

Rowan University's Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center's 2018-2019 Academic Year
Annual Report

Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center
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Table of Contents

I. Meet Our Team.....3

II. Executive Summary.....4

III. Physical Spaces.....5

IV. Events for the Academic Year.....6

V. Meditation Offerings.....8

VI. Community Outreach.....8

VII. Established Partnerships.....9

VIII. Acknowledgements & Statements on World Events.....11

IX. Moving Forward.....12

Meet Our Team

Suhail Johnson- Interim Director for Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution

Dr. John T. Mills- Assistant Director for Multicultural and Inclusion Programs

Tara Ferrucci- Administrative Assistant for Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution

Anne Byrne- Administrative Assistant for Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution

Donn Garby- Graduate Coordinator for Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration

Isha Strasser- Program Coordinator for Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration

The individuals listed above have been instrumental in the success of the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center for the 2018-2019 Academic Year. They have worked diligently to ensure that events are properly planned and executed, have advocated for the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center, and have dedicated countless hours to see the success of the Center for the academic year. Although many other individuals have helped to ensure the success of the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center, this core group of individuals have been the foundation for which the Center stands on.

Executive Summary

To the Rowan Community,

This past year, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center embarked on a new journey to bring back longstanding traditions, form new partnerships and inspirational programming, and expand more into the Glassboro and South Jersey communities. With the collective work of multiple individuals and organizations, the Center has established a new foundation for which the Interfaith and Spiritual Community at Rowan can stand upon. With this strong foundation, the recognition of the interfaith and spiritual needs and identities of the community can be *heard*, *seen* and *supported* throughout campus. I would be remiss if I did not send my gratitude to all the individuals who stepped forward this year and helped to establish this support system for the community. This year did not come without sorrow, though, and the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center did have to acknowledge some of the tragic events that occurred in our world this past year. The Center has worked hard to ensure that the community here at Rowan feels supported during these hard times and have a place to go if they need support.

As we move forward in the summer, and into the beginning of the next year, I wish to offer to the community the guiding factor for the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center. Next year, the term ***Unity Through Partnerships*** will be the guiding force for the center. Our events, initiatives, and messages to the community will be rooted in the idea that we are stronger as a united community and that this Interfaith and Spiritual community does not end at the borders of Rowan University. I look forward to working with this guiding idea next year and I look forward to continuing to serve the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center.

Respectfully,

Donn Matthew Garby
Graduate Coordinator, Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center

Physical Spaces

Prayer and Meditation Room in Hawthorn Hall

The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center has been proud to offer a prayer and meditation space for our students, faculty, and staff at Rowan. The space, located in a quiet corner in the Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution, offers the perfect space for quiet meditation, prayer, or thoughtful conversation. Included in the room is alternate lighting so that overhead fluorescent lights do not have to be utilized, adequate natural light, prayer and meditation equipment, and books for reference. The walls are free of any religious or spiritual artwork or symbols so that the space is inclusive for all. Right outside the space, there is a shoe rack so that if your prayer or meditation calls for the removal of shoes, you can place them in a secure location. Please check out the space in Hawthorn Hall 202. During the academic year the space is open Mondays-Thursdays from 8am-9:30pm and Fridays from 8am-5:30pm. Summer hours may vary.

Evergreen Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center

The Evergreen Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center is located in the Evergreen Residence Hall. Inside the Center, you can find a kosher kitchen, an interfaith library, a conference room/meditation space, and a space for cooking for events. Utilized mostly for our weekly meditation offerings, the space has also provided space for countless club and organization events as well as events for outside partners. Ideally situated on campus, this space is open for reservations for individuals, groups, or departments and serves as the perfect space for quiet reflection, intellectual conversations, and the sharing of knowledge. The Center can hold upwards of thirty individuals and is ideal for meetings with a beautiful view of the campus. Please contact the office for reservations or to find out when the Center is open.

Events for the Academic Year

For the 2018-2019 academic year, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center hosted over fifteen events and reached over four hundred individuals. Although the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center has put on a wide arrange of events this during the 2018-2019 academic year, we would like to highlight a few of the most impactful and/or successful programs from the year.

