



HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

Religion and Public Life

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

MISSION

Religion and Public Life promotes the public understanding of religion in service of a just world at peace.

APPROACH

We collaborate across disciplines and vocations to examine religion in context, advancing leadership to deepen understanding of the causes of injustice while opening imaginative possibilities for addressing the urgent challenges of our time.

TEN-YEAR VISION

By 2032, RPL alumna, fellows, and professional and lifelong learning participants are integrating religious literacy and just peace principles into a wide range of vocations, professions, and arenas. They are creating webs of influence that shape approach and practice, opening new possibilities for addressing critical issues of social importance.

HDS faculty increasingly emphasize the public dimensions of religion in their teaching, research, and professional and lifelong learning. Across Harvard University, including its professional schools, a robust understanding of religion is recognized as essential. HDS's cross-disciplinary convening power will have expanded in response to this growing expectation.

In the public square, religious literacy and just peace principles are increasingly mainstreamed into justice initiatives, as evidenced in public discourse and approach.

Religion and Public Life
Harvard Divinity School
14 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

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Dear Friends of Religion and Public Life,

It has been an astonishing year of many firsts for us at Religion and Public Life (RPL). Our programming rests on two central pillars: the [Religious Literacy and the Professions Initiative \(RLPI\)](#), and the [Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative \(RCPI\)](#). RPL supports a broad range of [programming within and beyond Harvard Divinity School](#), inspiring fresh approaches to conflict transformation, education, and a range of other fields. As we settled into and celebrated our new physical office in Divinity Hall, we collectively witnessed the power of convening scholars, students, and activists who share an unshakable lifelong commitment to the process of just peacebuilding.

One major undertaking this year was the establishment of a stakeholder-led strategic planning process to map out the vision and goals of Religion and Public Life. Our ambitious plan, *Religion and Public Life Forward*, highlights our central commitments across four core areas over the course of the next two years:

- Strengthen RPL Foundations
- Build the RPL Community
- Influence the Public Realm
- Build a Sustainable Program

We invite you to explore the full plan online at rpl.hds.harvard.edu/strategic-plan-rpl-forward.

Among other highlights this year, 11 remarkable Master of Religion and Public Life degree candidates each held a public presentation to showcase their thinking and application of religious literacy and just peace principles in their area of expertise. We are honored to celebrate their achievements as the first graduating cohort of the first new academic degree program at Harvard Divinity School in over 50 years.

The Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative supported the second year of 10 resident and nonresident fellows, culminating in the powerful series on cultural activism. The team shifted the traditional January term course to a spring-semester experience, concluding in the first experiential learning trip in two years, with eight students remaining in Israel/Palestine in supported internships this summer.

We continue to be moved by the power of the application of religious literacy in professional fields. RPL and HDS alumni relations colleagues sponsored two events with distinguished alumnx panelists in the fields of humanitarian action and the journalism. Both events illuminated the power of an HDS degree. We will continue our partnership with alumni relations and will host additional events for other highlighted professions in the fall. We are especially excited to report that our first group of 25 Certificate in Religion and Public Life students will embark on summer internships in diverse settings, serving 280 hours each as part of the certificate requirements.

We are approaching a staggering reach of nearly one million participants in the HarvardX Massive Open Online Courses. The team revamped the courses and relaunched them in the fall, supported by a group of graduate teaching assistants guiding online discussions with students across the globe.

It is the wise counsel and support of RPL's generous donors that makes this work possible. To say we are grateful to them, and to the many, many students, staff, fellows, faculty, and stakeholders who have made this inaugural year possible, is an understatement. Our ongoing cross-disciplinary collaborations have enormous potential to shift individual and interpersonal approaches while centering structural justice. We are eager to see what blooms in the years ahead.



Diane L. Moore,
Faculty Director, Religion and Public Life
July 2022



RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE IN 2021–22: BY THE NUMBERS

Fellows:

20



**Certificate in
Religion and Public
Life students:**

25



**Inaugural graduating
cohort of Master of
Religion and Public Life
students:**

11

**RPL-supported
summer internships:**

33



**Open houses
hosted:**

3

**Public events
RPL hosted:**

33

**Attendees at
public events:**

4,948

**Public events RPL
co-sponsored:**

6



3 New Professional and Lifelong Learning
workshops for educators:

with **50** educators

from **12** states

Website users:

334,773



HarvardX course participants:

45,120
people since fall 2021

987,298
total since launch in 2016

Global reach

HarvardX course participants:

194 countries

Website users:

219 countries and territories

**Participants in Religion, Conflict, and
Peace Fellows Spring Speaker Series:**

40 countries







MASTER OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

Reflections on the Inaugural Year

At the start of the fall 2021 semester, Harvard Divinity School welcomed its first class of candidates for the one-year [Master of Religion and Public Life \(MRPL\)](#), the School's first new degree program since the Master of Theological Studies was introduced more than 50 years ago. Drawing on the RPL's foundational principles in religious literacy and just peace, the MRPL supports experienced professionals from a wide range of backgrounds to promote a robust and capacious understanding of the power of religion in human experience and contemporary global affairs.

