



# INSIGHT

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## Multi-faith space on campus

Northumbria University



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# Multi-faith space on campus

## How can the positive design and management of university faith and reflective space improve campus relations and support the student experience?

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### Overview

In recent years universities have been moving away from the traditional Christian chaplaincy model to a multi-faith support offer, often with multi-faith rooms designed to be used actively by peoples of all faiths and none. However, these spaces tend to be bland and uninspiring, featuring flat white plasterboard walls, lowered ceilings and cheap flat pack style furniture. They also regularly feature no natural light and have little decoration, especially religious paraphernalia or iconography for fear of causing offence or excluding people of some faiths. This “negative” style of decoration and management is often upheld by stringent rules on the management of the space, implemented by an overseeing committee.

This research project therefore set out to investigate the feasibility of a more “positive” design and management of multi-faith and contemplative space. It considered this with a view to producing practical guidance for use across the sector, investigating the difficult issues of iconography, the use of shared space, praying together and how to make people of all faiths (and none) feel that the space is genuinely open and available to them.

### Background

Provisions for the expression and observance of religion and belief in UK universities are protected by law. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights is enshrined in UK law by the Human Rights Act, which provides a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the Equality Act 2010, which sets out a range of specified “protected characteristics” upon which it is illegal to discriminate – one being religion and belief.

Whilst there is no specific explicit statutory requirement placed on higher education providers to provide facilities for personal reflection, meditation and prayer (indeed there is no legal requirement for universities to provide any social or cultural facilities other than education), most, if not all bodies across the sector, have engaged actively with faith throughout their histories and many provide a range of physical facilities for prayer and contemplation.

A desk-based research exercise carried out recently at Northumbria to support the development of our own faith and contemplative space, has suggested that whilst chaplaincy and faith provision exists in some form at the majority, if not all, UK higher education institutions, this provision and its associated physical space is an evolution of what has existed historically, and changes and developments tend to be responsive rather than proactive, usually to support an ever changing student body. However, whilst chaplaincies have evolved for the better, to become more inclusive and diverse, arguably physical facilities to support their activities have evolved in a less positive manner. Where

physical space is identified for faith or secular contemplative activities, whether this is an adaptation of a previously otherwise occupied building or where funding allows the development of a new facility, there still seems to be both a clear separation between different religions or secular groups using the space, and limited use of the space interfaith dialogue and scholarly pursuit.

The former point has been stressed by Crompton (2013), who identified two contrasting ways of sharing space, which he categorised as “positive” and “negative”. Positive ways of sharing the spaces have images and artefacts from different faiths, and indeed none, on open view and woven into the fabric of the space. This leads to a feeling of unity by inclusion. In the alternative, the negative type, images and iconography from different religions are either absent or kept separate, and this leads, in Crompton’s view, to unity, but “unity by exclusion.” It is worth noting at this point that “positive” and “negative” relate to the style and conventions adopted in the management of the faith space. No judgement on either approach is implied or should be inferred from the use of these terms.

Crompton surveyed over 100 multi-faith rooms and identified that the primary architectural feature was flat white plasterboard walls and low suspended ceilings. Only one in ten had any natural light, and any furniture tended to be of the cheap flat pack type, primarily because of its neutrality. This negatively managed type of multi-faith space is often associated with a lack of permanent chaplaincy, and the hiding of religious iconography, either by its packing away in plastic storage boxes following use or its being hidden using clunky mechanical mechanisms such as curtains and screens. This creates a space that can be empty, somewhat cold and not one that has a feeling of shared ownership, dialogue, warmth and the development of positive relations or scholarly pursuit.

Whilst Crompton is an architect and no doubt his view is influenced by his professional specialism, he does identify the key challenges that have encouraged the move towards negative management of space, that is, the difficulties inherent with the alternatives. Guidance for the use of the multi-faith and quiet contemplation room at St. Georges, University of London highlights this<sup>1</sup>

“People of some faiths cannot pray in a room where imagery signs or icons or written materials from other religions are displayed. Therefore it is not permitted to permanently display imagery, statues or written materials in the multi faith and quiet contemplation room, or just outside the room.

“At the end of prayer, meditation or contemplation all these items must be immediately collected and either removed from the room or stored in the specific storage assigned to the group. This is so all users feel equally free to use the rooms. All room users should be considerate and understand that any paraphernalia left in the room, including books, prayer mats, religious pictures etc. can be very off putting for people from other faiths or no faith who also have an equal right to use the room. Any breaches of this will be reported directly to the interfaith forum.”

Whilst this is in no way an attempt to single out St. George’s, as guidelines for multi-faith spaces across the sector are likely to be very similar across institutions, it does highlight neatly the operational manifestation of the negative management of faith space and the creation of a space that is both everyone’s and no-one’s, with a slight transgression referred immediately to an overseeing committee.

