

ENGAGING WORLDVIEW: A Snapshot of Religious and Spiritual Climate



Part II: Interfaith Engagement and Student Attitudes

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Introduction

Part I of the *Engaging Worldview: A Snapshot of Religious & Spiritual Climate* series focused on students' perceptions of a range of religious and spiritual climate dimensions as well as engagement in curricular and co-curricular experiences. It revealed that students of diverse worldviews, races, and genders act within and interpret the campus community differently in terms of religion and spirituality. These nuances inform how college educators should approach their work to build more inclusive campus environments.

In Part II of this series, attention shifts to students' attitudes toward other worldviews and religious pluralism. This report explores the questions:

- ▶ To what degree do students have appreciative attitudes toward diverse worldviews?
- ▶ To what degree do students adopt positive orientations toward religious pluralism?
- ▶ How do appreciative attitudes and pluralism orientations vary across different student populations?

Educators can use this report to understand national trends related to these questions. Additionally, readers are provided with prompts to reflect on the data described herein, consider how these data relate to particular campus contexts, and determine how insights can be translated to practice on campus. Tips and resources provided throughout the report, as well as a set of recommendations listed at the end, are specifically designed to facilitate the application of research findings on college and university campuses.

Understanding students' attitudes and pluralism orientations related to religious diversity can illuminate opportunities for educational interventions, which, in turn, can improve religious and spiritual campus climate.

Acknowledgements

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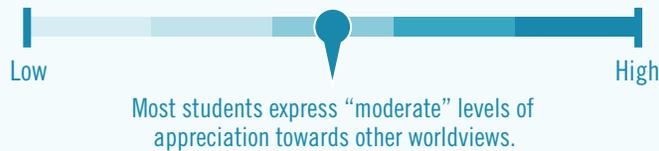
Engaging Worldview: Interfaith Engagement and Student Attitudes

Highlights from the Report

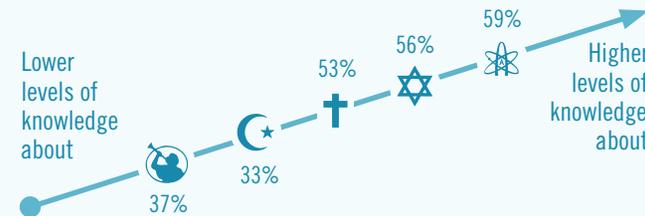
Read the full report for a deeper dive and reflections on how you can apply these findings in your interfaith work.

Appreciative Attitudes

How do different students feel about other groups?



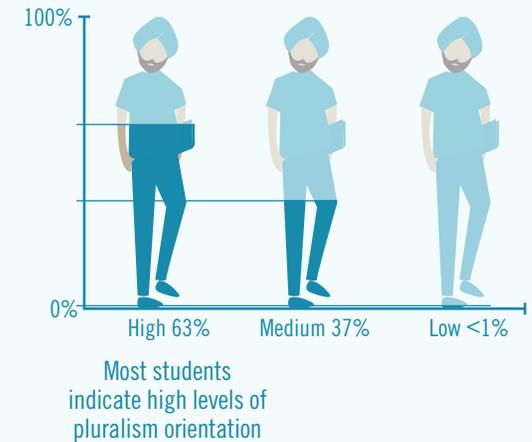
Students’ self-reported knowledge about other worldviews varies between groups



Interfaith engagement—both formal and informal—is positively associated with appreciative attitudes.

Pluralism Orientation

Do students express attitudes that provide potential for meaningful interactions across worldviews?



More than 80% of students who regularly encounter challenge—in conversations that encourage them to reconsider assumptions, during service projects with students of other worldviews, or when spending social time with religiously diverse students—report high pluralism orientation.



Fewer than 55% of students who rarely have such encounters are highly pluralistic.