Reflecting on the year, RPL Faculty Director Diane L. Moore noted: "The expertise that each MRPL candidate brought to our work together was generative and inspiring for members of the cohort and for others at HDS and beyond. The projects represent a remarkable array of talents and approaches that illustrate what candidates learned here at HDS about the power and complexity of religion relevant to their spheres. The collaborative vision for the program was realized as we all wrestled with the questions of what just peace entails in differing professional/vocational contexts and what a more nuanced understanding of religion can offer to enhance just peacebuilding efforts."

Ans Irfan, MD, EdD, DrPH, MPH, MRPL '22



"The MRPL has been a life-changing experience for me, personally and professionally, such that it shattered many of my assumptions around how the world works—especially when it comes to the normalized assumption of secularity as irreligious, the separation of church and state, and

the distinction between devotional expression of religion versus the study of religion. It was a profoundly generative space to imagine fresh ways of thinking, being, and praxis. RPL has equipped me with new analytical frameworks, not only to acknowledge and excavate the deeply embedded influence of religion in all aspects of our modern life in and out of the United States, but also to generate alternatives rooted in global health equity and dismantling structural racism. I am much richer due to this experience, which will continue to inform my work until my time has come. RPL's just peace foundation invites us to ask what I have always asked myself: What is public health if not the unapologetic quest for collective human flourishing?"

Rev. Erica N. Williams, MDiv, MRPL '22



"I truly believe what I said when we first came here that we were the Avengers. I said that all of us have come from different parts of the world, to learn more, so that when we go back to our parts of the world, we will be able to help to avenge and to bring healing and justice to earth. I know that we all will

leave this place and do some great—even greater—things. I think HDS has given me a lot of tools to go back into the world to be very bold, courageous, and uncompromising: uncompromising in making this nation one that reckons with the things that have happened, but also one that begins to repair what has happened. I have been doing the work of social justice for over 20 years. Through my HDS courses, I have identified that I am a womanist ethicist. This year I have become laser-focused on the plight of poor Black women. I am grateful for the resources that I have had access to this year, as they have given me the foundation needed to launch the Set It Off Movement. I am excited about building this work that will be around for generations to come."



RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND THE PROFESSIONS INITIATIVE (RLPI)

Teaching across Disciplines and Perspectives

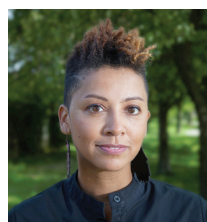
Through a series of virtual sessions convened since September, the newly formed [Religious Literacy and the Professions Fellows](#) program meshed diverse vocational pathways into a unique offering for HDS graduate students. The course Religious Literacy and the Professions, which Diane Moore and 10 RLPI Fellows co-taught, is a requirement for the Certificate in Religion and Public Life. In weekly small group sections held via Zoom, students connected with experts in their fields, exploring the power of understanding the influence of religion in so-called secular arenas that include government, media and entertainment, humanitarianism, community organizing, and journalism. A dynamic community emerged, bringing together these career paths with intersecting justice issues, including those of racial justice, climate change, immigration and refugees, and native and Indigenous rights.

All 10 of the RLPI Fellows gathered on the HDS campus in Cambridge in early April to strengthen connections built over the course of convening virtual meetings. In planning for the second year of the certificate program, the group began to develop a suite of case studies exploring religious literacy across professions and issue areas related to justice and to reconfigure the syllabus for the required course.

Each fellow recorded a short video exploring a “burning question” in their field of expertise, weaving in their learnings about the power and complexity of religion in shaping our civic and public lives. Fellows also had the opportunity to connect with students, exploring career questions and internships over shared meals and during the final RPL open house.

The RLPI also hosted School-wide skills workshops in podcasting—responding to student desire to hone public engagement skills—as a tangible application of ways to enhance public understanding of religion. Next year, the skills workshops series will be expanded, with potential training sessions on op-ed writing, facilitation, and power mapping.