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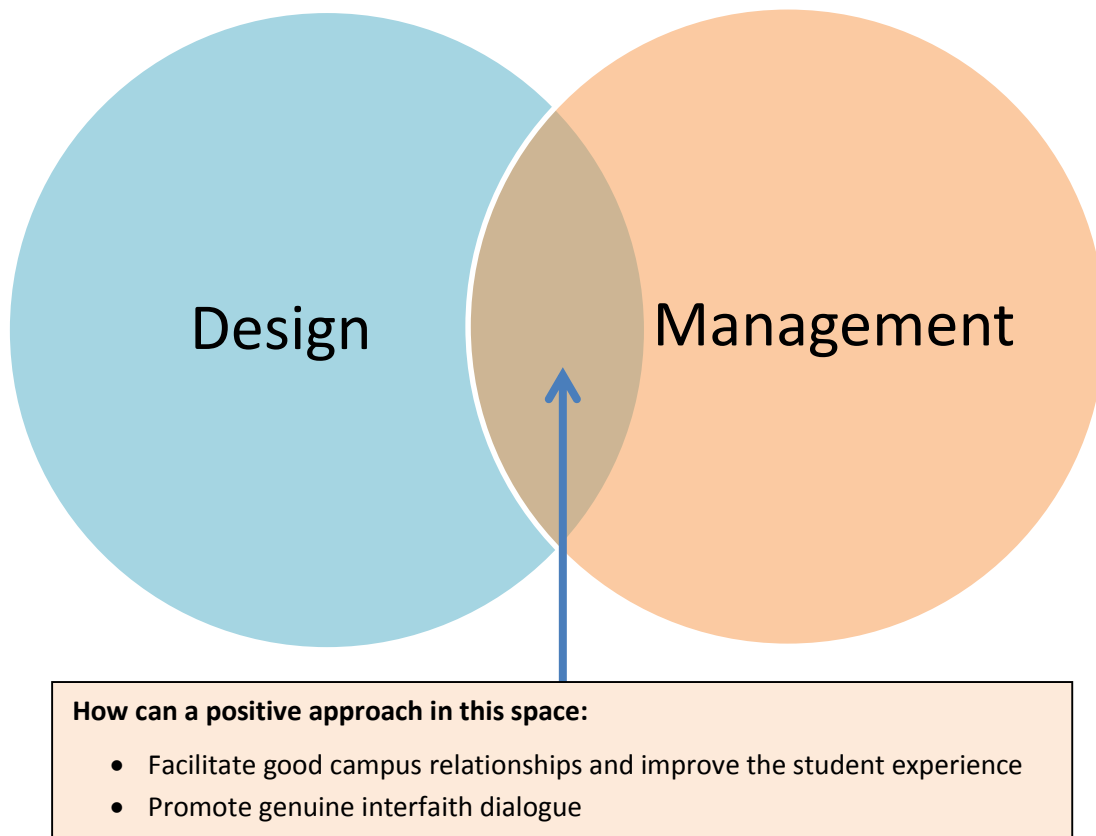
<sup>1</sup> Protocol for the Multi-Faith and Quiet Contemplation Room, St Georges University of London, downloaded from: [www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-georges/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief/Multifaith and quiet contemplation room protocol June 2013.pdf](http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-georges/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief/Multifaith%20and%20quiet%20contemplation%20room%20protocol%20June%202013.pdf)

It is understandable why the negative management of space has been the preferred option across the sector and beyond, partly as a response to a lack of comfort with the diversity agenda, partly from a genuinely held and laudable desire not to cause offence, and also partly due to the lack of practical guidance around a different, more positive approach. Most guidance available for the sector and beyond is limited to a discussion of legislation, religious differences with any actual instruction limited to stock advice such as “ensure neutrality of space and consult with users of the facility”.

This research project therefore set out to investigate the feasibility of a more positive design and management of multi-faith and contemplative space. It considered this under-researched element of faith and diversity with a view to producing comprehensive and practical guidance for use across the sector. It aimed to investigate in detail the difficult questions of faith in this context, such as the issues of iconography, the use of shared space, praying together and how to make people of all faiths (and none) feel that the space is genuinely open and available to them without resorting to the negative management approach.

The research project can be summarised neatly by the Venn diagram in figure one below.

**Figure one:**



## Project aims

### Aims

The project has the following aim:

- To investigate the positive design and management of multi-faith spaces, its feasibility and make recommendations for the sector.

### Objectives

The project will deliver its overarching aim through the following objectives:

- To investigate the religious, secular and practical arguments that have been forwarded in support of the negative management of faith and contemplative space.
- To investigate options for the effective and inclusive (positive) management of faith and contemplative space.
- To investigate how the design and management of faith space can help improve the student experience, promote good campus relationships, promote genuine interfaith dialogue and tackle radicalisation and extremism.
- Produce detailed and practical best practice guidelines for the sector based on the findings of the research.

## Methodology

The project followed tried and tested research methodologies for a small research project. The research was led by a project team of Northumbria staff comprising the Student Support Manager (Development and Inclusion) as project lead with specialist advice from the Head of Student Support and Wellbeing and our Coordinating Chaplain.

This small team developed a series of project briefs that outlined the two key strands to the research. The first involved desk research into the design and architecture of multi-faith space with a view to identifying whether more positive and inclusive approaches are architecturally possible and what they might look like. A specialist researcher was commissioned from Northumbria's own highly regarded Architecture and Built Environment Department to lead on this work.

The second strand of research was led by Northumbria's Student Support and Wellbeing service, specifically the Chaplaincy and Policy, Projects and Inclusion Team, who lead the university's approach to student diversity and supported by Northumbria Students' Union. This strand of research used focus groups with key representatives of the various student faith societies on campus as well as considering in detail the literature available. These were used to analyse and test some of the arguments put forward in favour of the negative management of faith space, and also explore the feasibility of the positive management of faith and contemplative space through a variety of theoretical and practical lenses.

Both strands of research benefitted from access to previous work carried out at Northumbria, including student-led research by Northumbria Students' Union, and legal briefings, which have been used in internal projects to develop our own faith space offer.

## Key findings

### Places of worship in the UK

The UK is an increasingly diverse country and a wide range of faith traditions are represented in our population. UK cities have a range of religious places of observance, all of which have their own unique styles and forms, and all of which seem at first glance incredibly different from each other. Whilst a full discussion of the detailed requirements and differences of places of worship is beyond the scope of this research, it is worth considering some of the traditional key features, as attempts to replicate these within multi-faith spaces are often the source of difficulties in their design and management.

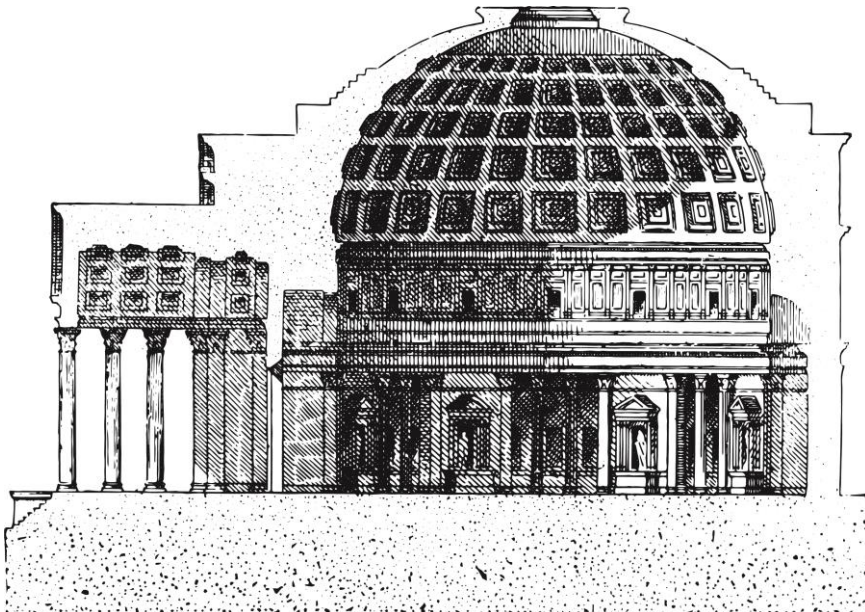
The key aspect of places of worship for the six most commonly observed religions in the UK are shown in table one below. This is only a summary and cannot, by definition, accurately describe every place of worship or every individual interpretation of faith requirements. It is intended to give a flavour of the rich diversity of design and activity that takes place throughout the UK's religious institutions.

