SABBATICAL REPORT

Religion Works

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Arts & Humanities
Religion

A. NATURE OF SABBATICAL PLAN

Introduction
My sabbatical plan involved creating a vibrant dialogue between students at Leeward Community College and the community of local temples and shrines. More specifically, I helped create scholarship opportunities that will directly benefit students who study religion.

1. Sabbatical Objectives
In order to keep my classes dynamic and my approach to teaching fresh, I am continually adding new material to the contents of my courses while reviewing, revising, and reexamining existing ones. Strengthening my courses serves to enrich the educational experience for students at Leeward Community College. One of the ways I try to improve my classes each semester is by utilizing the gained knowledge and experience from my research activities and community service work. I also learn from our students. I learn from their questions, from their experiences, and from their reflections. My proposed sabbatical plan encouraged and supported all of the above.

Religion is an ideal subject of study as it stands at the crossroads of history and philosophy, sociology and anthropology, politics and art, science and economics, and all these disciplines and more come into play in seeking an understanding of religion. The word “religion” literally means to “connect again,” and students engaged in the study of religion are connected to a wide array of disciplines and perspectives that help students build a solid educational foundation. They learn to see the various connections, including those between religion and cultural values. By examining these connections, students gain a stronger knowledge of and appreciation for the importance of religion, and a better understanding of how their own cultural and religious traditions intimately fit into broader contexts. My sabbatical plan strengthened this student learning outcome.

There are numerous local temples and shrines on the island. The first Japanese Buddhist temple was built in 1896 and the first Shinto shrine in 1898. Many others followed. They were vibrant entities then and served important functions that helped immigrants from Japan become residents of Hawaii. In short, they made meaningful contributions to Hawaii’s cultural heritage. However, many of these temples and shrines are in a state of decline as evidenced by their aging building structures and a dwindling elderly membership base. The reasons behind the degeneration are varied, but stem from a general theme: the temples and shrines are still rooted in a religious and cultural context that no longer exists in contemporary Hawaii. Simply put, they struggle to
maintain a relevant connection to society in general and to the young in particular.

A number of these temples approached me for help examining the ways in which they can modernize so that they may once again become meaningful and vibrant places that can support and contribute to the development of Hawai‘i’s future. In my view, the best source to look for the answers is our students themselves. They are young, they represent our future, and they know better than anyone else why they find these aging temples and shrines from another era unappealing.

I therefore worked with the temples and shrines to create scholarship opportunities that advanced the study of religion and more specifically, encouraged students to interact with the religious community in an objective, critical, and scholarly fashion through fieldwork, so that they in turn can appreciate the contributions these places of worship made to the well-being of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents’ lives. Students even found that the temples and shrines may still play a meaningful role in shaping their future. The temples and shrines benefitted from the input of our students. Two short examples will suffice:

At Koganji, a Buddhist temple in Manoa, students met Bishop Jikyu Rose, the founder of the temple. Students discussed the state of religion in Hawai‘i and shared ideas regarding what makes religion relevant to them. All agreed that there was value to the teachings of Buddhism, but simply getting students to visit the temples and see for themselves the contributions Buddhism has made to the local culture was an issue. One student then suggested the use of Mason jars as a way for the temple to attract a younger crowd to its annual Bon dance. Bishop Rose was so excited by the student’s suggestion that she quickly got her aides to take notes on the Mason jar idea. The bishop and I had no idea what a Mason jar was, but the rest of the students knew about the fad and attested to its popularity and potential for success at Koganji. Bishop Rose is now an avid supporter of our students and wants to create a Koganji scholarship for our students.

While the Buddhist temple Koganji is in the process of creating a scholarship for our students, a Shinto shrine has already done so and our students have begun to benefit from the financial support offered through this scholarship. Reverend Masa Takizawa and his wife Irene have enthusiastically supported our students whenever I bring them for a visit to their Shinto shrine, Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu. Though the shrine is Japanese in origin it promotes the respect and appreciation for Hawai‘i’s cultural and religious past, regardless of ethnicity or religious background. In April, one of our students—Melvin Monces—received the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha/Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu scholarship award. Melvin is Filipino and has a Catholic background. This was featured in a MidWeek column I wrote in May (http://www.midweek.com/app/shinto-shrine-bridges-differences/). I worked with Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu to create this scholarship.

