

Memo on the Religious Diversity and Belonging Task Force Report

To the Members of the University of Virginia Community:

In the wake of the Hamas terror attack on Israel, the initiation of the war in Gaza, and heightened concerns regarding antisemitism and Islamophobia around the world, President Ryan and I established the Religious Diversity and Belonging Task Force to examine the experience of religious minorities at UVA and the opportunities for our students to learn about religious histories and cultures. Throughout the spring semester of 2024, the task force reviewed a range of data from surveys and compliance units, held focus groups, and examined practices at peer institutions. The task force also arrived at recommendations for ensuring that students have opportunities for meaningful academic and personal engagement across religious differences, and that UVA is a welcoming and supportive environment for all our students, faculty, and staff.

We have now received the task force's final report. This memo provides a few important takeaways from the report, and an overview of the actions that we plan to take based on the recommendations of the task force.

Some key findings

The task force was asked to provide a multi-year assessment of student experiences. When asked in the most recent (2022) national standard higher education survey called SERU (Student Experience in the Research University) whether their religious views are respected on Grounds, 78% of Jewish undergraduates and 77% of Muslim students responded affirmatively. As the report notes, results for both groups have improved from 2018. That improvement is encouraging, and those survey results indicate that the clear majority of Jewish and Muslim students find their religious views respected at UVA. But as the report further details, the percentage of students in those two groups who responded to that question affirmatively is lower than for students with any other religious identity.

There are both differences and similarities when the survey question shifts from sense of respect for religious views to overall sense of belonging. Jewish undergraduate students in the 2022 SERU survey reported a higher sense of belonging than students of any other religious affiliation at UVA (89%), while Muslim students reported the lowest overall sense of belonging (71%). The available data on faculty, staff, and graduate students is quite sparse and, as indicated below, is something we need to develop more robustly moving ahead.

The task force also examined reports of bias, discrimination, and harassment. Following a national and global trend, the report indicates that at UVA in 2023-2024 there was a rise in reports with potential connection to religion. As the task force details, while the University takes all reports very seriously, a report does not in itself indicate that an incident of bias, discrimination, or harassment has occurred. It indicates that a concern has been reported which the University is committed to investigate and act on as needed.

Of the 56 reports related to religion this past academic year, the largest increase was in reports potentially connected to Judaism, with a total of 33 reports. There was also an increase in reports potentially connected to Islam, with a total of 9 reports. Any increase in such reports is troubling. At the same time, it is important to understand these numbers in the overall demographic context of the University. The numbers include reports from all communities at UVA—students, faculty, and

staff—who together make up more than 40,000 people, including an estimated 1400-1600 Jewish students and 800-1000 Muslim students.

The task force did not offer an independent definition of either antisemitism or Islamophobia. While the Commonwealth of Virginia has not adopted an official definition of Islamophobia, last year the Commonwealth adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a working definition. As a public institution we are bound by that action. At the same time, we are legally obligated and fully committed to ensuring First Amendment protections of free speech.

Recommendations and plans

The task force was charged to provide a series of assessments and to craft a set of forward-looking recommendations based on their findings. The recommendations include considerations of expanded dining options, additional space for prayer and meditation, review of holiday and leave policies, enhanced communications about religious accommodations, and expanded academic offerings, among other areas.

Some of these recommendations represent work that is already underway or that we can pursue immediately. There are recommendations that need further study, and we will provide updates as we do that work in the coming months. The report also leads us to consider additional actions.

It is of paramount importance as an academic institution that we have the resources to educate students, advance knowledge, foster informed and civic dialogue across the University, ensure safety and security, and strengthen all our community's sense of belonging.

With that in mind, some immediate necessary actions include:

- Enhancing communications with students and faculty about requesting and granting religious accommodations. We have developed [new guidance to ease and clarify this process](#), and we will include this guidance in messaging to faculty and students at the start of the semester.
- Reviewing our Inclusive Excellence efforts to ensure that they fully recognize the spectrum of religious identities as an aspect of Inclusive Excellence.
- Conducting an assessment of the availability of spaces on Grounds for prayer or quiet meditation to determine whether and where additional spaces are needed.
- Improving communications about the availability of kosher and halal food options in University dining facilities and assessing whether these options are sufficiently accessible or could be enhanced.
- Designating a Victim's Advocate and Coordinator within the University Police Department who is experienced in handling antisemitism and Islamophobia and all types of religious intolerance.
- Designating a lead coordinator to work within the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights in partnership with Human Resources, Student Affairs, the Provost's Office, and the Health system in responding to all reports that we receive related to antisemitism, Islamophobia, and any type of religious intolerance connected to national origin and ethnic ancestry.

- Expanding the existing group of local faith leaders that meet with President Ryan and other members of the University leadership team and make those meetings more frequent.
- Establishing a plan for student orientation training regarding the University's Preventing and Addressing Discrimination and Harassment Policy HRM-009 that includes education and awareness regarding Antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination and harassment.
- Increasing opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to build skills in interacting across differences, including a pilot program with the Constructive Dialogue Institute and a new series of "Dialogue Dinners" for students to build and practice these skills.
- Working with the schools and deans to conduct a thorough assessment of UVA's academic resources in topics such as religious traditions and cultures, the history and geopolitics of the Middle East, and conflict resolution, and providing Provost Office support to help recruit faculty in areas where there are key gaps or opportunities.
- Providing additional Provost Office funding for conferences, symposia, and other academic programming related to religious histories and cultures, relations between religious groups in the US and globally, and related topics.

The report's findings also underscore the importance of regularly renewing our fact basis. It is clear that we need comprehensive and up-to-date data to make the best decisions for our community. To that end, the University will extend its commitment to ongoing SERU surveys (with the results of the 2024 survey available this fall) and gather additional survey information (including data from undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff) on a regular basis.

Finally, the report includes other recommendations we will consider further. Recommendations in this category include:

- Working with the Interfaith Student Center to provide more robust opportunities for interfaith social activities and dialogue.
- Considering how our Student Health and Wellness programs, and the work of the Contemplative Sciences Center, can more fully recognize the ways that religion, spirituality, purpose, and meaning can contribute to well-being.
- Studying the recommendation to consider a chaplaincy/faith advisor program with a partner organization (and consistent with our constitutional obligations as a public institution) that is responsive to the breadth of student needs in the area of religious identity and connection within and across faith traditions.
- Reviewing the official holiday schedule and leave policies to consider allowing greater flexibility for employees consistent with their personal observance practices.
- In cases where University leadership decides to address a critical incident, and when timing allows, consulting affected groups to benefit from their perspective and seek their advice.

Closing

In closing this memo, I wish to again thank the task force and express our firm commitment to constantly and ever-more-fully becoming the university we are called to be: public, open, and welcoming to all; dedicated to the flourishing and sense of belonging of all our students, faculty, and staff; founded on the Declaration principle that all are created equal; and inspired by Jefferson's identification of his work in establishing the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, alongside his authorship of the Declaration, and founding of the University, as one of the three great accomplishments of his life.

Offering a welcoming and supportive environment to all our students, faculty, and staff is critical to the University's mission of providing a first-class education to students from all walks of life, creating and disseminating new knowledge, and serving the public. All members of our community must feel that they are a vital part of this place, recognize themselves in our mission, and know that they belong. All of us need to experience this, across all our diversities and commonalities—religion deeply among them.