RLPI Fellow Karilyn M. Crockett



“RPL has enabled me to think more deeply about trust as the foundation for all change and social transformation that lasts. Trust in a higher power, trust in one another, or trust in an institution is essential for moving us toward the world we are calling into being. As the Government

Fellow, every week I had a fresh opportunity to raise thorny questions about the efficacy of public policy and democratic political institutions. The students were undaunted and consistently pushed our conversations toward the possible, while naming new vehicles for accountability and action. What was clear to me before this year, and now burns in my heart as a refreshed mandate, is that we are built to look beyond ourselves and serve based on what we cannot see. The work of identifying and getting closer to this ineffable,

guiding star is the work of discernment and searching in community. For this and so many other reasons, RPL is a haven for believers who seek to transform the world as we know it and dare to trust the truth that this is possible and necessary.” —Karilyn Crockett

Karilyn Crockett, PhD, is the first Government Fellow for the Religious Literacy and the Professions Initiative of Religion and Public Life. Crockett co-founded Multicultural Youth Tour of What’s Now (MYTOWN), an award-winning, Boston-based, educational nonprofit organization. Crockett served for four years with the Mayor’s Office of Economic Development as the director of economic policy and research and as the director of small business development for the City of Boston, and she was the City of Boston’s first chief of equity. She holds a faculty appointment as professor of urban history, public policy and planning in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning.





CERTIFICATE IN RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE (CRPL)

Intended for students who are exploring application of the HDS education outside of traditional ministry or academic paths, the [Certification in Religion and Public Life](#) connects students with seasoned fellows and with meaningful internship opportunities to discern application of religious literacy theory in action. RPL is supporting 25 students in their required internships during summer 2022.

Ciara Moezidis, MTS '23



Ciara Moezidis is a first-year master of theological studies degree candidate with a focus on religion, ethics, and politics. Her more specific focuses are on the Middle East and North Africa and on addressing international human rights violations, such as ethno-religious persecution,

apartheid, and genocide. At HDS, she is pursuing a Certificate in Religion and Public Life, and she co-founded the Death Café, a student group for open discourses around death and dying.

Moezidis launched her 280-hour internship requirement earlier this spring semester with an exceptional opportunity to work alongside the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief. She is also a participant in the experiential course hosted by the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative, traveling with her class to Israel/Palestine in June and remaining in the region for an additional internship with The Carter Center in Ramallah, Palestine.

Carrying Middle Eastern Issues into HDS

“Diane Moore is one of the main reasons I came to HDS. I sat in on an interesting class of hers during DivEx, where she was teaching on Israel/Palestine.

Before I committed to HDS, I talked to her again, saying, “Hey, tell me why this is a place for me to be.” She said it’s not for everyone. But it is for certain people who really want to dive deeper into theoretical frameworks with nuances that aren’t being touched upon in policy, so they can bring that to the table. This sounded like something I was up for.

The Certificate in Religion and Public Life is new, so I didn’t know about it until the first week of the fall. It was a bonus for me. I committed to HDS without realizing that the School was building out a robust program for what I am interested in: the intersection of religion and public life in a practical aspect. As a part of that, I’ve been taking classes through the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative. Hilary Rantisi, Susie Hayward, Diane Moore, Reem Atassi, and Atalia Omer have all been central to my HDS experience. When I think of HDS, it is these five people, even though I know there’s a whole other world outside of what I’m studying, with other incredible individuals.

Broadening into Other Schools

I applied to concurrent programs at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts, and I recently received acceptances to both. I am currently deciding on the program that is best for me! My hope with either of these programs is to better understand international NGOs and institutions, and what policymaking looks like in this context.

I am pursuing a policy program to round out the skills and greater understanding of religion that I have gained from my HDS experience. How can we become more religious and culturally literate in both our policymaking and understanding of current issues affecting human rights when advocating for communities who have been wronged? I also would like stronger quantitative skills, so I think the concurrent program would be a great pairing.

I do not fully know what I’m going to do. But I think in the short-term, after graduation, I would love to move to the Middle East and gain greater experience on the ground. I could then see myself doing human rights advocacy at an international NGO, particularly focused on the Middle East

and North Africa and on topics of human rights violations, apartheid, and genocide.

Working with the UN

I was working as a graduate assistant for the Religion and Public Life Program in the fall. I primarily supported the assistant director of the CRPL program, Susie Hayward, in finding internship sites for students and building partnerships with other organizations.

During the two months I worked with her, she came across the opportunity to help draft a report on religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity, under the external office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief. Susie shared the opportunity with me, saying that it seemed like something I might be interested in, and she was definitely correct.

The CRPL students—there are about 20 of us—would typically do this internship during the summer, but I knew I wanted to be interning abroad in the summer. So, I decided to apply for the fellowship to intern in the winter/spring. I was ecstatic when I received an offer. Since December, I have been working with Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed's external office to produce this report, which he presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March.

