Comparisons Across Higher Education Contexts:

Findings from Collaboratively Adapting an Interfaith Diversity Study

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Abstract

Understanding campus climates for interfaith learning and development in higher education supports universities in achieving their missions of producing global leaders and ensuring equitable access to and experiences of campus life for students of diverse religious, spiritual, and nonreligious worldviews. The Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS) was a mixed-method study designed to explore these issues in the United States; recently, U.K. researchers collaborated with U.S. principal investigators to collaboratively adapt IDEALS to the U.K. higher education environment. First, using the interfaith learning and development framework as a guide, the authors outline what aspects of the national and institutional contexts the adaptation process considered and how it produced the context-specific data. Second, the relational contexts for interfaith learning were explored using a multiple case study approach, which resulted in cross-context assertions about how students in both countries perceived their campus climates, engaged across worldview difference, and encountered insensitivity about worldviews during their university experience.

Keywords: US; UK; international; higher education; worldview; religion; spirituality; diversity

Introduction

The United Kingdom and the United States both feature globally reputable universities, produce a significant volume of scholars and scholarship across many disciplines, and are highly popular study destinations. Students of different religious, secular, and spiritual (RSS) worldviews (Fitzgerald 2019) may have an unstated expectation of similarity between the countries, although the higher education and religious and spiritual histories of these two nations —both beneficiaries of Christian privilege—are quite different. Setting aside the obvious similarities of language, economic structures, levels of wealth, and assumptions about education, there are two key points of contrast at the national level that highlight significant differences between the U.S. and U.K. contexts as sites of interfaith engagement. First, there are important differences in the composition of the religious population. In both nations current patterns of religious diversity are tied to historic patterns of migration, the ways the diversity of the nation was eventually acknowledged in the late 1900s and protected through legislation, and differential trajectories of secularization. These histories are highlighted by the second contrast, which is the place of religion-related learning in publicly funded education. In the U.S., the first amendment separating church and state has limited devotional religious education and state-directed practices like prayer in schools. However, the U.S. has a large sub-sector of private religious schools which are free, by law, to organize their student admissions and curriculum in accordance with their faith identities. By contrast, the U.K. public school system absorbed around 7,000 religious schools, most associated with the Roman Catholic Church or Church of England, and reframed the religious education and practice components into a universal and compulsory “religious education” component of school curriculum. Despite these differences in

pre-university religious education, in both contexts higher education is a societal setting where students might engage across RSS differences.

Throughout the 20th century, the place of religion in modern society was regularly debated and at several points it seemed only a matter of time before secularization would transform traditional religious engagement and remove its place from society and higher education campuses completely. Parsons (1974) wrote extensively about how traditional Judeo-Christian religious structures predicated on collectivist action were being supplanted by individualism. As the century closed and the Cold War ended, a new set of tensions arose between Global North societies predicated, if no longer grounded, in Christian ideals and the Muslim world. The idea of an impending 'clash of civilizations,' which posited that societies holding vastly different sets of norms, values, and beliefs would not find a way to live side-by-side without conflict in the increasingly globalizing world, was popularized by Samuel Huntington in 1993 (Haynes 2018). The clash of civilizations argument was highlighted by the events of 9/11 and noted at the United Nations 'dialogue of civilizations' discussion and resolution during the general assembly meeting in two months later in November (United Nations 2001). The waning of Christian structures throughout both the U.S. and U.K., the rise of societal norms grounded in individualism and secular ideals, the increased diversity of students seeking higher education, and the renewed interest in connecting across ideological differences set the stage for new interfaith movements on university campuses as the 21st century began.

Comparative authors have argued for religion as an important aspect of education for all (Marshall 2010) connected to global citizenship education (Edwards and Kitamura 2019; Bowling 2023; Shaw 2023;), with Gomez Caride (2018) exploring in this journal how a cultural historical approach to religion is necessary for understanding how we frame citizenship. While

the secularization thesis, that religious authority will eventually decline in society, continues to be simultaneously debunked (Stark, 1999; Berger, 2017) and defended as a possibility (Kasselstrand Zuckerman and Cragun 2023), the need for education to address pluralism is increasingly acknowledged. Religious and nonreligious worldviews continue to be relevant to humanity's sharing of global resources and to conflict and peace and were included in PISA's assessment of Global Competence (OECD 2018). Most comparative education studies involving religious worldviews, however, have examined implications within a single tradition (Watson 2010) or within a national educational setting (Hotam 2017; Goren Maxwell and Yemeni 2018; Yu and Zhao 2024).

This paper goes beyond what Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) called "national containers" (20), the methodological tendency to frame society by the nation-state, which they and Suspitsyna (2020) argued was a "myopic conception of educational spaces and practices as defined by domestic academic norms and priorities" (131). Recognizing, instead, the possibility of connected sociologies (Bhambra 2020) between U.S. and U.K. higher education contexts and diasporic worldviews, this study presented an opportunity to explore how students across contexts might experience their campuses in similar ways. It advances scholarship on cross-context adaptations of national studies by examining campus climates in higher education, or the ways subgroups of the student body perceive the campus culture differently (Pascarella and Terenzini 1984; Tinto 2012), specifically the campus climates for worldview diversity (Rockenbach et al. 2020).

