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Faith in Diversity

A group of scholars from diverse backgrounds and nationalities gathered at UC Santa Barbara this summer to examine religious diversity in the United States and to learn firsthand how people with widely differing beliefs can coexist. They learned lessons of tolerance despite conflicting ideologies, and gained in-depth knowledge of American religious practices.

Participating in a program titled “Study of the United States Institutes — Religious Pluralism and Public Presence,” the scholars spent four weeks studying with experts in the field before departing on a two-week research tour. Topics included the ways in which religious thought and practice have influenced the development of American-style democracy, the intersections of religion and politics in national elections, and the sociology and demography of religion in the United States today.

The program, funded by the U.S. Department of State, is one of several taking place at different universities around the country this summer. This particular “Study of the U.S. Institute” (SUSI) employs a multidisciplinary approach that encompasses history, political science, sociology, anthropology and law to explore the historical and contemporary relationship between church and state in the United States.

Other SUSIs focus on topics such as contemporary American literature and U.S. foreign policy. All are designed to improve teaching about the United States in academic institutions abroad. Participants in the religious pluralism program represented such diverse nations as Armenia, Finland, Ghana, New Zealand, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine.

This year, the program's 15th, participants traveled to Salt Lake City, Utah, where they visited the Church History Museum and attended a panel discussion on religious minorities in Mormon-populated areas; Atlanta, where they visited a Jewish synagogue, a Hindu Temple and an Islamic Mosque; and Washington, D.C., where they toured the Holocaust Museum, the National Cathedral and other related sites.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.