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January 2020: the first month of the (secular) new year. A time to reflect and possibly to correct. One year ago this month, I reflected on several of the questions guiding our team’s work with Convergence Magazine, as well as the challenges we faced in bringing our ideas to reality. I admitted that our second issue was finalized later than we had hoped, coming out a full nine months after our debut. I shared honestly that it can be difficult to recruit writers for a new, untested publication. We struggled to carve out our niche in the market.

But we persisted. We reminded ourselves that success cannot happen overnight, particularly with an endeavor as complicated as launching new magazine with high standards. We reached out to contacts to invite them to write, and we showed off the quality work contributed by our early contributors. Downloads of the issues grew, and we received positive feedback from readers. We started to feel more secure. And now we are on track to maintain our publication schedule of three issues per year, released during the months of January, May, and September.

Our current issue reflects an interesting facet of the growth of the magazine: a breadth in the topics that our writers choose to discuss. Our focus remains on two core areas of convergence: 1) that between religious, secular, and spiritual identities on college campuses, and 2) that between administrators, faculty members, and religious, secular, and spiritual life professionals (including campus ministers). However, our larger objective gives us the latitude to publish pieces that extend the conversation about religious, secular, and spiritual identities into new environments and systems. That may mean that the content of some
of our issues (including this one) will not be categorized into easy themes; instead, they will contain a variety of timely and informative articles. We think that’s just fine.

Our first piece, in the Promising Practices section, features an institutional environment as yet not discussed in Convergence Magazine: a graduate training program in a psychology department. Peter Alexander Steele, Holly Elizabeth Cooke, Judy C. Jagiello, and their colleagues offer thoughtful reflections on their participation and leadership in a diversity support group for graduate students from all religious, secular, and spiritual backgrounds. Next, in Administration and Policy, Bob Smith discusses the qualities of the campus environment at Pennsylvania State University that made it possible for the university to build the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center and Eisenhower Chapel. Both of these pieces ask questions about institutional culture and what it means for religious, secular, and spiritual identities to be truly accepted and included in all spaces. The issue is rounded out by an Opinion essay on the meaning of religious freedom on college campuses from Convergence’s founder and Executive Director, Cody Nielsen; a Book Review of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s The Lies That Bind, by Simran Kaur-Colbert; and a Spotlight Program submission from Steven Sajkich about the University of Northern Iowa’s Campus Spring Read and Author Keynote.

As always, I invite you to share your reactions to any of these pieces on our Facebook page. You can also submit an article for publication in the magazine. See the Call for Submissions at the end of the issue for more information. Finally, I welcome any of our regular readers to get involved with Convergence Magazine behind the scenes: recruiting authors, reviewing submissions, writing an introduction like this one, or even conducting copy editing duties. Please reach out to me at jenny.small@convergenceoncampus.org if you want to discuss any of these options.
Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Perspectives (SSRC): The Formation of a Student Diversity Group in a Graduate Psychology Training Program

By Peter Alexander Steele, Holly Elizabeth Cooke, Sarah D. Afromowitz, Keegan D. King, Savannah Leyda, Michael Retallick, & Mykola Zubko

History of Secular, Religious, and Spiritual Considerations and Psychology

There is a historical disconnect between the field of psychology and the domains of spiritual and religious (SR) perspectives due to psychology’s quest to be considered a hard science (Ellis, 1980; Freud, 2012). In addition to the historic animosity between psychology and SR, there are at least two possible reasons why SR diversity continues to be overlooked in graduate psychology training. First, Crook-Lyon et al. (2012) highlighted the belief that SR considerations might be better addressed by other disciplines such as pastoral care. Second, Schulte et al. (2002) found the majority of faculty and clinical supervisors do not have an adequate level of SR knowledge or experience to be able to properly teach or supervise students. Brawer et al. (2002) found that 83% of professional psychology graduate programs fail to incorporate SR content into their curricula, which may serve to perpetuate SR microaggressions (Schafer et al., 2011; Vogel et al., 2013). We disagree that SR is a diversity factor that psychology is not equipped to address, and we provide an example of how a small group at our university has started to make big changes in addressing this area in graduate psychology training. Additionally, we acknowledge spirituality as a metaphysical identity that is distinct from religion and secularism. Thus, we use SSR to holistically describe this domain of diversity.

Convergence between SSR and Graduate Psychology Training

The most recent statistics reveal that it is critical for SR to be included in graduate psychology diversity training. Gallup polls between 1992 and 2012 reveal that over the last two decades, 79% to 88% of
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- Americans have said that religion is “very important” or “fairly important” (Gallup, 2015). Almost 70% report being either “very religious” or “moderately religious” (Gallup, 2015). Conversely, only 26% of psychologists identified religion as important in their lives (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013). Furthermore, the American Psychological Association (APA) has stated that SR facets of identity and diversity should be acknowledged and addressed while working with clients (American Psychological Association, 2017).

One way to fill this SR training gap at our university has been through the formation, continuation, and expansion of a student-led diversity support group. The group currently engages in SR experiential exercises as well as conducts and presents research. It is our hope that this piece will illuminate the need for expanded diversity modules to encompass SR in other graduate training programs, colleges, and universities across the U.S.

History of Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies

In 2010, two graduate psychology students at Pacific University recognized the need for a student diversity support group for religious- or spiritual-identifying individuals. As only 17% of graduate psychology programs incorporate SSR into their curriculum (Brawer et al., 2002), this is a risk factor for microaggressions against SSR individuals to occur (Nadal et al., 2010). Concurrently, due to the common secular nature of higher education, RS students at Pacific felt a lack of support around their belief systems. With the support of a faculty sponsor, they created the “Religion and Spirituality Group.” This group was housed within the psychology department of the university, but was open to all other health professions on campus. The group served as a way for members to learn about other worldviews and to exchange information about SR supports and resources in the community. In the fall of 2016, with the advent of new leadership and the addition of new group members, the Religion and Spirituality Group changed its name to “Students for the Integration of Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Perspectives (SSRP).” We included a second “S” to signify “secularism”—individuals who identify as atheist, agnostic, and those who do not consider SR as important in their worldview.

While the facets of solidarity and support for members remained a core element of the group, SSRP developed an official mission statement, expanding its focus to include: 1) group discussions to facilitate exploration of SSR biases; 2) clinical vignettes that include SSR elements; 3) experiential learning through attending services at local churches, temples, and spiritual centers; 4) literature reviews addressing SSR competencies for psychologists; and 5) SSR tabling events to educate other members of our university community.
In the fall of 2018, SSRP expanded to include research and program development as part of its mission. SSRP also updated its mission statement to reflect the group’s focus on developing SSR competencies that apply in both clinical and research settings. Lastly, we changed the name of our group from “Students for the Integration of Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Perspectives (SSRP)” to “Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies (SSRC).” This title change allowed for the focus to shift from solely acknowledging SSR differences, to being active and accomplished learners of these SSR differences.

During the spring and summer of 2019, members of SSRC presented posters and talks at seven local, regional, and national psychology conferences across the U.S. Current projects include: 1) assessing the utility of existing scales that measure microaggressions against religious and nonreligious individuals; 2) developing a new assessment measure of microaggressions against spiritual-identifying individuals; 3) conducting SSR microaggression research at our own university; 4) developing an SSR holiday calendar for our university; and 5) expanding our diversity of membership and workmanship to conduct ongoing projects.

SSRC aims engage group members in experiential exposure, research experience, and personal and professional growth. In an attempt to illustrate the group’s effectiveness as a graduate training model in providing support and knowledge, we asked for group members to provide testimonials.

Group Member Testimonials

SSRC members provided written narratives of their experiences for informal content analysis. Content analysis examines the actual content and structure of information collected (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). With the purpose of discovering the underlying meanings of text, content analysis systematically interprets themes and patterns of language, providing insights into cultural and historical phenomena (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Renz et al., 2018). Our current group leader, Peter Steele, did not provide his testimonial as his leadership role ensures different experiences, such as supporting group members, coordinating SSRC activities, and acting as a liaison between department faculty and group members. Given this different role, we decided to include it at the end of the paper with several suggestions for starting and leading SSR diversity groups on other campuses. We have included the full narratives of all of our members with minor changes in punctuation.