We wondered, what are the contextual differences when studying worldview across international higher education contexts? Specifically, how are the relational contexts for interfaith learning similar and dissimilar in U.S. and U.K. higher education? To answer, we

needed comparable data from two cases, which we obtained from the reports produced by two related studies conducted by our teams in the U.S. and U.K. This methodological article outlines the study's adaptation and its implications for other studies seeking to explore higher education beyond national containers, while also highlighting implications for debates about the broadening and value of diversity education.

Background

In the United States, Professors Matthew Mayhew and Alyssa Rockenbach partnered with the organization Interfaith America to implement the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS), a longitudinal mixed methods study conducted between 2015–2020. This unprecedented national study explored how to create a positive university climate for student engagement across worldview diversity and produced a large dataset, a body of national reports (Interfaith America 2024), and peer-reviewed publications (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2025). Out of this project, Mayhew and Rockenbach (2021) theorized the interfaith learning and development (ILD) model to explain the nested contexts affecting student's experience and developmental trajectories.

Professors Kristin Aune of Coventry University and Mathew Guest of Durham University, sociologists of religion who had also produced a body of work about religion and spirituality on university campuses (Guest et al. 2013; Aune Guest and Law 2019), anticipated a U.K. version of the study would be similarly illuminative about the university context for interfaith learning and development. Aune (personal communication, April 25, 2023) described the IDEALS U.K. study as "an exciting opportunity to understand better how UK students can learn to communicate and relate across difference: not just of religion but also of wider philosophical and political worldviews." The findings from IDEALS UK are being used to

inform universities across the country about how to develop a just and welcoming campus for students of all worldview identities, in keeping with the UK Equality Act (2010), which requires institutions to ensure equality of opportunity, eliminate harassment, and promote good relations across difference.

Purposes and Significance of the Inquiry

As Baker (2014) noted, the relationship between the educated society and spirituality "will likely grow into the future. This relationship holds great potential for new [comparative] scholarship, which has been virtually mute on the topic" (18). The U.K. research team's invitation to integrate the U.K. project with the U.S. team created an opportunity to compare interfaith development outcomes across two different Western contexts through the mindful adaptation of IDEALS across borders.

Accordingly, the first aim of our inquiry was to explore and highlight contextual differences in studying worldview diversity across international higher education contexts. This article outlines the study's adaptation and its implications for other studies that may seek to explore higher education topics beyond national containers. The second purpose was to explore specifically the convergence and divergence between U.S. and U.K. higher education relational contexts for interfaith learning and development. The team theorized that there would be high-level convergence across the two contexts and that divergences would be identified in how distinctive worldview groups experienced relational aspects of the campus context as positive or negative. Therefore, we asked: How are the relational contexts for interfaith learning similar and dissimilar in U.S. and U.K. higher education? We report on the international collaboration and adaptation of IDEALS to the U.K. higher education landscape, highlight findings from an

ongoing comparison of the data from the two projects, and discuss implications for international collaborations and adaptations of a similar nature.

Conceptual Framework

The ILD framework (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2021) was used as the foundational framework of IDEALS U.K., grounding the project in interfaith learning and development theory. The ILD framework and IDEALS studies conceptualize *worldview* as "a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these" (Mayhew et al. 2016, 2). Similarly, "RSS identity attempts to capture the complexity of one's faith or worldview that shapes the way one sees and experiences the world" (Curley and Leon 2018). We use worldview and RSS interchangeably.

Informed by ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979) and college impact theory (Astin 1984; Hurtado et al. 1998; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Tinto 2012), the ILD framework extended previous work about campus climates that recognized groups of students as having differential experiences. It identified a set of nested contexts that impact students' interfaith learning and development: national, institutional, relational, and disciplinary contexts, along with formal or informal student behaviors. Key to the ILD framework is the premise that "the person-environment relationship [is] reciprocal" (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2021, 7). The ILD was developed inductively from the U.S. study's results then applied deductively to the U.K. study, testing the framework's applicability comparatively.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

A critique of the ILD framework for cross-cultural work is that it centers individuals (Mayhew et al. 2023) and frames learning and development from a Western lens - contextually

informed but individually mediated - rather than incorporating a communal view of identity common to many worldviews. To mitigate how this impacted our cross-cultural work, we focused this analysis on the national, institutional, and relational contexts of the framework (see Figure 1), putting the findings of the two studies in conversation using the concentric contexts represented in the diagram.

As scholars embracing values-explicit comparative international research (Hayhoe 2021), it is important to name our positionality and the values that guide our work. All team members and authors seek to advance a pluralism orientation (Mayhew et al. 2016). All authors identify as White British or American, and most as Christian, however the IDEALS studies themselves were conducted and guided by multi-religious teams and advisory panels. The international IDEALS U.K. team represented Agnostic, Evangelical, Quaker, Mainline Protestant, and Muslim worldviews. The first two authors were the analysts for the present comparative inquiry and have experience working outside of their passport countries. Staples is an American who participated in the IDEALS U.S. to U.K. adaptation on site as a Fulbright scholar. Both were members of the blended IDEALS U.S.–U.K. team from the project's inception. Our intent in sharing this work is twofold: to advance knowledge on comparative worldview diversity to inform more equitable policy and practice and to encourage thoughtful collaborative international research partnerships.

