucus meetings: history and teachings of the ancient faiths

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch Break -- pizza served, plus time for fresh air in the Square

1:00 - 2:00 Healing / empowerment practices -- Faith Leaders

2:00 - 4:00 Caucus meetings: drafting of protocols

4:00 - 5:00 Plenary: Interim reports by Caucuses

Sunday, April 19

9:00 - 10:15 Caucus meetings -- finalize Caucus Reports -- Classroom

10:15 - 11:45 Plenary: Present Caucus Reports and Discussion -- Case Study Room

11:45 - 1:00 - Closing Address: "Faith and the Climate Future" Prof. Christopher Ives

BREAKING NEWS

THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND, ANNOUNCEMENTS OF BREAKING NEWS WILL INTERRUPT CAUCUSES AND PLENARY SESSIONS. THESE WILL BE FILTERED BY KEY WORDS:

"NATURAL DISASTER" "CLIMATE SCIENCE FINDINGS" "ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS" "U.N. FRAMEWORK UPDATES" "RELIGIOUS LEADERS SPEAK" AND "RELIGIOUS BODIES ACT."

Caucuses may vote to modify protocols in response to these developments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The pass/fail course grade for RELI E-1525 will be based on two components:

1. **Attendance and participation** in the three-day Parliament, including public speaking in caucus and plenary sessions and contribution to drafting caucus protocols (50%);
2. **Submission of two essays:** A three-page *Delegate's Brief* detailing the delegate's credentials, the nature and scope of the climate crisis, and a statement detailing three interventions that people of faith may play in addressing the climate crisis (*due at sign-in for the first Parliament session, 5 pm, Friday, April 17 via email and hard-copy*); and a 7-page **Press Release** summing up the contributions of the Faith Caucuses and evaluating the impact of the Parliament on member institutions of the faith traditions and on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (*due May 3 via email*). See below for more details.

REQUIRED READINGS

Delegates must be fully briefed in advance for Parliament deliberations to have maximum impact. *All delegates are required to read the following text and browse core websites prior to the first Plenary Session on April 17:*

Course Text (online)

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, eds. *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?*
(Cambridge, Mass.: Daedalus, Fall 2001).

<https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/publication.aspx?d=845>

Eight Core Websites

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): <http://climate.nasa.gov/>

New York Times: <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html>

Parliament of World Religions: <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=7&sn=3>

Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale: <http://fore.research.yale.edu/>

Alliance of Religions and Conservation: http://www.arcworld.org/arc_and_the_faiths.asp

The Earth Charter: <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/What-is-the-Earth-Charter%3F.html>

PANELIST / CONSULTANT / FAITH LEADERS

Religious leaders representing the major faith traditions will participate in the weekend as panelists and consultants to the faith caucuses. Each group will work directly with one or more of these activists.

Buddhist: [Dr. Christopher Ives](#), Prof. of Religious Studies, Stonehill College

Christian: [Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas](#), Episcopal diocese of Western Massachusetts

Christian: [Patrick Carolan](#), Director, Franciscan Action Network

Confucian/Daoist: [Yang Peng](#), former environment minister, People's Republic of China; fellow in Chinese religions, Harvard Asia Center

Hindu: [Mat McDermott](#), US Advisor, [Bhumi Project](#) and the Green Pilgrimage Network

Jewish: [Rabbi Shoshanna Friedman](#), climate activist and singer/songwriter

Muslim: [Munjed Murad](#), Fellow of the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions

WRITER'S GUIDELINES

The two essays should adhere to the following guidelines. Both will be created as a Word document with one-inch margins, double-spaced text, indented paragraphs, 12-point New Times Roman typeface; delegate name and course number / title should appear on top, with document and subsection titles centered below.

The Delegate's Brief, due via email by Noon, April 17, will be three pages with a list of sources on the fourth page. The brief should contain three parts: 1. Delegate (your) qualifications to serve on the Parliament, including courses, readings, or experiences related to religion and climate change that you bring to the table; 2. A concise statement regarding the climate crisis, its causes, scope, and remedies, as supported by current authorities (footnote your sources); and 3. Your opening proposals regarding the role that religious institutions and persons of faith should play in implementing these remedies. Confine your sources to the text and websites above and cite each one by footnotes and in a list at the end of your brief. (See <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/exams-grades-policies/student-responsibilities> for Extension School guidelines on proper citation, and <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do> for the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*. Remember that direct quotations require quotation marks or indentation in your paper to separate your words from that of your source. Interpretations and theories not your own, even paraphrased in your own words, should be credited to their source.)

The Press Release, due by Noon via email May 3, will be seven pages with a list of sources on the eighth page. The text should contain three sections: 1. A news summary of the special meetings of the Parliament of World Religions that took place at Harvard University on April 17-19, 2015, with a description of the purpose of the meeting, the delegates and speakers, and a summary and assessment of the outcome. 2. A closer look at the deliberations of the caucus on which you served. What unique doctrines or historical experience did the religious tradition represented by your caucus have to offer in the face of the climate crisis? What difficulties did the caucus face in applying religious teachings to this moment in history? Does religion have a role to play, alongside science, politics, economics and culture? 3. How well did the proposals in your Delegate's Brief serve the deliberations of your caucus? Were your assumptions about religion and the climate crisis modified by the discussions that took place? What are your predictions for the future? (Again, all references should be both footnoted and listed in the source page.)

COURSE INSTRUCTORS

Dr. Christopher Queen, Lecturer in Extension, Harvard University
Author/Editor of four volumes on Socially Engaged Buddhism
Founder/convenor, Wendell Climate Change Group

Dr. Timothy Weiskel, Course Consultant
Research Director, Cambridge Climate Research Associates
Instructor on Environmental Studies, Harvard Extension School

Dr. John Whitley, Course TA
Th.D., Harvard Divinity School
Authority on Jewish Apocalypticism and Esoterism