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Trends: Left at the Door to the Residence Hall: Religious, Secular, and Spiritual Identities and the Missing Engagement with Housing and Residential Life

RELIGIOUS, SECULAR, AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITIES (RSSIs) are an important aspect of the complex experiences of students in higher education. Often dismissed or forgotten by higher education professionals, RSSIs have shifted drastically over the 20+ years since Love and Talbot first wrote about them in 1999. While scholarship on RSSIs has steadily moved forward in the broader higher education discourse, it has been notably absent in the more specific area of housing and residential life. This article seeks to help practitioners consider RSSIs as a vital component of their efforts to support students by providing guidance on pathways to engage with religious and non-religious identities. Additionally, the article outlines the arguments pinpointing the importance of the topic in the advancement of housing and residential life efforts on campuses.

Love and Talbot's publication of "Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration for Student Affairs" in 1999 could be considered one of the more defining moments in an emerging field of study in religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSIs). The article, which sought to define "spiritual development" among other topics, has been cited often in the literature even though it is far past its prime; its message stands the test of time and can serve as a means of introduction to RSSIs. Love and Talbot seek to not only define spirituality and spiritual development, but also to introduce readers to spiritual development theory. A critical evaluation will find that the authors draw heavily from the work of psychologists such as Maslow, Kohlberg, and Gilligan alongside the publications of Chickering, a pioneer in meaning-making and purpose in higher education. Their conclusions imply that higher education has undervalued, underserved, and under-researched spirituality for far too long. More than 20 years later, much has changed regarding this area of identity, and the body of literature today is reflective of the implication that Love and Talbot set forth. In the following, we seek to call attention to RSSIs specifically within the field of housing and residential life, which has rarely touched upon such discussions.

More than 20 years ago, Love and Talbot recognized that the field of higher education could benefit from increased attention to research on student religious identity and development. In this paper, we seek to build on their work, updating and reinforcing their call for increased attention to spirituality, as well as religious identity, but in the context of housing and residential life.

American higher education originated in a context in which spirituality and education were inherently intertwined (Marsden, 1994), yet as higher education evolved within the changing nation, colleges and later universities followed societal trends and began separating public interests from religion (Collins et al., 1987). This shift away from religious communities as a driver of higher education came first by way of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 but did not become prominent until the mid-20th century (Marsden, 1994). Specifically, between the 1940s and 1980s, a series of legal decisions reinforced an ideal of “legal secularism” (Joppke 2016, p. 984) or the “wall of separation” (p. 985), which sought to create distance between religion and the public institution. Collins and colleagues (1987) described higher education’s use of the separation of church and state defense as a reason to avoid engaging in conversations and conducting research on spirituality.

A generation later, after student affairs was established as an interdisciplinary field of empirical study and intentional practice, Love and Talbot (1999) challenged the profession by asking why “spirituality and spiritual development have been conspicuously absent” (p. 361) from related discourse alongside parallel deliberations of student identity development, moral and ethical development, and cognitive development. Astin and colleagues (2011) responded to that call with a benchmark study and ensuing book exploring students’ spiritual lives, followed by Small and Bowman (2012), who surveyed the landscape of research related to college student religious development. Steady progress continues to be evident today via Small’s (2020) efforts to explicate a critical theory of religious pluralism and Mayhew and Rockenbach’s ambitious Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Study, better known as “IDEALS” (Interfaith Youth Core, n.d.).

Despite advancements in the broader higher education discourse on college student spiritual development, related studies and publications in the context of housing and residential life have been few and far between. In 2014, Craft sought to amend this, drawing together scholars and practitioners to produce a special issue on religion and spirituality in *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*. In general, though, housing and residential life is still lacking in its conversations about religious, secular, and spiritual identities.

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vocabulary that housing and residential life professionals can adopt to better understand the population they serve. Next, we review the demographic shifts that have taken place in religious identity among college students to help housing and residential life professionals forecast the needs of their constituents. This is followed by a discussion of critical issues that emerge at the intersection of religious identity and frontline work in housing and residential life. Finally, we offer guidelines for effectively integrating the concept of religious, secular, and spiritual identities into the practice of housing and residential life to better serve student needs and advance their holistic growth.