This comparative study focused on the relational context, or the interactive dimension of the students' experience of a campus climate, to answer how interfaith learning was similar or dissimilar across the two national environments. In both IDEALS studies, the relational context construct is composed of students' reported experience of five elements: (1) provocative encounters, or "challenging and meaningful exchanges with diverse peers" (Rockenbach et al. 2017, 12) that spur critical thinking and self-reflection, (2) supportive spaces for exploring and

expressing their own worldview, and the presence and impact of (3) coercion, (4) overt discrimination, and (5) unproductive environments "where students feel silenced by religion-based micro-aggressions" (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2021, 8). Importantly, a university's relational context can be changed over time with intentional choices by institutional leaders, which makes it a valuable focus of investigation for proposing how to positively impact interfaith learning outcomes.

Another construct used in both IDEALS studies was "pluralism orientation," defined as "the extent to which students are accepting of others with different worldviews, believe that worldviews share many common values, consider it important to understand the differences between world religions, and believe it is possible to have strong relationships with diverse others and still hold to their own worldviews" (Mayhew et al. 2016, 2). Theoretically, students who are more oriented toward pluralism are more likely to engage in interfaith learning opportunities, often supported by the positive interfaith interactions present in the relational context.

Meaning making is contextual. We acknowledge that internationally comparative research on this topic is laden with socially constructed meanings impossible to completely account for within a single study. Even in the best of scenarios, there will be problems of portability in seeking to adapt a study from one higher education context to another (Hofer and Sinatra 2010). In conducting theory-based research on measures of worldview climate that acknowledges contextual difference, we have attempted to respond to Carnoy's (2021) call for CIE researchers to "do intelligent empirical analysis that is based on theory" and studies interpersonal skills such as "tolerance for social differences" (39). In the next section, we briefly introduce the methods used by the studies, describe the blended team's approach to adapting

IDEALS for the United Kingdom, and highlight noteworthy differences in national and institutional contexts that informed the adaptation.

Collaboratively Adapting IDEALS Using the ILD

To ensure IDEALS was thoughtfully adapted to the U.K. context, the team made several structural decisions. The study leadership was composed of both U.S. and U.K. members who met monthly using Zoom to discuss the research design, contextual differences, language implications, third party relationships, and data analyses. The research complied with data protection regulations of both countries. Additionally, resources were shared between the international teams; both teams relied on the same data weighting expert and researchers to conduct quantitative analyses and Analyst 2 was embedded in both teams on-site. This collaboration throughout the project enriched the study and heightened team members' awareness of differences in contexts and findings.

IDEALS Research Design Elements

Both IDEALS studies were funded by external partners and organized as collaborative projects between researchers in multiple universities. Each incorporated student surveys at multiple time points, the first year of university and at least one subsequent year. The U.K. survey was adapted from the U.S. instrument. Both studies were mixed methods and involved selected campus site visits, focus groups, and interviews which were used to contextualize the quantitative findings. The two teams relied on modeling using the same factors and constructs and produced reports of their findings. This inquiry into comparative relational contexts is based on selections of these reports produced and published by each study's team.

U.S.-specific Methods

The U.S. IDEALS project followed a nationally representative sample of 3,486 undergraduate students at 116 campuses who were surveyed at their entry to college, after first year, and senior year. Eighteen campuses additionally participated in case study site visits which included student focus groups and interviews with students, faculty, and staff. The research was a multifaith partnership between The Ohio State University, North Carolina State University, and Interfaith America, advised by an eleven member multifaith advisory board of experts on religion in higher education. The project was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Fetzer Institute, and the Julian Grace Foundation.

U.K.-specific Methods

The U.K. team adapted the U.S. IDEALS survey for the U.K. context and partnered with YouthSight, a youth research agency, to conduct surveys of undergraduate and postgraduate students at 133 universities in Autumn 2021 (4,401 students) and Autumn 2022 (4,618 students). A total of 1,000 students participated at both time points, enabling the team to perform statistical analyses following the U.S. study's methods to measure changes in interfaith attitudes. The research proceeded in partnership with the Faith and Belief Forum, a U.K. interfaith practice organization that hosted the project's multifaith steering group, including Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh members. The project was funded by Porticus, a justice-oriented philanthropic organization based in the Netherlands, as well as The Spalding Trust and Durham University.

Approach to Adaptation

Although the U.K. and U.S. IDEALS projects unfolded in multireligious Global North higher education contexts historically steeped in Christian privilege (Small 2020), the team was aware from the outset that there were significant differences between the contexts. We

approached adaptation with intentionality, exploring contextual differences carefully throughout the research. As the UK study took shape, planning led to Analyst 2's decision to embed in the U.K. team during the project's first year, use of the same statistical techniques to those used by the U.S. team, and monthly meetings facilitating trans-Atlantic collaboration. Methods were subject to contextual interrogation from preliminary conversations through survey development, data collection and analysis, and interpretation. Collaborative meetings addressed the use of local expertise, defining worldview categories, identifying how constructs might translate into the U.K context, and adapting survey language to U.K. higher education. Deeper conversations addressed use of the terms “faith” or “religion,” how to frame and measure religious literacy in ways that were normative or meaningful for each context, and the salience of constructs and questions in comparative contexts.

