

RELIGION & EDUCATION

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SIG Newsletter

September 2022

AERA CONFERENCE 2023

The 2023 AERA meeting will take place on April 13th - 16th. The place-based component of the conference will take place in Chicago, while the virtual component will be May 4th -5th. The theme for this year is "Interrogating Consequential Education Research in Pursuit of Truth".

More information can be found [here](#).



Member Updates

Dr. Robert LeBlanc

SIG member, recently guest edited a special issue of the journal *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*. The title of the special issue is "Religion, Literacies, and English Education in Global Dialogue". A link to the journal and issue can be found [here](#).

Dr. Kahdeida Monét Martin

SIG member, received two grants this year. Dr. Martin was awarded a [Crossroads Project Community Stories Fellowship](#) by Princeton University to conduct an oral history project, "Embodied Memories of the Bay: Narratives of African Diasporic Religious Communities." In addition, she was selected to participate in the [Community Project to Prevent Discrimination and Violence Against Black and African Religions](#).

Dr. Kahdeidra Monét Martin is currently a postdoctoral scholar of education at Stanford University, under the mentorship of Dean Anne Charity Hudley. She is on the job market and is seeking a tenure track position in language, literacy, and culture in a department committed to decolonial praxis.

SIG MEMBER SPOTLIGHT - Dr. Sachi Edwards

Current Position: Lecturer (tenure track)

Organization: Soka University, Japan

Email: sachiteresa@gmail.com

LinkedIn: <https://sui.academia.edu/SachiEdwards>

Education: 2014 PhD in Higher Education,
International Education Policy

2008 MA in Religion, Polynesian
Religious and Spiritual Traditions

Professional Interests: International & Intercultural Education,
Higher Education Theory/Philosophy,
Qualitative Research Methods, Social Justice Education, & Interfaith Dialogue.



Selected Publications:

Edwards, S. (2018). "Critical reflections on the interfaith movement: A social justice perspective." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(2), 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe000053>.

Small, Jenny & Edwards, Sachi & Nielsen, J.. (2021). Introduction to the Special Issue: "The Emerging Critical Religious Studies Lens in Higher Education". *Journal of College and Character*. 22. 269-271. 10.1080/2194587X.2021.1977146.

Edwards, Sachi. (2021). Religious "Nones" and Onto-Epistemic Socialization: Problematizing Participant Self-Identification in Research on Religious Identity. *Journal of College and Character*. 22. 291-306. 10.1080/2194587X.2021.1977150.

Interview: The following text was generated from Dr. Edward's online interview on 19th July 2022. Some parts of her responses were rephrased and summarized.

Q1. What is it about the field of Religion & Education that intrigues you?

During my undergraduate studies in political science, I minored in religious studies. At that time, I wanted to go to law school because I was interested in mediation. But then I took a class titled "Religions of America's Ethnic Minorities." It was by far the best class I took in all of my undergraduate studies. We read books that really intrigued me about religious traditions that I was not familiar with, like Voodoo and Hmong religion. Also, **we read a book about Japanese American Buddhists and their experiences around World War Two. It was the first time that I felt like, oh my gosh, they're talking about me and my family. It was really exciting for me, and so later I got my master's degree in religious studies.**

But to be honest, I was a little bit jaded, because everyone in my MA program was into ancient textual readings and their interpretations. It just didn't do it for me. I then moved into a career in student affairs, because I had been working as a GA in that field. When I started my PhD in education, I did an international education program, but my research itself ended up being very U.S. focused. However, during my PhD program, I was taking courses on identity development, diversity, and multiculturalism. **I realized that it was just so easy for people to talk about things like culture, race, gender, sexuality.**

But, it was so difficult for people to talk about religion. People didn't think that religion was relevant. I literally had peers in my classes tell me that religion is not an appropriate topic to talk about. So, that really intrigued me and I was like, what is it about religion that people are just so against talking about?

Q2. How was your experience in academic classes on Interfaith Dialogue?

I originally started my PhD research on interfaith dialogue. I was so excited because I found a pedagogical model that has been shown by many studies to have success in terms of teaching students about social justice, identity, and power dynamics with regard to race and gender. I wanted to use the same model to talk about religion, since nobody had researched interfaith dialogue using this particular model before. I thought I would end up with all of these great things to say about how we can teach students about Christian privilege and religious oppression. What ended up happening, though, is that all three of the courses I studied failed, in my opinion, to deliver from the social justice perspective. So, my research ended up being more of a cautionary tale of how things can go really wrong, even if you have really good intentions.

Q3. Why was the power dynamics around religion not discussed in the classes you studied?

I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that the facilitators of the interfaith dialogues themselves were not clear about the power dynamics as it pertains to religions. Some facilitators were trying to translate things that they understand about race and gender, but they were not articulating the dynamics of power around religious identities. Other facilitators clearly opined that Christian privilege was not a real thing. Thus, because the facilitators didn't have the ability to explain religion using a social justice framework, **the students didn't learn it. Whenever words like privilege and oppression came up, they always reverted back to discussions of race and gender which seemed more familiar to them. Therefore, even in explicitly religion themed classes, they ended up talking a lot of about race and gender and learning very little about religion.**

Q4. What were some of your observations during your PhD research?

