

How is Liberal Education Addressing the Needs of Atheist Students?

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AAC&U Annual Meeting
Seattle, Washington
Saturday, Jan. 24, 9:30am

Population Size

- 14% of the world's population is secular, non-religious, agnostic, or atheist
- 1 - 3% of the U.S. population are self-reported atheists
- 17% of students surveyed picked "none" as their stated religious preference
- 15% of students stated that they are not interested in "spiritual/religious matters"

Setting the Context

- How I became interested in atheist college students
- Renewed focus on spirituality and religion in higher education
- Atheism's relationship to liberal education

Informal Knowledge About Atheist Students

- *Inviting Atheists to the Table: A Modest Proposal for Higher Education*
 - Robert Nash
- *Faith No More: The Campus Crusade for Secular Humanism*
 - Emily Nussbaum

Difficult Definitions

• Atheist	• Spirituality
• Agnostic	• Existentialism
• Secular, humanist, free-thinker, non-believer, non-theist	• Inner Development

Informal Knowledge About Atheist Students

- Stigmatized (Nash, 2003)
- Life Philosophy (Nussbaum, 1999)
- Invisible and Marginalized

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Research About Atheist Students (Mueller, 2008)

Confirms and expands informal knowledge:

- Knowledgeable about religions and philosophies
- Stigmatized
- Selective about who they tell
- Moral compass – being good for goodness sake
- Freedom of thought\forced self responsibility
- Challenges

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Serving Atheist Students - Inner Development

Overlaps and compliments normalization:

- Create safe “spaces”\Connect students
- Provide opportunities to share atheist perspectives in interfaith settings
- Provide non-religious and non-spiritual opportunities for inner development
- Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy example

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What Atheist Students Need from a Liberal Education

- Normalization of atheism on campus
 - Don't expect anything but want to be accepted
- Opportunities for “inner development”
 - Deserve opportunity for self-reflection

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More Information

- *Invisible, Marginalized, and Stigmatized: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Atheist Students*
 - *New Directions for Student Services* – “Religious privilege and student affairs practice: Intersections of difficult dialogues”
- *Chronicle of Higher Education* article
- Future research – qualitative and quantitative

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Serving Atheist Students -- Normalization

- Learn more about atheism
- Create a network of role models\allies
- Include atheism in student programming

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Discussion - Christian Privilege and Atheism

- Questions and comments from audience?
- How do these concepts relate to your understanding of liberal education?
- What are your impressions about using the term “spirituality” to frame the discussion about life’s Big Questions?
- How is your campus providing inclusive opportunities for all students to grapple with these issues?

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Web Sites

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friendlyatheist.com
secularstudents.org
<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

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