The Diversity Symposium:  
Fostering Engagement and Inclusion of International Students and Scholars  
October 11, 2013

Religious Diversity Roundtable  
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References and Resources

➢ This online magazine seeks to map and photograph every religious site within the five boroughs of New York, and to interview clergy and lay leaders at each site. Along the way, it posts many interesting stories and much fascinating information about religion in New York City.

➢ This classic article examines the concepts of persuasion, proselytism and conversion, both within and beyond a religious context, and in so doing raises some challenging questions for international educators to consider.

➢ This book is aimed at those “who do not know anything about other religions and do not have the option of…lengthy and laborious study” to learn. In a concise, systematic and clear way, the author presents a wide range of world religions in fifteen chapters that are easy to read and highly informative. Eight “main” religions are covered in about 8-12 pages each. An additional briefer description is offered for sixteen newer religious movements and traditional or tribal religions. The material is clear and readable—a good starting point for anyone seeking a quick but accurate description.

➢ Technology and widespread immigration have placed people with widely divergent backgrounds and beliefs into close proximity to one another, and this circumstance offers both a challenge and an opportunity for the people of the world. How can we live with the deep differences that exist among us? The author offers a challenging and remarkable proposal of a civil and cosmopolitan global public square, with what he calls “freedom of the soul” at its heart—the inviolable freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This is a thoughtful and thought-provoking book.

- An account of how colleges and universities across the country are re-engaging religion and how they can do that more intelligently and effectively; based on the Jacobsen’s visits to over fifty campuses, and their conversations with hundreds of faculty, students, college administrators, and chaplains.


- Utilizing a survey sample of nearly a thousand randomly selected students, this report addresses the overarching questions: What are the religious/spiritual beliefs and practices of NYU students? How do students differ by religious/spiritual backgrounds? How has NYU affected these changes?


- The authors argue that journalists and commentators frequently do not view religion seriously and therefore fail to grasp the religious context of the news. The book’s essays examine news stories reported by major media sources in which key religious dimensions were ignored, overlooked, or misrepresented. It offers all readers—whether people of faith or not—a fascinating analysis of the news media’s uneasy relationship with religion and religious issues.


- In this comparison of eight major world religions, the author asserts that all religions at their heart are really not the same. To that end, he attempts to give readers “basic religious literacy”, presenting each group’s beliefs and practices, the evolution of their traditions, their assessment of the problems humans face, and their assertions of the solutions to these problems.


- Modeled on other “zone-type” trainings, this NYU program seeks to provide an overview of how religion and spirituality affect participants’ lives, particularly in the context of higher education; and explore how religious issues and spiritual literacy are relevant to various constituencies at NYU and beyond.
http://www.nafsa.org/Learn_About_NAFSA/Governance_Documents/Ethics_And_Principles/Statement_Of_Ethics/NAFSA_s_Statement_of_Ethical_Principles/  
➢ Since its inception in 1948, NAFSA has been engaged in setting standards and encouraging ethical conduct among individuals, institutions, and organizations active in the field of international education and exchange. This statement is offered to help international educators provide those they serve with high-quality education and services.


➢ This declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Arising out of the experience of the Second World War, it represents the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled.  
➢ Article 18 (of 30) states: *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*
The Role of Ethics in International Education
Our contemporary world is marked by increasing globalization, greater connectedness, and ease of movement. Knowledge and awareness of other peoples, countries, cultures and beliefs is of utmost importance. As international educators we recognize that such knowledge is fundamental to the formation of educated persons and informed citizens and, increasingly, a key to professional, business, and personal success. The acquisition of this knowledge depends, to a great extent, on high-quality programs of international education and exchange.

International educators are dedicated to providing such programs and services with the highest level of integrity and responsibility. To accomplish this, we must attend carefully and actively to the ethical obligations that emerge from our relationships with students, scholars, our institutions, international partners, and other legitimate stakeholders.

As professionals, international educators share clear and defined values. We are committed to the welfare of the students and scholars in our programs. As educators, our decisions and actions should be guided by the goal of ensuring that our programs serve identifiable and legitimate educational purposes. Working in a global and multicultural environment, we are committed to the internationalization of education, not merely as a set of experiences, but as a value-laden set of interactions that produces individuals who are more knowledgeable, reflective, broad-minded, and aware.

The Role and Purpose of the Statement of Ethical Principles
We, international educators, declare our commitment to the following statement of ethical principles to:

- aid international educators in negotiating competing responsibilities, demands, and interests as they strive to make ethical decisions in complex and multicultural environments;
- inspire international educators to infuse all of their work with ethical principles and practices;
- advance the development of international education as a profession and strengthen the ethical dimensions of professional outreach, research, and training;
- aid professionals and their institutions in decision-making in the management, support, and provision of programs and services;
- highlight the ethical obligations embedded in the relationships surrounding international education;
- broaden and deepen conversations on ethical and professional practices in international education.