### History of multi-faith spaces

Whilst multi-faith spaces in their current guise are essentially a post-World War II phenomenon, which started to grow exponentially following September 11, 2001 (9/11 – Brand, 2012) it is worth noting that faith communities using the same spaces is nothing new. A historical look highlights two internationally famous buildings, which are in many ways, multi-faith spaces.

The first of these is the Pantheon in Rome, built in 125 AD by the Emperor Hadrian and designed by the Greek architect Apollodorus of Damascus. The Pantheon is famous for its circular dome measuring over 43 metres in diameter, which remains to this day the largest dome in the world of pure concrete. The Pantheon was initially built as a “temple to all the Gods” which was converted in 609 AD to a Christian Church, “Saint Mary and the Martyrs”, and is still used as an active place of Christian worship today.

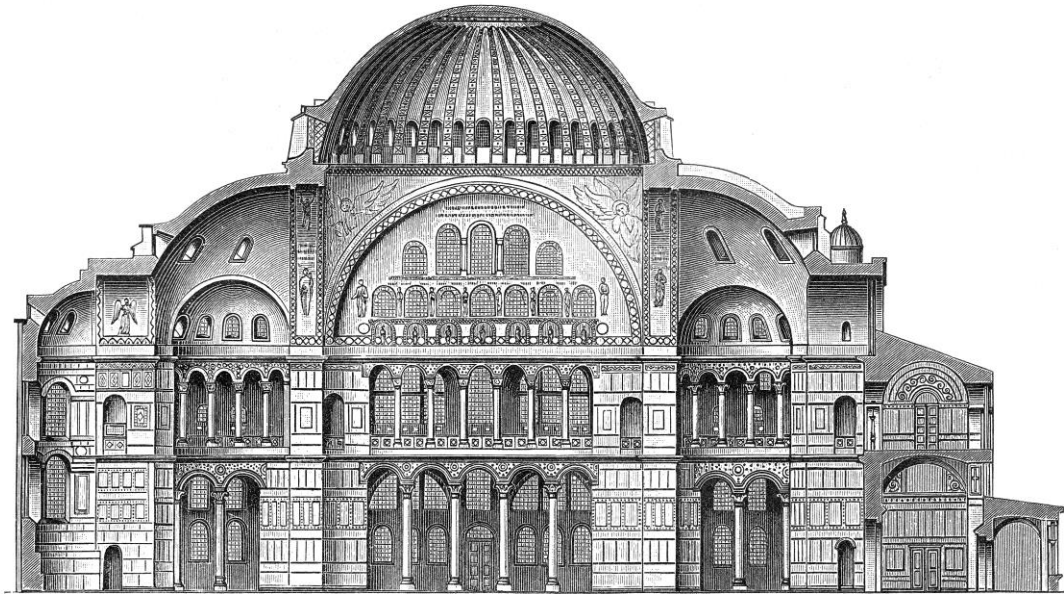
**Figure two:** The Pantheon<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Pantheon, vintage engraved illustration. Dictionary of words and things - Larive and Fleury - 1895. Image ID: 217379452. Copyright: [Morphart Creation](#).

The second such example is the Greek Orthodox Basilica of Saint Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, which was erected by the architects Isadore of Miletus and Enthemous of Thralles in 532 AD and is seen as a magnificent example of Byzantine architecture. The building constitutes a nave centrally surmounted by a dome of around 30 meters in diameter. Originally built as a Christian Church, the building was immediately converted to a Mosque by the Ottomans when they took Constantinople in May 1453. It remained a Mosque until 1935 when Ataturk, the first president of the new Republic of Turkey, transformed it into a Museum with all religious activity strictly forbidden.

**Figure three:** Hagia Sophia<sup>3</sup>



In a beautiful reflection of the current greater acceptance of religion in an increasingly secular society, in 2006 the Turkish government opened up a small multi-faith prayer room in the museum for Muslim and Christian staff to pray during the working day.

Such examples of different faith groups sharing the same spaces can be seen closer to home as well. Indeed, less than fifteen miles from Northumbria University, the main Sikh Gurdwara in Sunderland, Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara Sikh Centre, is thriving in the former Christ Church, Ryhope, following its closure by the Church of England. The community has retained many of the existing features of the church, including its high quality stained glass, and is currently renovating the building originally built in 1862.

However, these examples are different from the usual idea of a multi-faith space in that they are serial rather than parallel, that is, they have one faith making way for another to assume ownership of the space. Multi-faith spaces in their current guise are a relatively new phenomenon, as Brand (2012) observed. They started to appear in airport departure lounges, especially the United States, shortly after the end of World War II, becoming more popular and their functions increasingly recognised during the 1980s and 1990s. However, Brand argues, it is in the post 9/11 world and the increasing strive for religious tolerance and community / campus cohesion that they have moved into the sphere of public consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> Hagia Sophia - Istanbul (Turkey) - Vintage illustration / illustration from Meyers Konversations-Lexikon 1897. Image ID: 91588931. Copyright: [Hein Nouwens](#).



**Table one:**<sup>4</sup>

Table one shows a summary of some of the key features of traditional places of worship. It is not intended to be comprehensive.

