



Disrupting Religious Privilege on Campus

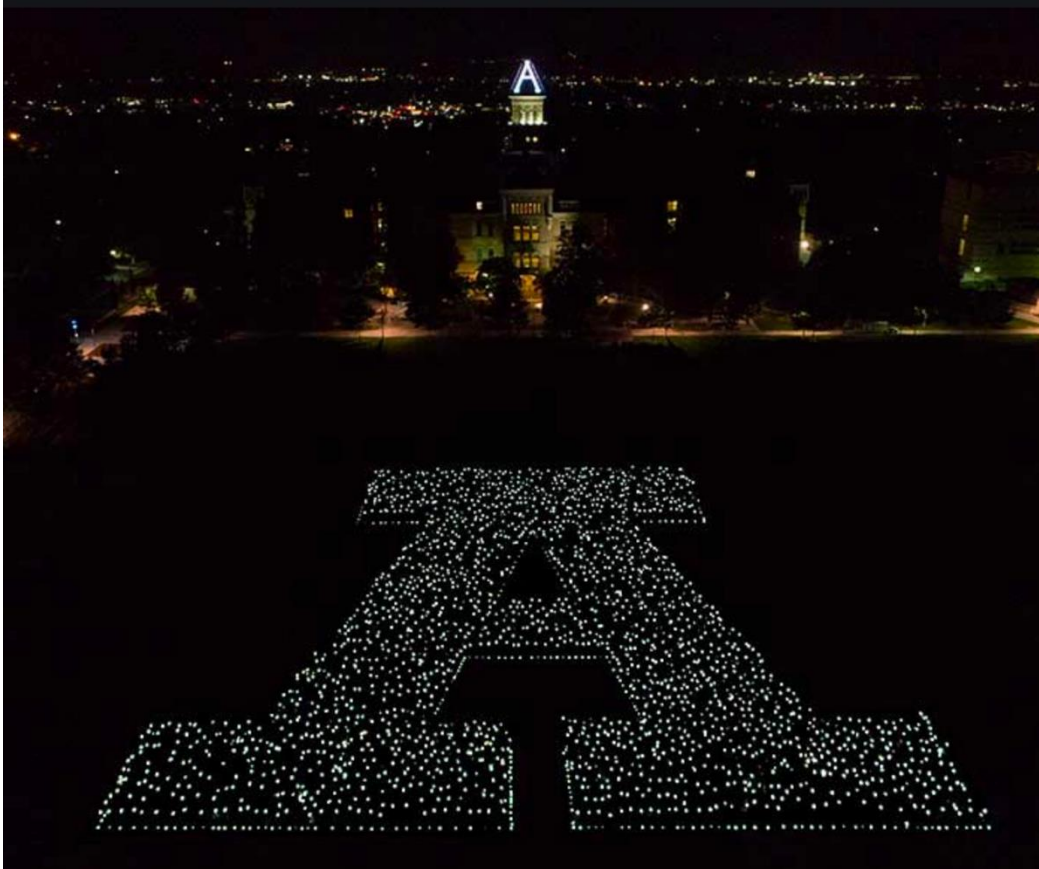
Challenges, Achievements, Next Steps

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Luminary: 2019



How welcoming IS this Aggie family...

...what are our particular challenges?

...what can make USU a more welcoming place for all?

“...what I want you to remember is you are not alone in this journey, you are part now of our Aggie Family” (1)

(President Noelle Cockett, Aug 23, 2019)



