



# **Social Action by Today's Colleges: Graduate Student Research Projects Promoting Values in Action**

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# Introduction

- Local and global engagement by students
- Initiatives: encourage undergraduates to be aware and take action on social dilemmas
- Issues of social justice
  - 2 projects:
  - promoting religious diversity and faith beliefs as they relate to civic engagement
  - poverty perception evaluations

# Social Justice

- Integrated into community-based practice, clinical work, and research
- Involves acknowledging privilege and conveying benefits of adopting a collaborative approach
- Related skills: advocacy and innovative interventions
- Challenges exist:
  - Promoting critical consciousness
  - Encouraging individuals to discuss and understand values
  - Addressing individual, group, and societal level changes using 'power to' strategies
  - conveying optimism students can 'make a difference' and impact seemingly overwhelming social problems

# ***Integrated into Social Action: Interfaith Youth at an Urban, Faith-based University***

- **Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)**
  - is a non-for-profit Chicago-based organization
  - promote religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation
  - Main focus: increase interfaith dialogue
  - Objectives:
    - assessing students, staff, and faculty at various campuses on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to religious diversity
    - implement interfaith related programs/curriculum

# Religious Diversity in America

- Most religiously diverse country in the world
  - 80% of Americans consider themselves religious among a wide range of affiliations (Pew, 2008)
  - non-Christian religions have tremendously increased and are therefore more visible in American society (Merino, 2010).
- religious intolerance, ignorance, and tensions?

# Why is there religious prejudice?

- Intergroup attitudes, domains of experience such as stereotypes, emotional response to groups, and symbolic beliefs
- Intergroup contact:
  - group formation, how cognition is effected, and behavior & social comparisons through identity & contact between groups (Watts, 1993)
- Intergroup Contact Theory: towards other religion groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)
  - Enhances knowledge of out-group
  - Reduces anxiety about intergroup contact
  - Increases empathy and perspective taking

# Interfaith Cooperation/ Religious Pluralism

*From now on, the great religions of the world will no longer declare war on each other, but on the giant ills that afflict [humankind].*

- Charles Bonney, 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions

- 1. IFYC defines interfaith as the engagement of people from diverse traditions
- 2. Religiously diverse people can live together in equal dignity and mutual loyalty, inspired by their various traditions to work together

# IFYC Movement

- Long-term mission of IFYC: interfaith cooperation between diverse communities rather than conflict
  - how people of different faiths interact
- Patel & Meyer (2011)
  - interfaith cooperation “seeks to bring people of different faiths together in a way that respects different religious identities, builds mutually inspiring relationships, and engages in common action around issues of shared social concern”
  - *Interfaith Cooperation in Higher Education Video*

# IFYC Guiding Ideas

- respect for religious diversity
  - positive relationships between groups
  - common action for the common good
  - leadership
- 
- **1. Appreciative knowledge of diverse religious traditions and philosophical perspectives.**
  - **2. Meaningful encounters between people of different faith and philosophical backgrounds.**
  - **3. Common action projects between people of different backgrounds.**

# Community Psychology

- Collaboration and participatory action research are key (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001)
- Strengths-based approaches, and sustained efforts through empowerment and engagement (Prilleltensky 2005; Maton, 2008; Dowick & Keys, 2001)
- Sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)
  - entails informal interaction with those nearest
  - localism for participation in the community
  - community satisfaction and familiarity
  - integral members through collective action and strengthening ties with emotional connections and greater investments

# Model Campus Engagement

- Phase 1:
  - Assessment & Planning
    - Visioning: connect to mission
    - Surveying: students, staff, faculty
    - Asset Mapping: task & focus groups
    - Strategic Planning: meetings
- Phase 2:
  - Program Implementation
    - Campus partnership goals:
      - Curriculum changes
      - Program implementation
- holistic, “ecological,” approach with stakeholders to foster sustainable commitment & measurable outcomes
- short-term training and capacity building sessions to longer-term strategic planning and visioning sessions.

# Previous survey questions:

- perceptions of varying religions and similarities
- comfort levels to practice/discuss beliefs on campus
- campus valuing different traditions working together
- traditions supporting different faiths working together
- religious discrimination on campus
- standing up to discrimination

## Interested in:

- opportunities to engage and quality of interactions
- peer networks
- participation in society
- group identification
- personal beliefs, views, values, goals, motivations
- personal experiences with diversity
- campus representation of different identities
- societal values

# Previous Survey

- Main ideas:
  - **campus environment** opportunities and experiences can lead to religious diversity **knowledge**, impacting student **attitudes** and **behaviors** related to interfaith cooperation
  - DePaul: 733/25,000
    - sent to 5000: Random process
  - Almost 50% are Christian or Catholic
  - About 26% Non-Religious
  - Most positive responses :
    - Catholicism and Buddhism
  - Most negative responses:
    - Mormonism
- Recent Literature
  - Midwest most diverse
  - Ignorance of religion
  - 25% of world are Muslims
  - Changing faiths of America
  - Views change with age

# Developing an Assessment of College Students' Spiritual Experiences

- Collegiate Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS) (Bryant & Mayhew, 2009): religious and spiritual climates shape student outcomes over time  
94 items
- Questionnaire addressing:
  - Historical inclusion/exclusion
  - Structural Worldview Diversity
  - Behavioral and Psychological Climate Dimensions
- Modified framework established by Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1999)
  - interrelated elements of the campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity

# New CRSCS Survey Tool

- Spring 2012 Launch
- gauges college students' perceptions of key campus climate dimensions
- assesses interfaith action
- profiles attitudes & behaviors related to interfaith engagement
  
- option to include up to 10 campus-specific questions
  - assess students' involvement and experiences with particular campus initiatives and programs
  - measure specific student outcomes that reflect the mission and values

# College Campuses

- Full student development:
  - incorporating values, emotions, relationships (Kocet & Stewart, 2011)
  - engage students to be global citizens in social action (Stedman, 2011)
- IFYC works with faculty, staff, and students to positively engage religious diversity on campus
- opportunity to build a movement of global citizens and successfully model interfaith cooperation

# Interfaith Projects

- Leadership Institute training:
  - Office of Faith-based & Neighborhood Partnerships at the White House
- Better Together Campaign
  - organizing a social action project
  - international projects

Tackle pressing issues like poverty and the environment
- Interfaith leaders of different faiths
- *President's Challenge Video*

# Perceptions of Poverty

How are perceptions formed?

