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**Title:** Invisible Faiths: Paganism and Religious Diversity at the University of Illinois

**Course:** Anth411 Section 1G and 1U (Methods of Cultural Anthropology) Fall 2007 -- Nancy A Abelmann

**About the Author:** I am a graduate student in anthropology and American Indian Studies here at the University of Illinois. I am also a practicing Pagan, a religious path I have followed for several years. Although I maintained privacy about my religious traditions, my beliefs were exposed after an encounter with a professor in my department. It was this experience that made me wonder about religious diversity on campus, and led to the formulation of this project. As a student activist, I plan to use this information to move forward towards raising awareness of alternative religions on campus, while continuing to educate the public about who we are. Besides being a student, I'm a writer, artist, former marathoner, and avid reader. In this capacity, I always strive to remain grounded, even in my anthropological theories.

**Keywords:** religious diversity, paganism, silencing, tolerance

**Abstract: Abstract**

In this research, I seek to understand religious diversity here at the University of Illinois. Using ethnographic methods, I propose a project to interpret the ways in which cultural expectations frame the experiences of Pagan students on campus, while at the same time, also frame the ways in which the University administration views the student body as a whole. Furthering preliminary research conducted in fall of 2007, this research seeks to determine the environment here at the University of Illinois for students of alternative religions. Considering a violent history against Pagans, this research takes careful account of potential risks to Pagan students and members of alternative religions. In this way, this project may also provide a foundation for future applied projects to encourage greater resources for religious diversity on campus.

**Initial Exercises:**

**Reading Response**

**Initial Exercises:** Arrowhead Mall Food Court, Muskogee, Oklahoma, August 28, 2007 1:47-3:00 p.m. I am sitting in a food court of the local mall

**Observation** between Muskogee and Tahlequah, Oklahoma. At the base of the Ozarks, the area is thinly populated, with only small stores

running along one or two streets in each town. A highway and a thirty minute drive separate the rural areas. The food court and surrounding mall seem to reflect the laidback, Oklahoma setting. Behind me, a theater stays closed, as the first movie doesn't begin until after 4:00 p.m. Still, customers, mostly middle-aged or elderly, linger around the movie theater, reading advertisements for movies such as *The Bourne Ultimatum*, and the less advertised *September Dawn*. I am sitting in one of approximately fifty tables, lined up in five rows of four or five in front of five independent food stops. The tables, which are surrounded by two to four thin green metal chairs, are divided into two groups, which are separated by a small platform with six children's rides. At the moment, Tigger is rocking his boat enthusiastically, although no child sits inside it. The air smells of pizza, spicy Chinese food, sugary cookies, and chestnut flour. The two trees that dot the chair-covered landscape are the only sign of outside life. Much like the Las Vegas casino, there are no windows in the food court, making time an invisible marker not to be judged by those inside. The cathedral ceiling is opaque white and peaks like a circus tent. Ironically, it seems to keep the heat inside. I take notes on those that pass by me. Elderly women briskly walk by in brightly colored jumpsuits, their arms pumping to an unheard rhythm as they circle around and around, only dizzying to the casual observer. Young teenagers hold hands and stop at the Italian place for a drink. When they sit down, the young girl wraps herself close to her companion, but his leg continuously taps the floor, hinting of unseen tension. I take stock of the steady flow of customers, noting that while there are many, there are far fewer shopping bags. I watch the custodians clean up the tables and count the earrings on the older female custodian. I watch the young mothers on their cell phones let their children play in the child area without paying attention to what they are doing. A baby, no more than 9 or 10 months old, wanders over to the children's rides. The mother does not take notice for a few minutes, although I watch for unsavory people as I wonder what's wrong with modern parenting... This exercise raised several issues for me. Like Stilgoe, I found myself waxing poetic, as if the sleeping writer was suddenly awakened. Ironically, waxing poetically means writing slower, and I quickly learned that life speeds by much faster than my pen did. My observations were, at best, incomplete. Most disturbing, this exercise raised for me the realization that I am not immune to what Deloria (1998) calls "expectations." I registered people's ages and clothing styles, and automatically processed information that may or may not have been true (as in the case of a young man I documented as "interestingly feminine"). If anything, it confirmed my own

humanity and subjectivity, both things that could be improved(!). I found that past experience influenced interpretations of behavior. When an older middle-aged man sat watching a young mother with her son warning flags blared, reminding me that our experiences frame our understandings; we can never be free of our own past. As anthropologists, we are charged with looking as objectively as possible at a situation. However, this exercise proved that in no situation can we (or at least "I") ever be fully objective. It is because of this subjectivity that other ethnographic methods are necessary to challenge and defy our expectations, giving our work a measure of veracity otherwise precluded by our own subjectivity and pre-judgments.

**Initial Exercises:** Over the last two years, the presence of "chief Illiniwek" has resulted in various dialogues and discourses about issues of racism, representation, and cultural authenticity. For this assignment, I compare and contrast two texts produced by individuals from different spheres of the academic institution. The first text is the press release issued on February 16, 2007 in regards to the retirement of "the chief." The second text is a formal faculty statement by one of the departments at the University of Illinois. Both were available online through the search function of the University database on the main website. I chose these two texts because of the various and conflicting assumptions (see Fairclough), social discourses (see Strauss), and other aspects of textual production these two texts represent and contrast. In February of 2007, the University of Illinois released a press statement announcing that "chief Illiniwek" would "no longer perform at athletic events" (New Release 2007:1). The news release reviewed the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) announcement that the University of Illinois could host athletic events once "the chief" had been retired. The statement further quoted the Board of Trustees Chair, Lawrence Eppley, on the issue. There are several different important discursive elements in the press statement. Keywords such as "tradition," "consensus," and "policy" play integral roles in the press statement. In emphasizing these terms in regards to the "chief," the University invokes the power Strauss cites in her analysis of public opinion. Nowhere in the press release does the University address terms such as racism or hegemony. In fact, the university uses the term "consensus" as a means of undermining and resisting the influence of the NCAA in the university's decision regarding the "chief." The statement claims that the Board of Trustees was already handling the issue, prior to the involvement of the NCAA, creating a silent discourse that places the University in a position of vulnerability against the