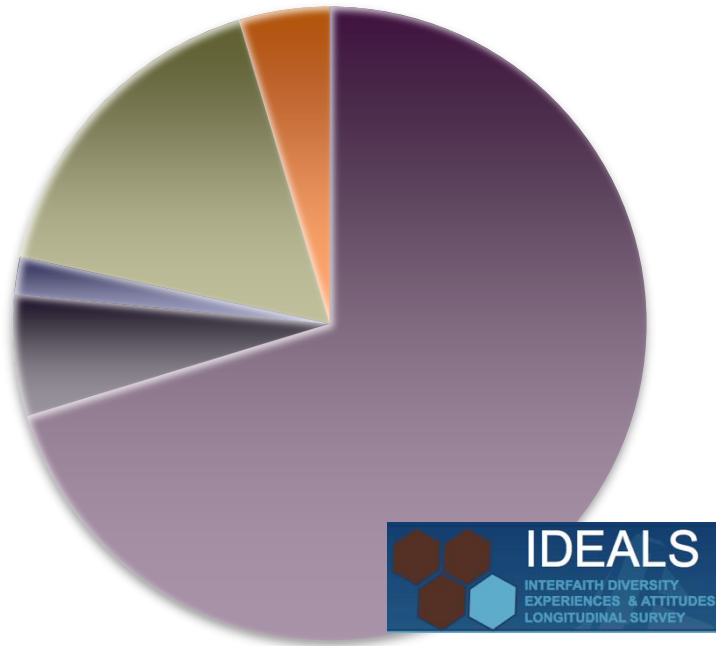
Per USU office of AAA (2)

Public/land-grant university

- ~24k students
- ~13k on main campus

All 50 states/68 countries

- ~83% White
- ~75% Utah resident students
- ~70% LDS student body



- LDS/Mormon (70.3)
- Other Christian (6.2)
- Other religious (1.9)*
- Not religious (17.0)**
- All other (4.6)***



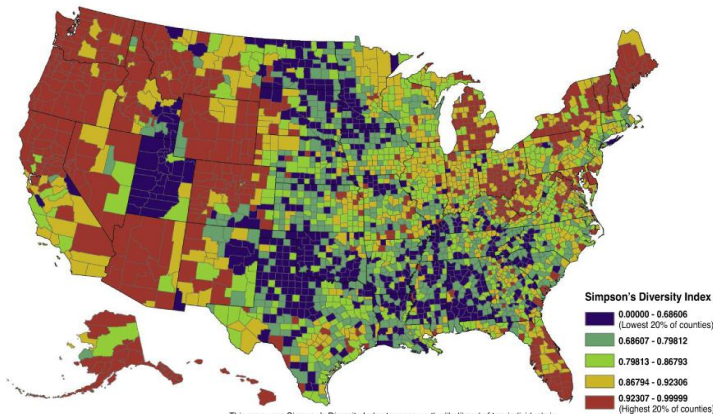
* Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish ** Agnostic, Atheist, Non-religious, None

*** Spiritual, Pagan, Another world view (3)



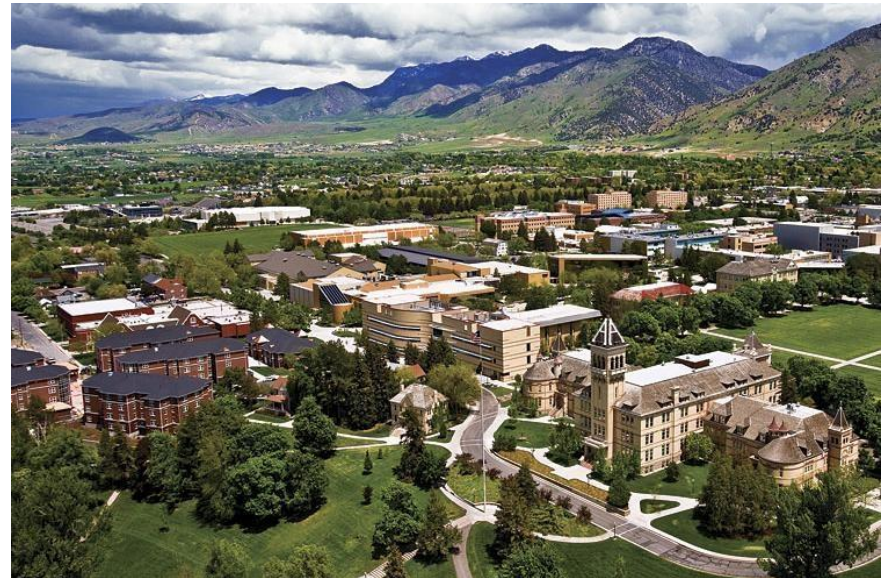


Religious Diversity in the United States, 2010



This map uses Simpson's Diversity Index to measure the likelihood of two individuals in the same county belonging to different religious groups based on the following groupings: Latter-day Saints, Catholic, Protestant, Other Christian (primarily Orthodox Christian churches), Islam, Jewish, or Other Religions. The high proportion of Protestants in the central states and the high proportion of Latter-day Saints in the mountain west create areas of low religious diversity. Greater diversity is found where many groups are at least moderately large, such as in many western states or northern New England.