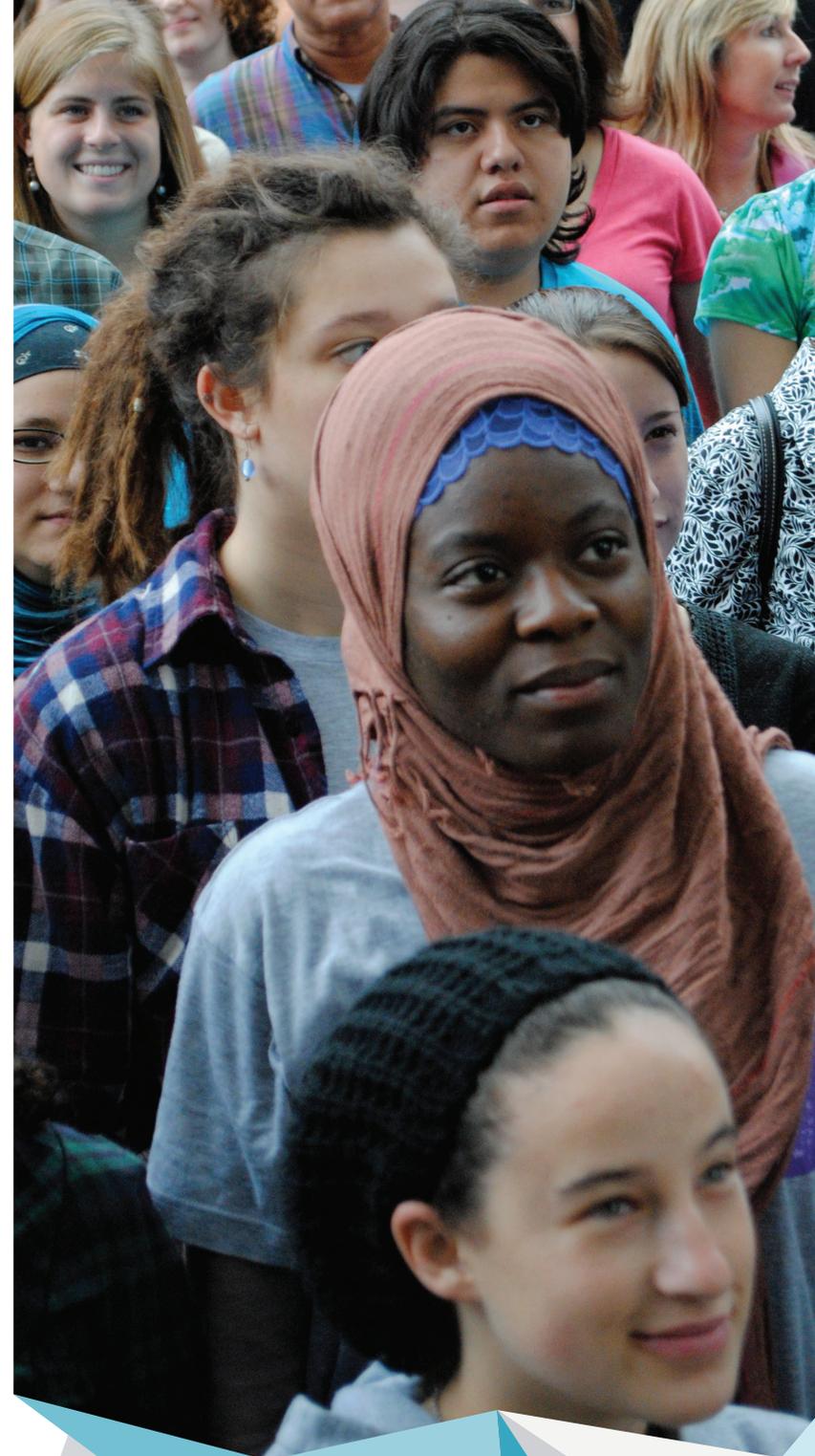
National Context

Religious diversity in U.S. society and around the world is an enriching aspect of the human experience. As people come together to contemplate fundamental questions about existence and purpose, they forge relationships, cultivate compassion, and challenge and refine their beliefs. In this way, religious diversity can inspire collaboration and service in light of shared values and motivation to make the world a better place. Nonetheless, problems persist, as religious diversity is also a source of conflict, yielding division and violence that can plague communities for generations.

In the U.S., colleges and universities are uniquely situated to provide a context for constructive engagement across lines of religious and worldview difference. In their recent book, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*, Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen (2012) remark on the need for institutions to play this role:

Given the varied religious profiles of the nation's colleges and universities, issues of religious diversity will present themselves differently on different campuses, but in one way or another, all institutions of higher learning need to address interfaith issues, because now everyone lives in an interfaith world. (p. 79)

Campus leaders have risen to the challenge by designing educational initiatives to promote attitudes and skills that are necessary for this type of productive global citizenship. Appreciative attitudes toward other religious and nonreligious groups are markers of students' willingness and potential ability to meaningfully engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation. This report explores student attitudes toward different worldviews, showing how diverse students perceive others and illuminating relationships between campus experiences and attitudes. These findings can guide educators to leverage effective interventions for increasing appreciative attitudes.

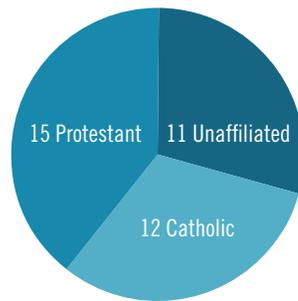


Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey Overview

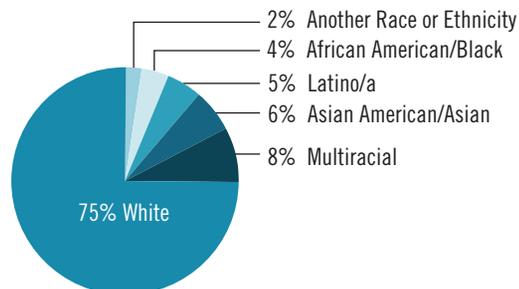
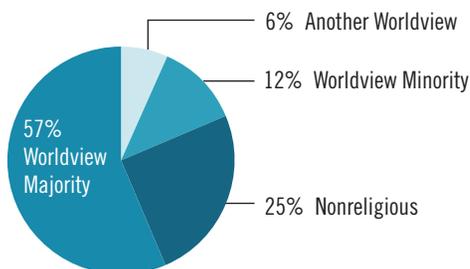
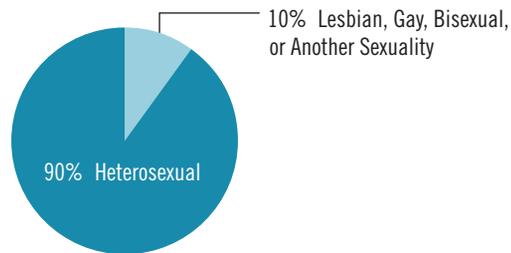
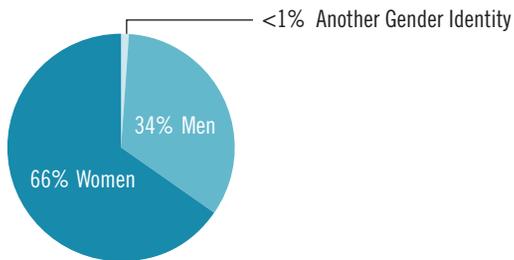
The Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS) is a theoretically-based and empirically-validated tool designed to help campus educators understand students' perceptions of and experiences with worldview diversity on campus.

This report is based on CRSCS data collected from 2011 to 2013. Below is a breakdown of participating institutions and respondents.

38 Institutions
(35 private + 3 public)



8,463 Student Respondents



Terms and Definitions

Worldview is considered a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual connection, a nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these.

Worldview Majority – students who are Protestant, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic Christians.

Nonreligious – students who identify as agnostic, atheist, nonreligious, “none,” or secular humanist.

Worldview Minority – students who belong to a faith tradition that is a numerical minority in the United States, including the Baha’i faith, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Mormonism, Native American traditions, Paganism, Sikhism, Unitarian Universalism, and Zoroastrianism. Additionally, students who selected “spiritual” are included in this group.

Another Worldview – students who indicated “another worldview” rather than one of the selections provided.