power of the overarching institution. The statement also makes particular assumptions about the “chief” controversy, including familiarity with the “chief” and such “traditions as the Three-In-One” and ignorance of the resistance to the mascot. In contrast to the official press release of the University of Illinois, the faculty statement addresses alternative discourses surrounding the issue of the mascot. Written in 2005 prior to the University’s decision, the statement addresses how the mascot negatively impacts what the faculty perceive as the missions of their department: teaching, research, and service. Keywords in the statement include “controversy,” “harm,” and “appropriate.” These terms create a discourse emphasizing the perceived negative impact of the mascot. In contrast to the University’s press release, the statement assumes that the goals of teaching, research, and service, are of utmost importance to the University. The press release, however, emphasizes the importance of athletic excellence and omits references to intellectual and academic aspects of the University impacting the student population. Each assumption creates alternative and conflicting discourses that either discount or emphasize the impact of the mascot. A second assumption of the faculty statement is an assumption that the reader will know what is and what is not culturally and politically appropriate, and that there is a single unified understanding of what that is. The faculty statement assumes that symbols perpetuating cultural stereotypes and racialized iconography will be generally recognized as inappropriate. Moreover, the statement uses the term “reasonable,” invoking the notion that only unreasonable people would be unable or unwilling to acknowledge the assumed inappropriateness of the mascot. Furthermore, the statement calls for the University to “lead the way” (Statement 2005: 2) in developing an institution that serves “all the citizens of the State of Illinois” (2). This “call” tacitly reminds readers of the institutional importance of the University of Illinois as a “flagship” University in the state and invokes assumptions about the role of leadership. To be a leading institution, the University should acknowledge what is and what is not appropriate and/or harmful to the student body. Interestingly, both of these texts provide examples of the ways in which various individuals handle what Strauss calls “emotional hotspots” discursively. At the risk of making further assumptions, I will hesitantly suggest that the “chief” might be an example of an “emotional hotspot.” The University’s response to this issue was to use keywords to elicit responses of fondness and regard for the mascot. Quoting Eppley, the press release states, “The Chief Illiniwek tradition inspired and thrilled members of the University of Illinois community for 80 years...” (2). It handled the demise of

the issue by calling to feelings of remorse over the retirement of the mascot. In contrast, the faculty statement appealed to rationality and reason in handling the issue, as demonstrated in its assumptions about reasonability and appropriateness. Clearly, these texts provide an interesting discursive analysis independently of each other. However, when placed in a position of contrast, these texts reveal the various discourses surrounding a single issue. As the adage goes, “there are always three sides to every story: yours, mine, and the truth,” so too, are there multiple sites of meaning in the formation of texts. Implicit undercurrents and cultural assumptions frame reader responses, while appealing to emotions and cultural understandings. Perhaps, then, it is only through multiple textual analyses that we can frame understandings of issues such as the mascot, racism, and the role of academic institutions.

**Initial Exercises:** I am sitting opposite my interviewee, Moira (a pseudonym), in the basement of a building on campus. We sit on comfy office chairs that swivel, which occasionally inspires me to zoom about the tiny student lounge with gusto. Moira is in her late twenties, well-dressed, and relatively at ease in her chair, occasionally laughing at my childish antics as I flout all standards of professionalism. I know Moira relatively well, and consider her a friend, so to my eye, she is as relaxed as I’ve ever seen her. Moira is active on campus in many areas of academic life, but mostly in her continued activism for Native peoples on campus and abroad. This keeps her constantly moving. Her physical presence, though relaxed, is still professional, reflecting what I’ve come to recognize as a high level of confidence and maturity. She keeps her arms crossed in conversation, only occasionally engaging in a nervous habit like rubbing her earlobe or chin as she thinks about an answer to my questions. The position catches me as somewhat defensive, which makes me wonder whether or not there is a subconscious anxiety about what’s to follow. Then again, it could just be how she’s comfortable. I begin by asking the required question. Moira explains how it was her grandfather who brought her here, both directly and indirectly. She tells me about the process through which she became a full-time student here at the University, and the ways in which the Native faculty on campus greatly contributed to her decision. Throughout the interview, Moira also emphasizes the importance of a Native community around her on campus. Moira’s family lives far from here and while her family still remains an important part of her life, she acknowledges that differences in educational backgrounds make it difficult sometimes for family “back home” to recognize how life is here at the University. The community here

**A Practice Interview**

is both intellectually and personally important to her. Throughout the interview, Moira and I chat about the overall process of going to school. We mention her activism on campus, but don't really unpack it. In many ways, it suggests our familiarity with each other's knowledge base, and I recognize that since it is something of which we are both aware, in light of this conversation, it can remain unspoken. I do ask for the record, however, if she has regrets. Here she pauses, and admits that she's looking forward to life as a "low profile" graduate student. I ask if she has anything more to add and she smiles and tells me, "Nope. That's it." While "only" a practice interview, this week's exercise has me once again reflecting on the nature of fieldwork. When I conducted work in Mexico with Chinese immigrants, a set questionnaire was established by the government institution sponsoring our research. As a result, I could meander into the field, notebook and tape recorder in hand, go out to see "my families," and perform the interviews without much personal thought. In contrast, in conducting even this "simple" interview, I found myself debating follow up questions and avoiding topics I thought may be too sensitive to an audience. Keeping audience in mind, I structured my fieldnotes to be relatively "shallow." While not necessarily lacking in detail, I was uncomfortable with the thought of exposing my fieldnotes to such a broad audience as our class. It feels somewhat exploitive, and seems to counteract my ingrained instinct to protect my "informants" as much as possible. In this way, it's difficult to determine where the "anthropologist" wanted to protect the said "informant" and where the "person" wanted to protect her friend. Once again, I was forced to confront the boundary between the mythological objective and the inevitable subjective. Another issue I noted in this project was how different it was to conduct an interview without a tape recorder versus my previous research. In Weiss's article, the transcribed tape recording allowed for a more critical reflection of the relationship between the researcher and the informant. With only my hurriedly typed notes I wrote in shorthand on the computer while giving the interview, I could not reflect back on body language and my own thoughts. It was write down what I was thinking, or write down what I was hearing. Once again, as with the observation exercise, the difference between the pace of life and the pace of human thought and action, is substantial and evident in the production of ethnography. In many ways, these issues reflect some of the difficulties mentioned also in the Emerson article. Yet, the advice that student's should leave the field after short periods of time to allow for adequate fieldnotes comes with its own problems. Often, life cannot be neatly segmented into hours and minutes; events happen that are

unpredictable and often exciting. If the field researcher is only to study “the field” for a designated time, how much of the experience will they miss? Over my stay in the Cherokee Nation this summer, I remember being exhausted after a long day of activities celebrating the Cherokee National Holiday. Despite this, my friends encouraged me to go to the Cherokee Intertribal Powwow that night. Had I given in to my desire to ruminate over the day, I would have missed out on an evening that was both professionally and personally rewarding. Fieldwork is not, and should not, be predictable. Perhaps the greatest lesson for me in this exercise was learning the complex borders between the personal and professional that comes into play in the fieldwork process.

