

The Dignity Project Fellowship: Youth Leadership Institute

-2021-2022 Program Overview-

“Our innermost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Christian a better Christian. I broaden my Hinduism by loving other religions than my own.... All religions are true”

- Mahatma Gandhi

“Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world”

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

This fellowship program is designed to train outstanding *high school sophomores, juniors and seniors*—15-18 fellows total annually—from Greater Boston to serve as interreligious and cross-cultural leaders, with the capacity to engage the diversity of our city (and broader society) with thoughtfulness, skill, and care. In constructing this intentionally diverse group, we will recruit a passionate cohort of young people from different spiritual and ethical backgrounds, including those who identify as “religious” and “secular.” We will also pay careful attention to other axes of difference, including race, class, and gender. In developing this initiative, we are working collaboratively with leaders and educators from various houses of worship, schools, and civic organizations throughout the city.

The overarching goal of the initiative is to cultivate a network of thoughtful and skilled young leaders able to build bridges of understanding and cooperation, and to stand up to bigotry and hate. The ethical/spiritual foundation for the project is the ancient and enduring notion that every human being is of inestimable worth, and that a society thrives when people learn to honor each other's similarities *and* differences. In this moment of increased polarization and resurgent intolerance, we need to help young people develop the ability and sensibility to find common ground when possible, and to engage in *dignified* discourse and debate when necessary. This is particularly important for our target audience, as these teens move closer to adulthood, preparing to leave home for college, university, and work life.

Program Structure (see calendar below):

Each participant will actively engage in *all* of the activities listed below. There will be brief assignments to be completed in advance of each monthly Zoom meeting.

- Opening Retreat (2 nights, 3 days)*
- 4 Monthly In-Person Gatherings (3 hours/location TBD in Boston)
- 4 Monthly Virtual Gatherings (1.5 hours on Zoom)
- Preparatory multimedia assignments: videos, podcasts, book chapter (1 hour maximum)
- 1 Religious or Community Site Visit is required on your own in October/November along with a journal entry to your Mentor, Program Director and Formation Team (3-4 hours)
- Closing Retreat and Celebration (2 nights/2.5 days)**
- Virtual Final Program Reflection and Evaluation Session (2 hours on Zoom)

* Please plan to block off the full days of the Opening Retreat (Monday-Wednesday, August 23rd-25th). Although we plan to meet overnight at a local retreat center, due to shifting COVID requirements, we may need to alter our plans. Regardless, we will meet each day.

** Participants will work in small groups—with mentorship—to share their learning with the broader community. Time will be dedicated in our gatherings to develop these projects. We believe that the fellows' experience will be significantly enhanced by embedding an action-oriented component into the program that grows directly from their learning together.

Learning Goals:

The overarching goal of this initiative is to provide the fellows with the experience, skills, and support to act as bold and empathic leaders; committed to the flourishing of an ethos of human dignity within and across their communities.

- Forge personal relationships with peers and mentors from different religious and cultural contexts
- Explore the values and beliefs—religious and secular—that support participants' commitments to creating an equitable and compassionate society
- Learn how to engage in constructive dialogue and work with a diverse team of individuals
- Study the lives and work of “upstanders” from American and world history, including the sources of wisdom that inspired, informed, and guided them
- Develop communication skills for use in formal and informal educational settings

Program Calendar—2021-2022*

* Programs will be held both in person and virtually via Zoom. The Dignity Project and Hebrew College, our institutional home, will monitor and follow local public health recommendations for safe gatherings.

- Opening Retreat: Monday, August 23rd - Wednesday, August 25th, 2021 (2 nights, 3 days)
- 4 In-Person Gatherings: Sundays, 2:00 - 5:00 pm:
 - September 12th, 2021
 - October 10th, 2021
 - November 7th, 2021
 - December 5th, 2021
- 4 Virtual Gatherings on Zoom: Thursdays, 7:00 - 8:30 pm:
 - September 23rd, 2021
 - October 21st, 2021
 - November 18th, 2021
 - December 16th, 2021
- Personal Site Visit: We will help fellows identify and schedule appropriate sites between October 10th and November 7th
- Closing Retreat: Saturday, January 15th - Monday, January 17th, 2022 (2 nights/2.5 days)
- Closing Celebration: MLK Monday, January 17th, 2022 (Time TBD)
- Virtual Final Program Reflection and Evaluation Session on Zoom: Sunday, January 31st, 2022 (5:00 - 7:00 pm)

Fellowship Stipends:

Each participant will receive a **\$1000 stipend** upon completion of the program. To receive the full Fellowship stipend of \$1000, Fellows must attend and participate in **all** the Fellowship events and activities with the exception of one absence. After one non-emergency absence, stipends will be lowered to reflect the Fellow’s record of attendance and participation. This ensures fairness to the entire Fellowship community.

Program Staff:

- Shelton Oakley Hersey, Dignity Project Program Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Kim Bress, Community Educator, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Rev. Tom Reid, Associate Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- Rabbi Or Rose, Director, Miller Center, Hebrew College
- 4 Dignity Project Mentors from local graduate theological schools and programs

For More Information:

Shelton Oakley Hersey, Program Director
 (857) 327-1483, soakleyhersey@hebrewcollege.edu

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