

Religious diversity: A basis for SPUP'S interfaith framework

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Abstract

Catholic Higher Education Institutions have become a conglomeration of religious and cultural diversity. This reality challenges Catholic educational leaders to institute proactive interfaith engagement to ensure unity, harmony and optimum learning in the academic community. In like manner, because of its reputable stature, offering international, affordable, accessible and quality education, St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) has become a place of convergence of various cultures, practices and beliefs of both local and foreign students, who have bolstered the religious diversity on campus. This study assessed the extent of SPUP's interfaith undertakings relevant to its learning environment; policies and regulations; and, programs and activities amidst the growing diversity of faith of its students. The evaluation of these is geared towards the formulation of an interfaith framework for the University. Through the descriptive survey method of study, results showed that the participants ascertained the interfaith endeavours of SPUP along the provision of learning environment as "Great Extent"; institutional policies and regulations as "Very Great Extent"; and, programs and activities as "Great Extent". From the findings, the elements of SPUP's interfaith framework model, namely: spaces, support and services were identified. The blueprint would serve as a guide towards a holistic approach in the development, implementation and evaluation of SPUP's interfaith program.

Keywords: interfaith, religious diversity, spaces, services, support

Introduction

Religious diversity fosters the relevance of interfaith understanding in Catholic education. This is because Catholic Higher Education Institutions have become a conglomeration of religious and cultural diversity. This reality challenges Catholic educational leaders to institute proactive interfaith engagement to ensure unity and harmony in a multicultural and multi-faith academic community.

However, religious diversity in an academic community presents formidable challenges as a result of ignorance, intolerance, and tension (Patel and Meyer, 2011) ^[13]. Particularly on college campuses, issues of difference across religion, faith, and spirituality are increasingly more divisive (Nash and Scott, 2009) ^[12]. On the other hand, the amount of knowledge one has about a religion corresponds strongly to positive attitudes toward interfaith understanding (Pew, 2008) ^[14]. For this, as interfaith flourishes into the academic scene of the 21st Century learning landscape, it must be integrated with institutional norms and practices (Ray, 2012) ^[16]. Moreover, academic campuses, due to religious diversity, are emerging as critical spaces for the advancement of interfaith learning (Creswell, 2012) ^[8].

Towards this end, although St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) is a Catholic University, it has upheld the meaning of its Catholic character as "universal." Because of its reputable

stature, offering international, affordable, accessible and quality education, SPUP has become a place of convergence of various cultures, practices and beliefs of both local and foreign students, who have bolstered the religious diversity on campus.

As SPUP is expanding, the diversity of the members of its academic community is growing. More so, SPUP must lead in developing new initiatives that engage commonalities and differences across faith and traditions to advance collaboration around issues of peace, dialogue and justice on campus, across the country, and around the world (Putnam and Campbell, 2010) ^[15].

This study aimed to assess the extent of SPUP's interfaith undertakings relevant to its learning environment; policies and regulations; and, programs and activities. The evaluation of these is geared towards the formulation of an interfaith framework for the University. Its direction is to explore the interfaith endeavours of the University as an interaction among students practicing different faith and traditions (Heckman, 2008) ^[10].

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

The study is guided by the paradigm below which served as its direction and the manner it was undertaken.