A CHANGING NOMENCLATURE FOR RSSIs

To engage in a discussion about religiously forward practices in housing and residential life, we must begin by developing a shared nomenclature to frame that discussion. Love and Talbot (1999) used “spirituality” as a term to describe the identities on which this article focuses. At the time, spirituality was often seen as a catch-all term for religion and a wide range of practices across a variety of religious and spiritual communities. Utilizing the word “spirituality” could have been seen at the time as progressive, encouraging audiences to think beyond the scope of the traditional silos of religion. Other language in the religious space includes terms like “interfaith,” “multifaith,” and “multireligious.”

In response to the need for more critical evaluation, one of the authors (Nielsen) was offered an opportunity to oversee revision of the Council for the Advancement of Standards’ (CAS) Religious and Spiritual Programs guidelines. This opened the door for a significant discussion about the language used to identify religious and spiritual individuals within higher education. The revision process involved professionals from a variety of religious and non-religious identities, including university chaplains, vice presidents of student affairs, and organizational leaders from Hillel International and the Secular Student Alliance. These professionals illuminated the need to consider using more inclusive language. In discussions during the CAS revisions, the terms “interfaith” and “multifaith” were considered to be too deeply aligned with Christianity, seen as off-putting to non-theist identities, and exclusive of particular identities of individuals on campus. Contemporary scholarship suggests that labels such as “interfaith” are often used to mask the activities and characteristics of communities that are Christian in nature (Small, 2020) and that initiatives considered to be interfaith may be dominated by Christian voices that dictate the settings and expected outcomes. Joshi (2020) takes this further, arguing that Christian normativity has been used as a weapon to marginalize religious minorities and deem their practices as less deserving of equal concern on campus.

In response to such concerns and critiques, the 2014 CAS group settled on the term “religious, secular, and spiritual” identities, often abbreviated as RSSI, which arranges the words in alphabetical order: R(religious), then SE(secular), then SP(spiritual). This term treats the embedded identities more equitably than did previous labels (Nielsen & Small, 2019). More specifically, the RSSI nomenclature seeks to dismantle

Christian hegemony, the “institutionalization of Christianity as the norm, including in language, beliefs, and practices” (Small, 2020, p. 15). More than anything, though, the nomenclature is responsive to the changing demographics of the RSSI community in the United States, to which we now turn our attention.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF RSSIs IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While colonialization normalized Christianity as the dominant spiritual identity in the United States for centuries, the demographics of RSSIs in the United States are presently moving from mostly Christian to being much more multireligious, or pluralistic, in nature (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). Two groups—those who identify as religious but non-Christian and those who ascribe to a wide spectrum of non-religious or fluidly religious identities—are of particular interest in the context of higher education and therefore relevant to housing and residential life professionals.

First, we have seen a significant increase in religious identities outside of Christianity. Via the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Immigration Act of 1917 (better known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act), and the Immigration Act of 1924, or the Johnson-Reed Act, the United States government has created barrier after barrier preventing Asians from entering the United States (Waldman, 2019). East and South Asian-identified individuals who potentially also ascribed to religious identities outside of Christianity were restricted from immigrating into the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1952 and 1965 subsequently overturned this legislation, allowing a new wave of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and Confucist immigrants to enter the United States (Waldman, 2019). Not only did they establish themselves in U.S. society over the next 50 years, but they also became some of the most educated people in America (Pew Research Center, 2014). Largely absent from higher education during the Baby Boomer years, the number of students with non-Christian religious identities is now growing almost every year (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2019). In the 2019 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Study, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists combined made up more than 10% of the total population of full-time first-time U.S. college students (HERI, 2019). While still minorities, these identities have been consistently increasing on campus, largely due to second and third generations of immigrants gaining access to higher education.

Even though non-Christian students are more prevalent on today's campuses, Muslims are the target of more hate crimes in the United States than any other religious community since the turn of the 21st century (Uddin, 2019). Ahmadi and Cole (2020) highlighted the experiences of Muslims, specifically Muslim women wearing

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hijab, and found that female Muslim students encountered bullying and discrimination as a nearly ever-present reality on campus. Following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the incidence of hate crimes against the Muslim community rose nearly 600% (American Civil Liberties Union, 2016). Likewise, an uptick in anti-Semitic acts on college campuses has also been reported by Hillel International (Mokhtarzadah, 2015; Saxe et al., 2015).

The numbers of non-religious-identifying individuals in the United States are also growing. CIRP data (HERI, 2019) have revealed that 16.5% of all first-year students identify as “none” in regard to religious affiliation. This figure more than doubles when accounting for students identifying as atheist or agnostic, two commonly used categories encompassing what the Pew Research Center identifies as “nones” (2014).

