



Form for submitting extended proposals
for consideration for the
**2022 ROBERT J. MENGES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING RESEARCH
IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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SESSION TITLE:	Re-envisioning Trauma-Informed Teaching: Empowering Students’ Personal and Academic Growth
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Does the research described herein involve human subjects (highlight one): yes no
 If yes, submit under separate cover documentation that indicates IRB approval.

1. RESEARCH QUESTION(S) & WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO THE FIELD:		
<p>In our qualitative case study, we evaluated the impact of trauma-informed course design on students’ learning experiences. We were particularly interested in how students engaged with trauma-informed course design in the context of learning potentially traumatic content (e.g., religion) and in a time of social trauma (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic). We investigated how using a trauma-informed lens impacted students’ learning, by asking the following research question: How are themes of trauma-informed principles reflected in students’ learning experiences and growth?</p> <p>To investigate our question, we incorporated principles of trauma-informed pedagogy (i.e., safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, choice, and empowerment) into the course design of an undergraduate, synchronously taught online <i>Religion and Politics</i> course and then analyzed students’ weekly reflection assignments through content analysis. The novelty in our approach lied in the fact that students were not asked to link their experiences to the five core principles underlying a trauma-informed pedagogy in their reflections; instead, students connected course material to current events and their daily lives. Therefore, we analyzed the impact of our trauma-informed approach by examining the themes of trauma-informed principles that were reflected organically in students’ learning experiences. We found that students co-developed a sense of safety by engaging in respectful peer dialogue; established trustworthiness through self-disclosure of personal beliefs; collaborated with peers to develop a deeper understanding of course content; and acquired transferable skills through choice in assessments. In addition, students experienced empowerment by recognizing their growth in four primary areas: (1) their personal beliefs and perspectives; (2) their understanding of the course material; (3) their learning; and (4) their ability to use academic tools.</p> <p>Our findings extend and support existing research on the efficacy of trauma-informed practices; furthermore, our research suggests that incorporating trauma-informed principles into course design can support students in their learning as well as bolster their capacity to succeed in other areas inside and outside of the classroom (e.g., engaging in difficult conversations, seeking out support, applying course content to their own lives). Finally, our case study presents innovative approaches for assessing how students engage with trauma-informed course design.</p>		
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2. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN:
<p>Course Selection</p> <p>We selected a <i>Religion and Politics</i> course at [BLINDED], as the course explored subject matter that may be considered traumatic for students. For example, adults may experience intergenerational</p>

trauma resulting from religious genocide (Dashorst et al, 2019), microaggressions due to their religious identity (Husain & Houward, 2017), or exclusion from religious family members due to their gender or sexual identify (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). In addition to exploring potentially traumatizing topics, the class took place remotely (due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic) and during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests. The collective trauma of these events may disproportionately impact students of color; furthermore, the pandemic exacerbated underlying issues of food, housing, and income insecurity (Enriquez & Goldstein, 2020; Linton, Leifheit, McGinty, Barry, & Pollack, 2021; Parekh et al., 2021).

Course Design

Drawing from literature outlining approaches to and ideas for incorporating trauma-informed principles (e.g., Stephens, 2020; Carello & Butler, 2015), we structured the course with intention to integrate safety (i.e., feeling protected from physical and psychological harm), trustworthiness (i.e., recognizing reliability, consistency, and dependability in others), collaboration (i.e., working together with a shared purpose and toward a common benefit), choice (i.e., having the ability to make decisions), and empowerment (i.e., discovering and developing their own capacities).

Data Collection & Analysis

We collected weekly reflection assessments from 22 undergraduate students enrolled in the course. In reflections students discussed course material and the role of religion in their daily lives. In the final course reflection, students reviewed their initial reflection assignment and color coded their responses to indicate phrases they agreed with, no longer agreed with, and/or were unsure if they agreed with. Reflections were analyzed using directed content analysis methods, where initial coding categories are developed prior to evaluating the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Reflections were blinded by the instructor prior to data analysis; to provide anonymity to the students in the course, each student was assigned a numbered code (1 – 22).

(See Appendix A beginning on page 11 for additional research design details.)

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3. LITERATURE REVIEW & THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE LITERATURE TO YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION(S):

Trauma is highly prevalent among undergraduates (Stephens, 2020; Frazier et al., 2009). Important in the context of improving teaching and learning in higher education, traumatic experiences and/or content may negatively impact students’ learning and engagement. Students are at risk of experiencing negative classroom experiences when learning about content that can be potentially traumatic, including retraumatization (Carello & Butler, 2014, Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 263), vicarious traumatization in response to coursework (Carello & Butler, 2014, pp. 158–159; Zartner, 2019), and compassion fatigue and burnout (Zartner, 2019). Trauma is a strong predictor of poor academic achievement (Anders et al., 2012; Arnwine, 2019, p. 77; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004), high attrition rates (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Duncan, 2000; Porche et al., 2011), and low student engagement (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Craig, 2016; Craig, 2017). Trauma poses an even higher risk to several marginalized and underrepresented groups of students, including

veterans, current and former foster youth, American Indian/Alaska Native students, refugees, LGBTQ students, and nontraditional adult learners (Davidson, 2017).

