

The Multi-Faith Imperative

A new facility meeting the needs of 21st century students

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The Pasquerilla Spiritual Center

The Pasquerilla Spiritual Center on the Penn State, University Park Campus is one of the first of its kind at a public university. The Center is the culmination of many years of dreaming and planning by a group of interested community members. The dream was to build a Center that would welcome all faiths to a common place for study, worship, and socializing.

There is a heightened recognition in today's society for the need to develop the entire individual—intellectually, culturally, and spiritually. Penn State recognizes that the well-being of its students—and their ability to lead whole, productive lives upon graduation—is not only a product of intellectual and cultural development, but also includes the development of sound morals, ethics, and community values.

The Center was totally funded through private donations and was designed to serve the 56 recognized faith groups presently organized on campus. The design committee agreed to

keep the Center free of religious symbols. The architectural design was based on the element of “light,” common to all faith groups.

Special features include a large worship space that seats up to 750 people; 11 new staff offices; a room facing east complete with a wudu attached used “first and foremost” for Muslim prayer; a room used “first and foremost” by Hillel which houses the Ark; a kosher kitchen; and a light tower which extends a soft glowing light across campus.

The Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs (CERA), a unit of Student Affairs, is the administrative unit responsible for the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center. As stated in its mission, CERA provides programs and a venue for the ethical, religious, spiritual, and character development of the University community, using diversity as a resource for the development of responsible and responsive community members through increased awareness and development. This mission finds expression in a broad offering of worship opportunities, educational events, and cross-cultural programs that enrich the heart and mind. The Center hosts a culturally diverse multi-faith community whose success is realized only through trust, mutual respect, and the struggle that genuine interaction sometimes requires. As individuals in this community, we are invited beyond the familiar and across boundaries where we can find a safe environment to celebrate our differences and can live with greater understanding, meaning, and peace.

Assessing the Impact

Penn State Pulse, a Gallup-type telephone polling system and Web-administered survey program, has provided data on the importance of religious and spiritual services for students. Pulse is a source for student assessment on various issues, expectations, usage, and satisfaction. In general, Pulse surveys, which receive Research Protections approval, last approximately five to six minutes.

CERA utilized the Pulse program to learn more about spirituality and religion on campus by providing baseline data in spring of 2003 prior to the completion of the new facility and then to measure change based on data collected in the spring of 2004. In 2004, 889 students responded to the survey. By phone, 632 responded for a 50.3% cooperation rate and by Web, 257 responded for a 12.9% response rate. For the total sample, the margin of error was +/- 3.25.

Demographics: Of the 2004 sample, 88.1% of the respondents were undergraduates; 11.9% were graduate students. Of the undergraduates, approximately 25% were from each class e.g. first-year, second year, etc.; 47.3% were male and 52.6% were female. In addition, 50.3% lived on campus, and 49.7% lived off campus; 6.4% were International students; and 83.9% indicated that they were non-minority and 16.1% were either minority or multiracial.

Religious Affiliations: Students were asked in their own words to define their religious affiliation - 33.0% of the respondents indicated that they were Catholic; 33.4% protestant; 4.4% Jewish; 1.7% Buddhist; 1.7% Hindu; less than 1% Islamic; and 7.7% not affiliated with a religious group.

Role of Spirituality and Religion in Students' Lives: In 2004, students were more likely to report that they were religious persons than they were in 2003; 39.4% reported being “strongly”¹ religious compared to 35.7% in 2003. Also in 2004, students were more likely to believe their close friends were spiritual than they were in 2003 (26.5% compared to 24.6%) or religious (24.1% compared to 21.5%).

Influence of Religion/Spirituality: As demonstrated in Table 1, evidence suggests that religion/spirituality played a more significant role in the lives of students in 2004 than it did in 2003.

Table 1. Influence of Religion/Spirituality

by percent ¹	2004	2003
Personal behaviors*	46.2	40.1
Daily decisions*	35.2	31.9
Choice of significant other/partner ²	32.9	39.4
Use of drugs and/or alcohol	32.3	na
Choice of activities	26.9	24.8
Choice of friends	12.5	13.4

*Significantly different at the .05 level

Perceptions of Climate: In 2004, 60.2% of students felt Penn State is supportive of religious and spiritual groups, compared to 54.4% in 2003. They also felt that in 2004 the student climate is more supportive of religious and spiritual groups than reported in 2003 (41.6% compared to 36.0).