Ian Baucom
Executive Vice President and Provost
University of Virginia

Task Force on Religious Diversity & Belonging

Final Report, July 2024

July 31, 2024

Introduction

On December 5, 2023, Provost Ian Baucom convened the [Task Force on Religious Diversity & Belonging](#) to serve as advisory to the University's President, Jim Ryan. Members of the Task Force include:

- Christa Davis Acampora (Chair), Dean, College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
- Nichole Flores, Associate Professor of Religious Studies
- Brie Gertler, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
- Sarah Goraya, Student, College of Arts & Sciences
- Kevin McDonald, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships
- Oludamini Ogunnaike, Associate Professor of Religious Studies (resigned on May 5)
- Jahan Ramazani, University Professor, and Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English
- Rabbi Jake Rubin (Hillel at UVA), Executive Director of The Brody Jewish Center
- Cedric Rucker, Interim Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
- Rachel Wahl, Associate Professor, School of Education and Human Development
- Nathan Welz, Student, Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy

Charge

The charge of the Task Force includes the following: **Assess the record of reports** of antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents and incidents of other kinds of religious bigotry at the University dating back to at least 2017, and **develop recommendations** for institutional follow-up based on what the committee learns. **Assess the University's engagement** with the leaders of Jewish, Muslim, and other religious communities, and **recommend** how we can deepen those relationships, and **examine educational offerings** on religions, including the history and impact of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of religious bigotry, and **recommend how we can strengthen those offerings**. The aim of the committee's work is also to **understand** how Jewish and Muslim students, faculty, and staff, as well as those of other religious backgrounds, **experience life on Grounds**, and how to attend more fully to these experiences as part of the University's broad **commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion**. The committee was charged with formulating related recommendations as advisory to President Ryan.

Opening

Members of the Task Force recognize that the current war between Israel and Hamas is not primarily *about* religion, and that the histories of war and displacement in that part of the world

are not only *about* religion or religious differences. At the same time, religious differences and similarities are not irrelevant to the substance of claims by multiple peoples and parties in the region. When discussing these circumstances, individuals' own religious and/or secular perspectives, experiences, *expectations*, and levels of awareness of and appreciation for differences and similarities *do* become relevant. That can make it harder to have a substantive discussion about matters on which people might disagree. It can make it hard to even frame the debate in a set of common terms. A starting place, though, can be recognition of our shared humanity and embracing that for its richness, complexity, and possibility. Such recognition must be infused with respect. **The recommendations shared in this report are aimed at advancing precisely this respect and recognition and should not be confused with addressing various political concerns and causes, which may also require fora, including channels for participation in University affairs that take the form of action.**

The Long Historical Context at the University

The long historical context of our work is the bold founding vision of the University of Virginia as a modern secular institution that, unlike most of its original contemporaries, would not compel or indoctrinate its students, staff, or faculty in religious beliefs but grant individuals religious freedom. Two of Thomas Jefferson's proudest accomplishments were authorship of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, ensuring religious liberty in the state, and the founding of the University of Virginia, which placed not a church but a library at its center.

This secular vision of the modern university—a vision that originally excluded the teaching of theology—gradually shifted over the years, as UVA allowed, for example, the construction of a nondenominational chapel on Grounds in the late nineteenth century. Even the original secular vision arguably functioned within an implicitly Protestant Christian framework in areas such as the calendar and the concept of religion as a matter of voluntary individual belief separable from other aspects of life. Still, the University has sought to maintain itself a neutral space that does not prevent a diverse array of religiously affiliated groups from organizing and has fostered a curriculum in which the study of many different religions has a prominent place of pride.

For all its inadequacies, the founding vision of a modern, secular university is of enduring value, and none of this report's recommendations for enhancing the sense of belonging of, and respect for, minoritized religious groups are meant to contravene this ideal. Nor are they meant to suggest that the University should communicate religious normativity that would potentially discomfit or exclude those without religious identifications or affiliations. Indeed, it is precisely because the University was founded, unlike most of its historical peers, without overt association with any particular religion that it should be especially capable of fostering a robust sense of belonging among people of various religious and secular affiliations, including minoritized or marginalized religious groups, and of helping genuine religious and secular liberty thrive without the fear of compulsion, threat, or exclusion.

Organization of the Work of the Task Force

Beginning January 16, 2024, following the winter break, the Task Force met as a full group approximately every two weeks until May 21, several meetings occurred thereafter to finalize the committee's recommendations. In order to carry out its charge, the Task Force organized into subcommittees and teams to undertake broad constituency **engagement, data collection and analysis, benchmarking** to inform recommendations, and efforts to represent **findings and recommendations** in the form of a **written** report.

Engagement Overview

The **Engagement** subgroup was led by Cedric Rucker, Interim Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, with support and participation by Nathan Welz, Student, Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy; Sarah Goraya, Student, College of Arts & Sciences; and Nichole Flores, Associate Professor of Religious Studies; and critically supported by Brie Gertler, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. This group worked with UVA's Office of Organizational Excellence to organize, promote, and populate focus groups. Thirteen total focus-group sessions were scheduled—five with student affinity groups, four open to all students by lottery, three open to faculty/staff by lottery, and one for workers not typically on email (contract workers and Facilities Management employees). Eleven sessions were conducted between Tuesday, February 13, and Thursday, February 29, 2024. Two sessions were cancelled due to low response. Ninety-six participants attended the sessions. The Engagement group also created and publicized a community input form, which allowed those with NetBadge IDs to respond to open prompts about experiences with belonging on Grounds and visions for the future.

The focus group process allowed for active participation from a cross-section of University-affiliated persons to have direct input on those matters that impact the sense of belonging for members of religious communities. With face-to-face engagements, participants were encouraged to respond to a variety of prompts, revealing self-reflective experiences, framing a vision of an institution where everyone feels valued, and dissecting barriers to engagement that may be removed or augmented to foster a greater sense of inclusion and belonging. Individuals unable or unavailable to participate in-person could provide responses to prompts in an online poll. These efforts were executed to represent the fullest possible range of experiences. Ultimately, these unfiltered perspectives, representing nearly 800 comments from nearly 100 participants, helped to illuminate how community members, students, faculty, staff, and other employees, experience UVA. They provided insight into the University experience of Jewish, Muslim, and other religiously affiliated members of the community.

Data

The **Data** group was led by Rachel Wahl, Associate Professor, School of Education and Human Development, and critically supported by Brie Gertler and other University officials responsible for reporting systems, threat analysis, and institutional data collection. A variety of sources were consulted. Professor Wahl conducted interviews and collected information from a variety of

offices, including the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (for “Just Report It,” Formal Complaints, Contacts); the University Police Department (incident reports and the Threat Assessment Team—including those received and identified without report [e.g., social media monitoring]). Three types of information were collected and analyzed, related to 1) student, faculty, and staff *perceptions* of religious inclusion, belonging, bias, discrimination, and harassment at the University; 2) *resources and programming* in curricular and extracurricular spaces available at the University related to religious life; and 3) *reported incidents* of bias, discrimination, and harassment. The first category included the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Survey (2016-2022), the [Climate Survey](#) (2018); Focus Group findings (2024); the [INSPIRES Campus Climate Index](#) (2022 and 2023 score cards), relevant convergent data drawn from student course evaluations;¹ and qualitative experiences reflected in [Visibly \(and Invisibly\) Muslim on Grounds: Classroom, Culture, and Community at the University of Virginia](#) by Salah and Tasin. The second category included a review of student groups and their activities collected from University websites as well as through contacting the relevant student groups and Offices such as related to DEI programming, and a survey sent to Deans and Department Chairs. The third category included data from the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights, such as their Just Report It system, and from the Threat Assessment Team overseen by Chief Tim Longo. Findings from the data are discussed below and are elaborated in the recommendations that follow.

Benchmarking

A **Benchmarking** exercise to identify best practices was led by Kevin McDonald, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships, with participation by Rabbi Jake Rubin (Hillel at UVA), Executive Director of The Brody Jewish Center, and Oludamini Ogunnaike, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, and supported by Rachel Spraker and Weija Wang of the Division for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Benchmarking findings and reflections are integrated in topical sections below.