<b>Faith</b>	<b>Design</b>	<b>Furniture and seating</b>	<b>Iconography and paraphernalia</b>	<b>Worship / faith activities</b>
Buddhism The vihara	Viharas are essentially plain halls or shrines.	Generally viharas have little furniture and large parts of the hall are blank.	An image of Buddha is usually present but not as a figure for worship.  A shrine is present with holy scriptures, images of the Buddha and instruments for meditation.	Like many eastern religions, taking off shoes on entry is an essential requirement, as is sitting on the floor.
Christianity The church	Traditionally Christian churches are divided into two main areas, the chancel for the priest or vicar and the nave, used by the congregation for worship or other activities.	All churches have fixed seating, or pews, which face towards the chancel where the altar is situated.	The focal point of Christian worship tends to be the crucifix, which is behind or on top of the altar, sometimes depicting Christ. Other paraphernalia such as candles and incense burners are often present.  In addition to churches, Christian cathedrals, which are similar in design but on a larger scale, tend to be based on a floor plan of a cross, and often have very decorative stained glass windows, which depict Christian iconography.	Christians sit, stand and kneel during various parts of services, which is facilitated by the fixed furniture.

<sup>4</sup> Information from [www.reonline.org.uk](http://www.reonline.org.uk).

Faith	Design	Furniture and seating	Iconography and paraphernalia	Worship / faith activities
<p>Hinduism The mandir</p>	<p>In the UK, many mandirs have been converted from previous uses, although a few purpose-built mandirs have recently been constructed. Traditionally mandirs are built towards the rays of the rising sun, and will not include metal in their construction as this is believed to interfere with the mental efforts of meditation.</p>	<p>No fixed seating is required for worship or meditation.</p>	<p>Key to the mandir is the practice of devotions to images including Ganesh, Vishnu and Krishna.</p>	<p>It is vital to be able to walk around the images of deities, to be able to sit on the floor for meditation or communal prayers, and to be able to offer incense.</p>
<p>Islam The mosque</p>	<p>A mosque or masjid traditionally faces toward Mecca and often has a dome and minaret, the latter used to call people to prayer.</p>	<p>Because Muslims kneel to pray, fixed seating is not present in a mosque. Carpets will be thick to accommodate prayer and may often have a design that shows an individual's prayer space. Prayer mats are often used.</p> <p>Outside the main worship space mosques have washing facilities to carry out ritual ablutions (Wudhu) before prayer.</p>	<p>No images of people are to be found in a mosque.</p> <p>Most mosques feature some way of indicating the direction of prayer (toward Mecca). This can take the form of a niche in the wall (a Mihrab) or a directional indicator such as an arrow.</p>	<p>Muslims kneel to pray and must pray a number of times each day at set intervals. Friday prayers or Jummah are of particular importance and will be the busiest time in a mosque.</p> <p>Mosques also tend to have wider community importance than just places of worship, including social and education functions.</p>

Faith	Design	Furniture and seating	Iconography and paraphernalia	Worship / faith activities
<p>Judaism The synagogue</p>	<p>There are few instructions on how synagogues should look from the outside, other than they should have windows and be the tallest building in town.</p>	<p>The most important and sacred religious item in a synagogue are the Torah Scrolls. They are housed in a special cupboard, the Ark, which is at the centre of the synagogue. The Torah is read from the Bimah (platform) and seats, often fixed, are placed in front of it.</p>	<p>Iconography is key to the synagogue, and in addition to the Ark and Bimah, there will be a Star of David, a Menorah or seven branched candlestick, and a light that is never extinguished to represent Gods presence.</p>	<p>In traditional synagogues men and women sit separately.</p>
<p>Sikhism The gurdwara</p>	<p>Gurdwara buildings do not have to conform to any set architectural design.</p>	<p>The Sikh sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib is central to the gurdwara interior. Sikhs tend to sit on the floor in front of the Guru Granth Sahib in worship.</p>	<p>Covered by a canopy, and resting on cushions as the focal point of the gurdwara, the Guru Granth Sahib is regarded with the utmost reverence. During worship a fan is waved gracefully over the Guru Granth Sahib as a symbolic gesture of the authority of the sacred book.</p>	<p>The tradition of sitting on carpet, of having bare feet and covering heads is normal and expected. In some gurdwardas men and women worship separately. Like the mosque, the gurdwara is the centre of the Sikh community and will often have comprehensive catering facilities reflecting the importance of sharing food within Sikhism.</p>

The development of multi-faith spaces on university campuses broadly reflects wider society. Johnson and Laurence (2012) note that US universities have gone through a process of being distinctly religious, even sectarian, through a greater period of secularisation to the current state of religious pluralism on campus. They note that the early US universities all had a strong Christian ethos. For example, in its early years after its formation in 1736 practically all of Harvard's faculty, administrators and trustees were ministers, as were almost half its early alumni. They contrast this with the current state of religious pluralism on US campuses and identify across the US a range of high quality multi-faith spaces, which have been developed either by new build, or converting previous secular or in some cases previous religious spaces.

Historically the situation in the UK is similar, although a search of the websites of the top 30 UK universities shows that large multi-faith centres in the UK tend to be less common, with Christian or multi-faith spaces (or both) tending to be the most usually found model. In addition, separate Muslim prayer rooms are common in the UK, with Gillat-Ray (2005) observing that by 2000 one third of UK universities were operating the separate Muslim prayer room model. Although it must be noted that physical facilities to support chaplaincy have not necessarily grown in line with the increasing diversity of the student body, as a rule university chaplaincies themselves have, with all universities researched having a wide and varied multi-faith offer either through their own chaplaincy or through well-developed links with the local community.

Across UK universities the move toward multi-space facilities, with or without the separate Muslim prayer room, has been driven by a number of factors. Some of these are distinctly practical, for example the need to provide facilities on campus for students is continually competing against ever shrinking resources both in terms of money but also space on ever stretched campus buildings and facilities.

Also it is worth noting that some religions do have very different requirements in terms of faith observance. For example, it is a fact of Islam that there is a requirement to pray a number of times a day. This has led to a perception of Muslim dominance of multi-faith space or the provision of separate Muslim prayer rooms. Indeed, Possami and Brackenberg (2009) in an analysis of usage levels of university faith facilities at the University of Western Sydney observed that only 3% of Christians questioned used the university facilities, compared with 50% of Muslims. Moreover, as Gillat-Ray (*ibid.*) observed, there has also been a rise in Muslim students in UK universities in recent years, both home and international, and Gillat-Ray sees the separate Muslim prayer room model as a response to this, while voicing concerns about this essentially relegating Muslim students to their own space.

