Religion & Spirituality at PSU: The Student Experience

Dianna Foulke & Jill Townley
Learning Outcomes

We hope that by participating in this session, you will:

- Gain an awareness of the religious/spiritual student population on campus
- Gain a better understanding of the unique experience had by the religious/spiritual student population on campus
- Learn new ways to better support religious/spiritual students in and outside of the classroom
Spiritual Life Assessment Action Team

- Formed through the Committee on International Student Recruitment and Retention (CIRR)
  - Comprised of members from SALP and ISL
- To address needs for religious space and accommodations voiced by international students
- Initiative broadened to include domestic and international students within the religious/spiritual minority on campus
- Goal was to gauge current campus climate, resources for religious/spiritual development and support, and needs including space and programming
Student Panel

- Introductions and share why your faith is important to you and how it integrates into your life.
- Please tell us about a time that you felt comfortable sharing your religious identity/beliefs. Where were you? What was the context? What do you think made you feel comfortable to share?
- Please tell us about a time that you did not feel comfortable sharing/practicing your religious identity/beliefs. Where were you? What was the context? Why didn’t you feel comfortable sharing?
- How can faculty and staff better support students from your religious/spiritual background and/or religion/spirituality on campus as whole?
Survey

● Created by action team
● 4 sections:
  ○ Campus Climate
  ○ Resources & Programming
  ○ Space on campus
  ○ Demographics
● Distribution: January-March
  ○ All international students
  ○ All students affiliated with religious/spiritual student organizations through SALP
  ○ Available at March “Interfaith Fair” event
● 100 Responses
Demographics

Religious, nonreligious, or spiritual perspective

- Muslim: 55%
- Hindu: 10%
- Christian: 23%
- Buddhist: 8%
- Other Responses Secular Humanist: 13%
- Agnostic, Atheist: 9%

Education Level

- Undergraduate: 61%
- Graduate: 33%
- Post Baccalaureate: 1%
- Doctoral: 5%

Citizenship Status

- U.S. Citizen: 70%
- U.S. Permanent Resident: 20%
- International Student: 8%
- Other: 2%
Campus Climate and Resources

- **58%** agreed that Portland State encourages and supports the expression and practice of their religion/ spirituality.
  - International students had a more favorable view with 68% agreeing versus 45% of domestic students agreeing.

- **Over 60%** agreed that Portland State is a safe community for all religious/ spiritual beliefs and practices and also feel comfortable expressing their religious/ spiritual beliefs on campus.

- **Only 38%** thought that Portland State provides adequate resources and accommodation for their religious/ spiritual needs.

- **56%** said they have had the opportunity to engage in conversations/ activities/ events with people from differing religious/ spiritual backgrounds.
  - 57% said that they are interested in engaging in conversations/ activities/ events with people from differing religious/ spiritual backgrounds.
Physical Space and Programming

- 36% indicated that there was adequate physical space on campus to practice their religion/spirituality.
- 59% of survey respondents indicated they would use a Spiritual Life Center or similar space on campus at least one per month.
- 63% of respondents indicated that they had never used the Quiet Prayer and Meditation Lounge on campus.
  - The top reasons were that they did not know about it or they did not need it.
- Students were most likely to attend Interfaith programming in small group discussions, panel discussions, and workshops.
Qualitative Themes

- The need for religion/spirituality to be included in diversity conversations and initiatives by the institution and leadership to encourage a more inclusive campus climate.

"Religion and spirituality are kept completely invisible on this campus."

“I feel like PSU more encourages people to be open minded in general, but it doesn’t really necessarily support your worldviews or religion.”
Qualitative Themes

- Training for faculty and staff on best practices for supporting students in the religious/spiritual population as well as managing classroom conversations.

“There has to be more action from PSU and awareness training on how to be an ally to Muslim and Middle Eastern students.”

“PSU as a whole has not been supportive and professors often speak directly at odds with my faith background without care or understanding and many other students have immediate negative views of my faith due to extremists groups.”
Qualitative Themes

- Resources including physical space, staff, and programming dedicated toward supporting spiritual life.

“I wish for a special place for religious students to freely discuss their beliefs or pray. PSU as an institution also doesn’t hold enough religious events.”

“I suggest that we have a religious center with representative from all religions in campus to accommodate the minimum needs for students and guarantee they have the necessary space and resources.”
Ongoing Efforts

- Advocacy for Religion/Spirituality to be included in institutional conversations and efforts to support PSU’s diverse student body
- Compiled survey results and made recommendation to Diversity Action Council to be shared with University leadership
- “Building Bridges” Interfaith Event Series
- Culturally Responsive Symposium Session
- Prayer and Meditation Spaces
3 Minute Sharing

With 1 - 2 other people, please briefly share the following:

1) Name and affiliation to PSU
2) Spiritual/religious (or non-religious) background of your family
3) Are you connected with a particular spirituality or religion now?

Goal is to briefly share your past and present spiritual/religious connections without judgement or disclaimers.
Final Thoughts:

Amplify the stories/needs/concerns of students of faith on the PSU campus

Build a PSU culture that encourages interfaith conversations
Questions?

Dianna Foulke: dafoulke@pdx.edu
Jill Townley: townlej@pdx.edu

Student Group Contact Information:

Muslim Student Association: msapsu@pdx.edu
Great Prophet Mohammed Group: gprophet@pdx.edu
Ratio Christi: rcpsu@pdx.edu
Jewish Student Union: jstu@pdx.edu