

Religion on Our Campuses was originally written and researched to be the basis for faculty seminars. In order to be accessible to a larger audience, chapters were rewritten and expanded to allow the book to be helpful apart from faculty conversations. The chapters "Religious Formation," "Disciplinary Formation," "Institutional Settings," "Community Warrant," and "Academic Freedom" aim largely at providing a vocabular and conceptual tools that can aid faculty in thinking through the issues. These "conceptual" chapters can be used to set up discussions, but they can also serve simply as background reading. The chapters in Part I (Cautionary Tales and Encounters), Part III (Narrative Identity and Inclinations) and the last two chapters of Part IV (Reticence and In the Classroom) are the chapters that have to date been most frequently used to set up actual faculty conversations. These last two chapters are the most prescriptive and practical of the lot. The chapter Disciplinary Formation is crucial background reading; if a faculty member reads no other "conceptual" chapter, he or she needs at least to read this one.

Kim Maphis Early: Welcome back to our final hour of conversation with Mark Edwards. We have received six questions already that Mark will address, and we encourage you to submit your own questions and comments as the chat continues. If you would like to email a question, please forward it to [kim.maphis.early@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kim.maphis.early@vanderbilt.edu) or telephone us at 615.341.0506.

Kim Maphis Early: To read more about Mark and an introduction to this conversation, along with instructions for submitting questions, choose the Action key above your log-in and then select Recent Room History.

Neville: This question came in after the close of yesterday afternoon's session: what do you normally do when you visit a campus?

Mark Edwards: It varies according to campus needs. In varying combinations I have 1) consulted with the PTEV director, staff, and board members; 2) met with faculty interested in the initiative and discussed how they might involve their colleagues; 3) met with faculty opposed to the initiative and discussed their objections and how to meet those objections; 4) given a lecture designed to interest faculty in the project; 5) given a lecture to kick off the seminars; 6) attended a couple sessions of a seminar series; and 7) helped with the evaluation of a seminar series. I should perhaps mention that I have limited funding that can help defray some of the expense of my visit to local campuses. The amount available depends on the number of visits I make to various campuses in a particular semester.

Alford: What is your judgment about the ways in which more conserving vs. more progressive schools deal with these issues?

Mark Edwards: I haven't detected any particular pattern. Some "conservative" schools I know have encouraged faculty to freely debate the question of the appropriate role of religious discourse in classes; some "progressive" schools have refused to even allow the question to be posed. In general—and there are notable exceptions—in more "progressive" schools the faculty tends to be more religiously diverse with, not surprisingly, far more faculty who practice or profess no religious tradition. At these schools reticence about personal religious convictions tends to be the "default mode" for reasons I discuss

throughout the book. But I have also visited church-related schools where reticence is also widespread but perhaps for different reasons—for example, the reticent faculty fear to challenge the public “orthodoxy.” In both contexts honest faculty conversations could, I am convinced, help the community move towards a more viable *modus vivendi*, one that helps students and faculty better deal with our religiously plural and conflicted world.

Kim Maphis Early: If you're just logging in, click on the Action key above your login name and select Recent Room History. This will allow you to see an introduction to the conversation and prior questions and answers from this session.

Alford: As a campus minister, I feel I am judged on how many students I am able to keep in the denominational fold during college. The truth about our students is that they are Christian but not necessarily identified with or loyal to denominations. When you talk about religious traditions, do you mean denominations?

Mark Edwards: When I speak about “religious traditions” I intend to gesture both at different denominational traditions within Christianity and at religious traditions other than Christianity (e.g., Judaism or Islam, which, of course, have “denominational” variations themselves).

Young: I read the transcript from the conversations yesterday and I like your instinct to think in a more carefully historical fashion about what is indeed the unfolding situation of our university and our sponsoring religious tradition. Who best to get that sort of information in front of faculty? The president, the provost, human resources division?

Mark Edwards: If you have an institutional historian, he or she may be the best one to tap. Colleagues who have been on the faculty a long time are another useful source, and they may be better able to share the “problems” as well as the “good times.” Having more than one “old timer” in the conversation is a big help, since memories obviously do vary [smile]. As a former college president, I realize that presidents need to be careful about saying too much about the “dark” side of their institution’s history. The same goes for provosts and deans, so these leaders may be handicapped in providing faculty with the whole story. I don’t mean this as a criticism, only as an acknowledgement of professional obligation. In general, I encourage faculty conversations around the institutional stories—and the plural is important, since most institutions have multiple, complex, sometimes contradictory stories that circulate. All of the above also applies to the sponsoring religious tradition (if there is one), with some of the same problems regarding how candid institutional leaders can afford to be.

