

BRIDGE Module

Why We Should Talk about Worldview

Preparation

- As the facilitator you will need to decide which content to use and when. You will find enough content in this module to facilitate a 3 hour session, however we advise you to stick to 60 minutes. We have intentionally provided a wealth of information and activities for you to tailor and personalize for students, staff, and community members. The module discusses social capital, civic pluralism, social scientific theories, worldview and the civic goods of pluralism.
- Familiarize yourself with the content and decide which videos and activities will be most beneficial, relevant, and effective for you to facilitate to your community.
- Print copies of the [Glossary of Terms](#) to hand out at the beginning of the workshop. Familiarize yourself with the terms (you will only be presenting a few of them formally in the beginning, the rest are for reference)
- [Cue videos 2.3](#)
- [Cue videos 8.3](#)

Learning Outcomes

- Explain key terms, such as religious pluralism, interfaith cooperation, and worldview
- Summarize the relevancy of religious and worldview identity to the American civic landscape and US higher education
- Increase awareness of the religious, spiritual, and secular landscape of US college campuses
- Increase understanding of how the religious, spiritual, and secular US college landscape influences one's own work and campus culture

Welcome and Overview

Tell participants: The BRIDGE Modules are designed to open a wider conversation about worldview diversity in your work with students and introduce you to the experience of interfaith relationship building.

Our goal is to understand why talking about worldview matters, and that we have existing interpersonal skills to call upon to be able to do so. We just need to practice.

Brief Definitions

Distribute the Glossary of Terms Handout

Tell participants: Clear understanding of terms is essential whenever engaging identity and worldview. In order to achieve that clarity, I am going to formally present a few key terms but this is the only time in the workshop that I will present in such a formal way. I know I'm going through a lot of information! Feel free to stop me when you have questions so we can all start from the same page.

[Optional Slide: Worldview]

Worldview: A guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, non-religious perspective, or some combination of these. The foundational outlook you have on life that helps you make sense of the world around you.

[Optional Slide: Worldview Engagement/Interfaith Cooperation]

Religious Pluralism: A world where people of differing religions and worldviews can live and work together in peace while maintaining their distinctiveness. We focus on working toward religious pluralism specifically: the proactive engagement of worldview diversity to a positive end.

Interfaith Cooperation/Worldview Engagement: This is the tactic through which to work toward religious pluralism. Interfaith cooperation is built by cultivating respect for worldview identity, mutually inspiring relationships between people of different worldviews, and action around shared values.

The rest of the terms on the sheet are for your reference; for the sake of time we won't talk about them today.

Video and Discussion: Social Capital

Tell participants: This video describes the purpose and importance of engaging religious diversity.

[\[Play video, Lesson 2. Module 2.3: Exploring Social Capital\]](#)

Ask participants: What major takeaways can we pull from this video? How does what the video explains resonate with our current climate?

Steer the group toward these points:

- Americans no longer have the option to ignore worldview diversity
- Diversity itself doesn't guarantee that people will get along or even interact with one another
- Diversity without social cohesion can be dangerous
- Interfaith Cooperation builds social cohesion if it is designed to encourage healthy interaction Transition to pointing out that engaging with worldview identity and diversity is complicated for various reasons. Ask participants: Why do you think we have such a hard time engaging worldview in general? Potential themes that might emerge (you can mention these as well):
- People often assume engaging around worldview will lead to conflict. f We're not sure what is permissible within the public educational system in particular. f No tradition is monolithic; there is a wide diversity of experience, interpretation, and practice within every tradition.
- People are a combination of many intersecting identities; one's worldview affects and is affected by their race, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and many more aspects of identity.
- Some folks have been done legitimate harm by certain interpretations of religious teachings; it's 3 important that we provide support for reconciling their experiences while challenging generalizations about entire belief systems based on the actions of a few.
- Worldview is often challenged, explored, and in flux during a person's college years.

Summarize: This is messy, imperfect work, but it is necessary and often very enriching, not just for communities but for individuals as well. It's important to enter it with goodwill, a willingness to understand another, and compassion for yourself.

If you are ending the entire session here...