In response, instructors and researchers in higher education have increasingly explored trauma-informed pedagogical approaches, which consider five core principles: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (Fallot & Harris, 2009; Carello & Butler, 2015; Davidson, 2017; Fenner, 2018; Tang & Kiang, 2011). Using a trauma-informed pedagogy can mitigate some of the risks for students (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2019; Carello & Butler, 2014; Carello & Butler, 2015; Cless & Nelson-Goff, 2017; Harper & Neubauer, 2021; Morgan, Pendergast, Brown, & Heck, 2015), including those posed for marginalized and underrepresented groups of students (Tang & Kiang, 2011; Wilson & Nelson-Moody, 2019).

However, research exploring the impact of trauma-informed approaches on students’ learning experiences is limited. Studies have assessed students’ own reports of their classroom experiences with trauma-informed approaches, by prompting students to link their experiences to one of the five core principles (Agllias, 2012; Black, 2008; Carello & Butler, 2015). Breckenridge & James (2010) analyzed student course evaluations, investigating students’ self-awareness of their own responses to trauma and their capacity to cope with and respond to traumatic experiences. Other studies have investigated the impact of a trauma-informed approach for courses involving potentially traumatic content (Bussey, 2008; Shannon et al., 2014; Zosky, 2013). However, there is a call for further exploration of students’ perspectives on trauma-informed practices (Carello & Butler, 2015; Stephens, 2020).

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4. FINDINGS, INCLUDING THEIR SIGNIFICANCE & LIMITATIONS:

Findings

Data analysis revealed that each trauma-informed principle (safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment) emerged in student reflections.

The theme of safety was co-developed through (1) engaging in respectful discussions with diverse peers, (2) addressing difficult concepts, and (3) being emotional and sharing their feelings with the instructor and with their peers. Students framed the course as providing a space where they felt safe to share their ideas, beliefs, emotions, and fears in an environment free of judgment. Having a safe space to engage in discussions with peers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives not only helped students understand the material but allowed students to practice engaging in respectful dialogue with people with different cultural backgrounds.

Trustworthiness appeared primarily through self-disclosure in reflections. Students explored, discussed, and reflected on their personal relationship with religion, building connections between their own positionalities and the themes explored within course texts.

Collaboration emerged most prominently in the context of in-class and small group discussions and group exercises. Collaborations were primarily impactful in two ways: (1) students were able to

engage with diverse views via collaboration, and (2) collaborations helped deepen students' understanding of material. Based on reflections, students openly shared their personal experiences (e.g., experiencing intolerance due to sexual orientation, gender, religion, race/ethnicity, immigration status) with each other in their smaller groups. Sharing among peers exposed students to different perspectives, ways of thinking, and world views. Importantly, students discussed how these peer discussions helped deepen their understanding of the class material. Students were able to explain concepts to each other and provide supporting examples from their own lives to help illustrate concepts explored in the class. Students also shared how learning with peers encouraged them to re-evaluate and challenge their own beliefs and preconceived notions.

Choice was experienced in four ways: (1) flexibility broadened students' perspectives, including those regarding course material, (2) flexibility encouraged students to develop transferable skills, (3) flexibility allowed students to feel included, and (4) flexibility was an enjoyable aspect of the class. Students shared that selecting particular topics/stories allowed for deeper engagement with and exploration of course material and of topics with personal resonance. Other students shared how the process of the reflection assignment (i.e., having the flexibility to investigate different current events in relation to the course material) helped them to learn more effectively.

Above all, the student reflections frequently conveyed empowerment by recognizing their growth in relation to four primary areas: (1) their personal beliefs and perspectives; (2) their understanding of the course material; (3) their learning; and (4) their ability to use academic tools to support their personal, intellectual, and academic growth and/or to explain their previously held beliefs and understandings. Students reflected on what they had learned and how the learning experience allowed them to more critically evaluate how religion/secularism has influenced their lives and how these issues might influence others' lives as well. In addition to personal growth, students also recognized their growth in understanding the course material and concepts (i.e., role of religion and secularism in shaping democracy and human rights, perceptions of race and ethnicity, understandings of gender and sexuality, and conflict and peacebuilding). Students elaborated on why they disagreed with their previous statements, recognizing statements that mischaracterized relationships between religion and politics or that were overly simplistic in their framing of complex issues. Students frequently expressed excitement in uncovering their learning as well as in having the opportunity to continue to learn more about the themes and topics explored in the class. Throughout the reflections, students discussed their growth in using academic tools to guide their learning process. Students recognized how their interpretation of real-world situations and theoretical framings of issues had evolved through the process of participating in course discussions, writing weekly reflections, reading/reviewing course materials, and identifying real world events.

(See Appendix B beginning on page 17 for supporting quotations.)

Implications

As previously discussed, trauma is highly prevalent among undergraduate students (Frazier et al., 2009); furthermore, experiencing trauma and effects of trauma may negatively impact learning, academic performance, engagement, and retention (Anders et al., 2012; Arnwine, 2019; DeBerard et al., 2004; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Craig, 2016; Craig, 2017). Our findings indicate that

incorporating trauma-informed principles into course design could be another avenue to support students in their learning as well as bolster their capacity to succeed in other areas inside and outside of the classroom. As such, using a trauma-informed design may be another tool available to instructors to not only advance learning, but to be a part of the holistic and comprehensive support systems that undergraduate students increasingly need – especially in the context of growing mental health problems among undergraduate students (Lee, Jeong, & Kim, 2021) and collective trauma and anxieties (e.g., COVID-19, climate change, racial and economic inequality (American College Health Association, 2020; Pihkala, 2020; Correia et al., 2022)).