A part of the report, the annex, was on the treatment of Baha'i in Iran, Yemen, Egypt, and Qatar. It was quite cool to see that my undergraduate thesis could inform this report. His staff has a wide variety of experts on different contexts around the world, and it was a great feeling to contribute meaningfully to the annex, based on my past research.

Thus far, this experience has brought to light what I would like to do more of, and less of. I realized I do not get as excited about research. However, this experience has solidified for me that these are topics that I find really fascinating and I want to dive deeper into, but maybe on an advocacy level rather than a fact-finding level.

I wouldn't have been able to access this opportunity without HDS and wouldn't have even known it existed. I am so grateful that Religion and Public Life had the tools and the access to be able to think of me and say, "This would be a good opportunity for you."

Statement excerpted from the full "Humans of HDS" interview conducted and edited by Owen Yager. Photos courtesy Ciara Moezidis. Read the full profile online at humansofhds.tumblr.com.

CRPL Internship Sites, Summer 2022

American Muslims Docuseries (online)

The Aspen Institute's Religion and Society Program (online)

Bunker Hill Community College (Boston, MA)

Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (Cambridge, MA)

Deeper Dive (Los Angeles, CA; 2 students) (online)

Elifelet (Tel Aviv, Israel)

Empowerment Avenue (online)

External Office of the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief (online)

Independent Jewish Voices Canada (Toronto, Canada)

International Bridges to Justice (Geneva, Switzerland)

International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (online)

International Committee of the Red Cross (Geneva, Switzerland)

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (2 students, online)

Ottoson Middle School (Arlington, MA)

Religion News Service (online)

Trinity United Church of Christ and Imani Village (Chicago, IL)

U.S. Institute of Peace's Burma Program (online)

U.S. Institute of Peace's Religion and Inclusive Societies Program (Washington, DC; 3 students)



RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND PEACE INITIATIVE (RCPI)

Cultural Activism across Borders: Growing an International Network

The Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) strengthened global networks this year, hosting 15 webinars and co-sponsoring three additional events on diverse topics related to the focal case study of Israel/Palestine. Engaging 10 resident and nonresident fellows in weekly convenings, the program hosted a series of nine public events from February through April 2022. Participants tuned into live sessions from over 40 countries.

With the relaunch, via HarvardX, of the Massive Online Open Course [Religion, Conflict, and Peace](#), RCPI Fellows also provided six new video interviews in an expanded section on the hermeneutics of citizenship and cultural activism.

In its academic offerings, RCPI transformed the traditional January (J-Term) course, Learning in Context: Narratives of Displacement and Belonging in Israel/Palestine, into a spring semester-long interdisciplinary field study seminar open to all Harvard graduate students. By experiencing the case study of Israel/Palestine through the RCPI teaching method, students gain deep knowledge of the context, as well as develop skills in conflict transformation that is applicable in other contexts.

The course attracted 48 student applicants from seven different schools at Harvard. After a rigorous selection process, 18 students were selected from six Harvard schools (Divinity School, Kennedy School, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, School of Design, and Law School).

The interdisciplinary group traveled to the region for immersive learning, June 7–20, 2022. Eight students will stay in the region for internships that include the following sites:

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Jerusalem

Just Vision, Jerusalem

Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Bethlehem

The Carter Center, Israel/Palestine office, Ramallah

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem

American Friends Service Committee, Jerusalem

Ruwad Jordan, Amman

“I was struck by the variety and manner of the usage of moral imagination in this session to promote cultural activism. The videos in particular gave such rich insight into the passionate work that people are doing to ‘imagine different sorts of worlds for our communities.’ Whether it be through creative arts displayed in numerous methods from music to comedy to even the art and science of agriculture, it was amazing to see such examples of how ‘unique the human experience is when related through creative culture.’ ”

—Online student in *Religion, Conflict, and Peace* MOOC

Palestinian Sumoud as Indigenous Hope

RCPI Fellow Rana Khoury's Civic Engagement Curriculum

As a Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative Fellow in Harvard Divinity School's Religion and Public Life program, [Rana Khoury](#) is developing a civic engagement curriculum aimed at Palestinian students in higher education. Khoury explains the core concept of Sumoud, saying, "Here, Sumoud translates as steadfastness. It consists of grassroot community practices that persistently cultivate spaces where people, especially women and youth, strategize ways to maintain their dignity, identity, home, and land." Khoury clarifies that this paradigm is "not to be confused with the neoliberal, authority-centered, top-down, apolitical definition of resilience." It is about community will. "Sumoud is the imaginative force that sustains the community's will to resist for freedom and justice."

