

The University of Oregon's Center for Intercultural Dialogue and UNESCO Chair for Transcultural Studies, Interreligious Dialogue, and Peace

In 2006, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) approved the first- ever American Chair in UNESCO's Intercultural Dialogue Program. The following year, Professor Steven Shankman was named UNESCO Chair for Transcultural Studies, Interreligious Dialogue, and Peace at the University of Oregon. The UNESCO Chair will promote research, teaching, and community engagement in transcultural studies, interreligious dialogue, and the pursuit of peace. The Chair will facilitate collaboration between the University of Oregon and the other Chairs in the UNITWIN network on Interreligious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding (<http://www.inter-cultural.org>). UNITWIN is the abbreviation for UNESCO's university twinning and networking system. There are currently only twenty Chairs worldwide in UNESCO's Intercultural Dialogue Program.

In September 2008, the new **Center for Intercultural Dialogue**, where the UNESCO Chair resides, was established. The Center

- promotes and encourages faculty research and teaching in transcultural studies and interreligious dialogue;
- fosters an environment of peace through dialogue;
- offers a UNESCO-sanctioned certificate in intercultural dialogue as a supplement to an advanced degree in a number of fields; and
- initiates and coordinates public programs and events.

A reasoned, public discussion of the nature of religion and religious symbols from a comparative perspective is imperative at the present time, especially in light of continued tensions between the secular and religious communities and the threat of religiously driven incidents of international and domestic terrorism. The Center for Intercultural Dialogue will bring together a number of disciplines in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences to address these concerns and will take concrete steps in transforming our region, our nation, and the world in the direction of peace. Among the fields represented in the new Center are religious studies; comparative literature; international studies; music; the visual arts and architecture; planning, public policy and management; political science; rhetoric; cognitive and decision sciences; arts and administration; anthropology; biology; environmental science; evolutionary psychology; and peace and conflict resolution.

In view of the multiple crises we face globally—terrorism, climate change, economic instability, food and fuel shortages, genocide, and escalating incarceration rates—it is vital to world peace that citizens engage in intercultural and interreligious dialogue instead of a polarizing clash of heated convictions. The Center will engage students, faculty, and members of the larger community in dialogue that addresses sensitive issues, drawing on the models provided by the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and theories of restorative justice.

Students, faculty, and community members in Eugene will collaborate with their counterparts associated with the other UNESCO Chairs around the world in efforts to build a global community through education and dialogue that transcends cultural, religious, and geopolitical boundaries.

For more information about the University of Oregon's Center for Intercultural Dialogue or the UNESCO's Intercultural Dialogue Program, please contact:

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