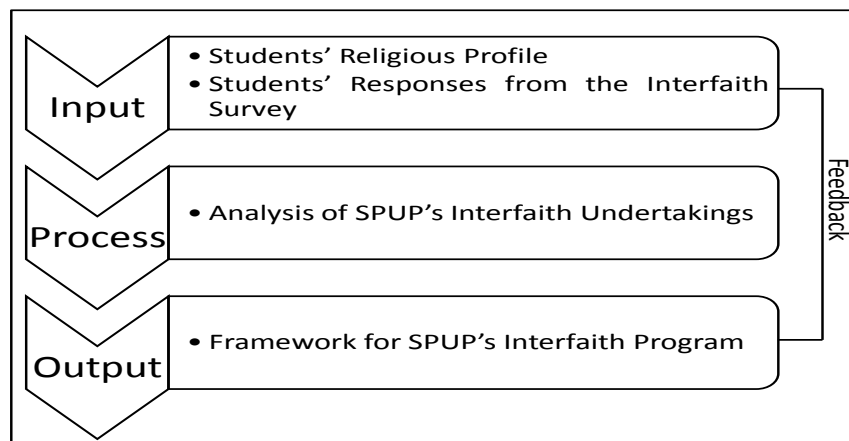


Fig 1: Paradigm of the Study

As described in Figure 1, the study took into account, as input, the participants’ religious profile, responses to the survey questionnaire, their remarks and suggestions relevant to SPUP’s interfaith undertakings. The analysis of the data obtained from participants’ assessment of SPUP’s interfaith practices was the process. Finally, based from the results of the analysis, the output would be SPUP’s interfaith framework.

Statement of the Problem

This study is geared towards the formulation of SPUP’s interfaith framework. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What is the religious profile of the participants?
2. What is the extent of the interfaith endeavours of SPUP as assessed by the participants along the areas of:
 - 2.1 learning environment?
 - 2.2 policies and regulations? and,
 - 2.3 programs and activities?
3. What is SPUP’s interfaith framework model?

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive research design, specifically the descriptive survey method.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study consisted of 230 students from SPUP’s Senior High School, College and Graduate School departments. However, the number of participants is equally distributed to Catholic and Non-Catholic students. Purposive random sampling is applied in the selection of the said participants.

Research Instruments

The collection of data is completed using the self-made questionnaire on “SPUP’s Interfaith Indicators Survey,” personally administered by the researcher. Indicators along interfaith undertakings correspond to the efforts of SPUP in providing learning environment, policies and regulations and programs and activities for its interfaith initiatives. The survey questionnaire elicited the religious affiliation, the assessment,

the remarks and suggestions of the participants relative to SPUP’s interfaith practices.

Data Collection Procedure

The following activities are undertaken in order to gather the data relevant to the study:

1. The researcher sought the permission of the University President to administer the survey to select participants.
2. The researcher administered the survey to select participants.
3. The researcher consulted an in-house statistician for data analysis and interpretation upon the completion of the data gathering.

Data Analysis

The following are used to analyze the data gathered for the study:

1. Frequency count and Percentage Distribution are used to determine the religious affiliation of the participants;
2. Weighted Mean is employed to ascertain the extent of the interfaith undertakings of the University. The Likert Scale below served as the basis for interpreting the value of the result:

Table 1: The Scale Range and Descriptive Interpretation

Scale	Descriptive Interpretation
4.20 – 5.00	Very Great Extent (VGE)
3.40 – 4.19	Great Extent (GE)
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate Extent (ME)
1.80 – 2.59	Low Extent (LE)
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low Extent (VLE)

3. Thematic Analysis is used to classify and group together remarks and suggestions that express the same thought or subject. The thematic groupings are used to reinforce the dimensions of SPUP’s interfaith framework.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Participants

The chart below presents the breakdown of the religious affiliations of the student-participants.

Table 2: The Religious Affiliation of Participants

Religion (Religious Affiliation)	Senior High School		College		Graduate School		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Adventist	0	0	0	0	2	5.00	2	0.87
Aglipayan	2	2.50	3	2.73	2	5.00	7	3.04
Anglican	1	1.25	2	1.82	2	5.00	5	2.17
Apostolic Christian	1	1.25	0	0	0	0	1	0.43
Baptist	5	6.25	5	4.55	2	5.00	12	5.26
Born Again	4	5.00	7	6.36	0	0	11	4.78
Buddhism	0	0	0	0	1	2.50	1	0.43
Church of Christ	4	5.00	7	6.36	0	0	11	4.78
Hinduism	0	0	5	4.55	0	0	5	2.17
Iglesia ni Cristo	7	8.75	9	8.18	3	7.50	19	8.26
Islam	0	0	4	3.64	2	5.00	6	2.61
Jehovah’s Witnesses	4	5.00	3	2.73	2	5.00	9	3.91
LDS/Mormon	5	6.25	4	3.64	2	5.00	11	4.78
Methodist	4	5.00	6	5.45	2	5.00	12	5.26
Pentecost	3	3.75	0	0	0	0	3	1.30
Roman Catholic	40	50.00	55	50.00	20	50.00	115	50.00
TOTAL	80	100	110	100	40	100	230	100

