

**Academic identity and religious identity:  
cognitive dissonance in students' higher education learning and assessment**

**Final Report**

**Dr. Alex Baratta, University of Manchester**

**Dr. Paul Smith, University of Manchester**

**Dr. Lydia Reid, Durham University**

## **1. Aims of the Study**

This Scoping Study had the following aims:

- To identify if university students who profess a religious faith have instances in which their religious identity in any way conflicts with their student identity;
- If such instances are identified, how do the students manage the conflict?;
- If certain conflicts are unable to be resolved or managed, what are the reasons for this?

The aims of the study thus tie in with a central goal, that being to better understand whether a university environment and/or one's status as a 'student' involves conflict with a religious identity.

## **2. Background to the Study**

In the past several years, religion in higher education has become a "hot topic" (Mayrl and Oeur 2009: 260). Academic research has begun to flourish in this area and policymakers have also begun to seek, and make, valuable contributions to this debate. It is perhaps rather surprising, though, that interest has been shown in these topics from the mainstream media. One does not have to look too far to find newspaper articles debating whether universities' free speech policies have been suppressed (Tickle, 2015, *The Guardian*; Grey, 2015, *Huffington Post*) or commentating on the latest clash between religious and non-religious societies (Mansfield, 2015, *The Daily Express*; Anon, 2012, *The Daily Mail*) or between religious societies and student unions (Morris, 2012, *The Guardian*). Indeed, David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, has even intervened on legislation recommended by Universities U.K. advising that universities allow external religious speakers to segregate audiences on the basis of gender. Cameron's spokesperson stated "He [Cameron] does not believe that guest speakers should be allowed to address segregated audiences, so he believes that Universities

U.K. should urgently review its guidance” (Barrett, 2013, *The Telegraph*; Weinberg, 2016). As a result of the comment, Universities U.K. did just that, and withdrew their original advice. The media’s sudden interest in religion and higher education may be due in part to the increasing scrutiny and reporting of Islam in British society (Jones, 2015: 185; Allen, 2010: 96). The most recent media articles have tended to focus on Islamic societies and speakers (Sanghani, 2016, *The Telegraph*; Mansfield, 2015, *The Daily Express*; Anon, 2012, *The Daily Mail*). The place of Islam, and of religion more generally, has become politicised. It is with this last point in mind that research into the area of religion and higher education is vital, and we must begin to understand the experiences and narratives of religious students studying at higher education institutions. It is also important that all faiths are included in this process.

It is often assumed that universities are a “product of the Enlightenment” (Fourie and Fourie 2009: 32; Warehime, 1993: 31) and that they embody a ‘secular’ ethos, one that promotes the values of reason, rationality and scepticism (Hamilton, 1996: 21, 22; Porter, 2001: 3; Guest et al., 2013: 22). However, this is not entirely accurate. Many of the oldest universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Durham have well-established connections with the Anglican Church. Institutions formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Manchester and Leeds, differ from those mentioned above in that they were founded on non-conformist principles, with a view to opening up education to all, regardless of religious background. However, this liberal approach does not mean that these universities could be described as being founded on distinctly ‘secular principles’. This is in stark contrast, however, to the University College of London, which was described by a local historian as “the Godless institution of Gower Street” (Legood, 1999: 133 cited in Gilliat-Ray, 2000: 24). Stephen Jones concludes that “The history of HE in Britain has left a complex mix of institutions that differ markedly in their orientation towards religion” (Jones, 2015: 191). More recently research carried out by the Equality Challenge Unit explored the role of equality legislation (from 2010 onwards) in shaping how universities ought to interact with religion. The legislation states that universities are expected to “ensure that all individuals, including those with a religion or belief or none, feel fully able to access and participate in university life” (Weller et al., 2011, 9). The researchers framed their analysis into four key areas: “participation and access”, “accommodating religious observance”, “discrimination and harassment” and “good relations” (loc.cit.). Despite the equality legislation, the students surveyed indicated that they still felt unable to express their religious faith on campus. Weller et al.’s research spans a number of institutions and it is interesting to contrast the finding above with a comment made by Gilliat-Ray, suggesting that post-1992 universities tend to

show more of a willingness “to engage with the multi-faith society” and take a more “inclusive...approach where religious and non-religious voices can be heard” (Gilliat-Ray, 2000: 149).