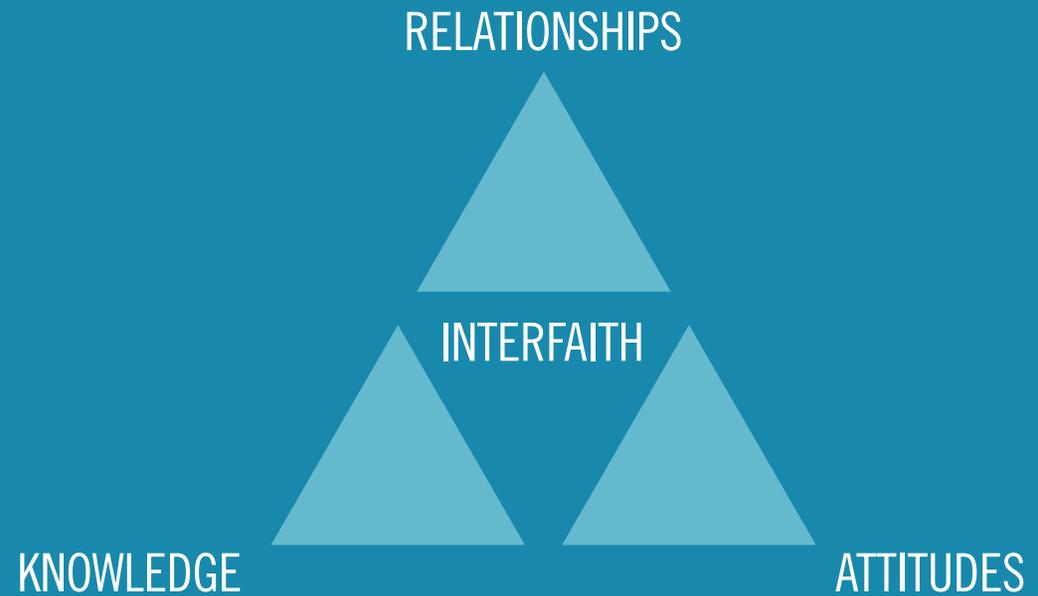
Interfaith Triangle

Why appreciative attitudes are important for interfaith cooperation

The interfaith triangle illustrates the reciprocal and interconnected nature of appreciative attitudes, knowledge, and relationships that, when engaged, drive one toward greater religious pluralism (Patel, 2012). Grounded in social science research about interactions across religious difference (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007; Putnam & Campbell, 2010), the interfaith triangle provides a compelling framework for building collaboration across worldviews.

There are numerous ways that connections between the three points of the triangle can foster cyclical and deepening positive regard for others of different worldviews.

Students can enter the interfaith triangle at any point and move toward its other two components. This report focuses on the appreciative attitudes component of the interfaith triangle, providing insight into how student attitudes differ and what institutional and individual factors are associated with attitudinal differences. Ways in which formal and informal interfaith experiences might play a role in improving appreciative attitudes are also explored.



Relationships

- ▶ As students form relationships with peers who orient around religion differently, they learn positive and meaningful information about their peers' traditions.
- ▶ When students' relationships with diverse peers engender feelings of positive regard toward those peers, by association, students may also build appreciative attitudes toward other individuals from the traditions to which their peers ascribe.

Knowledge

- ▶ When students learn appreciative information about a tradition or faith community, they are more likely to have positive feelings about members of that community.
- ▶ Students who know positive facts about a particular worldview group are often more willing to build relationships with people of that group.

Attitudes

- ▶ As they develop appreciative attitudes about a religion, students are more willing to seek out affirmative information about that tradition.
- ▶ When appreciative attitudes are cultivated, students are more willing to engage in new relationships across religious difference.

Appreciative Attitudes Toward Diverse Worldviews

Because appreciative attitudes have a theoretical relationship with students' pluralism orientation and interfaith cooperation (Patel, 2012), the CRSCS included a series of questions that capture students' appreciative attitudes toward individuals of other worldviews. Sometimes surveys ask students to think of "someone of a different worldview" when responding to questions, yet responses to these questions are difficult to interpret without knowing who students are thinking about when responding. Thus, the CRSCS measures students' appreciative attitudes toward five groups that have historically faced prejudice in the U.S. and around the world, and about which individuals often have polarizing opinions.

The five groups for which appreciative attitudes were measured:

- ▶ Atheists
- ▶ Evangelical Christians
- ▶ Jews
- ▶ Latter-day Saints/Mormons
- ▶ Muslims

Students were not asked about their own worldviews (e.g., atheist students do not receive survey questions about atheists) to ensure that attitudes reported represent how students feel about *other* groups.

This section of the report examines how appreciative attitudes toward the above-listed groups vary, how appreciative attitudes toward others differ based the worldview of the respondents, and how campus experiences relate to appreciative attitudes.

Appreciative Attitudes

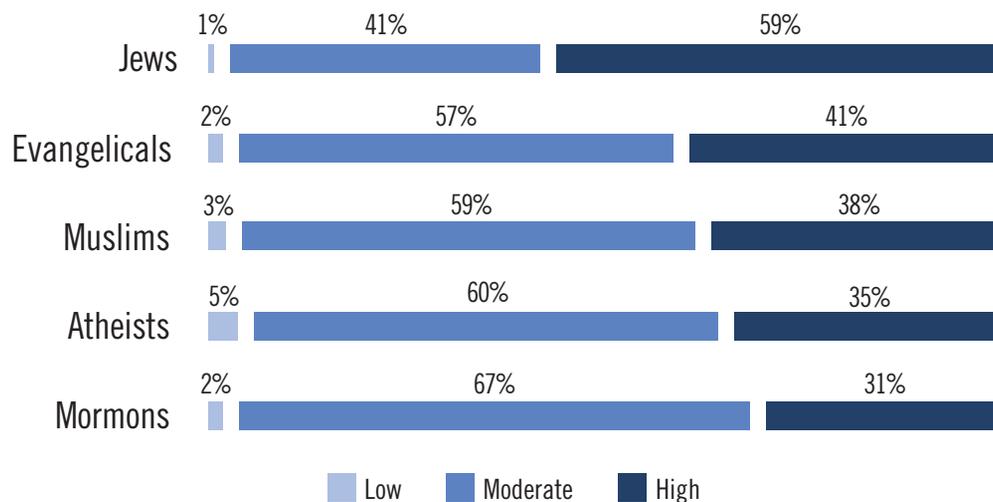
How do students' appreciative attitudes differ toward various worldviews?

Although few students have categorically negative attitudes toward any particular worldview group, most express moderate levels of appreciation. The chart below portrays the percentage of students with low, moderate, or high appreciative attitudes toward Jews, Evangelical Christians, Muslims, atheists, and Mormons.

These data suggest that there are opportunities for college educators and leaders to work toward improving appreciative attitudes and dispelling misinformation and stereotypes.

Student Attitudes Toward Specific Worldviews

Other students' appreciative attitudes toward...



Reflection Questions

- ▶ Why do students report primarily moderate attitudes toward other worldviews?
- ▶ What sociological and institutional factors may influence students' attitudes toward individuals of other religious and nonreligious identities?