National Context

In the ILD model, national context is assumed but undefined. We propose the sub-contexts of religious cultural, political, and higher education landscapes and describe the changes and key demographic differences found in each domain, followed by the assumptions and linguistic choices the team addressed in adapting IDEALS to the United Kingdom.

Religious Cultural

Religious cultures (Edwards 2018) are the communities of religious praxis and belonging with which people affiliate or associate, a particularly helpful construct in contexts where there is a high degree of worldview diversity that may or may not be primarily organized around beliefs or religious texts. Consideration of U.S. and U.K. religious cultural differences informed how worldview choices were organized on the survey. The U.S. partners deferred to the U.K. members’ expertise and previous surveys in creating the final list of worldview item menu

options which included groups with relevance to the United Kingdom, such as pagan and Sikh student populations (see Appendix A). Key religious cultural differences were higher percentages of non-religious (48%), Muslim (9%), and "other" religiously identified (8%) students in the U.K. commensurate with a lower percentage of Christian students (32%) compared to the U.S.

Political

Political contexts were understood to vary dramatically between the ways the countries organized political parties and coalitions, whether a party's power coincided with the tenure of the executive leader, and the interests of various political factions. Both contexts featured a range of political identifications, from more ethnocentric or nationalist to left-wing or socialist, and the ways RSS affiliation interacted with politics were also quite different. For example, the U.S. study included analysis of political party preferences alongside students' pluralism development around the time of President Trump's 2016 election, while the U.K. study was conducted post-Brexit as students, universities, and society were re-emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision was made to include political affiliation questions relevant to the national context in the IDEALS U.K. survey, with extensive discussion and consultation of external sources regarding how to organize and consolidate the myriad political party affiliation options, which in some cases overlapped more with students' regional loyalties than with their religious affiliations, reflecting the complexities of devolved government in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the comparatively secularized political domain of the U.K.

Higher Education Landscapes

The team was also aware that the national landscapes for higher education, too, differed, and not only in terms of institutional characteristics discussed in the next section. The ways that

higher education pathways are determined, how selection occurs, and which students have access to different higher education options, how higher education is funded, the length of degree programs, the ways in which faculty and campus wide initiatives are organized, and preferences for single-subject study versus multidisciplinary learning, could all potentially impact students' interfaith learning and development. One example was an emphasis in U.S. higher education on engagement in students' first-year experience. Although student engagement is important in U.K. universities, it is less programmatically organized and resourced, and not viewed as pivotal to a successful first year. Additionally, although the U.S. study included some student precollege characteristics (e.g. family worldview background, academic preparation), the U.K. team included additional items about students' experiences of religious education, a compulsory subject in U.K. primary and secondary schooling for which curricula are framed locally. How religious knowledge was defined and measured, too, became a point of difference between the two studies: the U.S. study assessed facts about world religions via an "appreciative knowledge" construct developed by the research team while the U.K. study incorporated a pre-existing religious literacy measure developed and used in higher education research by Theos (2020), a leading U.K. religion and society think tank.

Linguistic Adaptations

Linguistic adaptations ranged from the benign, such as the adoption of British English spellings and vocabulary (e.g. "societies" in place of "clubs"), to linguistic differences that indicated structural or support differences. These included differences between off-campus privately owned accommodation and university-sponsored halls of residence complete with dining halls, resident advisors, and programming. There were also differences noted between

U.S. and U.K. understandings of "chaplaincy" as an office and a place; in the U.K., chaplaincies often had an established relationship to the Church of England even at secular universities.

Institutional Context

The institutional contexts between the two countries varied, composed of distinct institutional conditions - the "immutable characteristics scholars often use to categorize institutions" (Mayhew and Rockenbach 2021, 8), including institutional type, geographical region, selectivity, religious affiliation, and size - and organizational behaviors. In the United States, there are over 2,000 higher education institutions that grant Bachelor's degrees across four institutional affiliations: public, private nonsectarian, private Protestant, and private Catholic. Comparatively, the IDEALS U.K. team identified 142 institutions with degree-awarding powers. A five-fold typology (Guest et al. 2013) which consisted of traditional/elite, inner city red brick, 1960s campuses, post-1992 campuses, and religion-affiliated campuses, was collapsed into three categories for the IDEALS U.K. study: traditional elite, secular, and religiously affiliated, the latter corresponding to the Cathedrals Group (n.d.) of 15 universities. In the U.K., most universities across types have religious chaplains and enroll students from a range of religious backgrounds.

The typical organization of student life also varies between the two countries. U.S. institutions have student affairs divisions with full-time, university-paid professional staff overseeing student activities, including, in some cases, religious life. At private institutions, religious life departments are often organized as part of the university administration. On U.K. campuses, student-led societies affiliated with a Students' Union typically provide a range of extracurricular engagement, and chaplaincy is usually offered through an administrative connection to the university. These structural differences alter the delivery of interfaith learning

in terms of programming, people, and spaces. Institutional differences extended to disciplinary conventions as well, with the locus of higher education interfaith research typically within departments of theology and religious studies in the United Kingdom and in departments of education in the United States.