Limitations

Due to the methodology guiding our research, we are not able to infer causal relationships between the integration of trauma-informed course design principles and students’ experiences of a trauma-informed approach. We also recognize that other factors may have contributed to students’ experiences (e.g., a smaller class size, the teaching style of the instructor, the content explored in the course). However, we hope to have shown what is possible, when attention is paid to the design of a course that involves potentially traumatic topics. Furthermore, we have illuminated how teaching with attention to trauma-informed principles does not change the nature of the content explored, but changes *how* instructional techniques may be provided (Wright & Laurent, 2021).

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TOTAL WORD COUNT FOR ALL 4 SECTIONS (MAX 2000 WORDS): 1989

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2013.795923>

Appendices: Supporting information focused explicitly on research design, instruments, and visual descriptions of findings (e.g., graphs, tables, figures, models, images) may be placed in appendices. Additional information associated with the research questions, relationship of the literature to the research at hand, or the limitations and study significance are **not** allowed in the appendices. Though not limited, the strongest proposals are typically supported by no more than 10 pages of appendices. To conserve space, for example, you can place multiple figures on one page, single-space survey instruments, etc. Keep in mind, the selection committee is not required to read beyond this general limit.



Appendix A: Extended Research Methods

Embedding Trauma-informed Course Design

We structured the course in a way that centered students as *capable* actors in their own learning process, with a capacity to develop and use tools and resources, to apply the course content to their own lived experiences, and to critically examine their own beliefs. As we describe below, we framed the learning process as dependent on and strengthened by participation of everyone in the course, established clear and consistent expectations, conveyed a welcoming and kind tone, and provided multiple opportunities for support.

Engaging students in their learning process

Important to the conditions for trustworthiness (i.e., developed through empowering participants), the course syllabus stressed that the course was structured in a student-centered way, meant to guide students as they applied the course content to their own lived experiences and critically examined their own beliefs. The syllabus conveyed that students had agency and responsibility in their learning process and in the course (e.g., making up missing assignments, contributing to course content), which reinforces another aspect of ‘trustworthiness’: establishing positive expectations in others. In addition, the syllabus and course policies explicitly discussed the importance of students being engaged as a key part in their learning (e.g., being clear about exploring their own positionality in their examinations of religion and politics). For example, the syllabus stated that “...all assignments center on how you are drawing connections between the course materials and your experiences.”

Emphasizing collaboration

The syllabus and course policies signaled the importance of collaboration by framing the learning process as being a shared experience dependent on the participation of everyone in the course. For example, the course description frequently used language that indicated a shared process of learning (e.g., “we,” “us,” “collectively”). Beyond using language that framed the class as collaborative from the beginning, the course design required students to engage with each other through in-class and online discussions. These discussions were described as being an integral part of the learning process and important for all students.

Encouragement to use resources and make selections

The course structure emphasized empowerment, by encouraging students to use tools and resources to guide their learning process, while providing flexibility and choice. For example, students were encouraged to look at the Q&A discussion board to see if other students had asked a similar question when they needed help, before emailing the instructor. For weekly reflections (which were graded in terms of completeness/effort as opposed to content), students were asked to use course texts to bolster their arguments; this practice allowed students to engage with scholarship when articulating their ideas as well as gave students practice in reading and applying academic journal articles. In weekly reflection assignments students were also asked to find current media stories and events that illustrated examples of theoretical concepts and themes discussed in class. By reviewing and selecting media articles, students were learning how to find and examine examples of concepts learned in class in local and global contexts. Requiring students to engage in their own discovery of current events and

to use scholarship in support of their arguments was meant to empower students, by helping them apply course content to explain situations happening in real-world contexts. Reflection assignments also allowed students to make their own choices in terms of topics to investigate, media articles to select, and formats for assessments (e.g., written or video recording). By offering numerous ways to engage in the material, students were able to pursue the topics most interesting to them (within theoretical frameworks discussed in the course) as well as articulate their ideas in whichever format they were most comfortable expressing themselves (e.g., verbally or in written format).

Setting a “safe” tone for learning

The course site and syllabus included various imagery that conveyed safety through diversity and friendliness. For example, the image selected for the course syllabus included an image of people from various religious backgrounds, genders, and ethnicities engaging in the same practice (i.e., holding their hands in a position of prayer). This conveyed a commitment to highlighting diversity of religion and identifying shared commonality in the same image. As another example, the syllabus frequently included “smiley faces” to pair a positive emotional connotation with the text outlining the course policies. These images helped to convey a welcoming and kind tone for both the course and the instructor. In addition, the instructor set a welcoming tone through the pre-course survey. The survey not only included self-disclosure from the instructor (e.g., acknowledging that mental health and wellbeing is important), but allowed students the opportunity to share and acknowledge areas where they might need additional support. For example, the survey asked the following questions:

1. Would you consider yourself an introvert or extrovert in classroom settings? (You can skip this question if you'd prefer not to respond.)
2. For students participating in synchronous class discussions: are you more comfortable participating in class verbally or through the Zoom chat?
3. Do you have any concerns about accessing resources, including basic needs (food, shelter, medical care), psychological care and counseling, or access to technology that you wish to share with me?
4. Do you have any accessibility requests or general concerns you would like to tell me about, regarding remote learning, the course subject matter, accommodations, or other? (For example, materials available in a different format, transcriptions, specific approaches to discussion boards, a preference of video discussion vs. discussion boards, etc.?)