Kim Maphis Early: If you're interested to read the transcripts of our prior conversations with Mark, they are available from the homepage of the website, in an article and as PDF's for downloading and printing.

Vanderbilt: Can you recommend a couple of recent books for background reading?

Mark Edwards: First, let me recommend an edited book that is scheduled to be published this January: Douglas and Rhonda Jacobson’s *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (Oxford University Press, 2008). I have a chapter in this volume, but so do scholars who take different approaches to the key issues. I am currently reading Anthony T. Kronman’s

Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life (Yale University Press, 2007). Kronman argues for humanities faculty to take up once more the task of preparing their students to think about the meaning of life. It advocates a form of "secular humanism," which may not appeal to some readers, but in the course of making his argument he touches on many of the key issues regarding deep conviction and higher education. Finally, for those willing to take on a book of more than 800 pages that frames the whole question of modern secularity in a new and engaging way, take the time to dig into Charles Taylor's revised Gifford Lectures, entitled A Secular Age (Belnap Press, 2007).

Vanderbilt: This question is from Judith Cebula, the Director for the Center for Faith and Vocation at Butler University: I am interested in engaging university leaders (president, provost, vice presidents, board of trustees) in a conversation about the place of religion on our private, but religiously unaffiliated campus (founded by the Disciples of Christ 1855, divorced from it since 1978). How does that conversation begin? How important is it that there be a goal for the conversation, such as Butler University statement on religion (religious diversity or religious pluralism)?

Mark Edwards: You pose a couple different questions. First, there are obviously different ways to begin the conversation with administrative leaders. I have, for example, been called in as a consult to talk with presidents and academic deans. I also know of cases where leaders from other campuses have been invited in to share their experience with the local administration. And it is almost always helpful to have interested faculty request a conversation with local leadership. Second, the conversations do work best when there is a goal in mind, but that goal is often phrased in process terms. My project is to get faculty to discuss the proper role, if any, of religious discourse in faculty interaction and in the classroom. But my book doesn't seek to provide any definitive answer to this "problem statement." Rather, it aims to set up and prime a conversational process under which engaged faculty can, first, successfully achieve a greater understanding of, and empathy for, each other's deep commitments and, second, having secured greater understanding of each other, may collectively pool experience, insight, and wisdom in order to craft a better way forward that works for the faculty and students on their particular campus. It aims to empower others to try out answers to the questions for themselves.

Young: I have read your chapter "In the Classroom." I worry less about religious questions coming up in the classroom than I do about students revealing their religious lives in advising sessions. I am just never sure how to react to these disclosures, and am equally uncertain about what the student may be expecting from me in such an instance. I often say that I am uncomfortable sharing personal information with students, and that heads off the conversation but may also be missing an opportunity. Any thoughts?

Mark Edwards: This is a topic worthy of conversation with colleagues who are better situated than I am to evaluate local conditions. In general, much depends on the standards and expectations of your particular institution, the standards of your discipline, your own personal comfort, and what the student actually says to you in an advising session. My chapter "In the Classroom" offers some broad suggestions about approach and pitfalls. It can be used to setup a conversation among colleagues on this tricky topic. I might add, for

what it is worth, that even experienced faculty sometimes has real disasters dealing with student questions. It is a risky art, not a science!

Mark Edwards: While I am waiting for another question, I thought I might mention that I've been accused of being a "wimp" for the cautious standards I advocate for classroom discussion. Basically, I take a much more conservative position when dealing with students than I do when considering interaction with faculty colleagues. This may be counter-intuitive--and I'd be glad to hear what the rest of you think--but I think that the unequal power relations between faculty and students and the many ways that religious self-disclosure (not to mention "natural inclusion") can go wrong argues for a circumspect approach. Your thoughts?

Butler: Thank you for earlier response.... May I ask a follow-up? In this day and age, to you think it is important for a private university to have a formal position on religion? We at Butler do not. But, we have a very, very active core of heavily evangelical students; a majority of faculty who do not share those religious views (some who do) and many on faculty and staff of the university (and people who apply for jobs at the university) who do not know what Butler stands for. Your thoughts?