Although “nones” are categorized as a single subculture, they represent more than atheists and agnostics (Pew Research Center, 2014) and encompass a complex set of identities that often do not relate to one another. Atheists and agnostics hold different beliefs and values, and those who might identify as “nothing in particular” are often not engaged in RSSIs at all (Pew Research Center, 2014). Included within the “none” category are also large numbers of individuals unwilling to choose a particular tradition (Bidwell, 2018) and may instead claim multiple religious identities. Combined, more than 33% of 2019 first-year U.S. college students did not identify with a specific religious tradition (HERI, 2019). Each of the identities within the “none” category has been underserved, underappreciated, and misunderstood regarding their needs for as long as U.S. higher education has been endeavoring to support students.

RSSIs AND INTERSECTIONALITY

A contemporary conversation about RSSIs should include a broad conceptualization of the complexities inherent in today’s college students. RSSIs must be situated in concert with other more salient identities such as race, gender, or LGBTQIA+. When understood in this way, professionals are able to more easily identify power dynamics in which being White and Christian is both a privilege and a potential oppressive force. For example, the notion that all Muslims are black or brown or that White Jews might be seen as less marginalized than other religious minorities calls into question how racial identity is seen as having a more marginalized status than religion does. Understanding RSSIs within this intersection of identities expresses the ways in which certain RSSIs may be further marginalized due to racial inequities. Yet, according to statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2021), Jews are the most targeted religious group for hate crimes. This is just one reason that colleges and universities should focus more of their diversity, equity, and inclusion work on students with

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religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Greater understanding of and engagement with RSSIs could help to overcome aspects of structural racism and colonialism within higher education as well (Wilder, 2014).

Any student affairs professional can and should continue to implement their commitment to support the whole student and their various identities. For housing and residential life professionals, efforts to support RSSIs can help set the standard for support from the moment a residential student arrives on campus. Professionals can proactively foster communities that address potential feelings of marginalization by working on relationships between roommates who may have different beliefs and practices. Professional staff can also invest in trainings and curricula that build awareness of how RSSIs can affect student learning and development. Furthermore, housing and residential life staff can create physical and psychological environments that celebrate and engage the different RSSIs likely to be present within the student population. These and more recommendations are covered in the following section.

CHALLENGES OF RSSIs FOR HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE WORK

There are many ways that RSSIs can and do become relevant in the context of housing and residential life. RSSIs become significant factors in the interpersonal relationships that students are expected to build among themselves in residential spaces; housing professionals must understand the relationships that form between staff and residential students, how staff consider RSSIs in their efforts to advance student learning and development in programming, and how residential environments can either dismiss or encourage RSSI learning and development. For each of these areas, there are notable challenges that commonly emerge in the field and opportunities that are yet to be realized.

Interpersonal Relationships Among Students

At the core of residential life work is the support of interpersonal relationships amongst students, especially those who room together. The insertion of RSSIs into the equation of student interpersonal relationships can be complicated depending on the variables. For students who are often quiet about their religious, secular, or spiritual identity but have traditions that they wish to practice, like having a shrine or meditation space, the concerns that residential staff have for them may be minimal, simply focusing on negotiating when a student might ask for privacy to conduct their practice. For some situations, especially in the case of those individuals who are more hostile about religion or may have practices of proselytizing, the situation can quickly become problematic. In these situations, professionals should be cautious about who has the “right” religious practices and instead focus on articulating the need for a community that is

inclusive and safe for all individuals. Because proselytizing can lead to hostile environments for students, especially non-Christians, professionals need to openly address concerns about how to appropriately practice one's tradition without infringing upon others. Administrators need to be keenly aware of many types of concerns and ready to negotiate cultural differences in partnership with students. Administrators should not simply try to dismiss such topics and needs as being a private matter or of no concern, as they are liable to reinforce the environment of hostility.

Relationships Between Staff and Students

Relationships between staff and students (e.g., resident advisor or resident director to resident) are a key component of residential life work. From the moment that housing and residential life professionals assign hallmates and roommates, interpersonal dynamics begin to be engaged. Students who are asked to navigate RSSI differences in their halls and rooms are best served when professionals are adept at recognizing and respecting RSSIs. Students will look to residence life staff to provide mentorship and wisdom regarding many concerns, including how to navigate RSSI differences.