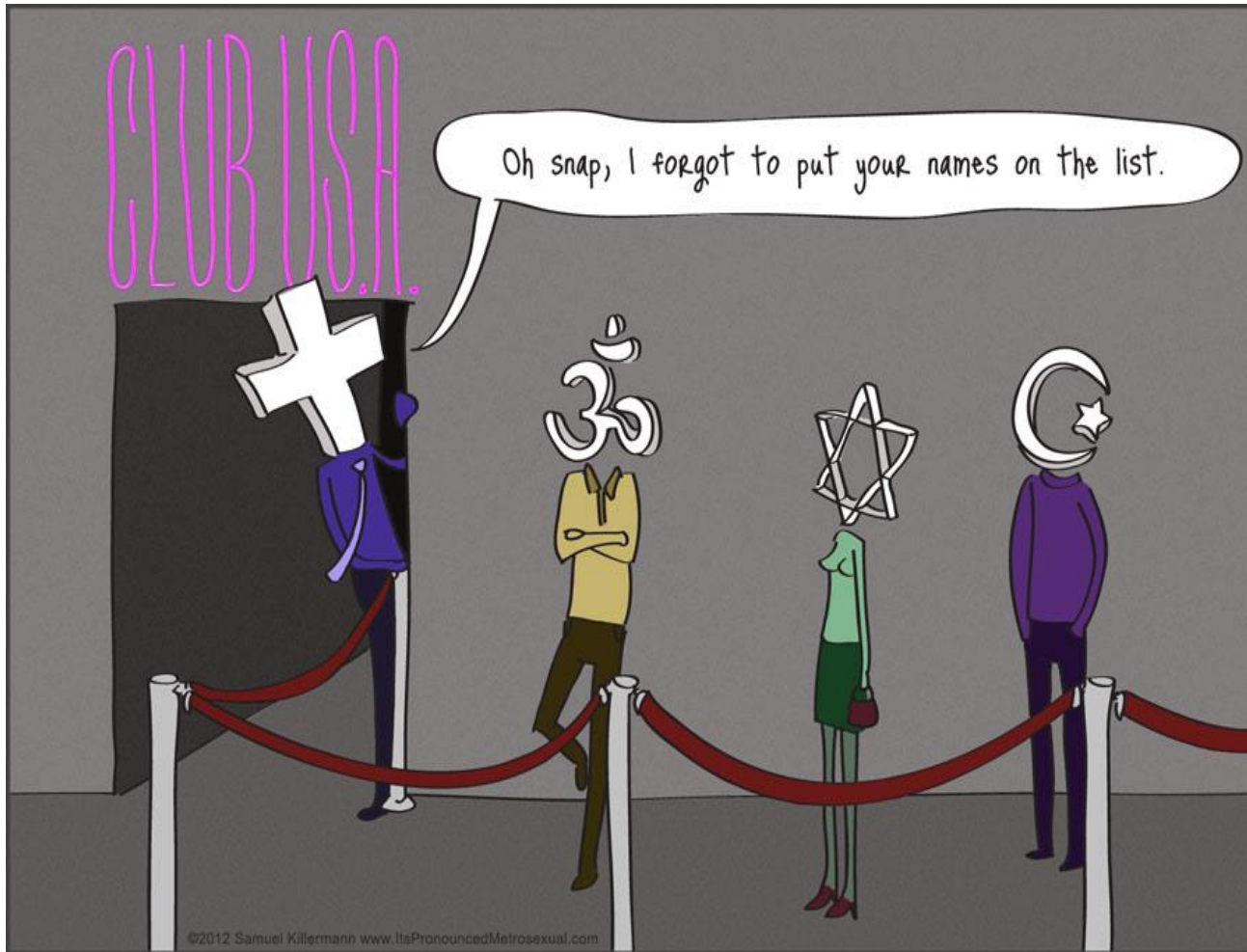
© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2012
Created by Research Services using ESRI ArcMap 10.0