As a result of my sabbatical project, students at Leeward Community College have benefitted from religion courses that they find meaningful and vibrant instead of courses that they simply take to fulfill a requirement. It’s a win-win situation for all.
2. Relationship of Sabbatical Plan to College Goals
In my courses I incorporate real-life situations and stories to help illustrate the subject matter at hand. I use this strategy to support one of the Institutional Learning Outcomes adopted by Leeward Community College—Critical Thinking and Problem Solving—that emphasizes the connections between ideas and real world situations. What happens to the form of a religion (building structure, rituals, etc.) when it no longer serves a meaningful function? What happens to the contents of a religion (teachings) when the context shifts (Hawaii early 20th century versus Hawaii early 21st century)? These are important issues that face religion and through the scholarships students will now acquire a solid understanding of the forms and functions of religion and how its contents are affected by shifting contexts.

Some of the temples and shrines work with local high school students to improve their understanding of the influence of modern technology (facebook, twitter, websites, etc.) on our lives. The aforementioned Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu, for example, has a website built by students from Damien Memorial High School. Leeward Community College has its own group of talented students who understand the construction and use of modern technology and social media. These skills are now being put to use in their study of local temples and shrines. This supports another of the Institutional Learning Outcomes adopted by Leeward Community College—Written, Oral Communication and Use of Technology—that enable students to contemplate and respond to the multitude of ideas and situations that surround them.

Religion is not simply analyzed in textbooks and in the classroom; but should be observed and studied in the communities in order to gain a more complete understanding of the subject. Because my background is in the area of contemporary religions, I emphasize current practices and perspectives in the courses I teach. This means that I encourage students to go out into the local religious communities and engage in a dialogue with various groups in contemporary society. They can then examine for themselves the relationship between what is taught in text and class, and what can be observed in practice. To what extent is there continuity between theory and practice, to what extent is there discordance and what accounts for this? These are some of the basic questions that confront students as they view the transitioning process of ideas and information to real world situations. Engaging in fieldwork is thus integral to deepening an understanding of and appreciation for religion and culture. My sabbatical project encourages fieldwork and now helps students gain a greater degree of tolerance, respect, and appreciation for the diversity that characterizes the world in general and the religious communities in particular. This cultivates the third of the Institutional Learning Outcomes promoted at Leeward Community College—Values, Citizenship, and Community.

3. Sabbatical Activities
I utilized the contacts and associations that I established over the years to accomplish my sabbatical objectives. I began with a focused and manageable group of Japanese temples and shrines to ensure that I could achieve my project’s goal. I made successful inquiries about creating student scholarships and received positive feedback. Much time
was spent working with the temples and shrines to agree on the details. Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu has established a scholarship for Leeward Community College students. Koganji temple is in the planning stage of creating a scholarship for our students. I am still engaged in preliminary discussions with Pearl City Hongwanji. I met with the temple’s reverend and the next step is the present the idea to the temple board and the congregation. I am scheduled to speak at Pearl City Hongwanji this summer.

I worked with the temples and shrines to ensure that they would be open and accommodating to our students who visited them. Through their active fieldwork, students examine the various temples and shrines and use the following 10 topics to build an analytical framework:

**Temple/Shrine Profile**

**Name and address of group:** What is the name of the group and how did it come up with the name? Any significance to the name of the group?

**Sect affiliation:** What denomination is the group affiliated with or what sect did it emerge from? Delineate some of the main themes of the sect or denomination.

**Organizational structure:** How is the group organized in Hawaii i.e. who are its leaders and what positions do they hold?

**Membership:** How many members does the group claim to have? How many members did you observe at its services? What is the membership makeup (age, gender, ethnicity) and what accounts for this?

**History:** When was the group formed in Hawaii and under what circumstances? What were its original objectives and are they being met?

**Social manifestations:** What part does the group play in the community (is it involved in helping the homeless, park beautification projects, etc.)? In what way(s) does it see itself contributing to society? What adjustments has the group made to accommodate the local lifestyle?

**Beliefs and practices:** What are the group's main teachings? What practices are considered vital for its members? Any peculiar qualities (beliefs, practices, leadership, etc.) that distinguish this group from other groups?

**Finances:** How is the group financed? Is it self-supporting (are members required to make specific donations on a regular basis) or does it receive financial help elsewhere (from its business or denominational affiliations)?

**Proselytization strategy:** How does the group attract and keep its members? Does it engage in door to door campaigns, social media presence, publications, etc.? Is the strategy effective? Why would a person join this group and not any other?
**Conclusion**: Overall assessment of strengths and weaknesses of religious group in its effort to practice and preach its religion. In your view, what are three major factors that determine or will determine the group’s success or struggle? Examine the evidence in above sections to support your assessment.

**Bibliography**: At least three sources must be used, including: 1) scholarly source, 2) group’s own publication, 3) personal interview.

