

Multifaith Reference Group

Aim

To ensure that staff and students from different faiths, religions, and cultures feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging to Federation University by empowering them to participate in decision-making and create positive experiences that enhance their overall success and wellbeing during their studies.

Scope

The Multifaith Reference Group assists Federation University to understand and appropriately respond to faith-related issues for staff and students and to support those from a diverse array of cultural and religious backgrounds.

The Multifaith Reference Group brings together staff and students of diverse faiths to determine priorities, initiatives and processes that are relevant to the faith communities at Federation University.

The Reference Group will provide recommendations to the University to inform the strategies and service delivery of the Engagement and Equity teams and to enhance the positive experiences and wellbeing of students from diverse faiths.

The Student Senate will take advice from the Multifaith Reference Group on priorities areas for action and best practice in making recommendations or developing projects relevant to faith-based communities.

The Reference Group may form sub-committees.

Terms of Reference

The Multifaith Reference Group will enhance the wellbeing, success, and engagement of students of diverse faiths by:

1. creating a channel for communication between faith-based communities, students and staff at the University;
2. making recommendations to improve the experience of students at the University, particularly where this relates to students of diverse faiths;
3. bringing those of different faiths together to promote peace and harmony and find common ground;
4. enhancing opportunities to interact and connect with students of faith and faith-based events;
5. co-opting a student from the Multicultural Committee and reporting recommendations to the Student Senate to enhance collaboration between these bodies.

Meetings

Meetings will be conducted three - four times per year. Meetings can be conducted in-person or virtually as suits the membership.

Membership

Joining

This Reference Group will accept nominations from staff and students to join at any time. Nominations will be considered by the Chair of Senate, the Reference Group, or their delegates, with assistance where appropriate. Staff and students who can represent their faith communities will be accepted. For the purposes of the Reference Group a faith community is a formal or informal body comprising of those with shared faith or values.

The group membership must aim to achieve gender parity, or as close to parity as possible. Applications will also be considered with this requirement in mind.

Those whose nominations are accepted become members of the group. Members are expected to speak on behalf of and make decisions in consultation with their community. Of these members, at least one student will be co-opted to the Multicultural Reference Group and to the Student Senate.

Roles

Members are eligible to nominate for the following positions within the Reference Group:

Chair – responsible for receiving agenda items, collaborating with the secretary to create the agenda, and leading meetings.

Secretary – responsible for distributing the agenda prior to the meeting, taking notes in the meeting, writing, and sending out minutes afterwards.

Leaving

A member may resign at any time by writing to the Chair, the Chair may resign at any time by writing to the Manager of Equity. The Reference Group may dismiss any member if:

- a. the member, without first seeking a leave of absence from the Chair, fails to attend 3 consecutive meetings;
- b. a resolution is passed by a majority four-fifths vote of the Reference Group that the member is found to have impeded the Reference Group in conduct of its business and/or engages in conduct that is disruptive and disrespectful to other members or impedes the ability of the Chair to direct a meeting;
- c. the member is found by the University, through its formal procedures, to have engaged in a breach of discipline or misconduct (including harassment, discrimination, bullying) in relation to any matter.

Respect and inclusion

The reference group is designed to further the inclusion of people from diverse faiths and raise issues and feedback to University leadership on these matters. The reference group invites open discussion when members have different views, however, this must occur in an atmosphere of inclusion and with respect to people from diverse faiths and beliefs.

Members are expected to:

- Encourage and support each other, even when they disagree.
- Discuss in a manner that demonstrates respect for one another.
- Refrain from expressing discriminatory and negative views towards other groups.
- Refrain from criticism of other faiths, beliefs.
- Refrain from transphobic, homophobic, or racist speech.

For members who fail to meet these expectations, the approach will be educative not punitive. Members will be supported to better understand how their speech could be more inclusive and the purpose and benefits of creating an inclusive space. Members who repeatedly fail to meet these expectations may be asked to leave the reference group and should understand that discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated at Federation University and may constitute misconduct.

Research Underpinning

Studies pertaining to student engagement and retention in higher education contexts have shown that a sense of belonging acts as a buffer against social isolation and disengagement among different types of student cohorts. Having a sense of belonging becomes more critical for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students who have to adapt to a new environment and those residing in regional areas.

Moreover, research has indicated that 'success' for students is not just academic. Success can take different forms that include, but are not limited to, forming positive relations with peers and staff, feeling that their voice is heard and their feedback is acted upon, or simply having the resilience to continue with their studies despite the challenges they face.

Therefore, the Multifaith Reference Group will adopt a holistic approach to students' wellbeing and success and operate from a 'person-in-environment' framework.