

Madeleine Thompson

**Graduation Year:** Junior

**College:** Arts & Letters

**Major(s):** Theology; Peace Studies

**Minors(s):** Catholic Social Tradition

**Scholar Group Membership:** No

**Did you received other funding for this project?:** No

**Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding?** No

**More details on CUSE funding assistance?** With the conference all the way in Provo, UT, it would not have been feasible for me to pay for flights without CUSE funding!

**Project Title:** Religion in the Public Sphere

**Project Location:** Provo, UT

**ND Faculty Mentor:** Professor Jason Springs

**Project Type:** Conference - Attendance

**Why did you undertake this project/experience?** Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project, Career discernment and/or preparation

**Did your funded experience help you:**

**[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]:** Very Much

**[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]:** Very Much

**[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]:** Very Much

**[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]:** Yes

**[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:**Yes

**Tell us about your experience.**

Attending the "Religion in the Public Sphere" conference through the BYU Wheatley Institution, I heard keynote speakers discuss "When God and Caesar Mix: Religion, Secularism, and the Public Sphere" and "Repressing Religion: Civic Consequences in Russia and Central Asia." I was divided into a small group on "The Religious 'Other' and Jewish Civil Society" led by Dr. Andy Reed from BYU. We discussed the importance of the "other," hearing another voice outside one's own tradition, specifically in regards to Judaism throughout the ages. We then split into two groups within our roundtable discussion, and my team began a program proposal for "Interfaith Dialogue Model on College Campuses." As we researched and pieced together our proposal we spent a day pitching our idea and receiving feedback before our final presentation. Through this process I gained great insight into flaws of our current models for interfaith dialogue and helped promote a move towards a storytelling format that not only tolerates difference but sees difference as integral to appreciate the other.

**Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.**

Discussing religion in the public sphere, I worked with individuals of a variety of religions, building connections with Muslims, Mormons, Protestants, Jews, Catholics, and Hindus not to mention individuals who do not believe in a particular religion. This was a valuable experience and one that I do not believe I would have ever had on Notre Dame's campus. Part of this conference involved building and presenting program proposals. For my program proposal, I worked within a small group on Judaism but we expanded our program to revolve around interfaith dialogue on college campuses. I was able to better my presentation and sale pitch skills, learn about what this topic looks like on campuses other than Notre Dame, and understand how interfaith dialogue affects the public sphere at large.

**Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.**

My hope for this conference was to reach a better understanding of how different religions function in the public sphere with the goal of gathering ideas and narrowing topics for a senior thesis through Theology and capstone project through Peace Studies. This experience helped me to learn about the significance of the "other" in Jewish civil society as well as just how important hearing stories of those who are different from you. As I prepare to study abroad in Jerusalem, Israel, learning from both Israelis and Palestinians, I believe this idea of listening to and learning from the "other" will be of crucial importance. I am now even more interested in studying how peacebuilding circles work to let the other speak. For a senior thesis, I am now looking at how restorative justice circles could play a role in a comparative study between conflicts in Jerusalem and conflicts in Chicago.

**What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?**

Take a risk and apply for funding because it can be an incredible experience! I've found during my time at Notre Dame that it is really easy to let busyness consume your day-to-day experience. While focusing on the next homework assignment or midterm is important, it can be really beneficial to look big picture and find experiences that allow you to learn outside the classroom in new ways. Putting in the work to create a proposal, contact a faculty member, and plan a detailed budget may seem daunting at first, but if you commit to small goals of completion, before you know it you have applied and the hard work can most certainly pay off!

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.  
mthomp29@nd.edu

