2024 Muslim Campus Life Summit
Formal Report
Duke University | January 22-23, 2024

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2024 MCLS Steering Committee

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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 space in various roles. The goals of this convening are: 1) to engage diverse perspectives and frameworks (academic, chaplaincy, DEI, administrative, student affairs, etc.) 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.

The second summit, MCLS 2024, was held at Duke University in January 2024. In the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attacks and the ensuing war on Gaza, various campuses were impacted by pro-Palestinian advocacy (and counter-advocacy), with increased activism and a rise in Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian / anti-Arab bias. Professionals who gathered at MCLS 2024 thus addressed various themes in this particular political and institutional context.

Session 1: Where Are We Today?

Participants highlighted the emotional toll on professionals in Muslim services, emphasizing the need for increased visibility of their work and the challenges in securing leadership support. Other issues identified included: adequacy (or lack thereof) of basic services for Muslim students; concerns about the decline in interfaith work following recent political events; and the importance of ongoing professional development. Campus infrastructure weaknesses, particularly during crises, underscored the need for collaboration and concrete actions, including addressing issues like doxxing. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of mental health support and encouraging reporting within student communities.

Session 2: Where Do We Want to Be?

In this session, participants discussed the significance of achieving minimum goals for Muslim life across the majority of US campuses, such as prayer spaces and halal food options. With this as the point of departure and acknowledgement that many campuses had already met this baseline, participants highlighted that chaplains and student affairs professionals especially needed to consider additional goals that impact and enhance Muslim campus life, such as: inclusivity and intersectionality of all Muslim identities, securing student buy-in for

programming, and fostering strong relationships between Muslim and Muslim-adjacent students with broader campus communities, i.e. being a "campus citizen." Moreover, many attendees also indicated the need for long-term planning as well as collaboration with other professionals on campus - laterally and hierarchically - to achieve goals.

Session 3: How Do We Get There?

In these sessions, attendees built upon prior discussions to determine possible pathways of achieving short and long-term goals. Ideas included: engaging and developing alumni relations, especially during times of crises; strategic partnerships with potential funders; unified approaches to development and admissions/recruiting; the role of local mosques and communities in supporting Muslim campus life and potential crowdfunding for chaplaincies.

Session 4: Large Group Share Out & Feedback

This session centered on the development of Muslim Campus Life (MCL) initiatives, with a focus on creating professional video content, consolidating resources, and refining the organizational structure. Attendees community development, enhancing alumni networks, and improving the summit experience through feedback collected. For future summits, suggestions included hiring staff dedicated to alumni networking, inviting diverse attendees, and addressing the unique needs of smaller or rural campuses.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Intersectionality and Racial/Religious Identities**: The intersection of racial and religious identities is crucial in understanding and addressing issues faced by Muslim students. Discussions should move beyond Islamophobia to consider these broader contexts, especially in the context of pro-Palestinian advocacy and anti-Palestine bias being an issue not limited to Muslim identities, through sometimes sharply intersecting with Islamophobia.

2. **Professionalization and Certification**: There is a need for the professionalization of chaplaincy work, including certifications and continuous training to ensure accountability and relevance to the current generation of students.

3. **Collaboration and Coalition Building**: Success has been found in collaboration across disciplines and institutions, especially in coalition-building among Muslim organizations and other communities.

4. **Reporting and Data Collection**: There is a dire need to encourage Muslim and Muslim-adjacent students to report bias incidents; data collection is crucial for effective advocacy of Muslim student needs. Campaigns to prioritize reporting and mobilize parents and students are necessary.

5. **Strategic Alumni Engagement**: Leveraging alumni networks for funding, mentorship, and development is vital. Innovative approaches like crowdfunding for chaplaincies have been effective for some campuses.

6. **Institutional Relationships**: It is essential to build strong relationships with university administration, development offices, and other key stakeholders for long-term support and resource allocation for Muslim campus life.

7. **Student Belonging and Inclusion**: Creating a sense of belonging for all Muslim identities on campus, with an emphasis on welcoming second-generation students, is crucial for the future of Muslim campus life.

8. **Community Building and Mental Health Support**: Mental health support and community-building initiatives become even more critical, and are sometimes easier for leadership to fund, in light of the challenges Muslim students face on campus.