Religious Dimensions
In 2012
**Wooster's Religious History**

**Dec 18, 1866**  The University of Wooster is founded as a school of the Presbyterian Church

**1870**  The religion requirement consists of 6 credit hours, 3 in the Old Testament, and 3 in the New Testament

**1870**  Kauke chapel is located in Old Main

**1874**  Westminster Presbyterian Church is founded as the campus congregation (now known as the congregation-in-residence)

**1901**  Old Main burns to the ground

**1902**  Memorial chapel is dedicated (fit 1000 skinny people)

**1963**  By-laws are amended from 100% to 75% of the trustees required to be “communicant members” of the Presbyterian Church

**1968**  The Board of Trustees establishes the Synod Affairs Committee

**1969**  The Synod of Ohio votes to release ownership of the college and its assets to the board of trustees – today the college is a fully independent institution but continues a voluntary relationship with the PC(USA) through a memorandum of understanding with the synod

**1969**  Religious Dimension Committee replaces the Synod Affairs Committee

**1969**  Father Edward Brennan, the first Catholic scholar, is hired to work in the Department of Religion

**1870s – 1970s**  Daily chapel is required (anywhere from 4-5 days a week)

**1971**  McGaw Chapel is dedicated

**1979**  By-laws amended to require 50% of the trustees to be Presbyterian

**Early 1980’s**  The department of Religion becomes the department of Religious Studies

**1996**  R. Stanton Hales is installed as the first non-Presbyterian President

**1996**  Linda Morgan-Clement is called to serve as the first Henry Copeland Campus Minister to the College

**2010**  Restructuring of the Board of Trustees eliminates the Religious Dimension Committee.

**2010**  By-laws are amended to require 25% of the trustees to be Presbyterian

**Today**  The religious perspectives requirement is 1 credit out of 32 necessary for graduation
Dear Readers,

Thank you for your interest and care for the Interfaith Campus Ministry at The College of Wooster. This issue of the Advocate is intended to engage YOU in a discussion about the religious dimension of the college today. It is my hope that our email will be flooded with your thoughtful responses that we will use as the core of our next issue. Your responses will be shared with persons across campus, including an ad hoc group of trustees who are themselves engaged in the questions and with the Alumni board, who discussed some of these topics briefly at their fall 2011 meeting.

When Wooster was founded, the religious dimension was part and parcel of its identity as a college of the Presbyterian Church. Protestantism was in its DNA with all of the earnest, hard-working, social justice passion, and unconscious privilege and racial and class bias that the word implied in the late 1800s. Over the years the campus community has changed and grown with the country and the world. With the help of emeritus faculty member, Gordon Tait, we trace an abbreviated history of some of the changes that impact the religious dimension on the following page.

Today the religious dimension is more ambiguous for insider and outsider alike. Institutional connection to the Presbyterian Church continues in membership in the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities, agreements with the Synod of the Covenant and Westminster Presbyterian Church, and in our by-laws where a small percentage of our trustees are required to be Presbyterian. In a multifaith sense it continues in the ministry of Interfaith Campus Ministries with the presence of a Campus Rabbi and a Chaplain who is an ordained Presbyterian minister, a range of student religious organizations, and speakers and programs that engage religious questions and support interfaith dialogue and collaboration. It also exists in students and alumni who expect from the College an education that includes relevant, expansive, and intelligent opportunities for spiritual growth that help equip our graduates to be leaders of character and influence in an interdependent global community.

The time is ripe for us to raise the question, what should the religious dimension at The College of Wooster look like in 2012? What role should religious and spiritual life play in the lives of students, staff, and faculty? How should the institution itself support the religious dimension and how should the religious dimension play out in the institutional culture? What key attitudes and approaches are essential in the creation and support of a lively spiritual dimension that can truly equip our graduates to be leaders of character and influence in an interdependent global community? I invited Karen Lockwood, Alumna and member of the Board of Trustees and Christina Bowerman, Junior, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Religious Studies Double Major and editor of this issue to share their responses to some of these questions. I hope that these will be enough to move you to take an hour, consider your own response to the questions, and then drop us a line.

Partners in ministry,

Reverend Linda Morgan-Clement, DMin.
Director of Interfaith Campus Ministry

Henry Copeland Chaplain

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**Interfaith Campus Ministries Staff**

Reverend Linda Morgan-Clement, DMin.
Chaplain & Director of Intefaith Campus Ministries

Emily Howard
Assistant Chaplain

Rabbi Joan Friedman, PhD.
Campus Rabbi and Assist. Prof. of History & Religious Studies

Karen Hahn
Catholic Campus Minister

Julie Longacre
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Mike Greer
InterVarsity Intern
"Intergenerational relationships have strengthened my college experience and helped my spiritual journey progress."