I noticed that so many Higher Education students and scholars just haven't thought about religion from the social justice perspective. **About ten years ago in the literature, there was this blanket assumption in the field of Higher Education that religion equals theistic belief, an assumption that is heavily critiqued in the field of Religious Studies.** So, it is often very difficult for students and scholars to understand that religious identity is not only defined by one's personal beliefs. It is hard for some to understand how privilege and the dynamics of oppression can also influence one's religious identity. I have these great (or awful, actually) quotes from research participants that said things like **"if you're oppressed because of your religion, I don't actually care because you chose that religion, and if you don't want to be oppressed, you can choose a different one."** They would say they felt bad about racial oppression because race is not a choice, but that religious identity is purely a personal choice and therefore not something worth caring about. **Many of them had this false assumption that religious minorities can make a different religious choice, but we know that historically this is not always the case; not to mention that should people have to change their religion in order to be treated with respect.**

Thankfully the field has grown with more critical voices. There are more people who are pushing back against this assumption that religion is purely theistic belief and personal choice. But I do think that unless you're someone who really thinks explicitly from a critical perspective, this is still an overwhelming default assumption. Folks who are studying religion in the field of higher education, who

are not well versed in the critical religious studies frameworks, they lean back on that a lot. **It continues to be really fascinating and frustrating for me that otherwise very smart, conscientious people, scholars, who clearly understand how systemic power imbalance works, often don't see it with regard to religion with Christian privilege, hegemony supremacy in and through education in the United States.**

Q6. How is your work and experience aligned with this Religion & Education SIG?

My work is aligned with this SIG, because it sits at the intersection of religion and education. But to be honest, I didn't initially see this SIG as a space for me. Because, when I first started exploring these issues back in 2012-2013, I got the impression that a lot of discussions that were happening in this SIG were more related to religious education as opposed to religious identity or diversity. I presented for the first time in this SIG in 2013, and I just remember feeling a little bit deflated. I didn't feel that anyone in the audience really seemed interested in my presentation. So, I left that conference feeling like I hadn't made any new connections with anyone. I kind of didn't really join this SIG until 2020. I did explore other SIGs and other conferences. Finally, **I realized that people in the general pool, or in other SIGs, generally weren't interested in hearing or talking about religion.**

While presenting at other SIGs, I kept getting comments like this belongs in the Religion and Education SIG or that this should be in the Religion and Education journal. My position has always been that the general population should also be thinking about religion, so why should we only be talking about religion in spaces specifically designated for it? That was kind of frustrating. So, **when I came back to Religion & Education SIG in 2020, I just wanted to be around people who actually thought that religion was interesting.** Also, by that point I had kind of shifted my focus to more foundational, methodological concerns like how we study religion and what foundational frameworks we use, which I thought would be good to discuss in this SIG. **I was happy to see that the Religion & Education SIG had diversified since 2013 and had become a place I felt good about.**

Q7. What suggestions do you have for students or scholars in Religion & Education?

- Seek and maintain community with like-minded students and scholars.
- Join the "Critical Religious Studies in Higher Education" network by emailing me. (sachiterera@gmail.com) and/or joining the [Facebook](#) group.
- Podcast "[Keeping it 101](#)" by Professors of Religion Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst & Megan Goodwin.
- "Heathen: Religion and Race in American History" by Kathryn Gin Lum.
- "Race for Revival: How Cold War S.Korea shaped American Evangelical" by Helen Jin Kim.
- "White Christian Privilege" by Khyati Joshi.
- "The Invention of World Religions" by Tomoko Masuzawa.

SIG RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

Conference on Higher Education Values, Belonging, Identity, and Purpose

The First Annual Conference on Higher Education Values, Belonging, Identity, and Purpose will be held online on **February 8-10th, 2023** for Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals, faculty, and graduate students. Hosted by the School of Education, Social Work, and Psychological Sciences at the University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC). The theme for the first annual conference will be "*Reimagining Higher Education to a place of belonging for all* is meant to provide a pathway for all professionals and students who work directly on or in tangential ways to the field of higher education to come together to discuss the importance of the humanity of higher education. Below are important dates related to this conference. To submit a proposal please follow this [link](#).

August 8, 2022	Call for Programs & Papers Open
September 1, 2022	Registration Opens
October 1, 2022	Program & Paper Proposal Deadline
December 1, 2022 (latest)	Program Acceptances Notification (by email)
February 8-10, 2022	Conference :)

For more details please contact Dr. J. Cody Nielsen, Director, Center for Spirituality and Social Justice, Dickinson College, PA at j.cody.nielsen@convergencestrategies.org.

MAINSTREAM NEWS & ARTICLES

[Equity-Focused Pedagogies in the Religious Studies Classroom: Editor's Introduction](#)

[Future of Higher Education: Fully Shift to Hybrid Model by 2025](#)

Religion & Education SIG Graduate Student Representatives Contact

Please email us information for the newsletter by the 15th of each month.

Hisham Qureshi (2hishamqureshi@gmail.com)

A PhD Candidate in Religion and an Instructor of World Religions at the University of Georgia. He researches how secular, spiritual, & religious students manage their identities on campuses.

Luke Walden (lcwalden@memphis.edu)

A doctoral student in the Educational Psychology & Research program at The University of Memphis. He is interested in psychometrics and the religious epistemology of college students.