

# Case Study: Assessing Interfaith Development Using the Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric

Institutions of higher education are tasked with preparing students for a constantly changing society, marked by issues of globalization, technological advances, and religious and cultural diversity. As a productive response to these changes, colleges and universities can be key agents for identifying the skills needed for interfaith engagement on campus and in the workplace. Co-curricular and extracurricular experiences can provide students the opportunity to develop the knowledgebase and skills that are essential to thriving in an increasingly diverse society. But what are those skills and, more importantly, how can we measure them?

## Overview

To help you navigate this resource, below we have included a title and brief description of each section within this resource.

- **Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric:** This section discusses the history of the Pluralism Rubric and gives an overview of how it is currently constructed.
- **Using the Pluralism Rubric at the University of Southern California—A Case Study in Interfaith Assessment:** The majority of this resource focuses on scholar practitioner, Sable Manson, and her use of the Pluralism Rubric.
  - ▶ **Measuring Interfaith Cooperation:** Explores the scales used to measure interfaith
  - ▶ **Developing Meaningful Assessment Measures & Connecting with Faculty:** Discusses how Sable connected with faculty in a business course.
  - ▶ **Bridging the Curricular to the Experiential:** Explains how Sable worked to create a seamless learning experience that bridged the curricular and co-curricular.
  - ▶ **Applying the Rubric:** Shares how the rubric was used in the course and program.
  - ▶ **Adapting & Aligning the Rubric for Assessment:** Chronicles how the rubric was adjusted to fit programmatic and curricular needs.
- **Case Study Insights:** Important insights gleaned from the case study.
- **Appendix:** Includes two examples of adapted criterion from the Pluralism Rubric

## The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric

Over the past few decades American higher education has placed greater emphasis on providing evidence of student learning.<sup>1</sup> Rubrics are useful tools to document and assess student learning, and in the fall of 2009, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) released [Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education \(VALUE\) Rubrics](#). The VALUE rubrics have been immensely successful in helping over 42,000 individuals from over 2,800 colleges and universities document and assess student learning across multiple domains. However, the rubrics failed to meaningfully engage religion, spirituality, and secularity. Enter the Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric (Pluralism Rubric).

Modeled after the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, the Pluralism Rubric was designed to help faculty and staff measure the dimensions of learning, growth, and engagement across the sometimes nebulous terrains of interfaith literacy and collaboration. The rubric was created by faculty from Wofford College and Elon University in collaboration with Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC). It assesses engagement along two pivotal factors. The first construct is worldview, or “a commitment to a religious, spiritual, or secular tradition that informs an individual’s tenets, values and meaning-making.”<sup>2</sup> The second construct is pluralism, or a “positive engagement with diverse religious, spiritual, and secular worldviews in order to gain understanding of differences.”<sup>3</sup> The rubric has five criteria (or categories): knowledge of own worldview, knowledge of other worldviews, attitudes toward pluralism, interpersonal engagement, and interfaith action and reflection. In each category students can be assessed a numerical value ranging from “0” to “4” (see figure 1). The categories are not hierarchal in nature, but they are interconnected. For example, an individual may have greater knowledge of other worldviews, but have lower attitudes toward pluralism. Using the rubric as an assessment tool is a meaningful way to demonstrate student growth in terms of pluralism and worldview engagement. The following narrative traces the evolution in the use of the Pluralism Rubric by a collaborative team of faculty and staff at the University of Southern California.

## Using the Pluralism Rubric at the University of Southern California: A Case Study in Intefaitth Assessment

**By Sable Manson, Program Director of Souljourners**  
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USC is located in one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world and our student population reflects the growing religious diversity of the United States. Souljourners is an interfaith certificate program in the Office of Religious Life that immerses graduate and undergraduate students in reflective interfaith experiences in their local community. Our office staff likes to say we serve the religious and spiritual needs of students from “A to Z—Atheists to Zoroastrians.” In addition to supporting our specific student religious groups, through religious directors, we also provide interfaith programming to encourage students to engage the religious diversity around them.

While our student leaders are committed to learning more about interfaith, we have found that our traditional programming (e.g. interfaith council, interfaith food fair, speed-faithing etc.) tended to “preach to the choir.” We wanted to find ways to involve the students who did not already come to our offices yet would benefit from learning more about interfaith. We knew developing partnerships with other departments

<sup>1</sup> See Peggy Maki *Assessing for Learning* for a full explanation of accountability and student learning movement in higher education. Declan Kennedy, *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: a Practical Guide* (Cork: University College Cork, 2006),

<sup>2</sup> Definitions taken from directly from the Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric. The resource can be found by visiting <https://www.ifyc.org/resources/pluralism-and-worldview-engagement-rubric>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*



would be critical to accessing new student groups. First, we reached out to the Residential Education department on campus, since we had an established religiously themed housing program. Our office also provided religious and spiritual resources for residential life staff to share with their students. We began designing an interfaith certificate program, targeted at student leaders, which offered students the opportunity to develop the skills needed to thoughtfully engage religious diversity. This included developing resources and selecting experiences that provided students exposure to other faiths and opportunities for personal reflection.

