MODULE OVERVIEW

This curricular module explores the role of religion in U.S. foreign policy, highlighting how the academic study of religion can inform the practice of diplomacy. Shaun Casey reflects on his experience working in the U.S. State Department and considers how a critical understanding of religion can improve the efficacy of government on the local, national, and international levels in a 2018 article on “Government Innovation in an Era of White Nationalism” [open access]. Casey reflected further on the intersections of government and religion in a 2018 lecture on “Globetrotting for Interfaith Harmony” [video].

KEY THEMES

Below, you can explore more resources on religion and U.S. foreign policy, with additional materials on religion and diplomacy, religion and foreign policy, and international religious freedom. Materials are designed to engage students with the following issues:

- religion and diplomacy, religious literacy, and interfaith collaboration in the U.S. State Department [Casey article, open access; Birdsall article, Berkley Forum]


- approaches to international religious freedom policy and implications for the Biden administration [“Rethinking U.S. Policy on International Religious Freedom,” Berkley Forum]

Instructors are encouraged to look through topics below [videos/PDFs/articles] and adapt these questions to their needs.
RELIGION AND DIPLOMACY


Why is religious literacy important in government, and how can the government do better in understanding the religious dynamics of its space?

Discuss the five lessons Casey draws from his experience in the State Department.


Discuss the work of the State Department’s former Office of Religion and Global Affairs under the Obama administration.

In what ways could this work and the office’s commitment to “radical inclusivity” be important in the context of today’s cultural and political climate?

“Globetrotting for Interfaith Harmony,” (2018) [video]

Why does religion matter in diplomacy? How can interfaith discussion be translated into collaboration and action? [see 6:29–16:35]

How can interfaith cooperation aid refugee resettlement? Discuss Casey’s experiences in refugee resettlement centers and the role of the State Department. [see 41:13–52:47]

“Religion and Diplomacy: A Conversation with Judd Birdsall,” (2021) [Berkley Forum]

What are some of the challenges and possibilities of religious engagement in U.S. diplomacy, according to Birdsall?

How can the Biden administration balance universal human rights with religious freedom? What steps could promote greater trust and respect between the government and various religious communities?

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM


Why does the author argue that “the temptation to get back to normal must be avoided” regarding U.S. international religious freedom policy?


According to the author, how can the United States, and the international community more broadly, build consensus on freedom of religion or belief policies?


What does the author identify as the paradox of free religion? Discuss the implications of this paradox for U.S. policy on religious freedom both domestically and abroad.


According to the author, how can the notion of religion as a moral virtue be integrated into Biden policy on international religious freedom?