# Creating Interfaith Learning Outcomes

To effectively address the local, national, and global challenges we face today, we must build bridges of cooperation between people of different religious and secular worldviews. Members of the higher education community especially, from faculty to staff to administrators, have the power and responsibility to shape students into future interfaith leaders who can foster these connections. But how do higher education professionals ensure that they are indeed developing students into interfaith leaders? Is there a clear picture of what it means for students to care about and effectively engage in interfaith cooperation?

A good first step is creating learning outcomes for interfaith work. This resource is designed to help you understand and develop interfaith learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are statements of the knowledge, understanding, and/or skills students are expected to gain by participating in a learning process.[1] Learning outcomes can help articulate your approach to interfaith cooperation and the considerations that are vital for effectively engaging in this work. Having articulated learning outcomes can also make planning and acting more straightforward. Whether sponsoring student events, creating departmental strategic plans, or formulating campus-wide initiatives, interfaith learning outcomes are imperative for high-quality programs and services.

## Categories of Learning Outcomes

Interfaith work requires knowledge, interpersonal skills, and a clear vision. Whereas some may simply define "learning" as the process of acquiring factual knowledge, we provide a broader framework of learning outcomes that encapsulates the multifaceted nature of interfaith cooperation. Learning and teaching scholar L. Dee Fink's taxonomy of significant learning explains the following six interrelated types of learning that many interfaith learning opportunities include.

### Foundational Knowledge

Understanding and remembering information and ideas is the foundation for multiple forms of learning.[2] For example, one of the precursors to cooperating with people of other religious or secular identities is a degree of appreciative knowledge about those identities. A 2009 Pew study found that people who have appreciative knowledge of Islam are three times as likely to have favorable views of Muslims.[3]

### Application

Using new knowledge to engage in new kinds of intellectual, physical, or social activity constitutes application learning.[4] In an interfaith context, applying knowledge of different religions or worldviews is vital for successful cooperation. For example, knowledge of religiously-based dietary laws is helpful when it is used to inform decisions about what to serve at a departmental dinner so all attendees feel welcome.

## Integration

Integration happens when students are able to see connections and synthesize seemingly disparate ideas.[5] It can be important for interfaith cooperation when, for example, religious students identify shared values they hold in common with secular students (or vice versa), such as valuing community service. Making this association can help religious students learn to include their secular peers in interfaith service activities.

## Human Dimension

Learning about oneself and learning to further relationships with others constitutes learning along the human dimension.[6] This includes gaining a strong sense of self, an understanding of how to interact with others, and emotional intelligence.[7] For example, interfaith involvement on campus might help students critically reflect on their own perceptions and help them more productively engage in conversation with others who have fundamentally different worldviews.

## Caring

Sometimes a learning experience can bring students to value or care about a certain subject or issue. When students care more about something, they expend energy to learn more about it and make it part of their lives.[8] For example, a student might come to value interfaith cooperation after taking part in an interfaith alternative spring break. As a result, the student might seek out opportunities to be more involved in interfaith activities back on campus or speak up when seeing peers treated differently based on their religious identity.

## Learning How to Learn

When students learn how to learn, they become better students, can construct new knowledge, and are able to direct their own continued learning.[9] Knowing how to learn will enable motivated students to develop their interfaith skills. For example, through learning more about interfaith cooperation, students may be better able to assess gaps in their interfaith engagement skills and to access resources that will facilitate life-long skill development. As a result, they are then able to direct their own skill-building process in the future.

# Writing Learning Outcomes

A good first step in writing interfaith learning outcomes is reflecting on a series of questions related to each learning outcome category. The following set of questions will help you begin formulating concrete outcomes for interfaith programs, classes, or initiatives. When answering these questions, consider the long-term impact by thinking about what learning students will retain a year or more following the experience.

| Questions for Formulating Significant Learning Outcomes[10] |
| --- |

**Foundational Knowledge**
- What key information (facts, terms, formulas, concepts, relationships, etc.) is important for students to understand and remember in the future?
- What key ideas or perspectives are important for students to understand?

