

Case Study

Leeds University Students' Union

What was your interfaith project?

Our plan for interfaith week was to organise talks and events that spanned the whole week.

	Mon 18th	Tues 19th	Wed 20th	Thurs 21st	Fri 22nd
Afternoon (11-3pm)	Religion 101 <i>(Chance for every society to share what they believe)</i>		Is there life after death? <i>(What do different faiths believe on this topic)</i>	Talks between the three Abrahamic faiths <i>(Similarities/differences between Judaism, Islam & Christianity)</i>	-Q & A Session (Clarifying common misconceptions). -Joint Prayer outside the Union**
Location	Democracy Corner		Democracy Corner	Democracy Corner	Democracy Corner
Evening		Prayer/ Meditation Night	Speed-Faithing	Temple Run	JSoc- Friday Night Dinner
Location		Common Room	Common Room	Various Locations	Hillel House

The afternoon talks were focused on "Discovering Faith," whereas the evening events were highly focused on "Interfaith". This was to educate the student body as a whole as to what various faiths believe, and to invite those without a faith to get involved in the activities for the week. The afternoon talks took place right in the centre of the student union in a busy open space that reached many students. A question box was present throughout the week for all students to post any questions they had relating to faith and these were either answered during Friday's Q&A session or individually by email.

Promotion for Interfaith Week was primarily through the different faith societies and their members. Additionally, we created a promo-video which was spread via social media and placed on the union- Interfaith Week Page on the union website. We also published the week through attending a show on the student radio and having an article published in the student paper.

Our evening events were more focused on members of various faith societies and provided a space for different individuals to come together and experience aspects of other faiths in order to broaden their understanding and respect for other religions. The Temple Run was a fantastic opportunity for students of different faiths to enter places of worship other than their own and experience first-hand a short snippet of a holy service. Whilst walking from one Place of worship to another, questions will be posed and dialogue was encouraged between members of the different societies. We hoped to provide a relaxed environment at both our Prayer and meditation night and speed-faith events to allow those of different faiths to enjoy food and each other's company, getting to know more about what they each believed and develop new friendships.

How did you ensure students were involved in the development of your project?

Leeds University Union has a total of 13 faith societies including; Ahlul bayt, the Atheist Society, Bahai, Buddhist Meditation, Catholic, Christian Orthodox, Christian Union, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh, Seventh Day Adventist and Pentagram. Each faith society has an Interfaith Rep who attended weekly meeting with me to plan and discuss the events for the upcoming year, including Interfaith Week. All of the ideas for the week came directly from the Interfaith Reps who have regular contact with their societies and voice the opinions of their members.

This was the first year that so many societies have wanted to work together and get involved in Interfaith Events. Furthermore, by partnering with the media societies in the union, we aimed to reach more students, to give everyone the opportunity to get involved with Interfaith Week even if they weren't already part of a faith society.

What impact did this project have on students you work with and within your students' union or college?

- How did it deliver one of the following outcomes:
 - o Encourage engagement between faith societies
 - o Increase understanding amongst students about different religions and beliefs
 - o Increase dialogue and collaborative action
- Were there any other outcomes from the project?

Our vision was: To ensure every student is aware of the faith communities on campus.

Impact on students:

- Interfaith Week was a platform for students from all different faiths and backgrounds to grow in their understanding of each others' beliefs to encourage mutual respect
- Students who wanted to connect with faith communities were made aware of how to do so
- All students were able to find out what various religions believe
- An expanded Interfaith week increased engagement of faith societies with the Union rather than just having an involvement in their wider faith communities in Leeds
- A greater sense of safety and freedom on campus for students to openly share a practice their beliefs

Faith can be such an integral part of a person that not having a strong faith community away from home can have a severe impact on an individual. By building relationships within the university and also with the local community, we aimed to ensure that each student has access to this network to make their time at university and away from home a well-rounded, comfortable and wholesome experience that helps students love their time at Leeds.

Even now, months after Interfaith week- students from different faith societies are continuing to invite each other to their events and holding regular interfaith opportunities, for example, the Isoc and CU girls breakfast. There is a greater sense of freedom for

Interfaith to occur and is now becoming a culture between the societies to involve each other.

What lessons did you learn in delivering the project that might be useful to other students' unions?

Involving the societies in the planning of the week is fundamentally key to them actually taking part. An easy way to encourage this further is to get introduce the committee's/ reps to each other so they already have a relationship and get them working together on the project.

Do you have any feedback from participants at your event?

We've had excellent feedback- and it's still ongoing. Interfaith isn't just a one of event- but something that should be continually encouraged. The students really felt that they were pleasantly surprised by the week. They learnt things that didn't expect to learn and thoroughly enjoyed the events planned. Furthermore, the relationships we wanted and hoped for were formed.

Photo/Video evidence of your event:

Video review - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTU8C-SqM8>

Video promo - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LueKS8DJ9vM>