Khoury hopes to promote these qualities in Palestinian youth through a "contextual, competency-based, and action-oriented" curriculum, as well as provide the groundwork to create necessary tools, develop critical mindsets, build a transformative vision, and claim their agency as they navigate their civic engagement pathways." Khoury's curriculum is composed of five modes of engagement: a) civic knowledge, b) civic skills, c) fieldwork and community service, d) community building, and e) action. Civic Knowledge will cover topics such as civic issues and values, Sumoud history and paradigm, political and legal systems, current affairs, and rights and responsibilities. Civic Skills will include advocacy and campaigning, analytical thinking, and communication and negotiations. Fieldwork and Community Service

will consist of hands-on practical training, volunteer work, and service projects. Community Building will focus on establishing trust across groups, networks, institutions/organizations, and communities. Finally, Action will implement initiatives, as well as give overviews of past and current popular civil resistance efforts, community actions, and cultural symbols and figures.



Of her experience with the RCPI, Khoury says: "The HDS experience has been unique, and I am grateful for the opportunity to develop my project in a vibrant, supportive environment. Being part of a cohort of fellows and being supported by the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative team has allowed for active engagement and debate on issues closely related to my work." This is particularly important because for Khoury, "being able to identify the paradigm has been the result of rigorous examination of the politics of resilience and counter arguments."

Read Rana Khoury's full profile at rlp.hds.harvard.edu/news.

Sustaining and Documenting Co-Resistance

A Conversation between RCPI Fellows Mati Milstein and Oriel Eisner

Two Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) Fellows, Mati Milstein and Oriel Eisner, met in the Religion and Public Life office in Cambridge to share their stories of connection fostered through their two-year-long fellowship experience. Eisner, a Topol Fellow based in Jerusalem, and Milstein, a resident fellow, connected after their shared time together where Mati documented and interviewed "contemporary Jewish activism in solidarity with Palestinians against the Israeli military occupation."

Milstein, a seasoned photojournalist, shared that "I did not initially intend for this project to have a first-person narrative come into it, but it did. There are a lot of similarities and parallels with the communities that

I've documented over the past few years. I grew up in an American-Jewish community with certain preconceptions and socialization regarding Israel/Palestine. It led me to a place where the work I did on this project was less and less journalism and more about solutions."

RCPI Topol Fellow Oriel Eisner is a leader in the Center for Jewish Nonviolence (CJNV), which "strengthens and uplifts a robust and connected movement of Palestinians, Israelis and



diaspora Jews committed to active shared-resistance.” Eisner shared that the timing of Milstein’s documentation served to capture a unique point in the history of the collaboration between CJNV and Palestinian partners on the ground: “It wasn’t guaranteed that we were going to stay down there, for Jewish and Israeli activists to be invited, and that it would work. It was very much new territory.”

On the Ground

Eisner: “Documentation is part of what we do. You, [Mati], had already spent time in the South Hebron Hills, it felt natural, like you were already part of it. One thing it allowed for, coincidentally with COVID: you stepped into a significant shift for what solidarity looks like in the South Hebron Hills. It’s an area where there’s been Jewish solidarity and non-Jewish international presence since the late 1990s. In the last year and half, what shifted was Jewish activists and also Israeli-Jewish activists staying there. Even being there for a week was dramatically different from staying here for a month, let alone staying for the past four months.”

Milstein: “It hadn’t occurred to me that there was a unique confluence of events and period of time that I was able to capture. It’s encouraging to hear that. The fellowship very

much accelerated the process of my thinking. Ten years ago, I was taking pictures at a place in the West Bank where I had formed connections with the local Palestinians who lived there and were attending weekly protests. There was a very particular dynamic between the soldiers and the activists then, and I identified with both narratives, both stories. I’ve moved on from that, but it’s been a long process. These past two years have allowed me to speed it up, everything is much closer and intense.”

Read the full conversation online at rpl.hds.harvard.edu/news.