Utah is one of the most religiously homogenous states in the U.S. LDS faith is prominent on campus. In 2016, 6800 (~50% of on-campus students) were also enrolled in LDS Institute classes. Institute enrollments were the largest in the state. (4)



The Problem of Privilege*



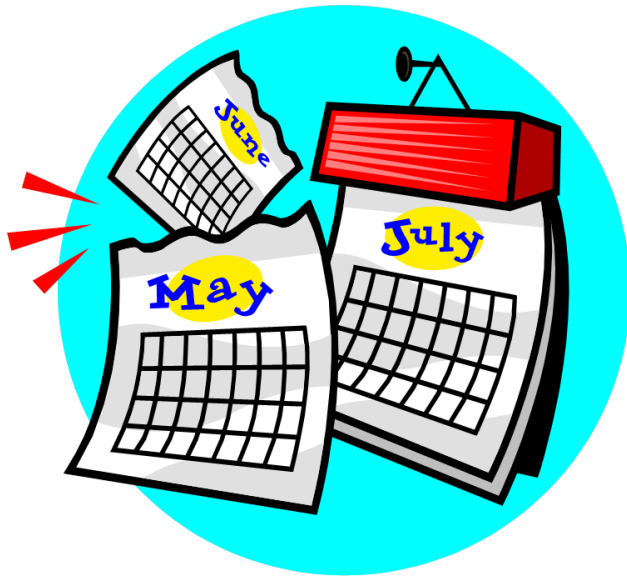
* Unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it. (<https://nccj.org/what-privilege>)

Please remain standing if...

- You know more than 30 people here at USU (or in Cache Valley) who share your particular religious/non-religious orientation
- It is easy to enroll your children in nearby private educational institutions that reflect your orientation
- Civic celebrations/rituals you attend often make reference to your orientation
- Most of the politicians who represent you share your orientation to religion and if you take an oath, you are offered a text reflecting your orientation on which to swear
- You can easily find foods, greeting cards, religious texts, clothing, etc., that affirm your orientation
- Your roommates or neighbors quite knowledgeable and quite positive about the core doctrines, ethics, values associated with your religious (or non-religious) orientation
- You don't often get singled out as "my one _____ friend" and you don't have to worry about being a good ambassador for those of your religious/non-religious orientation if someone cuts you off in traffic
- Holidays you observe are also observed by local businesses
- A bumper sticker supporting your orientation will not lead to your car being vandalized
- You feel quite confident that you can express or practice your orientation without being mocked or misunderstood
- In the last month, you have felt confident that your children won't be bullied or physically harmed because of your family's orientation to religion