Based on the findings of the above profiles. Students have a stronger understanding of the dynamics of religious groups in Hawaii, the local temples and shrines have gained a stronger understanding of how they are viewed by others, and my religion courses are stronger as I can adjust the contents of what I teach to the interest of students. An example of a student’s profile is attached below.

**Conclusion**

Students learn best when they are interested in a subject. Students tend to be interested in a subject of study when they can understand its relevance. Students have a better chance of understanding a subject’s relevance if they can relate it to their own lives. The ongoing attempts by the various temples and shrines to find a meaningful place for themselves in a changing Hawaii are certainly important issues students can relate to. My sabbatical project enriches my classes and helps my students become better learners. In my view, a learning environment where students attend because they are interested in the subject and therefore want to attend helps students develop self-motivation. They will come to class primarily for the sake of learning and not solely for the sake of a grade. This change in attitude is a key element for academic success. My hope is that my sabbatical plan will continue to play a part in this change in attitude and in their academic success.

My sabbatical project allowed students in my religion classes to see first-hand how content is transformed by context, and how form is influenced by function. More specifically, students learned that religion is shaped by the interactions and connections between the values of religious traditions, culture, and people. As such, perhaps the most important understanding I hope students continue to take away from my classes is the realization that they themselves have a critical part to play in its formation.
HAWAII KOTOHIRA JINSHA-HAWAII DAZAIFU TENMANGU

Name and Address of Group:

Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha
Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu
1239 Olomea Street
Honolulu, HI 96817-3343 USA

What is the name of the group? The name of this group is the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu. According the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu, “Each shrine has its own unique founding history, but the common characteristic linking all of these shrines is their desire for local, national and universal peace” (e-shrine.org). In my view that means with all the various shrines, they have their individual past which makes them different however as a whole they come together by sharing the same hope which is peace and to live harmoniously. In addition to the shrines founding history, I asked Irene Takizawa, how did it come up with the name, and if there is any significance behind the shrine’s name. According to her response, Kotohira Jinsha is a branch of Kotohira-gu in Shikoku. It has no known meaning and much mystery surrounds its origin, however it is re-known as the deity of marine safety. Tenmangu is a main branch located in Dazaifu, which is a city in Fukuoka. Tenmangu is the name of shrine dedicated to Tenjin or Sugawara no Michizane (Takizawa). According to japan-guide.com, Sugawara Michizane was an influential scholar and politician of the Heian Period, who has later been identified with Tenjin, the kami ("Shinto god") of education (japan-guide.com). Takizawa mentions that, Tenmangu is known also known as the deity of academics and culture. This group offers education blessing every August in accordance with ancient tradition (Takizawa). It’s interesting to know that Tenmangu is the only part that holds any significance meaning to its name, and the rest are just branches in different towns in Japan.

Sect Affiliation:

As far as the sect affiliation, I asked Takizawa what religious denomination is the group affiliated with or sect did it emerge from. She explains that the religious denomination of this group it has emerged from is Jinja Shinto, or main stream shrine Shinto (Takizawa). What does Jinja Shinto or main stream shrine Shinto actually mean? I believe that Jinja Shinto, or main stream shrine Shinto is a temple where people would go to worship a specific kami. This idea is further reinforced by the Shinto Online Network Association; it is a general term for all the rites and other activities performed by the local community or a kin community mainly in a building called Jinja or a shrine (jinja.jp/english/). This means that they hold regular ritual services and activities that would involve the community at the shrine.

Organizational Structure:

Regarding to the organizational structure, I asked Takizawa how is the group organized in Hawaii, and who are its leaders, and what positions do they hold. According to Takizawa, it is organized in Hawaii by a 501 (c) (3) non-profit religious church managed by a board of directors and officers (Takizawa). All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed under
the IRC (e-shrine.org). As far as its leaders, and the positions that they hold, their president is Shinken Naitoh and Chief priest or Guji is Rev. Masa Takizawa (Takizawa). They just have two people in this group who hold important roles in their organizational structure.

Membership:

As far as membership, I asked Takizawa how many members the group claims to have. She mentions that there is no form of membership; however they rely on volunteers to help organize events and activities (Takizawa). This raises the question of how, and what ways do they ask to be of assistance during these special events or activities? In her response, they have been blessed to have people interested in shrine activities who take the initiative to gather to plan and execute events. Emails or notices are sent out to shrine supporters if they are interested in volunteering their services. One big event that volunteers would help out is during New Years (Takizawa). This goes to show that even though they don’t have their own form of membership, they have a mixture of people from different ethnic background who would volunteer and help maintain these social activities for the shrine as well as for the people. What I find very kind about this particular group is that they recognize and appreciate the many volunteers who help out with organizing their events. One way that I know how the group shows their deepest appreciation for their volunteers and for those who make generous donations is by posting each and everyone’s names in the newsletters, which is available on their site.

