

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET: PEER PANEL ON RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION
(ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2 APPENDIX 12N)

This powerful activity requires advance preparation, either with members of the class who identify as members of marginalized, minority religious communities (for example, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans, Sikhs) and are willing to discuss their experiences openly with the class, or with other peers whom the facilitator can invite to join the class as panelists to talk about their marginalized religious experiences. If possible, it is important to have a diverse and multi/bi-racial group of minority religious panelists with attention paid to participants' multiple identities (gender, sexuality, ability, class, race and ethnicity, national origins, religious affiliations). A diverse panel serves to expose socio-economic, racial, and religious stereotypes (for example, not all Jews are White or observant, not all Muslims are Arab or wear head coverings, Native Americans belong to different religious traditions).

It is important for the facilitator to meet with members of the panel before the class to explore discuss the questions to be raised, in light of the specific goals of this activity. Panelists will need to think about what they want to say in advance (see examples below) and to prepare themselves to respond to "triggers." It has been our experience that Christian students may be surprised, unprepared for, and defensive about the anger that members of minority religious traditions may express about their experiences of institutional and cultural Christian privilege, and these interactions can be challenging if not anticipated and prepared for.

These are sample questions that the peer panel might address:

- What is our own personal or familial understanding of who we are as members of different minority religious identity groups (historically, culturally, ethnically, religiously, politically)?
- How do we experience ourselves as members of our religious groups in our daily lives? (Religious, secular; visible, invisible; religion-identified, not identified or hidden)
- What is our experience of marginalization or oppression in everyday life, on this campus, and in neighborhood, school or work settings? In the media?
- Are there other things we would like to take this opportunity to say about our religious identity and our experience?

These questions are intended to complicate the binary either/or U.S. constructions of race, ethnicity, national origins, religion, language, and culture, that fails to capture the range, complexity and diversity of religious identities in the U.S. and transnational identities (as well as the interaction of religious identity with other social identities). The panel provides opportunities to describe concrete examples of the interpersonal, institutional, and/or cultural experiences of oppression experienced in everyday life, as well as the feelings that remain long after the incident.

Students are expected to listen carefully, with cell phones and electronic gear packed away. They are given worksheets (sample below) to fill out and hand to their instructors as they leave the room following the panel.

The facilitator invites the panelists well in advance, and clearly indicates the purpose of the panel, the specific issues the facilitator hopes the panelist will talk about, and something about who the other panelists will be. If appropriate, the facilitator also shares the syllabus and readings with the panelists, if they are not already familiar with the course and students.

Here is some sample language, with specific prompts based on the facilitator's relationship with the panelists.

Thank you all so much for agreeing to participate on ... in our panel of voices on religious oppression for our students in The class meets and I'd appreciate your getting there a bit earlier so we can all settle in and greet each other. Each of you will have up to 10 minutes to introduce yourselves and to talk briefly about your religious identity and how that plays out in school, neighborhood, or work situations.. The interactions between your ethnic, racial, gender and religious identities will be part of what you'll want to address. For [...]:

What would be helpful to include is any transnational experiences (those in your home country or elsewhere) that impact your religious identity? your dramatic shift from a majority-to-minority religious experience as you moved from [a Muslim country] to the US. And you may want to address the tendency in the US to conflate ethnic and racial with religious identity (Arab/Muslim). I remember that last year you gave lots of very specific examples, and that worked really well for our students. [For ...]: You may be willing to give specific examples of your religious privilege in the US, and also how that religious privilege may intersect with your targeted identities -- and also, you may want to talk about how traditional (institutional?) Christianity tends to marginalize non-conforming sexualities. It may be helpful for students to hear you reflect about the intersections of your religious with your gender, sexual, and/or class and racial identities. [For ...and ...]: I've heard both of you speak eloquently about the racial and ethnic assumptions students make about each of you in relation to stereotypes of Who is a Buddhist, a Jew, a Muslim, (that is, who looks like a Buddhist, a Jew, a Muslim)? So, yes, please, do address those stereotypes. Also: [...] I remember that last year you were also willing to talk about the different religious identities within your extended family (you included grandparents) and I think that was really helpful for students to hear about -- the story of multiple religious identities in an extended family.

PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET: RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION PANEL

Your name: _____ Instructor's name: _____

Today's speakers are They will talk with you about their religious identities and experiences in the Christian U.S. culture – and also about how religion intersects with other targeted or privileged identities for them. As you listen to what they have to say, please answer the following questions – and then turn this sheet into your instructor at the end of class.

Examples of how the speakers describe being targeted or marginalized on the basis of their religious identities:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

Examples of Christian privilege that have occurred to you while doing the reading for this session or listening to the speakers. (Note whether these examples are at the *individual, institutional, or societal/cultural* level.)

- (1)
- (2)

Please write any questions or issues you'd like your instructor to address or discuss at your next class.