Tip

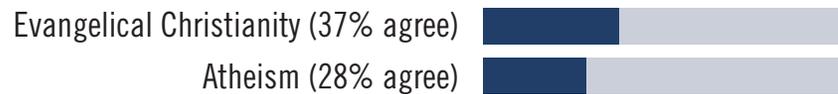
One way to help students move beyond moderately appreciative attitudes toward others is to build relationships based on common values. Focusing on shared values helps students recognize commonalities with students from diverse faith and secular traditions, thus providing opportunities to establish positive perceptions of others' worldviews. IFYC's resource, *Facilitator's Tools: Interfaith Conversations on Shared Values*, provides a framework for meaningful interfaith dialogue.

Appreciative Attitudes

What aspects of appreciative attitudes do students endorse the least?

The appreciative attitudes scales, composed of several questions or items, capture general appreciative attitudes toward particular traditions. A close look at individual items within these scales provides valuable information illuminating the nuances of attitudes toward different populations. For example, consider two items from the CRSCS that received low scores from student respondents.

Item: This worldview promotes tolerance and respect toward other worldviews.



Despite the fact that evangelicals and atheists diverge on most issues related to God, existence, and ideology, they are similarly viewed as lacking in tolerance and respect toward those who are different from them. The most vocal evangelicals and atheists often debate one another in public discussions about divisive political and social issues, which may lead observers to believe members of these groups are intolerant.

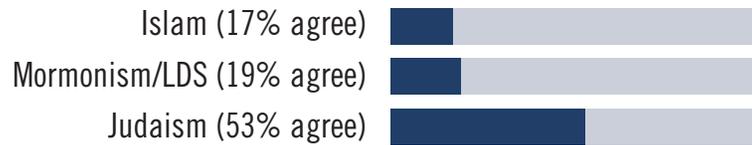
Educators have an opportunity to help college students appreciate the full spectrum of beliefs and values within evangelicalism and atheism, many of which are less apparent when only the most zealous voices are heard in the national conversation. Interfaith campus leaders may encourage programming that highlights examples of evangelicals and atheists expressing admiration or positive regard toward other traditions. While many social narratives put evangelicals and atheists at the extremes, counter-narratives may lead to provocative experiences that challenge students to reexamine their assumptions and perspectives.



Appreciative Attitudes

What aspects of appreciative attitudes do students endorse the least? (cont.)

Item: This worldview values equality between men and women.



At first glance, student attitudes toward Judaism reflected in this item may seem high relative to attitudes toward Islam and Mormonism. After all, more than half of students are in agreement that Judaism favors gender equality. By contrast, students appear to have reservations about whether gender equality prevails in the Muslim and Mormon/LDS faiths. However, when one considers that attitudes toward Jews are generally positive, responses to this item stand out. In fact, it was the lowest-rated item on the scale for Appreciative Attitudes toward Jews. Thus, it is evident that findings are more meaningful when considered in their broader contexts.

To address student attitudes about gender equality in different faiths, programming on campus might draw attention to the extensive diversity in theological interpretations and gender norms within various traditions. Students should have the opportunity to critically evaluate their own and other traditions, and come to appreciate the complexity and varied answers to the question, “Does X worldview value and foster gender equality?” That students are, on the whole, uncertain about equality among Muslim or Mormon women and men is also instructive for campus ministry leaders, as they may play a role in helping students on their campus deconstruct religious caricatures.



Tip

It may be difficult for students to appreciate the diverse perspectives within a variety of traditions when particular narratives are amplified in the national media. One way to hear alternative voices is through the IFYC Common Knowledge podcast; access episodes at <http://ifyc.org/podcast>.

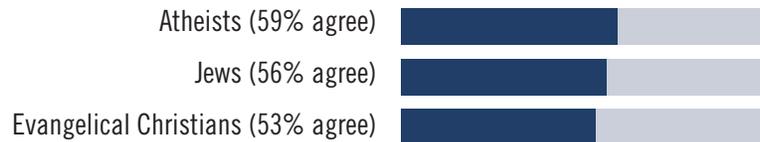
Appreciative Attitudes

How knowledgeable are students of other worldviews?

Another appreciative attitudes item also revealed interesting patterns. When asked whether they feel knowledgeable about each of the five worldview groups, students generally reported different levels of knowledge.

Higher Levels of Knowledge

Students agree they feel knowledgeable about...



Lower Levels of Knowledge

Students agree they feel knowledgeable about...



Appreciative Attitudes

How knowledgeable are students of other worldviews? (cont.)

There are two key questions for higher education practitioners to consider given these findings. First, are students' beliefs about their own knowledge accurate? Objective assessments of students' religious literacy are necessary to determine whether students' self-reported knowledge is consistent with actual knowledge. Second, regardless of students' actual knowledge, these data show that students *feel* less knowledgeable about certain groups (LDS/Mormons and Muslims). How can educators provide access to curricular and co-curricular resources that will help to develop and deepen students' religious literacy in specific areas? Offering interfaith programming that develops religious literacy may help foster appreciative attitudes and close the knowledge gap about particular worldviews.



Tip

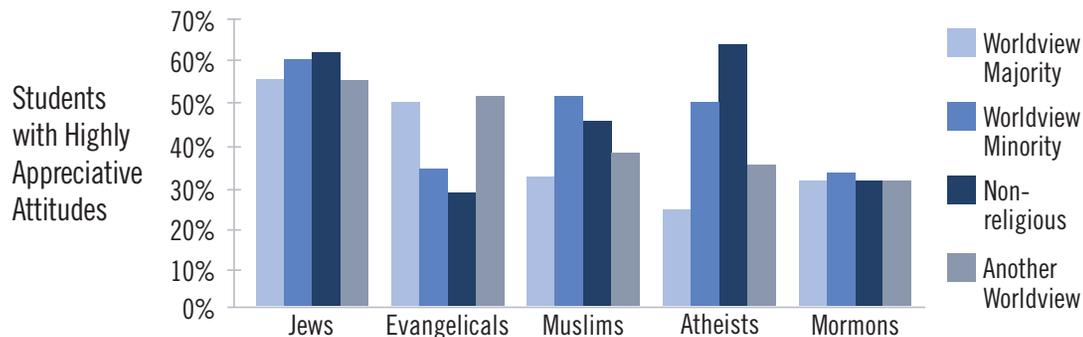
Want to help students discern how knowledgeable they *feel* versus how knowledgeable they *are*? IFYC's *Interfaith Literacy Quiz* is a good resource to help students understand this difference.

Appreciative Attitudes

Are appreciative attitudes toward others consistent across diverse student populations?

When disaggregating student responses based on worldview, varying levels of appreciative attitudes toward specific traditions emerged.