Multiple Case Comparison Methods

The national and institutional contexts informed the project's adaptations, addressing important differences between the United States and United Kingdom to produce contextualized but comparable data. The purpose of this study was to explore the cross-contextual findings related to the relational context to answer the question: How are the relational contexts for interfaith learning similar and dissimilar in U.S. and U.K. higher education?

We drew on Stake's (2006) multiple case study analysis approach to explore cross-context findings, called "assertions" in this method, across cases using the context-specific findings found in the studies' robust reports about the United States and the United Kingdom . Although the studies followed different timelines and reporting structures, both produced final reports that included primarily quantitative longitudinal data about students' interfaith learning experiences on campus over time: *IDEALS: Bridging Religious Divides through Higher Education* (Rockenbach et al. 2020) and *Building Student Relationships Across Religion and Worldview Difference* (Peacock et al. 2023). These reports were the data sources used to answer the research question.

Importantly, the relational context was a topic of interest for each individual study and was addressed directly in the final reports; the focus of this inquiry was to explore the same question across these contexts. Using the ILD, we first determined the cross-context sub questions (i.e. themes) relevant to our research question (see Table 1) and then adapted a series

of worksheets designed by Stake (2006) for research teams to determine cross-context assertions (see Appendix B). The two first authors, members of the research teams of the U.S. and U.K. studies, served as the primary analysts, then the principal investigators of both studies contributed to the secondary evaluation of the assertions.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The analytic process included several steps of independent and collaborative work. First, each analyst independently re-read each case report and (a) provided a short overall summary, (b) noted any constraints or distinguishing features that may have influenced the findings, (c) cited the specific evidence in the report that addressed each theme, and (d) evaluated the prominence and utility of the report for understanding each theme (see Stake 2006, 44–46). Second, the analysts extracted findings from the case reports into a combined worksheet (refer to Appendix B). Third, the analysts met together and jointly posited tentative assertions based on their independent reading of the reports, noting how the findings clustered with the tentative assertions. Some findings were deemed too context-specific to speak to the cross-context assertions and were discarded from the analysis. Others were combined with similar assertions, resulting in nine tentative assertions merged into four assertions.

Fourth, the analysts took an intentional step away from the process and then came back to re-evaluate their work. They determined two of the remaining assertions should also be combined, for a final total of three assertions, and jointly rewrote the tentative assertions to reflect the findings more fully. The final cross-context assertions are presented below.

Finally, the analysts engaged in triangulation with the principal investigators of both research teams to ensure the cross-context assertions accurately represented the context-specific report findings. The next section presents the evidence for these assertions based on the reported findings from the IDEALS studies in the United States and United Kingdom.

Cross-Context Assertions

This comparison surfaced important insights for further investigation. Below, we highlight the three assertions that apply to both the United States and United Kingdom illustrating similarities in how relational contexts generate interfaith learning on campuses, but dissimilarities in which groups encounter unproductive features of the climate.

Assertion 1

Most students perceive campuses as welcoming of diverse worldviews, but accommodations for religious observances are not easy for students of nondominant worldviews to access.

Encouragingly, most students experienced their campus as a welcoming place, supportive of and safe for worldview expression. However, this varied by worldview group; some students encountered difficulties securing adjustments for their non dominant worldview needs. U.K. students reported high levels of perceived worldview safety, with 82% of students viewing their campus as a welcoming place, 74% as a safe place to express worldviews generally and 69% for their particular worldview. There were striking differences reported by Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh students, who perceived less welcome for their religious views, around 35%, and Buddhist students also felt less supported expressing their worldviews on campus and in class.

U.S. students also generally felt they had a space to express their worldviews and receive support on campus, particularly among Atheist, Jewish, and Christian students, though there were disparities in perceived freedom of expression among different Christian subgroups. While

most U.S. students reported their campus climate as welcoming for diverse worldviews, they did not find it particularly welcoming to religious views in the classroom. Buddhists, Hindus, and underrepresented groups including Daoists, Jains, and Native Americans were much less likely than Christian, Jewish, and Muslim students to identify high levels of welcome. These groups reported three and a half times more difficulty finding space and support for their worldviews on campus than the average.

In both contexts, only half of students agreed faculty and staff were helpful in accommodating religious observance requests. Certain students needing such adjustments implies that the academic calendar was not structured around their worldview, hence these requests would not be expected from students in dominant worldview groups. In the United States, Muslims and Latter-Day Saints found it the easiest to secure religious accommodations for prayer times or holidays. Buddhist and Hindu students encountered the most difficulty getting faculty to grant their requests. Likewise, U.K. Buddhist and Sikh students were least likely to feel their needs for religious accommodation were well recognized. U.K. universities' long history educating Hindu students and relatively larger Hindu population may explain why these students felt more welcome and encountered less difficulty on U.K. campuses. More comparable were U.K. Sikh and U.S. Hindu student struggles obtaining religious accommodations, suggesting this experience is in part linked to minority status.