History:

When was the group formed in Hawaii, and under what circumstances? According to the history that was written by Ritz, she briefly explains the history of the shrine, and how they battled several obstacles to keep the local shrine from continuing all activities there. The first was Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha, established March 24, 1920, as a branch of Kotohira-gu in Kagawa, Japan, by Rev. Itsuki Hirota. After Pearl Harbor was attacked, the shrine priests were interned at Mainland camps. Six years later, the shrine was restored, despite the absence of the priests, but on June 6, 1948, its property was seized by the federal government. Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha–Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu was the first foreign entity to sue the U.S. government and win a ruling to have its property returned. On May 18, 1950, the shrine once again was able to continue all activities (Ritz). Rev. Masa Takizawa of Nagoya, Japan was installed as the 12th Guji in June 1994 and continues to perpetuate the Shinto traditions of the shrine” (e-shrine.org). As part of its history, I’ve listed the Guji succession that played an important role to the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu.

Guji Succession
1. Hitoshi Hirota 1920-1925
2. Donkai Okazaki 1925-1927
5. Seiji Takai 1971-1983
8. Kiyohiko Mohri 1990
As far as the community manifestation, I asked Takizawa what adjustments has the group made to accommodate the local lifestyle. According to Takizawa, in order to accommodate the local lifestyle is by honoring their host culture and the traditions of many other ethnic groups that cohabitate our island state (Takizawa). This means that they continue to follow the Japanese culture, and very open to the other cultures on the island. In what part does the group play in the community? According to Takizawa, it would be by preserving and perpetuating the Shinto traditions on Oahu (Takizawa). This means that they maintain and continue to share their tradition within the community by celebrating events or festivities. Another question that I asked was in what way it sees itself contributing to society. In her response, “Shinto is a “green” religion that has always stressed harmony, coexistence and a spirit of reverence and gratitude for nature and our environment. Compassion for the natural world is especially essential now that we are attempting to create a sustainable community” (Takizawa). In my opinion, that means Shinto is a religion that one would accept in high spirits, and showing kindness and appreciation in what great nature has to offer in our every day lives and practices. They have shrine festivals during the calendar year which many Japanese as well as locals participate in. Some activities would include the first visit to the shrine during New Years (Hatsumode), which is held in January. Shichigosan is another traditional event celebrated by 3 and 5 year old boys and 3 and 7 year old girls. On November 15, children dressed in kimono visit the shrine to report their healthy development and to receive divine blessings. What is also interesting is that they have a special day for pet blessing festival, which is held in June. During this event pets are being blessed for health and longevity. I think it’s a great idea because many Hawaii residents have pets and why not have animals blessed also. They come from different parts of the island to participate in this pet blessing and able to socialize with other pet owners too.

This group also holds private ceremonies for special blessings. Some of the blessings would include, “Anzan Kigan, which is a safe birth blessing for the expectant mother, celebrating the process of life, and prepare for the most profound moments of joy through an Anzan Kigan ritual for birth” (e-shrine.org). I guess that many expecting mothers find this blessing to be very important because no one wants any complications during birth, and they will try anything to make labor as smooth as possible. Another special blessing that they offer would be the Hatsumiya Mairi, which is for the baby. “It is a special ritual that allows the new parents to convey appreciation to the kami for the birth of their child and to express their wishes for the child to become good natured, kind hearted, true of spirit, respectful of all around and lead to their inner strengths to find their own path in life” (e-shrine.org). House blessings are also offered by the group. It’s a ceremony that brings positive energy into the home. The home is a very important part in our lives because it offers security, which should be treated with lots of love, and well maintained to continue the harmony of the home life. “The House Blessing aims to “feed” the house, show proper treatment and respect to it to create a sense of peace, balance and harmony” (e-shrine.org). I believe that many find their home as their sanctuary, a place they can find their sense of peace. What’s also popular about this particular group is that they
also big on omamori. While having private ceremonies, they have “yearly protective amulets” (Good Luck, protective power, blessings). Each Omamori represents a different kind of protection. They have omamori for the expectant mother, pets, home, etc. What’s really neat is that they have omamori’s with local designs, such as the hibiscus, or Hawaiian patterns. This goes to show that this particular group is really open to Hawaii’s unique cultural heritage.

As part of my experience, when I visited the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu with my classmates, I felt very welcomed by both Irene and Rev. Masa Takizawa. Both were comfortable in answering many of our questions when it came to what each item in the shrine represents, like the headgear that was worn on his head during the prayer, or even the wooden slab (shaku) that was held by Rev. Masa Takizawa.