View Mati Milstein’s project, *Walking through the Twilight*, in the digital gallery available online:

www.walkingthroughthetwilight.com

Watch Milstein’s RCPI Fellow presentation on YouTube:

[Walking Through the Twilight: A Visual Exploration of Contemporary Jewish Anti-Occupation Activism](#)

Watch Oriel Eisner’s RCPI Fellow presentation on YouTube:

[Shared Resistance and Solidarity: A \(Re\)Newed Paradigm](#)

Learn more about the Center for Jewish Nonviolence:

<https://cjin.org>



Photos by Mati Milstein

RCPI Alumna Katie Falk

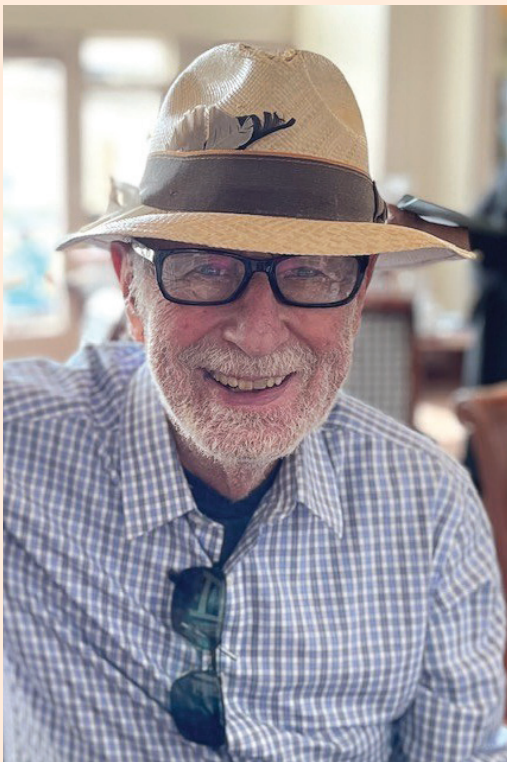
“I attribute many significant shifts in my personal and vocational paths to my experiences during the RCPI experiential learning course and internship. Prior to my travels with the RCPI, my comfort zone, both professionally and personally, was nonpartisanship (albeit with a liberal bent) in addressing the most divisive topics concerning Palestine/Israel. I became accustomed to presenting information from a variety of sources—whether it came from government ministries, NGOs, or media outlets—alongside analysis, in as neutral a manner as possible.”

“During my time with my RCPI cohort at Harvard and in the field in Palestine/Israel, I began to see how this commitment to nonpartisanship was largely a protective measure. It allowed me to analyze blatant injustices but also remove myself from the equation. The conversations we had with activists, artists, organizers, and as a group, in addition to our site visits to specific cities and towns, made it clear to me how nonpartisanship can be an obstacle to comprehensive change and a just peace in Palestine/Israel. By maintaining nonpartisanship, we assist, even if we do not intend to, in buttressing a system and status quo that privileges one narrative and people at the expense, or erasure, of another.”

“My time with B’Tselem as an RCPI intern further confirmed for me that I was moving in a direction where I could find alignment between my values and beliefs with that of the organization I was working for. It made me realize how central this overlap is to fulfillment, and it is something that I am no longer willing to sacrifice. It has been the driving force behind the opportunities I have pursued following graduation, including my decision to join the Center for Jewish Nonviolence’s second Hineinu cohort of activists taking part in sustained solidarity work in the South Hebron Hills.”

“Hilary, Atalia, Reem, Diane, and my fellow students have helped shape who I am when I show up for this work, and I am forever grateful for my time with them.”

—Katie Falk, '22, MA in Regional Studies, Middle East (Harvard University)



Remembering Sid Topol (1924–2022)

It is with our deepest condolences that we share the passing of Sidney Topol, a longtime friend of Harvard University through the Topol Family Foundation’s support of numerous efforts for peace-making. May his memory be a blessing.

Hilary Rantisi, director of the Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) at the Religion and Public Life program, reflected on her 20-plus years of friendship with Topol: “Sid Topol held a lifelong deep commitment to principles of nonviolence and justice. He was relentless in his pursuit of a vision of nonviolence and wanting to change the world. Sid’s generosity over many years culminated in the creation in 2020 of a Topol Fellowship on Just Peacemaking and Nonviolent Activism to enrich RCPI’s work with peace and justice practitioners. We have been fortunate to work with four dedicated Topol Fellows since the creation of the fellowship.”

Diane Moore, faculty director of Religion and Public Life, said: “We know that Sid’s legacy will have a lasting impact in our work at Harvard Divinity School. We are grateful for the privilege of knowing and partnering with him in helping to realize his vision.”

PROFESSIONAL AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Religion and Public Life offers opportunities for the public to engage with the complexities of religion's influence on civic life. Due to COVID and the proliferation of online events and courses, we've witnessed massive growth in our reach, and we plan to continue to leverage the resources of Harvard Divinity School's faculty, affiliates, and networks to offer meaningful content to grapple with the power of religion.

Advancing Religious Literacy with Secondary School Educators

Foundational to RPL programming is our ongoing support to secondary educators who are introducing a cultural studies approach to teaching religion in U.S. high schools and community colleges.

