

Mapping Interfaith Cooperation to Your Campus Mission and Values

Connect interfaith to your campus vision, values, and mission

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This resource is designed to help you rally support for interfaith efforts across your campus by mapping your interfaith cooperation goals onto your campus's mission and values. A campus's mission sets priorities for the campus community and aligns students, staff, and faculty around a common vision. Campuses articulate their missions in a variety of ways. The most common avenues are mission or vision statements, mottos, strategic plans, and learning outcomes.

By tapping into your campus's mission, you can create a strong platform for your work and anchor your interfaith efforts to what matters most to your campus. For example, if you are advocating for an interfaith reflection and meditation space on campus, you could reference your campus mission statement's commitment to supporting the needs of a diverse student body as a way to connect the proposed space to the values of the institution. Or, if you are lobbying for the development of a course on the history of the interfaith movement in America, you could reference your campus's goal of developing global citizens and underscore how important it is for students to know about and appreciate diverse religious and philosophical traditions as they develop global competency. Whatever your interfaith goal, making it relevant to your campus's articulated values will help you attract more stakeholders and get more funding and support all while fulfilling your campus's mission.

In this resource, you will find examples of how several different campuses have connected their interfaith activities to their mission or values and a step-by-step guide for how you can lead a process to (a) identify how your campus mission connects with your interfaith cooperation goals and (b) leverage this connection to strengthen your interfaith efforts.

Mapping Interfaith to Your Mission and Vision: Campus Examples

University of Tampa

In 2009, the University of Tampa (UT) in Florida convened a Resource Team for Faith, Value and Spirituality, which was charged with casting a vision for the soon-to-be constructed Sykes

Chapel and Center for Faith and Values. The Resource Team's work was particularly critical because UT is a secular university with a bumpy relationship to issues of faith and religion. There were constituencies on campus that were opposed to the new Center because they felt that the institution should not support religious practice. The Resource Team had to respond to these critics and was asked to identify how the Center would serve the greater good of the university.

Stephanie Russell Krebs, Dean of Students at UT, was charged with selecting and convening the Resource Team members. She knew that in order for the Resource Team to successfully represent the desires and concerns of the broader community, it would need to include the naysayers. Stephanie met with the deans of the four colleges at UT and asked for recommendations of faculty who had a discipline-specific or personal interest in religious life as well as recommendations for faculty who were the most outraged by the building of the new Center. She also recruited from among her student affairs peers. The result was an interdisciplinary group that truly represented the breadth of responses to the new Center, even if the members didn't see eye-to-eye.

As part of their visioning process, the Resource Team members analyzed a set of mission-oriented documents such as the UT mission statement and the "UT Educational Experience," which is a set of learning outcomes for the university, and identified places where the goals and activities of the new Center would overlap with the values articulated in these guiding documents. The Research Team found many connections between the goals for the new Center and these existing mission documents. As a result, the members of the Research Team were able to incorporate existing university values and goals and use familiar language in the vision for the new Center.

At the conclusion of their visioning process, the Resource Team identified three learning domains for the new Center for Faith and Values: character and values, spiritual journey, and greater understanding of world cultures and religions. All three domains are represented in various ways in existing UT mission-related documents although they were often labeled or categorized differently. For example, self-reflection, character development and personal growth are all considered goals for Tampa students, but they had never been labeled "spiritual journey" before.

By presenting the learning domains of the new Center for Faith and Values as intertwined with existing university mission documents, the Resource Team was able to situate the new Center within the existing goals of the institution and start from a strong place of agreement and buy-in. This allowed the university community to begin an important conversation about the role of religion on campus and raise awareness of the opportunities that the new Center would offer to students. Over the past several years, this tie-in has helped the Center gain credibility on campus and recruit supporters, particularly amongst those who were initially opposed to it.

Berea College

Berea College was founded in Berea, Kentucky in 1855. John G. Fee, the founder of Berea College and an ardent abolitionist, understood Berea's historic purpose "to promote the ca Privacy - Terms

of Christ,” as a call to advance peace and justice in the world. This mission is articulated in the Great Commitments, which provide the backbone to Berea’s identity. The College’s scriptural foundation, “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth,” continues to inspire a campus culture of acceptance and dignity for all community members.

