Instructor’s Guide

ACTIVITY FIVE

Thinking Critically About Expert Knowledge

**Target Audience:**
- Advanced undergraduate students
- Graduate students
- Appropriate for all course examining specific religious groups

**Activity Type:**
- In-depth discussion question (for extended discussion or individual essay assignment)
- Digital activity – computer and internet access required
- Critical thinking exercise

**Activity Goals:**
- Encourage students to use the DRH for research
- Improve students’ digital data literacy skills
- Encourage critical consideration of the subjective nature of knowledge construction

This activity can be used to prompt in-depth group discussions, or as an individual term paper assignment. The goal of this activity is to encourage students to critically consider expert sources related to a specific religious group. Students are first asked to pick a religious group entry from the DRH, and to select a specific query and expert answer to assess. The example questions given in the activity were selected because they are often complicated and may inspire scholarly disagreement. Alternatively, you may want to suggest other queries that you know to be contentious within your specific region. Prior knowledge of the DRH is assumed, so you may wish to have the students complete at least activity two prior to taking on this activity. To polls related to a specific religious group, place, object, or text, the "Visualize" feature allows users to compare all the given answers to specific questions. The features available in "Visualize" then allow the user to see the distribution of answers as a graph, their geographical distribution, and the date range in which the related groups were practicing.

After the query and answer are selected, students are given a series of questions for consideration to help guide their analysis. This includes thinking about the query itself, and whether it is ambiguous, considering the evidence to support the expert answer, and attempting to reflect on whether an emic or etic consideration of the question might provide contrasting conclusions. Finally, the students are asked how the religious group in question might be impacted if the answer to the question were different – allowing them to consider the significance of this belief or practice.

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