



Interreligious Encounter and Civic Leadership In Spaces of Commerce & Transportation

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Abstract

This assignment aims at fostering leadership, especially in inter(religiously) complex situations. It calls upon the student to critically assess the role of leadership and agency in such situations in a growing interreligious and intercultural world. This assignment asks the student to analyze a case involving interreligious encounter at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. In particular, it asks students to assess the leadership of Steve Wareham, the airport director, who must respond to conflicting demands of customer service for passengers and religious accommodation for taxi cab drivers. The Under-Told story, “Muslims Face Challenges in Minnesota,” is utilized as a dynamic means to bring this case-study to life through video, audio, and storytelling.

Story Link

<https://www.undertoldstories.org/2007/05/18/muslims-face-challenges-in-minnesota/>

Learning themes/topics for consideration

In this learning module, students will:

- critically examine the complex role of religion in daily life as it intersects with civic, business, social, and personal responsibilities
- identify various stakeholders and their respective perspectives in an (inter)religiously complex situation
- evaluate leadership effectiveness of those in positions with responsibility and power
- propose constructive leadership solutions to a concrete problem in a religiously complex situation

Preparation

Instructors: consider following these steps to implement this learning module allowing for adaption to your specific course and curricular goals.

1. READ (before class) : “Driven By Faith” Case A, 8 pages (prepared by the Pluralism Project at Harvard University)
2. WATCH (before class) : “Muslims Face Challenges in Minnesota,” Under-told Stories Project / PBS Newshour, May 18, 2007 (00:07:30)
3. Optional: Consider analogous cases and background information on Minnesota’s Somali communities by reading:
 - [Nate Anderson, “Pharmacists with No Plan B,” Christianity Today, 1 AUG 2006](#)
 - [Maria Perez, “‘Good Catholic Male’ Pharmacist Allegedly Refused Medicine to Woman Having a Miscarriage,” Newsweek, 18 OCT 2019](#)
 - [Patrick Condon, “Minnesota leads nation in Somali Immigrants,” MPR News, 17 FEB 2006](#)
 - [Ibrahim Hirsi, “The Complicated Reality behind the Story of the Somali Community’s Success in Minnesota,” MinnPost, 14 AUG 2017](#)
4. Optional: WRITE (before class): Prepare a 300-500 word Case Study Analysis that addresses some or all the following questions:

First-Level Questions (Description):

1. What is the conflict in the case study?
2. Is this a case about religious diversity or immigrant assimilation? How would either of these characterizations of the case influence analysis of the dispute?
3. What more do you need to know (or wish you knew) about this case to properly assess it? Why?

Second-Level Questions (Stakeholders):

1. Who are the major stakeholders in this case? What are their major interests? What do they stand to gain/lose? With whom are you sympathetic or frustrated with?
2. Who does Mr. Wareham consider as stakeholders? Where in the case do you find this? Are there other stakeholders he might have overlooked?

3. What would it be important to understand about recent immigration to Minnesota, including Somalis?
4. How do the conflicting discourses within the Muslim community complicate the situation? What interests do these different voices represent? How should the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) officials respond to these different voices?
5. What role do the media and public opinion play in this situation? What weight should MAC officials give to these factors?
6. Case Study Documents A& B cite a few authors, journalists, and News outlets (e.g., Daniel Pipes, Fox News, etc.). How have these individuals, networks, and publications portrayed Islam in America in the past and how might it influence their assessment of this case?

Third-Level Questions (Prescription):

1. Did the video change your views or raise any questions in ways the text did not?
2. On August 1, 2006, how would you rate Steve Wareham's leadership effectiveness in his role as Airport Director. How would the various stakeholders assess his leadership? (e.g., taxi drivers, Vicki Tigwell, customers, etc.)?
3. What other stakeholders demonstrated leadership in this case? How would you rate their effectiveness in resolving this conflict (e.g., religious and community leaders)?
4. What solutions might you propose going forward to solve this problem?
5. Did the video or text make you think of any analogous cases in recent memory or that you've encountered in personal experience?
6. Can you propose any over-arching policies for analogous future conflicts that involve religious practice, public service, and conducting of commerce?
7. Should religious accommodations be made in the employment context? If so, what are the limits? Would making an accommodation in this situation be the start of a slippery slope?

Background

For an in-depth discussion, students should view the video, Case Study A, and optional readings ahead of time and write a low-stakes reflection based on the questions offered above as suggestions. Students are encouraged to identify "things I wish I knew, but the video and case-study do not provide" and then use some of the resources below to answer those questions.

- Case-Study Document B for conclusion of the case (provided by the Pluralism Project)
- [Barbara Pinto, "Muslim Cab Drivers Refuse to Transport Alcohol, and Dogs" ABC NEWS, published 26 JAN 2007](#)
- ["Muslim cab drivers lose round in court," MPR NEWS, published 9 SEP 2008](#)
- [Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is It O.K. to Fire a Muslim Driver for Refusing to Carry Wine?" New York Times, published 19 JUL 2017](#)
- ["Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center](#)

- [“Being Muslim in the U.S.” Video, Pew Research Center, 2018](#)
- David J. Walz, “Conscience Clauses, Title VII and the Religious Right of Refusal to Performing Tasks in the Workplace,” *The Journal of Law in Society* 19, no. 1-2 (2019).

Discussion Questions

You may consider using the discussion questions assigned to the students prior to class (see list above), however you may decide to focus on only one or two during class.

This study guide was prepared by Hans Gustafson, director of the Jay Phillips Center and faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas (hsgustafson@stthomas.edu) and Elinor Pierce, research director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University (epierce@fas.harvard.edu)