Holly’s Experience (4th-Year PhD Student)

“What drew me to SSRC were the microaggressions I was experiencing and witnessing on a weekly basis at school. Because the majority of individuals on campus share an agnostic and atheist perspective, a widespread assumption of shared beliefs (or tribalism) develops. When this occurs, the doors can open for microaggressions to transpire against perspectives that are not shared by the majority. In the case of my university, people would often talk down about religion and spirituality. This even happened in my statistics class of all places. Over time, I felt silenced. I felt like I didn’t have a voice to speak out, or, at the very least, anyone to speak with about these experiences. Fortunately, I met someone in class one day who told me about SSRC and invited me to attend that day’s meeting. As soon as the meeting started, I realized that this was exactly what I was looking for. This was where the change that needed to take place on campus would start.

“I have gained so much perspective being a part of SSRC. Because of the experiential meetings, book chapters, articles, vignettes, and site visits, I approach SSR diversity factors with a new curiosity and an open mind that I did not realize I was missing. On a site visit, I make it a point to understand the meaning that a group derives from their SSR perspectives. By understanding the meaning, I can appreciate the importance and value that their perspectives play in their life. Something I love the most about SSRC
is the research arm that we created. The experiential arm is essential in learning and gaining perspectives about other worldviews, but the research arm of the group is the powerhouse of change. To date, we have presented at seven conferences across the U.S., sharing about our group’s structure and experience, as well as on select topics that the group has chosen for research aims. This has been the most rewarding outcome for me as a member of SSRC. To be able to spread knowledge and implement change through networking with other universities, professors, and researchers gives me hope for a future where fewer microaggressions occur on college campuses and more individuals feel included throughout their training.”

**Judy’s Experience (4th-Year PsyD Student)**

“I am a PsyD doctoral candidate in the NW corner of the U.S. I identify as Atheist, though I place a high value on religion and spirituality for those whom it is part of their identity. It is my belief that many others will always be different from myself in their belief structure, and differences should be respected and celebrated. It was this belief along with my lack of knowledge surrounding most religions and spiritual beliefs that drew me to SSRC over two years ago. The group has provided opportunities for me to pursue cultural humility, gaining increasing amounts of knowledge on SSR issues, including the intersection of psychology and SSR. The group has allowed me to enact social justice in my community by advocating for more SSR education in my graduate school program.

“Prior to engaging in this group, I had a low-level of understanding of how SSR might interact with psychology. I am now more equipped to provide equitable mental health care to those who hold SSR within their identities by providing a thorough assessment. I am able to capitalize on aspects of a client’s SSR beliefs presenting as strengths while noting aspects of SSR beliefs that may be risk factors.

“Furthermore, SSRC’s experiential outings to places of worship and weekly meetings, wherein we evaluate vignettes relating to SSR, have been very valuable to my professional and personal growth. Furthermore, SSRC’s dedication to research has allowed me space to evaluate SSR literature, supporting my other domains of growth.”

**Sarah’s Experience (3rd-Year PsyD Student)**

“I am a third-year PsyD student in the Pacific Northwest. I joined SSRC upon entering grad school because I was excited about the site visits and the discussions of SSR as a diversity factor among ourselves and our clients. My interest in SSR grew during undergrad at The George Washington University, where I took and enjoyed many classes housed in the Religion department for my Peace Studies minor. I was able to receive a very basic understanding of world religions from these courses. However, my education in psychology has sorely lacked SSR factors,
and, until joining SSRC, I was unable to find a way to integrate SSR with my chosen career path in clinical psychology.

“Through SSRC, I became more actively aware of the presence of SSR microaggressions that occur in the hallways, classrooms, and my social and family circles. As someone who grew up in a Jewish household, I was familiar with being part of a minority culture to most of my peers, hearing unintentionally negative or derogatory slights through jokes, and being hyper-aware of anti-Semitism throughout the world, though I never used the word ‘microaggressions’ to describe any of what I experienced. While my practice of the Jewish faith declined during my adolescence, I’ve continued to identify with Jewish culture, a diversity factor that SSRC has helped me better understand.

“SSRC has allowed for eye-opening experiences in a supportive environment. This group is a place where learning opportunities frequently present themselves; SSR microaggressions are actively addressed and can be discussed so that we, as clinicians, scholars, and people, can grow and better understand ourselves and our current, and future clients.”

Keegan’s Experience (1st-Year PhD Student)

“I am a PhD student at a school in the Pacific Northwest, where I completed my Master’s degree a few months ago. I originally came to SSRC to assist in research, but I did not have much interest in how the exposure could affect my clinical practice. I have always believed that a person’s SSR diversity can help us understand who they are if we look at it from a functional lens, and if I was pressed I would have said that this is the only usefulness. However, as time has progressed and I’ve spent more time with this group, I have begun to see this diversity factor as much more robust and important. Such that, function maintains the importance and is joined by the fact that SSR informs the very ecosystem where a person exists. SSR has fast become as important as gender or ethnic identity when trying to conceptualize a client; when incorporating SSR into my conceptualizations I find myself pathologizing less and less. I think that beyond all other advantages that a clinician will have as a part of an SSR group, that last one—pathologizing less and less—is one of the strongest arguments for incorporating a group like ours into the conversation. The destruction of bias leads to the lessening of fear, and fear’s antithesis is curiosity.”

Savannah’s Experience (1st-Year PsyD Student)

“I am a first-year PsyD student on the Health Track interested in working with families and children. I chose Pacific University as a result of the strong emphasis this institution places on cultural competency. My goal as a clinician is to understand my clients from their own cultural background. While I thought I had a solid grasp on what it means to consider all aspects of an individual, it wasn’t until orientation, when we were introduced to SSRC that I truly contemplated how important religious, spiritual, and secular beliefs can be in shaping an individual. I completed my undergraduate degree as a pre-medical student and throughout traditional scientific training, religion is often ignored. SSRC felt like the perfect opportunity to explore my interest in how belief systems impact individuals and their relationship with the world freely, something I was unable to do in my past education.

“As a first-year student, this group has provided me with exposure to content and discussions that I otherwise would not be a part of until the later years in my education. I believe this exposure and the ability to view situations from a greater perspective of religious, spiritual, and secular competence will be essential when working with clients starting next year. In general, I have noticed that I am more aware of religious, spiritual, and secular microaggressions that occur in myself and others. I am thankful for the opportunity this group has provided for introspection and growth that will make me a more competent clinician in the future.”
Michael’s Experience (1st-Year PsyD Student)

“I was interested in SSRC because I have always had an interest in studying various religions and other worldviews and ways that they could be used in therapy. Often I have seen the disrespectful way other academics would treat those with some spiritual or religious belief systems. This has caused many confrontations and eroded cooperation between various individuals. I have had several encounters in high school and out in my everyday life where many people have verbally attacked me for my beliefs, so I am sympathetic to people who feel that their deeply held beliefs belittled. I have learned that there are others also wanting to improve their understanding and cooperation across realms of belief, which has given me some hope that with effort and education others can learn to be more tolerant. Since joining SSRC, I have decided I want to work with spiritual and religious populations. I have enjoyed learning and discussing various things that others have experienced in their clinical hours and other proposed situations and learning from the different views of the other members of SSRC. I look forward to having new members every year to further diversify the perspectives on this interesting realm of diversity.”

Mykola’s Experience (1st-Year PsyD Student)

“I was not born in America. I am originally from Ukraine, and I moved here when I was seven. There were many things I lost in that cross-continental move, but something that traveled very closely with me was my religion. Some of my earliest human connections in America were through the Russian Orthodox church. The church tethered me to friendships and community in a foreign land, and I was grateful to have it.

“Around the time I was in high school, I consciously severed that line. I had come to a different perspective on my beliefs, and I no longer wanted to be part of the community that had given me so much, for so long. This change in perspective was heartbreaking, and leaving God was even more so.

