

# RECOGNIZING CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE ON CAMPUS:

## Suggestions for Creating an Inclusive Environment for Inner Development

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# Context

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- My interest in Christian privilege
- The Journey: From promoting “spiritual development” to fostering “inner development”

# Learning Objectives

- To be able to define Christian privilege and give examples of how that privilege manifests generally in U.S. culture
- To gain understanding in how Christians experience privilege in higher education settings and how Christian privilege affects the holistic development of non-Christians
- To identify strategies to facilitate a supportive environment for inner development

# What is Privilege?

- Privilege manifests in silent advantages which those in the dominant social/cultural group experience in their everyday lived experiences (McIntosh, 1988)
- Privilege is so pervasive for those in the dominant group that if they were fish, they would not even feel the water in which they were swimming (Bem & Bem, 1970).

# Who are Christians?

- Christians are those who believe in:
  - ▣ Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior
  - ▣ The teachings of the Old and New Testaments (e.g. the Holy Trinity and the resurrection of Christ) (Schlosser, 2003).
  
- This definition includes Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, and smaller denominations (Schlosser, 2003).


# What is Christian Privilege?

- “An invisible knapsack of unearned and unacknowledged benefits with which Christians in the U.S. walk casually around, as if with a knapsack on their shoulder” (Clark, Brimhall-Vargas, Schlosser, and Alimo, 2002).
- Spectrum of Christian privilege with Protestants, and to a lesser extent, Catholics, experiencing the greatest level of privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006)

# Christians Privilege on College Campuses

- Institutional calendars
  - Classes convene Monday through Friday and occasionally on Sat.
  - Semester break falls prior to Christmas
  - Secularization of Christmas and Easter places Christian symbols into the center of cultural fabric
- Space, Language, & Living on Campus
  - Christians are given “prime real estate” on campus
  - Christian term, “Chaplain”, refers to all faith leaders
  - Meal plans may not provide food prepared according to religious instructions (i.e. kosher or halal)
- Institutional rituals
  - Invocation and benedictions at commencement
  - “The Year of our Lord” or A.D. on diplomas

# Addressing Christian Privilege

- Make structural/procedural changes
  - ▣ Re-examine the calendar and official ceremonies
  - ▣ Review space allocations for student groups
  - ▣ Ascertain flexibility of housing and dining in terms of meeting non-Christian students' needs
-  Where do subtle and explicit reinforcements of Christian privilege exist?
- Create mentoring communities to “ignite the fire” for moral conversations and dialogue

# Strategies for a Supportive Environment that Fosters Inner Development

Create mentoring communities as safe spaces for dialogue

- First and foremost, ***Respect the basic human dignity of all.***
- Basic Assumptions of Moral Conversations (Nash, Bradley, & Chickering, 2008)
  - ▣ Grant the right to hear any and all viewpoints, no matter how “outrageous.”
    - Humility and Charity – attribute the best motive to the speaker; any critique or correction must be motivated by a commitment to help build understanding, not to harm
    - Faith – trust that hearing from another is worthwhile and valuable to us in some way
    - Self-denial – reexamine your own assumptions and biases
  - ▣ Develop a willingness to find the truth in what we oppose and the error in what we espouse . . . at least initially

**“If argument is impelled by the answers, conversation is moved and marked by the questions” (Martin Marty, 1997, p. 155).**