Housing and residential life staff may assume that religion is a private matter or may be harboring implicit biases regarding religious identity. This is not uncommon, especially when the negative views are toward evangelical Christians, who remain among the most populous source of religious expression on campuses today (Pew Research Center, 2019). Frustration with and hostility toward evangelical Christians by student affairs professionals is simply a mask for the larger issue: that higher education holds dismissive viewpoints regarding religious identity at large (Nielsen, 2020). This can be tricky to navigate. As professionals seek to foster inclusive environments, they may also push aside problematic religious identities and communities, which runs counter to the spirit of inclusion and further marginalizes RSSIs.

One way to approach this is to address implicit biases regarding religious, secular, and spiritual identities. Oftentimes, evangelical Christians are the subject of arguments against religious inclusion on campus, with professionals pointing to anti-LGBTQIA+ and sexist attitudes by some evangelical communities as a rationale to avoid discussion of and engagement with religious identities (Choi, 2019). These attitudes mask the hidden bias that many students may experience from staff: to be religious may be equated with ignorance (Nielsen, 2020).

GOALS FOR HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE WORK

Programming and Educational Outreach

Programming and educational outreach are tools that housing professionals use to support students' learning and development. This programming can foster a climate within campus housing that is inviting and safe for students of a variety of identities. Unfortunately, RSSIs are rarely considered topics for programming and education; instead, they are seen as individual experiences that have little to do with the collective community culture or climate.

Further, instead of direct programming, there may be a tendency for housing professionals to lean into a Christian cultural experience, which is often seen in programming that privileges Christianity and its practices. This sometimes comes in the form of bible studies in residential halls or in invitations by RAs to attend church services or said bible studies which they themselves might lead. Due to the dominance of Christian normative tendencies in higher education, these activities are often allowed.

Recognizing that these programs are seen as unremarkable in residential spaces further exacerbates issues of marginalization amongst minoritized religious and non-religious students. It seems more expected that in recent years the secularization of higher education would seek to eliminate these events; however, both authors can attest that bible studies and invitations to Christian religious services and other events remain a frequent occurrence in housing and residence life culture.

Inclusive Environments

Ultimately, the work of housing and residential life is situated in physical spaces. The physical environments of housing spaces are often sterile, but during the month of December (“the holidays”—a phrase most often utilized regarding Protestant and Roman Catholic Christmas and Easter) this often changes. Physical displays and decorations, use of language which preferences these holidays, and the celebration of such days is not in itself a problem. What can become a clear concern is the disregard, questioning, and dismissal of other religious holidays. A lack of programming and educational outreach regarding RSSIs thus illustrates a concept that Small (2020) described as false neutral secularism, wherein the attempt to support no particular religion continuously preferences Christian, and often White Protestant Christian, practices. While a Christmas tree in a residence hall may not appear to be problematic, especially because such displays are not overtly Christian, their presence helps to demarcate Christmas as a holiday that is celebrated. Honoring other religious, secular, and spiritual holidays can strengthen inclusion efforts, and housing and residential life can benefit from a greater awareness of other traditions.

One lingering concern is that, when addressed, religious traditions or non-Christian communities are likely to be appropriated into “Christian-like” status. For example, some institutions may consider highlighting Hanukkah, a very minor but often appropriated Jewish holiday, which is deemed to be comparable to Christmas, while observances like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover are often not celebrated or honored within the housing experience.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER INTEGRATING RSSIs INTO RESIDENTIAL LIFE WORK

One way to build comfort with RSSIs is to practice these conversations with peers in order to understand their thoughts and experiences. These conversations are often challenging, as individuals vary greatly in their own personal knowledge and experience with religions. As staff approach these conversations, they should adopt a posture

of cultural sensitivity and curiosity as opposed to one of assured knowledge. By simply expressing an interest in hearing another's story and experience, opportunities can occur. This also provides a setting for residential life professionals to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences and how they influence their attitudes in engaging in RSSI conversations with residents. Once professional staff feel comfortable having a conversation with a peer, this will open them to similar conversations with student staff and residents. Even simply asking how one makes meaning of the world allows individuals to express their beliefs and views in an authentic manner. There are several approaches to enacting these dialogues as noted below.

Provide Staff with Tools for Conversations with Each Other

One of the easiest intentional opportunities to advance this work is to evaluate the representation of staff employed by housing and residential life. While institutions cannot ask about religion in hiring processes, the ability to carefully provide opportunities for conversation amongst staff regarding all forms of identities, including RSSIs, offers the possibility of more open dialogue regarding the needs of certain populations.