“Throughout my years after leaving the church I developed a bias and negative outlook on religion. I do not imagine I would have had cause to look inward and confront my bias had I not joined the Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies (SSRC) student group. Every week at SSRC meetings, we make sure to address misconceptions, microaggressions, and research that all directly deal with secular, spiritual, and religious clinical competencies. The SSRC student group has been particularly useful giving me an openness to the religious and spiritual experiences I used to be a part of.”
Themes
To understand SSRC’s effects on the group members, authors Holly Cooke and Judy Jagiello searched for themes among the group members’ testimonials. These themes encompass both the qualities of SSRC members and the group’s effects on members. There were six consistent themes found:

1. Witnessing and Experiencing Microaggressions and Discrimination
Prior to joining SSRC, many group members began to notice the occurrence of microaggressions against SSR beliefs and individuals on campus. Furthermore, participating in SSRC influenced some group members to actually notice microaggressions more. Witnessing these discriminating comments and conversations was mentioned five times amongst members. These numbers speak to the evidence of SSR microaggressions presently occurring at the graduate psychology level. SSR diversity factors are not being acknowledged in graduate diversity training, which not only results in groups of students feeling excluded, but also perpetuates a negative cycle of acceptance of SSR discrimination. This can be seen as the marginalization of a people group as the majority worldview continues to foster bias toward the minority worldview (Hamilton & Sharma, 1997). A natural in-group/out-group dynamic is then created, pushing the minority worldview to the outer edges of the acceptable social climate. As a result, the underrepresented group continues to feel like a foreign threat or, at the very least, an insignificant perspective, further fueling the majority’s views of reality once again (Kuhn, 1970). The majority atheist and agnostic views at Pacific can put the minority perspectives at risk of continual experience of SSR microaggressions.

2. SSR Collaboration and Support
In response to the microaggressions and discrimination experienced on campus, SSRC has provided a space for peer-to-peer support and collaboration on how to address the frequent discrimination and microaggressions commonly experienced. This theme was brought up six times. By being involved in a group with a common goal which is to honor and become competent in diverse SSR perspectives, members not only find solidarity in a peer-led group, but they also begin to notice differences between exclusivist, universalist, and inclusivist SSR perspectives. Concurrently, SSRC also allows individuals the space to explore their own beliefs and biases in a supportive and collaborative environment. Peer-support has been found to be a model for facilitating open conversations which ultimately lead to a larger, desirable change (Solomon, 2004). It is the hope of SSRC that this peer-support model influences the institution as a whole, promoting a more receptive and comfortable environment for SSR students.

3. Valuing Perspectives: Acknowledging SSR as a Diversity Factor
One of the most valuable components that participating in SSRC has produced among its members is the valuing of others’ SSR perspectives and beliefs. This theme emerged a total of ten times. Soon after participating in SSRC, members quickly began to recognize the importance of SSR as a diversity factor and that this is greatly needed in graduate training. Members also realized that their shared experiences indicated that they were in a unique place as students in recognizing an issue amongst their educational environment that the institution as a whole either did not see or deemed minute (Higher Education Quality Council, 1994). As regular peer group activities and involvement have been found to support deeper learning and reflection (Bold, 2008), members of SSRC have come together to address concerns of discrimination and bias in the classroom and halls of their institution.

4. Advocating against Discrimination and Bias
Advocating against discrimination and bias was brought up seven times in the group members’
testimonials. Additionally, group members were able to explore their own biases. As a product of deeper learning and reflection from peer group participation, members of SSRC devised a research project involving assessing the level of microaggressions currently committed and experienced at their institution. Members of SSRC plan to take action against discrimination by shedding light on the dearth of SSR diversity training in their graduate program. These actions lend support to research showing that peer support is a critical and effective strategy for ongoing change, which can be extended to larger organizational levels (University of North Carolina, 2019). This is very encouraging as SSRC then plans to use these findings in creating a stand-alone measure for assessing spiritual microaggressions. In doing so, SSRC will provide further evidence to their institution that SSR should be incorporated in diversity training.

5. Personal and Professional Growth

Many group members mentioned SSRC has fostered personal and professional growth. This was brought up eight times in the testimonials. These personal and professional growth experiences have provided multiple opportunities for self-reflection. This is an invaluable byproduct as most graduate students do not have the chance for such professional growth until being face-to-face with a client in later stages of training such as internships (Hage, 2006; McMinn et al., 2003). SSRC aims to show its institution that SSR diversity training will prepare students to be more reliable clinicians when encountering SSR presenting concerns. What has been the most rewarding and personally meaningful for members of the group is being able to witness the shift in personal perspectives and bias among some of them. As a result of creating a supportive, open, and understanding environment, certain members have been able to grow from places of hurt toward healing.

6. Gained Clinical Experience

SSRC appears to be a catalyst for increasing clinical skills, as this theme was brought up six times by group members. With the six-fold approach of exploring personal SSR biases, discussing clinical SSR vignettes, attending site visits, reviewing current SSR literature, producing outreach events, and conducting and disseminating research, SSRC has helped its members gain clinical experience with SSR diversity factors that would not otherwise be acquired with the current diversity agenda of their institution. As a result, members can begin clinical work, practicum placements, and internships with resources and experience that can support clients who are in need of spiritual or religious support, intervention, or referrals. It is SSRC’s mission for all students at their institution to have these same opportunities in gaining SSR diversity experience.
SSRC Leadership Experiences and Recommendations

We have incorporated Peter Steele’s experience as the group chair into our recommendations for developing SSR diversity groups at other colleges and universities. Two experiences, unique to the chair, stand out.

First, SSRC is focused on a diversity factor that impacts individuals’ worldview and identity. Our chair navigates advocating for (a) the needs of the group to the faculty and community, and (b) the needs of the faculty and the larger community to the group. While this may be a difficult balancing act for any group within a larger institution, Peter took particular care to advocate for both the smaller group and the larger institution when addressing an aspect of diversity and identity.

Second, since Peter took over as chair of SSRC in the Fall of 2017, the group has undergone massive change and growth in terms of size and scope. With growth comes growing pains. One particular growing pain was managing the specific interests of each member of SSRC and determining how to incorporate each individuals’ interests and strengths to fit with the goals of the larger group. For example, when SSRC took on a large number of research projects, some of the emphasis was temporarily taken away from the experiential aspect of the group. This was particularly difficult as several individuals ended up leaving the group. On the other hand, developing and expanding the research arm of SSRC attracted other members who enjoyed the research focus.

We believe the following recommendations will aid in the successful development of other diversity groups focuses on the secular, spiritual, and religious aspect of worldview, identity, and diversity:

1. Delegate roles to any member of the group who would like to actively participate. This facilitates members having a more active voice, will aid in fostering personal and professional growth, and may help individuals feel included.

2. When going out into the community to do a site visit at a place of worship, reflection, meditation, and/or learning, contact the leadership of the institution beforehand to ask for permission for your group to attend. This can minimize the chance of a negative impact on the recipient community.

3. Manage the needs of the group with the needs of the larger institution, and allow the voices of both to be heard. When this happened successfully, we found our group was best able to work within the larger institution to affect change without being at odds with the institution.

Conclusion

SSRC is a student-led group that was formed in response to the microaggressions and discrimination that frequently occur in graduate level psychology training programs. These negative attitudes toward SSR individuals can be traced back to the historical tension between religion and psychology. The systemic issue that developed over time as a result of this historical strain eventually generated discomfort talking about SSR topics, a lack of confidence in addressing SR concerns, and inadequate SSR knowledge of teachers and supervisors when mentoring graduate students. Members of SSRC recognized these shortcomings in their training and, over the last nine years, made an effort to bridge the clinical training gap between SSR diversity and the deficiency of college curricula.

Today, SSRC is a growing group that has made it their mission to fervently and continually educate its members about SSR competencies. SSRC implements change through education and research, which started within the walls of campus and extended to multiple conferences around the U.S. Through clinical
vignettes, attending site visits, reviewing the literature, and conducting outreach projects, SSRC has made it their mission to abide by APA guidelines and fight for the SSR diversity training that is essential in helping future clients.

References


Directly across from the library on the main campus of the Pennsylvania State University sits the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center and Eisenhower Chapel. The facility is more than 60,000 square feet, houses the Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development (CSED), and provides office and worship space for more than 60 religious/spiritual student organizations. Impressive as is, it becomes even more so when you consider this a dedicated space at a public university.

It all began in 1955 with the opening of the Eisenhower Chapel, an all-faith chapel. The space was quickly filled, and in 1974 the facility went through an expansion. Even with this expansion there remained a need for more space as the number of religious/spiritual organizations continued to grow. Finally, the university moved forward with another expansion, and the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center opened in 2003.

The administration of the university recognized the growing need for more space back in the early 1950's, acted upon those needs, and developed plans and policies to ensure the success of such a venture on a public university campus. For decades the leadership of the university has had the foresight to support a vibrant religious/spiritual community at a public university.