Highly Appreciative Attitudes Toward Particular Worldviews by Aggregated Worldview



Student attitudes vary the most from group to group when they consider evangelical Christians, Muslims, and atheists, but attitudes toward Jews and LDS/Mormons are fairly similar across groups. Programmatic strategies on campus might be directed toward worldview groups that hold less-than-favorable views toward one another. For example, worldview majority students tend to be less appreciative of Muslims and atheists than their peers, while nonreligious and worldview minority students have lower levels of appreciation for evangelical Christians compared to other students. Creating and sustaining constructive engagement and relationships between students in these groups is a strategic way to begin addressing attitude change.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ Why are there differences in attitudes across various worldview groups?
- ▶ What sociological or ideological factors contribute to these differences in attitudes?
- ▶ What can educators do to address these underlying factors to change attitudes?

Appreciative Attitudes

Do positive aspects of campus climate relate to appreciative attitudes?

Campus Climate and Attitudes

Both positive and negative aspects of the campus religious and spiritual climate have connections to appreciative attitudes toward various worldviews. Thus, campus climate is another important factor to consider when addressing student attitudes about other traditions.

Space for spiritual support and expression

Appreciative attitudes are more apparent when students perceive their campus as providing space for spiritual support and free expression. Thus, faculty and staff should carefully consider whether physical spaces, campus traditions, religious accommodations, institutional policies, and language use facilitate positive experiences for students to express a range of religious and philosophical identities.



📖 Terms and Definitions

Space for spiritual support and expression

describes a climate in which students feel comfortable fully attending to their worldview identities. A welcoming climate includes:

- ▶ Accommodations for celebrating religious holidays
- ▶ Students' ability to safely express themselves in class
- ▶ Places where students can turn for help with spiritual struggles

💡 Tip

Physical spaces can play an important role to help students of diverse worldviews feel comfortable on campus. With limited resources, it may not be possible to designate unique spaces for all worldview populations represented at an institution. Interfaith spaces can be a useful alternative, as they provide support and a safe environment for all students. The *Creating an Interfaith Space on Campus* resource can be valuable when considering an interfaith space for your campus.

Appreciative Attitudes

How might negative aspects of climate affect appreciative attitudes toward others?

Negative aspects of campus climate have potentially detrimental repercussions for appreciative attitudes toward many worldview groups. As students experience higher levels of insensitivity, divisiveness, and negative interworldview engagement, appreciative attitudes toward a range of worldviews tend to become less favorable. The table below illustrates where there is a relationship between negative climate indicators and attitudes toward particular worldview groups.

When students indicate higher levels of...	Insensitivity on Campus	Divisiveness on Campus	Negative Interworldview Engagement
...they generally report lower appreciative attitudes toward:	Jews Evangelicals Muslims Atheists Mormons	Jews Muslims Atheists Mormons	Evangelicals Muslims Atheists Mormons

The implications for practice on campus are clear: climates that are insensitive, divisive, or hostile may harm students' outlook on religious diversity in general and toward specific communities in particular. It is imperative that campus leaders directly address these problems by implementing strategies that bring students together in productive and meaningful ways. Educators must be sensitive to conditions that may result in contentious exchanges rather than dialogues aimed at understanding others.

Terms and Definitions

- ▶ **Insensitivity on campus** pertains to hearing derogatory comments about one's worldview or feeling mistreated on the basis of one's worldview.
- ▶ **Divisiveness on campus** represents conflict between or segregation of religious or worldview groups.
- ▶ **Negative interworldview engagement** consists of tense, hostile, or unresolved interactions between students of different worldviews.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ What aspects of your campus environment may contribute to insensitivity, divisiveness, or negative interworldview engagement? What can you do to change these environmental aspects?
- ▶ What populations may not perceive safe spaces for support and spiritual expression on your campus? How can you change existing spaces or policies to be more inclusive of these populations?

Appreciative Attitudes

Does engagement with religious and spiritual activities relate to appreciative attitudes?

In addition to perceptions of the campus climate, a range of programmatic experiences are also linked to more or less favorable attitudes toward diverse worldviews. General religious and spiritual activities are experiences that significantly relate to appreciative attitudes.

Student participation in general religious and spiritual activities is associated with less appreciation of atheists. Whereas 39% of students who rarely participate in general religious or spiritual activities have highly appreciative attitudes toward atheists, the same is true of only 31% of students with moderate or high levels of general religious or spiritual engagement. It may be that students encounter primarily religious people in those settings and have little opportunity to engage and learn from atheist individuals. Faculty and staff may want to consider proactive efforts to include atheist, agnostic, and other nonreligious students more intentionally in aspects of campus spiritual life. Doing so may require campus leaders to broaden language and programmatic purposes, and reach out to nonreligious students to welcome and include them.



📖 Terms and Definitions

- ▶ **General religious and spiritual activities** includes experiences such as participating in student religious organizations for their own traditions, attending religious services on campus, and engaging in programs on spirituality and purpose.

💬 Reflection Questions

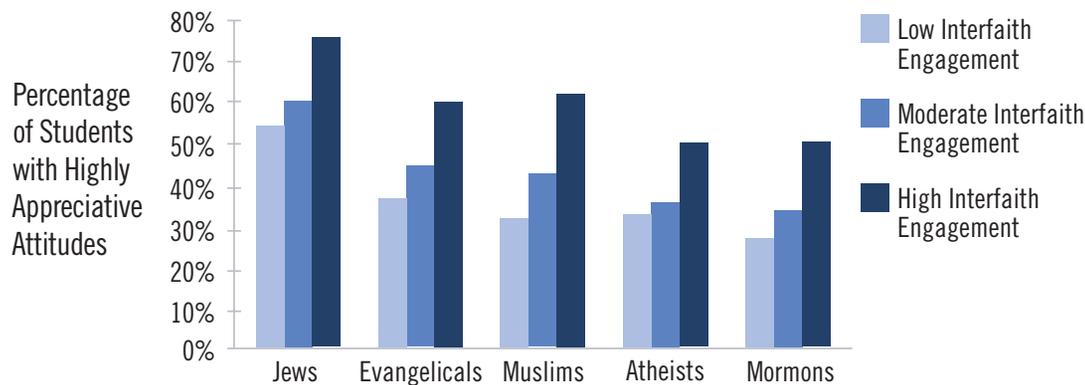
- ▶ How do you engage atheists and other nonreligious students in aspects of religious and spiritual life? What spaces are or are not appropriate for doing so?
- ▶ How does the language used in different religious and spiritual activities include or exclude those who are nonreligious?