- Media
- Culture
- Experiences

# Activity

George is working full-time, but he does not make enough money to pay for rent, food, and other living expenses. George is a single dad with three children. He and his children currently reside at a homeless shelter.

- Why do you think George is in his current situation? How do you think George can change it?

# Previous Research on Perceptions of Poor

Inaccurate media portrayals:

- Overrepresentation of African-Americans: Gilens (1996) 2/3 of poor people are black
- “Deserving poor” (i.e., working poor or elderly) – underrepresented in the media (Gilens, 1996)
- According to media: 49% of poor are African-American (reality – 27%); 33% of poor are White (reality – 45%); 22% of poor are Hispanic (reality – 24%); 0% of Asian-Americans are poor (reality – 4%)
- 30% of poor shown working; in reality, it’s 50%

# Previous Research on Perceptions of Poor

- “Lack of effort” and “loose morals and drunkenness” (Kluegel and Smith, 1986)
- Criminals, alcoholics, and drug addicts (Gans, 1995)
- Lazy, sexually irresponsible, deviant (Parisi, 1998)
- “Welfare Queen” (Coughlin, 1989)

# Activity

- According to Shek (2002) Chinese Perceived Causes of Poverty Scale:
  1. Fate/luck
  2. Personal problems
  3. Social injustice
  4. Lack of opportunities

# Undergraduate Attitudes Towards Poverty

- *Undergraduate Perceptions of Poverty Tracking Attitudes Survey (UPPTS, Blair, Taylor, Schoepflin, & Brown, 2011)*
- 43 items, 8 subscales
- Measures attitudes towards the poor and welfare, as well as exposure to poverty

# Subscales

- Social Welfare Attitude
  - Welfare makes people lazy*
- Poor are Different
  - Poor people act differently*
- Basic Rights
  - Everyone, regardless of circumstance, should have enough food*
- Need to do More
  - Charities should do more to help the poor*

# Subscales (cont'd)

- Belief in Equal Opportunity
  - Any person can get ahead in this country*
- Flawed Character
  - Poor people are dishonest*
- Access to Resources
  - Lack of self-control is a major challenge for the poor*
- Social Empathy
  - I feel that I know what it is like to be poor*

# Analysis

- *T-test: Compare University ministry students with students not engaged in university ministry*
- **Lower** scores indicate more **structuralistic and empathetic** attitudes towards poverty
- **Higher** scores indicate more **individualistic and “blame the victim”** attitudes towards poverty

Subscales	Uni. Ministry n=62	Gen. Students n=206
Need to Do More*	13.10 (4.63)	14.86 (3.83)
Welfare Attitude	39.28 (4.99)	39.37 (5.51)
Poor are Different*	16.61 (5.08)	14.74 (4.13)
Basic Rights	6.28 (3.91)	7.00 (3.70)
Belief in Equal Opp.	12.56 (3.12)	12.07 (3.03)
Flawed Character*	17.00 (6.33)	14.86 (5.43)
Access to Resources	9.68 (3.00)	10.29 (2.88)
Social Empathy	8.87 (2.66)	9.09 (2.56)

# Analysis Summary

Only statistically significantly different subscales were

- Need to do More,  $t(266) = -3.03, p < .05$
- Poor are Different,  $t(263) = 2.93, p < .05$
- Flawed Character,  $t(265) = 2.61, p < .05$

# Discussion

## Mixed results!

- Those engaged in University Ministry may think that different entities (societies, businesses, charities, etc. ) should do more to help the poor
- non-University Ministry had lower scales on Flawed Character and Poor are Different. Maybe non-University Ministry students have more empathetic attitudes towards those living in poverty.

# Why are people poor?

- Qualitative component to survey

**“Using your experience and definition of poverty what are the top three conditions (or factors) that cause an individual, a family or a group of people to be living in poverty?”**

# Audience Participation

- What do you think some of the responses were?

# Qualitative Responses

- Poor money management
- Laziness
- Drug addictions
- Lack of education
- Physical or Mental disorder
- Loss of jobs
- Lack of opportunity

# Qualitative Responses

- Tough economy/recession
- Low salary
- Unemployment
- Inheritance of poverty - being born into it
- No family support
- Neighborhood
- Race/ethnicity

## ***Poverty Amongst Plenty: Perceptions of the Economic Poor by Undergraduates at a Faith-based Urban Institution***

- Additionally, an increase in media exposure of living conditions around the world, as well as a struggling economy, makes the issue of poverty relevant and salient to college students today.
- Furthermore, by examining college students' attitudes towards and perceptions of those living in poverty, as well as how they believe individuals become poor, we can start to understand students' sense of empathy of those living in poverty, as well as their understanding of why poverty exists.
- Framing poverty as an example of social injustice is a challenge for individuals in Western societies, who may conceptualize poverty as an individual choice. Research may also guide university curriculum to include opportunities that expose students to poverty, as well as education about structural reasons for poverty.

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