In Table 2, the participants are grouped into Catholics and Non-Catholics. A total of 230 students, with 115 from each group, served as participants. For the Non-Catholics, the Iglesia Ni Cristo had the most number of participants with 19 students; followed by the Baptist and the Methodist groups with 12; and, the Born Again and Mormon (Latter Day Saints) sects with 11. Buddhism and Apostolic Christian have only 1

participant respectively.

Assessment of SPUP’s Interfaith Endeavours (IFE)

A. Learning Environment

SPUP provides a learning environment where students exercise their faith with due respect and reverence to the religious identity (Lambert, 2004) ^[11] of SPUP.

Table 3: Assessment on the provision of Learning Environment

Interfaith Indicators of Learning Environment	Assessment					
	Non-Catholics		Catholics		TOTAL	
	N=115		N=115		N=230	
	M	DI	M	DI	M	DI
1. SPUP designates particular venues on campus for interfaith activities.	3.70	GE	3.79	GE	3.75	GE
2. SPUP provides avenue for interfaith dialogue.	3.46	GE	3.71	GE	3.59	GE
3. SPUP endeavours the campus as an avenue for interfaith interaction.	4.02	GE	3.51	GE	3.77	GE
4. SPUP recognizes the growing religious diversity of its academic community.	3.74	GE	3.54	GE	3.64	GE
5. SPUP promotes the interconnectedness or relationship of the diversity of faith.	4.10	GE	3.44	GE	3.77	GE
6. SPUP provides platforms or fora for expression of faith practices and beliefs.	3.41	GE	3.30	ME	3.36	ME
7. SPUP fosters a learning environment where faith and culture meet.	3.10	ME	3.27	ME	3.19	ME
8. SPUP recognizes and appreciates the uniqueness of other beliefs.	3.58	GE	3.77	GE	3.68	GE
9. SPUP promotes relationships that value dignity, respect, esteem, understanding and dialogue.	3.41	GE	3.42	GE	3.42	GE
Total	3.65	GE	3.57	GE	3.61	GE

As presented in Table 3, both non-Catholic and Catholic participants evaluated the provision of learning environment relative to SPUP’s interfaith undertakings as “Great Extent.” As shown in the chart, it could be inferred that SPUP provides a learning environment to advance its interfaith activities. Moreover, it could also be ascertained that SPUP campus is conducive for interfaith experiences. Lambert (2004) ^[11] affirmed that the provision of designated venues and recognize diverse expressions of faith manifests an academic campus where religious diversity is thriving. Furthermore, SPUP learning environment conforms to the thought that in order for interfaith programs to prosper, it must breed respect to and appreciation of other religion where it establishes connection in finding commonalities with other faith

(Terenzini and Reason, 2005) ^[17].

However, indicators along the provision of learning environment where faith and culture meet and the provision of platforms and fora for expression of faith practices and beliefs are regarded by the participants as “Moderate Extent.” Because of this, there is a need to emphasize that religion is part of culture. Beck and Ajzen (1991) ^[3] suggested that interfaith is important to culture because through the interaction of faith and culture, interfaith highlights the benefits of working across differences, for a shared goal. Moreover, Interfaith must lead towards the understanding of cultural roots and heritages (Gordon, 2017) ^[9]. On the other hand, the provision of platforms or fora to promote and advocate interfaith foster among students the capacity to

engage in activities to advance interfaith understanding (Tisdell, 2008) [18]; however, it must be in consideration with the identity of the institution (Bryant, 2006) [7].

B. Policies and Regulations

Institutional policies and regulations guide the conduct of interfaith engagement activities (Brill, 2011) [6] of SPUP.