## Measuring Interfaith Cooperation

Since we were designing content for a certificate program, it was essential we identify the skills we sought to develop in our students as well as a method for measuring development. Our research led us to consider the scales related to Students' Religious and Spiritual Qualities<sup>4</sup> and the Pluralism Rubric. We also examined interfaith programming on other campuses to determine how to best approach cultivating students' interfaith skills and proclivities. We found that successful interfaith development programs facilitated meaningful interactions between people of different faiths through sharing personal stories about each other's lived experience. However, students were often initially intimidated by interpersonal engagement across lines of difference. Many co-curricular programs helped students become more comfortable by offering positive and accurate information about other worldviews and opportunities to consider their own worldview or beliefs. These programs helped students develop a knowledgebase, examine their personal experiences, and shift attitudes towards pluralism and interfaith cooperation.

Through our research we recognized that the Pluralism Rubric offered a tool for assessing these crucial components of successful interfaith programming (i.e. knowledge of own worldview, knowledge of other worldview, attitudes towards pluralism, and interpersonal engagement). The Pluralism Rubric also helped our team begin to conceptualize our potential objectives. We knew different students would begin at different points along each criterion so we set as our primary goal the facilitation of students' growth rather than a fixed arrival at the final capstone. We began by examining each criterion's milestone description to understand its unique characteristics and how we envisioned students developing within the framework of that criteria. Then we considered each criterion's applicability within a residential education context. This included creating curriculum for residential training activities, identifying potential interfaith experiences, and selecting the grade and reward structure (i.e. digital badges, certificates). We also began to detail how students might demonstrate development and/or proficiency along each criterion.

## Developing Meaningful Assessment Measures and Connecting with Faculty

Since assessment was a crucial component of our program design we sought additional support from our campus' assessment services. This included presenting our assessment plan at their quarterly campus assessment symposium for faculty and staff. The main goal of the symposium is to receive feedback on the program assessment plan for improvement; it also offered an opportunity to share our work with professionals from other parts of campus that we might not interact with otherwise. One such individual was a faculty member who taught the USC business school's only course on diversity issues. She was intrigued by our program outcomes and recognized that they aligned well with the intentions of her course. She also appreciated our program design because it articulated the program objectives while also providing a clear method of assessment (i.e. scales and rubrics). She shared that while the course she taught focused on diversity in the workplace (e.g. racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation) it lacked depth related to religious diversity, which our program could supplement. Although the initial plan was to create

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<sup>4</sup> Astin, Alexander W, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm. *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

a co-curricular program, the assessment symposium opened up a new opportunity for collaboration across student affairs and academic affairs.

## Bridging the Curricular to the Experiential

In order to leverage the beneficial nature of that meeting, my research assistant and I sought out an additional program partner whom could provide a bridge between the in-class and out-of-class learning experiences around issues of interfaith. We began working with the business faculty for the in-class components. My program, Souljourners, would oversee the out-of-class experiential learning components of the course. Souljourners' goal has always been to provide students with positive and accurate information about religious diversity, opportunities to interact with others across religious difference, and the space to reflect on issues of religion and spirituality.

For this business course, Souljourner program staff worked with students to provide them opportunities to engage and reflect on interfaith issues outside of class. The Pluralism Rubric helped us create thought-provoking written assignments which challenged students to reflect on their prior experiences with other faiths, discuss their own worldviews, and explore their attitudes towards diversity. For example, the criteria for "Knowledge of Own Worldview" and "Knowledge of Other Worldviews" provides a framework for asking students about their own religious or spiritual history. We encouraged them to discuss the different interfaith interactions they had experienced over the course of their childhood. For students who did not grow up in religious households, we asked them to discuss their perceptions of other faith groups. Most importantly, we asked students to discuss any concerns they might have about interacting with individuals from another faith and how comfortable they felt with interfaith engagement. By offering students these prompts at the beginning and end of the course we could provide a direct measure of student growth in these respective areas.