Appreciative Attitudes

How might interfaith experiences influence appreciative attitudes toward other worldviews?

Interfaith engagement—whether formal or informal—is positively associated with appreciative attitudes. Students who engage in more interfaith activities tend to have higher levels of appreciation for different worldviews.

Highly Appreciative Attitudes Toward Particular Worldviews by Interfaith Engagement



Terms and Definitions

- ▶ **Informal interfaith engagement** involves, for example, socializing, dining, studying, and having conversations with peers of other worldviews.
- ▶ **Formal interfaith engagement** includes, for instance, participating in service work with students of different worldviews, attending multi-faith services or celebrations, and participating in interfaith dialogue.

Appreciative Attitudes

How might interfaith experiences influence appreciative attitudes toward other worldviews? (cont.)

Because the data are cross-sectional (collected at one point in time), one cannot make causal claims about the effects of interfaith engagement on attitudes. However, such a strong association likely suggests that students with positive attitudes may gravitate toward interfaith activities, that interfaith activities may help improve attitudes, or that both may be true.



Reflection Questions

- ▶ How can you create spaces that foster informal interactions across worldview differences?
- ▶ How can you integrate interfaith experiences into existing programs and initiatives?

Tip

One way administrators can help more students engage in interfaith cooperation is by integrating these experiences in current programs and initiatives. Whether at residence life floor meetings, orientation sessions, or leadership development workshops, educators can incorporate elements of interfaith understanding into existing activities in which students regularly participate. When effectively integrated, students can meaningfully engage across religious and nonreligious worldviews through everyday campus experiences. *Incorporating Cooperation into Existing Campus Programming* can be a helpful guide for staff interested in this practice.

Pluralism Orientation

Diana Eck (1993) provided a multifaceted definition of pluralism, suggesting that pluralism consists of:

- ▶ Actively engaging with diversity;
- ▶ Moving beyond tolerance to acceptance of others;
- ▶ Making genuine commitments in the midst of relativism; and
- ▶ Understanding and appreciating worldview differences (not merely commonalities).

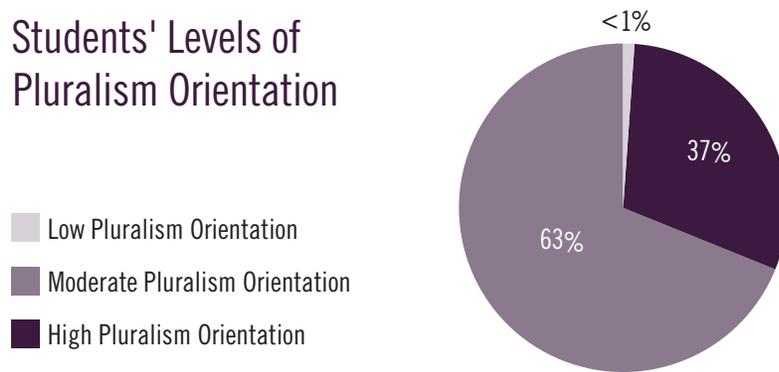
Based on this four-part framework, the pluralism orientation scale measures the degree to which students believe a set of statements accurately reflects their perspectives. Students who have a high pluralism orientation value genuine understanding of and engagement across worldview differences. However, students with lower pluralism orientations will not necessarily recognize such acceptance and interaction as important.

Pluralism Orientation

Do students' pluralistic attitudes and behaviors align?

In general, students express favorable attitudes toward pluralism, providing potential for meaningful interactions across worldviews.

Students' Levels of Pluralism Orientation



Regarding specific components of pluralism orientation:

- ▶ 86% of students say it is “very accurate” that they respect people who have worldviews that differ from their own.
- ▶ 79% believe it is “very accurate” that cultivating religious tolerance and understanding will make the world a more peaceful place.
- ▶ 66% affirm it is “very accurate” that their faith or beliefs are strengthened by relationships with those of diverse religious and nonreligious backgrounds.



Pluralism Orientation

Do students' pluralistic attitudes and behaviors align? (cont.)

An important task for higher education researchers and practitioners is to determine how well students' self-assessments coincide with their behaviors. For instance, despite the fact that two-thirds of students claim to value and respect people of other worldviews, far fewer actively engage with others. **Just 3% of students are highly engaged in formal interfaith activities.** Thus, before assuming that attitudes alone suggest college students are well on their way to productive citizenship in a religiously and culturally diverse society, educators need to explore whether students are gaining skills in the realm of interfaith engagement through actual interactions with diverse peers. If not, it is also critical to examine why students' attitudes and behaviors are not aligned. It is relatively easy to profess a commitment to pluralism; living out those values day-to-day is arguably much harder. Higher education can play a role not only in promoting attitudinal changes, but in changing behaviors as well.



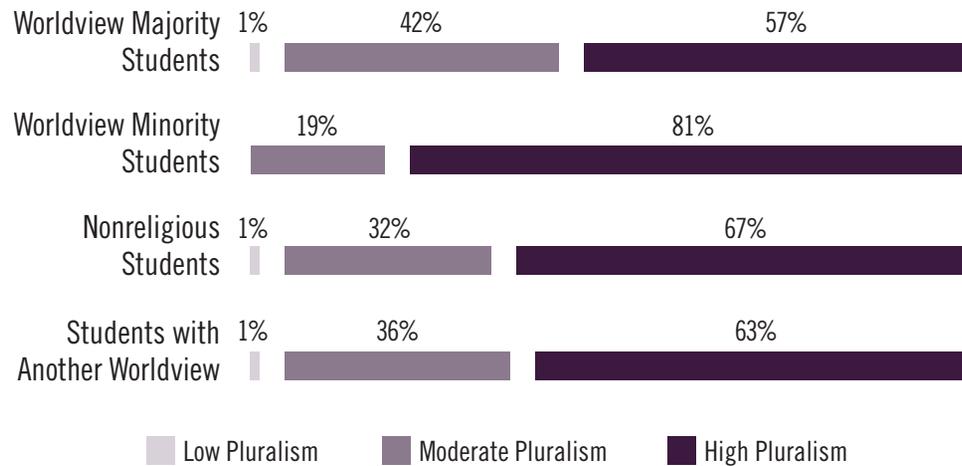
Reflection Questions

- ▶ In what ways can you challenge students to reflect on how their values and beliefs align with their actions?
- ▶ Are there ways you can help students recognize points of congruence and dissonance between what they espouse and how they act?
- ▶ How can you better model pluralistic attitudes and behaviors through your role on campus?