Tell participants: Thank you so much for your participation today! I will be sending a follow-up email that includes a link to a survey so you can provide feedback about your experience and how this workshop could be strengthened in the future. We really appreciate your input, so thank you for your time in advance. I'll also include some follow up resources that will help support your continued engagement with worldview identity, and don't hesitate to be in touch to continue the conversation about how you can incorporate this into your daily work. Thanks again!

Video & Discussion: the Civic Goods of Pluralism

Tell participants: It's important that we are aware of the impact engaging worldview can have on our society. Actively engaging in our religiously diverse democracy calls us to have an understanding and a knowledgebase of the people that inhabit this world with us. As the most religiously diverse developed country in the world, we are also the most religiously illiterate (Prothero, 2008). This paucity of information serves as the foundation for many misunderstandings, perpetuates stereotypes, and fuels hate crimes. Please watch this video. When you watch this video, consider how these 'goods' translate to our campus specifically.

[\[Play video, Lesson 8. Module 8.3: The Civic Goods of Pluralism\]](#)

Reflection and Visioning

[Optional Slide: Civic Good of Pluralism]

Tell participants: Let's think about how the civic goods would appear on our campus if pluralism were the norm. We'll consider each Civic Good separately. Describe to me what you would see around campus to indicate these things were present:

- More Understanding, Less Prejudice
- Strengthens Social Cohesion
- Creates Bridged Social Capital
- Continuity of Identity Communities
- Creates Binding Narratives for Diverse Societies

Write the things people mention on the board or on paper.

ACTION STEPS

Ask participants: We've established that engaging worldview differences is important to build religious pluralism, and that pluralism encourages the civic goods we just explored. What is our charge in working with students? What is one specific action you can take to continue to grow your ability to engage worldview difference in a healthy way? 4

Example answers:

- Read up on other worldviews to grow my literacy
- Include my worldview in discussions around my multiple identities
- Invite people to be vulnerable in sharing their beliefs, and modeling that vulnerability with them
- Advocate for more awareness and accommodation for worldview minorities on my campus

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BRIDGE Glossary of Terms

Why We Should Talk about Worldview

1. Abrahamic Religions

Religions whose people draw their origins to the Hebrew patriarch Abraham. The best known Abrahamic religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

2. Antisemitism

A certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. ([International Definition of Antisemitism](#))

3. Bias

The action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, and allowing personal opinions to influence one's judgment. ([Cambridge English Dictionary](#))

4. Common Good

Committing to the common good means recognizing that our various identity expressions and relationships can only exist when those principles and structures are healthy. Simply put, the common good are those principles and structures that a range of groups benefit from and people generally agree we have a collective interest to uphold. ([Eboo Patel, Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, p. 96-97](#))

5. Eastern Religions

Religious traditions whose origins are in the Eastern hemisphere (East, South, and Southeast Asia). Major Eastern Religions include Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, and Confucianism. It is important to note that members of these communities now live in countries across the globe.

6. Interfaith

This term is best understood by breaking it down into “inter” and “faith.” “Inter” refers to the relationships between people who orient around religion differently. “Faith” is defined as the relationship between an individual and what we commonly understand as a religious or philosophical tradition. Put together, ‘interfaith’ is about how our interactions with those who are different impacts the way we relate to our religious and ethical traditions, and how our relationships with our traditions impact our interactions with those who are different from us. ([Eboo Patel, Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, p. 39](#))

7. Interfaith Cooperation/Engagement

A process in which people who orient around religion differently come together in a way that respects different religious identities; build mutually inspiring relationships; and engage in common action around issues of shared social concern. Interfaith cooperation does not depend upon shared political, theological and spiritual perspectives. People who engage in interfaith cooperation may disagree on such matters. (Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer. “The Civic Relevance of Interfaith”, The Journal of College and Character. Vol. XII. No. 1 (2011))

8. Interfaith Service

Community service and/or civic engagement projects with an element of interfaith engagement inserted as a reflection before, during, or after the fact. Interfaith service often happens between different houses of worship, or individuals of different worldviews. (Eboo Patel and Adam Davis, Hearing the Call Across Traditions: Readings on Faith and Service (SkyLight Paths Publishing: Woodstock, VT, 2011) pp. 289-301)