**Question:** Question Revision: While the background for this research project remains the same as the original question below, I decided to narrow my question from the broader, “What are the experiences on campus?” I initially sought an answer to the secrecy behind the lack of obvious pagan voice on campus. I wondered if it was a matter of intimidation, as was my own personal case with a professor, or if, as some suggested, it was a matter of maintaining a certain mystique to the practices of alternative religions. But, much like the broader question, the reasons behind secrecy are as varied as the practitioners. If anything, this is a lesson against homogenizing of communities. There is as much variety and individuality in the pagan community as there is anywhere else. Keeping these lessons in mind, I have changed my question(s). I have decided instead to ask how do pagans feel about religious diversity on campus (or if they feel there is religious diversity on campus) and what, if anything, would they change about it on campus? Because this is the first project I’ve been able to find about pagans on campus, I think starting at the “beginning” of the overall issue of religious diversity (is there any to begin with) and then asking about change is the first critical step towards implementing change to benefit both the pagan community and the campus community as a whole.

According to the Illini Union website (<http://www.union.uiuc.edu>), there are more than 800 registered student organizations (RSO) on campus. A brief survey of the website indicated that there were over 50 RSOs that were classified specifically as “religious” organizations. Of these, almost 40 are Christian-based organizations. In my time here, I have witnessed pastors preaching on the Quad, protesters encouraging an old-fashioned “Bible-thumping” to correct errant ways, chalked advertisements for the “Bible in any language,” and self-identified “evangelical

Christians” investigating a meeting of the community pagan group to ensure that we were “not causing any trouble.” On the other hand, I have also been witness to the development of the only registered pagan organization on campus. When I talked with students of the organization about possibly doing a project about being pagan on campus, they all laughed. One has to admit one is pagan to have an experience as a pagan. Having been forcibly “dragged from the broom closet” by a professor in my first year, I understood exactly what they were saying. My question for this project relates to the need pagan students feel to hide “in the broom closet” and keep their identities safe on campus. I want to ask why on a public university campus where there are over 50 organizations dedicated to religion, do pagan students feel that a critical part of their identity must remain subdued. I seek to investigate whether this fear stems from outside pressure from other organizations, geographical pressure and the location of the University in the so-called “Bible-belt,” or whether it is a response to the failure of popular culture and the academic community to rectify stereotypes that persist about the pagan community, and in particular, about witchcraft, in general. Finally, I am interested to see whether or not there is an interrelationship among all of these factors, and how they influence life for pagan students on campus.

**Plan:** Revised Plan: As of this semester, the University now has an active pagan association on campus. As part of both my personal and professional goals for this semester (and class), I've become involved in the association and taken on an officer position within it. Because my personal and professional interests cross in this project, I've decided to ask for voluntary participation in the project.

Because this is the first project I could find on paganism on campus, I decided to do as much data gathering as possible. While the archive does provide some interesting historical context, I feel that focusing more on contemporary experience might help to create a project that is relevant to pagans on campus today. That being said, I've decided to conduct interviews and a brief survey from within the pagan association. Rather than go outside the association to talk with members of other religious groups, I decided to focus on the pagans on campus to get their point of view. I think, should this project develop into something broader, that meeting with members of other organizations and traditions on campus will be vitally important. However, for the brief time that we have this semester, I will begin data gathering with the pagan student association. My



plan for this semester is to have those willing to participate fill out a brief survey about their experiences. I will also conduct interviews with willing members (probably 2 or 3), including the founder/president of the organization (scheduled for 11/1). I will also conduct participant/observation within the association throughout the semester. I feel it's important to note here, that the extent of my participant/observation will no doubt be impacted by my personal involvement in paganism. While I intend to reflect upon my own experiences with the association, as well as my own subjectivity in looking at the experiences, I think it's important to note that I don't intend to write about experiences relating to rituals or personal communications with people I consider friends. While this may compromise the anthropological "scientific" quality of the research, it's also important to note that I can speak to and about the community from a perspective few researchers can. Thus, with the true double-edged sword of "native" fieldwork, I will conduct this project as both anthropological observer and pagan participant. My (very preliminary) plan for this project is to use standard ethnographic methods to conduct a preliminary investigation into pagan life on campus. As an active pagan both in the community and on campus, I plan on carrying out extensive "participant-observation" throughout the semester. I hope to conduct preliminary interviews with members of the pagan religious organization on campus, and possible random surveys of other students on campus to gauge general responses to the presence of alternative religions on campus. I also hope to conduct a review of academic literature about contemporary paganism and witchcraft to assess how these practices are viewed in the academe. In this way, I hope to use this project to be able to speak to the question of religious diversity on campus, as well as provide a knowledgeable voice in the pagan community as to the environment in which we practice and live. Due to the somewhat difficult nature of this topic, I feel it is also necessary to acknowledge here preliminary considerations for the implementation of the project. Perhaps most obviously, as a pagan individual and student, who has had varying experiences related to my identity on campus, it would be impossible for me to not acknowledge my own subjectivity. For these reasons, I will do my utmost to not let my own feelings alter the ways in which I frame the project for other pagan students. There is also a great concern as to safety. Having had some of the experiences indicated in the "question" section, it is obvious that not all of campus is open to this kind of religious diversity. Because of this, the confidentiality and anonymity of my informants will be the utmost concern in this project. Yet, despite the difficulties previously mentioned, it is hoped that this project can provide

insight to the campus community, and contribute to greater support for, and understanding of, religious diversity on campus.

**Data:** I am sitting at a café in downtown Urbana, scribbling observations in a notebook and wondering at the nature of visiting cafes. Like most times lately it seems, I found myself contemplating the matter of disposable income, and I ruminate over the presence of the people in the café. I feel guilty for not buying anything, but life has happened again, and this week the budget's tight. I make a note to buy hot chocolate this week to make up for my delinquency. I sit above most of the people there, lingering in the quiet balcony area upstairs because the tables were all full downstairs when I came in. Upstairs is quieter, with a few people scattered at tables working, or perhaps playing, at their laptops. A couple of girls sit on nearby couches, drinking coffee and chatting. With the exception of a few stragglers coming up the steps to check for space or people, the upstairs area stays the same for sometime. I find myself going quickly through a box of throat lozenges, as it appears that I have come down with yet another plague. I have worked all day as a cashier at the grocery store, so I am exhausted. I organized the interview when my interviewee could schedule in some time, which is rare because she seems to have an insanely busy schedule, much like myself. As the clock on my new digital recorder clicks away, I realize that my interviewee is late. I decide to give her until 9:00, anywhere from a half hour to an hour late based on our appointment, and wait. At 8:46, Lillian rushes into the café, and walks hurriedly through the doors. She rushes about the bottom floor, not stopping to order anything and then glances up at me. I grin and wave, and watch as she sighs with relief as I haven't left yet. She apologizes, laughing while trying to catch her breath, and rubs my back in an unexpected gesture of friendship and apology. As someone whose behavior is usually interpreted as "stand-offish," I am surprised. Lillian appears to see the other side of me. She sits and we laugh about timing and the nature of running constantly from one thing to another. She is coming from an event in her department. Another student produced a video with no support from faculty, and Lillian felt it good to support her. This says much about Lillian's character. She is a warm, friendly person with a great sense of humor. Her hair is cut short, which makes sense because of her constant activity. She is a senior undergraduate in liberal arts, and is prepping work for her final thesis. She wears a simple, elegant black sweater and earrings, but no necklace. She is engaged, so I catch myself looking at her ring, a beautiful blue diamond that appeals to the part of me that likes to gawk at shiny objects. We spend the next hour chatting