Pluralism Orientation

How do pluralism orientations vary depending on student worldview?

Pluralism Orientation by Aggregated Worldview



Another component of the critical work of interfaith leaders involves addressing lower levels of pluralism among certain populations of students. Worldview minority students tend to be more pluralistic, whereas worldview majority students are less pluralistic. There is also some degree of variation by gender identity. Students reporting “another gender identity” are the most pluralistic (79% have high pluralism scores), followed by female students (65%) and male students (59%). Although most students endorse the key elements of pluralism, a significant minority—especially among men and the worldview majority—remains less committed to appreciating and engaging with religious and worldview differences. Therefore, educators must consider ways to foster pluralism specifically for Christians and men. This may consist of creating unique interventions for these populations, or integrating practices that promote pluralism growth into existing programs that serve these groups.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ How can educators better engage men in interfaith experiences?
- ▶ What factors related to men and masculine identities may create barriers or opportunities for fostering men’s religious pluralism?
- ▶ How do educators foster pluralism in worldview majority students?
- ▶ How can educators help Christians understand the value of worldview diversity, and engage them in interfaith dialogue?

Pluralism Orientation

How do educators create campus environments that promote pluralism?

The tried-and-true adage, “challenge and support,” coined by Nevitt Sanford (1966) is an apt characterization of the experiences reported by highly pluralistic students. As the chart on the previous page depicts, students who perceive the most space for support and spiritual expression on campus, and who are highly engaged in provocative encounters with worldview diversity, interfaith activities, and informal interactions with diverse peers, tend to be more inclined toward pluralism than their peers. More than 80% of students who regularly encounter challenge—in conversations that encourage them to reconsider assumptions, during service projects with students of other worldviews, or when spending social time with religiously diverse students—score highly on the pluralism measure. Fewer than 55% of students who rarely have such encounters demonstrate a high pluralism orientation.

Feeling supported is another essential component of pluralism. More than two-thirds of students who experience a high degree of support (at campuses where accommodations



Terms and Definitions

- ▶ **Provocative encounters with worldview diversity** consist of challenging or stimulating experiences with people of different worldviews that promote critical reflection on their own or others' beliefs.
- ▶ **Space for spiritual support and expression** describes a climate in which students feel comfortable fully attending to their worldview identities.

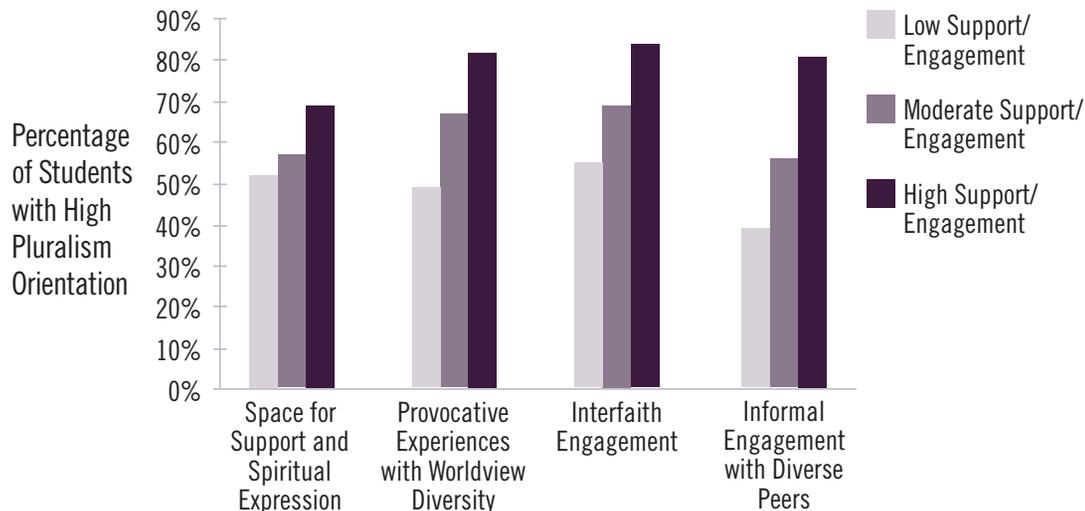
Pluralism Orientation

How do educators create campus environments that promote pluralism? (cont.)

are made for celebrating religious holidays, where students feel safe expressing themselves in class, and where there are places students can turn to for help with spiritual struggles) are highly pluralistic. By comparison, just 52% of students who experience low levels of support score high on the pluralism measure.

As with appreciative attitudes discussed earlier, one cannot infer causation given the cross-sectional nature of the data reported here. Pluralistic students may be drawn to supportive and challenging environments, or supportive and challenging environments may enhance pluralism orientation. It is likely, though, that pluralism and positive diversity experiences are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, cultivating challenge and providing support in the domains of religion and spirituality on campus are promising directions for campus leaders.

Students with High Pluralism Orientation by Support and Engagement

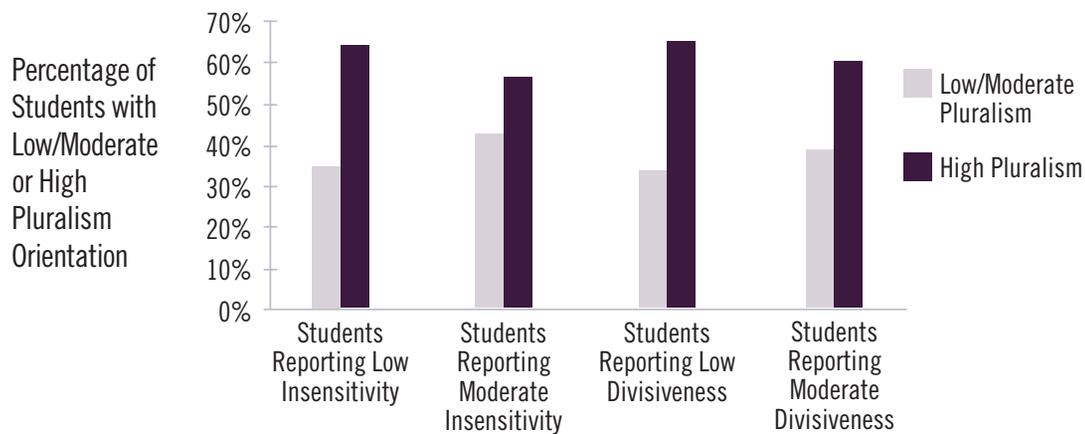


Pluralism Orientation

How are students' pluralism orientations potentially affected by negative aspects of campus climate?