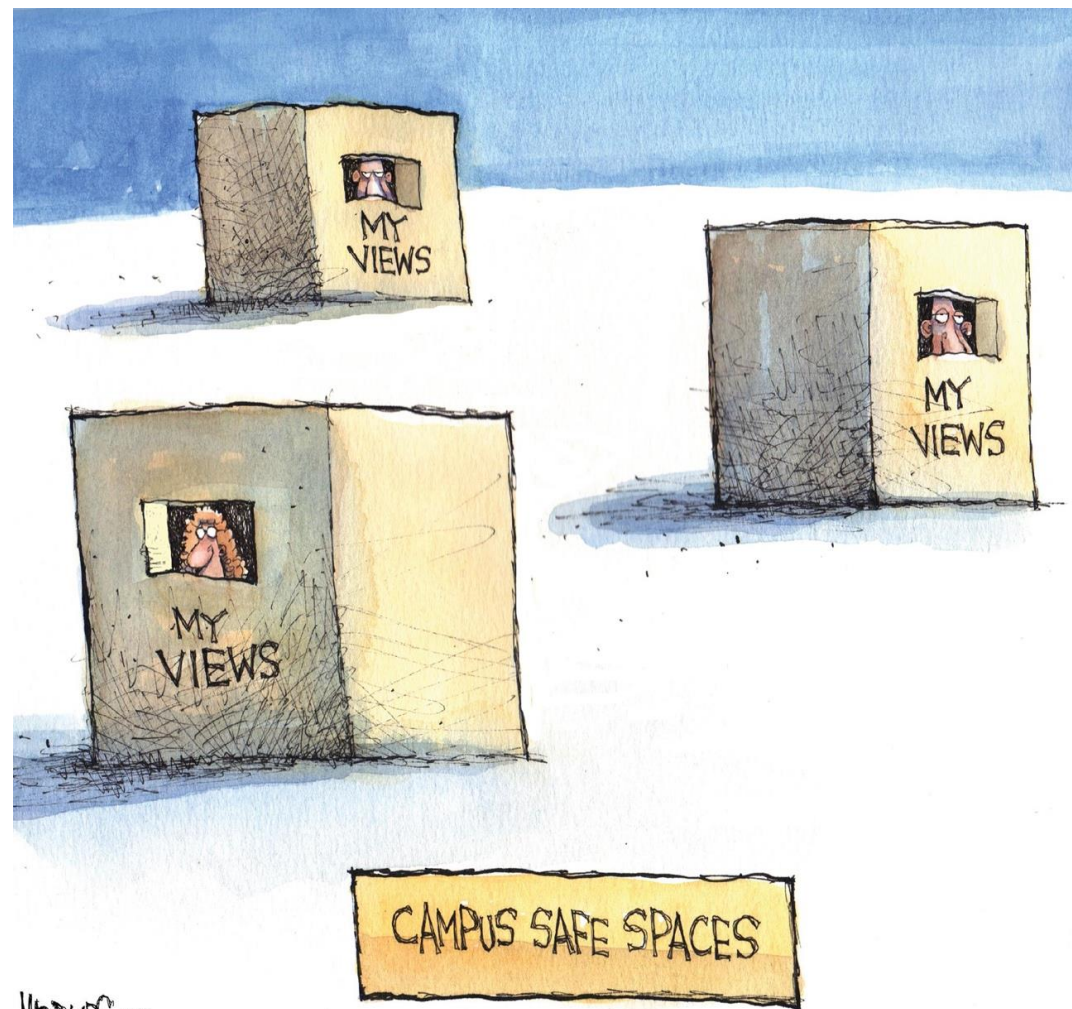
Turn to a neighbor and discuss...what other examples of religious privilege come to mind?



CLOSED SUNDAY

How does religious privilege impact our campus climate?





LDS students: fears of Mormon bashing

“exmormon” students: fears of being judged as “immoral” by Mormon peers

Minority adherents: annoyance at “friendshipping” and proselytizing

Atheists/agnostics/nones: friendshipping, proselytizing, judgment (5)

1. How important is it for you to express your religious/spiritual identities on campus?
2. How open are you to doing so?
3. What barriers get in the way?



N=160 faculty, staff, students, Spring 2014
N=45 indepth student interviews, Fall 2014

Student comments...

Spiritual, not religious student:

“I think people really, really want to talk about these things and share. Pretending that we don't have religions is kind of a pain actually and I don't think that anyone wants that. I think that can increase feelings of loneliness...”

LDS student:

“I think because it is a majority, it feels like it's okay to make fun of it, and it's okay to make fun of the members and the traditions...”