The RLPI offered its first, fully online, asynchronous Summer Institute in 2021, drawing 22 participants from 9 states and from Canada, and Russia. The program provided seven modules for educators, with learner centered introductions to critical pedagogy and religious literacy case studies through analysis of power, peace, and conflict frameworks. RPL staff and HDS graduate students provided real-time responses and individual feedback to each participant who completed the course. A second fully online, free Summer Institute for educators will be held in July 2022, with 30 participating in both self-paced and live online sessions, and another 40 in the asynchronous course.

This year, the team introduced three unique opportunities to explore principles of religious literacy applied to specific topics: imagination and the arts, place-based knowledges and Indigenous rights, and climate justice. Each workshop

took the format of an asynchronous online module and a live workshop featuring RPL Fellows as guest facilitators. This successful pilot engaged more than 50 educators from 12 states within the United States.

The three asynchronous modules are available for educators to access, on their own time, for professional development and to strengthen classroom experiences for youth.

A sampling of responses from participating educators:

"I am highly impressed by the intersectional and inclusive materials that have been incorporated in the modules."

"I am enthusiastic about these workshops, and I am grateful for the opportunity to participate, and not only participate, but to be included and to be seen."

"The mix of readings, videos, and discussion boards was effective. I also appreciated a diversity of voices speaking to imagination from their different contexts. The [multimedia content] was especially welcomed because many teachers could instantly see how to use it in a classroom application."

HarvardX Massive Online Open Courses: Nearly One Million Students Enrolled Globally



RPL's highly successful Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) were relaunched for a sixth year, with updated content and with combined enrollment over the lifetime of the courses now approaching one million.

The 45,120 registrants joining the courses since the October 2021 relaunch included 16,198 participants in the Religion, Conflict, and Peace course. Overall, 987,298 people have registered to participate in these courses since their launch in 2016. Within the World Religions through Its Scriptures series, the Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam modules remained the most popular, followed by Religious Literacy.

This year, the popular Religion, Conflict, and Peace course added new content that highlighted a hermeneutics of citizenship framework and work in cultural activism.

Given the continued high participation levels, RPL supported four yearlong graduate students to engage with and monitor active discussion boards across the courses. Their ongoing engagement enhances learner experience while providing RPL with deeper insight into the audiences that enroll in these courses.

Participants had this to say about their experience of the courses in general and the new content in particular:

"It has been enriching and overwhelming all mixed together. I have been challenged in ways I cannot explain. My eyes open to a world I know little about. Again, thank you, and, to all the responders, you help me grow."

“Thank you for making this class so transformative. It was. You are the reason I believe I can make my own corner of the world a little better.”

“The course has exceeded my expectations; I want to thank you for the level and depth of the material covered during the course. The topics on the discussion board invited me to reflect in depth with others with different perspectives. Thanks to this, the world does not seem so big and far away.”

“Thank you for bringing this course and making it accessible to learn. I am grateful for the efforts to make this a diverse class, addressing many issues, and remaining respectful and hopeful about the future of religion and peace.”

Access the free MOOCs at rpl.hds.harvard.edu/engage-apply/harvardx-courses.

Weather Reports



In partnership with Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study and World Religions and the Planetary Health Alliance, RPL hosted Weather Reports, a fall series of online public conversations with HDS Writer-in-Residence Terry Tempest Williams. Simultaneously, Diane Moore taught a fall course, Weather

Reports Seminar: Conversations in a Climate of Uncertainty. RPL staff also supported Terry Tempest Williams in hosting a post-event series of “fireside chats” to continue discussions between Terry and interested HDS students.

The overarching focus of this coordinated effort was to explore how we might recast this moment in time as one of meaning rather than despair. How do the arts and acts of imagination allow us to see the glittering edges of uncertainty as places of possibility instead of portals of anxiety? And where do we find the strength to creatively confront all that is breaking our hearts?

The 10-week [online conversation series](#) hosted by Terry Tempest Williams featured conversations with poets, writers, public servants, theologians, biologists, scholars,

and activists who are engaged in the spiritual reckoning and awakening surrounding climate collapse, sacred land protection, and planetary health. Highlights included:

- A Burning Testament to Climate Collapse, with filmmaker Lucy Walker
- The Climate of Sacred Land Protection, with Gwich'in activist Bernadette Demientieff
- The Climate of Grief, with poet Victoria Chang
- The Climate of Compassion for All Beings, with professor Janet Gyatso
- The Climate of Consciousness, with writer Michael Pollan
- The Climate of Resistance, with novelist Chloe Aridjis and global activist Wanjira Mathai
- The Climate of Attention, with *New Yorker* staff writer Elizabeth Kolbert
- The Climate of the Future, with novelist Kim Stanley Robinson

The series attracted 3,902 live attendees and nearly 14,000 views online. These conversations continue in classrooms and in our programming, including through the climate track within the CRPL and in the professional development modules for secondary school educators.