"I wish more people would be open to other people that might be different than you and that is okay."

"Oddly enough I have fostered my spiritual life a lot in my classes. Through class discussions I have realized what is really important to me and it has really helped shape my values."

"I don’t follow any specific religions or faith traditions, but I consider myself to be a religious person because I follow a certain set of values and they are how I live my life."

"Performing with the Wooster Chorus is a very meaningful and spiritual component of my life because it is something I choose not to major in because it is a source of inspiration and joy that I want to preserve — performing and creating art like that is something more than just singing or dancing."

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"A lot of when I feel spiritually connected is in a community."
"You have a religious and spiritual journey, whether you choose to or not. The college requires you to take a religion class and almost any class will broaden and show someone else's perspective about what religion can be and what religion is."

"I would like to have more professors, staff members, and community members attend multi-faith or single faith events."

"OICM is a great resource for me personally because they have programs like Worthy Questions and Interfaith Dialogue Dinners that provide a safe space to discuss deep questions with like-minded individuals."

"I hope for a community of support and encouragement that supports and affirms me but also challenges me to grow and challenges me to question."

"Religious but not spiritual"

"Spirituality is connected to nature."

"I really enjoy getting to know families from the church I attend in the town. It offers a connection that is beyond just peers your age. The college misses the diversity outside campus and this church has helped show me that."

"The best spiritual growth can come out of meeting people so different from you, but in the same way you can’t force people to interact with people they aren’t comfortable with or don’t get along with. Interfaith dialogue is a good start and a safe space, but we need something more campus-wide than that."
As I write, I face the limits language imposes on discussing the religious dimension at the College. Language can seem a badge of judgment, or be a great liberator of communication. It seems that one’s personal views are best understood if expressed in words that are neutral, not laden with the vocabulary of a particular religious affiliation but instead accessible by those of different or no affiliation. I hope I can write here with this in mind!

I believe that a thoughtful discussion of the religious dimension requires a wide look at our larger college communities. These include the cultures that our current and future students bring to campus, the cultures into which we send students to study, and the nation and world that our students will serve as future leaders. What an opportunity we have! The world cries out for a broad understanding of different faiths, which vary both in expression and in beliefs surrounding food, worship, ritual, taboos, and life events so deeply human that they are often made sacred. The global possibility of stability, leadership, and peace only expands as we equip our future leaders to understand and respect religions and their roles in conflict and reconciliation.

A thoughtful discussion also will join the power of students’ age-appropriate traits with the College’s unique qualities.

Students at Wooster, say ages 17-23, bring curiosity-boundless amounts of it. They bring an intuition for honesty – that thing that sniffs out a weak or insincere theory or position. They bring playfulness – the kind that bridges differences with spirit and practices the courtesy of wit as fun. They bring internationalism – a generational belief that cultures must not be swallowed by exported consumerism or mass production (“globalization”). Many feel a thirst to learn how a highly contrasting culture can equip an American with skills for her future effectiveness.

And college students bring their age of searching. On the threshold of adulthood, and alone at last in a new environment, they ask who they are and what the deeper meaning is of life. Some young people know they are searching. Others may identify it as restlessness. Most, however, know that searching for variety is good; they get to ask questions without bounds and to find answers of their own. The answers they find are personal, shared, and changeable. The answers meld their family’s strong cultures and values with the breadth and tone of the search itself. Within these traits lies the start of spiritual exploration, which I define as having a safe place to wonder and debate, indeed to attempt and reject and change everyday practices or large acts of faith and giving. Here also is the seed of spiritual growth, which I define as exploring what this sense of the spiritual is that human cultures universally honor.

So what about our College’s unique qualities marries to these traits of impending adulthood? The College has always aimed to encourage, to feed, to enrich its graduates’ independent questioning, exploring, and searching for answers. This is what our founders aimed for, even when speaking in what we recognize to be Christian Protestant vocabulary. Our College’s position as the premier institution for mentored undergraduate research is all about that journey of independent wondering and answering. We recognize that good questions are endless in any field, and that curiosity lies right next to scholarship. Students graduate not with all the answers but with well-formed questions and the conviction to think broadly, inclusively and without pre-judging their answers.