Former LDS student:

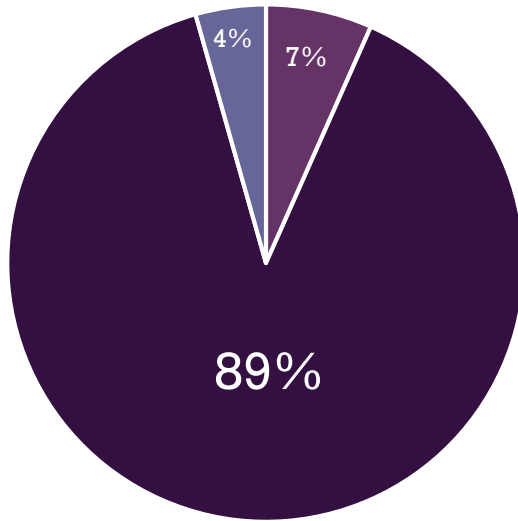
“Don't ask don't tell, that is very present...there's a lot of pressure for people who still desire the approval of LDS members...”

Atheist student:

“I feel like it's ok to believe the way I do. As long as I don't bring it up, it's ok...”



“It's important to me to be able to express my religious identity on campus.”



- Not important
- Important
- No opinion



- Longitudinal survey (Fall 2015-Fall 2018)
- 7194 first-year students at 122 colleges and universities
- Surveyed as freshmen, sophomores, seniors: experiences on campus regarding religious diversity/interfaith engagement and impacts of this
- USU, one of 25 public in survey (6)

Campus climate research
2014-2019



Religious/spiritual self-identification

Collapsed	USU	Peers	National Sample
Religious& Spiritual or SBNR	85.3% (~63% LDS identified)	65.6%	65.6%

The campus is very religiously diverse

Yes	20.4%	68.0%	57.2%
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I am satisfied with the religious diversity on campus

Yes	36.9%	63.7%	58.4%
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Religious organizations on this campus are diverse in the faith traditions they represent

Yes	35.9%	68.2%	63.8%
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Campus is a welcoming place for people of different religious and non-religious views

Agree	63.1%	75.7%	73.4%
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Religious and non-religious differences create a sense of division on this campus

Yes	38.2%	17.6%	17.4%
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People on this campus most often interact with those of the same worldview

Yes	83.4%	66.2%	65.5%
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I have often felt pressured to keep my worldview to myself

Yes	33.0%	18.3%	18.7%
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Negative engagement with others because of my worldview (e.g. spiritual/religious orientation)

I've felt silenced	16.6%	8.0%	8.3%
Guarded interactions	25.2%	15.2%	16.2%
Stayed quiet	40.8%	24.0%	23.9%

Approximately 20% difference btn USU and comparison groups in terms of

- **RELIGIOSITY:** USU is perceived as MORE religious
- **DIVERSITY:** USU is perceived as LESS diverse
- **SENSE OF WELCOME:** USU is perceived as LESS welcoming of specific groups: especially atheists/non-believers
- **DIVISIVENESS:** USU is perceived as MORE divisive because of religious difference
- **CLIQISHNESS:** USU is perceived as MORE “cliquish”: students interact primarily with those who share their beliefs
- **SENSE OF COERCION:** USU is perceived as MORE coercive, diversity of world-views are LESS accepted

Mental Health and Social Connectedness



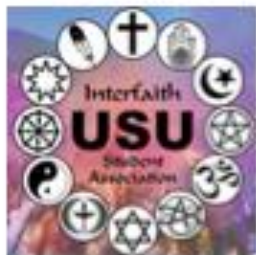
- I feel unwelcome
- I feel isolated & disconnected
- I feel judged
- I have to hide who I am
- My religious/spiritual views don't help me cope

"lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having alcohol use disorder....loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity"

Julianne Holt-Lunstad, et al, (7)