and laughing. We talk about our respective programs, the long hours, work, money, and life in general. I know that I am kind of nervous, and it seems to rub off a little on Lillian. As someone with a rather casual interview style, I am unsure as how to begin. We are surprised when her mother, who is up for a visit for the weekend, and her fiancé stop by to see if Lillian and I are done with the interview. We laugh and explain that we haven't even begun yet. Her fiancé, Gabriel, is much like Lillian. He is tall, lean, with blonde hair and blue eyes. I have met him only once, but he left me with the impression of warmth, as well as a deep sense of protectiveness of Lillian, which instantly earns my respect. He moves close to her, his arm around her shoulder. Like Gabriel, Lillian's mother hovers close, once and a while glancing at me, so I do my best to put them at ease. They have both met me before at an educational event for the pagan organization on campus, so I hope they know I don't bite. We discuss the interview and Gabriel offers to come back to pick up Lillian when the interview is done, so she states she will call him. Once they leave, we discuss the peculiarities of my new recorder, and laugh as we discuss how our own personal recorders are both defunct, which was the reason behind my latest investment. I turn on the recorder and we begin the interview. I let her know about the confidentiality information, which has us both laughing by the end of it. I explain that I have no outlined questions, so we begin with basic information. We decide on the name Lillian for her pseudonym. I ask how she came to paganism and she explains that she has been pagan both consciously and unconsciously. Unconsciously she states she's been pagan, "...as long as [her] memory serves." Consciously, she states that it was around the fourth or fifth grade when she became aware of her gifts, which she states she saw as "a sixth sense, a sixth ability of some sort." However, because she didn't understand these gifts, she pushed them away until she was ready to deal with them again a couple of years ago. As a relative beginner, we then talk about developing different skills and techniques. I recommend some tricks that I have learned over time, and we agree to pick up the conversation later. As the conversation moves forward, we talk about the role of mentorship in our paths to paganism. She mentions how her fiancé was originally her mentor, but things changed as their relationship became romantic. They have been together a year and a half, and I find myself smiling at the story of how they met, which appeals to my romantic soul. I ask about her family, and she explains that her parents are very open to her choice of religion. Up until this point, both Lillian and I are apparently comfortable with the conversation. As I venture forth to ask about the questions I have come to have answered,

however, Lillian takes long pauses to answer questions, and I notice her laugh does not come as readily as before. I realize at times that I have struck a deep emotional chord, and I am at once sorry, but I let her carry the conversation until she decides to stop and I can move the subject in a new direction. I ask her if she's "out of the broom closet" in her department and she responds that, "I don't outright present it in person. Um...and I actually considered strategic ways of coming out of the broom closet to the senior class because I'm sure they wouldn't give a shit, but then I realized that the rumor wheel in the [department] is very well oiled and most of my...members for my senior thesis are conservative Christian....And I could see that [her final thesis] just falling to pieces." As we talk further she says, "There is no way that I would let my faculty know. It.. It's not a choice I would make. I'm certain there are ways they could find out based on, etc, etc. Not that most of the do go on Myspace and Facebook so I'm not concerned about that, but there is no way I would ever and it's my senior year and things are set in stone, I'm already cast in pieces, but, yeah..." Although when I ask her about safety concerns, Lillian replies that she does not feel physically threatened on campus, these words speak volumes to me. As we spoke, Lillian was nervous, and I could tell that there was deep concern for her final thesis and the risk of being identified. I found myself documenting not only the nonchalant words about safety, but these spoken words about being found out, and her body language, which became uncomfortable. Finally, as I ask her about her experiences on campus, she comments that there are no minimum requirements for religion when it comes to the student body. She, in fact, feels unrepresented and unheard on campus, even as she states that the university itself is probably more tolerant than others. In another moment of changing positions, Lillian states, "I think that the thing that bothers more is that not being particularly Wiccan, if I do present it publicly, I don't have any legal standing, I don't have any legal back up, I don't have proof. And um...that that's probably the main thing that that helps me make my decisions about who to tell and who to open that door to. It's political games because sure, Wicca is a legally supported and protected religion but I don't necessarily fall under that umbrella." I nod in agreement here in the conversation. Because paganism is such a broad religious category, it is often difficult to define. Although the United States government has recently recognized Wicca in regards to soldier's rights, the acknowledgement of paganism in general has not yet been actualized. For those of us who aren't Wiccan, that provides no legal standing or protection. As the formal interview ends, I offer to drive Lillian home. We talk on the way to her apartment,

sharing experiences in our own paths and practices. We laugh at the dangers of apartment living in Chambana, and we anxiously follow a police officer which Lillian jokes is probably going to her building. We talk for a while in the parking lot, and agree to keep our conversations going. While for an hour of time I could officially document her as an interviewee, it would appear that in all other time, we are to become good friends. We hug and I go home to my bed.

**Data:** Searching digitally through the boxes of archives online, I decided to focus on the boxes pertaining to religion. I first searched by subject, which yielded several results under the heading “religion,” but not surprisingly did not yield anything under “paganism.” I wasn’t surprised by the latter, since most pagans on campus tend to be quiet about their religious beliefs (the purpose of which is my central question for this semester, I think), and to date, there really have been no solid pagan organizations on campus that would actually keep a record of what went on in the meetings. At this point, I make a mental note to encourage PSA (Pagan Student’s Association) to keep an archive box so that future generations can build on what will hopefully develop into a long-standing university organization. I clicked on the heading for “student organizations—religious” and again on the “Selim B. Peabody Speeches and Sermons 1881-91, 1894.” These two boxes, I think, have much to say about the reason for my project.

