

Impact of Judaism 101



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Background

Taking the stated missions and goals of 1) Wake Forest University, 2) WFU Campus Life, 3) Office of the Chaplain, and 4) the job description of the Director of Jewish Life, an informal Judaism 101 course (and survey) were designed to highlight these visions, and to see, if through these offerings, WFU divisional/departmental/office goals could be achieved as part of the course learning outcomes. These classes started in Fall 2015, and this report covers that period of time.

Introduction

The Judaism 101 informal course was set up in weekly self-contained educational components related to many aspects of Judaism including holidays, practices, values, sacred texts, ritual artifacts, and lifecycles.

These classes were held during lunch hours to encourage increased attendance, and were designed to foster respectful questioning and discussion. Handouts were given at all class sessions with links to interesting websites and articles.

This course was NOT for college credit. Participants hailed from all areas of Wake Forest University as well as from the Piedmont Triad area. Participants included Jewish and non-Jewish students, faculty, staff, and local community members.

Methods

A survey was drafted utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods and measures, featuring 8 questions that specifically asked about the achievement of stated WFU division, department, and/or office goals.

Sixty-five (65) people attended at least one session of Judaism 101 in the Fall term of 2015. Forty (40) people completed the survey (almost 62%).

Here are a few of the questions and the responses:

Question # 4. Did this class increase your...

*Answered: 39; Skipped: 1

	Yes	No	Maybe	Total Respondents
Intellectual curiosity?	89.74% 35	2.56% 1	7.69% 3	39
Spiritual / religious curiosity?	84.21% 32	5.26% 2	10.53% 4	38
Cultural fluency?	87.18% 34	2.56% 1	10.26% 4	39
Self-examination?	71.79% 28	2.56% 1	25.64% 10	39

COMMENTS:
- It reminded me that I need a refresh on my Bible stories.
- Course material makes you think about what you already know regarding this subject.
- Tip of the iceberg! Makes me want to learn more. Thankful for being able to learn a few morsels during the workday.
- Opened my understanding.
- I have begun reading the holiness code in Leviticus. I think that is a sign of curiosity.
- I am even more curious as to what we will be taught in the next class.

Question # 5. I felt this class was...

*Answered: 39; Skipped: 1

	Yes	No	Maybe	Total Respondents
A good or meaningful use of my time.	100.00% 39	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	39
A safe environment for me to express my opinions and ask questions	94.87% 37	0.00% 0	5.13% 2	39
Helping me explore the spiritual dimensions of my existence.	71.05% 27	7.89% 3	21.05% 8	38
Helping me advance mutual understanding and respect among differing traditions. *	100.00% 39	0.00% 0	2.56% 1	39
Helping me develop thoughtful and engaged perspectives on global religious and political issues related to my own background. *	76.92% 30	7.69% 3	17.95% 7	39

COMMENT:
- Think over time some of above would be true. Helpful in sparking self-reflection and encouraging desire to learn more. Think will take more time to shape my perspectives in a meaningful way.
- It was especially helpful to understanding the cultural significance of the 1973 war starting on Yom Kippur traditions are fascinating but what would really crank my gears is understanding the why. why blow a ram's horn; why a ram's horn; why 4 times; why each time is a different cadence; etc... the significance quotient is there but not the background that lends more meaning to the tradition.

* Survey respondents could answer multiple options, including "yes", "no", and "maybe" all in same answer.

Results

The results of this survey show that...

- These classes allow participants to explore the spiritual dimensions of their lives
- Such courses can expand cultural fluency
- Exploration of global religious and political issues can be related back to one's experience and life
- Classes can be simultaneously fun and meaningful
- Discussions during classes can foster and promote mutual understanding
- Staff, faculty, and students appreciate informal educational options
- Some staff have difficulty in attending PDC offerings

Question # 8: Additional comments?

Answered: 20; Skipped: 20

- Really enjoying these classes and what the leaders and attendees bring to the table.
- your rating scales should be broader than yes/no/maybe-- such as "How knowledgeable was instructor", etc. Just a suggestion.
- Great class, enjoy the interaction among the participants
- Really enjoyed this class. It's nice to learn with levity!
- I work off campus. I want to go and usually register, but because we are no longer allowed to park on campus, the ability to get there at noon depends upon the shuttle or the borrowing of a parking pass. Taking the shuttle there and back adds 45 minutes to the hour meeting and is often not possible for employees. I wanted to tell you that there are logistical reasons that some of us cannot attend or cancel their registration.
- Great series, really enjoying it!!!
- I appreciate Gail's anecdotes, which brought the material to life.
- This class and the time we spent there is very peaceful, and enlightening.
- Gail, I have truly enjoyed participating in Judaism 101 classes and look forward to continuing to learn more about my heritage.
- She did a great job presenting the material. I felt it brought knowledge without pushing a particular religion.
- Nope!
- Nope
- Nope
- Nah
- I ready and waiting for the next class.
- I believe my real attraction to attending is trying to understand what the Jewish experience means. what is the basis of the faith and how does it relate to and address today's world. where is Judaism in context to current events (same sex marriage, racial violence, empowerment of women, environmental justice, disparity of wealth, etc.).
- Gail, I truly enjoyed the class and am thankful I have the opportunity at Wake Forest to explore my heritage in a comfortable environment
- I enjoyed learning that other cultures have similar practices to Judaism

Conclusions

Providing Judaism 101 informal educational courses can be beneficial for students, staff, and faculty of WFU, and for the general Triad Piedmont community.

Most of the participants in these informal classes are WFU staff (53)! Three (3) participants were faculty, and eight (8) were students. Only one (1) of the students was Jewish, and a few were international students.

Perhaps, there is a need for WFU staff to have access to more educational programs beyond that which is technical instruction and career focused, to the personal and spiritual dimensions.

Such educational opportunities might be expanded to include an Islam 101, Hindu 101, Catholicism 101, etc., to continue to expand cultural fluency and mutual understanding.

One might think that these "101's" would fall under *Introduction of World Religions* or *Comparative Religions* course, and they do, but the informal classes serve a function for those who want to learn without extensive reading lists, writing papers, and/or the need for college credit.

It is recommended that we explore different times and venues for informal classes. This would assist in including as many participants as possible, and in reducing obstacles to attendance, such as parking issues. Consider offering classes off-campus, such as at UCC, and eventually at Innovation Quarter.

Having this course, and possibly others, which fall under the auspices of PDC, adds the layer of "Personal Development" to that of "Professional Development" although often the two are interconnected.

References

- Wake Forest University Mission: <http://strategicplan.wfu.edu/vision.mission.html>
- WFU Campus Life Mission Statement: <http://campuslife.wfu.edu/about-us/>
- WFU Office of the Chaplain Mission Statement: <http://chaplain.wfu.edu/home/mission-2/>
- Informal Jewish Education: http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Bretan_uncg_0154D_10347.pdf

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