One way to significantly advance support for RSSIs is to provide adequate training materials for all professional and student staff. Materials may include an orientation to the practices of these traditions; definitions of terms; general understanding of how religious, secular, and spiritual identities fit into the higher education diversity, equity, and inclusion space; and what to be aware of when creating events and programs. These materials should be developed with input from the religious and non-religious communities on and off campus.

It is also important for professional housing and residential life staff to have a greater understanding of the legal issues surrounding higher education's support of RSSIs. This is especially true in public institutions, where First and Fourteenth Amendment protections require that institutions uphold the free exercise of religion on campus. These legal issues can be as simple as making sure that those involved in any and all religious traditions can openly discuss their practices and that housing and residence hall spaces prevent majority Christian communities from forcing religion onto residents.

To understand the concerns as well as potential legal issues, we encourage a lean-in approach in which professionals are open to learning more about needs rather than simply dismissing RSSIs as a private concern. All staff levels, from RAs to senior housing professionals, and all areas of residential life programs would benefit from engaging in a set of curricular-designed trainings that include case studies. This pedagogy allows for integrated learning and can help to draw out potential implicit biases that housing staff and professionals may hold.

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Provide Students with Opportunities to Connect

Once housing and residential life staff are comfortable engaging in the topic of RSSIs in regards to their own beliefs and experiences, it is important to provide further tools for conversations with residents. One way to ensure this is through formal training in religious literacy. Providing a basic understanding of RSSI language will improve religious literacy, but because RSSI language is ever evolving, staff will need to revisit these ideas regularly. It may be useful to collaborate with philosophy or religious studies faculty, who can help introduce these terms and briefly describe beliefs held by different religious traditions.

Validate Religious, Secular, and Spiritual Diversity as a Safe Educational Topic

Professional staff should consider programming opportunities in which RSSIs can be more generally discussed. For example, an RA may create a program about different stress management techniques. In this scenario, a student may bring up their religious, secular, or spiritual beliefs, and the staff member can then intentionally validate religious, secular, and spiritual diversity as a safe topic. Additionally, RA staff can offer programs that include campus partners skilled in building RSSIs (e.g., directors of centers of spirituality or equity, diversity, and inclusion professionals trained in religious equity concerns). Additionally, RAs could escort residents to campus events that are supported by a campus partner trained in and equipped to support RSSIs on their campus. Examples of these might include teaching Shabbat services where Jewish professionals host non-Jews or offering events focused on understanding various religious communities across the world.

The U.S. context is that Christian-identifying individuals have a privileged status and are identified by recognizable practices and symbols (Edwards 2018; Small, 2020). Perhaps this is most prevalent during the holiday season, a time in which traditionally Christian holidays are celebrated and the campus calendar provides breaks to accommodate them. While housing and residential life professionals are unlikely to influence changes on the magnitude of altering the campus calendar, promoting practices that provide visibility and affirming markers of other traditions—as well as educational opportunities—can help shift the focus to other religious, secular, and spiritual identities. This means taking extra care to not over-promote Christianity by, for example, displaying only Christmas trees in campus housing during winter holidays. Staff might consider other traditions and take advantage of opportunities to promote a variety of traditions throughout the year, including Eid, Holi, Vaishali, and Sukkot. In offering these opportunities, professionals intentionally validate religion as an identity that is considered as part of the campus experience.

Create Conducive Environments

Physical environments are often indicative of values held by the individuals and institutions that occupy and control them (Strange & Banning, 2001). One easy step for housing and residential life staff is to consider the current ways in which they celebrate and honor RSSIs within residential buildings. Some institutions may have prayer and reflection spaces that are located within the residential community. But very few residence

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halls offer these spaces, and more needs to be done to foster a campus experience in which spaces for prayer and meditation are validated as a component of RSSI inclusion.

Most campuses include a variety of spaces used for programming for a variety of marginalized groups, including multicultural or LGBTQIA centers. RSSIs should have similar spaces allocated for use. While not always within the direct purview of housing and residential life professionals, advocacy for such spaces by staff and RAs can go a long way toward creation of such spaces. It is important to consider these spaces as something of value, and not as an afterthought, and they should not be located in undesirable locations like a basement or in an area that some students may not be able to access based on mobility, since this sends a nonverbal implication that these functions are not valued by the institution (Strange & Banning, 2001). There is ample opportunity to consider these spaces, as well as renovations that may be necessary to provide them, as part of larger diversity, equity, and inclusion conversations.