The theme of institutional context also remains important in Guest et al.’s ‘Christianity and the University Experience’, an RCUK-commissioned study. This is one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind (in the U.K.) and spans several institutional contexts. Guest et al. discuss the extent to which universities can be considered ‘secular’, as well as how Christians express their faith on campus, and what sort of challenges they may face. Guest et al. point out that personal religiosity “cannot be simply reduced to a matter of propositional belief”; rather, beliefs are “more conflicted, more open-ended than our theoretical tools might lead us to understand” (Guest et al., 2013: 24). Therefore, phenomena such as religious pluralism may in fact provide “a source of inspiration to evolving, self-directed identities rather than a threat to established plausibility structures” and “we might also expect such identities to be less vulnerable to the secularizing power of higher education” than was originally thought (*loc.cit.*). Crucially then, Guest et al.’s findings conclude that the university may *alter* religious patterns but not necessarily eradicate them entirely (Guest et al., 2013: 108).

Along with religious pluralism, the other frequently cited secularising force relates to the pedagogy of the classroom. This is where our research starts to make a real contribution. There is currently mixed academic opinion on the interaction between personal religious beliefs and university degree courses. Guest et al. refer to the university as “simultaneously serv[ing] both an anchoring function...and a perspectival function...and, as such, it often challeng[es] and reconfigur[es] pre-existing assumptions and values” (Sharma and Guest, 2013: 61 in Guest et al., 134). Interestingly, Guest’s last point on reconfiguring existing assumptions/values can take place both within the classroom (through lectures and teaching) and outside of it (through socialising with friends). Sabri et al. find a similar position (as well as a host of others) in their research on religious students studying Theology. They note:

Students appear to face the problem of negotiating a course that enables them to explore the interface between their faith commitment and their academic study, and they do so in a variety of ways. Some are determined not to let their studies affect their faith stance such that a strict division is enforced. Others find that the interface is one that is personally disturbing and so gradually move away from a previous faith position or sometimes, with great heart-searching, find one that is rather different from what they had when they first came to university. There are also those students

whose faith stance is essentially the same though informed by a critical awareness that was not previously present (Sabri et al., 2008: 44).

Sabri et al.'s comments are supported in the accounts of our interviewees which ranged from some participants feeling that their faith enhanced their studies to those that found learning about feminism, for example, challenging to their existing views. This detailed analysis of the interaction between degree course and religious faith remains an under-researched area. In-depth discussions on the nature of this type of interaction tend to be confined to two areas: the implications of having a religious belief when studying and/or teaching Theology (Cherry et al., 2001: 70) and the implications of having religious beliefs when studying and/or teaching science (Hollinger and Smith, 2002: 245, Scheitle, 2011: 122, Ecklund, 2010: 115). While both of these have been reasonably documented, there are many other instances where the two may interact (for example in degrees on literature, drama or maths – to name but a few). There have been two passing references to religious beliefs and degree courses: the first by the Equality Challenge Unit who state that “For 48.1% and 46.9% of respondents [students and staff], religion or belief is not considered relevant to course content and teaching, respectively” (Weller et al. 2011: 35). The second is by Dinham and Jones (2010) who briefly refer to evidence from one of their Muslim interviewees showing how religious faith can be conducive to or challenged by the classroom. However, this was used as part of a discussion about how universities should respond to religion rather than as an occurrence in its own right.

Elaine Ecklund's research is effectively an inversion of the aforementioned research in that she interviews and surveys lecturers (rather than students) from a range of elite universities in America. Ecklund first establishes the beliefs of these science lecturers and then she explores how they handle issues relating to religion in the classroom. One noteworthy case was provided by a scientist called “Raymond” who pointed out that religion periodically comes up in his physics course. He informs Ecklund that many of his students have been brought up in religious households from the surrounding Midwestern area and, as a result, he is aware of the religious students in his class “being pulled in different directions from what they were taught when they grew up” (Ecklund, 2010: 72). Ecklund asks Raymond how he responds when religion is brought up in the classroom; he states “I just ignore it. They're in the big time now!” (loc.cit). According to Ecklund, Raymond's dismissive response is indicative of a particular “cultural script” which illustrates just one of the ways that scientists make sense of religion.