Writing

Writing, including organization of this report has been supported by Jahan Ramazani, University Professor and Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English, and Christa Davis Acampora, Chair of the Task Force and Dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

A broad overview of the timeline of the Task Force activities is as follows:

January: Organization—commenced review of resources, developed guiding questions

February: Engagement—conducted focus groups and collected community comments; analyzed input and feedback

March: Data analysis and refinement; provided a mid-term leadership update

April: Began to formulate recommendations and draft points for advisory reporting

May: Delivered a preliminary oral advisory report and discussion with President Ryan

June-July: Delivered Leadership Recommendations and Community Report

¹ See convergent data on belonging and diversity of views in recent [UVA reporting](#).

Framework—Guiding Questions

To organize areas of focus and in order to structure the inquiries and recommendations, the Task Force formulated and adopted a series of questions, including:

1. Do UVA Jewish and Muslim students, faculty, and staff, and those who identify culturally with these and other religious traditions, feel that they belong here and that they can fully participate in and contribute to life at the University?
2. What is the record (tracing back at least to 2017) of threats, bias, and harassment related to actual or perceived religious affiliation at UVA? How has the University responded to reports of such incidents, and how have those responses been experienced by affected individuals/groups?
3. Do our students have adequate opportunities to participate in communities of faith and related cultural affinity groups, and to form genuine connections with those from other religious backgrounds?
4. Do our educational offerings provide adequate opportunities for students to learn about religious cultures and traditions other than their own and about the history and impact of religious bigotry?
5. Do our Inclusive Excellence efforts consistently include religious cultural identities?

Our findings related to these questions constitute the body of this report. Recommendations are found in each section, many gathered in the first (Belonging), and all recommendations are compiled in a final section.

The University's Readiness and Academic Capabilities

In times of crisis, academic institutions have opportunities to deploy academic resources to support the broader community in understanding and interpreting those events. This was true in this case, and multiple events were organized by schools and other units. Still, those people most directly impacted were also those who were most pressed into service in this respect. For example, in the past year alone, colleagues in Jewish Studies organized **70** events and meetings, including three international conferences, two major public lectures—one accompanied by a string quartet—several visiting scholar lectures, two reading groups, a film series, and twenty events and gatherings related to Israel-Palestine. **Some of our recommendations are aimed at building the University's capacity to be responsive to these sorts of events and to more equitably share the responsibilities for response.**

Over the past decade or more, several faculty with expertise in the politics and cultures of peoples in the Middle East left or retired from the University, and these positions were replaced by faculty with other interests. This has left some gaps in our academic offerings and has reduced the depth and breadth of our related expertise. Some recommendations aim at addressing this.

Section 1: Belonging at UVA

Guiding Question: Do UVA Jewish and Muslim students, faculty, and staff, and those who identify culturally with these and other religious traditions, feel that they **belong** here and that they can **fully participate in and contribute to life** at the University?

Overview of Insights from the Qualitative Data

Drawing on input from Focus Groups and the book [Visibly \(and Invisibly\) Muslim on Grounds](#)

Undergraduates:

Students desire to form strong bonds within their faith traditions (such as through student groups) but also express a strong need to feel recognized and valued by the University at large.

Individual faculty can play a significant role in whether and how students feel recognized and valued at the University, for both better and worse. For instance, a faculty member who is dismissive of a student's religious identity and a faculty member who is understanding, respectful, and accommodating can both strongly impact how a student feels at UVA.

Students desire clear, transparent communication about University processes that affect them. Students may tend to assume that actions are motivated by bias and discrimination when the reasons behind decisions appear to be left undisclosed.

Students desire robust dialogue across many forms of difference. At the same time, students wish to be protected from speech they consider harmful or threatening.

Students benefit from the opportunity to gather in-person in community with one another, particularly at times of crisis and tragedy.

Students express the desire for symbolic gestures from the University that recognize and show the value of their religious identities, such as statements from the President's Office, in addition to concrete accommodations, such as a University calendar that is more responsive to religious holidays and religiously diverse dietary options (such as Halal and Kosher food).

Insights from the Quantitative Data (SERU and 2018 Climate Survey)

In both the SERU surveys and the 2018 Climate Survey, reported experiences of "belonging" at UVA *in general* were higher for Jewish than Muslim (and other) students. For example, SERU data were available from 2015-2022. During that period, students identifying as Jewish registered a positive response with the statement "I feel that I belong at UVA" at the highest rate of *any* religious group in each year the survey was administered.² However, in the SERU studies since 2018, both Jewish and Muslim students reported the lowest levels of agreement

² For Jewish students: 2015: 94%; 2016: 92%; 2018: 89%; 2020: 94%; 2022: 89%. By comparison, during the same period, Muslim students consistently reported the *lowest* levels of agreement with the statement: 2015: 77%; 2016: 65%; 2018: 71%; 2020: 71%; 2022: 71%.

with the statement “Students of my religious beliefs are respected on this campus,” even though agreement with this statement has increased among both groups since 2018, as reflected in the chart below.

Additionally, as shown below in “Section 2,” reported experiences of threats, discrimination, and bias are now and have historically been higher for both Jewish and Muslim students. In SERU data, Jewish students reported an increase in harassment or discrimination after 2017, but the numbers declined thereafter. However, as shown in the section below, in AY23-24, nearly 60% of reports of bias, discrimination, and harassment in which the religious identity of the reporting person was shared, were submitted by persons identifying as Jewish, the highest percentage among all groups. For further context, in AY23-24, among all reports of bias, discrimination and harassment, 17% were connected with self-identified religious affiliations.

The Task Force was able to review data related to graduate students, faculty, and staff, but these were highly limited (drawn exclusively the 2018 Climate Survey, which also had a relatively low response rate and now is dated). **Thus, to gain more insight into experiences of belonging on Grounds among graduate students, faculty, and staff, further institutional research should be considered.**

Data related to graduate students, faculty, and staff were highly limited and dated. To gain more insight into experiences of belonging on Grounds among staff, graduate students, and faculty, further institutional research should be considered.

Observations and Impressions:

As detailed above, in large scale University surveys, undergraduate students report differences between senses of **belonging** and **respect**, and both Jewish and Muslim students report experiences with **bias** and **discrimination**.

Overall, at the undergraduate level, Jewish students report feeling high **belonging** (89%, highest among all religions), while Muslim students feel less **belonging** (71%, lowest among all religions). However, students’ **reported sense of religious identity specifically being respected** is lower than other groups for both Jewish and Muslim students (78% and 77%, respectively; lowest among all religions). Again, the sense of religious identity being respected has increased for both groups since 2018.

Percent of students who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree: "Students of my religious beliefs are respected on this campus"

	2015	2016	2018	2020	2022
Agnostic/Atheist	86%	85%	91%	93%	96%
Buddhist	81%	89%	92%	84%	85%
Christian	94%	92%	91%	91%	91%
Hindu	91%	94%	88%	84%	87%
Jewish	89%	89%	74%	78%	78%
Muslim	77%	64%	61%	62%	77%
Spiritual	93%	94%	92%	93%	
No preference	91%	94%	93%	95%	97%
Other	80%	84%	80%	77%	84%

Source: Student Experience in the Research University, [SERU](#)

**Percent of students who responded 'yes':
Since attending UVA have you personally
experienced harassment or discrimination
regarding: spiritual beliefs**

	2016	2018	2020
Agnostic/ Atheist	5%	1%	4%
Buddhist	4%	0%	4%
Christian	8%	7%	8%
Hindu	6%	3%	0%
Jewish	9%	17%	13%
Muslim	30%	24%	11%
Spiritual	5%	4%	0%
No preference	0%	2%	3%
Other	12%	4%	5%

Source: Student Experience in the Research University, *SERU*

For both Jewish and Muslim undergraduate students, percentages of survey respondents who say they have experienced **harassment** or **discrimination** are high when compared with other groups (in 2020: 13% and 11%, respectively, the highest all religious affiliations). Note that 2022 data are not available, because the question was changed by the survey designers for that year. Jewish students, in particular, reported an increase after 2017, and this declined in the following survey. While the percentage of Muslim students who report harassment or discrimination remains high in comparison to other groups (although currently lower than

Jewish students), this percentage has declined significantly from 2016, when it was 30%.