Furthermore, to reinforce aspects of trustworthiness during class sessions, the instructor disclosed personal information relevant to positionality (e.g., religious identity and experience) with students. Sharing personal experiences with students during discussions where applicable was intended to foster an environment where students felt comfortable disclosing their experiences and contributing to discussions and peer learning exercises.

Communicating opportunities for support

The syllabus clarified that office hours could be used to discuss personal issues, in addition to course content. Important for physical and emotional safety concerns, the syllabus mentioned that students could email in advance, if office hours needed to be held privately to discuss course material and/or personal matters. Additionally, students could make office hours by appointment. As students were



participating in the class virtually (and many attending from spaces shared with others), allowing students to set a more private time for office hours allowed them to discuss personal matters in conditions that were suitable for them.

In addition to creating safety through traditional office hours, the instructor also established an optional “muddiest point” or “MP” office hour following one of the biweekly classes. The MP office hour was described as an optional, ungraded space for students to ask any questions about the course content (e.g., authors’ arguments, concepts discussed in class). Importantly the syllabus framed the MP hour as a space for students to ask even those questions they assume are obvious and unnecessary. By making it clear that no questions would be judged, the syllabus and MP hour signaled to students that they should feel comfortable asking for help and clarification.

The instructor also established a student-only discussion board to allow students to ask questions within each topic module (with an option for bringing the instructor into the conversation if necessary). This provided students with another avenue to ask for help as well as the opportunity to communicate primarily with their peers. For those students who feel more comfortable asking peers for clarification (rather than the instructor), having this additional space to communicate could be helpful.

The instructor conveyed that students could seek out additional resources beyond the instructor and their peers if needed. For example, the syllabus referenced a variety of centers on campus that could help them with academic and personal support (e.g., food assistance, writing support, disability services). Attempting to destigmatize seeking out services, the pre-course survey and syllabus also emphasized that being a student can be stressful and that the university offered various forms of support to help in addressing various challenges. This may have been helpful for those students feeling uncomfortable or uncertain in getting support outside of the classroom.

Establishing consistency

By establishing clear and consistent expectations in the syllabus (and following through with these expectations), the instructor signaled qualities of trustworthiness by demonstrating reliability, consistency, and dependability. For example, the weekly assignments followed a similar formula (e.g., format, word length, grading criteria, due date) that created dependability throughout the class. As another example, students were given a description of how weekly reflections would be graded (completeness rather than content) and given the opportunity to continually practice the same reflective exercise over the weeks and become comfortable with a less traditional grading scheme.

Collecting feedback

The instructor administered several surveys throughout the course to collect feedback and student information and to “ensure that [their] experience in the course is as positive as possible.” By including the course feedback surveys in the syllabus, the instructor signaled that students would have the opportunity to share their perspectives associated with participating in the class (e.g., positive or negative) and that the instructor cared about assessing their emotional experiences as students. Feedback was collected halfway through the term; one survey asked students to share how well they have been able to keep up with course expectations while the other asked students to share



their feedback regarding the instruction of the class. A final course evaluation survey was administered at the end of the course.

Communicating privacy policies

At the beginning of the class, students were asked to complete a survey that collected personal information, so the instructor could connect the course content to their diverse backgrounds and experiences (e.g., personal religious beliefs, familial religious affiliation). However, students were assured that their responses would be anonymous. Similarly, students were given assurances that their personal weekly reflections would not be shared with any other students in the course. In addition, the syllabus made it clear that while the instructor-speaking portions of lectures would be recorded, all student discussions would only be recorded with explicit consent from students. This allowed for students to discuss topics openly during class, without worrying that these comments would be recorded and shared without their approval.

Data collection

We collected weekly reflection assessments from 22 undergraduate students in the course. In addition to discussing the course material within the reflection assignments, students discussed the role of religion in their daily lives. In the final course reflection, students reviewed their initial reflection assignment and color coded their responses to indicate phrases they agreed with, no longer agreed with, and/or were unsure if they agreed with. As students were given the choice to submit written assignments or audio recordings, we transcribed and/or evaluated recordings for two students and written reflections for 20 students.

Assessment Prompt and Instructions

Week 1 Reflection Prompt and Instructions (500-750 words or 5 minutes):

1. How significant has religion, spirituality, and/or secularism been in your personal life? Has it changed over time? What influence have your family/community/country of origin/ language/etc. had on your views?
2. In your view – is religion/spirituality/secularism:
 - a. important in the US? (If you're from somewhere else, you can reflect on that context here.)
 - b. important in the world (international politics)?
 - c. important in the world (international politics)?
 - d. becoming more or less important in the US and the world?
2. Has this week's sources raised new questions on the role of religion, spirituality, and/or secularism for you? How? And if not, why not? (refer to the Week 1 Roadmap)

Write your responses on the word processor of your choice and save the file as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf or record your audio/video on a platform of your choice and save the file in order to upload the media recording. Then click "Start Assignment" to "Choose File" to upload, include a note to me if you choose, and finally click "Submit Assignment." For this reflection, the substance of your response will not be graded. So long as you have answered all five questions, followed the word limits, and demonstrated some thought in your response, you will be given full credit. Please answer the questions as honestly as you feel comfortable doing so.