To borrow Ecklund's terminology Raymond's response is illustrative of a "script of suppression" (loc.cit) by ignoring religion in the classroom. Ecklund usefully distinguishes between two types of suppression: one, like the example above, is the idea that religion has no place in the classroom and the other that academics should not teach areas that may be considered beyond their remit (ibid., 77, 78). Ecklund also points out that, alongside "scripts of suppression", there are also "scripts of engagement". The latter, she argues, are more relevant in courses on evolutionary biology and the sociology of religion. In these subjects the scientists engaged with religion in the classroom but they did so in one of two ways: in the first case religion was contrasted with science (sometimes to the point of using scientific theories to override religious ones) and, in the second, religion was mentioned to highlight the involvement of certain religious traditions in the formation of historical ideas or disciplines (e.g. Christian ideas in the formation of political thought) (loc.cit). Ecklund points out that such "scripts of engagement" can be either positive or negative – depending on the outlook of the scientist. For example, Ecklund raises the case of a chemist who regularly refers her students to a website documenting the personal struggle of a religious scientist carrying out scientific research (ibid., 81). The chemist mentioned previously (along with a minority of other scientists) appeared to be making a conscious effort to *consider* religious arguments in order to appreciate the points of view of their religious students.

However, in contrast to the above, was another type of engagement, which saw religion as a threat that must be 'dealt with'. Ecklund refers to a scientist called "Anthony" who has taught himself about the Bible in order to *challenge* the fundamentalist students who frequently quoted parts of the Bible at him during lectures (ibid., 83). Intelligent design proved to be another contentious issue, and one scientist began his classes by declaring that intelligent design was unscientific and irrelevant to chemistry (loc.cit). Interestingly, it was not just natural scientists who took this approach and Ecklund herself admits her surprise at discovering that social scientists were just as vehement in their approaches. Ecklund recalls an example of a female sociologist who told her students "You don't have to distance yourself from religion and think about it from an outside perspective, but you do if you want to succeed in this class. And so if you don't want to do that, then you need to leave" (ibid., 84). The social scientist's comment makes explicit the idea that religious belief ought to be kept out of the classroom. What we might consider, however, are instances in which religion might be a legitimate resource for meaning making, particularly in academic assessment.

## **2.1 Religion on campus**

One way of characterising the broader context for these matters of the student religious experience in universities is to see them as part of a complex that concerns a variety of minority and protected statuses. In universities, this is presently taking on a particularly concentrated – and public – form, as seen in the various polemics concerning free speech, identity politics, racial equality, no-platforming, “safe spaces”, and the place of subjective experience in learning (e.g. Anthony 2016, Reisz 2016, Peters 2015, Fish 2005). It is increasingly being realised that these identity markers do not operate in isolation, but are in a relationship of complex intersectionality whereby any of them can implicate any of the others (see Wood 2006). For instance, two recent reports by the Runnymede Trust (Alexander & Arday 2015, Weekes-Bernard 2014) conflate gender, race, religion, age, class and nationality in the sense that these markers may signal underprivileged status within universities, but suggest that various configurations of these will provide the specific features of possible disadvantage and certainly of the student experience. So, in the study by Weekes-Bernard, which started out as a report on race within a specific university, six out of 31 student interviewees cited their religious faith as having some form of influence on their participation and progression in higher education. The same recognition of intersecting identity features was even visible in some student comments (p. 36):

There are social events created, for students, which more or less revolves around drinking and partying and things like that. I’m okay with that, but what I’ve observed is that there aren’t any events which get the same kind of limelight as drinking events [like] non drinking events and it should do really. I think for people who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, they’re having to challenge themselves because they’ve come from an environment where it’s no drinking, quite family orientated. They’re having to challenge themselves as people and almost change if they want to change.

Universities, then, can be seen as a microcosm of general society, but one in which these issues tend to be played out in increasingly newsworthy and public forms. In fact, the public nature of religion, in contrast to fairly recent times where previously it was assumed that faith was best kept behind closed doors, has been the source of local polemics: “On-campus student-run societies have emerged as crucibles for the fomenting of religious controversy. This is sometimes in spite of the stated institutional priorities of their universities, which often assume religion is best confined to the private sphere, policies of

‘tolerance’ sometimes encouraging the removal of religion from the public spaces encompassed by university life” (Guest 2015: 251; see also Fish 2005).