**The Archive**

The box entitled “student organizations—religious” contained files recorded by the YMCA from 1919-1999. These files included pamphlets and files about marriage, love, meetings, etc. The second box, which contained Selim B. Peabody’s sermons, contained the sermons, letters, correspondence, etc. of Selim B. Peabody, who apparently gave sermons at major assemblies and events at the University at that time. These boxes seemed to emphasize to me how the foundations of the University were influenced greatly by Christianity. Rather than be surprised by this, as I think it adequately reflected the time period, I found myself curious as to whether or not anything had been done to break away from that tradition here at the University. Neither the boxes marked “religious discrimination” or “religious workers association papers” dealt with any outside religion on campus. In fact, the only files in the box under “religious discrimination” were from a fraternity. I found it interesting the University has not chosen to put on file in its archives any formal policies granting protection from discrimination to those of alternative belief systems. In light of my interview with Lillian, I realized that maybe

there is a genuine need for concern about legal protection at the University. The box for religious workers dealt only with the work of pastors and priests who formed religious foundations at the University. This too, I felt, supported the hypothesis that the University was influenced by Christian institutions. I think its important to note, that while searching these archival boxes yielded results that supported a history founded in part in Christianity, that I acknowledge it would have been impossible at the time for them to acknowledge paganism, as paganism only rose to consciousness in the United States after 1950. Nevertheless, I don't think that we can ignore history, and if the history of the University is ensconced in Christian belief systems, what kind of environment does that establish for other religions? As documented in an earlier assignment, of the over fifty registered student organizations dealing with religion, over forty of them are Christian-based. Finally, I think the search through the archives highlighted the potential importance of this project, not just for pagans, but for members of other belief systems as well on campus. As I worked on this week's assignment, I realized that my overall proposal should speak to this, as well as to ways in which religious diversity can be highlighted at the University in a way that is safe for members of alternative faiths. In this way, to further this project, rather than focusing on the archives, I have decided to add another textual analysis of a recent article and DI comment page about paganism, and another interview from a member of PSA.

**Data:** For this part of the research, I decided to conduct a survey among members of the pagan student association on campus.

**Data Continued** Because I've conducted several interviews before in other projects, I constructed the survey to include questions that provide both open-ended, more qualitative oriented questions, and questions that were close-ended and easy to quantify. The survey was comprised of 13 questions related to the students' experiences as pagans on campus, and a series of early questions as to age, sex, university position, and preferred pseudonym. I sent the survey as an attachment via the association listserve, requesting responses by Tuesday night. As of 6:00 pm, the time of this writing, I have received three responses of approximately ten surveys sent out. This could be do to students unwillingness to participate in the project, or, as I strongly suspect in some cases, students being too busy to take on an extra "assignment" on relatively short notice (less than one week). That being said, if I were to extend this project into further semesters, I would probably give my participants more time to complete the survey and have most completed in person to have

a greater response.

The responses came from one staff member, one graduate student, and one undergraduate student, which I think, increased the diversity of responses. Of these respondents, the undergraduate student has been practicing paganism for 1-5 years, the graduate student for 5-10 years, and the staff member for 10-15. Likely, this corresponds to ages, suggesting that most people convert to paganism as young adults. This is unsurprising as two wrote that they had previously practiced Christianity and the other Judaism. While life histories are not a viable method for this project, I noted that it would have been interesting to find out about the change to paganism and the forces in their lives that led to the decision to make the change. While knowing that for many it is a painful subject, I think it would also be interesting to note how their families responded to this change.

When I asked the question about whether or not the respondent's felt that the University was tolerant towards other religions, only one informant responded with a straight, "sure." The other two informants, both older, and not from central Illinois, wrote that they think the lack of response to pagans, was either due to "tolerance" or "ignorance." The issue of ignorance is a major trend in the responses from both interviews and surveys, and seems to be of great concern to pagans on campus. The two students on campus responded to the Quad day booths where Christian organizations on campus were very much in evidence. While they state that there were no openly aggressive proselytizers that day on the Quad, both mentioned that they felt silenced by the lack of alternative voices on campus. I think this speaks to both the historical background mentioned in the archives entry, as well as to the broader dominance of Christianity in Western culture. It led me to wonder if the silence was simply because no one, including other pagans, knows we're here.

Another interesting response gathered from the surveys was whether or not the respondents felt that the University provided enough resources for religious diversity. Of the three respondents, the two students responded that they did NOT feel that the University provided adequate resources. The staff member wrote that he/she did not feel that the University could provide resources as a public University. I think this reflects a disconnection between students' actual experiences on campus and what the formal policy of the University states. Obviously, while the formal policy is affected by the separation of church and

state, students' of minority religions feel overwhelmed by the preponderance of Christian organizations and resources. In fact, other than the Illini Union or classroom spaces, the pagan association has no space that is friendly to hold meetings. Christian students on campus have a variety of resources, from the Channing-Murray, to the YMCA, to the churches on campus, to the Intervarsity Fellowship on Green St., as well as other areas on campus. Aware of my own subjectivity, and cynicism(!), this made me wonder if the University provides tacit support of these organizations through the expectation that they will be there. Buildings are built on campus and in campustown because there is the expectation that there will be Christian students, but there are no buildings for alternative faiths.

Finally, all the respondents were very supportive of the student pagan association on campus. It would seem that the development of a pagan association is something that respondent's feel will help encourage diversity on campus and allow for the pagan "voice" to be heard. Likewise, I hope that this project also contributes to greater diversity, and provides the first steps towards a critical analysis of the condition of religious diversity as it currently stands in the University, for faculty, staff, and students alike.

## **Interview 2**

I am sitting at another cafe on campus with Clara, a first year graduate student and fellow board member in the Pagan association on campus. Clara is open, friendly, and activist-oriented. We get along well, as we share many common interests, and a similar sense of humor. This is the second time we've had to re-schedule, so we are both amused and exasperated at the crazy turns life takes, particularly in the middle of the semester.

We greet each other, exchange pleasantries and then marvel at the wonder of technology that can bring us digital recorders. Our interview is short and to-the-point, taking only about 12 minutes of recording time. Clara and I have talked about the subject of Paganism on campus several times, so I am pretty aware of her feelings about the issue. We laugh at how basic the questions feel. It makes me grateful for being able to do a project so close to me, let has simultaneously allowed me to remain a member of my community. The interview is thus made to be quite comfortable, and is more formality than requirement.



Unlike, Lillian, Clara's views on Paganism at the University are more activist oriented. She is unafraid to "be out of the broom closet," and is very open about her beliefs. To Clara, ignorance is the greatest enemy of Pagans on campus.

When we get to the "meat" of the interview, Clara tells me about the feelings of silencing on campus, and how that translates to the lack of a formal dean of religious life. She states, "I think that the biggest source of silencing on campus is the abundance of non-alternative, non-pagan religious groups. It's very Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, like maybe two other mainstream religions that I'm just not aware of. But, um, I think it's silencing in that you're so obviously not represented on a huge campus." When asked if this was related more to the students lack of initiative or the administration, Clara admitted that she thought it was a responsibility of both parties to ensure safe space and representation for alternative religions.

Perhaps the key element to this interview, was Clara's desire to see a Dean of religious life put into place on campus. "...I think to some degree the administration is responsible for making it clear that there is a space for everyone, and I feel like a dean of religious life for some total segment of student life that was dedicated to religious and spiritual wellness, yknow, among students would provide a space that would provide more opportunities for interfaith dialogue." Thus, to Clara, working against ignorance involves the administration, which helps solidify the activist call in me to bring about change.