It is not only responding to the needs of Muslim students that has led to the current models of provision in UK universities. Gillat-Ray in 2005 and 2010 observed an increasing move towards individual worship occurring in society, especially noting that whilst traditional places of worship were increasingly empty, multi-faith rooms were becoming more full. Not only this, but multi-faith rooms tend to be places of individual contemplation rather than places where acts of group worship take place. There is a commensurate shifting of responsibility on to the individual and away from any religious authority figure to set the rules and boundaries for their own behaviour in the space, and as such any one group ownership of a multi-faith space is, by definition, limited. This is coupled with the increasing number of students describing themselves as "humanist" or "spiritual".

Given all of the above, it is perhaps not surprising that the current model of provision has emerged across UK campuses. Given the competing demands on any multi-faith space, the different requirements of those groups and individuals using it and a move to greater levels

of individual spirituality or secularity, it is understandable that many universities have seen the neutral, bland and, to use Crompton's terminology, negatively managed space, perhaps supported by the separate Muslim prayer room, as the fairest and most parsimonious option for the faith provision.

However, this is not the only way forward, and the research has suggested that there are real and practical alternatives to the current prevailing models. Considering multi-faith spaces in the US in particular, there are a large range and diversity of options available to create more inclusive and positively managed spaces. Excellent examples of these are highlighted in Johnson and Laurence (2012) and Brand (2012), which range in size and scope as well as their origin (converted single space facilities, new builds or converted office / secular spaces) – but there is a consistency in these, in that they could usually be described as either a “single space” option or “multi-box” approach. I would define these terms as:

- “Single Space” option: the single space model proposes a single large space for all faith groups to use. This is the more traditional vision of a multi-faith space where all faiths will use the same room for their prayer needs.
- “The multi-box” option: this proposes a larger space, which has individual prayer rooms within it for each faith, as well as shared communal and social areas.

Both of these options can lend themselves to a far more positive (using Crompton's distinction) approach, and form the basis of our further analysis for this report.

## Analysis

The research has supported Crompton's assertion that the majority of multi-faith spaces are designed and managed in the “negative” way. There are understandable practical reasons for this, such as the real demands of ever decreasing resources and ever rising expectations, coupled with the relative simplicity the negative style of management brings through minimising as far as possible any inter-faith disagreement and offering the lowest possible likelihood of causing offence. Also from an architectural point of view, the negative style can be aesthetically pleasing and of architectural merit; it does not have to be bare walls and flat-pack furniture.

An example of this is the Meditation Space at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Designed by renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando the space is incredibly minimalist, featuring concrete walls in a circular shape. This, in Ando's words, “go beyond the differences of race, religion or nationality in order to respect the idea and the way of being individual's belonging to different cultures and societies. With this cramped space, I attempted to express peaceful, cohabitation on earth”.

Whilst this research has uncovered the very real reasons behind the negative approach, indeed finding from an architectural point of view why this might be beneficial, the remit of the work was to identify whether a positive approach was possible. We have identified that whilst a significant proportion of spaces are of the negative, bland, uninspiring style so berated by Crompton, a good number are more creatively, inclusively and positively designed and managed. A substantial number of these have been found in universities.

Consideration of a number of these positive spaces both in the UK and the US has led me to conclude that they fall, broadly, into two distinct styles. The first of these I have termed the “single space” model, which is where all faith and observance takes place in one space. A good example of these is the Interfaith Centre at Bryant University in Smithfield Rhode Island, USA. Designed by New York based architects Gwathmey Siegel Kaugam and built in

2010, the core of the building is a large circular space that does not, architecturally, draw on or make reference to any religious or faith tradition. Above eye line, the words “In the beginning” are printed in various different community languages around the circumference of the room.

Another example of the single space approach is highlighted by Johnson and Laurence (2010), that at Tufts University located in Medfield, Massachusetts, USA. Converted from a former hall, the space consists of a spacious worship and gathering space that uses natural elements, such as light and wood, to create a sense of warmth and tranquillity. The room has elements specific to particular religious traditions, although ones that would not be prohibitive to others, for example an inset shelf for holding ritual objects during worship, something of particular importance to Hindus and Buddhists. Around the central room, additional facilities support religious observance, such as ablution facilities for Muslims, offices for university chaplains and a kitchenette.

The second model is where distinct and separate facilities are provided for different faith groups, combined with shared social and meeting spaces under one roof – a model I have termed the “multi-box” approach. The first example of this approach, again identified by Johnson and Laurence, is Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA, which was developed during the renovation of an historic chapel. The chapel itself was renovated with new chairs, lighting, and so forth, with the lower level being converted from a previously dingy basement into a welcoming multi-faith centre. The heart of this is a multi-faith room that provides a flexible environment, not just for worship but also lectures, meetings and sharing of food. A further series of rooms are linked to the centre, including a multi-faith library, mediation space that has twice daily sessions, as well as weekly yoga and a separate prayer room with space for ablutions for the use of Muslims.

Another example also found in Massachusetts is at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), where the chapel was proving too small to serve the diverse religious needs on campus, so an adjacent building was renovated. This renovation concentrated on bringing light into the space as well as using colours, which while neutral were not bland. Spaces include a Jewish worship and study room, a Muslim prayer room, three dining / meeting rooms and three kitchens, one of which is Kosher. The building’s design and operation also allows for meetings, religious, educational and social events.

Both of these models have their advantages and disadvantages and we discussed them at length with student representatives drawn from our faith groups on campus as well as our chaplaincy team. Islam, a range of Christian traditions and Judaism were represented in these discussions. Whilst we acknowledge that this is not as comprehensive as we had hoped, this does represent the largest faith groups on many campuses and our Coordinating Chaplain was able to bring knowledge of all faiths to the discussions.

### The single space

There are a number of practical advantages to following the single space model. Firstly a single space, whilst by definition having to be reasonably large to accommodate faith observance, will be smaller than any form of multi-space design. This is a distinct advantage, particularly in city universities whose campus footprint is under constant development pressure. Also, such spaces are likely to be cheaper to develop and manage due to their smaller size and are also therefore simpler to plan and easier to create, either through new build or conversion of existing spaces. Revenue costs will be smaller as well, due to the small size of the space, but also as there are no additional activities taking place such as educational and community events.

The single space model also follows well from many of the findings in the literature. For example, by definition a single space would have to be more neutral (although not negative) than a multi-box option. As Gillat-Ray (2010) points out, society appears to be moving away from group and collective acts of worship to the increasing popularity of individual spirituality and reflection, and the simplicity and emptiness of a single space prayer room allows the user to fill the space with their own thoughts and experiences, taking from it what they need.