9. Islamophobia

Closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Muslims. An Islamophobe is an individual who holds a closed-minded view of Islam and promotes prejudice against or hatred of Muslims. ([Council on American- Islamic Relations](#))

10. Multi-faith

Involving or characterized by a variety of religions. IA uses the term “inter” over “multi” because the world has long been “multi” in the sense that people who orient

around religion differently have existed on the same planet at the same time. The modern era is distinct insofar as there are high levels of interaction between diverse individuals and groups. ([Lexico](#); Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, p. 39)

11. Religious Pluralism

The term “pluralism” is understood and defined in a variety of ways. IA draws its understanding from the work of Diana Eck, who argues that diversity is simply the fact of people with different identities interacting with one another. In and of itself, diversity is neither good nor bad. Pluralism, on the other hand, is an achievement. We argue that pluralism has three main parts — respect for all parts of identity, relationships between people and communities who orient around religion differently, and common action for the common good. (Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a Christian Country has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2001) p 70.; (Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, p. 93)

12. Secular

Denotes attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis. This term identifies non-religious individuals broadly and includes atheism, agnosticism, and secular forms of humanism. (American Humanist Association)

13. Unaffiliated

Not associating with any worldview, religious or intentionally secular. These folks are sometimes referred to as ‘the Nones’. (IA)

14. Values

A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life. ([Oxford English Dictionary](#))

15. Worldview

A guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, non-religious perspective, or some combination of these. The foundational outlook you have on life that helps you make sense of the world around you. ([Mayhew, Rockenbach, et. al., *Emerging Interfaith Trends: What College Students are Saying About Religion in 2016*](#))

BRIDGE Script

Why We Should Talk about Worldview

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

- Effective Citizenship
- Professional Competence

Script

Connect the campus mission to interfaith cooperation

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

US Religious Landscape

Colleges and universities are microcosms of the religious diversity that is shaping American life. Consult, [Public Religion Research Institute](#), to learn more about the religious diversity of your state.

Whether within one's residence hall, classroom, neighborhood, PTA, or Little League team, our students need to be equipped to engage across difference. As the next generation of leaders, our graduates need interfaith literacy to successfully navigate their lives as effective citizens and competent professionals. Hospitals, classrooms, the service and hospitality industries, and global businesses are some of the most religiously diverse spaces in the US; our graduates need to know how to foster engagement in order to flourish within these complex systems. What works? How do we know? In our work on campus we have regular opportunities to foster a stronger sense of belonging and connection as well as to fully live out our mission and develop the whole student. The Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS), a research project that seeks to understand undergraduate encounters

What works? How do we know?

In our work on campus we have regular opportunities to foster a stronger sense of belonging and connection as well as to fully live out our mission and develop the whole student. The Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey ([IDEALS](#)), a research project that seeks to understand undergraduate encounters with religious and worldview diversity on a national scale, highlights the importance and impact of positively engaging worldview diversity on both the student and the campus climate. IDEALS tells us that students who have a discussion with someone who holds another worldview from their own or participates in a conversation where they feel challenged to rethink their own assumptions, including those who have a provocative encounter similar to the concept of brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013), are the students who express more appreciative attitudes for other social identity groups by the end of their first year. Students who experience worldview related provocative encounters double their overall rate of change (from 5–10%).

*Note: The full report is available here: [Best Practices for Interfaith Learning and Development in the First Year of College](#)

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

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

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

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

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

Questions and Responses

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

What is worldview?

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

What is interfaith?

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

What is interfaith cooperation?

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

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

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

Other Resources

[Building an Interfaith America](#)

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

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

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

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

The Christian Science Monitor recently covered the “Friendships Matter” report, whose findings say that, despite an atmosphere of polarization, many college students are forging relationships outside their own belief systems. The article features IDEALS researchers and IFYC staff who explain why the findings from the report are important, and how fostering friendships across faiths can open students’ minds to other points of view, skills which they carry with them even after college.

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

Charlayne Hunter-Gault, PBS Special correspondent, sits down with founder and president Eboo Patel to examine how interfaith dialogue can be used to bridge racial divisions.

References

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