

Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs

Kathleen M. Goodman, Mary Ellen Giess, and Eboo Patel, *editors*

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2019

(xiv + 318 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-609-7, \$35.00)

Reviewed By

Liora Gubkin

*California State University,
Bakersfield*

Interfaith studies as an academic field overlaps both religious studies and theology. With a decade of support from Interfaith Youth Core, this field strives to transform students into interfaith leaders with the capacity for “engaging religious diversity to ameliorate tensions or respond to discrimination as well as to build a healthy, thriving civic space” (159). *Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs* brings together twenty-nine contributors to provide a resource for student affairs professionals and the faculty who educate them.

The book is organized into five parts, beginning with setting the context (three chapters) and ending with foundational knowledge about various worldviews and traditions (five chapters). In between are chapters on “Teaching Ideas for Student Affairs Faculty” (three chapters); “Strategies and Activities for Student Affairs Practitioners” (three chapters); and “Using Case Studies to Engage with Religious Diversity and Build Interfaith Leadership” (five chapters).

The book is filled with practical resources to support student affairs faculty and staff who want to engage religious diversity. Part Two provides detailed examples of courses, lessons, and activities for integrating religious diversity material into already-established student affairs curriculum or for creating stand-alone student affairs graduate courses focused on worldview diversity. Part Three showcases successful programs including two chapters with brief write-ups submitted by faculty and staff from universities throughout the country. Part Four includes a helpful opening chapter on pedagogical considerations and multiple case studies.

Parts One and Five bookend the practical resources. Some may consider it odd to place “Foundational Knowledge,” which contains basic information about several identity worldviews students may bring to campus, at the end of the book. This organizational choice helps undercut the misperception that one must be an expert on a religion before one can engage in religious diversity education. Furthermore, each chapter in Part Five is limited to focus on what a student affairs professional should know to support students. The authors attend to diversity within traditions and the likely numerical and cultural minority status of non-Christian students who are developing their adult identities.

In “Social Justice and Interfaith Cooperation,” Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer examine two approaches to engaging religious diversity. Somewhat controversial for some, they argue for focusing on religious pluralism rather than social justice to build interfaith cooperation. Patel and Meyer acknowledge there is a risk when educators attend primarily to the complexities of students’ multifaceted identities without a focus on power dynamics and relative privilege, but they assert the benefit of building relationships across difference is worth the risk. Regardless of where one stands on the issue, this chapter is worth reading for its careful posing of the challenges one faces when religious identities and social justice commitments appear to be in conflict.

Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs is a valuable resource for Interfaith Leadership education. The wealth of concrete examples and the extensive reference sections that conclude many of the chapters make this an important resource for student affairs professionals and any other educator interested in cultivating Interfaith Leadership on college campuses.