

Climate Science in Theological Education
Cohort 3 – FAQ Session 2
Q&A Transcript

QUESTION: Our school is interreligious and not all of our students are preparing for ministry per se, so I'm hearing that I might want to focus this grant toward the population of students that are preparing for ministry, which would be primarily a chaplaincy program and ministry in a bunch of forms and definitions and contexts, rather than on programs that focus on interreligious studies and that kind of thing. Is that correct?

Yes, the theory of impact and change that these projects are working on is to have religious leadership and people who are informing the activity of religious communities to have greater comfort, familiarity with science and engagement with science. And so, yes, in that sense, an audience that is doing academic interreligious studies would not be the primary audience here. The primary audience would be those people who are headed into a vocation in ministry in some context.

To add, the work of people who are facilitating interreligious engagement and who are coming from diverse religious traditions and finding a path into being meaningful leaders, whether or not they're in ministry, is really important. We are looking at the limitations of these framings of religious vocations that come through the kind of prevailing and predominant religious communities that we have in North America. And that limitation is something we recognize and we're interested in finding ways of framing this work that can serve other communities that don't have those same ministry models. So for example, we're thinking about how denominations that don't have clergy like the Quakers or the Latter Day Saints, might be still educating people who are influential in their communities and who are doing important work from a theological grounding. And so as you think about your students and your audience and ways that make sense to meet them where they are and serve the kinds of vocations and professions and leadership opportunities that they'll be entering, I just want to encourage you to be creative with the prompt and to come to us with questions or, if you want to brainstorm together about how to kind of frame that in a way that works for you. We wouldn't want to exclude the people who just are coming from a tradition or a context that doesn't fit the language that we've laid out.

When you are thinking about the language you use in your application, many of the reviewers and a lot of our previous programs have been working in sort of more rather structured framework of theological education. And so consider providing some of that context to help us and our advisors and reviewers understand that this is still leadership in these communities, even if we're not talking about, an ordination pathway or something like that.

QUESTION: The grant materials and some of the conversation here uses the language of climate as the umbrella. But a lot of the examples we saw don't only engage questions of climate change directly. They're talking about things like eco justice in

the local neighborhood, or whatever. So I'm hearing that it doesn't have to be directly kind of climate science related. Right?

That's right. Yes, I thank you for bringing that up. As far as the project title goes, and the framing of the theme or topic for engagement, climate change does not need to be it, and climate science in a strict sense does not either – for instance atmospheric science, carbon emissions. There is a way in which that's the center of the bullseye of our title as we framed it, but that need not be your framing. The framing can take the whole variety of forms that the examples given outlined. Climate or climate change does not need to be central, or even part of that, as long as you're engaging with something that is related to this complex of climate and environment issues.

QUESTION: The Institute that I am with has several partners around the world. So I was trying to figure out who to work with on this because there's a theological seminary in Country 1 that I think this would be great for, but I think it could have more impact in Country 2. But my issue with working with pastors in Country 2 is it's a very loose system, not really akin to seminary education. And I'm wondering if it'll be recognizable as these are pastors, these are people training to be pastors in a system that's quite informal. And I just really didn't know whether that was acceptable. But there's pretty much zero climate education in Country 2, so I think it could have a great impact.

If you would like to have further conversation with one of us about like specific questions like that, please do feel free to reach out. But yes, I would just emphasize that we have been trying to expand the reach of this program. And we're also kind of in a learning process of seeing the real diversity of opportunities out there for people who are serving in communities and trying very hard not to limit the language we're using, recognizing that there's lots of limitations sort of built in to some of the language that we use about this. So I would say, these are places where, for the benefit of the reviewers, adding a little bit of further explanation if it doesn't necessarily match what is the traditional model will help to make sure. This can be especially helpful in the question in the application that asks about why is this particularly important or appropriate for your context.

QUESTION: You spoke of two previous cohorts. This is the third. Do you anticipate a fourth or is this our last chance?

We would love to. Currently, we don't have funding for a fourth, but we are continuing to seek funders. The success of this program, like we started with enough funding for two cohorts, we were able to build on the success of that to get funding for a third one. Our hope is to continue. So also, if you know funders who want to fund this kind of project, please feel free to send them our way.

QUESTION: My seminary was privileged to be part of the Science for Seminaries work, and that was very impactful for the seminary, and it has lingering effects that I could point to. So in a way this is to say this wouldn't be new for us and we have already accessed funding and I'm kind of wondering does that disadvantage us?

To the question of whether previous applicants are eligible, the answer is yes. Even grantees to the first and second cohort of this climate science project are eligible. The caveat there is just doing something different that builds upon what you've done before, but that expands in a new direction. So it isn't just a simple kind of reiteration of what's been proposed before, but is a way of taking what's been done and what has hopefully been sustained in some way and finding a way to develop and expand it in new directions.

QUESTION: I have an academic background, but I'm currently a student at my institution. Would I still be eligible to be a project lead on something like this as somebody who's being formed and being educated to be a religious leader?

I would say you'd need someone who is on your project leadership team who was faculty or who had some staff position. We've even kind of struggled to allow for adjunct faculty to be project leaders because there isn't the kind of sustainability of their foothold in the institution. And part of what we're looking to generate is change at the level of the institution, an event that takes place, but also a new engagement with science that can have legs into the future. And that's really limited with students who will only be at the institution for a short period of time. So I would say as a student, you can play a major role in the development of a project and carrying out a project, but it will be important to find someone who's well established at your institution who can be a project lead.

QUESTION: I work with two institutions, a university where I'm a student and an academy that is a fourth through eighth grade school. Have you had collaborations between universities and primary education? Would that be something new? Would that be interesting or not?

There has been some. I think of the project at Hood Theological Seminary, which as one aspect of several moving parts had some summer programs, and some of those were for elementary and middle school age kids. Even engagement with undergrads has been only a small minority of our projects, and so going younger than that gets farther away from this kind of primary target audience of ours. But faith formation, of course, is happening for at these younger stages, and the educators at those institutions are important leaders. And so I would recognize that this isn't our central target audience, but we acknowledge that it's an important target audience and finding ways to creatively partner with that institution is exciting to us. If you can find a thoughtful way of proposing something there, I think we'd be very open to, you know, to considering that for a grant.

One example I can think of from another school is if you have graduate students from the university doing field education at that primary school and they will be these leaders out there in the field helping the leaders in that primary school be cognizant of these conversations within climate science, that might be something to think about as an activity or arm of your project that you're thinking about.

One of the main things that we really encourage you to think about is what will be meaningful in the context that you are in. And hopefully that's why we give so many examples because we want to emphasize that our goal is to equip you for this work and to

make sure you have good science resources for your engagement. But we don't require it has to be done one particular way – as a course, as a project that does one specific type of activity – because you are the ones who know the communities that you're serving the best and what will be meaningful for them. And that gets into also the language that you're using for your project and what aspects of climate-related science you're engaging, which is going to be meaningful for your community.