Breaking down barriers, whether of race, gender, or religion, have been central to Berea’s ethos since its founding, but until recently, had not been directed toward interfaith activities. Several of the Great Commitments support Berea’s inclusive Christian approach and can be newly interpreted to support interfaith engagement on campus. The third Great Commitment reads, “To stimulate understanding of the Christian faith and its many expressions and to emphasize the Christian ethic and the motive of service to others” and the fifth Great Commitment adds, “To assert the kinship of all people...” Berea’s legacy of embracing a variety of Christian expressions and asserting a common humanity regardless of race or religion paves the way for a commitment to interfaith engagement.

Under the leadership of several key staff and faculty members in the Campus Christian Center, and with the guiding vision of President Emeritus Larry Shinn, Berea has made a commitment to engaging religious diversity on campus and to fostering interfaith cooperation across the institution. Berea has continued to live out its inclusive Christian heritage by welcoming people of all faiths and secular traditions through launching a Multi-Faith Council, organizing a series of interfaith action and dialogue events on campus, and participating in the President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. Katie Basham, Assistant Director of the Campus Christian Center, often remarks that Berea is committed to engaging religious diversity because of, not in spite of, its Christian heritage.

Elon University

In 2009, Elon University in North Carolina, established a new strategic plan titled, “The Elon Commitment: Engaged Minds. Inspired Leaders. Global Citizens,” that incorporates an intentional focus on interfaith cooperation. Interfaith leaders at Elon do not have to work to build a bridge between their work and their campus’s mission because the connection is already made explicit in this document. The first of eight themes highlighted in the strategic plan is, “An unprecedented university commitment to diversity and global engagement.” Under key objectives in this section of the plan is, “Build a multi-faith center and promote interfaith dialogue.” Later in the document is a list of ways that the university will expand support for the spiritual expression of its students, including building the new multi-faith center. This was a ground-breaking component of the new strategic plan since Elon University has a historic connection to the United Church of Christ, but is a secular institution today.

The same year that the new strategic plan was released, President Leo Lambert charged a committee of faculty, staff, and students to develop a proposal for a new multifaith center, designed to serve as the physical embodiment of Elon’s commitment to spiritual support and the academic engagement of religion. In the spring of 2013, the Numen Lumen Pavilion, which is home to the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life and Elon’s interfaith activities,

opened its doors. The name for the new space was taken from the Elon University seal, which bears the words, “numen” and “lumen.” Numen and lumen translated from Latin mean “spiritual light” and “intellectual light,” and signify the highest purposes of an Elon education.

There are three lessons we can learn from Elon’s example:

- **Guiding documents matter.** Every Elon community member is familiar with The Elon Commitment. Staff and faculty understand that their roles on campus are connected to the priorities laid out in the plan. For this reason, it has been extremely helpful to students, staff, and faculty who are advocating for interfaith programs on campus to be able to point to the line in the strategic plan that encourages interfaith dialogue. If your campus is in the process of drafting a new strategic plan or vision statement, find out who is on the committee who will be reviewing and finalizing the text. Set up a time to meet with one or more of the committee members in order to make the case for including an explicit reference to the importance of respect for religious diversity and interfaith cooperation.
- **Diversity and global engagement can be great partners to interfaith cooperation.** At Elon, the emphasis on interfaith dialogue in the strategic plan is part of the diversity and global engagement theme. This has allowed staff and faculty who are devoted to diversity at Elon to become involved in multifaith planning and to share ideas and best practices. On many campuses, there might not be a specific mention of interfaith cooperation in the institution’s guiding documents, but there will likely be a focus on diversity or global engagement. Use this opening to advocate for the inclusion of religious identity as a key form of diversity and for religious and interfaith literacy as an element of global awareness.
- **Language matters.** By naming the new multi-faith center after the Latin phrase on the Elon seal, the multi-faith community symbolically connected the new spiritual and religious hub on campus with the “highest purposes of an Elon education.” When you are naming your interfaith events or designing your publicity materials, find ways to use familiar and meaningful language that will connect your interfaith efforts with your campus’s deepest values.

