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Hidden Amongst the Crowd: Experiences of Students from Underrepresented Religions and Denominations

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HIDDEN AMONGST THE CROWD: EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED RELIGIONS AND DENOMINATIONS

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Why this project?
 - Experience working at the Jay Phillips Center
 - Campus-wide emphasis on fostering inclusivity
 - Connecting campus experiences with broader research
Mahaffey and Smith (2009)

LITERATURE REVIEW

- The diversity conversation largely excludes religion
- Religion a key part of identity development and social belonging
- Students from underrepresented religions face barriers to inclusion on college campuses
- Lack of religious inclusion is related to
 - Higher attrition
 - Reduced academic success
 - Feelings of marginalization

CAMPUS CONTEXT



REPRESENTATIVENESS COMPARED TO STATE DATA

- 51% Catholic
 - 10.7% Lutheran
 - 15% No affiliation
 - 19% other forms of Christianity (including Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist and non-denominational).
 - 0.44% Buddhist
 - 0.3% Muslim
 - 0.08% Jewish
 - 0.73% Other (non-Christian)
- 22% Catholic
 - 20% Lutheran
 - 20% Unaffiliated
 - <35% other Christian
 - <1% Buddhist
 - 1% Muslim
 - 1% Jewish
 - <3% other non-Christians

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To understand students' lived experiences of religion
- To analyze the academic, social, economic, and institutional factors that shape these experiences
- To provide the research findings to the institutions so that they might guide more inclusive practices

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Designing the project to continue on
 - Sought funding: Mellon Grant 2019-2021
 - Setting up an advisory board so findings can guide institutional programming

SAMPLE & METHODS

- Semi-structured interviews (March 2019 – May 2020)
- Students - purposive sampling
 - N=24 students from underrepresented religions and denominations
 - N=24 Catholic students
 - Saturation could be achieved with as few as 12 participants per group (Guest et al., 2006)
- Key informant interviews (campus ministries, interfaith center, intercultural office)
- Qualitative data analysis

RESEARCH TOPICS

- I. Religious identity and practice
 - I. Evolution of religious identity and practice since starting college
 - II. How the schools' religious identity shapes identity and practice
 - III. Access to needed religious resources
 - IV. Intersection with other parts of identity
- II. Experience with the theology requirement and other academic contexts
- III. Attitudes towards religious inclusivity

RESULTS

7 in-depth semi-structured interviews

Participants identifications include:

- Catholic – but more spiritual than religious,
- On the agnostic-atheist spectrum,
- Pentecostal Christian
- Orthodox Christian
- Christian Quaker
- Muslim

THEMES: CATHOLIC IDENTITY OF CSB/SJU

The Catholic identity of the schools played little to no role in the majority of the interviewee's decisions to come to CSB/SJU

- “One of the main reasons I have decided to come to CSB/SJU was because of the financial package, because coming from a very poor family, this felt like a suitable choice. Another thing ... was because... it was a small school.”
- “Mainly, because I grew up [on the East Coast], I wanted a different experience... Also, I got a really good financial aid package and that was really important in my decision”
- “I would say money for sure...[the catholic identity of the school] it was not even [a factor]”
- “Location, finances and... academics; I just... I had a good tour experience... [the catholic identity of the school was] not especially [something that influenced my decision to come here]. I know that for my parents, who brought me on tours, it was rather important for them, shall we say, that there was a church nearby that I could attend.”

THEMES: RESOURCES

“As someone who has the ability to go to a service of my religious group, I feel providing opportunities, whether that be bussing to a St. Cloud mosque or providing other religious groups the facilities of the chapel, so that they can have their Mass services, I know we are now doing the protestant Mass maybe expanding that to a Jewish or Lutheran service depending on how many students we have of those denominations... but just being able to have those spaces... if there needs to be a prayer room on camps that is not in the church because people don't necessarily want to go to a church that is not with their religious group...”

