

## Sikhism at Hiram College, Ohio

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Fall 2018

With the impetus coming from Prof. Gurinder Singh Mann of the Global Institute for Sikh Studies (GISS), I taught a course entitled “Sikhs & Sikhism: Identity in an Interdisciplinary Perspective” at Hiram College. Not having taught such a course, I was reluctant to do so but, after having done this I can say that I found it to be a truly rewarding experience both intellectually and personally.

The experience made me realize how one could easily weave one’s academic/professional interests into further educating oneself about one’s own heritage and faith, while concurrently making others aware of it. Having taken the course, the students left with a deeper understanding of Sikhism, its cultural diversity, and to some degree the basis for their own multidimensional identities. The cross-cultural understanding was enhanced not only by learning about a different “culture,” but also by seeing how people share various identities and aspirations.

The central research question driving the course was “Who or what is a “Sikh”? In other words, what is the nature and content of “Sikh identity”? The students were asked to answer this question by exploring the content of Sikh doctrine, the multiple layers of their sociological complexity, and changing relationships with various political authority. Thus, the fields of theology, sociology, and history/political science were used and integrated for tracing the theme of the course.

The last day of the class comprised a two-hour “field visit” to the local Sikh *gurdwara* in Cleveland during which the students listened to the *granthi*’s discourse, partook in the *langar*, interacted with the *sangat*, and analyzed the iconography and art work there. The “field visit” to the *gurdwara* was the highlight of the course and provided an important experiential component.

Trained as a political scientist, I had a good academic understanding of Sikh history and contemporary politics, but teaching this interdisciplinary course provided me with a much deeper and humbling understanding of Sikh doctrine and the sociology of the birthplace of the Sikhs—the Punjab. In fact, my own understanding of who and what I am (and what I want to be) as a “Sikh” was fundamentally deepened by teaching this course. I transmitted and discussed this newly-discovered knowledge and perspective to my children, who also benefitted from it greatly.

I wish to thank Prof. Gurinder Mann for prompting me to consider and eventually take up this academic endeavor, and GISS for its support. Not only have I become a better scholar/teacher as a result of teaching this course but, in my humble opinion, also more self-reflective Sikh and member of this rich diasporic tapestry called America. I look forward to teaching to teaching the course again in 2019!