Launching Joint Certificate in Religion and Society



HARVARD
Extension School

Beginning in the fall of 2022, a new jointly sponsored certificate will

invite professional and lifelong learners to learn religious literacy theory and methods and explore their application. Since 2008, Harvard Divinity School and Harvard Extension School have partnered on sponsoring the Religious Studies and Education graduate certificate for Harvard Extension students. In 2013, the partnership was amended to allow HDS students to earn the certificate as part of their HDS degree program.

The new [joint certificate](#) expands the reach of this opportunity to a broader audience of experienced professionals. Made up of four courses, the content will advance the public understanding of religion from two different entry points: one place-based, one professions-based.

One teacher in the RPL network will be selected to receive a full scholarship sponsored by Harvard Extension School toward the completion of the certificate.



DIVINITY HALL

RPL IN THE NEWS

[“‘I want to be in school forever’ Maggie Rogers Graduates from Harvard University,”](#) *The Boston Globe*, May 26, 2022. Singer-songwriter and Grammy Award-nominee Maggie Rogers is one of the inaugural Master of Religion and Public Life graduates.

[“Religious Studies Can Inform, Strengthen Journalism | Faith Matters,”](#) NJ.com, May 15, 2022. Opinion piece covering the joint event by HDS alumni relations and RPL, “Leading toward Justice: Intersections of Religion, Ethics, and Journalism.”

[“Divinity School Student Discusses Religion as a Determinant of Health,”](#) *The Harvard Crimson*, April 19, 2022. Master of Religion and Public Health candidate Dr. Ans Irfan presents his final project.

[“Divinity School Hosts Conversation on Peace and Power in Palestine,”](#) *The Harvard Crimson*, April 11, 2022. Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) Fellow Noura Erakat’s event, “Decolonize Now: A Conversation about Radical Imagination and Justice in Israel/Palestine.”

[“A Century before the First Earth Day, There Was the Forest Festival in the Middlesex Fells,”](#) *The Boston Globe*, April 9, 2022. HDS faculty member Dan McKanan authors an op-ed on the history of local forest festivals as a precursor to contemporary Earth Day celebrations.

[“HDS Fellow Presents Art Exhibition on Cultural Activism and Identity,”](#) *The Harvard Crimson*, March 30, 2022. Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) Fellow Taurean J. Webb’s event, “A Home for the Human Spirit: Cultural Activism and the Moral Imagination in the Inherit Art Project.”

[“Santa Monica Police To Host Discussion About Race And Policing,”](#) *Patch Santa Monica*, March 8, 2022. Mention of RPL Organizing Fellow Álvaro Huerta participating in an upcoming community discussion about race and policing organized by Santa Monica’s Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission.

[“Ukraine Crisis Coverage Reveals Stark Biases,”](#) *Axios*, March 6, 2022. Includes comments by RPL Media and Entertainment Fellow Maytha Alhassen.

[“HDS Alumni Discuss Intersection of Ethics, Religion, and Spirituality,”](#) in *The Harvard Crimson*, March 2, 2022. Susie Hayward, associate director of the Religious Literacy and the Professions Initiative at HDS, moderates a panel discussion among HDS alumni on the intersection of religion, ethics, and humanitarian action.

[“Consider This: Panel Discussions around Boston, February 26-March 5,”](#) *The Boston Globe*, February 26, 2022. Highlight of the RPL event “Assessing Domestic US Religious Politics’ Impact on Foreign Policy.”

[“A Just World at Peace,”](#) *Harvard Magazine*, January-February 2022. Harvard University’s President Lawrence Bacow on the opening celebration of newly renovated Swartz Hall and the launch of RPL.

[“Elizabeth Kolbert Sees a World Depleted, and Possibly Defeated, by Climate Change,”](#) by Clea Simon, *The Harvard Gazette*, November 19, 2021. Highlight of the RPL Weather Report with New Yorker staff writer Elizabeth Kolbert, hosted by Terry Tempest Williams.

[“Chance of Sun in Michael Pollan’s Climate Forecast,”](#) *The Harvard Gazette*, November 2, 2022, by Alvin Powell. Highlight of the RPL Weather Report with Michael Pollen, hosted by Terry Tempest Williams.

[“Toward a ‘Religiously Literate’ World,”](#) by Nancy Kathryn Walecki, *Harvard Magazine*, September-October 2021. Feature on the launch of Religion and Public Life and the promotion of religious literacy in the professions.



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