Beliefs and Practices:

What are the group’s main teachings? Based on an interview between Ritz and Takizawa on the topic of beliefs and practices, Takizawa mentions that “Shinto is a complex of ancient rituals and beliefs that perceives the presence of a life force or an essence in all things” (Takizawa). They also have ‘reverence for the land and its natural elements that give life to human beings. This means that Shinto presents many values, and as part of our everyday life to be appreciate the beauty of nature in all things that surround us, like the trees, mountains, waterfalls, etc.

Takizawa says that “Were keepers of Japanese culture” (Takizawa). In my view this means, that they’ve been doing this for quite sometime, and it is part of their tradition to share the Japanese culture with others. She also mentions that some argue that it’s not a religion at all. Why do many people feel that Shinto is not a religion? The author Yamakage mentions in his book that according to the Western conception of religion, a religion typically has a founder, a doctrine, precepts or commandments, and objects of worship, such as symbols or idols. Unlike Shinto, they have none of those. That is why people feel that Shinto is not a religion. I think Shinto is an uncomplicated belief that anyone can practice. It involves respect, and to be in deep connection with love towards great nature.

According to Takizawa, Shinto Shrines are important community centers in Japan and finds that it is more diverse in Hawaii. There are a variety of festivals which were carried out as the sacred order taught “the spirit of gratitude, and harmony through their interaction with people and nature” (Takizawa). That means to be thankful for the wonderful blessings life brings, and showing appreciation to everyone and everything that surrounds us. That’s why I think Hawaii is such a diverse place also, everyone gets along very well, and everyone tries to take care of each other. What would be the main goal for the future generations to come? And in what ways can they continue to share the Japanese heritage? Takizawa believes that their main goal is to encourage the present as well as future generations by the celebrating the variety of activities, and share their Japanese heritage to other ethnic groups (Takizawa). I believe that it is very important to pass this on to the younger generations because it’s another way of honoring the Japanese culture through the variety of activities that are celebrated.
What would be very important in this type of practice? According to Takizawa, she believes that the practices that is vital for its people is the tradition, family, love of nature, physical cleanliness and gratitude to all that allows us to exist, which is expressed through matsuri or festivals (Takizawa). This means that family would be the main tool that binds the tradition together, natural objects are just like sacred spirits, which people worship, being pure would be keeping yourself clean all the times, and by honoring the spirits through the wonderful celebrations and festivities.

**Finances:**

How is the group financed? Is it self supporting or does it receive financial help elsewhere? According to Takizawa, the group is self-supporting; there is no tithing, and no requirements for donations (Takizawa). According to the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Dazaifu Tenmangu, the group is recognized by dedicated members, priest, as well as officers who continue to provide the spiritual and cultural needs for the community. In part of the dedication by its people within their group, the Kotohira-gu and Dazaifu Tenmangu of Japan has also played a significant contribution by offering their financial as well as spiritual support (e-shrine.org). It is not mandatory; however anyone can give monetary contributions if they wanted to.

**Proselytization Strategy:**

Regarding proselytization strategy, I asked Takizawa how does the group attract and keep its members. According to Takizawa, they don’t have proselytization in Shinto (Takizawa). The Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha – Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu established their individual website that is available to the community. The website offers newsletters, as well as “In the news” interviews that were done by local news writers from the Honolulu Advertiser and Star bulletin that provide insight information of the various activities or events that take place there.

**Conclusion:**

In my view, I think this group has two strengths that make them do very well through their practice. For one thing, their main goal is to pass on the tradition to the present as well as future generations, and other ethnic groups. What they do to pass it on is by planning a variety of events or celebrations which involves the community. By doing that the community is able to interact with each other, and just enjoy these types of celebrations while passing on the Japanese culture.

Although this group doesn’t have any form of membership, they have been blessed to have a mixture of volunteers who are able to help out when it comes to planning special events that take place at the shrine. That is why I think it’s a strength for the group because they are very fortunate to have so many people who would take the initiative to lend a helping hand, even though they are not required to.

There is one thing that I think could be a struggle to the group, which is in the financial area. They are self-supporting with no form of membership, no tithing, or no requirements for
donations. What would happen then if people who did contribute at one point end up not donating anymore? It is one thing to consider because I would assume that everyone is going through financial hardship, and people are being really careful on how they spend their money. Would they be able to continue the variety of events if funds were low or would their self-support would be enough to cover the cost? I’m not sure, but whatever the outcome is, I believe they will find a way to continue its practices there.

Works Cited