Certainly, there have been those who have challenged this arrangement and objected to public funds being used for religion. Most of the individuals challenging the presence of a spiritual center and chapel on campus are referring to the concept of separation between church and state. However, most do not
know that the Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development receives no funds from the university. From the beginning, the administration recognized that church-state separation could be an issue. But they knew that the university could create the CSED because it would not be establishing a religion, nor would the university be standing in the way of an individual’s right to practice their religion. The opportunity would be there, but participation would be, and remains, a personal choice.

Having decided to permit religious communities the opportunity to meet on campus, the administration looked at the possibilities of where worship services could be held. Having a dedicated chapel would be ideal, but how to fund it was another question to answer. Fortunately, it didn’t take long to recognize the best option would be to build a chapel funded entirely with private donations. No public monies would be spent. The campaign started, and Penn State soon had the funds to move forward. This process was repeated with the expansions in 1974 and 2003.

But what about funding staff to manage the chapel and, eventually, spiritual center? Should the chapel offer programs and host events? What about the upkeep of the space? How is all of this going to work at a public university?

The administration decided that it wasn’t enough to simply have a space dedicated to religious/spiritual life, but that Penn State should have a dedicated staff to oversee operations of the facility and to conduct programs promoting religious/spiritual development. The staff of CSED plan and implement programs and events throughout the year. Programs include bringing in speakers, interfaith panels, religious literacy opportunities, social gatherings designed to encourage comfort through familiarity, and more. The staff of CSED also offers support to religious and spiritual student organizations, professional development opportunities, and advocacy for religious and spiritual recognition and development, and more. Surprisingly, to many, is that all of this occurs without CSED receiving funds from the university. The endowments provide most of the funds and are supplemented by fees charged for weddings, renting space to community groups, and any gifts made to the center.

With such resources and opportunities, the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center/Eisenhower Chapel hosts more than 4,000 events annually and typically sees more than 4,500 students participate in events each week during the academic year. Some observances, such as Ash Wednesday, bring in as many as 3,000 students on that one day. Passover Seders use most spaces in the building in order to accommodate everyone. Jumah prayer often hosts more than 400 Muslims each week. Diwali celebrations are popular, Bahá’í students
are active, and evangelical Christian students meet with the atheist and agnostic students. Even a few bris ceremonies have been held in the spiritual center.

The variety of religious/spiritual groups makes the spiritual center/chapel one of the most diverse and inclusive places on campus. Students from all over the world attend Penn State and make their way to CSED. The students bring with them a very diverse religious and spiritual offering that is made more diverse by the addition of many cultures. The staff at CSED are also responsible for advocating on behalf of religion and spirituality on campus. Advocacy can range from educating others, including staff and faculty, about religious traditions, to protecting first amendment rights, as well as an individual’s religious identity. It can mean clarification regarding funding for student organizations and the programs they wish to host. Or, it may mean speaking with a faculty member regarding religious observance and attending class.

However, with more than 45,000 students and more than 17,000 employees on the main campus of Penn State, it’s easy for the CSED and religious/spiritual life to be in the background for most. With the approval of the administration, CSED staff have been focusing on making religion and spirituality a part of the culture at Penn State, which is fitting considering the history of religious freedom in Pennsylvania.
The "Holy Experiment"

William Penn, a British citizen, was often a source of agitation to his father, an admiral in the British navy, because he wanted to practice the Quaker religion (Murphy, 2019, p. 63). At the time, this was not acceptable in Britain. The king decided that he could help both himself and Admiral Penn by offering the land we now know as Pennsylvania if William would agree to move there and oversee the area. All agreed to this arrangement, and William set out for Pennsylvania, which he named in honor of his father.

William decided to engage in a “holy experiment” (Crist, 1987, pp. 3-9) and invited any and all wishing to live a life free to practice the religion of their choice to come to Pennsylvania. The result was a diverse population of religions, cultures, and tolerance. This tradition became key to developing what would become the Constitution of the United States.

Of course, there have been significant developments over the centuries regarding religion. Many of those developments have not been positive and have resulted in religion becoming more controversial. The controversies are typically due to a lack of knowledge about religions, extremist groups becoming the face of a religion, scandals, and a judgmental society, to name a few.

CSED does what it can to make religion an acceptable and enjoyable part of the cultural norm at Penn State. Spiritual life, becoming more common as many move away from organized religious traditions, has also been added to the offerings. The hope is to show that religious/spiritual life can be a very positive part of someone’s life without it being a threat to anyone else and that there are identifiable benefits to people participating in religious/spiritual life such as being part of a community and establishing morals and values. And, thanks to people like the Astins and their work *Spirituality in Higher Education*, we know that the benefits to students are numerous and, as a result, benefit the university as a whole (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 135-136).

The key administrators in developing and securing religious/spiritual life at Penn State have been the university presidents, vice presidents for student affairs, the office of general counsel, and the directors of CSED (previously known as The Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs).

While CSED is the heart of religious/spiritual life on campus, it is equally important to have a wider presence across campus that then extends into the neighboring community as well. The campus of Penn State and the community of State College are separated mostly by College Avenue and Atherton Street, with pockets extending beyond those boundaries. Such geographic closeness naturally creates a great deal of overlap between the university and the town. CSED works
closely with many houses of worship in the community as well as the Interfaith Initiative of Centre County. Regarding religious/spiritual life, the main difference between the town of State College, PA and Penn State is that the university tends to be more intentional in what it does for religious and spiritual growth and how it does it.

The opportunity to practice religion and spirituality on campus has been available to all at Penn State since, at least, 1955. Still, CSED staff continue to ask what they can do to protect religious/spiritual freedom on campus?

One way to respond to this question is to do what Penn State is currently doing, through CSED: making religious/spiritual life part of the accepted normal culture. Like anything that may draw mixed reactions, you cannot force acceptance. You cannot legislate, mandate, or write a policy that results in true acceptance. To have true acceptance, true diversity, true inclusion, there has to be a natural and genuine acceptance. Trying to force someone to be open and accepting often results in the opposite; a larger divide occurs, resentment grows, and there is backlash.

Ever mindful of this, CSED has worked to identify ways to make religious/spiritual life happen across campus in ways that are obvious but not forceful, are assertive but non-threatening, and encourage independence while promoting collaboration. Instead of highlighting how special and unique it is to have these opportunities on campus, CSED tends to highlight the events and resources. This is also true at the other 23 Penn State campuses across Pennsylvania, including five campuses that have chapels or spiritual centers.

Independence to practice your religion/spirituality in a non-threatening environment is key to the success of religious/spiritual life, and Penn State has provided that through the spiritual center and chapel. Within the facility are numerous programmable spaces that range in size from accommodating one person to accommodating 750. Such spaces are available to be reserved by all the religious/spiritual student organizations at no cost. CSED staff manages the facility and reservations ensuring that as many gatherings as possible can happen. There is a physical plant staff of three that are responsible for janitorial services, maintenance, and setting-up and tearing-down of the spaces to meet the different needs of each student organization. Three of the spaces have a permanent orientation to them: the Meditational Chapel is Christian, another room is Jewish in orientation, and another is Islamic. All three of these spaces can be, and are, used by any student organization.

The Meditation Chapel has Christian symbols on the walls but the Pagan and Wiccan students prefer this space for the natural energy it emits. Some of the student organizations that use the room holding the Torahs like to have food but refrain from having pork, shellfish, and other foods not permitted in Judaism.
And student organizations try not to reserve the space used for Muslim prayer because they know that Muslims pray five times each day and will be coming and going throughout the day and evening to fulfill their obligations. This understanding of the needs and practices of the diverse religious/spiritual population results in a supportive environment that allows spiritual and ethical growth.

**Collaboration Across Campus**

Opportunities for growth extend beyond the spiritual center and chapel into the residence halls, the law school, dining halls, classroom buildings, the student union, the president’s house, the administration building, the main library, and the university strategic plan for capital improvements. Residence halls have been broken down into neighborhoods, with each neighborhood consisting of four residence halls. Every neighborhood will have one residence hall that houses a prayer/meditation space. With close to 60 residence halls on campus, there will be at least 15 prayer/meditation spaces in residence life. These spaces are supplemented with an ablution area for the Muslim students and the provision of other religious/spiritual resources. The Director of Residence Life worked with CSED to learn more about housing a successful prayer and meditation space by meeting with staff and students and by visiting the spiritual center. And the training for resident advisors includes a presentation from CSED staff about what to expect and how to accommodate religious/spiritual residents.