Because this interview was conducted prior to the archival research, it's difficult to say how Clara might feel about the religious foundations of the University. I find myself looking forward to a follow-up interview. In general, Clara's activism has brought about changes for the community. It is hoped that her efforts, and the efforts of this project, will work to bring about the positive changes imagined in the proposal for this semester.

**Data:** Title: Invisible Faiths, Invisible Voices: The Pagan Presence at the University of Illinois

**Video/Plan**

Opening "Who are We?": To begin the video, I would first record one of the public educational meetings hosted by the Pagan association on campus, recording both the speakers and any relevant information they may share, as well as videotaping the responses of those in the audience. In particular, the question and answer segment at the end of educational meeting would be

especially important to the video. In this way, audience members could observe reactions to actual pagan community members, and may receive answers in turn to questions they may have about the pagan community. This section would probably last about 1-2 minutes, depending on the information being discussed.

Scene 1 “Archival research”: In this section, I would interview briefly the archives librarian at the University of Illinois, documenting some of the religious foundations of the University, raising the question of whether or not the Christian influences that formed the University continue to impact the religious environment on campus. I would also include here archival photographs I noticed in the office, including that of a maypole, which is a traditionally Pagan event celebrating fertility. This section would last between 3 and 5 minutes.

Scene 2 “Spaces”: In this next section, I would record different “snapshots” of the different spaces on campus available to students of different religions, including the Campus Ministry houses, churches, Christian fellowship buildings both on and off campus. This section would act as a bridge between the past formations of the University and the contemporary manifestations of certain cultural expectations in regards to the student body here on campus. The dual questions of both history and space would serve as a background for observing the feelings of Pagan students on campus. This section would last about 1 minute.

Scene 3 “Interview”: This would be one of the central parts of the video. I would ideally like to interview a member of the non-Pagan community on campus. This would ideally be a member of a Christian registered student organization on campus because of their predominance in terms of religious organizations. Because so many of the Pagan students I’ve communicated with over the semester express discomfort at the abundance of Christian organizations and the sometimes overwhelming presence of those organizations on campus (particularly on Quad day), I think it would be important to interview with at least one student to assess whether or not those fears are potentially well-grounded. This section would last 3-5 minutes.

Scene 4 “Interview 2”: To contrast the feelings of different members of the student body, I would do another interview with a student of an alternative religion on campus. This would also ideally be a member of a registered student organization. I would do this to address the fact that alternative religions are in fact,

present here at the University of Illinois. The question of history and spaces impacts not only Pagan students, but also students of other non-Christian religions as well. In this way, this section could help highlight the feelings of other religious communities on campus, as well as address the overall issue of religious diversity on campus. This section would last 3-5 minutes.

Scene 5 “Interview 3”: This interview would be with a Pagan student on campus, and preferably, a student involved in the new Pagan student organization on campus (if only because I know them and it would be more convenient!). In this section, I would videotape a student talking about their experiences on campus, highlighting some of the issues Pagan students face on campus. These include a lack of safe space for gathering, a lack of legal protection, a lack of administrative help in the event of some form of discrimination or violence, and a lack of a formal institutional program for promoting religious diversity. As with the previous interviews, this section would last between 3-5 minutes.

Scene 6 “Final Interviews”: In these interviews, I would sit down with members of the University administration, preferably those involved in student services, and ask them about religious diversity on campus. In this way, the video would also provide the administration’s view of what can and cannot be done in terms of religious diversity, while highlighting the level of awareness among administration members about religious diversity on campus. This section would last between 3 and 5 minutes.

Flash Focus “The Administration, Religious Diversity, and Silencing”: “Flash Focus” is a cinematic tool used to alter the focus from one aspect of the screen to another action occurring simultaneously on the screen. In this way, I would utilize the interview voices while simultaneously keeping the video interesting by interspersing pictures and facts through the interview processes. For example, I would flash a series of facts and pictures illustrating the campus climate, including the proselytizers that often frequent the quad, the lack of institutional administration for religious diversity, the number of RSO’s regarding religion and their breakdown according to religion. I would also report on instances of violence that have occurred in Illinois against Pagan community members, a fact which influences whether or not students feel they can openly express their religion. These would be a series of short excerpts that would probably last between 5-7 minutes in total.

Conclusion “Education”: I would conclude here with how

members of the Pagan association conclude our educational meetings and interviews, with the statement that the best way to gain knowledge about the community is to talk to one of us in person. This section would probably occur at the same educational meeting as the first clip and last approximately 1 minute.

Credits Total approximate running time of video: 23-36 minutes

**Discuss:** Although preliminary, the project conducted for this class did show some interesting insights into the lives and views of Pagan students on campus, as well as into the overall issue of religious diversity on campus. Through a combination of interviews, surveys, and participant-observation, I was able to gather data about and from the Pagan community at the University of Illinois. Although my initial hypothesis was to address the question of why Pagan students do or do not represent themselves as Pagan in their daily lives, preliminary research indicated that a more fundamental question had to be asked. Before one can question the religious diversity and potential silencing of alternative religions in any space, one has to address whether or not religious diversity even exists in that space. In order to understand one facet of this question, I decided to talk with Pagan students involved in a new Pagan association on campus about their experiences. Was their silence imposed or chosen? Was religious diversity an issue for Pagan students, and what changes do they feel should be made?

The synthesis of data presented in previous entries on the EUI moodle website, shows that the issue of religious diversity at the University of Illinois is a question unaddressed by members of the administration, and perhaps, by the members of the student body, in general. Reading the online blog responses to an article printed in the Daily Illini this year about the new Pagan association, students critiqued the belief system of Pagan students, as well as commented that it would be discriminatory if the association received University funding. This reflects an apparent concern among the Pagan community about the ignorance of students who are non-Pagan. It also reflects a resistance on campus to alternative belief systems, and a tacit question of the validity of alternative religious beliefs.

This questioning of alternative belief systems highlights another crucial characteristic of the University and the issue of religious diversity. Over 40 of the approximately 50 religious registered student organizations are Christian-based. These organizations

are well represented at Quad day, through proselytizing on the quad, and are provided with meeting space and houses through University funding. Churches are built on campus property, and members of outside Christian organizations (such as the Gideons, for example) are allowed on the quad. Preliminary research into the archives indicates that religious pastors have also had a notable presence at the University and have contributed to the overall administration of the campus. More than ignorance of alternative communities, this demonstrates the tacit acceptance and expectation of a Christian majority on campus. Their University provided housing and facilities are not questioned, or seen as discriminatory, nor in violation of constitutional law (considering that the University is a state-run public school). However, students openly resist the presence of Pagans on campus, as well as the formal establishment of an organization representative of that community. It is perhaps no wonder that all the Pagan students spoken to in this project commented on the feeling of being silenced on campus.