NAFSA’s STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Integrity
We will manifest the highest level of integrity in all our professional undertakings, dealing with others honestly and fairly, abiding by our commitments, and always acting in a manner that merits the trust and confidence others have placed in us.

Respect for the Law
We will follow all applicable laws and regulations and carefully and reflectively advise students and scholars regarding those laws and regulations. We will seek out appropriate guidance and advice when regulations appear contradictory, ambiguous, or confusing or when a situation is beyond our role or competency.
Quality
We will strive constantly to provide high quality and educationally valuable programs and services. We regularly will evaluate and review our work in order to improve those programs and services and will seek out and adopt exemplary practices.

Competence
We will undertake our work with the highest levels of competence and professionalism, regularly seeking and acquiring the training and knowledge necessary to do so. Our commitment to professional competence will extend to exercising thorough oversight of external programs and placements. Through careful planning and the development and implementation of appropriate policies, we will do our utmost to ensure the safety, security, and success of students, staff, faculty, and scholars.

Diversity
In both word and deed we will respect the dignity and worth of all people and be properly attentive and responsive to the beliefs and cultural commitments of others. In the planning, development, and implementation of programs and services we will engage respectfully with the diversity of peoples and perspectives. We will strive to ensure that our programs reflect the diversity of our institutions and their educational goals.

Transparency
We will demonstrate the appropriate level of transparency in dealings with individuals and organizations. In collaborations with other institutions and individuals we will proceed on the bases of equality and mutuality. Transactions with external providers of programs and services will be conducted professionally, always keeping the welfare of students foremost, and disclosing any potential conflicts of interests. We will provide faculty, staff, students and scholars with the information they need to make good decisions about program participation and to facilitate their adjustment to the locales and cultures where they will study or work.

Access
In planning, developing, and implementing our programs we will strive to ensure that they are accessible to all qualified individuals, doing our utmost to guarantee that international education is available to all who desire it and can benefit from it.

Responsiveness
We will maintain open and readily accessible communication with individuals in our programs and services and with our institutional partners. This includes providing students with the appropriate level of support based on age, experience, language ability, and placement.

Holding these principles constantly in mind, we will work to extend and improve international education in all its forms and at all levels, including advocating for programs, policies, regulations, and laws that reflect these principles. Additionally, we will work aggressively for the realization of these principles in our personal and professional conduct, throughout our institutions, and in organizations with which we affiliate.
Persuasion comes in many forms.

The proselytization of international students and scholars on U.S. campuses is not conducted solely by religious sects. Political groups, social causes, and secular ideologies aggressively seek new proselytes as well. This article will differentiate activities that involve mere persuasion from unethical behaviors exhibited by overzealous convert makers.
What Is a Prosylectic?
The Oxford English Dictionary informs us that "prosylectic" derives from the Latin proselytus and before to an earlier Greek form which in ancient times was associated with religious conversion, particularly that of a gentile to Judaism. Today, a proselytizer is defined as one who induces an individual to convert to another faith, political party, institution, or cause. Proselytization is still very much with us.

NAFSA has formally addressed the proselytization of internationals on a number of occasions. For example, in its 1981 revision of "Standards and Responsibilities in International Educational Exchange," NAFSA recommended that "there must never be any attempt to proselytize, and any invitation to a foreign student or scholar to an event sponsored by a religious or political group should clearly indicate the nature of the event and its sponsorship." More recently, NAFSA's Committee on Ethical Practice refined its guidelines on proselytization and published its recommendations in the "Code of Ethics" (1992). The new guidelines state firmly that community organizations working with internationals "should make clear (to volunteers and participants) that surreptitious, deceptive, or coercive proselytizing is unacceptable" (emphasis supplied). The wording suggests that it is not the making of converts itself that is troublesome, but rather "surreptitious, deceptive, or coercive" activities. Despite the Code's evenhanded approach, proselytization remains a controversial issue in the international community.

The pall of disfavor surrounding the proselytization of internationals stems from a misconception and a stereotype. The misconception is that all proselytization is coercive and deceptive. Although the ultimate purpose of a campaign of persuasion may be to convert (for example, to convert a person from the Democratic to the Republican stance) the effort need not be unethical. A stereotype adds to this misconception. The stereotypical proselytizer is a creature out of a nightmare—a concealing, conniving, and premeditating zealot who deliberately preys on the vulnerabilities of homesick and culture-shocked internationals and isolates them further from the world of education, culture, family, and friends. The stereotype is more often than not a Christian evangelical of markedly conservative sensibilities. It is a potent image. Because of its potency and the lingering misconception that proselytization is always unethical, convert making is often vilified, whether or not unethical behaviors are present.