Along with on-campus living there are numerous dining halls on campus, and students may choose any dining hall; they are not limited to the one nearest their residence hall. The staff of the dining areas began to think it might be a good idea to have prayer and meditation space available near the dining halls as well because there were many students that often engaged in prayer or meditation before meals, typically using the common areas. Similar to the staff from Residence Life, several staff from the dining halls worked with CSED to plan for prayer and meditation space. Space near several dining halls has been set aside for such activity.

Then the law school reached out to CSED and spoke with staff about the demands of the law school students and explained that such demands on their students throughout the day made it difficult for them to get to the spiritual center or chapel. The law school was reacting to students finding a quiet space in the law library or a vacant classroom for prayer and/or meditation. I visited with staff at the law school and viewed a room that they identified to convert to a prayer/meditation room, and we worked together to design an accommodating space.

Directly across from the law school is the Penn State Arboretum, and I have met with staff that oversee the arboretum and discussed the
possibility of designing and installing a meditation garden there, surrounded by plant life that would attract butterflies and emit soothing, calming fragrances.

On the other side of the arboretum is Schreyer House, the official residence of the university president. Eric Barron, current Penn State President, has been extremely supportive of religious and spiritual life. President Barron has met with students from various religious groups, included students on campus-wide committees to represent religious interests, participated in religious events, and has hosted Shabbat services and meals at his residence. Whenever there have been tragic events involving religion, President Barron has reached out to the religious communities and released statements on behalf of the university. His reaching out to students and CSED has been a tremendous help in making religious and spiritual life part of the culture, including in Old Main, the building that houses the Office of the President as well as other high-ranking university administrators.

Being a focal point of the university, Old Main attracts a lot of attention. The administration at Penn State is supportive of religious and spiritual activities occurring inside and out throughout the year. The plaza in front hosts the lighting of a 12-foot tall menorah, and senior administrators participate in the event, including a reception that moves indoors after the lighting. Muslim prayer is occasionally held on the lawn in front, as is a Jewish block party, and CSED rolls out a portable labyrinth for anyone to use, try for the first time, and learn more about its purpose. And every December you can view the Christmas and holiday trees in the lobby.

Finally, the director of the student union building, known as the HUB, is currently developing a plan to add prayer and meditation space to this heavily used building. Many students expressed interest in the HUB having such space, and the administration listened. The development of prayer and meditation space has now been added to the capital strategic plan for the university, making it a priority. Also in the HUB is the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, formerly the LGBTQA Center, which hosts "Chaplain Chats" weekly. Chaplain Chats is staffed by religious affiliate staff from CSED, and students, especially from the LGBTQ community, can go speak with a religious leader during those times. This has been successful enough that I am working with Residence Life and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to host a similar arrangement in the residence halls.

With all these locations on campus hosting and housing religious/spiritual activities and organizations, it is not unusual that engaging in a religious/spiritual life is widely accepted at Penn State, and not just at the main campus. Penn State has a total of 24 campuses across Pennsylvania and five of those campuses have a dedicated building, chapel, or spiritual center for religious/spiritual life. CSED works closely with these campuses, as well as those that do not have dedicated space but do have religious/spiritual student organizations.

All of this is possible because of the recognition of what religious and spiritual life can do for students and the Penn State community. While the administration, from the president of the university, to the provost, vice presidents, student affairs directors, and deans have all been supportive, it is important to mention that faculty and staff have been as well. Faculty are encouraged to make accommodations for those that have conflicts because there is a religious observance that students wish to attend and, overwhelmingly, they work with the student and CSED so that the student is able to be observant and not be penalized for missing class. Even athletics is supportive and has invited me to meet with the coaches to discuss the needs of religiously observant students. Of course, the motivation for all this is the students.

Penn State students participate in religious and spiritual life and are supportive of each other. They are open to interfaith activities, support freedom of religion, work with CSED and other university units,
participate in surveys, committee meetings, and communicate with staff, faculty, and administrators, and come together to support one another when needed without regard to religion.

Still, there are many colleges and universities that limit religious and spiritual activities on campus. Some do not have, and are not interested in having, religious/spiritual life on campus in any form. Religious and spiritual life at Penn State is healthy and thriving and can be found throughout campus with plans to expand to more locations. Having all of this and making it work has attracted a lot of attention from colleges, universities, higher education professionals, and student affairs organizations. Much of the work is done behind the scenes. Most importantly, students and other members of the Penn State community benefit from the work of CSED and the willingness of an administration to set a standard that demonstrates that a healthy religious and spiritual life can be present on any campus, and when it is, good things happ

References


Right, Left, All Over: Neoliberalism and the Unspoken Rejection of Religious Identities from the Elite Academy

By J. Cody Nielsen

Bring up the topic of evangelical Christianity with an administrator on campus and the eyes start to roll. Evangelical Christians will tell you they know this. And it’s true. We have a stigma in higher education against evangelical Christianity. At many institutions, there exists a stigma against conservatism, against the Republican party, against Trump supporters. But oftentimes, this overt sense that evangelical Christianity is the only religious identity people are put off by is a mask for a much more challenging bias: that many believe that any form of religion is antithetical to higher learning. And while we have often blamed the evangelical Christian community, the problems go far deeper. Once acknowledged, higher education can come to terms with its complicated relationship with religion in North America.

Approaching implicit biases for or against religion often begins when invoking the phrase “religious freedom.” This term has become synonymous with the conservative right, and often to utter it out loud evokes a wide range of negative feelings and references, like when members of the conservative Christian right claim “religious freedom” to deny queer couples a wedding cake or a marriage license. Yes, there are incidents that call into question how religion is being used to marginalize others. But at its core, religious freedom, especially in the United States, is deeply tied to the first 16 words of the First Amendment of the Constitution: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* The great challenge of these words to institutions of higher education within the United States is that their professionals often believe these words to mean “a separation of church and state.” Those words, once placed into a letter to the Anabaptists by Thomas Jefferson, would themselves never make it into the United States Constitution (Siedel, 2019).

Those sixteen words have a complicated history. During the debates regarding the language of the United States Constitution, Federalists like James Madison objected highly to the presence of language
specifically governing free exercise of religion. But, as Melissa Rogers (2019) states in her book *Faith in American Public Life*, “The argument that religious liberty protections were unnecessary simply did not stand up to public scrutiny” (p. 23). Instead, anti-Federalists fought hard for 12 separate bills, ten of which were adopted when Madison finally relented after facing threat of losing the election to his colleague James Monroe. Madison’s support for a Bill of Rights ushered in arguably the most important words that protect the freedoms of religious minorities in the United States today, all because the conservative Baptists who threatened to vote for Monroe over Madison (amongst others) had fought for it.

This is where the complication of religious freedom comes to roost. When pressed, I would suspect that most people think religious freedom is a problematic phrase. Historically, it is one of the most important phrases in terms of religious affairs for minorities. But seeing that most institutions of higher education lack this understanding, and often the willingness to delve into a complex issue, the academy often utilizes separation of Church and State as its rationale to remain hands-off of religion on campus. Some members of the academy believe that because of these words, they have little to no responsibility for supporting student’s religious, secular, and spiritual identities. This has fostered campus environments with subtle messaging that to be religious is to be ignorant. Thus, when one reaches an age to attend the university, it is time to let go of these lesser beliefs. Now that is a pretty bold statement to make, one at which many reading this might become offended. Yet, data now shows this subtle messaging may be exactly what is occurring.

A few years ago, Kateri Boucher and Jaime Kucinskas published a study in *Social Inclusion* (Boucher & Kucinskas, 2016). In the study, the researchers analyzed the perceptions of student participants related to their campus experiences for expressing their religious identities. Time and time again, participants reflected negative connotations regarding their religious beliefs and practices. One student stated, “There’s just this belief that being religious implies a lower intelligence level” (p. 44). Additionally, students remarked that “many students who arrived on campus identifying as religious or spiritual said that they began to avoid public displays of religiosity and did not talk with their peers about their religious or spiritual backgrounds” (p. 41). The title of the article, “Too Smart to be Religious,” should call to attention the ways in which higher education is threatening religious identities and moving them to the margins of campus.