But as Guest also points out, the increase of religious and other forms of diversity on campus has led among other things to “A desire to be mindful of the cultural needs of high fee paying international students [which] has also encouraged a greater sensitivity to the needs of non-Christian groups, including the provision of halal food on university campuses and a greater flexibility surrounding exams lest they clash with religious festivals” (ibid.: 252). This greater visibility of religious identities has been tied into various ‘internationalisation’ agendas within universities (Tomalin 2007, Stevenson 2014), seemingly with mixed success. Tomalin (2007) shows how university staff may become concerned about their ability to recognise when they might be discriminating against a student’s religion of culture. One reason for this is the agenda of multiculturalism, which Tomalin suggests may see religion go relatively unnoticed by virtue of it being seen as a subset of ‘culture’. Stevenson suggests that religion “is rarely recognised or valorised on campus” (2014: 46) despite internationalisation initiatives, meaning that when it is noticed, it may be to ‘other’ (ibid.) or to impose an institutionally-decided subjectivity on them (Kimura 2014).

### **3. Methodological Approach**

Having been granted ethical approval from the University of Manchester, we began to seek out participation from students. This had been preceded by meeting with University Chaplains (both Protestant and Catholic), as well as discussing our proposed research with a local Mosque and members of academic staff. This was a means merely to ‘test the waters’, as it were, to gauge how much, if at all, religious leaders on campus believed there to be any inherent issues with being a student and a member of a faith. We were told by both Chaplains that the University is secular, and one in which ‘we don’t do religion’, further telling us that this is ‘a live issue’. This issue involves members of faith coming into contact with beliefs and practices on campus that go against their religious beliefs. Anecdotal evidence explained to us included students in the Sciences who withhold their religious beliefs for fear of ridicule, specifically withholding information about their involvement with the church on applications for funding, even though such involvement is a legitimate aspect of their ‘extracurricular activities’. Further evidence included students in the Humanities who reported to the Chaplains lecturers who used the lesson as a means to rally against religion in general. It seemed to us that some religious students feel, partly at least, that they do not have a ‘voice’.

We displayed posters around campus advertising our research and the need for participants, leaving it entirely at the students' discretion to contact us further once they had read the summary of our study and its goals. A team of three researchers then interviewed seventeen students in private locations (e.g. our offices) on our two campuses with one student responding in writing. The interviews were recorded and thirteen of the most relevant transcribed. We realised that the discussion could be a potentially sensitive one, and for this reason briefed all students before beginning the interview as to our aims, and asked them for permission to record the interview. The students had already agreed to such via signing their consent form, so this final briefing was merely a reminder, as well as a means to ensure that they were prepared to begin the interview. The interviews were conducted without any undue stress on the students' part, but it was clear, that, for some, the chance to share their stories with us was indeed a cathartic experience.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

From the results, there are three broad categories to describe the experiences of the students, all of which will be discussed in turn with one specific example each:

- Those who had no conflict to report
- Those who reported a conflict, but one that they were able to manage
- Those who reported a conflict that is unable to be resolved

'Conflict' is a broad word, but one that indeed best describes the situation for some of the students. It is difficult to quantify conflict, but for the purposes of our study we felt it made sense to use the word, at least as a placeholder concept, to describe any incidence of students' faith not being commensurable with any aspect of their university experience, whether this is based on lecture content, assessment, comments made by lecturers or anything else that they felt was relevant to mention in the interviews.

##### **4.1 Those who have no conflict to report**

A Buddhist from China expressed no identity conflict based on being a university student (studying Translation and Interpreting Studies) and a Buddhist. She explained that her religion 'helps to release academic pressure'. This was further explained in terms of her belief in destiny; 'if you just listen to destiny, doesn't mean you should stay negative. Because what is going to happen will happen whether you do something to change it or not.....don't

put too much pressure on yourself, you can listen –you can hear the inner voice yourself and for those who do not know what they want to do, because they are going too fast, their attention is distracted by our society, by all those external pressures’.

From her account, Buddhism is suggested as influencing all of her everyday life, in as much as it facilitates a fatalistic approach to life, which would of course include her studies. Indeed, the student explained to us that there were no conflicts of any kind to discuss regarding how her faith led to any issues connected to being a student. She even told us that ‘I can’t think of any examples that the academic study can use’. She did, however, explain that this was partly based on her Buddhist principles, which would be in conflict with another choice of study:

‘I think it has something to do with my major, because my major has more to do with Humanities oriented. I don’t have to carry out those experiments that may involve the conflicts with my belief. If I major in scientific... If I have a major in a scientific subject that have experiments on those live animals’.