**Application**
- What kinds of thinking are important for students to learn?
  - Critical thinking, in which students analyze and evaluate?
  - Creative thinking, in which students imagine and create?
  - Practical thinking, in which students solve problems and make decisions?
- What important skills do students need to learn?
- What complex projects do students need to learn how to manage?

**Integration**
- What connections (similarities and interactions) should students recognize and make among ideas?
  - Between information, ideas, and perspectives in this experience and in other experiences?
  - Between this experience and the students' own personal, social, and work life?

**Human Dimensions**
- What can or should students learn about themselves?
- What can or should students learn about understanding and interacting with others?

**Caring**
- What changes would you like to see in what students care about, that is, any changes in their
  - Feelings?
  - Interests?
  - Values?

**Learning How to Learn**
- What would students like to learn about...
  - How to be good students?
  - How to engage in inquiry and construct knowledge about interfaith work?
  - How to become self-directed learners relative to interfaith cooperation?

# Articulating Learning Outcomes[11]

In formulating your interfaith learning outcomes, it is important that they start with concrete and specific verbs to indicate exactly what you want your students to learn. The following table lists some suggested verbs that correspond well with each learning outcome category.

| As a result of this initiative, all participants will be able to... | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge**<br>• Remember<br>• Understand<br>• Identify | **Application**<br>• Manage<br>• Solve<br>• Assess<br>• Do (a skill)<br>• Imagine<br>• Analyze | **Integration**<br>• Connect<br>• Relate<br>• Compare<br>• Integrate<br>• Identify the interaction between...<br>• Identify the similarities between... |
| **Caring**<br>• Get excited about...<br>• Be ready to...<br>• Be more interested in...<br>• Value... | **Human Dimension**<br>• Come to see themselves as...<br>• Interact with others<br>• Understand others in terms of...<br>• Decide to become... | **Learning How to Learn**<br>• Read and study effectively...<br>• Identify sourcs of information on...<br>• Construct knowledge about...<br>• Frame useful questions...<br>• Create a learning plan[12]... |

## Considerations When Developing Learning Outcomes

Discerning how many learning outcomes to write for each initiative is challenging. Large or long-term interfaith initiatives may have several learning outcomes that are mutually reinforcing. On the other hand, smaller or short-term programs may require only a few learning outcomes. Specifying too many learning outcomes may detract from the program's focus rendering it ineffective and difficult to assess.[13] Be realistic about how many learning outcomes your interfaith initiatives can appropriately address.

When writing learning outcomes, it is also important to consider how specific to make the outcome statements. In some cases, learning outcomes that identify specific topics, skills, timeframes, or amounts are helpful; however, in other situations, specific learning outcomes may be too restrictive. The specificity of outcomes varies based on several contextual factors like the scope and duration of the initiative. Also, make sure your outcomes reflect institutional norms around learning outcome construction – learning outcomes will be more widely accepted if they align with your institution's culture. The individuals involved with assessment at your institution, for example, those in the Institutional Research office, can be a good resource for you in this process.

## Conclusion

This resource is a starting point for outlining a framework and process that can help you effectively create interfaith learning outcomes. Incorporating interfaith learning outcomes will provide focus and clarity for your programs and initiatives. Additionally, learning outcomes serve as integral components in a process of assessment. Measuring student progress towards your outcomes (for example, through presentations, conversational reflections, journals, blog posts, surveys, focus groups, photo projects, interviews, etc.) can

set a solid foundation for assessing your interfaith work and determine ways to improve and leverage student interfaith learning.

To help interfaith educators develop learning outcomes for their respective campuses, departments, and events, IFYC maintains a list of interfaith learning outcomes to serve as a clearinghouse. You can find this list at www.ifyc.org/learningoutcomes. With access to a range of interfaith learning outcomes, interfaith educators can adapt existing outcomes to their campus context. Submit your interfaith learning outcomes to be included as part of the clearinghouse by emailing survey@ifyc.org.