The secularization of campus is nothing new, as many studies have found that at public universities, many students are disenchanted with religion (Freitas, 2010). Additionally, higher education has stymied religious identities on campus through lack of policies and practices...
(Nielsen & Small, 2018) as well as pervasive “religious intolerance” (Lane et. al, 2013). As students come face to face with these biases on campus, their identities suffer, instead being forced into what as Tim Clydesdale (2007) famously described as the “identity lockbox.” And a climate that requires students to hide part of their identity is a threat to the whole of campus.

**Complicit Campus Intolerance**

If the liberal campus environment is a place of negative sentiment toward religion in general, there is a threat that higher education is failing to support the whole student. The idea of global citizenship falls short if students’ religious, secular, or spiritual identities are not welcome. But even further, in an age in which anti-Semitism, anti-Islam, and other “anti’s” of the religious realm are continually pervasive in western culture, a campus that disregards religious identity and holds a cultural narrative that to be religious is to be naïve is one which is complicit with those hatreds or intolerances. Higher education itself becomes part of the larger problem, something that I would hope administrators take seriously.

Here in the United States, the Trump administration has rationalized and normalized in many ways open hostility, even to the point of violence, toward Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and other religious minorities. Trump’s own rhetoric from his podium, first as candidate and now President, has given fodder for his base and followers to openly carry out acts of hatred toward anyone who looks or behaves differently than Trump’s White base. Our campuses should be places of stark contrast, responding from educated and counter-narrative viewpoints in which inclusions are upheld. Yet, we seem to be falling short when it comes to religious identity.

My words are not meant to send a signal that all institutions are failing at supporting religious, secular, and spiritual diversity. But if campuses are in any way resistant toward changes in policy and practice that seek to support these identities, they are themselves part of the larger problem. Failure or unwillingness to discuss religious identities, to adhere to Constitutional amendments, and to overcome one’s implicit biases will result in higher education being a part of the on-going undermining of religious minorities in the United States. Belief by administrators that religion should be kept as a private affair, or even worse, that it is an area of identity reserved for those less educated, is a core microaggression that must be tackled among higher education’s diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Perhaps it is best to step back and ask fundamental questions of intersectionality when considering the concerns of religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Certainly, systemic racism can easily be understood as part of the reason religious, secular, and spiritual identities have struggled to gain support on campus (Wilder, 2014). White Supremacist culture has for too long demonized the identities of people of color and prevented minoritized individuals from being given equal footing in society, and elite higher education institutions have been forced to confront and are still confronting their racism (Wilder, 2014). Higher educators should consider the reasons they are truly unsure and skeptical regarding their stances toward religious identities and should carefully examine which policies and practices (that have as well been tied to concerns around race) potentially undermine support of these identities.

Moving past the ways in which higher education has addressed religious identities and the concerns they have previously had now becomes imperative. Perhaps the reasons for such apprehensions have to do with how many higher education institutions were founded by Protestants or are because of the ways chapels have been built on both private and public campuses. Maybe it is simply that the complexity of religious, secular, and spiritual identities makes it difficult for administrators to approach and consider this area for support within diversity, equity, and inclusion. Maybe it is simply that we don’t know better or have been ingrained with the concept that it is better to leave this identity to personal experience rather than
muddy the waters and create policies on campus that would require
time and energy. But somewhere in higher education’s collective
memory is a bias, and it is not just about evangelical Christians, but
rather all of religion.

A system as influential as higher education can provide an alternative
narrative to address its historical issues of White Supremacist and
anti-religious culture. Moving forward, higher education should
establish an approach to religious, secular, and spiritual identities
that addresses historic concerns and begins to pivot toward a more
holistic approach. There are arguments to be made that students
may consider their own personal relationship with religion long before
college, as the Pew Research Center’s (2015) data suggests, but for
the many millions of students who today continue to identify with a
religious identity (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2019), administrators
must not simply dismiss their identities. As well, higher education
needs to reject the cultural narrative that to be religious is to be naïve,
as this must be changed if anything is to be different for our students.
And ultimately, campus administrators must actively consider
alternative viewpoints to simply pushing religious identities to the
margins—even evangelical Christians, as their identities must also
matter. We do not have a separation of Church and State on campus.
There is no such thing, only the words of the founding fathers who
finally relented with sixteen words we live by today: \textit{Congress shall
make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the
free exercise thereof.}

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Kwame Anthony Appiah’s 2018 book *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* is relevant reading for student affairs and higher education professionals, researchers, and particularly for educators invested in college student religious, secular, and spiritual identity development and in interfaith engagement. Appiah’s book challenges the ways our contemporary thinking about identity, especially existential worldview identity, could become “more reasonable, even, perhaps, a little less antagonistic” (p. xiii). Appiah does not necessarily center student identity development theory with epistemological questions about the nature of a student. However, he does open the book with a quotation from German pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, asking “Who am I? This one or that one? Am I then this one today and tomorrow another?” (p. vii). This opening quotation is consistent with the critical thinking skills higher education researchers encourage student affairs professionals to develop and consider by understanding what is meant by theoretical borderlands (Abes, 2009). Abes advances Anzaldúa’s (1999) definition of borderlands to challenge inequitable power structures in student development theory and research. Abes (2009) posits that theoretical experimentation in research on student development “has the potential to benefit the student affairs profession by revealing new possibilities for how student development theories can be more inclusive of marginalized student populations” (p. 141). Anzaldúa (1999) describes borderlands as a
third space, that is neither one land nor the other but a new space that is a both/and location. This borderland is an environment where individuals fluctuate between discrete worlds, participating in both and wholly belonging to neither, none of them “home,” yet none of them “not home.” (p. 528)

Essentially, the opening questions from Bonhoeffer are those which prompted me to pause and ask two questions in relation to existing student affairs literature on student identity development. First, how should interfaith engagement in student affairs and higher education involve creating learning environments which allow both students and educators to navigate each other’s borderlands? Which is to say: create learning environments where one may fluctuate between discrete worlds and at best, create one’s own third space, perhaps even an interfaith space in the process. An interfaith space or borderland where one may find oneself rethinking one’s existential worldview identity and asking the same question Appiah presents Bonhoeffer asking at the opening of his book: “Who am I?” By including Appiah’s text as a reading in one’s student affairs in higher education course, educators can best prepare their students for developing mindsets for constructive interfaith dialogues.

Such mindsets allow us and our students to fluctuate between “this today” and “another tomorrow” (Appiah, 2018, pg. vii). The second question is how are student affairs researchers considering theoretical borderlands in the study of student religious, spiritual and secular identity development? One may certainly find even more considerations to relate with in reading Appiah.

The Lies That Bind takes readers in a journey through how Appiah fluctuates across borderlands, or third spaces in his life, as he weaves his personal narrative with interdisciplinary knowledge though each of the book’s six chapters. Each chapter is cleverly titled starting with the letter C—“Classification,” “Creed,” “Country,” “Color,” “Class,” and “Culture.” Appiah addresses how each of these very “disparate ways of grouping people have some important things in common” (p. 8). Reading Appiah’s book provided me with moments to pause and consider how we go about teaching interfaith engagement in higher education. By problematizing the very way “we’ve been taught to think of religion principally as a matter of beliefs,” Appiah argues “this simple idea is deeply misleading, in ways that can make interreligious comity seem both harder and easier than it really is” (p. 36). I strongly recommend educators to engage graduate students in student affairs and higher education programs addressing diversity and interfaith comity by first introducing Appiah’s arguments in his opening chapter, “Classification.”

Appiah’s book contributes valuable insights aligned with Convergence
Magazine’s vision to empower professionals to move toward a future that removes stigmas, opens communication, and fully incorporates religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Appiah goes straight to the heart of the matter on the significance of discussing existential worldview diversity:

religion, nation, race, class, and culture—divide us and set us against one another. They can be enemies of human solidarity, the sources of war, horsemen of a score of apocalypses from apartheid to genocide. Yet, these errors are central to the way identities unite us today. We need to reform them because, at their best, they make it possible for groups, large and small, to do things together. They are the lies that bind. (Appiah, 2018, p. xvi)

There are three critical take-aways for student affairs and higher education professionals around Appiah’s discussion of religion in the book chapter titled “Creed.” First, there is Appiah’s questioning of how we understand religious identity, in which he suggests that “people distort the nature of religious identity by a narrow fixation on faith” (p. 44). His argument is that religion is not centrally about the things we believe, even though people “refer to religious identities with words like ‘faith,’ ‘confession,’ or, indeed, ‘credo’ from the Latin for ‘I believe’” (p. 36). Appiah wants to, in his own words, persuade readers that “religion is not, in the first instance, a matter of belief;” and “that at the heart of religious life across space and time are matters other than creed” (p. 36). Taking his argument further he writes, “once you see that creeds are not so central, you’ll also have to accept that scriptures—as sources of belief—matter less than people think” (p. xv). Second, Appiah’s conceptualizes religion as “distinguished among belief, practice, and community. But in obvious ways, each interpenetrates the others” (p. 39). And third, Appiah highlights how “the modern concept of religion as a class that includes, say, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism gained currency only in the nineteenth century” (p. 44).