Although it was heartening that most students' experience of their campus climate was positive, there is a need to continue advocating for campus climate assessments and ensuring equitable experiences across worldviews, particularly in the classroom. Students in both educational contexts and across worldview groups reported a higher perception of welcome than ease of securing religious accommodations. This was in two national contexts where access to

education and freedom of religious expression are purported to have legal or constitutional protections. How access applies to religious difference in both contexts remains unclear. Equity was not the experience of religious minority students. This finding demonstrates that while there has been progress in religious inclusion, there remains work to be done to ensure equity for non dominant worldviews.

Assertion 2

Students of different religious and nonreligious identities demonstrated similar levels of worldview engagement and diverse friendships, but more rarely engaged in provocative conversations about deep differences.

Engagement in interfaith activities with others was similarly high across both contexts. In the United Kingdom, about two thirds (66%) of students reported socializing with someone of a different worldview and 40% said they discussed differences about their values. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim students were the most likely to report informal worldview engagement with their U.K. peers while only about 40% of Sikh students reported engagement across worldview difference. In the United States, most students (93%) reported having one friendship and half (49%) reported having five or more friends of different worldviews by the end of their final year of university. About 41% of U.S. students reported having a disagreement with a friend about a religious matter and 71% a disagreement about politics; importantly, the majority of these disagreements ended with the students staying friends.

These findings demonstrate students are making friends across worldviews and that their challenging conversations usually end well; however, many students do not engage in conversation about these differences and perhaps miss opportunities for provocative encounters (i.e., interfaith learning moments). One reason that emerged for both sets of students was a

tendency to spend time with those who share their worldview. In the United Kingdom, half of participants felt students primarily spend time with others of the same worldview and only 55% try to establish diverse relationships; in the United States, a slightly higher percentage (63%) reported the same perception. Another reason may be that students lack the skills to have challenging conversations well and therefore opt out. Among U.S. students, 65% indicated they felt confident navigating challenging conversations, but only 32% had built the skills needed to connect across differences through formal interfaith activities. In the United Kingdom, less than 1 in 10 students had participated in or attended a formal activity to build their skills for positive interfaith encounters. Likely due to a combination of lacking skills and wanting to maintain harmonious relationships, 59% of U.S. students reported self-silencing, defined as only engaging occasionally during challenging conversations to avoid conflict. Only 13% of U.K. students reported having provocative encounters either “frequently” or “all the time.” Jewish (25%) and Christian (24%) students in both contexts were slightly more likely to report conversations of this type happening regularly.

The findings across contexts revealed that curricular spaces may be a prime area for additional opportunities to support provocative encounters. In the United Kingdom, few students reported visiting religious spaces (13%), taking a course on religious diversity (14%), or discussing religious diversity in a module (23%) as part of their studies. In the United States, about 1 in 4 students (26%) had enrolled in a class designed to explore religious diversity, however students were more likely (61% or higher) to have learned about a nonreligious difference (e.g., ethnicity, politics) than about a different religious tradition (46% or less). Importantly, students reported engaging in worldview-related discussions in classrooms across disciplines. Although most provocative encounters seem to happen during informal interactions,

the skills needed to ensure these are positive encounters leading to interfaith learning and development tend to be acquired through formal interfaith activities or in the classroom, and a minority of students are taking advantage of these opportunities.

Assertion 3

Religious students heard insensitive comments about their worldview, experienced divisiveness on campus, or reported instances of coercion to (self-)silence or change their worldview.

Students who claimed a religious or spiritual worldview experienced more insensitivity and discrimination on campus than those who identified as Secularists, Atheists, and religious "Nones." Among U.K. students, around 10% reported regularly hearing insensitive comments about their worldview from peers and from academic staff or administrators. Christian and Hindu students reported the most insensitivity from peers (23% and 26%) and Jewish and Sikh students the least (4% and 3%); however, Jewish students reported the most insensitivity from staff (41%) and felt the most discriminated against on campus. Institution type also played a role; traditional elite universities were reported the most frequently as having discriminatory environments and Cathedrals group universities the least. Although insensitive comments were generally reported at lower rates among U.S. students (1%), in both contexts religious groups reported more insensitivity than Nonreligious, Atheist, and Secular students. In the United States, Hindu and Muslim students reported the highest levels of insensitivity (33% and 7% respectively), with one-third of Hindus reporting regularly hearing insensitive comments about their worldview. In both contexts, minority worldview students were much less likely to report having a place they could express their worldview compared to dominant worldview students.

The two studies analyzed students' perceptions of divisiveness between worldview groups on campus, with divisiveness perceived by 25% of U.K. students and 7% of U.S.

students. This, too, varied by students of different religious and nonreligious perspectives and by campus type. In the United Kingdom, traditional elite university students reported the most separation by worldview groups and the most division and conflict. Overall, 20% of U.K. students perceived there to be quarrels between groups with most of these students having personally observed conflict. At U.S. campuses, Jewish students reported the highest levels of divisiveness (21%) and their perception was that it had increased over their time at university.