Visit www.ifyc.org/resources or email us at info@ifyc.org for more information on interfaith cooperation.

## References

1   Declan Kennedy, Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: a Practical Guide (Cork: University College Cork, 2006), https://cora.ucc.ie/bitstream/handle/10468/1613/A%20Learning%20Outcomes%20Book%20D%20Kennedy. pdf?sequence=1, 21.

2   L. Dee Fink, *Creating significant learning experiences* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 31.

3   "Views of religious similarities and differences: Muslims widely seen as facing discrimination. Annual Religion and Public Life Survey," *Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life*, last modified 2009, http://www.pewforum.org/files/2009/09/survey0909.pdf.

4   Fink, Creating significant learning experiences, 31.

5   Ibid., 31.

6   Ibid.,  44.

7   Ibid., 44 – 47.

8   Ibid., 32.

9   Ibid 50.

10  Ibid., 75.

11  Ibid., 74.

12  Ibid., 79.

13  Kennedy, *Writing and using learning outcomes: A practical guide*, 41.

# Appendix I: Example Interfaith Learning Outcomes

The following examples reflect interfaith learning outcomes that campuses can use for a range of interfaith initiatives.

After this initiative, I would like participants to...

## Foundational Knowledge

- Identify three appreciative facts or facets of a religious or philosophical worldview
- Recognize and explain how worldviews are dynamic and have multiple expressions
- Articulate interfaith cooperation as the appreciation of and engagement with people of different religious and non-religious identities
- Identify assets on campus that will support interfaith endeavors to create change

## Application

- Analyze the role of religion, spirituality, and value-based worldviews in significant current and historical events
- Plan events that accommodate for needs of religious and secular students
- Imagine how interfaith competence can be practically applied in their future professions
- Coordinate communication between multiple religiously-based student organizations to effectively engage in interfaith projects

## Integration

- Compare common values between two religious or philosophical worldviews other than their own
- Integrate knowledge of interfaith cooperation with that of their major
- Identify intersections between an individual's religious/philosophical identity and other aspects of their identity
- Relate their own ethical commitment to the ethical commitments that people of other religious or secular identities have
- Connect interfaith cooperation to the institutional mission of their college or university

## Human Dimension

- Interact with others across lines of religious difference in ways that can build relationships and foster meaningful dialogue
- Come to see themselves as interfaith leaders, proactively working with at least one person of a different religious or secular tradition to initiate positive change
- Feel comfortable maintaining relationships even in the midst of deep disagreement
- Understand others in terms of their faith tradition or philosophical perspective

## Caring

- Value interfaith cooperation as a civic imperative
- Care about developing relationships with people of different religious/secular identities
- Openly reflect on tensions among worldviews
- Develop a personal philosophy of why they engage in interfaith work

## Learning How to Learn

- Frame useful questions that help them learn more about other religious or philosophical traditions from other students
- Identify websites/publications that can contribute to their knowledge about interfaith action in society
- Create a learning plan to gather interpersonal skills necessary to navigate tensions between ideologically different people or groups in order to promote pluralism

# Appendix II: DePaul University Examples

Learning outcomes can reflect a range of formats and institutional cultures. DePaul University uses programmatic and departmental learning outcomes that align with their mission to guide interfaith work on campus. Below are a few example learning outcomes from their Office of Religious Diversity that focus on interfaith cooperation.

| Department Level | Program Level |
|---|---|
| Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity programs will integrate their spiritual/ religious/ philosophical tradition's beliefs into their daily lives. | Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity educational programming will apply what they learned from the program(s) to their daily life or world understanding. |
| Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity programs will build skills to lead civic engagement efforts and build community in pursuit of justice. | Students who participate in Office of Religious Diversity community service programs as leaders will demonstrate skills for facilitating interfaith/ pluralistic reflections. |
| Students who participate in Office of Religious programs will consider their own and others' spiritual/ religious and cultural practices and traditions. | Students who participate in service with people from multiple spiritual/ religious/ philosophical traditions will value shared social action with those from a religious/ spiritual/ philosophical tradition different from their own. |