In my own response to negative experiences regarding my spiritual beliefs, students have commented that, unlike other critical issues, religion is not embodied or a visible part of someone's identity. Yet, Pagan students feel that they cannot wear jewelry or clothing related to the beliefs, and cannot speak about or profess their beliefs on campus due to the climate. In fact, while students commented that the response to Paganism seems low-key, they also commented that they were unsure whether it was because of tolerance or ignorance. Not only does this demonstrate a failure to understand the significance of spirituality for some members of the campus community, what this also highlights is an insecurity among members of the Pagan community about their safety, both spiritually and, perhaps, physically. In discussing a potential public ritual, there was concern about safety, so it was decided security from campus police would need to be included. The logical inference would be from this decision, that the general feelings among Pagans, is that this campus is not tolerant towards alternative religious beliefs.

In light of this information, it would seem that the data implies that religious diversity is an unattended issue here at the University of Illinois. In order to ascertain whether or not this is a valid assessment of the University environment, further research is necessary. I would recommend to anyone interested in this issue, to conduct further research among members of the Pagan community, both inside and outside the new organization. I would

also recommend continuing longer term fieldwork, so that the impact of the organization on campus could be monitored and analyzed. Importantly, I think it is necessary to also continue research with members of other alternative religions on campus in order to assess whether or not the feelings of silencing are common among non-Christian organizations, or are directed explicitly at the Pagan community. Finally, I think it is also important to conduct research with members of the Christian community on campus, to determine whether or not there is real concern for Pagan students on campus, both spiritually and physically.

It would be impossible and highly inappropriate to write conclusively about the question of religious diversity utilizing only the information gathered from this preliminary project. Nevertheless, it would seem that there is a serious question as to the impact of Christianity on campus, and the extent to which the expectation of Christian presence on campus influences the University administration's plans for spatial development and their allowance of open proselytizing on campus. There is also a question about the legality of religious diversity on campus. While staff members argued that the University may not be able to provide resources for religious diversity, it is important to note that the University does provide resources for Christian students on campus, including ministry housing. It seems clear then, that critical interrogation as to the University's position on religious diversity is necessary to clarify the University administration's views towards alternative religions on campus.

**Research Abstract  
Proposal:**

In this research, I seek to understand religious diversity here at the University of Illinois. Using ethnographic methods, I propose a project to interpret the ways in which cultural expectations frame the experiences of Pagan students on campus, while at the same time, also frame the ways in which the University administration views the student body as a whole. Furthering preliminary research conducted in fall of 2007, this research seeks to determine the environment here at the University of Illinois for students of alternative religions. Considering a violent history against Pagans, this research takes careful account of potential risks to Pagan students and members of alternative religions. In this way, this project may also provide a foundation for future applied projects to encourage greater resources for religious diversity on campus.

## **Statement of the Research Problem**

In a recent article in *USA Today*, journalist Judy Keen detailed the controversy over the opening of the Witch School in a small Illinois town. Members of local churches responded to her interview questions declaring that members of the Witch School were “in darkness,” “deceived,” and that they had brought a “spiritual battle” between good and evil to the Illinois town. More importantly, members of these churches have made their goal conversion ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com), last accessed 12/9/2007). Stories like these aren’t uncommon in the Pagan world. Websites keep members of the Pagan community abreast of controversies, conflicts, hate crimes, and legislation impacting the community. Thus, when I came to the University of Illinois, I was surprised to find...not much. Where were the other Pagans? Why were they hiding?

Over the last semester, I have conducted research under the Ethnography of the University of Illinois in order to understand the nature of religious diversity on campus as it relates to the Pagan community. Through interviews and text analysis, I discovered that many Pagans, while feeling generally optimistic about raising awareness about the community, felt that they were silenced and ignored on campus. The lack of official resources for religious diversity impacted their lives, and made them question whether or not they could reveal their religious affiliations without fear. Textual and archival analysis revealed that the University’s foundations have been influenced by Christianity. The question left by this preliminary research, is how does the University’s foundations, cultural expectations, and lack of resources for religious diversity impact members of alternative religions, in particular, Pagans, on campus?

## **Statement of Proposed Research**

In his work on American Indian communities, Philip Deloria (2004), writes that cultural expectations of communities lead to stereotypes. Consequently, popular culture undergoes an upset when these cultural expectations are questioned and defied. I argue that the issue of cultural expectations plays out on two fields at the University of Illinois. One, the expectations around the Pagan community creates the stereotypical representation of “witches” as “gothic,” “hippie,” or “satanic.” As a result, members of the Pagan community are made vulnerable to stereotypes. Two, cultural expectations help to formulate the ways in which the University administration allocates particular resources.

Moreover, preliminary research indicated that the University of Illinois administration has expectations about the student body. Churches built on school property as well as school supplied funding support the hypothesis that the administration has an expectation that Christianity will be present at the University. These expectations in turn form the environment in which students learn and live, impacting their daily lives.

In order to address the questions mentioned above as well as to interrogate the matter of expectation, I propose a research project that looks at the Pagan community more in depth. In the fall semester of 2007, a new Pagan association was developed for students, faculty, and staff at the University. I propose that extensive participant-observation and interviews be conducted within the community. I would also propose that research be conducted with members of the non-Pagan community on campus, in particular, members of other religiously-oriented student organizations. In order to assess the overall environment for Pagan students, as well as to address the extent to which religious diversity is present on campus, I would further suggest that research be conducted among Christian organizations as well as members of alternative religious communities on campus. In order to understand the University's policies about religious diversity, and in order to address the issue of resource allotment, members of the University administration would also be interviewed during the course of this research.

### **Methodologies**

The project will utilize multiple ethnographic field methods, including interviewing, survey questionnaires, focus groups, and video technology (see below for further description as well as ethical concerns.) The researcher(s) will conduct extensive interviews with members of the Pagan community, including, but not restricted to, members of the Pagan student association on campus, as well as members of the University administration, and members of the non-Pagan community (ideally, members of Christian student organizations on campus). Interviews could incorporate both close-ended and open-ended questions, allowing for data that is both easily quantifiable (as in basic statistics questions such as age, gender/sex, student status, etc.), and qualitative research. (See Bernard (2004) for some interviewing techniques.)

General surveys will be administered at random to students on the quad to determine how the student body views religious



diversity at the University. Surveys allow researchers to reach broader populations, while allowing for anonymity of participants, and also allow for a broad spectrum of responses (see Bernard (2004) for more information on questionnaires and Fink and Kosecoff (1998) for a how-to on surveys).

By far the most integral field method, is what Stilgoe (1998) calls “exploration.” According to Stilgoe, “Exploration encourages creativity, serendipity, invention” (19). I say this because some anthropologists and theorists (see Bourdieu (1993), for example) encourage the use of “leading” or “baiting” questions in their research. The Pagan community has been greatly misunderstood and misrepresented in popular and academic literature. This being said, I would encourage those considering this project to be open to alternative worldviews, and be wary of seeking answers that may not really be there (see the section on ethics for more commentary about this.)

