

Emile Lester

Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, VA, US

Dr. Lester is an expert in church and state issues, especially controversies surrounding teaching religion in schools.

Biography

Historically inaccurate and biased social studies textbooks will likely end up in high school classrooms nationwide after they were adopted by the Texas State Board of Education in 2014. That's the opinion of Emile Lester, associate professor of political science at the University of Mary Washington, an expert in church and state issues,

Dr. Lester, who reviewed the proposed textbooks at the request of a Texas watchdog agency, testified before the Texas Board of Education that the high school textbooks contained widespread errors and prejudices--including information that weakens the separation of church and state, minimizes how violence was used to spread Christianity and gives biased portrayals of Muslims and Islam. Despite his testimony, the Texas State Board of Education adopted the textbooks, a decision that could have national impact. Since Texas is a large purchaser of textbooks, these books will likely wind up in schools across the nation.

In other research Dr. Lester found that high school students who take a course in world religions are more tolerant of those who worship differently. A 2006 study, which he co-authored, considered the effects of the unique Modesto, Calif., public school requirement that all high school students take an extended course on world religions. His report, published by the First Amendment Center, finds support that this knowledge breeds support for the rights of others, provides a fuller appreciation for shared moral values among world religions, and does not encourage a change in the students' own religious convictions. His findings received the attention of The New York Times, C-SPAN and USA Today, National Public Radio, and Voice of America.

Author of "Teaching About Religions: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools," Dr. Lester served on the Newseum panel, "Does GOD Make a Difference? Taking religion seriously in schools and universities" and was a featured panelist at the "God in American National Symposium on Religious Literacy" hosted by PBS and the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life. He also participated in a national symposium titled "Public Schools, Religion, and the First Amendment" in New York to promote conversation on how public schools, religion, and the First Amendment intersect.

Industry Expertise

Education/Learning, Government Relations, Government Administration, International Affairs, Research, Training and Development

Areas of Expertise

American Constitutional Law, Church and State Issues, Teaching Religion in Schools, Minority Religious Groups, Political Philosophy

Affiliations

Religion and Education (Journal) : Editorial Board

Education

University of Virginia

Ph.D. Government and Foreign Affairs

London School of Economics

M.Sc. Political Theory

George Washington University

B.A. Government

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