Mark Edwards: I am going to offer the bold suggestion that "it depends." [grin] I think that universities generally need to take a "big tent" approach, and in any case (at least in my experience) even schools that have a formal position still have many faculty and students who think and act "otherwise." Subscription to particular credal affirmations is required in some schools--either for all faculty or for a subset--and I certainly understand the motives involved. But any faculty member who has been at such a school can tell stories about the anguish and sometimes mental reservations that underlie at least some subscriptions. This whole issue can make for a lively faculty conversation on the right campus!

Stnorbert: Julie Massey from St. Norbert College here. Two days ago we held our second retreat for the Board of Trustees on the topic of the vocation of the college. This is not identical to your work, but there seem to be common threads. Our program has worked a good deal with faculty and staff, and twice directly with the board. Any ideas about how one might bring board and faculty together in a conversation about religion on campus? My sense is their corporate perspectives are quite distinct at times.

Mark Edwards: Obviously, you could (and, I infer, you may already have) invite members of the board to join your faculty-staff conversation. The problem, I expect, is that individual board members should not (and legally cannot) speak for the board, only for themselves as individuals. But that can lead to tensions, because they may feel that they have an obligation to represent whatever the board's position is and, to complicate matters, when they are only speaking as individuals, faculty or staff may think that they are speaking for the whole board. It might be worthwhile to be explicit about these problems and see what can be worked out jointly within these limitations. I may have other thoughts later, but this is what occurred to me on the spur of the moment.

Joseph\_\_Valparaiso: Yesterday there was a question regarding student's desire and ability to discuss spiritual things over against faculty and that there may be indeed something to be

learned from these students. Are you aware of any reactions in the academy to the UCLA study on spirituality on campus? Is the study helpful to the academy as to informing of current religious attitudes within students? Any other bearing on your perspective and encouragement to engage one another?

Mark Edwards: I am not aware of any systematic reaction to the UCLA HERI study. For my part, I wrote a whole chapter on Students that I finally decided not to include in the book (which is aimed largely at faculty formation and attitudes). I reviewed the HERI study, Christian Smith's study, and several others. To put it bluntly, I was not impressed with the methodology of the HERI study and have some severe reservations about the conclusions they reached. The Smith study is more useful, but seems (to me) to expect more propositional and cognitive knowledge on the part of teenagers than I think is warranted. But both studies raise questions worth discussing with faculty colleagues. I could say much more, but probably should move on for now [smile].

INHEM: At what point (if any) can/should campus ministers/chaplains become a part of these faculty conversations?

Mark Edwards: These faculty conversations work best when faculty take the lead and have their discussions among themselves. But the chaplain's or minister's office can provide encouragement, offer support in the way of meals or even small honoraria, and generally get the ball rolling. In my experience, if the chaplain is part of the discussion it can inhibit faculty exchange. But when the chaplain is also a faculty member, it can become even more complicated, but also (sometimes) works okay. So I might say "it depends." [smile]

Stnorbert: A quick reaction to Young's question about students' religious self-disclosure. As one who is not faculty, but works in a ministerial capacity on campus, I am regularly reminded that the students don't really need to know much about my beliefs. But in talking through their own beliefs, questions, and spiritual dilemmas, they can arrive at fuller understanding of their faith life. I know faculty on our campus who play a very similar role, especially in the context of advising, with their students.

Mark Edwards: This is a good point. Thank you for making it. (And, BTW, when faculty share their views with each other, they, too, often arrive at a fuller understanding of their own position as well as at a better, even empathetic understanding of colleagues. Augustana left.

Vanderbilt: Another question from Butler: I have a strong sense that professors and others applying to work at private unaffiliated schools and families considering it for their student, have felt misled when they choose a school because they see it as secular and arrive only to find out that unaffiliated does not always mean secular. Any thoughts on how a university should handle such circumstances?

Mark Edwards: Indeed. The problem is that labels like "unaffiliated" and "non-sectarian" and even "secular" can mean many different things to different folks, and even "secular" institutions can have a strong religious sub-culture. As a college president, I had occasion to deal with active proselytization on my campus by a couple outside groups. Parents were not happy about that, but there was relatively little I could except explain various first

amendment rights and how college is a place to be exposed to new ideas, including (perhaps) rather unsettling ideas. If a college or university does have religious requirements, by the way, the AAUP expects that the requirement will be made explicitly in the offer and contract of employment. See my Academic Freedom chapter for more details.