Table 4: Assessment on the provision of Policies and Regulations

Interfaith Indicators of Policies and Regulations	Assessment					
	Non -Catholics		Catholics		TOTAL	
	N=115		N=115		N=230	
	M	DI	M	DI	M	DI
1. SPUP accepts members of other faiths availing of its academic programs and services.	4.68	VGE	4.59	VGE	4.64	VGE
2. SPUP provides equal opportunities among the members of other beliefs or faiths.	3.92	GE	3.80	GE	3.86	GE
3. SPUP implements regulations supportive of interfaith understanding.	4.03	GE	4.10	GE	4.10	GE
4. SPUP promulgates policies adhered by the members of other religions.	4.14	GE	4.44	VGE	4.29	VGE
5. SPUP conducts dialogue to members of other faith on campus.	4.12	GE	4.17	GE	4.15	GE
6. SPUP institutes policies for the promotion of the well-being of the members of other faith.	4.23	VGE	4.24	VGE	4.24	VGE
7. SPUP allows students of other faith to contribute in the formulation of rules and regulations.	4.29	VGE	4.29	VGE	4.29	VGE
8. SPUP provides orientation on its policies as a Catholic University.	4.27	VGE	4.39	VGE	4.33	VGE
9. SPUP fosters regulations for the development, capacity, interests and needs of its diverse members.	4.20	VGE	4.12	GE	4.16	GE
Total	4.21	VGE	4.24	VGE	4.23	VGE

The results in Table 4 revealed that the participants evaluated the provision of policies and regulations on interfaith endeavours of the University as “Very Great Extent.” It could be gleaned that SPUP’s educational policies are geared towards the advancement of interfaith on campus. In any interfaith undertaking, institutional policies are important to address and promote mutual respect, integrity, ethical principles, cultural diversity, understanding and dialogue (Brill, 2011) [6]. It could also be inferred that the presence of operational strategies relevant to religious diversity illustrates SPUP’s capacity to reinforce its interfaith undertakings (Patel and Meyer, 2011) [13]. These regulations include admission or acceptance in the institution, provision of opportunities, avenues for growth and development, contribution to policy-making and fostering avenues for interaction with other faith-members (Gordon, 2017) [9].

However, policies and regulations pertinent to the provision of equal opportunities to students regardless of faith must be promoted so that proper guidance and adherence to these are fostered. Regulations supportive to interfaith opportunities must be emphasized as these are critical in the development and implementation of the program (Brookfield, 2003). For an interfaith paradigm to prosper, it must be built with actual policies that can fully engaged interfaith collaboration among the diverse believers. A vibrant interfaith community is that which is poised to work together toward a greater common good (Paul VI, 1965).

C. Programs and Activities

Programs and activities are means to advance interfaith understanding and interaction among SPUP students (Trisdell, 2008).

Table 5: Assessment on the provision of Programs and Activities

Interfaith Indicators of Programs and Activities	Assessment					
	Non -Catholics		Catholics		TOTAL	
	N=115		N=115		N=230	
	M	DI	M	DI	M	DI
1. SPUP fosters interfaith in its programs and activities.	4.06	GE	4.06	GE	4.06	GE
2. SPUP involves members of other faith in community related activities and programs.	4.11	GE	4.06	GE	4.10	GE
3. SPUP integrates interfaith understanding in its curricular programs and designs.	4.12	GE	4.11	GE	4.12	GE
4. SPUP fosters authentic learning of Faith in to the presence of other beliefs on campus.	4.18	GE	4.22	VGE	4.20	VGE
5. SPUP advances unity and harmony through intercultural and interfaith programs and activities.	3.68	GE	3.67	GE	3.68	GE
6. SPUP respects the practices and beliefs of its partner communities.	4.11	GE	4.06	GE	4.10	GE
7. SPUP provides opportunities for the sharing of beliefs in its service-learning program.	4.18	GE	4.15	GE	4.17	GE
8. SPUP works for justice and peace through its community programs and activities.	4.10	GE	4.08	GE	4.09	GE
9. SPUP promotes inclusiveness through its academic and community-related activities.	4.02	GE	4.01	GE	4.02	GE
Total	4.06	GE	4.05	GE	4.06	GE