Any course or series of interfaith dialogues, both inside and outside of traditional classroom learning environments, would benefit from reading Appiah’s chapters on classification and creed. Reading these chapters might make interfaith comity easier in graduate courses or community dialogues, in the sense that readers will have the ability to reference a valuable interdisciplinary analysis which explores how the modern notion of creed is constructed. Appiah’s analysis provides readers a wealth of examples around how a mindset for constructive interfaith dialogue is developed over a lifetime by sharing how he navigates his own borderlands. In this borderland mindset, assumptions are confronted, humility is reflected, accusations are withheld, offenses are overlooked and the writer himself embraces tolerable discomfort (Craft & Goodman, 2019, p. 14).

Appiah’s chapter on creed challenges the assumptions people make about the intersection of culture and religious identity by exploring how preachments and practices, interpolation and
interpretation, scriptural determinism, metafundamentalism, and ancestor worship inform how one understands religious identities. He writes, “Once you think of creedal identities in terms of mutable practices and communities rather than sets of immutable beliefs, religion becomes more verb than noun; the identity is revealed as an activity, not a thing” (Appiah, 2018, p. 67). Appiah’s concept of creedal identity provides an excellent opportunity for student affairs and higher education professionals to pause and consider if and how activities on their campus allow for students and staff to engage with their existential worldview diversity. Are students and staff able to find food which complies with respective religious diets in dining halls? Is the university incorporating holidays on to the school calendar so students can be with their families and communities without worrying about missing an exam? Are students and staff able to wear their articles of faith without the fear of being profiled, surveilled, harassed, or disqualified from playing a sport or participating in an extra-curricular activity? Are we introducing or creating spaces for all to pray, dance, and meditate freely in accordance to their worldview? Is our curriculum reflective of the diversity of religious beliefs, traditions, and communities in an increasingly multiracial and multiethnic society? What are we doing to encourage and advance climates which appreciate the diversity of activities involved with living one’s creed?

In this way, Appiah’s discussion of worldview identity development converges with the ways higher education professionals understand cultural knowledge and practices to intersect with student secular, spiritual and religious identity development through ritual, music, and art forms. Professionals can take Appiah’s definition of religion and consider how one’s praxis could evolve to invite complexity around how we and our students understand what it means to have an existential worldview identity:

If by religion you meant a single coherent set of doctrines, precepts, and practices, then none of the familiar global religions—or any of the local folk religions of a thousand societies around the world would be one religion. It would, at the limit, be a plentitude of religions in every moment, new ones hatching every day. (Appiah, 2018, p. 41)

The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity offers professionals aspiring towards culturally relevant pedagogy in student affairs and higher education a cosmopolitan perspective on worldview identity. Appiah captivatively weaves his own personal narrative of coming from an interracial and interfaith family and credits Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectionality theory with an examination of assumptions surrounding worldview identity. Along with being a personal narrative, Appiah’s book extends insights on how people around the
world adopt mindsets for constructive interfaith engagement across time and space, and his chapter on creed raises consciousness around intra-faith complexity. Appiah (2018) closes his chapter titled “Creed” by writing: “we do not merely follow traditions; we create them” (p. 67). This closing line is a powerful reminder that each of us is empowered to engage in the process of creating traditions on universities campuses for greater inclusion of religious diversity and interfaith engagement in the realm of student affairs in higher education. And for professionals aligned with Convergence Magazine, reading Appiah will allow you to pause and reflect on the lies you might be bound to and prompt you and your students to rethink the way creed, along with other identities, are woven in to tradition on your campus. It is my hope that by reading Appiah’s book you too will find yourself in a mindset prepared for interfaith dialogue and perhaps rethinking how your campus might create traditions and environments where all students are able to express their diverse existential worldview identities. Appiah’s book provides readers with an advanced global intercultural and appreciative understanding around, as the title states, rethinking identity.

References


Campus Spring Read and Author Keynote

By Steven Sajkich

What was your role during the program?
I served as the primary contact and organizer for the spring common read for campus and coordinated the author’s visit.

Please provide a program description. Include any relevant details, including title, what motivated starting this program, who sponsors it, and what kind of pre-planning/ maintenance it requires.
For the spring 2019 semester, the University of Northern Iowa Professional Development Committee organized a spring common read and author keynote for the campus community. Part of this initiative was motivated by grant received by Interfaith Youth Core along with financial assistance from the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of the Provost. We chose the book Faitheist by Chris Stedman. The pre-planning included gathering interest among students, faculty, and staff to see those interested in participating in the common read. Those interested completed a Qualtrics form indicting their interest and contact information so that a copy of the book was able to be delivered to them. Each participant signed up to participate in a small group that met between January and March for three- to four-hour long sessions. The group sessions were led by members of the Professional Development Team along with other university staff interested in leading a small group discussion. Overall, we had 80 participants. Additionally the author visited campus for a keynote for the campus community.

What is the program agenda? Please include set up/break down, the flow of programming, and any common pitfalls to keep it going smoothly.
Overall, participants signed up between November and December so that books were able to be
Each individual then completed a separate form indicating which small group session they would like to be in. At that point, the small group leaders emailed the participants for their groups when the meeting times would be and what chapters would be discussed in each group meeting. Regarding the author’s keynote, I worked with the author regarding the details of the visit, contract, and other details for his visit.

What is the program budget? Please include all sponsors, and respective contributions. If you had preexisting resources that helped (e.g. discounted catering through dining services, physical spaces, etc.) please note them.

The main funding for the common read and author’s keynote was provided through a $5,000 campus innovation grant from Interfaith Youth Core with further financial assistance from the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of the Provost.

What impact has your program made? Please include any intended learning outcomes, if there was an intended audience, and how you followed up with participants or not.

One of the main intended learning outcomes was to facilitate a common read for faculty, staff, and students centered on religious/worldview diversity including small group discussions. This outcome was met through the common read. The initial goal was to have at least 50 participants. We ended up having a total of 80. Following the small group discussions, each participant was sent a survey indicating whether they increased their knowledge of religious/worldview diversity, if they felt more confident in talking with a peer/colleague on religious/worldview diversity, and how they would apply their experience to their work.

What advice would you give someone running this program for the first time?

The biggest piece of advice I would provide to someone would be to make sure that you are able to stay organized with all of the details of a common read for a campus community. There are many involved components that include communication, marketing, and other logistics. While one could organize a similar program without providing a book to participants, most likely not as many individuals would sign up if they needed to provide their own book.
Contributors

Sarah D. Afromowitz
Sarah D. Afromowitz is currently a third-year doctoral student at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. She is expected to graduate on the Adult Track with her PsyD in clinical psychology in 2022. Her clinical interests include trauma and working in interprofessional healthcare settings. She is a member of the student diversity group Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies (SSRC) where clinical and research interests of the role of spirituality, religion, and secularism intersect. In addition, Ms. Afromowitz is interested in research related to resilience, compassion fatigue, and ACEs.

Holly Elizabeth Cooke
Holly Elizabeth Cooke is currently a fourth-year doctoral candidate at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. She is expecting to graduate with her PhD in clinical psychology in August of 2021. Mrs. Cooke is interested in how to promote SSR diversity training in higher education, the impact of SSR microaggressions in the graduate training environment, and in group/out group experiences of SSR. She has been a member of SSRC for the past year. Mrs. Cooke has experience researching and presenting on various topics in the field of psychology.
Simran Kaur-Colbert
Simran Kaur-Colbert is a PhD Student at Miami University in the Department of Educational Leadership. Her research involves understanding the emergence of interfaith infrastructure on public and private university campuses. She holds a Master’s degree in Diplomacy and International Commerce from the University of Kentucky and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Mary Washington. A community-engaged scholar-activist, Simran is a leader with the grassroots movement for truth and reconciliation in relation with the Equal Justice Initiative regarding racial terror lynchings in Oxford, Ohio and is the Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Interfaith Center at Miami University.