The USU Interfaith Initiative and Interfaith Student Association

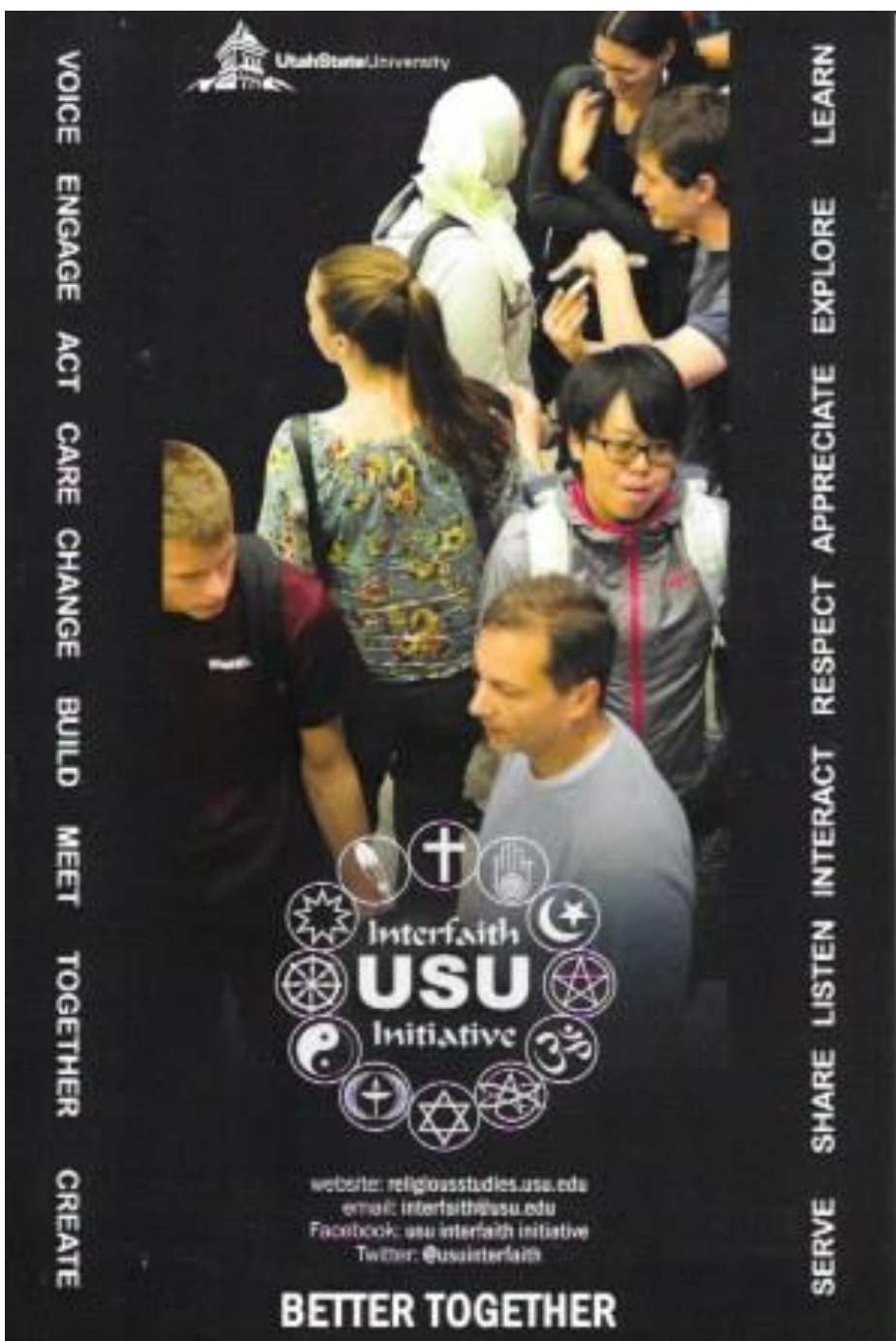
The USU Interfaith Initiative and the USU Interfaith Student Association work to create positive and meaningful interaction among people who orient around religion differently by providing safe spaces to voice our beliefs and values, by teaching skills for interacting with respect and appreciation across “faith-divides” and by coming together to serve the common good. 