The single space model also forces multi-faith dialogue, as only one space requires negotiation of the space in terms of what is acceptable in the room, booking times and so forth. This conscious and unconscious negotiation of the space (Gillat-Ray, 2005), if managed sensitively, can serve to increase levels of interfaith understanding and have a positive impact on campus cohesion, especially if two faith traditions can successfully negotiate a way of using the space at the same time. The work of Verkaik (2012) into contemporary mosque design suggests that this is at least possible, and notes that what is important to prayer, particularly in Islam, is the right atmosphere; prayer does not require territory.

Our students of faith considered the single space option at length, agreeing that there were some definite advantages to the model but that to make it work in practice dialogue would be absolutely essential, not least to overcome the perception that certain faiths were dominating the space and effectively taking ownership of it.

Some of the examples discussed above were considered by the students and thought to be positive, although the words “In the beginning” as used at Bryant were seen as not having much meaning in most faiths beyond Christianity. The use of text as a form of decoration was widely encouraged, however particularly if it referenced themes common to all faiths such as peace, beauty and love. It was also noted that images of nature are perfectly acceptable to most faiths and that in Islam it is imagery of humans which is the most difficult to accommodate as these are prohibited.

The idea of the circular prayer space was very well received, as a circle was seen as being accommodating to all faiths, and if no fixed seating or furniture was present, each individual faith tradition could orientate its observance in the most appropriate direction. Indeed, many of the Muslim students suggested that decoration could actually be used in a positive manner in a circular room. It is crucial in Islam to know the direction of Mecca to orientate prayer, but this can be done by an arrow, a compass or another means. Also, as there can be no distraction in the eye line when in prayer, it was suggested that all the walls of a circular shared space could be decorated except a space in the direction of Mecca. Not only would this create an inclusive space for all, but would also provide Muslims with a direction indicator and ensure nothing in their eye line whilst praying.

The students also considered the difficulties of iconography from different faiths in the shared space, and agreed that this may be the most difficult challenge. The Christian crucifix, for example, is used as a focal point for prayer and often includes an image of Christ. Both the use of focal points and depiction of humans is prohibitive for Muslim prayer. Holy books, however, were seen as less of an issue, and Muslim students we spoke with saw little difficulties in praying in a space where Bibles were present, for example.

There was a genuine desire amongst students to find what they termed the “tolerance point” – that point in terms of iconography and decoration of a multi-faith space that is tolerable for all faiths. There was an agreement that this point exists and that it is not necessarily at the point of negative, bland, uninspiring spaces. The students we spoke with were very keen to stress that these were their opinions and they may not be speaking for even a small portion of people of their respective faith traditions. They recommended very strongly that each university consider its own student body and develop an approach that

works best given their unique circumstances. As one of the Muslim students noted, it is probably something that faith leaders should get together to discuss, but “the more people you ask, the more different responses you will get!”

As with anything, there are drawbacks of the single space model. The chances of getting the decoration right, for example, are slim because there is always a risk that some image will offend someone. Also, there is a real issue with certain types of religious iconography and paraphernalia in a multi-faith space, which means that certain things cannot be fixed in the room, which creates the need for storage. There is also the ever-present risk that some faith groups may be seen as dominating any space. Also, whilst our students were happy that text could be used as a form of decoration, they were concerned that this could also serve to make some people less welcome in the room. As such they were adamant that any text used in and around the room should be in English only.

The literature is less optimistic, and has suggested that a genuinely shared space is not possible because politics and human nature will always get in the way, with some groups always likely to try to exclude others in an attempt to assume ownership of the space (Gillat-Ray, 2005). Also, some writers (Gillat-Ray, 2005 and Brand, 2012) have suggested that “pollution” of the space is a very real issue for some people of faith, and the very fact that other faith traditions are using the same space renders them less sacred. However, it is worth remembering here that multi-faith spaces are not traditional places of worship, so are not sacred in that sense of the word, and effective management of the space by the university should alleviate any issues such as these.

### The multi-box

Like the single space option, there are a number of distinct advantages to taking a multi-box approach. A multi-box approach sees a range of dedicated rooms provided for different faith traditions all under one roof and linked by communal space such as kitchens, social spaces and library / study areas. By definition, this option is larger and provides a greater range of spaces for faith and religious observance to take place, as well as providing space for secular activities, private reflection and, via the social spaces, even greater opportunity for interfaith dialogue, both in a scholarly and social setting. Given that this option provides separate spaces for the different traditions it allows for the fitting of permanent religious iconography, paraphernalia and, where appropriate and required, furniture and seating. Moreover, this option will minimise any potential disagreements over allocation and perceived ownership of the space, while still providing many of the benefits of the single space option through the shared interfaith spaces.

Again, like the single space option, following a multi-box approach addresses many of the issues raised in the literature. Brand (2012) was concerned that the single space option may lead to awkward silences and enforced separation as different groups attempt to use the room at the same time, leading in turn to a separation. He views the opposite as being true from the social spaces of a multi-box approach, because the “rules” in a public social space are usually clearer and understood by all.

The practical considerations of sharing a faith space are also addressed neatly by the multi-box approach, which by definition will not lead to the perception of one faith dominating the entire space nor the need to negotiate iconography and store paraphernalia. Indeed, this was acknowledged by an AMOSSHE Futures discussion in May 2014, which concluded that practical considerations encourage universities down the route of providing separate facilities. The same meeting concluded with a reminder for colleagues that the Equality Act does not mean equal treatment for all, and thus taking both into account, a multi-box model with different sized areas for the different traditions might be a natural conclusion.



The multi-box option is certainly the most practical approach, and was the one favoured by the students we spoke with. They argued that many of the perceived barriers to sharing space are in fact real from a theological viewpoint, but that in addition to this, the multi-box option does alleviate considerably the practical challenges and negative perceptions of sharing a single space. One challenge in particular that would be addressed by the multi-box option was sound, and the fact that some faith observances require chanting or singing while others are performed in silence. The multi-box option, if properly soundproofed, makes this easier.