Mapping Interfaith to Your Mission and Vision: Your Campus

Students, staff, and faculty at the University of Tampa, Berea College, and Elon University leveraged their campus’s mission language in order to support their interfaith efforts. Now it’s your turn to think about ways you can connect your campus’s mission and values to your interfaith work. Follow the steps below to get started.

1. Identify Your Primary Interfaith Goals

The first step is to meet with a group of key stakeholders who are dedicated to helping you lead interfaith activities and ask, “What particular initiative are we trying to advance? What

case are we trying to make? Why might it be helpful to connect our goals to our mission?" Once you have a clear sense of where you want to end up, you can begin to think about the best way to connect with your campus's mission and values in order to get there.

2. Compile a List of Existing Mission-Related Documents

The next step is to do some research in order to identify your campus's mission, values, and priorities. Here are some tips for gathering your campus information:

- Start with the obvious. The most well known statements will serve you the best because they will be the most familiar to your campus community. Are there mottos or statements that seem to "be everywhere?" Language that is used at every campus-wide gathering or in every publication? A big seal with an inscription that you have to walk across every day to get to class?
- Search websites, admissions brochures, alumni publications, etc. for these key words: mission statement, motto, founding statement, strategic plan, campus values, learning goals, learning outcomes, 5-year plan, 10-year plan.
- Ask key people on campus for their help. Some places to start are: Office of Communications and Marketing, Office of Admissions, Office of the President, Office of Alumni Relations, academic leaders such as the Chair of the Faculty Committee, Archivist, and Librarian. These are the areas and individuals on campus tasked with articulating your campus values to the community.

3. Look for Key Concepts that Relate to Your Specific Interfaith Goal

Once you have a list of relevant documents and statements, begin looking for themes that overlap with your particular interfaith focus.

- Look for key words or phrases that relate to interfaith cooperation including diversity, preparing students for global citizenship, instilling moral character, developing change agents for good, holistic student development, service-learning, community partnership, religious and spiritual life.
- Remember that you are trying to find natural connections between your interfaith goals and the deepest values of your campus community. Keep it simple and be savvy. If you have to force a connection, then the example you found is probably not going to compel key stakeholders on campus to get behind your work and it could possibly damage your relationships if faculty or administrators think you are just "using" university language to further your goals.

4. Discuss How You Might Leverage these Connections

After you've identified your campus mission statements and found specific pieces that you think overlap with your interfaith goals, convene your interfaith committee to discuss the connections. Ask the group, "How does this language help us better tell the story of our

interfaith work and its importance on campus? Are there any new allies we might cultivate because of this connection?" Generate ideas for how you might use these connections to further your cause.

5. Identify Opportunities to Showcase How Your Goals Connect to Your Campus

Mission Once your group has discussed your findings and landed on the most compelling connections, take time to think together about what you could do to use these new connections and new language to further your goals while fulfilling your university mission. Some ideas include:

- Write an article in your school newspaper highlighting how your interfaith activities fulfill your campus mission.
- Record video interviews with campus stakeholders talking about the connection and post them on your interfaith group's social media sites or your campus website.
- Use the language in remarks you make at a campus-wide event.
- Schedule a meeting with your Dean or President to share ways in which your programs are fulfilling your campus mission and to discuss ways that the administration might increase support for interfaith efforts.
- Attend meetings of various clubs on campus and share how your interfaith activities are aligned with the campus's priorities and invite the club to partner with you to design an interfaith event in the future.
- Present your findings to your student government in order to raise awareness of your interfaith efforts with student leadership.

You have the opportunity to fulfill your campus's mission through your interfaith work. By identifying ways your campus mission overlaps with your interfaith goals, you can draw more people and resources to your work and strengthen your interfaith impact. Staff at the Interfaith Youth Core are eager to help you in this process. Please email info@ifyc.org to get connected with an IFYC staff member who can offer you support.

ifyc.org / info@ifyc.org / (312) 573-8825