**WE ARE
BETTER
TOGETHER **

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Some of Our Initiatives 2014-19

- Interfaith Leadership Lab
- Interfaith Leadership Certificate
- Better-Together Interfaith Ally Training
 - 350 trained over 4 years
- Interfaith Student Association
 - classroom panels, site-visits, speed-faithing, talk-better-together, presence at A-day, Day on the Quad, etc.
- Major speakers
- Mobilization against Islamophobia
- Designation of campus “reflection room”
- Conversations with Clergy/faith directory
- “Faith-Distress” Support Group (with CAPS)
- Spiritual reasoning club
- Student research projects
- Interfaith Fellows Program
- Robust website at <http://interfaith.usu.edu>





There is a need for this work but the initiative has NO resources to be sustained or to grow*:

Ignore

- Interfaith Initiative not viewed as key to university mission

Dismiss

- Interfaith Initiative not viewed as a priority use of scarce resources

Distance

- Lack of awareness of Initiative existence, mission, impact

* More than \$22,000 “one-time” monies over the last 5 years from Interfaith Youth Core but no on-going USU allocations/investments

The ask...

- Support for creation of **Office of Interfaith Leadership, Meaning-Making and Spiritual Well-Being** (like a growing number of public university campuses) to develop:
 - Expansion of interfaith leadership programs (to build capacity and opportunity for appreciative engagement across religious divides)
 - Expansion of mindfulness and other programs supporting meaning-making for all students/staff/faculty
 - Spiritual care services for students in crisis (in coordination with CAPS) and development of student-to-student peer-mentoring program
 - Creation of campus/community partnerships to expand faith-based resources for non-LDS students and to coordinate campus ministry programs according to university policies and protocols



List of sample public institutions with similar programs/initiatives

- Utah Valley University
- University of Utah
- Colorado State University
- Arizona State University
- New Mexico State University
- Washington State University
- Salem State University
- Grand Valley State University
- Truman State University
- University of North Florida
- University of Delaware
- University of North Texas
- Cal State University (San Bernardino, Long Beach)
- University of Vermont
- University of Massachusetts
- University of Maryland



And the list is growing...



Map of U.S. universities (public and private) who have engaged with Interfaith Youth Core to promote interfaith cooperation on campus since 2010, photo by author, 9/26/29

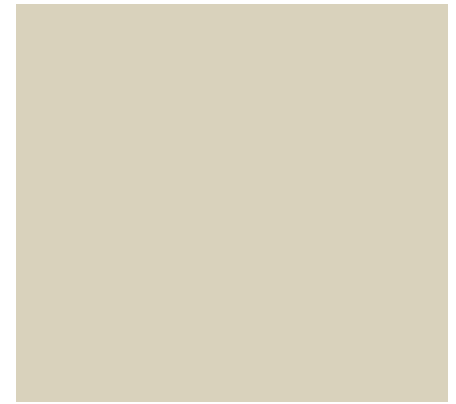
- Kansas State
- Clayton State
- U. Illinois
- Christopher Newport
- U Alabama
- Rutgers
- Missouri State
- U. Wisconsin Madison
- U. Northern Iowa
- Virginia Tech
- Ohio State
- Pennsylvania State
- Eastern Washington
- Miami of Ohio
- Westchester U
- U Michigan
- Evergreen State (10)



References

- (1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY0LC1-QEpM>, last accessed 10/21/19
- (2) http://www.usu.edu/aaa/enroll_sum_pdf.cfm, last accessed 10/21/19
- (3) IDEALS Final Report, Time 1, http://interfaith.usu.edu/about/campusclimate/research_products, last accessed 10/21/19
- (4, 5) Glass-Coffin, Bonnie. "Building Capacity and Transforming Lives," *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 2016, 40(2), 258-269, http://interfaith.usu.edu/about/campusclimate/research_products, last accessed 10/21/19
- (6) IDEALS Final Report, Time 1, Time 3, http://interfaith.usu.edu/about/campusclimate/research_products, last accessed 10/21/19
- (7) Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Tyler Harris, and David Stephenson, "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2015, 10(2):227-237
- (8) Warner, John, "One Small Step to Address the Student Mental Health Crisis," *Insider Higher Ed*, Feb. 24, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/one-small-step-address-student-mental-health-crisis>, last accessed 10/21/19
- (9) Internet research using search terms, "public university spiritual," from 4/1-4/15/19
- (10) List of participating institutions, together with Utah State University, at "Interfaith Cooperation at Public Universities," IFYC Convening, 9/26/19





Let's make USU more welcoming for all!

For more information:

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