Final Reflection Prompt (1,500 words or 10 minutes):

Step 1: Copy and paste your Week 1 reflection from this course onto your final reflection document.

Step 2: As you are rereading your Week 1 reflection, color code your responses:

- red for statements you no longer agree with;
- green for statements you still agree with;
- blue for statements you're unsure about.

Step 3: Respond to the first four (4) reflection questions, which are almost identical to Week 1's questions. Each answer should have the following two parts and cite at least one class resource for each of the four questions.

- Part 1: Write a new 100-word response to the question (*you can answer before color-coding!*)
- Part 2: In an additional 150 words, using your reflection color-coding, answer: has your response changed since Week 1? If so, how? If not, why not? (*Be sure to mention how at least one reading/material/discussion has impacted your response*)

(If you submitted a video/audio file for your Week 1 reflection, you would need to have it transcribed. I can send you the transcription of your reflection – just email me. For the final submission, please submit your color-coded transcription and an audio/video file with your final reflection.)

Part One: Reflecting on changes from Week 1's responses (250 words each)

1. How significant has religion, spirituality, and/or secularism been in your personal life?
2. Based on your observations, how significant has religion, spirituality, and/or secularism been in domestic politics? (*This can be the US, or your own country of origin. Be sure to specify.*)
3. Based on your observations, how significant has religion, spirituality, and/or secularism been in international politics?
4. How do you think the futures of religion, spirituality, and/or secularism are changing in domestic politics, and/or international politics?

Part Two: Reflecting on the class as a whole (150 words each)

For the questions below, please be specific and reflect on relevant readings, lectures, class discussions, discussion boards, reflections, teaching method(s), peer comment(s).

1. What are you curious to know more about (what are some remaining questions) as a result of completing this course?
2. Did the readings/discussions/materials/assignments from this course enlarge/enhance your understandings of religion, spirituality, and/or secularism? If so, how? If not, why not? Explain with specifics.
3. How do you think what you have learned through the weekly reflections will stay with you beyond this course? (*Use these questions to help you: What was rewarding about the weekly reflections in this class? What was challenging? What was your favorite of the reflections?*)

Overall, what part of the course was most influential in changing or reaffirming your perceptions about religion, spirituality, and/or secularism? Explain with specifics.

Write your responses on the word processor of your choice and save the file as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf or record your audio/video on a platform of your choice and save the file in order to upload the media recording. Then click "Start Assignment" to "Choose File" to upload, include a note to me if you choose, and finally click "Submit Assignment." For this reflection, the substance of your response will not be graded. So long as you have answered all five questions, followed the word limits, and demonstrated some thought in your response, you will be given full credit. Please answer the questions as honestly as you feel comfortable doing so.

Data analysis

The reflections were analyzed using directed content analysis methods, where initial coding categories are developed prior to evaluating the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We developed a coding scheme based on the literature outlining the following trauma-informed principles: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. For each code (e.g., safety), we defined the principle (e.g., sense of emotional and physical safety), conditions for development (e.g., co-created by those present and participating), and possible examples (e.g., a student describes the classroom as a “safe space”). Two of the co-authors then coded the reflections using the directed coding scheme; as the coding process continued, the initial coding scheme was revised and refined to develop data themes. Furthermore, both coders reviewed and discussed their respective codes as well as the directed coding scheme, to support the consistency and reliability of the analysis. Reflections were blinded by the instructor prior to data analysis; to provide anonymity to the students in the course, each student was assigned a numbered code (1 – 22). The instructor, a co-author on this paper, did not analyze the data.

Appendix B: Supporting Data for Findings

We note that representative quotes exemplifying the trustworthiness theme (e.g., self-disclosure of personal experiences with religion) are omitted due to the personal content of those quotes.

Table 1

Safety Themes Reflected in Students' Experiences

Safety Theme	Students' Experiences
Engaging with Peers	<p>“It is really nice to be having conversations with other people who have completely different values and trains of thought in a non-aggressive and genuine manner... I really wish I could take those conversations and replay them and just smile and appreciate how great they are.” (1)</p> <p>“I love how respectful... this class was, and how everyone was so open in sharing their own perspectives and personal opinions... We learned how to be respectful of others’ cultures and religions...” (11)</p> <p>“It’s one thing to be able to read an article and attempt to get to an understanding of what the author is attempting to say, but I personally benefited from this class since it was a diverse actively engaged group of brilliant individuals who shared not only their views but personal experiences to contextualize what the authors were telling us...if we can empathize as a class and simply listen to each other’s experiences we can begin to break down the illusion of equality... we can learn to empathize with those who are treated unequally.” (16)</p>
Exploring Difficult Topics	<p>“[I appreciated the instructor’s] openness and willingness to have challenging conversations.” (3)</p> <p>“[The instructor] didn’t avoid controversial or sensitive topics; that created a safe space that made me feel like I could ask questions, share my opinions, or discuss any interpretations. This approach to teaching taught me the importance of not shying away from overwhelming topics and that breaking down the factors can provide a whole picture of the topic.” (4)</p> <p>“I do not feel like this is something that I think will be discussed by my friends, but discussing it in the class or at least in these assignments with reflections was extremely helpful.” (5)</p>
Sharing Emotions	<p>“I learned that when I speak about things that cause me profound inquiry, I get very emotional, and perhaps that isn’t the best. I found that I can do this and be taken</p>

seriously by my grader, but that this also feels more genuine to me than perhaps any other paper that I've written." (3)