This illustrates that the choice of one’s study can be directly involved with a potential conflict on the part of religious students, or lack thereof, but in this case, her choice of study remains ‘neutral’ in this regard, and her faith was expressed in terms of being an enabler in her overall life.

#### **4.2 Those who reported a conflict, but one that they were able to manage**

A Nigerian Christian post-doctoral student, studying Geology, first explained how his Christian duty to pray is attended to as part of his everyday life at university. Here, there appears to be no conflict at all, save for an implication that his demands as a student sometimes do not allow for as much time to spiritually reflect as he might wish:

‘...during lunch, instead of just going to eat food, I go to St. Peter’s first of all, and pray. Ok, so, I go there, spend like an hour to pray, read the Bible, most times, not every day, and then come back to my studies. So with that, I am refreshed, recharged spiritually to do my studies. So if I’ve got more time maybe I would have done more religious activities, but the academic work is so demanding that I’ve not got all the time, but the most important religious activities I try to do them’

However, the student went on to explain that his beliefs in a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account is in direct conflict with the prevailing views of evolution in his academic community. The student further explained that he does not believe in theistic

evolution/evolutionary creationism, but a literal account of Genesis regarding creation as opposed to, as he puts it, creation by ‘gradual accumulation’ (i.e. evolution). In his assessments, however, he admitted to having to ‘put God out of it’:

‘...it’s going to be tough but the best way to do it at least is to give the different viewpoints and then to say as a scientist according to the methodology we use now, we put God out of it so that we can understand from scientific perspective.....so with that it is not a big issue to separate the theological belief and my scientific inclinations of study.’

This student further explained that Geology is not a ‘religious-friendly department’, based on its scientific principles regarding creation:

‘...It is not religious-friendly because most people believe don’t believe in creation, they believe in evolution. So, I guess part of it is indoctrination, when I say ‘indoctrination’ I mean from when most of the professors in Geology, when they were kids going to school, children going to school, they were made to think that God doesn’t exist’.

The student thus has a conflict in as much as his firmly held beliefs are at complete odds with the beliefs in his department, notably mentioning his professors’ viewpoints regarding evolution. However, he is comfortable to ‘put God out of it’ in assessments, in which evolution is routinely referred to. He expressed no identity conflict in this regard; he is still a Christian, but recognises a need to withhold this aspect of his identity in his academic work. While he also told me that he has witnessed his faith to those in his department, he believes that it is his conduct that will ultimately identify him as a Christian, and not witnessing or discussing it in his assessments. This is seen particularly in his desire to love his ‘fellow man’. Thus, we see how a conflict in beliefs – spiritual and academic – can peacefully co-exist in this student.

### **4.3 Those who reported a conflict that is unable to be resolved**

A British Muslim student, studying Religions and Theology, as with the previous student discussed, expressed no issue when it comes to the need to pray and essentially, attend to what might be broadly regarded as ‘spiritual matters’:

‘The university has been great, so sometimes on Fridays when we get, during the break I am allowed to take 15 minutes, sometimes it is 10 minutes in between but I can take 5 minutes extra, to pray and come back. They were very helpful in terms of, my Department particularly, for example when it comes to Eid Holiday’

Indeed, it is suggested that Universities recognise students' religious needs with regard to prayer, worship and even the need to take religious observances into consideration during exam time. However, the student explained that there are instances in which her identity as Muslim is incompatible with University life, by first explaining how she does not appreciate being labelled in the first instance:

'The thing is 'identity' has become so constrained, so for example, there is this new context that we have to be British Muslims, or British this, British that. What if you don't want to be? What if you don't even want to be labelled as Muslim? What if you just want to be [own name]?'

The student's account suggests a desire not to be pigeon-holed, based on her identity as a Muslim – essentially, a precursor to being stereotyped. The student continued to discuss how her identity as a *female* Muslim also puts her at a disadvantage:

'I feel like, yes, there is always this narrative that "you can be Muslim, provided that you do this", but doesn't that take the agency away?.....And it is worse when you are woman. Because every single person so when it comes to for example the way you dress, the way you do this, the way you do that, there are so many questions. So for example if you, if you are a Muslim they get shocked that "why does she wear a scarf and you don't? Why do you do this...no one will have you on the media. There'll be a Muslim guy, and they will go to them and they will ask them "ok, what do women need?" But, they've not asked the women!'