Did you know that CSB Campus ministry has a non-denominational reflection room that is open to all religions?

“I may or may not have known that... They may have put out a notice, I vaguely remember, when they first made the room but it is not something they really publicize and I feel like considering the fact that every week, I get an email saying what Mass times are as if from one week to the next I should expected a different time unless it is super bowl Sunday, they could include that in their weekly Mass emails, in a very noticeable place.

THEMES: RESOURCES

“The interfaith center has never reached out to me personally, asking me to join them. You haven’t created a space for me, I wasn’t asked to join anything, saying we want to be a resource to you... I am a human, work in [progress] type of being, I want to start praying but I don’t have the resources to help me... at this point I don’t know how many more Muslim people are going to come in ...Just like we made AIM, and there is a first gen club... why can’t there be an interfaith student development organization? Because if you are just going to be there to put on events, I don’t need events, I need actual development. If you are not providing me with resources, what am I coming to you for? I can’t just come to every... interfaith dialogue, I have that almost every day... I interact with people that are not my same faith every day. That is not really beneficial to me, it is beneficial for these white people who don’t know [about other faiths]”

THEMES: RESOURCES

“There is some difference between having people here and catering to their needs... It is hard for me to say should there be bussing every week because for Christians, everybody goes to church on Saturday or Sunday, our major day of the week is Friday and there is classes on Friday. So how does it look for me to say yeah you should have bussing for me to go pray when I have classes... That is why I would suggest just doing it on major holidays and then prayers on our major holidays are in the morning, as in 6 am so honestly, it wouldn't even interfere with class time. You would come back in time for class.”

THEMES: FOOD ACCESSIBILITY

“Fasting, you know, I can’t eat anything from sun up to sun set and odds are the dining room is closed by the time I can eat so if I am a first year or second year student, how am I gonna access to food? And because fasting Ramadan is based on the lunar and it is not just based on the regular calendar, I think it moves up a month every year or every two months every year or something like that, it is different every year. Ramadan starts finals week this year.” – Muslim Student

“My [religious practice] has definitely been affected... the [main] one is fasting, I just don’t think there is enough food, enough kinds of foods to eat, that I like to fast so I haven’t fasted ever since I came here...[the fasting rules include] not eating dairy products, no meat, no milk, no eggs, nothing like that for fifty five days [during lent], which if I was back home it would be easy to do because there is just all kinds of food I can eat and like. But coming here I am very restricted in what I can eat and the food I can eat” – Orthodox Christian Student

THEMES: FOOD ACCESSIBILITY

“Typically, my branch, we are not supposed to eat beef or chicken, that is just something we are not supposed consume, and plus I came to that as well, where I don’t want eat them because the animal cruelty and stuff like that is something that holds my beliefs strong, I am not eating that. The refectory and then sexton, there is not many choices on being, those other options besides a salad. Because that is basically what people typically think if you are choosing not to eat of chicken. Oh yeah, we are just going to replace with a tossed salad or something like that. I identify as a pescatarian, so I only eat fish meat and that is only offered an x amount of times and there is not many options to typically choose from... Yes, definitely [if affects my ability to get adequate nutrition]. You are getting your protein from the fish but if they are not serving anything remote close to fish that day, you are kind of stuck, I don’t know, the pasta, things they necessarily call vegetarian so how am I going to need my protein today or the other nutrients that I typically need?... [Ideally] I would like an incorporation of a vegetarian bar or more towards your pescatarians, vegetarians and vegans because I am pretty sure there are many faiths and cultures that don’t eat meat.” -Quaker Christian Student

CONCLUSION

The path forward is nuanced, complex and far from straightforward but goal is clear are rooted in existing traditions.

- “You gotta learn how to adjust and still incorporate those same [Benedictine] values. If you wanna preach community make community available for those in your community... If you want to be hospitable be hospitable to them and know where they come from.”

Thank you