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Luce Foundation Grant to UCSB Will Advance Understanding of Religion's Impact on Global Humanitarian and Human Rights Efforts

The Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies at UC Santa Barbara has been awarded a \$400,000 grant by the Henry Luce Foundation to launch a new research and educational initiative that will advance understanding of the impact of religion on international humanitarian efforts and human rights organizations around the world.

"Since religion plays such a vital role in world affairs, it is mandatory that we understand better how it both helps and hinders humanitarian efforts in building a global civil society," said Mark Juergensmeyer, director of the Orfalea Center and an international expert on religious violence and conflict resolution who will lead the three-year project. "This generous grant will fund a very important venture."

Although international politics is increasingly challenged by the national and transnational movement of religious politics, the study of religion has been surprisingly absent from the established curricula of most graduate programs that prepare workers for positions in humanitarian and service agencies associated with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

NGOs are now in the forefront of efforts to develop a global civil society, noted Juergensmeyer, who is also a professor of global studies, sociology, and religious studies at UCSB.

The Orfalea Center project will focus on issues related to religion that are relevant to all humanitarian organizations working abroad.

It will bring together for the first time NGO leaders and scholars from international affairs graduate programs in the U.S. and in Europe for a series of UCSB workshops, conferences, and public lectures to identify and address real-life issues connected to religion that are important in the field.

"We thank the Henry Luce Foundation for this extraordinarily generous support of our Orfalea Center project on the impact of religion and humanitarian service on our global society," said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang.

"Scholarly exchange with international experts will stimulate and advance the research of our outstanding faculty and will inspire our students to help make a better world."

International workshops will be held at UCSB on Africa, the Middle East, South and East Asia, and Latin America, and partnerships will be established with centers and NGOs in these regions.

Research findings and discussions will be made widely available, and a "Handbook on Religion in Global Civil Society" will be compiled for use by academic and international NGO communities.

The project will also lead to the development of a new concentration on religion in UCSB's master's program in global and international studies that will serve as a model for other international studies programs nationwide.

"UCSB's new graduate program in global and international studies is the first to focus on these issues in a global context," said Juergensmeyer.

Other UCSB faculty involved in the initiative are Richard Appelbaum, professor of global studies and sociology; Giles Gunn, professor and chair of global studies and professor of English; Wade Clark Roof, J. F. Rowney Professor of Religion and Society; and Richard Falk, visiting distinguished professor of global studies at UCSB and the Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University.

The Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies was established at UCSB in 2006 with the generous support of Paul and Natalie Orfalea and the Orfalea Family Foundation.

The UCSB project is part of the Luce Foundation's Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion and International Affairs that seeks to deepen American understanding of religion as a critical -- but often neglected -- factor in international policy issues.

It supports projects at U.S. institutions in the academic, public policy, and media sectors to enhance programs and projects on religion and international affairs.

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