

Why We Should Talk about Worldview

This script is a sample set of talking points aimed at student-facing professional staff on a college campus. It can be utilized in both structured meetings and impromptu hallway conversations to convey the urgency and impact of engaging worldview. The most compelling arguments weave an institution's context (survey results) and priorities (values, strategic plan) into the conversation—this script is a place to start. As higher education professionals who might only find 10-15 minutes to “make the case” for this important work, we want to equip you in this endeavor by prioritizing two key reasons for engaging worldview in higher education:

- ▶ Effective Citizenship
- ▶ Professional Competence

SCRIPT

Connect the campus mission to interfaith cooperation

We have an opportunity to prioritize the engagement of worldview diversity on our campus. For many years we have discussed how diverse [insert institution name] is, which is a fact, and I want us to do more with this diversity. I want us to energetically engage with individuals who orient around religion differently and create opportunities to work together for the common good (Eck, 2002). The religious, spiritual, and secular diversity in the US and on our campus have drastically changed over the years and we need to engage with it. With the increased religious diversity of our nation and the world any graduate from this institution must be able to respect religious, spiritual and secular identities, foster mutually inspiring relationships across difference, and inspire a commitment to the common good—three key areas in the pursuit of civic religious pluralism.

Whether within one's residence hall, classroom, neighborhood, PTA, or Little League team, our students need to be equipped to engage across difference. As the next generation of leaders, our graduates need interfaith literacy to successfully navigate their lives as effective citizens and competent professionals. Hospitals, classrooms, the service and hospitality industries, and global businesses are some of the most religiously diverse spaces in the US; our graduates need to know how to foster engagement in order to flourish within these complex systems.

What works? How do we know?

In our work on campus we have regular opportunities to foster a stronger sense of belonging and connection as well as to fully live out our mission and develop the whole student. The Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey ([IDEALS](#)), a research project that seeks to understand undergraduate encounters



US RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Colleges and universities are microcosms of the religious diversity that is shaping American life. Consult, Public Religion Research Institute, <http://ava.prii.org/#religious/2018/States/religion/m/> to learn more about the religious diversity of your state.

with religious and worldview diversity on a national scale, highlights the importance and impact of positively engaging worldview diversity on both the student and the campus climate. IDEALS tells us that students who have a discussion with someone who holds another worldview from their own or participates in a conversation where they feel challenged to rethink their own assumptions, including those who have a provocative encounter similar to the concept of brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013), are the students who express more appreciative attitudes for other social identity groups by the end of their first year. Students who experience worldview related provocative encounters double their overall rate of change (from 5–10%).

***Note: The full report is available here:**

[Best Practices for Interfaith Learning and Development in the First Year of College](#)

IDEALS also tells us that students are in a better position to learn from provocative encounters when their own worldview development is supported and respected. We know our demographics, and this information requires us to take seriously the extent to which our spaces are inclusive of everyone, including religious, spiritual, and secular identities and perspectives. We must consider what we make accessible to our diverse religious groups and how we assist in creating spaces on campus that work toward interfaith cooperation. For instance, what are the types of multifaith spaces and interfaith engagement opportunities we facilitate? What policies are in place that acknowledge religious observances?

In addition, we need to consider the context of each individual and the extent that their previous interactions or engagements have landed anywhere on the spectrum between supportive and discriminatory. And, we must also understand the extent that students, faculty, and staff engage in interfaith learning opportunities and how those are engineered to be meaningful and educational. [IDEALS](#) tell us that students who perceived having space for support and spiritual expression for their worldview on campus experience a 1-7% rate of growth in appreciative attitudes toward other social identity groups. This makes a significant impact on how students feel, engage, participate, and influence the campus and its climate. We cannot continue to take our campus's religious, spiritual, and secular diversity for granted. In fact, we need to prioritize it. Let's start by reviewing, writing, and communicating policies, training and hiring staff, as well as allocating spaces and other resources to this commitment.