For Graduate Students: In the [2018 Climate Survey](#), Jewish students reported feeling less belonging and respect for their religion, while Muslim students reported feeling the highest levels of belonging. Both reported perceiving less respect for persons with their religions specifically.

For Faculty: In the [2018 Climate Survey](#), faculty reported comparable senses of belonging across religious groups, but Muslim faculty reported feeling less respect for their religion and perceived more bias (however, note that only 5 Muslim faculty responded to the 2018 Climate Survey).

For Staff: In [the 2018 Climate Survey](#), Muslim staff reported feeling the most sense of belonging, but in this case, too, response rates and sample sizes were low; see the [full results](#) available online.

The data collection effort itself revealed several key points. First, while undergraduate perspectives and experiences related to religious inclusion, belonging, bias, discrimination, and harassment are tracked regularly through the SERU survey, information on graduate students, faculty, and staff is limited to the 2018 climate survey, which had a very low response rate in some categories. Additionally, while the committee found that undergraduates benefit from myriad student groups and activities to support religious life and identity, few apparently exist for faculty and staff. Moreover, those resources that exist for undergraduates are focused

primarily on religious identity rather than inter-religious understanding. For example, the Interfaith Student Center has existed mainly as a space available to religious student groups to use separately rather than as a vehicle for inter-religious programming.

In regard to reporting of incidents of bias, discrimination, and harassment, data on religious identity has only recently become easily accessible; these data were not tracked in an accessible manner in the past. Moreover, there is a lack of alignment between the data captured by systems such as Just Report It and the kinds of incidents that are actionable by offices such as the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights. This is because the policy that guides when the University can intervene in an incident covers discrimination and harassment, but not bias. Therefore incidents of bias that are reported may be difficult to address (see figures presented in section 2 below).

Overall, all University offices worked diligently and swiftly to share requested data. Tracking systems have improved in recent years, making more recent data easier to access.

Best-practice highlights:

One strategy for enhancing belonging is developing a chaplaincy program. Several of the institutions reviewed by the Benchmarking group have chaplaincy and faith advisor programs that are interrelated. The University of Illinois and the University of Wisconsin have the Religious Workers Association and the Faith Leaders Advisory Council. Florida University also has the Campus Multifaith Cooperative. The benchmarking analysis ascertained that at public institutions chaplains are not paid by the institution; the chaplaincy program and/or advisory program consists of agreements with self-organized and self-governed associations that primarily interface with student affairs offices. Through MOUs and governance rules of the independent associations clarifying expectations around nonproselyzation and ethics, the chaplains/advisors are provided with regular access to space for connecting with individual students or student groups, student affairs offices manage forms and signups to enable students to share their information with chaplains/advisors early in their educational career, and the availability of pastoral care is included in student well-being models.

The Benchmarking group also took note of how some other institutions address “holiday” leave differently from UVA, which does not currently offer “holiday” leave as a balance to be used by individual employees at their discretion. Some distinguish “closures” or institutional “observances” rather than using terms such as “holiday” or “religious.” Rather than relying on the idea of making an individual accommodation—though at some schools that is also referenced—in each of these, the language in the policy is used to normalize that employees may wish to use alternative days for an observance or personal need that is of meaning to them. Some institutions allow banking of these days and others do not.

Rutgers (“Floating” balance):

<https://policies.rutgers.edu/B.aspx?BookId=12162&PageId=459533>

University of Illinois (“Floating” balance): <https://humanresources.illinois.edu/campus-holiday-schedule/>

University of Nebraska (“Floating” balance): <https://hr.unl.edu/policies/holiday-and-vacation-leave/>

University of North Carolina (“Alternate Holiday”):
<https://policies.unc.edu/TDClient/2833/Portal/KB/ArticleDet?ID=131762>

University of North Carolina (“Personal Observance”):
<https://policies.unc.edu/TDClient/2833/Portal/KB/ArticleDet?ID=140000#:~:text=Employees%20may%20use%20Personal%20Observance,own%20religious%20or%20cultural%20background.>”

Related Recommendations

See also the compendium at the end of the report

Spaces:

- Ensure access to prayer/meditation spaces in the living, learning, and working spaces of the University. Conduct assessment of availability and use; provide additional spaces where needs are identified; and ensure that their availability is well and regularly communicated.

Food Options:

- Explore opportunities to enhance food preparation facilities and options in dining and residence halls consistent with the religious diversity of the University (i.e., kosher, halal, faith-specific fast-breaking foods, etc.).

Chaplaincy Program:

- Study and devise a sustainable chaplaincy/faith advisor program that is responsive to the breadth of student needs in the area of religious identity and connection within and across faith traditions. At this time, the need for a chaplaincy position for Muslim students has clearly arisen, and/or partnership with a privately run and funded Muslim Life Program.

Religious Accommodations:

- Expand communications about the availability of religious accommodations, the need by policy to communicate denials, and what is reasonable accommodation in the learning and working environment.
- Provide sample language for all members of the community to request accommodations.
- Explore technology-supported accommodation processes that allow for effective tracking, monitoring, and communication.
- Review religious accommodations policies and procedures to identify barriers to accessing them and remove those barriers.
- Consider reviewing the official holiday schedule and perhaps leave policies to allow greater flexibility and agency for employees consistent with their personal observance practices.

- Explore ways to broaden awareness about the dates and significance of religious observances, extending beyond email communications (e.g., the March 11, 2024 email message), the [UVA Inclusion Calendar](#), and “[Inclusion Insights](#)”.

Speech:

- Launch a series of programmatic initiatives to support the forms of speech to which the University **aspires**, such as curricular and extracurricular activities that teach students dialogic skills and/or model dialogic skills for students. These could also include programs for faculty and staff to learn how to address controversial issues in classrooms and in extra-curricular spaces.
- Promote greater visibility of and engagement with the University’s statements and resources regarding free speech and our aspirations for respectful expression and constructive dialogue, including the [Statement on Free Expression and Free Inquiry](#) and the [associated FAQs](#).

Community:

- Expand the group of leaders from local faith communities that UVA leadership meets with to provide counsel. Make those meetings more frequent.

Section 2: Threats, Bias, and Harassment

Guiding Question: What is the record (tracing back at least to 2017) of threats, bias, and harassment related to actual or perceived religious affiliation at UVA? How has the University responded to reports of such incidents, and how have those responses been experienced by affected individuals/groups?

Summary of Reports (AY23-24)

Sources: Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (“Just Report It,” Formal Complaints, Contacts); University Police Department (including information provided by the Threat Assessment Team—including those received and identified without report [e.g., social media monitoring]). Figures below include all constituencies (students, staff, and faculty) across all units, including the health system. Most cases were reported by students, and those alleged to have perpetrated the behavior were usually not identifiable.

- Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights: Total reports of incidents with potential bias involving any religion for the period beginning July 1, 2023, as of May 9, 2024: **56**. There was an increase in reporting after 10/7/23. By comparison, there were **22** total reports last year. Among the reports this year, sometimes reporting to different entities. The committee did not have access to complete information about how the matters were addressed or resolved.
- Threat Assessment Team: As of June 13, 2024, among all cases reported to the Office of Threat Assessment, **4%** (total of **29**) had elements related to religious identity. While this represents an increase from prior years, it follows patterns observed during other times of national, international, or local matters of concern.
 - **0** Threat Assessment cases were determined to pose a serious or credible threat.
 - **1** Threat Assessment case required ongoing assessment and/or management by the Office of Threat Assessment. This represents less than one percent of all threat assessment cases requiring this level of management.
 - All other cases (28) are or were addressed through standard University processes and resources, e.g., Student Affairs, Employee Relations; referrals to the Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (EOCR) or the University Judiciary Committee for consideration of policy or standards of conduct violations; or supportive referrals to Faculty and Employee Assistance Program or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).

Reports of bias, harassment, and discrimination increased in AY23-24, more than in any other year since the current reporting system was put in place.

Historical Overview

As evident in the following table, **reports of bias, harassment, and discrimination increased in AY23-24, more than in any other year since the current reporting system was put in place including following the events of 2017**. The historical data also show that these reports are most commonly linked with persons identifying as Jewish (average of 50%; 60% in AY23-24) followed by persons identifying as Muslim (average of 20%; 16% in AY23-24). It is in this context

that **the Task Force recommends that concerns about safety and security be considered a top priority when reviewing the recommendations.**³ As discussed at the end of the report, these concerns have also been raised by other task forces, which suggests that this is an ongoing challenge.

Reported Incidents of Bias, Discrimination, & Harassment

YEAR	TTL	Judaism	Islam	Sikhism	Hinduism	Christianity	Not Identified
23-24*	56	33	9	-	1	2	11
22-23	22	9	6	-	-	3	4
21-22	11	-	5	1	-	-	5
20-21	12	4	2	-	-	1	5
19-20	12	3	4	-	-	-	5
18-19	16	12	2	-	1	-	1
17-18	19	12	5	-	-	-	2

**As of May 9, 2024; during AY 23-24 reports with potential connection to religion represented roughly 17% of all reports assessed by the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights .*

Source: Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights

Related Recommendations

See also the compendium at the end of the report

- Ensure that support provided to religious groups during gatherings on Grounds enhances their experience of physical safety, and makes them aware of safety measures and resources. Effective execution of this recommendation rests on good communication practices and ongoing relationships with groups and their leadership.
- Refine incident coding processes concerning reported instances of bias, harassment, and discrimination based on religion. Data are not routinely reviewed and compiled along these dimensions.
- Review and analyze the experiences of reporting systems and practices, including any barriers to reporting and experiences of follow-up after reporting, to identify possible areas for improvement.

³ Some committee members took note of the recent “Dear Colleague” guidance from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, which addresses [“Protecting Students from Discrimination, such as Harassment Based on Race, Color, or National Origin, Including Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics,”](#) dated May 7. Reviewing and comparing those examples with UVA reports is recommended.

- [Another committee is actively considering](#) when University leadership should publicly comment on social and political events. In cases where University leadership decides to address a critical incident, and when timing allows, it is advisable for University leadership to first consult affected groups to benefit from their perspective and seek their advice.

Section 3: Opportunities to Connect

Guiding question: Do our students have adequate opportunities to participate in communities of faith and related cultural affinity groups, and to form genuine connections with those from other religious backgrounds?

On the basis of observations drawn from interviews, focus groups, comments, the book *Visibly (and Invisibly) Muslim on Grounds*, and the committee's local institutional knowledge, it seems that students by and large are able to connect with their own communities of faith and related cultural affinity groups, and are supported in doing so. The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has recently begun to keep a partial list of prayer spaces on Grounds. Contemplative Sciences has expressed its willingness to partner in hosting this content and helping to make it visible, in conjunction with ODEI and the Multicultural Student Center.

Forming genuine connections with those from other religious backgrounds, however, is less common and less robustly supported than it might be. As the Data subcommittee surmises from its extensive research, those resources that exist for undergraduates are focused primarily on religious identity rather than inter-religious understanding. The Interfaith Student Center has existed primarily as a space that is available to religious student groups to use separately rather than as a vehicle for inter-religious programming. Ample student groups support religious identity, with fewer resources dedicated to building relationships between religious groups on Grounds. The Task Force's recommendations follow from these findings.

Related Recommendations

See also the compendium at the end of the report

- Continue administrative support and supervision (from Student Affairs) in the reformation of the Virginia Interfaith Coalition (VIC).
- Ensure the Interfaith Student Center has resources to support more robust opportunities for interfaith social activities and dialogue, and that it is inclusive of a broader number of student groups.
- Enhance opportunities for faculty/staff support for religious student groups, including providing resources, development/training, and recognition for this service.
- Provide support for events that encourage deliberation across differences within groups, not only between them.
- Assess interest from employees in a self-organizing resource group related to faith/interfaith dialogue, to expand our inclusive excellence practices to be more explicitly supportive of religious, secular, and spiritual identity.

Section 4: Opportunities to Learn

Guiding question: Do our educational offerings provide adequate opportunities for students to learn about religious cultures and traditions other than their own and about the history and impact of religious bigotry?

Survey of Curricular and Extracurricular Offerings

To understand and assess the current opportunities at UVA for learning about religious identity, including but not limited to historical, political, cultural, and theological perspectives related to religious groups, the Data group developed a survey of curricular and extracurricular offerings available through each school and relevant centers/institutes at the University. A summary of these findings is found below.

Overview of Curricular Offerings

The College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences offers many relevant courses—three dozen (**36**) in Spring 2024 alone and **more than 75** over the period of the past academic year—across numerous academic departments. These courses address religious cultures, traditions, and forms of bigotry. While these offerings are concentrated in Religious Studies, Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESALC), and History, additional courses are available in the departments of Politics, Sociology, Women, Gender & Sexuality, among others. Some Global Studies courses also touch on religious themes among the broader scope of study. A sampling of courses offered in A&S include: RELI 2024 Jewish-Muslim Relations; HIEU 3692 The Holocaust; MEST 2559 Israel-Palestine Conflict through Cinema; HIST 3501 Modern Jewish History through Literature and Film; and RELI 3200 Muslim Misfits: Islam and the Question of Difference.

Also notable, however, are some potential gaps in the curriculum, such as courses on the Middle East centered on its politics or its collective history. As this year’s crisis in the Middle East has made painfully evident, the politics of the Middle East is not an area of concentration on the UVA faculty at present, though it has been in the past. It is an area not only of current but of ongoing concern to students, as it is to many peoples in different parts of the world.

Additional academic offerings in this area can deepen knowledge, enable critical engagement with received ideas, and support civil and informed dialogue across differences.

While the vast majority of curricular offerings directly addressing religious identity and experience are found within Arts & Sciences, several schools provide courses that are related to or address these topics to varying degrees. Such offerings include the Batten School’s LPPS 5555 Advanced Public Policy & Leadership Seminar - International Humanitarian Law: Conflicts in Middle East; the School of Law’s courses on religious freedom and liberty; SCPS’s Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies courses on world religions; and the School of Nursing’s Fundamentals of Nursing course which emphasizes religion and spirituality in end-of-life care. The School of Education and Human Development has numerous courses that address cultural identity broadly, including religious identity. The Public Service Pathways Program’s UNST 1410: Democracy and Public Service also includes competencies related to understanding one’s own and others’ identities, inclusive of religious identities.

The University Library offers a variety of resources through Research and Learning Services that complement the curricular offerings of the schools. These include research guides for available religious studies resources and instruction sessions for research in courses addressing religion, as well as an Understanding Difference guide, which touches on the Jewish American and Arab American experiences. The library's collections include a renowned collection of Tibetan and Buddhist materials, a growing Mormon Studies collection, and other resources across faith traditions.