In Table 5, the participants considered the provision of interfaith programs and activities as “Great Extent.” This demonstrates the capacity of SPUP to employ varied approaches to promote interfaith in its academic and

community engagement activities. As a learning institution, SPUP’s academic programs and community activities serve as an avenue for students of diverse faith to socialize and work together. By doing so, students can explore and grow in their

own beliefs, while also gaining an appreciation for the beliefs of others (Thetamanil, 2009) ^[19]. Moreover, when students engage in academic activities and community programs in the context of interfaith interaction, their knowledge, skills and attitudes are enriched by the experiences of others (Viera, 2012) ^[22].

However, intercultural and interfaith programs and activities to advance unity and harmony need to be mapped out and be

consistently integrated in other academic and community-related activities and programs (Biglem, 2007) ^[4] to maximize and elicit active participation of the members of other faith.

SPUP's Interfaith Framework

The framework would provide a paradigm for the Interfaith program of SPUP.

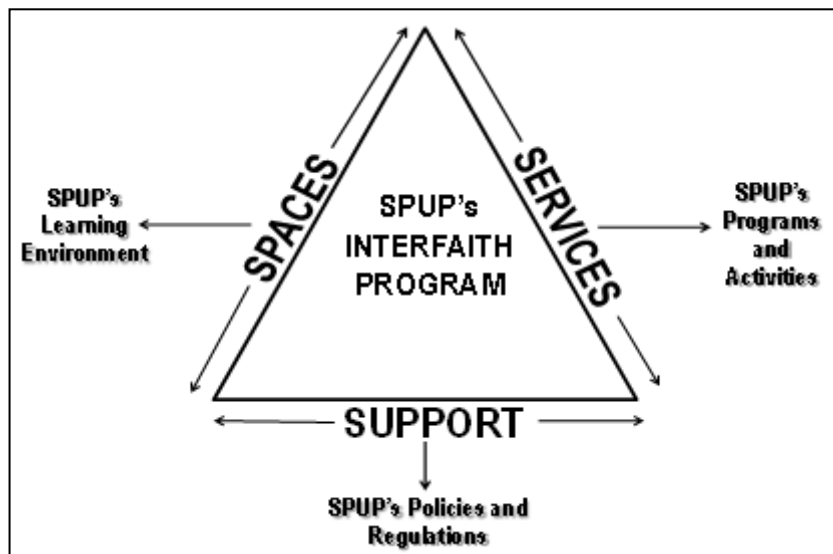


Fig 2: SPUP's Interfaith Framework Model

The framework, as shown in Figure 2, is derived from the results of the assessment of the participants to SPUP's Interfaith undertakings. The paradigm will serve as basis for the formulation of strategies and institutionalization of activities (Bryant, 2012) ^[7] for SPUP's interfaith program.

The framework is composed of three elements and their relationship with SPUP's interfaith program:

1. **Support** – This refers to SPUP's policies and regulations supporting interfaith initiatives. Institutional policies and regulations serve as foundation of an Interfaith program (Gordon, 2017) ^[9]. The participants acknowledged that in SPUP, policies are clearly articulated. As for interfaith undertakings, they pointed out that SPUP adheres to Open Admission Policy (SPUP Student Handbook, 2017) ^[21]; for them, this means that students may enrol in the University regardless of religious affiliation. Moreover, they also cited that policies relevant to the Catholic Identity of SPUP are emphasized during orientation activities and in student fora. The regulations highlight that proselytization is an illicit act in the University (SPUP Student Handbook, 2017) ^[21]. This supports the idea that for interfaith activities to prosper there must be a common understanding or persuasion of the inherent integrity and validity of all religious affiliations (Ray, 2012) ^[16]. Moreover, these policies and regulations define the creative formulation and proactive implementation of an Interfaith program (Brookfield, 2003).
2. **Spaces** – These refer to SPUP's learning environment as an avenue for interfaith interaction. Due to growing religious diversity, SPUP campus is an emerging space for