It was with an element of reluctance that the students we spoke with concluded that shared common spaces with separate prayer facilities are probably the best way to go, and interfaith dialogue could take place in the shared areas. They were very keen to stress, however, that all options needed to be considered carefully, and that each university must come to its own conclusion. As one of the participants commented: “religions coming together is easy, coming together in the same place of worship is hard.” This neatly reflects a recent quote from Vatican sources on positive interfaith dialogue between Catholics, Muslims and Jews, who, whilst acknowledging the very positive relations, observed that due to theological and liturgical differences followers of these three religions “do not pray together, but we do come together to pray.”<sup>5</sup>

There are some drawbacks with the multi-box option. By definition, such a facility would have to be (very) big, expensive to build and manage, resource intensive, and it may be difficult to have effective oversight of all of the activities taking place in the facility. Even if resources are available to build such a facility, finding the physical space on campus to site it is likely to prove a challenge, especially for city centre universities, and such an option may lend itself more to a new build rather than a conversion, which is likely to further complicate the search for a site. Also, despite having to be big, ironically the facility may not be big enough. Separate faith spaces are unlikely to be as big as a single space and this may lead to difficulties in accommodating large events – Jummah (Friday prayers) being the most obvious, although not the only example.

Whilst this option is likely to lead to less perception of unfairness in terms of any one faith dominating the space, there is still a risk that the likely and necessary provision of different sized rooms for different faith traditions may lead to a perception of unfairness. Also, the design of any multi-box centre would need to be very carefully thought through, as it is theoretically possible to continue adding additional rooms and spaces to accommodate every faith and philosophical belief, but equally possible to create a centre which effectively has Christian space, Muslim space and space for “others”. Both of these must be avoided.

Finally, the future-proofing of such a facility, due to its inherent lack of flexibility, is more difficult than with a single space. Changing student demographics may render parts of the facility unnecessary or not fit for purpose, leaving the university with a potentially large redevelopment cost.

## Recommendations

Building on all of the above, the following are practical recommendations for designing and managing university multi-faith spaces:

- Agree exactly what the university wants to develop before making a start, whether this is a single space or multi-box approach. As part of this the university should

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<sup>5</sup> [www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-to-host-pentecost-invocation-for-peace](http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-to-host-pentecost-invocation-for-peace)

consider the current and projected demographics of its students and staff, the space available on campus to develop the provision, what resources (such as funding and staff time) are available, and what facilities are available nearby in the community.

- Dialogue is absolutely key to developing and managing the provision. This dialogue should establish the cultural preferences and religious interpretations of existing, and if possible, prospective students. This will help identify possible options and tolerance points.
- Develop any space as near as possible to the centre of campus, thus making it a central part of the university both physically and metaphorically.
- The space should provide some “moment of awe” on entry to ensure it is psychologically separate from the wider campus.
- Agree the design and management of the space:
  - Any single space should be circular with no fixed or semi-fixed furniture, and moveable room dividers should be considered.
  - Central tables with chairs facing the front should be avoided, as this replicates the usual prayer arrangements for only a small number of faiths.
  - Some appropriate decoration can be included on the wall, but the area facing Mecca should be left blank both to provide a directional indicator and to ensure no distractions for Muslims in prayer.
  - Holy texts can be present in the room, but imagery is best avoided.
  - Iconography must be avoided, especially that depicting humans and those used as a focal point for worship.
  - Issues of sound should be addressed, both to create the appropriate ambience and to ensure proper sound proofing.
  - The principles apply similarly to the shared areas of the multi-box model, although there is greater scope to be more creative in these spaces, particularly in terms of iconography on display, due to the separate prayer rooms.
- The needs of all faiths on campus need to be considered so the room does not end up as a Christian and Muslim plus ‘others’ space.
- Any written materials should be in English unless absolutely necessary.
- Any name should be inclusive but also meaningful to the university; avoid clichés.

## Conclusions

The research has highlighted that faith remains a big issue on campus. Students in both the US and UK are becoming increasingly spiritual (Rockenbach and Mayhew, 2014) and evidence suggests that a slight majority of students still report having a faith (certainly this is the case at Northumbria), despite many universities being secular organisations. Moreover, Rockenbach and Mayhew’s research has suggested that students of faith often feel isolated on campus, that atheist students regularly report higher levels of satisfaction with the spiritual atmosphere on campus, and there are definite links between the quality of faith space and levels of student satisfaction. With all this in mind, the provision of faith space on campus continues to be relevant. However, this need not be something necessarily different or more complicated than other challenges facing universities. Rather, responding positively to the increasingly diverse faith needs of students should be seen as part of our ongoing

efforts to promote diversity and enhance the student experience, rather than some new or different problem.

Multi-faith spaces are becoming increasingly common across society and these do tend to be of the negative style described by Crompton. While these negative spaces can have some merit, architecturally at least, both the literature and the students we spoke with stress strongly that multi-faith spaces in universities are essentially different. Gillat-Ray (2010) notes that most multi-faith spaces are in places we pass through – airports, shopping centres and so on – and as such the ownership of these places is ambiguous and lends itself better to the simplistic and mechanistic negative style of management. University spaces are not the same, having a greater degree of permanency in users, and whilst she notes that this can lead to perceived ownership by one faith, it does provide us with a very real opportunity to do something different with our multi-faith spaces than the societal norm. Not least, we can avoid the observation that many multi-faith spaces tend to be “watered down” versions of Christian churches (central aisles, front focal points and suchlike) and create something unique to our unique settings. As one of our students put it: “this is very different from what you find in shopping centres and airports”.

University prayer and faith spaces do stand aside, both from conventional, sacralised and dedicated places of worship, as well as the more publicly accessible spaces. This gives us perhaps a unique opportunity to create a vibrant community facility on campus, which not only brings students together from different faith traditions, and none, but also provides the opportunity to feel part of the university as well as the wider student body, which can only help with student satisfaction scores and future alumni associations.

Undoubtedly there are challenges. Any decisions on what should be built or developed will be resource driven, and we must ensure any single space is welcoming and inclusive, and any multi-box model avoids becoming a ‘Christian and Muslim plus others’ facility. We must also acknowledge that every university is different and that no one model is applicable to all circumstances. The key to any build is to work with staff and students, and where appropriate the local community, to identify what is best for your university. It is vital to identify both what is needed as well as the particular faith traditions present in your institution. It is equally vital to identify exactly those points of tolerance between different faiths to ensure that any space is welcoming and inclusive to all without slipping into the negative style.

In conclusion, the research has shown that through effective design and management, coupled with dialogue and increased understanding of theology and cultural requirements, we can create more inclusive, exciting and above all positively managed multi-faith spaces on campus.

