## Leadership Practices for Interfaith Excellence in Higher Education

The RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS of higher education are changing rapidly. College campuses have become prime sites for conflicts involving religious identity. Many such stories have made national news—polarizing debates about Israel/Palestine, frustration by campus religious groups regarding "all comers" policies, the emergence of a strand of atheism that is overtly hostile to

and Los Angeles. The student body includes members of the local Somali Muslim, Hmong, and Native American communities; students of color constitute 30 percent of the student body, and Lutherans only 20 percent.

Such dynamics are only one dimension of what Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen call "pluriform religion" in their recent book, No *Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*. They claim that the era in which religion was privatized

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diversity on campuses, the embrace of multiculturalism by higher education more broadly, and the visibility of religious controversy in global politics has made the proactive and positive engagement of interfaith issues a necessity. The Jacobsens explain that "paying attention to religion in higher education today is not at all a matter of imposing faith or morality on anyone; it is a matter of responding intelligently to the questions of life that students find themselves necessarily asking as they try to make sense ofresponsibility."3Few issues touch more broadly or more deeply on complexity, diversity, and change in the twenty-first-century world than those related to how people who orient differently around religion interact with one another. Interfaith cooperation in higher education thus ought not to be the pet project of a handful of colleagues who attend niche gatherings; rather, as the Jacobsens argue, it is one of the keys to fulfilling higher education's mission as a social institution that nurtures leaders and enriches a diverse body politic. Given these stakes, knowing what leads to excellent campus-based inter-



Higher education is well equipped to take on this charge. America's college campuses have long set the educational and civic agenda for the nation on issues such as multiculturalism, volunteerism, and environmentalism. College campuses are social laboratories where a range of interfaith strategies can be tested; faculty can help create the necessary knowledge base to support and guide interfaith engagement, and higher education can make it a priority to nurture interfaith leaders, much as it has done with multicultural leaders. Of course, many college campuses have been doing some version of this on an ad hoc basis for many years. Chaplains and deans of religious life have worked to accommodate the spiritual needs of Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, humanist, and other minority traditions. Students have launched interfaith clubs and councils. Courses focusing

Eboo Patel, AAC&U Annual Meeting have had experience with interfaith cooperation

public space was necessary if they were to be honest about meeting the needs of their student body. Therefore, Utah Valley's president, himself a member of the LDS church, approved a new wellness building on the condition that it include a space that would be open to students of all faith traditions. This interfaith reflection center demonstrates the university's commitment to respecting and accommodating the full array of students' religious identities.

5. Making interfaith cooperation an academic priority.

Higher education movements lack "legs" if students are not committed or invested

visits to sacred spaces and faith-based spring break service trips, and provide guidance and advising to Elizabethtown's service-focused "Better Together" interfaith student group. In addition, Elizabethtown students may be selected as undergraduate fellows in ethical leadership, a program that emphasizes interfaith leadership. The fellows focus on networking, integrating life and work, and reflecting on experiences such as internships and volunteer service. Through these efforts, Elizabethtown is leveraging community relationships in order to help students take their interfaith leadership into "real life."

9. Assessing campus climates and interfaith initiatives. Interfaith cooperation is a relatively new phenomenon and, accordingly, intentional

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