Across both contexts, religious groups, in contrast to nonreligious groups, experienced the most coercion, particularly silencing and pressure to change their worldview or to separate their academic experience from their worldview. In the United Kingdom, about one in ten students experienced each of these, with Jewish students feeling the most silenced (67%), the most pressured to listen to unwanted perspectives (31%), to keep their worldviews private (67%), and to separate their personal worldview from the classroom (63%). However, Christian students in the United Kingdom felt the most pressured to change their worldview (14%). Jewish, Christian, Sikh, and Muslim students on U.K. campuses specifically felt pressure to not share their experiences of discrimination. In the United States, 36% of Hindu students, 20% of Muslim students, and similar rates of Evangelical, Catholic, and Jewish students reported feeling pressure to conceal or limit expression of their worldview or to separate it from their academic life.

These reports of religious groups regularly experiencing insensitivity, pressure to change their worldview, to self-silence in academic spaces, and to under-report discrimination in contexts with varying degrees of divisiveness stand in contrast to students' general perceptions of their universities as welcoming of diverse perspectives.

Implications

The IDEALS studies sought to answer what differences matter for students' interfaith development, especially in institutional contexts where the university has agency to impact student development for the benefit of students and society. Universities can better position themselves to contribute to meaningful interfaith discourse in two primary ways. First, they should integrate the values of religious diversity and interfaith cooperation within the institution's global learning mission and ensure that the mission drives initiatives to advance student development in these areas. These efforts are necessary and relevant considering this study's findings about religious students who continue to experience discrimination, self-silencing, and insensitivity across higher education contexts. Second, leaders and educators in universities should recognize that these students may face multiple minoritization on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, citizenship, or socioeconomic status. In response, universities should address religious bias among staff who may be unaware of their impact yet perceived as "frequently" insensitive to groups of students in their care.

This project also highlighted a method for responsible cross-border adaptation of a survey instrument, providing a roadmap for how context may be used to inform the assumptions, language, and design of research addressing a nuanced and embedded cultural topic like worldview. Although both national contexts have been deeply influenced by Christianity, their demographics and religious, political, and institutional contexts vary considerably. Despite similarity in overarching assertions, contextual differences were apparent in the comparison between the two studies' data, especially at the worldview group level. Based on this analysis, the IDEALS measure of relational contexts may be considered for adaptation to other historically Christian Commonwealth education settings where scholars and practitioners are interested in

understanding and advancing a pluralism orientation in society. We have demonstrated the utility of taking a collaborative and contextual approach to research design using the ILD concentric rings as a guide to foreground and interrogate assumptions at each level of context, to sharpen research and ensure it remains faithful to local lived experience. Additionally, the recommended practice of having a diverse advisory board for local context considerations emerged as not only relevant but crucial for responsible adaptation. Lastly, this research demonstrated that the multiple case study method is helpful to make meaning of cross-case context comparisons.

The findings also raised areas ripe for comparative research between the United States and United Kingdom. The divergences noted in each section could be further explored using mixed-method comparative analysis of the full datasets available to the two research teams. For example, comparing U.S. and U.K. student experiences during their first year could illuminate key experiences for interfaith learning, enabling the production of new knowledge beyond what was presented in the study reports.

In terms of implications for practice, this study demonstrated the importance of finding out about communities' experiences on a given campus. For example, even though there may be an existing religious policy on campus, this study showed minority worldview groups still have difficulty securing adjustments for their observances. Other scholars have also noted a range of religious accommodation policies' quality, appeals processes, and variance by location (Maples 2023). Institutions should audit their practices to ensure religious inclusion does not stop at welcome but includes equitable access; this is a key area for improvement aligned with higher education's espoused values and legal duty. Additionally, this study highlighted how developing skills across difference requires institutional intentionality in formal spaces like classrooms or organized programming. These provide the support students need to meet the challenges of

interfaith learning and development that they experience during provocative informal encounters. It is our hope this study provides both researchers and practitioners considerations for discussion on their campuses.

Discussion

Collectively, the applied impact of the IDEALS projects can be summarized succinctly: it is hard to disrupt something that is not acknowledged. For the few who are doing this work, whether multifaith chaplains in the United Kingdom or a range of student life, diversity, or chaplain interfaith champions in the United States, the findings are hardly a surprise. What IDEALS studies do is amplify the experience of minoritized RSS students, providing faculty, administrators, and government leaders with quantitative data they can use to advocate for practices that support worldview diverse students and lead to greater equity. We need both thoughtful, critical qualitative work in this area internationally and tools that can generate nationally representative data for decision-makers.

By incorporating the ILD's concentric contextual rings, identified through the original IDEALS study, and using them as a bridge to make meaning of distinct but similar challenges to interfaith learning and development in the U.K. context, this multiple case study led to comparative findings between two national contexts. The study highlighted how, in the relational context, U.K. students face similar challenges navigating worldview diversity on campus to their U.S. counterparts. In many ways, the assertions showed how the national and institutional contexts were really the drivers for divergence. The differences in institutional types, the RSS demographics of the countries and university student populations, and the organizational structures of academic life were necessary to account for and made comparison possible. Demographic differences showed up in the details of student groups' reported perceptions and

activities, but there were also striking similarities. For example, across both contexts, Buddhist students seemed to be particularly underserved, and Jewish students reported a paradox of experiencing high support while also encountering high levels of insensitivity.