In the same way, one graduates not with the mastery of one religion’s answers and practices, but perhaps with the taste of reflection about the spiritual aspect of life. Indeed, a habit of seeking access to the varieties of ways that religions guide such reflection not only increases the graduate’s tools for bridging religious divides, but also gives the individual numerous approaches to the deeper – perhaps common -- essence of human spirituality. Honoring the high value of good questions, we know upon reflection that to address religion on campus is a chance to build curiosity about many approaches.

Thus I come to my personal answers to your questions. It seems to me that at the College of Wooster, we want to do in religion what we do best in everything else. We attract variety, we bring it together to share, we enable the individual’s exploration, and we graduate citizen-scholars capable of leading the world’s future amid a harmonization of many conflicts, cultures and politics. So too with our approach to a religious dimension.
We hold fast to our liberal arts educational mission when we welcome but do not judgmentally require worship and holiday observance, not only for a Christian tradition familiar to our 1866 founders and our 20th Century trustees and friends, but also for prominent national and global religions and other faiths that the students bring. Opportunities to worship, counsel, feast, share, and console will reach students who may include their friends. When the subject comes to religion, we teach in the tradition of this broad honoring of varying means of religious observance, including non-religious beliefs about a spiritual dimension.

Being a home to such a breadth of beliefs and traditions offers ways explore and demonstrate tolerance and insight. It also recognizes that individuals may take spiritual journeys in their lifetimes. That home should avoid pre-judgment or favored prescriptions for a young adult’s exploration, which will occur in his/her own time (and perhaps not on campus at all). Our graduates will do in a complex and shrinking global culture what graduates have done before them: lead wisely, with conviction plus tolerance and understanding.

As a religious Religious Studies/Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies double major, I am becoming increasingly less religious. Coming to Wooster as a devout Presbyterian and now identifying as more of a cultural Presbyterian, I am a very much a part of the “frozen chosen people.” I chose Wooster initially because of the Presbyterian foundation that paired so nicely with the focus on the interfaith religious dimension on campus. I did not declare a Religious Studies major until the fall of my junior year. Given the number of classes I had already taken and my research interest, it just seemed to fit. While I value my education in religious studies, it often conflicts with my Presbyterian core beliefs and values. I am constantly aware of how some of my “fellow” Christians have treated people negatively over time and it makes me ashamed to own the Christian label. This facet of my education informs my hopes for the religious dimensions on Wooster’s campus.

It wasn’t until I started attending Wooster that I realized the diversity at the college isn’t all that they claim in the Office of Admissions. I hope that that Wooster starts to work harder to foster the diversity that is present instead of continuously pushing for more diversity when the students who fit in the “diversity” category might not feel safe to celebrate their diversity. While we have a wide array of religious activities offered on campus, they are largely isolated happening mostly in Overholt house, home to OICM, or Babcock, home to CDGE. While these locations have become safe zones for religious and non-religious students alike, they are not in the hub of campus. While Overholt, located on the North end of campus, is ideal for creating a spiritual get-away for students, it also increases the isolation of religion and spirituality on campus. Students must have intention to go out of their daily routine to seek religious or spiritual life.

Other than these two safe places I have never seen anyone, of any faith, pray in public. Along with the privatization of religion, it isn’t considered “cool” to be religious, for staff, faculty, or students. Linda Morgan – Clement, is the public face of religious life on campus due to her role as campus Chaplain paired with her extreme compassion. Why aren’t there more adult role models who are open about their religious/spiritual life or lack thereof? I wish that more professors/staff and students alike were more open about their religious/spiritual life. Why can’t people be as open about their religious and spiritual life as they are about their political leanings? Joyce, a Lowry worker, is extremely open about her religious faith and I admire this about her because she is not shy about expressing herself, no matter who the student or adult walking by. The religious dimensions on campus would increase if we have more people as open as Linda and Joyce, just to name two.

While I am personally using these four years to take a break from attending actual church, I continue to be heavily grounded in OICM. Programs like Worthy Questions have given me a safe space to integrate spiritual and religious life into all aspects of myself. This exploration has shaped my college experience in a way no other college could have. The College of Wooster should stop ignoring or shying away from religion and start celebrating the religious diversity, the desire for community, and the desire for belonging, that the Wooster community expresses.
Interfaith Campus Ministries Mission Statement
Interfaith Campus Ministries fosters religious, spiritual, ethical, and moral growth for students, staff, and faculty at The College. As a community of communities and as seekers after meaning, we wrestle individually and communally with questions of ultimacy. Interfaith Campus Ministries supports and encourages the development of character and commitment required to be agents of just and peaceful transformation in the world.

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