Religious Diversity Week

For the second year in a row, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center hosted Religious Diversity Week in November to raise awareness of different religious beliefs and how to respect those that follow them. The week consisted of events such as a student panel on religious life at Rowan, a day dedicated to learning about underrepresented religions and beliefs, and a presentation built upon connected religion to other aspects of our lives. The week saw a wide range of individuals attend and participate and showcased the Center's dedication to supporting the religious and spiritual community at Rowan. One of the highlights of this week was the record number of students who attended the programming throughout the week and the number of events offered to the community. The Center saw approximately 50 students attend the events throughout the week.

3rd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Day of Service

The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center was proud to bring forth the 3rd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service to the Rowan and Glassboro communities. This year, we were able to expand our reach and partner with existing organizations as well as new organizations. This year, we continued our partnership with the Camden Cathedral Kitchen and expanded to also work with the Borough of Glassboro, the Mosaic Family Center, and the

Gloucester County Animal Shelter. We were also able to expand on the number of items made and donated for these organizations. We increased our donation of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the Camden Cathedral Kitchen from 600 to 1,100-an increase of 500! This year, we also saw the largest increase of interest to participate in the event, with over 200 individuals registered.

2nd Annual Better Together Day

Although modified from the previous year, the 2nd Annual Better Together Day was one of the best collaborative partnerships that the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center had. This year, we partnered with Leadership Rowan to make the program a Silver-Level Certificate program. This year, the event was a panel of multiple individuals within the Rowan community, from different faith backgrounds, who came together to have an interactive conversation with the audience on what a better world would look like through an interfaith context. This event brought together a great conversation on what this world would look like and transcended interfaith barriers. We saw over 20 students not only attend this panel, but participate in the conversation and help work to create a better world for everyone.

Ash Wednesday

This year, for the first time ever, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center partnered with the Church of the Good Shepard and St. Thomas Episcopal Church to bring an offering of ashes to our community. This was a well-attended event and was the first time that ashes were offered on Rowan's campus. This also opened up an opportunity to form a partnership with these two organizations and bring the community's faith on campus. The two churches were able to offer ashes to 19 individuals including students, faculty, and staff.

Meditation Offerings

This past year, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center was proud to offer the first series of ongoing meditation sessions at our Evergreen location. Isha Strasser, an ordained Interfaith Minister who has been working in the field for over twenty years, offered a variety of interfaith meditation techniques and contemplative practices, including compassion meditation, silent meditation, and relax, and align sessions of restorative yoga.

Isha Strasser also led the first annual Winter Retreat on January 4, 2019. This all-day event included a broad range of spiritual practice, including formal sitting meditation, walking meditation, Hatha Yoga, Lectio Divina, Mindful Eating, and group dialogue on how to cultivate a contemplative life. Due to the overwhelming response, an additional retreat was offered on January 18, 2019.

These offerings were open to students, faculty and staff of the Rowan community and offered an opportunity for individuals to cultivate vibrant inward peace, develop and strengthen their unique spiritual identity, and support the underlying unity of life through prayer and intention. These meditation offerings were some of the most well attended programs and saw a high number of returning participants throughout the weeks. We look forward to expanding upon this foundation to create a beacon of lighted inspiration on campus.

Community Outreach

Connecting the Religious and Spiritual Communities to the LGBTQIA+ Community

In order to ensure that members of the Rowan community could practice their faith beyond Rowan's borders, and without conflict with other identities that they may carry, the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center worked to create a new form of community outreach in which local religious and spiritual organizations would have the opportunity to attend a Safe

Zone Training. The hope of the Center was that these community partners would then be able to create a safe space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to practice in their organizations. After reaching out, nine organizations, from a multitude of faiths, responded and were able to send not only members of their organization's leadership, but also general members, to the training. This has also opened up the space for partnerships in other areas and we have already seen some of these organizations put together a panel to discuss religion and spirituality with LGBTQIA+ communities. This commitment to ensuring safe spaces do not end at Rowan's borders has provided a unique opportunity to form new partnerships, inform the community of what is going on at Rowan, and provide knowledge of the LGBTQIA+ community and identity to members of the Glassboro and surrounding communities. The hope is that this outreach will continue and will become a staple in our foundation of success.

Bringing Student's Faiths to Campus

The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center has also worked hard to ensure that students have a place to practice their worship. Because of that, we have started to allow outside organizations to host services in our Evergreen Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center. This has allowed students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to worship on campus, if they do not have a vehicle to get them off, and connect with these organizations and individuals. This partnership has also allowed for members of these religious and spiritual organizations to connect with Rowan and form new partnerships with our Center.