While these point to larger societal issues, they have implications for her life on campus, certainly seen in the comment 'provided that you do this'; this was a reference to what the student sees as a demand to adopt a certain stance to 'prove' she is not militant. For example, the student went on to describe the Charlie Hebdo killings:

'So, when the Charlie Hebdo thing happened it was the worst! Because as in, yes, I defend the right for everyone's freedom of speech, but I am not Charlie. I don't support Charlie Hebdo. And there was a more, a very big thing: "but, oh, did you get offended?" I said "of course I did", and I don't want to kill somebody, but of course I did!'

Thus, we can see comments made by others, presumably non-Muslims, which point toward what might be regarded as a 'reassurance' of sorts, in this case, a reassurance that Muslims on campus do not agree with the actions of the terrorists. Moreover, the student

further discussed the killing of Muslims in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for which there was comparatively less media coverage.

The student then went on to express overall conflict with her Muslim identity on campus regarding the Prevent strategy. She feels 'let down by the university' regarding Prevent, expressing a desire for more protection for herself against a backdrop of feeling afraid to give her opinions in class when such opinions might be regarded as in need of reporting:

'Why didn't the University take it up? Like, why didn't we have a consultation or something? With the Chancellor and saying, "look, I am going to protect you. We need to protect freedom of speech, I'm gonna protect this I'm gonna protect that". Why do we... [hesitates] why can't we, why weren't we protected? In the prevent strategy they flag things up: "oh is there a sudden change in routine? Does this person seek counselling? Oh, do they feel like the domestic policy is wrong, do they want to bring a change into the world? Then flag them up!.... How am I supposed to feel about me able to express anything in class? And oh, my professor feeling "ok, I should flag this up'.

While this is an ongoing issue for the student, she suggested a solution, partly at least, by educating students on campus, as a means to address what she believes is media-fuelled misinformation against Islam:

'...sometimes it's really hard, most of the times you can't blame them because that's what they have been fed by the Media and stuff, not everybody studies religion in the classroom. That's why I really like the idea of a general course....I feel like it should be made compulsory to everyone, at least like lectures or seminars or something. I feel that to address your Religion in HE or ethics'.

For now, the student acknowledges that her conflict is unresolved. It largely revolves around issues connected with stereotypical notions of Islam and a fear of voicing her opinions in class regarding, for example, domestic policy (e.g. the war on terror). She does suggest, however, that it could be resolvable in part, based on allowing for freedom of speech that need not be regarded as in need of reporting to the authorities; the student used the term 'non-violent extremists' to refer to those whose views, while perhaps controversial to some (though no example was given), are not supportive of terrorism. Whether or not the Prevent strategy and this level of freedom of speech can co-exist is another matter.

## **5. Conclusion**

From the results, there were more students who expressed a conflict based on the two identities than those who did not, with some unable to manage the conflict in as much as there appears to be no resolution. 'Conflict' is to be understood as necessarily wide-ranging, of highly varying magnitude, relevant in a number of contexts and in various media. Beyond the three broad categories presented in the previous section regarding the focus on identity conflict, there are two subsequent broad categories into which the participants can be grouped, particularly those for whom there is a conflict.

First, conflict for some students, manageable or not, is based on the disciplinary assumptions and discourses inherent in their particular programme of study. This is seen for instance in the example of the Geology student, albeit a conflict that he manages. On the other hand, two Catholic students studying Neuroscience took part in a classroom vote on "Who should have rights to IVF treatment?", in which 'all four options presupposed that someone should have the right to IVF. There was not an option that said, 'no-one should have the right to IVF'.' The students made the point that 'no-one should have the right' is a logical and ethical possibility that was not included in a Bio-Ethics class to a group full of future health professionals. On the other hand, a Jewish Music student expressed no conflict in any sense with singing the music of Wagner, even though it is banned in Israel; the student, however, did not feel comfortable singing in a church; perhaps this could also be linked to her notion of 'safe spaces', albeit from a perspective different than that of the Student Union.

