

## {Description}

The International Summer School on Religion and Public Life (ISSRPL) is an annual international, interreligious summer school that meets in a different country every year for approximately two weeks. It provides a framework where students, civic leaders and prominent academics from different countries can explore the issues of religion and the public sphere with an aim of developing new strategies of tolerance and pluralism while maintaining a commitment to tradition and religious identity. The program is centered around three academic courses together with the processes of group building and the construction of working relationships across religious and ethnic identities. The didactic goals of the school are thus cognitive as well as social.

The ISSRPL is a unique initiative. It combines a global perspective on religious thought with social scientific research on tolerance, civil society and a pluralistic approach to pedagogic practice. Its goal is to transform both the theoretical models and concrete practices through which religious orientations and secular models of politics and society engage one another. Its guiding principle is that in order to build relations of tolerance and understanding between groups and to shape a civil society, the perceived barriers between secular, modern and more traditional religious values must be broken down. Rather, political orientations and social practices must be developed that will draw on both religious traditions and the insights of secular modernity in new and creative ways.

## {The Challenge}

Given the salience of religious identities worldwide, it is crucial to take religion seriously. This means seeing the potential of religion to provide resources for tolerance and mutual acceptance and not solely for conflict and oppression. The ISSRPL is devoted to furthering these goals within an educational milieu. It provides the educational context for the intensive training of fellows in those areas where religious thought and secular Enlightenment concepts of self and society overlap as well as where they conflict. Training includes not solely a cognitive or intellectual component, but also provides an experiential or social component – creating relationships and building group interactions predicated on the dual sources of religious and more secular civil society traditions. In so doing, it “models” the broader social goals of the project and develops allegiances and networks of individuals committed to the enterprise.

The ISSRPL mission is to educate a new cadre of religious and civic leaders, who, while maintaining their religious identities and affiliations, will provide much needed leadership in bridging the worlds of religious and secular communities.

## {Locale}

The ISSRPL meets each year in a different country. In line with its commitment to substantive dialogue across traditions and a mutual engagement of different perspectives, the changing physical location is of paramount importance. Meetings have been held in the Balkans, the Middle East, the United States and elsewhere.

“Crossing multiple lines of difference – an experiential bridge between the theoretical and the practical.”

## {Catalyst for Change}

One of the ISSRPL's most important functions has been to provide an international, global and interreligious space of publicly spoken truths, where the effects of each individual and organizational effort can be multiplied through the connections established and linkages effected. Through the networking capacities it offers, the ISSRPL has an important role as enabler of social, educational and institutional action around issues of religion and pluralism in the public realm.

## {Outcomes}

Four major outcomes of the summer school are envisioned:

1. Transformation of awareness and perception of the participants. While not attenuating in any way their commitment to their own religious traditions, the school hopes to open the participants to other religious traditions and view them not solely as a threat.
2. Enhance understanding of what has generally been viewed as a tension between modern secular and more traditional understandings of self and society.
3. Build in the participants an understanding of this tension as a “creative” one, rather than an unbridgeable obstacle to understanding.
4. Recruitment of the participants into an ongoing effort and dialogue around these themes that will build on the experience of the summer school to establish ongoing relationships and networks of interaction the year around.

“To see the other  
To see the other see you  
To see yourself seeing the other.”

## {Courses}

Fellows take three courses. Each course meets for two academic hours a day. The courses are as follows:

**Course 1: Religion and Civil Society** This course deals with the overarching theoretical issues of religion and civil society. It brings together different sources, traditions and intellectual perspectives to explore areas of overlap, conflict and potential dialogue between religious traditions and more secular, modern worldviews. It is taught every year.

**Course 2: Religion and Public Life** This course changes every year with the theme of that year's school. In the past it was devoted to such topics as religion, pluralism and democracy in Southeast Europe; the Muslim Question in Europe; the role of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; a comparison of different civil society initiatives of religion in the public realm.

**Course 3: Practicum** Presents an arena in which to explore different ways of bringing the theoretical issues discussed in the other courses into practical application. The different faculty of this course reflect on their own professional experience and present models by which the insights of the Summer School could be realized in different institutional spheres. The fellows often take an active part in the organization of this course. Among other issues, we have explored religious women's groups devoted to peace; violence against women; the rebuilding of religious edifices in Bosnia; and religious involvement in community safety in Boston.

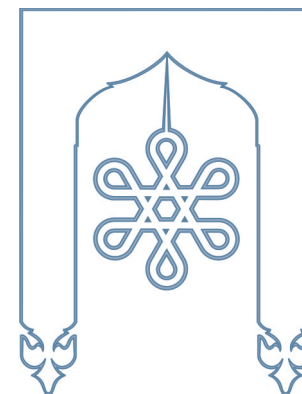


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The ISSRPL officers and board of directors are listed at [www.issrpl.org/board](http://www.issrpl.org/board).



International Summer School  
on Religion and Public Life

610 Centre Street, Suite A  
Newton, MA 02458 USA  
[info@issrpl.org](mailto:info@issrpl.org), [www.issrpl.org](http://www.issrpl.org)