Overview of Extracurricular Offerings

Many of the University's schools also provide students extracurricular offerings related to religious identity. The Darden School hosted a Religious Diversity at Darden Panel in fall 2023 in which Darden Jewish Student Association and Darden Christian Fellowship discussed experiences of different faith traditions. This is in addition to school supported student-run Diwali, Ramadan, Holi, and Easter events. The Batten School hosts a series of nearly 20 Dialogue Across Difference Dinners. The Law School has several active CIOs based on a range of religious identities with whom its Student Affairs Office partners to hold various events in recognition of their faith traditions, ranging from Iftar Dinner with the Muslim Law Students Association to Rosh Hashana celebrations with the Jewish Law Students Association.

University centers including the Karsh Institute of Democracy, the Center for Politics, the Miller Center, UVA Global, and others also provide students with extracurricular opportunities to learn about topics closely related to religious identities and cultures; these offerings have increased in number and frequency since October 7. Some of these offerings include: Two Student Dialogue and Dinner events hosted by the Karsh Institute during which students discussed the conflict in the Middle East; an event in which an Israeli and a Palestinian who have lost family members in the conflict told their personal stories of bereavement and explained their choice to engage in dialogue; and a Democracy Dialogue on Free Speech at Universities presented by Karsh and the Miller Center. The Contemplative Sciences Center also provides students with classes and programs on contemplative techniques and mindfulness with a basis in Buddhist practice. As mentioned in this report's introduction, the Jewish Studies Program organized 70 events and meetings this academic year, 20 of them related to 10/7 and its aftermath.

A challenge is that while these opportunities are admirable, they might not be scalable. At institutions where this type of programming is widely available, the larger community is participating regularly (e.g., the Dartmouth's Dialogues, meant to facilitate conversations and skills that bridge differences), and the programming is an outgrowth of the institution's faculty with expertise in the area. Moreover, one-off events do not always draw significant student interest, and coursework in these areas would provide the opportunity for deeper and sustained learning.

Best-practice highlights:

The [Middle East Dialogues at Dartmouth College](#)—widely celebrated in the media and hosted at UVA for an event in April by the Dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences—illustrates the importance of having a faculty deeply knowledgeable in different aspects of the Middle East. Because of the “decades-long partnership” of Dartmouth faculty in Jewish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies, with “a longstanding commitment to fostering dialogue, community, and joint academic inquiry,” Dartmouth has been able to mount such a dialogue and augment its course offerings in this area.

Another example of the importance of having an academic faculty with differing points of view on the Middle East is the [widely reported joint statement](#) issued by two Berkeley professors, one grounded in Israel studies and the other in Palestinian studies. Issued within the week after the October Hamas attacks, the joint statement by faculty members who vehemently disagree called for civil campus dialogue based on mutual respect and dignity. Such faculty can model for students the possibility of open, informed debate and discussion.

Related Recommendations

See also the compendium at the end of the report

- Consider emulating Dartmouth Middle East Dialogues model (partnership between Jewish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies), including professors from different backgrounds with different specializations teaching Israel/Palestine and Middle East politics together.
- Bolster opportunities for University engagement on questions of religious diversity and belonging, including additional funding for speakers, symposia, etc.
- Expand the range of academic offerings—courses and other programming—that provide students opportunities to engage differences within and across religious traditions.
- Expand hiring of new faculty, support for graduate students, and creation of new courses that would contribute to deepening engagement with a variety of religious traditions, histories, and identities (e.g., Jewish Studies and the new Islamic Worlds Studies initiative, both of which connect multiple schools); and increase support for programming and hiring related to the politics, history, and religions of the Middle East, including exploring creation of an umbrella structure such as a Middle East Studies program.
- Enhance opportunities for study in related disciplinary areas through study abroad and explore including religious differences among the offerings in the Engaging Differences courses in the College’s Engagements curriculum.

Section 5: Inclusive Excellence

Guiding question: Do our Inclusive Excellence efforts consistently include religious cultural identities?

UVA makes some effort to include religious cultural identities in its inclusive excellence practices. In the benchmarking study, which explored how other universities approach student, faculty, and staff support and engagement in this area and others, UVA rated roughly comparable to many among thirteen of its public peer institutions as identified by SCHEV and five public institutions in Virginia. It did not, however, achieve the highest ratings in this regard. Interviews with administrators at other institutions indicate that those schools with the strongest support systems have been the most resilient at difficult times, particularly when it comes to weathering the crisis conditions within the academy since October 7.

One favorable factor among others was the existence of an administrative position related to spiritual and religious life, a point-person overseeing and coordinating engagement with the institution's religious and spiritual communities at times of high tension and otherwise. Such a person may be in Student Affairs, the DEI office, the provost's office, or elsewhere. With some reluctance to propose the creation of yet another administrative position in response to a major challenge, members of the Task Force contemplated whether such a position might be carved out of existing capabilities among the UVA faculty and administration.

The Task Force did not have the resources or expertise to fully consider the advisability and efficacy of mandatory trainings of faculty, staff, and students in religious diversity awareness and interfaith skills, and it reached no conclusions about the best means for achieving these ends. It supports further examination of this matter. It also **recommends that the UVA administration consider identifying and implementing, on a regular (rather than occasional) basis, effective means of addressing and reducing incidents of religious bias, discrimination, and harassment.** Similarly, inclusive excellence practices can be strengthened by supporting employees seeking to organize on their own a resource group related to religious and interfaith dialogue.

The Task Force recommends that the UVA administration consider identifying and implementing effective means of addressing and reducing incidents of religious bias, discrimination, and harassment.

Yet another way of strengthening UVA's inclusive excellence efforts along spiritual and religious lines is to integrate these factors into the institution's well-being model. The Contemplative Sciences Center has expressed interest in such possibilities. Additionally, the current Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development's expertise in religious affiliation and belonging could be leveraged, perhaps in partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence, to develop and enhance programs supporting religious affiliation and belonging.

Related Recommendations

See also the compendium at the end of the report

- Actively assess effective means of addressing and reducing incidents of religious bias, discrimination, and harassment and integrate these in regular (rather than occasional) administrative practices, including trainings aimed at providing for greater understandings of religious discrimination (i.e., anti-Mormonism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and bias against other minoritized religious traditions).
- Explore the possibility of an administrative position related to Religion and Spiritual Life. This could be in Student Affairs, VP DEI office, or provost office.
- Ensure the availability of development opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to support religious diversity awareness and multi-faith/interfaith skills. To provide faculty development opportunities, consider leveraging the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development's expertise in religious affiliation and belonging.
- Assess interest from employees in a self-organizing resource group related to faith/interfaith dialogue, to expand our inclusive excellence practices to be more explicitly supportive of religious, secular, and spiritual identity.
- Integrate religious and spiritual considerations in the University's well-being model, inclusive of meaning, purpose, spirituality, faith. A willing partner in this effort is the Contemplative Sciences Center, which will soon have opportunities for growth in programming as their new space opens.

Section 6: Compendium of Recommendations and Concluding Reflections

What follows is a compendium of recommendations covering multiple dimensions of life on Grounds. Responsive actions might require different timelines and prioritization. With this in mind, the Task Force wishes to elevate the following as **priority concerns** for University leadership:

Policing and safety, and their connection with relationships and **belonging** on Grounds

Affirmative articulation of the **positive values for an inclusive community that UVA supports** as well as **more explicit articulation of the boundaries of acceptable speech and activities** on Grounds

Recognition of a need for **proactive and responsive action** to address and reduce **incidents of bias on Grounds**, recognizing that actions might differ with respect to education, training, and policy review

Campus **leadership and expertise** relating to including concerns for and managing differences arising from **Religious and Spiritual Life**

Compendium of Recommendations

Belonging

Spaces:

- Ensure access to prayer/meditation spaces in the living, learning, and working spaces of the University. Conduct assessment of availability and use; provide additional spaces where needs are identified; and ensure that their availability is well and regularly communicated.

