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## OU establishes Center for Religious Understanding

In light of the prominent role religion plays in society, Oakland University has created a new center to help increase awareness and understanding of various faith traditions. The Center for Religious Understanding (CRU) will provide academic, research, and partnership opportunities for individuals and organizations across Oakland's campus and to the general public.

CRU Director Dr. Alan Epstein said the Center provides a forum for people of diverse backgrounds to discuss issues with civility.

"Engaging the campus and surrounding community to talk about controversial matters, but in a very nonthreatening atmosphere, to reach some common understandings, is an important component of our institutional purpose," Dr. Epstein said. "We don't see this being done systematically on other campuses in our area."



The Center's mission is focused on four main objectives:

- Collect and organize resources for the interdisciplinary exploration of religion in society at Oakland University
- Investigate religious identity and its role in society through inquiry in the humanities, social and natural sciences, and engagement with the creative and performing arts
- Facilitate dialogue around religion and public issues by establishing associations between CRU and its fellow academic units at Oakland, area collaborators, and individual religious communities
- Expand religious literacy both on the Oakland University campus and in the wider community.

As part of its mission, the Center will complement Oakland University's academic courses, seminars, student projects, internships and study abroad opportunities. The University currently offers an independent major and general concentration in Religious Studies, as well as minors in Judaic Studies, Islamic Studies and Christianity Studies. Courses are taught with an emphasis on the historical, social and cultural context of each faith tradition.

"It would be a real shortcoming of any university to allow students to graduate without some understanding of religious topics or traditions," said Dr. Michael Pytlik, director of OU's Judaic Studies program. "In order to be a good citizen...students need to know some of these things. Religious literacy is an important part of it. I think that will be one function of the center."

CRU will also promote religious literacy in the surrounding community by providing speakers, teachers and other resources to facilitate dialogue among those in varying faith traditions.

In addition, the Center will host grant-writing workshops for students and faculty and provide guidance for establishing research projects. Opportunities for research collaboration among students and faculty will be developed and CRU will build partnerships between Oakland University, donors, public officials, community leaders, religious organizations and faith communities. To further promote public engagement and understanding, CRU will serve as a resource for media inquiries about religious issues.

For more information on the Center for Religious Understanding at Oakland University, contact Dr. Epstein at (248) 370-2358 or visit the [website](#).