The second group concerns conflicts that belong outside the realm of the student's programme but which implicate higher education studies in some way, and which are quite diverse in nature. For the Muslim student, this involves issues relating to the Prevent strategy, which of course is essentially university-wide, and her feelings of marginalisation as a Muslim. For the Jewish student, her issues are tied to the notion of 'safe spaces', seen in her desire to not meet me in preparation for the interview outside the Student Union; this was justified in that she believes, along with many Jewish students, that the Union is hostile towards Israel and subsequently, Jewish students, many of whom do not wear their yarmulkes on campus; in this instance, identifying as Jewish is not regarded by many Jewish students as compatible with University – this again ties to the notion of a safe space.

From the results, it is therefore somewhat difficult to tie down the issues to one overriding cause, and some of the issues are clearly expressed on an individual basis, though some are indeed suggestive of larger problems (e.g. the Prevent strategy's implications for Muslim students in general, and a suggested collective distrust on the part of Jewish students toward the Student Union). Based on these results, we seek an audience with the relevant

people on campus in order to see how this can be taken further. To this end, we have already met with the Chaplains and discussed our results, an audience made up of multiple faiths, including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh.

Ultimately, however, the accounts provided by the students point toward the student experience, and how students of faith feel, at worst, ignored, or at least believe that there is a need for more consideration of their beliefs (e.g. the Catholic Neuroscience students have no issue with evolution, but do indeed have an issue with the ethical implications of IVF technology). Can the beliefs of religious students be incorporated into the curriculum in a meaningful way, however, considering the objections that overwhelmingly atheist students or indeed secularising tendencies in universities generally might raise?

Perhaps there is room for a ‘happy medium’, suggested by the Muslim student who calls for mandatory classes to be offered for students, acting as a positive counter to negative media images (in this case, of Islam) and essentially being offered as a means to educate students, in this case about all faiths. Might such a course be offered to all incoming undergraduates, in as much as it is seen as a need, in an effort to promote tolerance and understanding? For this to work, however, there is a need to engage with religious students campus-wide in the first instance, gathering their views on what they regard as conflicts, notably those that they believe are most relevant for their fellow students to be informed about. Putting the ‘two halves’ together consisting of religious students and the relevant campus authorities is necessary, as the need for education, and not misinformation, is wholly relevant in today’s multicultural society, and multicultural campus.

## 6. Outputs

- We have already presented the results of our research on two occasions at Manchester University, one within the Institute of Education and one for the monthly Chaplains’ meeting; a third presentation will take place in May, again part of the University’s weekly Education-themed talks.
- Paul Smith has an upcoming publication based on the case study that was the inspiration for this project, a paper in the *London Review of Education*: special edition on academic literacies.
- Upon completing the final paper for the study in the spring, we will seek publication in *Studies in Higher Education* and/or *Higher Education Quarterly*.

- I also received £10,190 in funding in December 2015 to continue the study on religious identity in students, from the University of Manchester's HSIF (Humanities Strategic Investment Fund). The title is 'The conflict between religious and academic identities of university students' and the study will be conducted across three universities: Leeds, Bolton and Coventry. The study will be concluded by late spring, and a conference will be organised for November 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, as a means to disseminate the results of our study and have others present on the theme of religion in Higher Education.
- Following this second study, we will seek ESRC funding in 2017 for a further study, one that investigates the issue on a European level.
- Potential 2016 conference papers based on abstract submissions thus far:
  - BERA annual conference
  - BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference
  - Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference
  - In addition, we plan to submit our abstract to the 2016 SRHE conference once information is available on the website

## 7. Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Dr Kristin Aune at the University of Coventry, for her invaluable help and assistance on this project as a critical friend, as well as being on board for the HSIF-funded study.

## References

Alexander, C. & J. Arday (2015) "Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy" Runnymede Trust, <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf> accessed 11/11/2015

Allen, C. (2010) *Islamophobia*. London: Ashgate

Anon, 'University Atheist Society ordered out of Freshers' Fair for displaying 'Blasphemous' Pineapple called Mohammed', *The Daily Mail*, 4 October 2012

Anthony, A. (2016) "Is Free Speech in British Universities Under Threat?" *The Guardian*, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 2016, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/24/safe-spaces-universities-no-platform-free-speech-rhodes>

Barrett, D. 'Gender segregation guidelines to be reviewed as David Cameron steps into row for the first time', *The Telegraph*, 13 December 2013.

Cherry, C., DeBerg, B., Porterfield, A. (2001) *Religion on Campus*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

Dinham, A. and Jones, S. (2010) *Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education: An Analysis of Challenges of Religious Faith, and Resources for Meeting Them, for University Leaders*. Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education Programme, York, U.K.: York St John University.