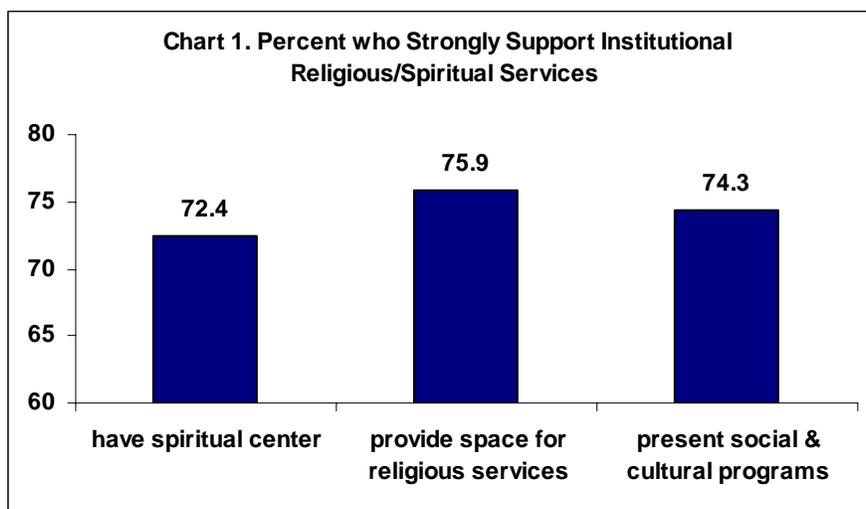
Religious Involvement: In 2004, 45.6% had attended religious services or events on campus at least once a semester during the academic year; 58.3% had attended religious services or events off campus or at home at least once a semester during this academic year; 24.6% were at least “slightly” involved in a religious or spiritual organization on campus; and 91.2% indicated their religious affiliation had not changed since coming to college.

Religious Knowledge: In 2004, 49.8% of the students surveyed indicated they were at least somewhat more knowledgeable about their own religious/spiritual affiliation, and 65.2% were at least somewhat more knowledgeable about other religious/spiritual affiliations since coming to college.

Importance of University Support: As indicated in Chart 1, approximately three-quarters of the students surveyed supported having a spiritual center on campus; felt it was important to provide space for religious services on campus, and University-sponsored social and cultural programs. In addition, 63.4% strongly supported educational programs; 61.6% strongly supported providing space for personal meditation; 48.6% strongly supported discussions lead on personal decision-making & ethical values; and 48.2% strongly supported the University providing the opportunity for religious mentors.

¹ Percent who responded either “substantially” or “to a great extent.”

² In 2003, the question was worded “choice of future significant other.”



Use of the Center: In 2004, 86.7% of the respondents stated that their religious and spiritual needs had been met since coming to college compared to 81.9% in 2003. In the spring of 2004, 44.5% of the students surveyed had been to the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center—Eisenhower Chapel while, in 2003, 29.4% of the students had visited the Center. Of those who had been to the Center, 83.8% were satisfied with their experiences. In 2004, 70% of the students who had visited the Center had attended a religious service while in 2003, 53.4% of those visiting the Center had attended a religious service. In 2003, 44.8% of those visiting the Center had attended programs compared to 34.7% in 2004.

Summary of Findings: Evidence suggests that 1) religion and spirituality are of greater importance in the lives of Penn State students today and that the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center—Eisenhower Chapel, and 2) the Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs are having a positive influence on the religious/spiritual climate on the Penn State University Park Campus.

Future Challenges

Incorporating a Spiritual Center onto a public university campus setting is not without challenges. The spiritual center staff must serve as change agents dealing with several overarching challenges. First are the issues of the separation of Church and State, which have often provided public universities with a hands-off approach with regard to attending to the religious and spiritual needs of students. Second, funding sources continue to be a challenge. Private donors and endowments are essential for daily operation costs. A third challenge is balancing the competing needs and expectations of the various constituents and stakeholders. Finding a balance for programming, sharing space, planning multi-faith activities, communication, and representation is challenging and time-consuming. As the Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs Mission Statement reads, “The Pasquerilla Spiritual Center—Eisenhower Chapel hosts a culturally diverse multi-faith community whose success is realized only through trust, mutual respect, and the struggle that the genuine interest sometimes requires. As individuals in this community we are invited beyond the familiar and across

boundaries where we can find a safe environment to celebrate our differences and can live with greater understanding, meaning, and peace.”

Despite these challenges, we believe that the efforts of the Center are serving important needs for our students with regard to their own religious and spiritual needs and development and in exposing them to faiths different from their own. We also believe that our role in promoting the moral and ethical development of students is paramount to the mission of higher education.