Education is the first step to undermining distrust, stereotypes, and bias

Actively engaging in our religiously diverse democracy calls us to have an understanding and a knowledgebase of the people that inhabit this country alongside us. As the most religiously diverse country in the world, we are also dangerously religiously illiterate (Prothero, 2008). This paucity of information serves as the foundation for many of our misunderstandings, which perpetuates stereotypes and fuels hate crimes. Unfortunately, we see ongoing bias incidents and attacks against Muslim (www.cair.com/resources/cair-civil-rights-reports), Jewish, Christian, and Native (www.ncai.org/prc) individuals and institutions (www.adl.org/adl-hate-crime-map). How can our campus be proactive in building relationships across lines of religious difference if we aren't equipped to discuss it? The reality is that we can no longer deny the influence that religion, spirituality, and secularity have in our civic sphere. As our institutions are dedicated to developing the next generation of civic leaders, we need to elevate interfaith cooperation as a civic priority in order to graduate educated persons who become effective citizens and competent professionals.

Let me ask you, how can we justify not talking about worldview?

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Please remember that questions are great as they convey interest and a genuine curiosity. Use these answers to common questions to guide your engagement.

What is worldview?

Worldview is a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, non-religious perspective, or some combination of these. The foundational outlook you have on life that helps you make sense of the world around you (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Correia, Crandall, and Lo, 2016).

What is interfaith?

Interfaith is the interaction between people who orient around religion, faith, spirituality, and secularism differently (Patel, 2016).

What is interfaith cooperation?

Interfaith cooperation is the destination and the world we are trying to build. Those building blocks look like cultivating respect for worldview identity, mutually inspiring relationships between people of different worldviews, and action around shared values (Patel, 2016).

But we already talk about diversity—why is highlighting religious/worldview identity important?

It is a timely tool and addresses many of the ills we see around us. Just as cultural literacy and media literacy have become essential tools for the educated person, so religious/worldview literacy will become essential in the years to come. We already see it in our communities today since America is only becoming more religiously diverse. Religious/worldview identity is often one of those topics that people are happy to ignore—it's our job to give people productive, enriching spaces and resources to engage the conversation directly.

OTHER RESOURCES

[Building an Interfaith America](#)

Listen to Eboo's keynote address at the Interfaith Leadership Institute, "America is a potluck nation. A melting pot gets rid of our distinctiveness and merges all of our flavors together, but a diverse democracy does not benefit from endless sameness. It thrives upon the varied gifts that diverse people bring. If people don't contribute, the nation doesn't feast." (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAT94ffRnx8&t=1s)

[Campus Friendships Can End a Civil War Before It Starts](#)

Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, IFYC's Senior Advisor for Public Affairs and Innovation, writes about the importance of interworldview friendships, and urges Americans to begin forging bonds across religious, political, racial, and other forms of diversity. (www.religionnews.com/2019/10/01/campus-friendships-can-end-a-civil-war-before-it-starts)

[Cancel Culture's Flip Side: Gen Zers Befriend Political Foes](#)

The Christian Science Monitor recently covered the "Friendships Matter" report, whose findings say that, despite an atmosphere of polarization, many college students are forging relationships outside their own belief systems. The article features IDEALS researchers and IFYC staff who explain why the findings from the report are important, and how fostering friendships across faiths can open students' minds to other points of view, skills which they carry with them even after college. (www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/1120/Cancel-culture-s-flip-side-Gen-Zers-befriend-political-foes)

[How Students Are Building Bridges Between Faiths](#)

Charlayne Hunter-Gault, PBS Special correspondent, sits down with founder and president Eboo Patel to examine how interfaith dialogue can be used to bridge racial divisions. (www.pbs.org/video/race-matters-1536793004/)

REFERENCES

- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators*, 135-150.
- Eck, D. L. (2002). *A new religious America*. HarperCollins World.
- Mayhew, Matthew & Rockenbach, Alyssa & Correia-Harker, Benjamin & Crandall, Rebecca & Lo, Marc. (2016). *Emerging Interfaith Trends: What College Students Are Saying About Religion in 2016*.
- Patel, E. (2016). *Interfaith leadership: A primer*. Beacon Press.
- Prothero, S. R. (2007). *Religious literacy*.
- Rockenbach, A. N., Mayhew, M. J., Correia-Harker, B. P., Morin, S., Dahl, L., & Associates (2018). *Best practices for interfaith learning and development in the first year of college*. Chicago, IL: Interfaith Youth Core.