Food Options:

- Explore opportunities to enhance food preparation facilities and options in dining and residence halls consistent with the religious diversity of the University (i.e., kosher, halal, faith-specific fast-breaking foods, etc.).

Chaplaincy Program:

- Study and devise a sustainable chaplaincy/faith advisor program that is responsive to the breadth of student needs in the area of religious identity and connection within and across faith traditions. At this time, the need for a chaplaincy position for Muslim students has clearly arisen, and/or partnership with a privately run and funded Muslim Life Program.

Religious Accommodations:

- Expand communications about the availability of religious accommodations, the need by policy to communicate denials, and what is reasonable accommodation in the learning and working environment.
- Provide sample language for all members of the community to request accommodations.
- Explore technology-supported accommodation processes that allow for effective tracking, monitoring, and communication.
- Review religious accommodations policies and procedures to identify barriers to accessing them and remove those barriers.
- Consider reviewing the official holiday schedule and perhaps leave policies to allow greater flexibility and agency for employees consistent with their personal observance practices.
- Explore ways to broaden awareness about the dates and significance of religious observances, extending beyond email communications (e.g., the March 11, 2024 message), the [UVA Inclusion Calendar](#), and “[Inclusion Insights](#)”.

Speech:

- Launch a series of programmatic initiatives to support the forms of speech to which the University **aspires**, such as curricular and extracurricular activities that teach students dialogic skills and/or model dialogic skills for students. These could also include programs for faculty and staff to learn how to address controversial issues in classrooms and in extra-curricular spaces.
- Promote greater visibility of and engagement with the University’s statements and resources regarding free speech and our aspirations for respectful expression and constructive dialogue, including the [Statement on Free Expression and Free Inquiry](#) and the [associated FAQs](#).

Community:

- Empanel a group of leaders from local faith communities to meet with the President or senior UVA leadership regularly to provide counsel. To this end, expand the existing group of local faith leaders that UVA leadership meets with, and make those meetings more frequent.

Threats, Bias, and Harassment

- Provide support to religious groups during gatherings on Grounds in ways that enhance their experience of physical safety, and ensure that those groups are aware of safety measures and resources. Effective execution of this recommendation rests on good communication practices and ongoing relationships with groups and their leadership.
- Consider more direct tracking and high-level data concerning reported instances of bias, harassment, and discrimination based on religion. Data are not routinely reviewed and compiled along these dimensions.
- Assess experiences of reporting systems and practices, including any barriers to reporting and experiences of follow-up after reporting, to identify possible areas for improvement.

- [A committee is actively considering](#) when University leadership should make public statements about social and political events. In cases where University leadership decides to address a critical incident, and when timing allows, it is advisable for University leadership to first consult affected groups to benefit from their perspective and seek their advice.

Opportunities to Connect

- Continue administrative support and supervision (from Student Affairs) in the reformation of the Virginia Interfaith Coalition (VIC).
- Ensure the Interfaith Student Center has resources to support more robust opportunities for interfaith social activities and dialogue, and that it is inclusive of a broader number of student groups.
- Provide support for events that encourage deliberation across differences within groups, not only between them.
- Enhance opportunities for faculty/staff support for religious student groups, including providing resources, development/training, and recognition for this service.
- Assess interest from employees in a self-organizing resource group related to faith/interfaith dialogue, to expand our inclusive excellence practices to be more explicitly supportive of religious, secular, and spiritual identity.

Opportunities to Learn

- Consider emulating Dartmouth Middle East Dialogues model (partnership between Jewish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies), including professors from different backgrounds with different specializations teaching Israel/Palestine and Middle East politics together.
- Bolster opportunities for University engagement on questions of religious diversity and belonging, including additional funding for speakers, symposia, etc.
- Expand the range of academic offerings—courses and other programming—that provide students opportunities to engage differences within and across religious traditions.
- Expand hiring of new faculty, support for graduate students, and creation of new courses that would contribute to deepening engagement with a variety of religious traditions, histories, and identities (e.g., Jewish Studies and the new Islamic Worlds Studies initiative, both of which connect multiple schools); and increase support for programming and hiring related to the politics, history, and religions of the Middle East, including exploring creation of an umbrella structure such as a Middle East Studies program.
- Enhance opportunities for study in related disciplinary areas through study abroad and as part of Engaging Differences in the College’s Engagements curriculum.

Inclusive Excellence

- Explore the possibility of an administrative position related to Religion and Spiritual Life. This could be in Student Affairs, VP DEI office, or provost office.

- Actively assess effective means of addressing and reducing incidents of religious bias, discrimination, and harassment and integrate these in regular (rather than occasional) administrative practices, including trainings aimed at providing for greater understandings of religious discrimination (i.e., anti-Mormonism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and bias against other minoritized religious traditions).
- Ensure the availability of development opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to support religious diversity awareness and multi-faith/interfaith skills. To provide faculty development opportunities, consider leveraging the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development’s expertise in religious affiliation and belonging.
- Assess interest from employees in a self-organizing resource group related to faith/interfaith dialogue, to expand our inclusive excellence practices to be more explicitly supportive of religious, secular, and spiritual identity.
- Integrate religious and spiritual considerations in the University’s well-being model, inclusive of meaning, purpose, spirituality, faith. A willing partner in this effort is the Contemplative Sciences Center, which will soon have opportunities for growth in programming as their new space opens.

The Task Force further recommends that the University Administration consider developing tracking similar to what is available for the recommendations of the 2020 Task Force on Racial Equity: <https://dei.virginia.edu/racial-equity>

Concluding Reflections

Ongoing Reckoning with “2017”

The Task Force’s charge included a mandate to capture and reflect experiences of those identifying with minority religious communities and cultural connections “going back to at least 2017.” The selection of this timeframe is due to the fact that on August 11 and 12, 2017, hundreds of self-described white supremacists descended on the University and the greater Charlottesville community in two days of violent demonstrations. On the second day, a member of the group drove a car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one of them and seriously injuring others. The University—and significant portions of the nation—reeled from this experience. Indeed, these events in Charlottesville continue to frame national discussions of race as well as experiences of Jewish students on U.S. campuses as incidents of antisemitism have risen nationally.⁴

Following these events, UVA President Teresa Sullivan charged a working group of deans with leading the University’s response. That group formulated a set of recommendations, including

⁴ As just an example, see the comments of Virginia Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Ranking Member of the Education & Workforce Committee during the committee’s hearings on antisemitism, May 23, 2024 (<https://edworkforce.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=410623>; beginning at 16:07).

“time, place, and manner” policies pertaining to protests in the Academical Village in order to enable free speech on Grounds while also protecting the community from the extreme violence it experienced during those events.

Additionally, that working group offered numerous observations and recommendations aimed at promoting a stronger sense of community and shared safety. The University Police Department (UPD) response was a significant subject of inquiry, and an external consultant helped formulate recommendations focused on UPD engagement, training, and community participation. The recovery plan included changes in protocol and analyses and discussions of differences of impressions of and experiences with policing and their relationship to felt senses of safety and belonging.