"I think [the notion that the] instructor does not look at the substance of [my] reflection is a very novel innovation, and I also like this model very much, I can write a word in my own mind." (6)

Note. Themes related to the trauma-informed principle of safety are summarized in Table 1. Representative quotes that exemplify each theme are also given.

Table 2

Collaboration Themes Reflected in Students' Experiences

Collaboration Theme	Students' Experiences
Engaging with Diverse Views	<p>"I found it interesting that more often than not in these five weeks I was contrasting with my fellow classmates, but in the most beautiful way. Contrast in interpretation, but a lot of commonalities in overall experience and feeling." (3)</p> <p>"In the discussion I saw a lot of different examples and knowledge, for example in week 4 [a student] mentioned a lot of new concepts and knowledge that I did not know. I am very happy to learn in this way." (6)</p> <p>"The whole class discussions and the breakout rooms were really eye-opening experiences for me...I really enjoyed this course as a whole because it gave me the opportunity to see things in a different perspective and change my perception on religion and society." (11)</p> <p>"...seeing the different relationships others have with religion has given me some clarity of what religion means to me as an adult. What made me change my mind was the survey results from week one and the discussion it sparked—especially hearing how people are still spiritual but don't necessarily subscribe to or follow a religion." (18)</p> <p>"I believe the discussions we had in class were the most influential in changing or reaffirming my perceptions about religion, spirituality, and/or secularism... I found it very interesting to listen to what my other classmates had to say regarding the themes of the week and the readings we had... because my classmates all came from different backgrounds they each had their own perceptions and their own experiences that related with the theme of the course. With my classmates sharing those experiences and what they believed in, I was able to expand on my knowledge of the various religions even within our school." (21)</p>

“The discussions were impactful for me because it showed that others had my opinion, and that it could reaffirm what I believed in.” (5)

“I learned so much more from... the class discussions. There were times that I would stay after class and talk to other classmates that sparked my curiosity. I longed to have conversations like that in an online setting. I’ve missed it so much... I learned so much about religions that I didn’t know much about when we were in discussions... My classmates are all so infused within their cultures and being able to talk to them about it was my favorite part.” (22)

**Deepening
Understanding
of Material**

“I do not feel like [the class topics are] something that I think will be discussed by my friends, but discussing it in the class... was extremely helpful.” (5)

“I personally found it much easier to grasp concepts that were new to me based off of what my peers discussed in the classroom. I found the open class discussions much more interesting and considering the class was quite diverse, listening to each of the students' experiences and input helped put many new ideas into perspective. For example, I had great difficulty understanding the third week’s module, however, succeeding my meeting with the Professor after class time, along with a few other classmates, I was able to have a better understanding of that week’s material as well as the assignment that we were required to turn in. I was able to listen to personal examples that were provided by others, and I also found that I was not the only student who had difficulty understanding that week’s concept.” (8)

“The most influential part of this course that solidified my perceptions about religion, spirituality, and secularism were definitely the breakout rooms that we participated in during class, and it was super interesting to hear the perspectives of my other classmates in that everyone had to participate and present their thought process in how they interpret the readings.” (9)

“The breakout room assignments were helpful because it gave me other students understanding of the readings, which helps me remember to content of the material.” (12)

“I would read each article before class and then we would discuss it together. Any misunderstanding or anything I was confused about was usually resolved during class. I liked how we were engaging what we were reading about in class, how we were discussing with one another what in the readings stood out to us. Most importantly, I was able to hear what my classmates thought about each reading. I think that is what was most influential to me. That my own understanding of religion was expanded by listening to the stories my classmates told. It was a real-life example of how religion and spirituality is unique to everyone. The readings gave me all the facts and knowledge about how religion is a difficult concept to define but our class discussions helped me understand and grasp what the readings were trying to explain.” (14)

“I think the course readings were powerful, but they were a bit difficult, so class discussions were crucial to understanding the course materials... For instance, I had a hard time understanding how Yemen’s Qat Chews are relatable to religions but the discussions in class... helped me understand the connection.” (15)

“I absolutely believe the discussions, and reading materials we based our lectures and discussions upon, developed my understanding of Secularism as an ideology itself, particularly in the US shaped by the political and social history of the US.” (16)

“What was most rewarding about this class was hearing the discussions my classmates had, specifically about their personal experiences with religion. It was always insightful to get a different perspective on my own religion and learn new things about their religions and how it relates to class. It’s one thing to learn about religion from media, articles, and readings, and it’s so insightful to learn it from others. So it’s always helpful to hear the perspectives of my peers.” (18)

Note. Themes related to the trauma-informed principle of collaboration are summarized in Table 2. Representative quotes that exemplify each theme are also given.