Established Partnerships

The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center would like to acknowledge and thank the partnerships established in the 2018-2019 academic year. This year would not have been possible

without the support of these partners and their commitment to serving the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration community at Rowan.

We would like to take a moment to thank:

- Borough of Glassboro
- Camden Cathedral Kitchen
- Catholic Campus Ministries at Rowan
- Chabad at Rowan
- Church of the Good Shepherd
- College of Education at Rowan
- Dr. Harley E. Flack Mentoring Program
- First Presbyterian Church in Pitman
- Fisher of Wo(Men)
- Gloucester County Animal Shelter
- Hillel at Rowan
- Leadership Rowan
- Muslim Student Association at Rowan
- Residential Learning & University Housing at Rowan
- Rowan Cru
- St. Thomas Episcopal Church
- Student Life at Rowan
- The LGBTQIA+ Center
- The Mosaic Family Center
- The Multicultural Center

- The Sikh Coalition
- The Women's Center
- United Methodist Church of Glassboro

Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to our success!

Acknowledgements & Statements on World Events

This past year, the world suffered many losses because of targeted attacks on religion and spirituality. The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center would like the Rowan community to know that we stand for peace and unity. We strive to ensure that the interfaith and spiritual needs of the community are heard, supported, and understood. We are a center for everyone to come to if they feel like they need a place to grieve after a targeted attack. Recognizing that there is, unfortunately, many attacks on religion and spirituality in this world, we do our best to send out statements on those that impact our community. If ever there is an attack and we do not send out a statement, but you wish to see one, please reach out to us at interfatih@rowan.edu and we can do that. Please see a list, below, of attacks in which the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center condemn and for which we offer a space for our community members to come to if they are grieving. We hope for a future where peace is found, and statements do not have to be sent out because of the understanding and acceptance of all religions and beliefs.

- The bombing of the Shiite Mosque in Kabul
- The shooting at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue
- The shooting at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs in Texas
- The attack on the Mosque in North Sinai, Egypt
- The attack on the church in Quetta, Pakistan
- The bombing of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Jolo, Philippines

- The attacks in Christchurch at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Center
- The burning of the St. Mary Baptist Church, the Greater Union Baptist Church, and Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana
- The killing of Christians in Northern Nigeria
- The continued divide between the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Southern Thailand
- The fire at the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris
- The coordinated bombings in Sri Lanka
- The shooting at the Chabad of Poway

The Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center holds these attacks in our hearts, and we want to acknowledge that although they occurred, we will not let them defeat or divide us. We also recognize the importance of highlighting the immensity of goodwill and service that religious traditions offer to the needy all around the world. We will strive to bring attention to these events as well.

Moving Forward

Moving forward into the 2019-2020 academic year, we will continue to hold on to ***Unity Through Partnerships*** as we establish new partnerships and support systems for our communities. We have accomplished so much this year and I know that as we progress forward, our possibilities will be endless. This year was a success for our Center and we owe that success to many individuals. We look forward to working with our partners in the future and we hope that the students, staff, and faculty at Rowan can find a place for their interfaith and spiritual needs. As the new Graduate Coordinator team for ISEC, Isha and I have started outlining goals for which we will work on next year, falling under the idea of ***Unity Through Partnerships***:

1. To establish a formal system in which members of the Rowan community can connect to the interfaith and spiritual communities in Glassboro and the surrounding areas.
2. To establish a formal system in which members of the Rowan community can connect to the interfaith and spiritual communities on Rowan's campus.
3. To bring forth more faiths on campus for services and ensure that there is equity in time allotted for these organizations.
4. To establish a three-year Strategic Plan for the Interfaith and Spiritual Exploration Center so that support systems are not on a year-to-year basis.
5. To respond to the needs of students, faculty and staff through creative and inspiring ongoing programming.
6. To offer opportunities for retreat, renewal and replenishment through interfaith contemplative practices.
7. To strengthen our relationship with student religious groups on campus to encourage dialogue with and between different faith groups.
8. To empower students, faculty and staff with practical tools for conflict resolution.
9. To hold a vision of joy, unity and restorative justice for ourselves and the world.

We look forward to working towards these goals and we hope that the continued partnerships, as well as new ones, can guide us through this. Here is to an amazing 2019-2020 academic year!