However powerful the stereotype might be, however widespread the misconception, they are both nonetheless incomplete mirrors of nature. In reality, proselytization is less stereotypical and more subtle, and, when unethical behavior is present, includes pressures to convert to ideologies far more numerous and disparate than the stereotype implies. It is probably not true that in most cases the unethical proselytizer is a shouting evangelist poised in front of the student union. In fact, it is too narrow to view proselytization as operating only in religious contexts, where there are political, social, and even economic contexts in which convert-makers attempt to snare the proselyte as surely as any stereotypical itinerant preacher.

By way of illustration, the five critical incidents described below are offered in an effort both to explore several forms proselytization may take, and to show something of the complicated lives of the new proselytes. The incidents are composites; the names are fictitious.

Pan's Letters
A graduate student from China, Pan came into the international student center at his college during early fall 1989 to describe a series of troubling events at his home off-campus and at the Department of Computer Science. Pan had received two long letters through campus mail in which a "fellow student" (under a pseudonym) had accused him not only of being a "bad citizen of China" but also a "capitalist reader" and a disgrace to the Chinese community because he harbored pro-democracy sentiments. The writer said Pan was unworthy to be a leader of the Chinese student community. Both letters ended with accusations about Pan's putative sexual orientation.

A similar letter was received by the president of the Friendship Association of Chinese Students (FACS) on campus. The author insisted that the letter be printed in the FACS newsletter and that Pan be forced to "struggle" with these issues—in other words to engage in self-criticism and show remorse for his anticomunist behaviors.

Pan also received a series of threatening and anonymous phone calls that centered on his involvement with the campus democracy movement when he was an FACS officer. There was tremendous loss of face for Pan because the substance of the letters leaked into the Chinese population, most likely as a result of an action by the author of the letters.

Deepea and Her Friends
A student from India, Deepea sought advice at her university's international center about her imminent return home after the completion of her master's degree in public health. She seemed apprehensive about the life waiting for her in India. A member of the privileged Brahmin caste, Deepea was also a physician. As she explained her situation, it became apparent that Deepea feared returning to her husband because of increasing tensions between them (her two young daughters had returned to India at the family's insistence the previous year). Deepea kept emphasizing: "I may not be the same person that I was before."

Deepea explained that she had become close friends with two American women in her department who had strong feminist beliefs. Deepea was frequently challenged by her friends about her traditional beliefs regarding women's role in Indian family and society. Over time, she had come to agree with several tenets of feminism, especially in regard to reproductive freedom and the equal status of women. Her family, and especially her husband, were shocked by Deepea's adoption of these "American" concepts, which they considered degrading to the family.

Deepea felt there was danger that her marriage would fall upon her return home and that she would disgrace her parents and her daughters. Her two American friends were urging Deepea to seek a divorce and claim custody of her children. She feared that such action might be disastrous but longed for the perceived freedoms.
depicted by her friends. Her respect for her friends and her sense of obligation to her family caused her to feel great confusion as to the best course of action.

U.S. dollar conspired to create a very difficult financial situation for an undergraduate student from Brazil, Milton. It became extremely difficult for him to make payments to the university. Tuition and fees, monthly rent, required health insurance payments—all were in arrears. Milton understood that there were off-campus work authorization possibilities for an F-1 student experiencing urgent, unforeseen financial need but balked at the two- to three-month INS turnaround for issuance of employment authorization. He felt he needed more immediate financial assistance.

Soon afterward, Milton received a phone call and the next day a visit from a solicitor offering “Easy Cash” at “Reasonable Student Rates.” Having been exposed to similar commercials and advertisements on television and in the print media, all exhibiting happy, successful young professionals who used “plastic” regularly, Milton applied for and received a credit card with the solicitor’s assistance. The credit card quickly came in the mail, and the student rapidly exhausted the credit line of several thousand dollars by paying bills. He repeated this process with two other credit cards, and ended up owing nearly $10,000 at 18 percent interest with no means of meeting this new financial obligation.

Commentary

These critical incidents, to one degree or another, tell of the making of converts. Some of the new proselytes came willingly to the point of their conversion: Nozuko to Christianity Deeply to feminism. Some resisted conversion or, at best, were without timely awareness of their having become

The Newsletter

Two male students from the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed and Ahmet, sought advice regarding a situation that had arisen among members of the Islamic Student Association (ISA), an officially recognized student organization on campus. The two students were concerned that the ISA was becoming too conservative for them, and they worried that the leadership of the ISA was beginning to embrace some aspects of fundamentalist Islam. Although the students enjoyed the company of their fellow Muslims, they both were uncomfortable with the prospect that their behavior at the university and in the community might be monitored and dictated by what they perceived as an increasingly conservative worldview among ISA members.