Table 3

Collaboration Themes Reflected in Students’ Experiences

Choice Theme	Students’ Experiences
Broadening Perspectives	<p>“... the weekly reflection asked us to look up current events, which tied me to religion and made me change my attitude about the relationship between religion and me.” (6)</p> <p>“The aspect that I enjoyed is conducting the research on my own, that way, not only was I understanding what was being taught in the class, but I would also be taken to different sources and different links that allowed me to broaden my perspective, dig deeper, and find out about new events or information that I was not enlightened to.” (8)</p>

“Having to find an article that relates to the weekly discussion each week forced me to think about the content more deeply and objectively... the learning outcomes are more comprehended with the reflection assignment.” (12)

“Weekly reflections allowed me to make connections between the current events and course materials. In addition, having to reflect on what we learned gave me a chance to revisit what I learned and apply the learning to my own world. I found it helpful, and a much more efficient way of learning than a quiz or a test, because a quiz or a test makes you remember ‘who said what’ but in this case, I had to think about ‘why who said what’ and ‘how’ it applies to the world now.” (15)

“Being able to supplement a current event to the readings and understand the theme in a different way made it easier for me to understand the phenomena and themes that the readings discussed. I think the challenging part was connecting the source and reading to my own personal views because I honestly had no personal connection to religion up until now, so it was interesting to challenge myself into building an opinion regarding religion, spirituality, and secularism.” (20)

“Because certain current events are so specific, as well as the readings, it was hard to find the connections and compare them together. But, I do think that because it was difficult, it made me use my brain more and to further my understanding on the topics.” (21)

Developing Transferable Skills

“Although challenging at first it continued to get easier, the most challenging was to connect it back to the concepts discussed in class while looking for a recent event, and connecting it to a reading, so basically it was all difficult at first. However, it prepared me for conducting research and writing a dissertation.” (9)

Inclusion

“The most challenging part of writing reflections for me was to find current events associated with the readings and theme of the week. It was my first time finding articles and trying to use the reading to connect it all together. But, it was also my favorite part of writing reflections. In my Week 4 reflection, I found an article on Korean American Christian women and learned so much through that one article. I never felt so included and heard, and I’m sure that I would have never found that article if it wasn’t for deep diving into the theme.” (11)

Enjoyment

“The process of conception was full of self-denying thoughts, but fortunately, I survived. I think weekly reflection is not only homework, but also an exploratory process, because the knowledge learned in class is limited, and you can only learn it if you take the time to explore. In general, although this is a stressful class, the joy of exploration is greater than the stress.” (19)

“I think my favorite part of the class was the weekly reflections, particularly looking for an article that connected to the theme of the class.” (20)

“I wish more classes asked questions about what I’ve previously known and what new things I learned at the end of the week. I love being able to unpack that as an assignment.” (22)

Note. Themes related to the trauma-informed principle of choice are summarized in Table 3. Representative quotes that exemplify each theme are also given.

Table 4a

Empowerment Theme 1 Reflected in Students’ Experiences

Empowerment Theme	Students’ Experiences
Growth in Relation to Previously Held Personal Beliefs and Perspectives	<p>“That reading was extremely eye opening to me, because I never really understood that colonialism was deeply engraved within the Ugandan system. It never really hit me that everyone perceives religion differently, and everyone follows it differently.” (2)</p>
	<p>“As a result, I’ve been able to open my mind to learning, understanding, and incorporating some of these practices into my life.” (4)</p>
	<p>“In contrast to the first week's reflection, I found that the fact that ‘religion, spirituality and secularity are not important in my life’ has been turned upside down. Through the five weeks of study, I have come to believe that all three elements are important to the formation of international relationships. First, Schwarz and Lynch's article gave me some insight into this unfamiliar concept, and then the Daughters of Dolma documentary reflected on the reality of human, religious, and secular relationships.” (6)</p>
	<p>“I thought I had a firm grasp on the definitions of secular and spiritual; however, reading the various assigned readings, made me question the denotation of such words. As Weisenfeld describes in ‘Religion in African American History,’ religion can lead to various communities and movements, along with identities that individuals bind to (pg. 1). While I would not consider myself religious, I am spiritual, and the course had made me realize how religion and spirituality can really intersect and be part of one’s identity. Personally, the course has made me more aware of how my nonsecular beliefs are a reason as to why I wish to aid others.” (7)</p>
	<p>“I stated that my family as a whole hadn’t really influenced my view on religion, which is the part I am unsure about. Schwarz and Lynch discuss the neo-weberian approach to studying religion in their article, stating that it is difficult to define religion because it is tied to a person's particular beliefs and assumptions about said religion. So I do not believe my religion is the same as my parents, I think that I created what I believe in myself. However, I do think that my parents had a very large influence on what I believe in today, even if our views are different.” (14)</p>

“A lot of the course materials changed my perception of religion and secularism. Before this course, I used to think that since I am no longer a Christian, I am enlightened because I no longer am confined to a certain religion and their ‘magical’ beliefs. I noticed how I placed religion under secularism, thinking that modernity is a complete isolation of religions. I learned that this thinking was short-sighted and limited.” (15)

“... watching Daughters of Dolma and their testimonies changed my mind about completely giving up religion and spirituality. I am not sure where my spiritual life is heading towards, but I welcome it.” (18)

“I think that these readings were influential on my part because I, too, once thought that the premodern traditional practices were keeping followers prisoners to a strict guideline when really they were not.” (20)

Note. Table 4a summarizes student experiences falling under the theme of growth in relation to previously held personal beliefs and perspectives of the trauma-informed principle of empowerment. Representative quotes that exemplify the theme are given.

