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The World of Religions Virtually Goes Through Wyoming
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One of the great things about Wyoming is that it is a place where you can "get away from it all." The "it all" of that phrase refers to the world of humanity, especially in the sense of the crowded cities, states and countries where most people live. So it is unusual to consider the notion that the religions of the world go through Wyoming, but that is what has just happened, at least in terms of the cyber-world of religions on the Internet.

The Internet is a wonderful tool, but so often you cannot find what you are looking for, or your search generates so many hits that you cannot identify what you want to know from everything else. And then, if you do find what you want, often the information is so elementary you do not learn anything, or it is so advanced that you cannot understand it. This is particularly bad for world religions where Web sites are frequently written by insiders using insider language.

Enter a team of university faculty and students from Wyoming. Led by University of Wyoming Religious Studies Director Paul Flesher, this group of students, alumni and community college professors recently provided the expertise (and hard work) for creating a Web site that can help people looking for information about different world religions on the World Wide Web. (You can visit the site at <http://research.studentadvantage.com>.)

Working with a company called Student Advantage, this team served as the "expert consultants" with regard to religions on the Web. While the company provided the software, the team searched the Internet to find more than 2000 Web sites about religion. They then described the kinds of information each site

contained and classified them to simplify browsing. Thus rather than a search finding anything and everything, people can look through only sites about religions, whether by searching or by browsing by topic or religion.

The Wyoming team selected the 2000 best religion Web sites from tens of thousands of sites on the Internet. Sites include those from large religions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, as well as from religions with smaller memberships such as Judaism, Bahai and even Zoroastrianism. New religious movements were also included: Scientology, the Unification Church, and Rael, to name just a few. African and Afro-Caribbean religions also appear. Sites on the Old and New Testaments and the archaeology of ancient Israel and early Christianity have their own sections, as do important religious issues such as the separation of church and state.

In addition, the Web site provides introductory tutorials explaining how to study different religions and how to analyze and evaluate their Web sites. Finally, for those who are studying world religions in college-level classes, the Web site provides samples of A, B and C papers, and explains which features of the papers earned them that grade.

So despite the ability to withdraw from the world we have in Wyoming, through their contribution to this Web site, Wyoming faculty and students introduce the Internet world to the world's religions.