As evidence of this conservative trend, the students produced copies of the recent ISA newsletter, which included a brief article praising a group of female students in the ISA for successfully securing an apartment lease off-campus. The students then went on to explain that the article was significant because, in their estimation, it was not praising the women for their initiative in establishing a home off-campus, but because they had done so with other conservative Islamic believers. Non-Muslims were not among their roommates.

Plastic

Extreme inflation in Brazil and a subsequent devaluation of the Brazilian currency against the

gram (ECP) at the local First Baptist Church. The ECP was a successful mission outreach program of this church and was advertised widely in the local media. Nozuko found out about the ECP through an advertisement in the campus newspaper. The coordinator of the ECP was a community volunteer of long standing, involved with NAFOA for many years. The coordinator had made the NAFOA Code of Ethics required reading for all volunteers. The ECP disclosed in advertisements and in introductory meetings that, in addition to secular materials, readings from the Bible would be used to increase language facility and to serve as starting points for discussions of the Christian faith.

Having attended ECP classes and get-togethers for a semester and a half, Nozuko (who was not originally a Christian) began to be more and more interested in Christianity. Shortly after spring break, she accepted an invitation to join the First Baptist Church and was baptized at the Sunday evening service.

Upon learning of her conversion from a concerned friend, the director of International Student and Scholar Services at the university where Nozuko was a full-time student called the pastor of the First Baptist Church to protest what she viewed as inappropriate proselytization on the part of the ECP.

Nozuko Converts

A female student from South Africa, Nozuko, began attending the English conversation pro-
a proselyte. Pan to ultra leftist communism; Mohammed and Almet to conservative Islam; Milton to deficit spending. None of the protagonists was targeted by cultists. None was pressured by stereotypical proselytizers. Some were faced with proselytization that had a strongly religious or overtly political context. Others felt pressures to "convert" that were rooted in social and economic contexts. What else can be gleaned from the incidents?

In the case of Pan and the venomous letters, it is fairly apparent that a variation on a theme is present, the leitmotif of which is political ideology. Pan can be seen as experiencing a form of coercive and abusive political proselytization that has as its primary intent Pan's conversion to leftist conservatism. For Pan, this would mean a return to the communist fold, so to speak, via the humiliation of the "struggle" referred to in one of the letters.

The incident involving Deepa and her friends exhibits a type of social proselytization that also has discernible political overtones. The two friends may or may not be aware of the intense pressure they brought to bear on Deepa as a result of their desire that she embrace feminist ideology. They may have presumed that Deepa was part of a "dysfunctional" family situation that was inately oppressive to her as a woman. From the perspective of an American feminist, this may have been a logical assessment of Deepa's plight. From the perspective of Deepa's Brahmin family, however, their view is inaccurate and hurtful to their daughter, wife, and mother.

Mohammed and Almet are faced with the perceived pressure by Islamic Student Association leaders to adopt more fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. From the information supplied, it does not appear that the actions of the group's leaders are surreptitious. The proselytization, though distasteful to Mohammed and Almet, is not unethical. Although concerned about the pressure they feel to conform, the two students cannot provide evidence that they are being harassed. Of more immediate concern, perhaps, is the newsletter article praising ISA members for choosing Islamic roommates in that it implies that separation from nonbelievers is desirable.

Milton has become a proselyte to credit consumerism, an economic mindset that is new and unfamiliar to him and one that he has zealously embraced. The repercussions of his credit spending are probably just becoming apparent to Milton as the months go by and the interest on his "plastic" is compounded; the bottom line, as he may eventually discover, is that Milton is far worse off financially than he was to begin with. If Milton is a proselyte, who then is the proselytizer? The ethics of the solicitor who helped Milton obtain credit cards may be dubious, but it is not entirely fair to lay the blame solely on this person. Milton also fell victim to the culture of credit con

It is not innately synonymous with coercion, deception, or other unethical behaviors. From a constitutional standpoint, it cannot and should not be prohibited, lest we alienate ourselves from our community. What can and must be termed is unethical behavior in convert making. A focus on ethics lends itself to viable and effective action. Prohibition does not.

Finally, it is important to consider that the unethical and stereotypical religious proselytizer is not a total fabrication; such persons do exist in the world, and their improper behavior must be seen for what it is and thwarted. However, the religious stereotype alone should not be focused on as the sum total of proselytization gone wrong. Unethical behavior in convert making elsewhere will then go unlooked for, unseen, and unchallenged.

—David B. Austell, Jr. is the director of International Student and Scholar Services at the University of South Florida in Tampa. This article was originally presented at the 1994 conference of NAFSA's Region VII in Huntsville, Alabama. Selected as "Best of Region," the session of which this article forms a part will be presented again at NAFSA's 47th annual national conference in New Orleans, May 28–June 2. Presenting with Dr. Austell will be Davis E. Prober, minister to internationals at Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C.
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