Ecklund, E. (2010) *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fish, S. (2005), "One University Under God?" Chronicle of Higher Education, Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
 Guest, M. (2015) "Religion and the Cultures of Higher Education: Student Christianity in the UK" in Beaman, L. G. & L. Van Arragon (eds.) "Issues in Religion and Education: Whose Religion?" Boston: Brill

Fourie, J. and Fourie, W. (2009) *Let's Talk About Varsity*. South Africa: Gabbema Books

Gilliat-Ray, S. (2000) *Religion in Higher Education: The Politics of the Multi-Faith Campus*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Grey, J. '5 Most Controversial Things that Happened at UK Universities in 2015', *The Huffington Post*, 26 December 2015.

Guest, M. and Sharma, S. (2013) 'Navigating Religion Between University and Home: Christian Students' Experiences in English Universities', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 14, (1), 59-79.

Guest, M., Aune, K., Sharma, S., Warner, R. (2013) *Christianity and the University Experience: Understanding Student Faith*. London: Bloomsbury.

Hamilton, P. (1996) 'The Enlightenment and the Birth of Social Science' in Hall, S. (ed.) *Modernity: an Introduction to Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Hollinger, F. and Smith, T. (2002) 'Religion and Esotericism among Students: A Cross-cultural Comparative Study', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17: 229-49.

Jones, S.H. (2015) 'Religious Literacy in Higher Education', in A. Dinham and M. Francis (eds.) *Religious Literacy in Secular Society: Theories, Policies and Practices of Faith in the Public Realm*, Policy Press/University of Chicago Press, pp.187-206

Kimura, M. (2014) "Non-Performativity of University and Subjectification of Students: The Question of Equality and Diversity in UK Universities" *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 35, no. 4, 523-540

Mansfield, K. 'Islamic Society students disrupt University Lecture on Blasphemy and make death threat', *The Express*, 4 December 2015.

Mayrl, D. and Oeur, F. (2009) 'Religion and Higher Education: Current Knowledge and Future Directions for Future Research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48, (2), 260-275.

Morris, S. 'Bristol University Christian Union bars women from teaching', *The Guardian*, 4 December 2013.

Peters, M. A. (2015) "Why is My Curriculum White?" *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, editorial, 1-6

Porter, R. (2001) *The Enlightenment*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Reisz, M. (2016) "The Corrosion of Conformity on Campus" *Times Higher Education*, Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 2016, at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/interview-joanna-williams-university-of-kent>, accessed 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2016

Sabri, D., Rowland, C., Wyatt, J., Stavrakopoulou, F., Cargas, S., Hartley, H. (2008) 'Faith in Academia: Integrating Students' Faith Stance into Conceptions of their Intellectual Development', *Teaching in Higher Education* 13: 43-54.

Sanghani, R. 'Gender Segregation: The Truth about Muslim Women 'forced' to sit away from Men', *The Telegraph*, 19 January 2016.

Scheitle, C. (2011) 'Religious and Spiritual Change in College: Assessing the Effect of a Science Education', *Sociology of Education* 84: 122-136.

Stevenson, J. (2014) "Internationalisation and Religious Inclusion in United Kingdom Higher Education" *Higher Education Quarterly* 68: 46-64

Tickle, L. 'Free Speech? Not at Four in Five UK Universities', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2015.

Tomalin, E. (2007) "Supporting Cultural and Religious Diversity in Higher Education: Pedagogy and Beyond" *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12:5-6, 621-634

Warhime, N. (1993) *To Be One of Us: Cultural Conflict, Creative Democracy, and Education*, New York: University of New York Press.

Weekes-Bernard, D. (2014) "The Educational Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Students at Manchester University" Report for the School of Social Sciences, Runnymede Trust

Weinberg, J. (2016) I won't stop offering a platform to so-called 'hate speakers', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2016.

Weller, P., Hooley, T., Moore, N. (2011) *Religion and Belief in Higher Education: The Experiences of Staff and Students*, London: Equality Challenge Unit.

Wood, M. (2006) "Breaching Bleaching: Integrating Studies of 'Race' and Ethnicity with the Sociology of Religion" in Beckford, J. A. & J. Walliss (eds.) "Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates" Aldershot: Ashgate