Table 4b

Empowerment Theme 2 Reflected in Students’ Experiences

Empowerment Theme	Students’ Experiences
Growth in Relation to Previously Held Beliefs about Course Material	<p>“I realize that I do not agree that secularism is an important notion within the United States as I once believed. The United States may try to demonstrate secular and democratic values, but truly as the foundation of the country is based upon Christian principles, and a lot of the bipartisan political debates are religiously affiliated (LGBTQ, Abortion, etc.), the role of religion is on a much larger scale than I had imagined.” (1)</p> <p>“In the first week’s reflection, I had previously stated that religion was a rather growing part of the United States, however, after further research, I am unsure of whether or not that statement is actually true. During the course, we were introduced to the idea that modernity leads to a decline in religion, and after further deliberation, I have found this statement to actually be quite true.” (8)</p> <p>“I will say one of the most eye-opening lectures that I’ve watched that have changed my thoughts, titled <i>The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion as a Source of Violent and Nonviolent Militance</i>, never would I have thought of religion and violence in the same sentence, where one impacts the other. However, when historian Scott Appleby stressed the importance of religion being the heart of what people believe, how they behave, and how they organize their politics, expanded my knowledge in</p>

using religion to build peace, enhance compassion and spread forgiveness among others, and it has made me excited for what this course has to offer.” (9)

“I do believe I have shifted greatly in my consideration to secularism as this idea of separation of religion and politics to now viewing it as its own ideology grounded in Western centered capitalistic attitudes. I think I previously granted Secularism too little credit for the importance it plays in justifying the actions of some groups over others for simply doing the right thing. I am talking of course of the discussion had in Jason Ritchie’s article *Pinkwashing, Homonationalism, and Israel-Palestine: The Conceits of Queer Theory and the Politics of the Ordinary.*” (16)

“...I do think that my thoughts on secularism have changed. It has changed not so much in a negative or a positive way, but in a more analytical way.” (17)

“Yes, some articles really helped me understand religion better, such as the first article from Walsh.” (19)

“Unlike what I said in my Week 1 reflection, I believe religion, spirituality, and/or secularism has been very significant in domestic politics of the United States. I never put much thought into how religion tied with domestic politics before taking this class but I believe religion has been very significant throughout the United States’ history. For example, in Week 3’s reading, *Religion in African American History* by Judith Weisenfield, it talked about the history of African Americans’ religion when they were brought to America as slaves.” (21)

“I see now that religion and spirituality is very significant in domestic politics. Before this class, I would say that nonwestern countries are the ones that have this issue that religion is in their politics too much. However, that is not the case. I have always seen the United States as pretty secular, but I’ve come to learn that it is the opposite.” (22)

Note. Table 4b summarizes student experiences falling under the theme of growth in relation to previously held beliefs about course material of the trauma-informed principle of empowerment. Representative quotes that exemplify the theme are given.

Table 4c

Empowerment Theme 3 Reflected in Students’ Experiences

Empowerment Theme	Students’ Experiences
Growth in Relation to Learning	“I also want to learn more about and respect others’ religions and spiritualities (both I knew about before this course and those I learned during this course)... Sharing my perspective was invigorating and piqued my interest in continuing my studies on these topics.” (4)

“... it will be interesting to see if my views on religion, spirituality, and secularism have changed or remained the same as I pursue my future academic endeavors.” (9)

“This class caused me to think about justice in new ways; I see the paradox now between providing justice from a legal system standpoint versus providing justice for the spirit based on different beliefs... This class also reinforced my burgeoning interest in religion because it exposed me to some of the contemporary complications in politics between the different doctrines.” (12)

“I have also learned so much from my own reflections. I wish more classes asked questions about what I’ve previously known and what new things I learned at the end of the week.” (22)

Note. Table 4c summarizes student experiences falling under the theme of growth in relation to learning of the trauma-informed principle of empowerment. Representative quotes that exemplify the theme are given.

Table 4d

Empowerment Theme 4 Reflected in Students’ Experiences

Empowerment Theme	Students’ Experiences
Growth in Relation to Using Academic Tools to Guide Their Learning	<p>“I learned more than I had thought I could from academic papers and deepened my understanding of numerous topics. Once I used context clues and broke down literary terminology or asked for an explanation in the lecture, the dots started to connect, and I followed the complex points the authors were making. I found that having readings directly associated with lectures was incredibly helpful because we could discuss and delve deeper into the topic.” (4)</p> <p>“My response has not changed since Week 1. Again, referencing Kizito, there are clear indications as to how American politics has been affected by these issues. What is more important here is the way in which society has viewed these issues to be acceptable.” (5)</p> <p>“In Week 1, I thought that religion was becoming less prevalent in international politics, but I now think differently as I look into more international news and current events. A lot of events have religious context or undertones to the story that I wasn’t able to see before.” (11)</p>



Note. Table 4d summarizes student experiences falling under the theme of growth in relation to using academic tools to guide their learning of the trauma-informed principle of empowerment. Representative quotes that exemplify the theme are given.