2023 Muslim Campus Life Summit
Formal Report
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Prepared by:

2023 MCLS Steering Committee

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Executive Summaries

Summit Context

The Muslim Campus Life Summit (MCLS) project aims to bring together university professionals who serve and/or do research on Muslim students, as well as Muslim professionals in the higher education administrative space. The goals of this convening are: 1) to engage diverse perspectives and frameworks (academic, chaplaincy, DEI) on key issues and 2) to determine strategic collaborations, learning models, and future prospects for Muslim campus life in the US. The first summit was held at Stanford University and hosted by the Markaz Resource Center.

Sessions 1 & 2: Institutional Share-Out

Participants introduced themselves, their journeys to their current position, and some aspects of their work and campus, followed by pain points and questions. Some common pain points included working among diverse Muslim student populations in relation to gender, ethnicity, nation of origin, and other identities; the challenge of working with staff and the university (whether being "of" or "at" an institution). In addition, Islamophobia was brought up as an issue of racism that is often erased or misunderstood due to the miscategorization of it as merely religious bigotry. Further, participants discussed serving the community beyond the campus as a welcome challenge and the need for students to grow as individuals, not just "Muslim" students that the university pegs as hyper-religious. Questions revolved around relationships with Admissions Offices, funding structures and fundraising, and campus partnerships.

Sessions 3: Intra-Community Dynamics

Participants were divided into three groups, focused on gender/sexuality, racism/race/ethnicity, and religiosity/sectarianism. Emerging themes included: an "exodus of Black Muslims" from mainstream MSAs due to feelings of marginalization and invisibility; the challenge of addressing gender dynamics and gender equity, especially vis-a-vis misogyny, sexual ethics, and LGBTQ issues and subsequent reactions to them; and the challenges of defining religiosity and students feeling the need to adjudicate orthodoxy and normativity among each other. The potential of offering "multiple entry points" is a goal for the broad Muslim/interfaith communities on campus. Generally, naming the diversity within the Muslim community is helpful and can lead to discussion of specific issues.

Session 4: External Pressures

Participants discussed external pressures in terms of Islamophobia, Secularity, and Palestine. The conversation first centered on naming the challenge of fighting Islamophobia in its many forms without escalating incidents to shut people out. The issue of White allyship is sticky, because White allies often have the privilege to be zealous without suffering the consequences of not building sustained solidarity. Participants then discussed how religion is defined and shaped at the university- affecting all People of Color, including Muslim students, faculty, and staff. The idea of new "agreements" (Laura Rendon) helps reframe how different community members engage with religion and push back against frameworks that continue a Protestant hegemony. Discussing Palestine remains difficult, but needs a sustained commitment from students (like at the University of Michigan) to allow relationship building and trust. Further, students from Palestine or of Palestinian heritage are often ignored in favor of those who have strong voices on campus and many assumptions about the issue come from an American exceptionalist framework. Participants also pointed out being put in positions or asked to participate in discourses where their or their community's values are often compromised.

Key Takeaways:

1. Importance of a convening that brings together diverse constituencies across higher education serving the Muslim community
2. How to inculcate a "Multiple Entry-Points" approach for a diverse student community
3. Communicating with Admissions Offices to enhance recruiting mechanisms

Key Themes Warranting Further Discussion:
1. An Intersectional Framework to serve Muslim/Muslim-adjacent students that includes DEIB & chaplaincy theories as well as academic research
2. Self-care for practitioners to avoid burnout; building a support network
3. Mental health and wellness
4. Factors related to funding and what that looks like for different types of institutions
5. Convergence Model as a framework, especially for bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims
6. Collective statements and definitions: e.g. Islamophobia, Ramadan, "this is who we are", etc.