By partnering with an upper level business course, we were able to challenge students to think about faith, religion, and interfaith cooperation in civic and business spaces. We explained that religious diversity within professional spaces was increasing and it would benefit them to develop a greater awareness and aptitude of religious issues. Faculty members discussed current events related to religion in the workplace and how these issues are addressed within different professional contexts. Through discussion, students would explore the practical implications for the workplace. We wanted to reframe religious literacy and interfaith engagement as key professional competencies that will help students advance in an increasingly diverse global marketplace.

To help students understand the impact of religious diversity on their professional development we had each student research a Fortune 500 company's policy on religion in the workplace and discuss the potential implications. This assignment was designed to encourage students to consider the religious and spiritual experiences of others, particularly religious minorities, in the workplace. Students were also asked to discuss how the lessons they learned through their interfaith/intercultural experiences may be applied in a professional situation. Our intention was to demonstrate to students the professional value of interpersonal skills, particularly between different worldviews and identities.

## Applying the Rubric

Starting this course, we wanted to see how students changed over the course of the semester. We used the Pluralism Rubric to design a pre-course test and a post-course test because it provided a helpful scale to measure student knowledge as well as their proclivity toward engaging in interfaith work. Four of the five



criteria detailed in the Pluralism Rubric (i.e., Knowledge of Own Worldview; Knowledge of other Worldviews; Attitudes towards Pluralism; and Interpersonal Engagement) fit well with our desired programmatic and curricular learning outcomes (e.g. increased knowledge of other worldviews). Only “Interfaith Action and Reflection” was excluded from our assessment because we felt this criterion measured students’ actions and experiences beyond their current course and thus beyond our realm of assessment at that time. Using the other four criteria, the Souljourner staff and business faculty designed experiences and reflective assignments that would facilitate the development of these traits and skills.

We used the pre-test to understand students’ experiences and opinions of interfaith prior to their experience with Souljourners and the course. Our reflective written prompts invited students to describe their experiences with individuals from other faiths and utilized the Pluralism Rubric’s criteria of “Knowledge of other Worldview” and “Attitudes towards Pluralism” to assess these assignments.<sup>5</sup> At the close of the semester students completed a post-test, and we were heartened to see that, within the short span of a semester, students were making gains in each of the four areas we assessed using the Pluralism Rubric. It was immensely helpful for us to have documented evidence of how students translated these interfaith skills into professional contexts; it was equally beneficial for students to have a tangible evaluation of what they previously interpreted as soft, capricious, and arbitrary skills.

## Adapting and Aligning the Rubric for Assessment

The Pluralism Rubric is an assessment tool that in many cases can be used right away without modification; however, for this upper-level business course, some adjustments were made. The adjustments were prepared by our collective team, which consisted of three Souljourner staff members and the two faculty members for the business course. This group evaluated the rubric and adapted it to fit course needs. There were multiple rounds of edits and revisions to establish clarity in wording and definitions.<sup>6</sup> The team then applied the rubric to a small subsample of assignments to achieve grading consistency among members. While the Pluralism Rubric provided an established scale for measuring different aspects of interfaith engagement, it also offered the flexibility to be adapted to fit the needs of each reflective assignment. We found that designing the reflective assignments, with the rubric in mind, helped us identify what information we were most interested in capturing. Adapting the rubric also ensured greater alignment between the information we planned to gather and our methods for measurement.

## Lessons Learned from the Souljourners’ Case Study

This case study provides rich insights for assessing student development in interfaith cooperation. Three lessons stand out as especially helpful:

1. Begin with the End in Mind
2. Adjust, Amend, Adapt
3. Start the Conversation

**Begin with the End in Mind:** Understanding what you are measuring at the outset can help you think about where to embed various forms of assessment within the program design. Creating clear interfaith learning outcomes is foundational to quality assessment work. IFYC offers a resource on [creating interfaith learning outcomes](#) based on L. Dee Fink’s taxonomy of learning outcomes. In the Souljourners’ case study, we see that the Pluralism Rubric helped to shape the learning outcomes for the course and created greater alignment between learning objectives and the assessment plan.

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<sup>5</sup> See the Appendix for a sample of writing prompts.

<sup>6</sup> See the Appendix for an example of how criteria were adapted to fit programmatic and curricular needs.

**Adjust, Amend, Adapt:** Assessing interfaith engagement can be difficult. The descriptions of each criterion can be adjusted, amended, and adapted to fit the needs of the assignment or program. Initially, Souljourners was a co-curricular program designed solely to engage students in experiential learning. But working collaboratively with academic partners, the group was able to amend the rubric and expand the criteria of interfaith engagement from a personal experience to a professional competency. Whether you use a portion of the tool or the entire rubric you can adapt it to align with your learning outcomes or program objectives.