Similar to appreciative attitudes, pluralism orientation is diminished in campus environments that students perceive as divisive and insensitive. That is, pluralism scores are lower at campuses where students hear derogatory comments about their worldview, feel mistreated on the basis of their worldview, and perceive conflict or segregation resulting from worldview differences.

Negative Aspects of Climate in Relation to Pluralism Orientation



A full 65% of students on campuses who report low levels of insensitivity are highly pluralistic relative to 57% of students on campuses with at least moderate levels of insensitivity. Likewise, 66% of students are highly pluralistic on campuses with low levels of divisiveness; where there is at least moderate divisiveness, 61% of students are highly pluralistic. For educators, identifying and confronting the sources of insensitive remarks and divisive conduct are vital first steps toward establishing a community that values and enacts pluralism.

Reflection Questions

- ▶ What proactive work does your campus do to create an environment that discourages insensitivity and divisiveness on the basis of worldview?
- ▶ What systems does your campus have in place to identify and address insensitivity, particularly egregious instances of insensitivity, toward people of different worldviews?



From Research to Practice

How to translate report findings to educational interventions.

Fostering positive attitudes toward diverse worldviews and cultivating greater pluralism in college students are central aims in interfaith education. This report illuminates various factors associated with pluralism orientation and with student attitudes toward a range of worldview groups. To make use of the findings set forth herein, it is important to consider how they can inform practice and shape educational interventions on college campuses. Therefore, what follows are nine recommendations based on the information shared in this report.



From Research to Practice

Foster Interfaith Literacy

- 1 Highlight diverse narratives within traditions to foster nuanced understandings of worldviews.
 - ▶ Students' misunderstandings related to a particular narrative may be due to their limited perspective of that worldview. By acknowledging and exhibiting intra-religious diversity, practitioners can help students develop more complex understandings of various worldviews that can challenge negative assumptions about those groups.
- 2 Provide opportunities for storytelling and dialogue that explore how people from different worldviews understand issues including, but not limited to, gender equality and tolerance of other beliefs.
 - ▶ Feelings toward students of other worldview identities may be tied to assumptions about their stances on a variety of social issues. Storytelling and dialogue not only require students to clarify their views of certain social issues in relation to their worldview, but also provide opportunities for others to learn how individuals make meaning of social issues in light of their beliefs. Regardless of an individual's view about a certain issue, understanding the frame from which they approach the issue and their decision-making rationale may challenge negative perceptions of their worldview perspective.



From Research to Practice

Foster Interfaith Literacy (cont.)

- 3 Encourage students to critically reflect on their relative knowledge about various traditions and empower them to increase their interfaith literacy.
 - ▶ Do students know a few isolated facts about a worldview? Is that information accurate? Have students sought out information to help them better understand diverse worldviews and the contributions different groups make to society? Interfaith literacy is a lifelong learning process; students who cultivate nuanced understandings of other worldviews may develop more positive attitudes toward them and more effectively engage in interfaith leadership in society.

- 4 Create opportunities for students to better understand and appreciate traditions with which they have ideological differences despite strong disagreement.
 - ▶ Some groups have fundamental ideological differences (i.e., atheists and evangelical Christians) that can be the source of great tension. Interfaith educators must acknowledge deep disagreements, yet offer opportunities for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of others. Common action for the common good, through service with and for others, can be a powerful experience that moves students toward interfaith cooperation. It is especially meaningful when coupled with group reflection that allows participants to voice their reasons for engaging in service and explain what such activities mean to them.



From Research to Practice

Cultivate Influential Environments and Experiences

- 5 Make sure your campus has space for support and expression for students of various religious and nonreligious worldviews.
 - ▶ Space for spiritual support and expression has emerged as a key campus factor in cultivating positive attitudes and religious pluralism. Unfortunately, perceptions of support may not always be consistent across students with different worldviews. Educators should have a clear understanding of the worldviews represented on their campuses to ensure programmatic support, physical space, and staffing resources are provided for all students. It is important to remember that, although nonreligious students may not need support for religious expression, they still seek opportunities for engagement, meaning-making, and reflection related to their worldview.
- 6 Foster an inclusive environment by teaching students how to have productive conversations across difference.
 - ▶ All too often, students either avoid disagreement or engage it in toxic ways. Modeling and facilitating positive engagement in controversial conversations across difference can prove valuable for student interfaith learning. By learning how to effectively navigate difficult conversations, students can mitigate negative interactions with others, build efficacy to meaningfully engage with diverse others, and develop strong relationships with others even in the midst of deep disagreement.
- 7 Integrate interfaith experiences into existing campus programs.
 - ▶ Interfaith programming is clearly connected to positive attitudes toward others and the pluralism orientation of students. Unfortunately, engagement in interfaith activities often occurs at low levels. Educators can involve a broader range of students in interfaith programming by integrating interfaith elements into existing campus-wide programs and traditions. What would it look like if interfaith experiences were a part of student orientation, welcome week, convocation, homecoming, family weekend, sponsored lecture series, community-based learning, senior week, commencement, or other campus-wide events?



From Research to Practice

Cultivate Influential Environments and Experiences (cont.)

- 8 Consider innovative ways to engage Christian students and men in interfaith experiences.
 - ▶ Christians and men tend to exhibit lower levels of pluralism orientation when compared to their peers. It is possible that Christians, as members of the U.S. worldview majority, are less frequently exposed to peers who do not share their beliefs and thus have fewer opportunities to develop appreciative attitudes and knowledge of diverse worldviews. For men, lower levels of pluralism orientation may be related to broader engagement trends in higher education that show men taking part in campus activities at lower rates than their female counterparts. In both cases, the onus may be on interfaith educators to develop interventions specifically for these communities, whether through Christian ministries, male/masculinity programming and services, or other channels. While interfaith initiatives should not dominate these spaces, there is room to meaningfully and appropriately integrate interfaith components into programming that targets specific campus groups.

- 9 Create spaces that foster informal interactions across difference.
 - ▶ Some of the most powerful ways to shape how students perceive other worldviews involve informal conversations with peers. These can be late-night discussions in the residence halls or exchanges over dinner in the cafeteria. The question is, how can interfaith educators bring diverse populations together and provide cues that spark informal conversations? Strategies include creating interfaith spaces that draw students of different worldviews into proximity, and effectively-utilized table tents and bulletin boards in public spaces that stimulate inter-worldview dialogue.

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