Focus groups could also be an important asset to this research (see Gibbs for a discussion of focus groups). In particular, focus groups could allow students of different religious affiliations to talk across their differences, hopefully contributing to an eventual applied project with this research, and promoting diversity. Focus groups within the Pagan community specifically could also highlight the diversity among community members, and help highlight major concerns of the community.

### **Ethical Concerns, the IRB, and “Applying” Anthropology**

As always with ethnography, the primary ethical concern of this project is not to do with those that interpret the research, but the one(s) who produce(s) the research (see the Anthropological Code of Ethics published by the American Anthropological Association for discussion of the researchers responsibility to their community). Because of this, reflexivity is greatly encouraged. In particular, as Sarah Pink (2001) writes, any work using photography or video should include reflexivity. Should a documentary be produced in the construction of this project, critical reflection is required in order to understand both the motivations behind scripting, taping, editing, etc., as well as the potential effects of the research should be considered. Finally, because of the sensitive nature of religious communities, and, in particular, the physical as well as spiritual vulnerability of Pagan community members, an important ethical concern of this project is the protection and confidentiality of all informants involved. It is therefore encouraged that strict IRB protocol be followed and

approval be sought before beginning this project. As always, pseudonyms should be applied in all aspects of the project, and any data not encoded in password protected data sources (such as Word, Notepad, etc.) should be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

## **Significance**

In a recent conversation with a source outside of the purview of previous research and the University of Illinois, after a public ritual was held by members of the Pagan community, members were followed. In the aftermath, one man's home was burned down, one member's car was vandalized, and a man and woman were severely beaten. While this incident did not occur at the University of Illinois, it did happen in this area, meaning that Pagans both on and off campus are at risk of physical assault. The significance of this project is the safety I hope it will generate for members of the Pagan community. More importantly, it draws attention to the desperate need for awareness and critical discussion about religious diversity at the University of Illinois.

In the wake of 9/11, religious currents in the United States have grown increasingly tense. Anthropological theorists Gupta and Ferguson (1997) point out the interconnectedness between the global and local. Thus, the events that happen in the broader society affect those that happen in Illinois, and drip downwards to the University, and vice versa. By encouraging a project that works on diversity on the local level, it is hoped that religious diversity and tolerance can be encouraged in the broader global sphere. As such, this project encourages an applied element, hopefully to be complete in conjunction with this project, or as result of the project. Community outreach and support is integral to encouraging religious diversity and promoting a safe space for participants of all religions on campus. Only when this level of tolerance is achieved can members of the Pagan community, as well as other alternative religions, finally declare, "Our burning times are over."

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**EUI Links:** After reviewing several of the proposals on the EUI website and not finding any that pertained to an exclusively religious minority, I selected a proposal that dealt with the experience of women in the Department of Computer Sciences. While the proposal seeming would have nothing in common with a project on paganism (one works on a University-wide level, the other in the narrower environment of a specific Department, etc.), I actually found threads of commonality between the proposals. In fact, the opening sentences of the proposal were what attracted me to it, and were largely behind my decision to select that project. In the opening paragraph, the article sites the article "Analyzing discourse for Cultural Complexity" by Strauss. In her citation, the proposal author writes about the cultural assumptions that frame notions of gender in the Computer Science department. Few women are expected to enter the field, and the ones who do are perceived as outside the normative. Likewise, my project question also deals with assumptions, and certain cultural expectations in regard to behavior, dress, and status of members in the pagan community. Popular culture structures images and

expectations of the pagan community as both the stereotypical demonized crone of Wizard of Oz and grungy earth-lover that can be either “hippy” or “goth.” These expectations can frame the experience of pagans on campus. Like the women in the Computer Science department of the proposal, pagans are in small number in the respective environment of the project. I would argue that part of the reason behind the small numbers is associated with the cultural assumptions around these populations. In both cases, although in their own ways distinct, the populations in question are outside the normal expectations for either the department or the university as a whole. For those that do attend, part of their experience is framed by “difference,” a difference constructed from the normative established in these cultural assumptions. In general, although there were many other commonalities between the research proposal selected and my own, they fall outside the purview of this assignment. They illustrate, however, how seemingly different agendas can serve a unified purpose: to question cultural assumptions, and to promote diversity.

**Reflect:** Over the course of this semester, I have thoroughly enjoyed my research project. As a board member in the Pagan association, I found my participant observation to be incredibly enjoyable. Through many laughs and honest conversations I was better able to understand the community around me, and realize that I wasn't alone in how I believed. That's a big relief for someone who has had negative experiences within her own department!

The research process for this project was incredibly easy. Other than falling behind in my transcripts and posting, I found working in the online environment to be fun and engaging. Being able to read other's research projects and provide commentary added a valuable dimension to the projects, I think, as it kept us working together. However, I must state, as someone technologically incompetent, Moodle could be a challenge. I wouldn't, however, change the format from an online format.

Compliance with IRB was one of the harder elements of this project. To my surprise, members of the Pagan community *wanted* to be heard. It was tempting not to use pseudonyms, but having been around violent experiences against Pagans, it seemed the wiser. The rest of IRB protocol as relatively easy for me as a researcher. I take the responsibility of my communities very seriously, so I do my utmost to maintain good ethics.

I think, by far, the most intriguing element of this project, was

coming back to myself. I have always taken my research very seriously; I have always taken it upon myself to take an activist stand in everything I do. To be able to work with a community that I am part of was very rewarding, and I hope to do more with the project. Although I have never made any pretense at objectivity, sometimes dealing with my own subjectivity was difficult. Religion is so much more than a social construct, I think, and emerging myself from the often colder interpretations of the social science community was difficult, especially where so many social scientists have really bungled up research on Paganism!

In general, my research process was really interesting, fun, and rewarding. If I could re-do things, I would try to get more data, but maybe that's just the scientist in me!

**Recommendations:** After working with pagan students on campus, researching the archives, and talking with students in the EUI class, it has become clear that not much is known about the question of religious diversity on campus, and what exactly constitutes religious diversity. Because of this, I would offer a recommendation to the administration on campus, in particular to those in charge of student life, to organize an office dedicated to promoting religious diversity on campus, and for helping students who encounter religion at the University of Illinois. Various religious practitioners utilize the public space of the "quad" to express their religious beliefs; it seems appropriate that students have a safe space on campus where they can address these encounters, their belief systems, and receive advice.

I would also recommend that a project be conducted with the officers and members of other registered organizations on campus dealing with religion. In this way, it could reveal the way students feel about religion on campus, and also reveal whether or not the University is a safe space for students of alternative faiths. This seems especially important considering the tense climate surrounding different religions in the post-September 11th world.