**Start the Conversation:** Discussing religion and faith can be difficult in many university settings. Resources, such as the Pluralism Rubric, can help to begin (and at times continue) the important conversations on interfaith engagement. The rubric became the starting point for the Souljourner staff to discuss the intentions of the program; and the rubric also helped broker a relationship with a faculty member around issues of religious diversity. Furthermore, the rubric can be a catalyst for conversations with students about the skills they want to develop or a tool to help colleagues and administrators discuss departmental/institutional goals. Even if the conversations and initiatives ultimately deviate from the specifics of the resource itself, the Pluralism Rubric can be a needed spur for encouraging greater interfaith engagement.



## Appendix

### Example 1: Adapting Knowledge of Own Worldview Criterion

Original Criterion: Knowledge of Own Worldview				
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
<b>Knowledge of Own Worldview</b>	Situates own evolving worldview within a pluralistic context	Reflects upon and clarifies own worldview in pluralistic context	Recognizes own worldview within the context of external processes (e.g. personal history and social norms) and how processes shape life choices	Articulates personal worldview and how it impacts own life

Souljourners' Adapted Criterion: Knowledge of Own Worldview				
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
<b>Adapted Knowledge of Own Worldview</b>	Situates own <b>evolving</b> worldview within a pluralistic context  <b><i>Understands and can communicate the internal/external factors which influence different worldviews</i></b>	Reflects upon and clarifies own worldview in pluralistic context  <b><i>Demonstrates an understanding of other worldviews through the respectful acknowledgement of similarities and differences</i></b>	Recognizes own worldview within the context of external processes (e.g. personal history and social norms) and how processes shape life choices  <b><i>Discusses</i></b> how personal history and social norms shape his/her worldview and life choices	Articulates personal worldview <b><i>by providing some definition and/or detail</i></b>

### Sample Reflection Questions

- As much as you feel comfortable, describe how you religiously and/or spirituality identify and how you expect the experiences in Souljourners to develop this identity.
- If you do not feel you have a religious or spiritual identity or are still exploring, discuss how you find meaning and purpose AND how you expect Souljourners to develop this approach. Example 1: Adapting Knowledge of Own Worldview Criterion

## Example 2: Adapting Interpersonal Engagement

Original Criterion: Interpersonal Engagement				
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Interpersonal Engagement	Adept at interfaith dialogue among diverse participants. Able to navigate differences among participants to foster pluralistic ethos	Thoughtful about asking and responding to questions to deepen understanding when conversing with those of different worldviews	Sensitive to those who hold other worldviews while learning to navigate reactions of self and others	Somewhat self-aware and empathetic when discussing own views with those who hold different views

Souljourners' Adapted Criterion: Interpersonal Engagement				
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Adapted Interpersonal Engagement	<p><b>Demonstrate a proclivity</b> towards Interfaith dialogue among diverse participants. Able to communicate the <b>potential differences among classmate/future colleagues</b></p> <p>Communicates an interest in fostering pluralistic ethos <b>in future work setting</b></p>	<p>Thoughtful about asking, responding, engaging religious diversity <b>in professional settings</b>. Willing to question and deepen their understanding of classmates/colleagues</p> <p>Expresses interest in conversing with those of different worldviews, sharing their own views <b>in the future</b></p>	<p>Sensitive to those who hold other worldviews <b>in professional settings</b></p> <p><b>Demonstrates learning</b> related to navigating interactions with others <b>while communicating own worldview</b></p>	<p>Somewhat self-aware and empathetic when discussing own views with those who hold different views <b>in professional settings</b></p> <p><b>At minimum, recognizes others will have different worldviews</b></p>

### Sample Reflection Question

- How have your experiences in Souljourners influenced your knowledge of business communication in regard to religious diversity, identity, or expression? Example 1: Adapting Knowledge of Own Worldview Criterion

Figure 1

Original Criterion: Knowledge of Own Worldview				
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
<b>Knowledge of Own Worldview</b>	Situates own evolving worldview within a pluralistic context	Reflects upon and clarifies own worldview in pluralistic context	Recognizes own worldview within the context of external processes (e.g. personal history and social norms) and how processes shape life choices	Articulates personal worldview and how it impacts own life
<b>Interpersonal Engagement</b>	Adept at interfaith dialogue among diverse participants. Able to navigate differences among participants to foster pluralistic ethos	Thoughtful about asking and responding to questions to deepen understanding when conversing with those of different worldviews	Sensitive to those who hold other worldviews while learning to navigate reactions of self and others	Somewhat self-aware and empathetic when discussing own views with those who hold different views