the advancement of interfaith learning (Creswell, 2012) ^[8]. For the participants, they respect the Catholic nature of SPUP as it accords reverence to their faith. College and Graduate School participants indicated that there is a free expression of thoughts and opinions in the spirit of academic exchange and discussion inside the classroom. This approach in the academic setting helps students to authentically interact across religious traditions (Terenzini and Reason, 2005) ^[17]. Moreover, the participants accounted some areas for interfaith interaction. These are the Interfaith rooms at the St. Paul Home Complex; the Peace corner at the Guidance Office; the Our Lady of Chartres Chapel; the Labyrinth; the Plaza de Martires; the Grotto, the parks; the activity centers and classrooms; and, the well-landscaped gardens on campus. These areas are designed to support interfaith activities and to create opportunities for interaction across differences (Beck and Ajzen, 1991) ^[3]. Moreover, these locations on campus are vital as they are the venues where members of diverse faith, religion, spirituality and traditions can practice and deepen their understanding of their own faith and most importantly, participate in interfaith dialogue, cooperation and education (Patel and Meyer, 2011) ^[13].

3. **Services** – These refer to SPUP's academic programs and community activities. These are avenues for interaction, collaboration and cooperation between and among the students regardless of their creed (Heckman, 2008) ^[10]. Programs and activities promotive of interfaith undertakings may be one of the following but not limited to conversation groups, collaborative projects, joint service

programs, and thematic dialogues (Shaefer, 2013) [20]. The College participants agreed that these are manifested in their participation in the classroom and community activities of their Religious Education subject, service-learning program of their respective courses and outreach activities of their organization. Moreover, in their remarks, College students of other faith are also encouraged to participate in religious activities; while, others are also given opportunity to lead prayers in class and other occasions. They also specified the conduct of International Students' Day in the University. The Graduate School students referred to their course on Pauline Ethics; while, the Senior High School students to their subject on Paulinian Spirituality, Identity and Mission. However, there is a need to explore other undertakings to further advance interfaith and intercultural understanding along programs and activities. As the religious diversity of SPUP is growing, programs and activities may also facilitate the preparation of students for leadership and service as a response to the challenges of global citizenship (Baxter, 2013) [21].

Conclusions

It could be concluded that the results of the assessment of the participants affirm the capacity of SPUP towards interfaith undertakings amidst religious diversity on campus. With its competence to provide learning environment, SPUP shows its ability to provide a learning environment conducive for interfaith experiences. On the other hand, SPUP's institutional regulations reveal that its educational policies are geared towards the advancement of interfaith on campus. Moreover, the programs and activities demonstrate the proficiency of SPUP to employ varied programs as approaches to promote interfaith in its academic and community engagement activities.

With the SPUP's interfaith framework, it establishes the capacity of the institution to integrate interfaith endeavours in its operations. As the blue print comprised of the elements of spaces; services; and support, SPUP's interfaith program must gear towards a holistic approach in the development, implementation and evaluation of its interfaith undertakings.

Recommendations

Culled from the results of the assessment of the interfaith undertakings of SPUP, the following recommendations are made for consideration:

1. For interfaith program to be institutionalized as an advocacy of SPUP with the International Relations Office, Student Affairs Office, Christian Formation Office, Guidance Office and Advocacies Office collaboratively working to lead interfaith undertakings for students;
2. For student programs initiated by the Student Affairs Office and the Paulinian Student Government to include interfaith prayer in activities like student orientation, fora, programs and the like;
3. For a study to be conducted by the Christian Formation Office relevant to the participation of students of other Faith in the Christian Formation Outreach Services;
4. For information to be disseminated by the Advocacies Office, Student Residence Office, International Relations

Office and Student Affairs Office regarding activities and venues on campus where students may hold interfaith activities;

5. For the monitoring and evaluation of the integration of interfaith interaction and dialogue in the learning design and strategies by the Academic Team; and,
6. For the conduct of a study by other Researchers to evaluate the interfaith framework vis-à-vis the designed activities related to it.

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