Areas of clear convergence were that the provision of spaces for support and expression and a perception of welcome were important for students to have positive worldview encounters with their peers. However, across contexts there are still troubling reports of students not receiving equitable accommodations and experiencing a campus environment that is unproductive for interfaith learning. The U.S. study had previously demonstrated that religiously minoritized students perceive more divisiveness and insensitivity on campus and are most likely to experience coercive and negative interfaith encounters (Rockenbach et al. 2017). Although these negative encounters occurred in both contexts, the patterns differed. In the United Kingdom, Christian students, followed by Jewish students, most frequently and consistently experienced high degrees of pressure to change their worldview, to keep their worldview to themselves, or to separate it from their academic experience, despite the historical role of the Church of England in government, society, and education. The U.K. findings contrasted with U.S. findings which showed Muslim and Jewish students reported the highest levels of insensitivity and coercion, and that Buddhist students felt the least safe expressing their worldview in class or on campus (Rockenbach et al. 2020). However, U.S. Evangelical and Catholic students also felt pressured to limit religious expression on campus, despite embedded structural Christian privilege in U.S. society (Small 2020). Edwards (2021) argued that Christian hegemony is linked to a global phenomenon of epistemological superiority that continues to reproduce coloniality in higher education. This study's findings from two historically Christian higher education contexts confirm a reported secular bias in the academy (Shahjahan et al. 2010)

that functions in tandem with religious privilege in society (Small et al. 2022). The findings illuminate the experience of Christian students as privileged in some respects, benefiting from academic practices and societal norms that establish their worldview as normative and requiring less accommodation, but the students also experienced insensitivity and the need to self-monitor in the classroom similar to minoritized worldview peers (Riggers-Piehl et al. 2022). The intricacies of how Christian privilege operates and is experienced by different worldview groups in U.K. higher education, in a similar or different manner to the United States, requires further study. According to our findings, religious students across higher education contexts may experience the campus climate differently than nonreligious students, with additional challenges experienced by religious minorities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that a meaningful comparison of interfaith learning in the United States and United Kingdom was possible due to the research teams' thoughtful, contextual design and responsive adaptation of the data collection instruments, procedures, analysis, and interpretation. The study illuminated how a multilevel foundation was laid between the two research teams for cross-context analysis, culminating in comparative findings about how students across these two national cases experienced the relational context for interfaith learning and development on their campuses. The findings reveal there is more work to be done to ensure students of all worldviews feel not only welcomed on their campuses but free from coercion with the ability to avail equitably of accommodations and report negative encounters. Universities can offer formal opportunities to develop students' interfaith engagement skills. Likewise, there is a need for universities to mitigate the unproductive climates religious students experience. These findings are important because students across contexts and categories—domestic and

international, religious and nonreligious—should be able to develop their inner lives and feel their communities are welcomed and supported during their university experience. When the data clearly demonstrates this is not the case, higher education communities must acknowledge the gap and adjust research and practice accordingly.

Appendix A

IDEALS U.K. Survey Worldview Self-Identification Menu Options

None
Agnosticism
Atheism
Buddhism
Christianity, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism)
Christianity, Orthodox
Christianity, Protestant (e.g. Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal)
Christianity, Roman Catholic Confucianism
Hinduism
Humanism
Islam, Shi’a
Islam, Sunni
Jainism
Judaism
Non-religious
Paganism
Sikhism
Another religion or worldview; Please specify:
Prefer not to say

Appendix B

Sample Cross-Case Analysis Worksheet

INSTITUTION NAME	
Summarize the case in your own words (3-5 sentences):	
Describe situational constraints that may have affected case activity (i.e., limitations):	
Describe what distinguishes this case from others (i.e., how unusual it is for the quintain):	
Rate the prominence of each multicase theme in this case:	
Prominence of Theme 1 in this case:	
Prominence of Theme 2 in this case:	
Prominence of Theme 3 in this case:	
Prominence of Theme 4 in this case:	
Prominence of Theme 5 in this case:	
Rate the utility of this case for exemplying the multicase themes:	
Expected utility of this case for Theme 1	
Expected utility of this case for Theme 2	
Expected utility of this case for Theme 3	
Expected utility of this case for Theme 4	
Expected utility of this case for Theme 5	
Summarize the case findings in your own words (3-5 sentences):	
Describe additional findings the existing case report overlooks (if applicable):	
Highlight possible excerpts in the original case report:	
Case reports for review and markup are available here.	
Document any analyst memos or impressions:	
How are the relational contexts for interfaith learning similar and dissimilar in U.S. and U.K. higher education?	
Theme 1	How do students experience provocative experiences that challenge their religious. secular, and spiritual worldviews?
Theme 2	How do students experience supportive spaces for exploring and expressing their own worldview?
Theme 3	How do students experience coercive places where they feel forced to examine or change their beliefs?
Theme 4	How do students experience unproductive environments where students feel silenced by religion-based micro-aggressions?
Theme 5	How do students experience overt discriminatory practices?

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