## Addendum

### Introduction and purpose

The report author recently had the opportunity to represent AMOSSHE on a study visit to Colorado, USA. This addendum to the main report considers whether the institutions visited during this trip are facing the same challenges as their counterparts in the UK, and what, if any, solutions they have in place.

### Religion in US universities

US higher education institutions, like those in the UK, are seemingly under no legal obligation to provide prayer space on campus. However, in an echo of UK legislation, the

exact rules around prayer on US campuses is somewhat elusive. In the US, whilst public entities such as universities may not establish religion or a specific religion, neither may they take steps to infringe upon the individual's free exercise of his or her religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup> As such, the approach to faith and prayer on campus in the US is as varied as it is in the UK and this variation was evident in Colorado.

### The AMOSSHE exchange

AMOSSHE has a long-standing reciprocal study visit arrangement with our equivalent US association NASPA. This year's study visit was to Colorado and constituted visits to a wide range of different types of institution, namely:

- Colorado State University
- University of Colorado – Boulder
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado – Denver
- University of Colorado – Colorado Springs
- Colorado College
- Pikes Peak Community College

This spread of institutions, ranging from commuter campus universities in metropolitan centres, through land-grant institutions to private liberal arts colleges, provided AMOSSHE delegates with a unique opportunity to visit the full range of US institutions. Wherever possible during the study visit, colleagues in the US were asked about their experiences of providing multi-faith spaces.

### Observations

All the universities visited were considering multi-faith or multicultural spaces on their campuses, and were actively either providing or developing some form of provision for their students. It was striking that many, if not all, institutions we visited were facing similar challenges to the UK and had adopted similar responses, including multi-faith spaces in student union buildings and multi-cultural lounges in communal areas.

The majority of universities we visited had a single or series of single-space prayer rooms. Interestingly, during our visit we did not observe any university operating the Muslim prayer facility model so prevalent in the UK, although we did get the impression that in some institutions the multi-faith spaces may have been *de facto* Muslim prayer rooms. It may be that the perceived Muslim dominance of multi-faith spaces observed in the UK is also an issue for our colleagues in the US. Indeed, this was suggested as a challenge at one university we visited, whose plans to develop a multi-faith space with attached Wudhu facilities did not gain approval because the governing committees (elected from the local community) were concerned that including such facilities would turn the facility into a Muslim prayer space. The university concerned is confident though that with some additional work this can be overcome.

The complexities of the US funding system do seem to have an influence on the development of the multi-faith model. Much university activity in the States is reliant on (often sizeable) donations from parents, alumni and the community, and one institution we spoke with was facing the particular challenge of trying to manage the differences between potential donors from different faiths in the development of their new prayer facility and

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<sup>6</sup> National Association of College and University Attorneys (2013), accessed at: [www.indiana.edu/~vpgc/docs/LegalUpdates/PrayerAtCollegeEvents\\_2013-5-3.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~vpgc/docs/LegalUpdates/PrayerAtCollegeEvents_2013-5-3.pdf)

encouraging them to accept a multi-faith model. This conversation was running alongside the ever-present challenge of facilitating dialogue between staff and current students from different backgrounds.

### Examples of good practice

We saw a number of examples of good practice, but two particularly worthy of highlighting are University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) and Colorado College.

#### University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Established in 1965 as an extension of the University of Colorado system, UCCS is a rapidly growing and successful campus. The University worked closely with its international



students to develop a multi-faith space at the heart of the university library, which is a room for “reflection, meditation and prayer.” While the university acknowledges some challenging conversations early on in the development of the space, including some particularly sensitive issues such as gender segregation, they view the process to have been highly beneficial and to have led to solid, close relationships with their international students.

The room at UCCS is of the traditional multi-faith space type, but it is particularly impressive for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is at the heart of the campus and in the middle of the library. Secondly, the space is very definitely a shared space, with all users expected to either share the space or fit their activities around each other (see image above). This supports the assertion made by Gillat-Ray (2005) that a single space can help encourage multi-faith dialogue, as it requires negotiation in terms of what is acceptable in the room. This conscious and unconscious negotiation of the space can serve to improve levels of interfaith understanding and have a positive impact on campus cohesion.



Thirdly, we saw evidence of holy texts and paraphernalia from different faiths (in this case Muslim prayer mats) being present on open display in the room (see image left). This supports the assertions made by the Muslim students in our consultation activities that it was possible for Muslim prayer to take place in a room where items from other faiths were present, as long as this is handled sensitively.

UCCS has shown that dialogue and sensitive management of the space can lead to provision that is open and more welcoming to all than the traditional approach, and they have achieved this in a small space at the heart of campus.

## Colorado College

A few miles away across the city of Colorado Springs, Colorado College is a smaller, liberal arts college, which takes a very different but equally impressive approach.

Colorado College has a Chaplaincy team in place, similar to those that can be observed in many UK institutions, and has a wide range of active student communities supporting many faiths and beliefs on campus, including Baha’i, Buddhism, Catholicism, Christian Scientists, Hinduism, Islam, Mormons and Orthodox Christians, amongst others.

The team is able to draw on a number of resources, including some unique faith spaces, notably Shove Chapel, which was built in the 1930s. Whilst visually referencing Winchester Cathedral, and even having one of its stones as a cornerstone, Shove Chapel is a non-denominational building that houses many on-campus activities, including religious services of many denominations (including Buddhism and Catholicism), as well as meetings for community organisations, the practice of traditional medicine and support groups.



Colorado College has been intentional in its approach of keeping the various faith traditions under one roof instead of having many separate buildings. They are also committed to reaching out to and including students who do not identify with a particular tradition and are exploring spirituality, other religions and connecting more deeply through integrative spiritual practices. Colorado College is also investigating options to further expand their faith provision on campus.

## Conclusions

In conclusion our colleagues in the US are facing many of the same challenges we are in the UK. Whilst numbers of students of faith, particularly non-Christian faith, may be smaller due to smaller numbers of international students, their voices are being heard and provision is being made on campus in the majority of cases.

Whilst the provision we observed tended towards the single space model, this was not universal, with all the universities we visited making provision in different ways, reflective of their unique histories and heritage and responsive to their current student population. What came across strongly was the importance of ongoing dialogue with students, staff and alumni of faith to develop an approach that works best.

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