We have worked with campuses that have begun intentional communities wherein RSSIs take center stage. As the current IDEALS study (Interfaith Youth Core, n.d.) has heavily documented, college students who have at least one friend from another tradition are more likely to hold greater appreciative attitudes toward the entire tradition than students who do not. Intentional living-learning communities can be spaces in which to engage the whole campus through the leadership development of students who may go on to work with administration to foster important changes in campus policies and practices. Furthermore, the presence of these communities continues the above-mentioned opportunities with admissions and international student offices by offering examples of ways in which these students could be engaged should they choose this institution and as yet another representation of the institution's commitment to valuing and supporting RSSIs. In the end, the campus climate is especially important to supporting RSSIs, whether that be in the form of physical spaces or the environmental conditions in which conversations around such identities are safe and welcomed.

ADVANCING THE WORK BEYOND RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION

The previous section outlined several strategies that can help housing and residential life professionals address the diverse religious, secular, and spiritual concerns of students. This final section looks at ways to advance the work by creating cultures that affect the larger campus and the student body and serve as a long-standing commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The work of housing and residential life departments often includes helping students meet dietary needs in the form of dining services. Many traditionally marginalized religious identities will find that options of Kosher (Jewish), Halal (Muslim), and lacto-vegetarian (Hindu) diets are difficult to locate within campus dining centers

(Ahmadi & Cole, 2020; Nielsen & Small, 2019). As housing and residential life staff encounter students who may be struggling to find these options, it can be important to ask questions that give students permission to articulate their needs with someone they see as an advocate. Housing and residential life staff need to be trained in sensitivity toward these concerns as a pathway to become advocates for fulfilling these needs. Thorough knowledge of the complexity of Kosher, Halal, and vegan and vegetarian needs can help support staff in being forthcoming with students and asking about their experience of food options on campus. Should the staff learn of concerns, they can support students' discussions with dining services leadership about meal options and how to effectively meet the needs of religious minorities on campus.

A second area to be considered is how to support RSSIs within admissions and international student recruitment. In attempting to diversify the applicant and admitted student pool, colleges and universities should consider how religious identities affect student choice based on current institutional policies and practices. Housing and residential life professionals can advance this work by advocating for support for religious holidays that may be less familiar to campus members, facilitating programming that creates broader religious literacy, and de-centering the Christian religious holidays, which often dominate décor during November and December. If housing and residential life professionals consider creative and innovative solutions to supporting RSSIs, creating a culture in which such identities are highlighted, then their work with admissions and international student service professionals can be a pathway to effectively target and recruit students from religious minority groups.

CONCLUSION

Trends on college and university campuses related to attitudes of students regarding RSSIs have changed dramatically since the early 21st century (see Mayhew et al., 2017; Small & Bowman, 2012). Now is the time for housing and residential life professionals to confront the long-standing missing pieces of the profession's commitment to "fostering of a diverse, inclusive, and equitable membership with the capacity to influence campus climate change" and to "advocacy and responsiveness that champion the concerns of the profession" (Association of College and University Housing Officers – International [ACUHO-I], 2020, p. 2). To do this requires more than procedures; it requires a change of mindset that begins by working together in exploring our biases, confronting long-standing oppressive systems, and effectively engaging in a relearning process.

Housing and residential life staff serve as some of the most important professionals on campus. Some of the most impactful conversations and experiences for students happen within residences; as these settings are a micro community from which the entire campus takes shape, beginning conversation in these spaces would be a tremendous step forward. Though consideration of RSSIs has been a challenge for housing and residential life professionals, now is the time to begin a conversation about religious, secular, and spiritual identities and thereby advance practices and policies that support and nurture a more inclusive and equitable experience for all of our students. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does your residence/housing department offer any training on RSSI for full-time or student staff members?
2. Do your residence life staff feel they have the competency to engage in RSSI conversations with their peers, student staff, and residents?
3. Do your dining centers accommodate the different dietary restrictions to meet the needs of your students' religious identities?
4. Does your housing department offer any physical spaces within the residence halls that students can use for prayer, reflection, or meditation?
5. Has your housing department collaborated with campus religious studies departments or affiliated campus ministry partners?

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