Keegan D. King
Keegan King is currently a first-year doctoral student at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon and is expected to graduate with his PhD in 2024. Mr. King has multiple varied interests, however his research has begun to focus in on diversity factors that are chosen by an individual and/or are not identifiable at first-glance. This led him to becoming a part of the Pacific University student diversity group SSRC (Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies). Mr. King focuses heavily on a few research areas such as the integration of technology and psychology; hate groups and their underlying psychology; and treatment adaptations.

Judy C. Jagiello
Judy C. Jagiello is in her fourth year at Pacific University, School of Graduate Psychology. She is a PsyD candidate in clinical psychology, expected graduation from the Health Track in August 2021. Her clinical interests include working with Veterans of the U.S. military in healthcare settings. Her research interests include exploring topics such as chronic pain, mental health stigma, Veteran specific issues, and secular/spiritual/religious issues. She is a member of two student research groups, Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies Research Group and Anxiety Research Team.
Savannah Leyda

Savannah Leyda is a first-year doctoral student at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. She is expected to graduate with a Psy.D. in clinical psychology on the health track with a sabiduría latina/o psychology emphasis in 2024. She has completed research on the transgenerational impact of maternal age on offspring development and the effect of maternal SSRIs usage on fetal development. Currently, Ms. Leyda is clinically interested in cultural differences and how they impact the therapeutic alliance, clinical presentation, and client treatment. Ms. Leyda joined SSRC to expand her knowledge of religious and spiritual diversity and how it impacts the clinical experience.

J. Cody Nielsen

Dr. J. Cody Nielsen is Founder and Executive Director of Convergence on Campus and lives in Minneapolis. Dedicated to the work of civil rights for religious, secular, and spiritual identities, Cody spends his time traveling to various conference and speaking engagements as part of the work of growing the movement amongst professionals in higher education. He is a bread maker, marathoner and biker, enjoys the outdoors and especially the mountains, and has a six-year-old son.

Michael Retallick

Michael A. Retallick is currently in his 1st year of graduate student at Pacific University of Oregon on the Adult Track of the PsyD program and is expected to graduate 2025. He received his BS in General Psychology from Brigham Young University of Idaho in 2017. He is member of the secular, spiritual, and religious competencies (SSRC) group. His clinical interests include family therapy, individual therapy, roleplaying games as therapeutic interventions, inclusion of client belief systems into therapy, empathy, and promoting prosocial behaviors.
Jenny L. Small

Jenny L. Small is Managing Editor of Convergence Magazine and the Convergence Director of Communications. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan and is the author of multiple articles and books about religious, secular, and spiritual diversity and meaning-making in higher education. Her new book, *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education: A Social Justice Framework to Support Religious Diversity*, is forthcoming from Routledge in 2020. Dr. Small is also an Associate Editor for the *Journal of College and Character*.

Bob Smith

Bob Smith is the Director of the Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development at The Pennsylvania State University. He works with students and university administrators to make active participation in religion and spirituality a typical part of the campus culture. Bob has served on university committees, has held leadership roles in student affairs organizations, and has presented at colleges, universities, and conferences. He has earned degrees from Mansfield University, Elmira College, and Lock Haven University, where he earned a Master of Education in Teaching and Learning.

Peter Alexander Steele

Peter Alexander Steele is currently a fourth-year doctoral candidate at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. He is expected to graduate on the Adult Track with his PsyD in clinical psychology in 2021. Mr. Steele is the current chair of the student diversity group Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies (SSRC). His research interests include SSR diversity considerations, graduate psychology teaching and training, clinical supervision, and psychological assessment and scale development and validation. Mr. Steele has experience in presenting at local, regional, and national professional conferences on various topics in the field of psychology.
Mykola Zubko

Mykola Zubko is currently a first-year doctorate student at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. He is expected to receive his PsyD in 2024 with an emphasis on adult psychology. His clinical interests are related to trauma and the veteran population. Mr. Zubko is involved in orchestrating diversity conferences at Pacific University, and the student diversity group Secular, Spiritual, and Religious Competencies (SSRC). His research interests lie with therapists themselves, and ultimately how clinicians can improve patient outcomes and their ability to treat people from all walks of life.
CONVERGENCE MAGAZINE WILL FOCUS ON TWO AREAS OF CONVERGENCE:

1) the convergence between religious, secular, and spiritual identities on college campuses, and
2) the convergence between administrators and faculty members in all levels of higher education and religious, secular, and spiritual life professionals (including those in campus ministry positions). The magazine’s objective is to promote harmonious campus communities and the fostering of responsible global citizens through spreading understanding among those who espouse a wide range of identities and worldviews.

The target audience for Convergence Magazine is professionals, students, and scholars located on college campuses in the areas served through the publication’s content. In addition, the magazine is aimed to those working in related fields beyond campus borders, such as in religious organizations, schools of theology, and houses of worship, and in non-profits and educational service organizations serving the field of higher education student affairs.

Convergence Magazine is published online on a tri-annual basis and acts as one of the pillars of the Convergence organization, others of which include training professionals, consultation with universities, organizational systems and collaborations, and additional content (blog, podcast, webinars, and conferences).

The editors of Convergence Magazine solicit contributions in the following categories:

**Promising Practices**
Practitioners from all divisions, particularly those employed in the target convergence areas, are invited to tell the stories of the successful convergences on their college campuses. (Word count: between 3,000 and 4,000 words)

**Administration and Policy**
Administrators and other professionals are invited to describe the higher-order administrative practices and implemented policies that have led to successful convergences on their college campuses. (Word count: between 3,000 and 4,000 words)

**Opinion**
All higher education professionals are invited to share their opinions on steps that can be taken within our shared field to promote the two categories of convergence. (Word count: between 2,000 and 3,000 words)
Book Reviews
All higher education professionals are invited to share a review of a new or recent book publication on a related topic, such as interfaith dialogue, worldview development, or chaplaincy work. (Word count: between 1,000 and 1,500 words)

Spotlight Programs
All higher education professionals are invited to share brief information about a promising program on their own campus that meets Convergence Magazine’s goals of promoting harmonious campus communities and the fostering of responsible global citizens. The format for this category is question and response, differing from the feature-style writing in the Promising Practices category.

In addition to on-the-ground practitioners and administrators, the editors invite faculty and graduate students to submit articles in the above categories. However, the focus should remain on concrete strategies and ideas for practical implementation.

Convergence Magazine is not a research journal. The tone of the magazine will be forthright and conversational, rather than research-intensive. However, as the editors strongly believe that all promising practices, policies, and opinions are undergirded by high-quality research, we expect that cited references to supporting literature will be included in all published pieces. Please utilize the APA 6th edition for formatting these references.

Call for Submissions
Submissions for each tri-annual issue will be due two months prior to the publication month, on the 15th of the month. For example, upcoming submission deadlines will be:

March 13, 2020 for publication in May 2020
July 12, 2020 for publication in September 2020

Any submission that misses a deadline will automatically be considered for the following issue.

Note: Submissions to Convergence Magazine do not need to be blinded. Because the editors are seeking stories based on real-world experiences, details about specific campuses and programs are necessary and should not be anonymized. Authors should think carefully about whether this is appropriate for the articles they are submitting.

Because Convergence Magazine is an online publication, authors are invited to submit full-color photos to accompany their pieces.

To be considered for publication in any of the first four categories listed above, upload your document and photos at the following website: https://convergenceoncampus.wufoo.com/forms/sgyg5f903xhasp/

To be considered for publication in the Spotlight Programs category, complete the following online form: https://convergenceoncampus.wufoo.com/forms/m16e590j0ivlq8v/

Questions can be directed to Dr. Jenny Small, Associate Director for Education and Content:

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What We’re Talking About
What’s Being Talked about on the Convergence Blog

GREG VELTMAN: NEW YEAR, NEW HABITS?

NORA BOND: IS SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK?

MARIA AHMED: FINDING STUDENT AFFAIRS THROUGH THE MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION