

Tending the Spiritual Lives of Students: Is It Possible?

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10:30 Introductions & brief overview

Session outcomes: participants will:

1. Learn new findings about the spiritual development of students published in the last ten years.
2. Consider common obstacles or concerns about engaging in the spiritual development of college students.
3. Share strategies for creating safe environments around spirituality.

10:40 Controversial statements & discussion

Participants will discuss the extent to which they agree with each of the following statements:

1. Student affairs professionals should not share their own spiritual beliefs with students on campus.
2. Spiritual struggle results in greater acceptance of diverse world views.
3. At non-religious universities, an emphasis on students' spiritual development should be less than on other aspects of their development.

10:50 Definition of spirituality and faith

Presenters will suggest the following definitions of spirituality for purpose of this session:

Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious belief, parochially understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience. Faith is a broad, generic human phenomenon. To be human is to dwell in faith, to dwell in the sense one makes out of life—what seems ultimately true and dependable about self, world, and cosmos (whether that meaning be strong or fragile, expressed in religious or secular terms). This way of understanding the nature of faith has value for secular and religious folk alike. It addresses our culture's current hunger for a shared language about things "spiritual" (Parks, 2000, p. 7).

Spirituality points to our inner, subjective life, as contrasted with the objective domain of observable behavior and material objects that we can point to and measure directly. Spirituality also involves our affective experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, p. 4, 2010).

Religiousness typically involves membership in some kind of community of fellow believers and practitioners, as well as participation in ceremonies or rituals (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, p. 5, 2010).

11:00 Literature overview & quotes

Voices of Students:

People have a lot of questions about the veil. They probably think that you're from one of those Islamic countries which has all these oppressed women. But I don't think they know a lot about why it's done or the rationale behind it; or that there is a philosophy and that it's not necessarily oppression (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003, p. 57).

Some people don't know how to react, so they wait to see how other people are going to react and then join along with them. So, if a couple of people start laughing, then they all start laughing. Or people just stare and they don't have anything to say. You get mixed reactions. It depends on what kind of crowd, what kind of audience is there. It kind of made me really, really shy. I don't even want to know how they are going to respond most of the time (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003, p. 58).

You usually don't hang out with people that much. Because you're afraid of being rejected. . . . I think the main thing is you just feel left out. You feel different. . . . Just three months ago, I stopped wearing the scarf because I was just tired of being isolated. Tired of not being able to hang out and I was the only one in the dorm that covered. (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003, p. 61)

Whenever I met someone, I always felt that they had already formed an opinion of me. And that is what happened most of the time. And I felt that I just couldn't even talk about veiling or Islam after that or kind of clarify some of the things that they thought. And whenever I did speak, I knew that I was immediately just being labeled as a fanatic, as a fundamentalist. No one was even willing to really hear me out. (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003, p. 61)

I feel like there's a strong wall that is put up when anything Christian is discussed. I was reading the newspaper on campus. It seems like they are a lot more open to other religions. But, if it comes to Christianity, it's like, "Oh no. We are not going to

deal with that. That's not going to be a part of what we are doing." (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007, p. 29)

You can have a class where other religious identities are talked about. People talk about Eastern religions or even tribal religions. And they are talked about with respect. But Christianity is made fun of. I would say that it's kind of the popular thing to be antagonistic towards Christianity in class (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007, p. 30).

11:30 Case studies (1-2) & discussion

Seema Case Study

Seema is a 20 year-old sophomore on campus at a large public university, who chooses to veil. You are a Associate Director for the Office of Multiculturalism. You have noticed Seema attend some of the programs put on by your office, but she always seems to be in the background, never really joining in the activities or talking to anyone. One day as you are walking across campus you see Seema, she seems deep in thought and somewhat disturbed. You introduce yourself and ask her if there is anything she would like to talk about. She says no, but you let her know where she can find you in case she changes her mind. Later that week, Seema comes into your office wanting to talk. She says that she feels isolated and alienated on campus. She complains that the majority of students do not engage her in conversation and recently her efforts to find a job on-campus have not turned up anything. She has been thinking about not wearing her veil and asks your opinion. What do you think might be going on with Seema? What do you do?

Natasha Case Study

Natasha is a 1st generation Native American junior on campus of a large private institution. She has just transferred as a Biology major, hoping to one day to work in the medical field. You are the Associate Director of Student Life. Natasha's RA, Bethanny, has

approached you concerned about Natasha's distant behavior. Natasha, being the oldest on her floor, does not seem to interact with anyone, usually only leaving her room to go to classes and eat dinner. Bethanny has been proactive in trying to get her to come to hall events and outings, but Natasha simply says no. Bethanny is concerned that there might be more to this than meets the eye and asks what to do.

You have talked to Natasha and it has come up that she is having some difficulties with some of her professors, one in particular. She is taking a history class, during which the professor presents American history with no mention of native peoples or the way the westward movement affected them. On top of this, her grandmother recently passed away and she has to go home to participate in the burial rituals. She has tried to explain to her professor that she will not be in class for the week, but her professor has said if she doesn't show up, she will not pass his class.

What are the issues of this case study?

How might you support Natasha's spirituality?

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Resources

<http://spirituality.ucla.edu/>

This website shares the findings of UCLA's seven year study on the role that college plays in the spiritual development of students. The study discusses the ten spiritual and religious measures that individuals used to describe their spirituality.

<http://spirituality.ucla.edu/publications/promising-practices/default.php>

A PDF version of the guidebook that came out of UCLA's study on spirituality. It outlines initiatives and practices that institutions around the country are utilizing to facilitate the spiritual development of students, and discusses the role of campus personnel in facilitating students' spiritual development.

<http://www.beloit.edu/slp/>

Beloit College, a 4-year private university in Wisconsin encourages students of all faiths to share their beliefs on campus and encourages spiritual exploration. Programs include:

Spirit Fest – an orientation to spiritual and religious clubs and organizations on campus, includes representatives from local faith communities, and introduces students to upcoming activities and spiritual life sponsored events.

A Place at the Table – weekly small group sessions where students can discuss their own faith and engage with others who do not share it.

What Matters to Me and Why (WMMW) – an informal monthly conversation during lunch hour highlights a student or faculty member to share their experiences and discuss their beliefs with others.

<http://www.gellercenter.org/home>

Colorado State University – Fort Collins, a 4-year public university in Colorado developed the Geller Center for Spirituality which encourages students to explore their spirituality and answer difficult questions. The program includes weekly meditations meetings, free-form dancing, and for-credit workshop courses.

<http://bronfmancenter.org/spirituality-project-nyu>

New York University a 4-year private university in New York developed the Spirituality Project that explores different faith traditions and encourages mindfulness to connect spiritually. Programming includes guest lectures, sitting meditations, and collaboration with the health Center at NYU.