Post-2017 recovery efforts included significant academic programming, and much of that focused on experiences of Black students, faculty, staff, and members of the larger community. At least one event was devoted to examination of shared experiences of Black and Jewish members of the University communities.⁵ Archived materials show that at least one event referenced “Belonging” as “part of a speaker series that addresses the intersections of sanctuary, belonging, flight, refuge, and national identity before the background of the events of August 11/12, 2017.” It was co-sponsored by the Jewish Studies Program (among many other programs, departments, and offices).⁶ Another event focused on the history of fascism, antisemitism, neo-fascism, and neo-Nazism in the U.S. and Charlottesville.⁷ Given the overtly racist and antisemitic language of the violent demonstrators, this focus was understandable. But it is notable that the term “Muslim” and the experience of Muslim and other religious minorities, who also felt threatened by the violence, do not appear as a theme in any of the programming.

As the Task Force on Religious Diversity & Belonging began its work, members of the community raised questions about the adequacy of the University’s post-2017 response and, specifically, recovery efforts focused on the Jewish community. Several members of the current Task Force along with others raised questions about outcomes of the recommendations by the 2017 working group, the extent to which those recommendations had been adopted and

⁵ “A History Intertwined: Black and Jewish Experiences Within UVA,” November 28, 2017, 7:00 pm, New Cabell Hall, Room 489, hosted by The Black Student Alliance (BSA) and The Jewish Education Initiative.

⁶ “Sanctuary and Belonging” with Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times, October 23, 2017, 6:00 pm, Nau Hall Room 101, South Lawn, hosted by The Miller Center, the Center for German Studies, and the Religious Studies Department.

⁷ “The Fascist Threat: What You Should Know,” September 27, 2017, 5:30 pm, Nau Hall 101, hosted by The Corcoran Department of History, The Center for German Studies, and The Program in Jewish Studies. This event featured a public conversation with Manuela Achilles, William Hitchcock, James Loeffler, Kyrill Kunakhovich, and Sarah Milov, UVA faculty and students, some of whom continue to call UVA their academic homes.

assessed, and they questioned whether recommendations from this Task Force would be given full consideration, ultimately resulting in action.

Thus, it is a strong recommendation that the University scrutinize prior reports, including those of the Task Force for Racial Equity (2020). The reports by task forces from 2018, 2020, and now 2024, identify similar and overlapping themes, especially concerning matters relating to speech and safety. To make real progress in addressing *enduring challenges*—and not only in a moment of crisis—there must be a commitment to carry forward the collected insights and sustain change. If not, this might be regarded as a contributing factor for the *next* task force three or four years hence.

This Task Force was unable to fully take up these important matters of follow-through on previous reports. There simply was neither enough time nor sufficient resources to engage in thoughtful discovery and deliberation on that matter.

The protests of 2023-2024 were in many respects separate and distinct from the committee's charge, yet they are in some fundamental ways inseparable from the work of the committee. Some members of the committee experienced this quite deeply. Indeed, after May 4, one member resigned, and several others contemplated doing the same. The Task Force strongly recommends that University leadership consider reviewing the report of the Working Group addressing the events of 2017 in light of the recommendations in this report. We also suggest exploring pathways for recovery and response from campus protests of 2023-2024 that could be informed by lessons learned since 2017 as well as assessment of work that is ongoing.

Additionally, the Task Force wishes to emphasize the point that the limited availability of data for the 2023-24 efforts means that faculty, staff, and graduate student perceptions in the current moment are not adequately captured in this report. Thus, we strongly recommend that the University review and assess its collection of related data to inform and guide actions aimed at improving the experiences of persons from a variety of religious traditions on Grounds.

For example, the 2018 Working Group that examined the events of 2017 focused on “enhancing the safety and security of our community; of living our values and engaging in self-examination of our own climate, culture, and environment; and of leading by putting our considerable scholarly resources toward better understanding of August’s events, their larger implications, and their relationship to developments in the nation and the world.”⁸ **The efforts at the time did not appear to include much recognition of the harms and injuries experienced by the UVA Jewish community, which was specifically and directly targeted by the violent demonstrators on the Lawn who carried signs and shouted slogans “Jews will not replace us.”** It was clear in committee engagements and evident during protests in 2023-2024 that these wounds were still raw.

⁸ This quote is taken from the January 25, 2018 “Progress and Updates” announcement that appeared on the UVA website. The website was archived 9/8/2023 5:15:31 PM. Within that catalog, this update appears on P. 19.

The 2018 Working Group examined “how the University can approach what happened here as a launching pad for future research, teaching, and the advancement of knowledge. Against August’s stark evidence of enduring fault lines within our society, universities provide a crucial venue for full, frank, and open exchange of ideas. The University of Virginia now has the occasion to take the lead in this discourse.” As part of the response efforts following campus protests in 2023-2024, the Task Force considers a review and assessment of the activities that followed the 2017 events on Grounds to be important.

The landscape committee, which arose from the 2018 efforts, wrote in their report: “the University is— and must remain— a place where, as we learn together, we will encounter ideas and histories which can be difficult or even offensive and that it is a place where we live together, and so must remain sensitive to one another and to the well-being of all those living here.” Some members of the UVA community experienced this as violated in 2023-2024, and part of the challenge to heal. The earlier committee also remarked: “The environment itself ought to advance students’ safety, power, and happiness.” These concerns also came up repeatedly in the context of the 2024 Task Force’s work.

Part of the response to the events of 2017 was to consider the interplay between speech and campus inclusivity. At least one event was devoted explicitly to this topic.⁹ In the winter of 2021, in response to ongoing tensions about what kinds of speech should or should not be allowed, the University appointed the Committee on Free Expression and Free Inquiry, which wrote a statement that was subsequently adopted by the Board of Visitors and affirmed by the Faculty Senate: <https://freespeech.virginia.edu/statement-free-expression-and-free-inquiry>. These concerns were central in the protracted events on Grounds of 2023-2024.

Most reported incidents of bias during the 2023-2024 academic year pertained to reports of speech that was regarded as harmful or threatening. Feedback in student conversations, in focus groups, and from alumni, parents, and other members of the community included pressure for University officials and administrators to punish those who violated others’ senses of what should and should not be allowed in this domain.

There have been many questions raised during this process about the limits of speech, definitions of hateful (if not formally “hate”) speech, including definitions of what constitutes antisemitism and Islamophobia.¹⁰ There have also been loud calls for the University to make

⁹ “Perspectives on Balancing the First Amendment and Inclusivity,” April 4, 2018, 12:00 pm, Purcell Reading Room at the School of Law, hosted by: Black Law Students Association, Jewish Law Students Association, and Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights. The event featured “Professor Anne Coughlin and Professor Alexander Tsesis of Loyola Law for a conversation about the interplay between the First Amendment, campus speech regulations, and ensuring an inclusive and welcoming campus environment.”

¹⁰ The Commonwealth of Virginia has adopted the [Working Definition of Antisemitism](#) adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) on May 26, 2016.

clear how its own policies and statements relate to *particular cases* and not only in terms of abstract principles. There were also appeals for University leadership to articulate limits on speech and expressive activity as well in order to more actively affirm the positive values supporting a robust academic community. **The Task Force was unable to agree on the best—or even better—ways to address these matters, but we could all agree that having a policy and making a statement about free expression and free inquiry are not, alone and in and of themselves, sufficient.**

Finally, we wish to underscore what should be obvious: namely, that one-time actions will not address the concerns that surfaced during our study and reflection. It is also the case that the charge of the committee did not necessarily include the full scope of related matters that warrant attention. For example, improving the experiences of Jewish and Muslim community members on Grounds surely includes directly addressing antisemitism and Islamophobia, but these are also pernicious features of broader society that negatively impact the experiences of *everyone* on Grounds and most especially those who are Jewish and Muslim. The causes and course-ways of these forms of bias, discrimination, and harassment likely differ in important ways, and the University should consider identifying dedicated resources to reducing their prevalence on Grounds and within the larger community.