

Enhancing Spiritual Capital on Campus: Practical Action Steps for Improving Campus Spiritual Climate

By Leslie M. Schwartz

In this article, Schwartz helps educators clarify, consider, collaborate, connect, and create their own spiritual practices to enhance spiritual capital on their campuses. Through sharing five practical action steps to create a Spiritual Action Plan for their institutions, educators can begin to engage in this important work today as they take positive steps to increase their institution's spiritual campus climate.

Finding A Place For Spiritual Capital On Campus

As I walk along the main quad at the University of Illinois during the first week of the semester, I am among a sea of hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and other visitors making their way to their next class, meeting, or engagement. Life is constantly moving all around me at a hectic pace, hardly leaving any space for contemplation – or even conscious thought – about what I'm off to next. And I can almost guarantee that my students' lives aren't any slower!

As a leadership educator and mindful human being, it seems to me that if we are to create lives of significance that are grounded in a deeper purpose, then we need to also create space to consider what guiding beliefs and values shape our lives and what purpose we are working so hard to achieve. While there are many components to this process, starting in our higher education institutions where young adults are creating their lives every day seems obvious.

Many researchers and educators agree that spirituality should have a central place in our institutions, and it is up to individuals within our colleges and universities to infuse spirituality to amplify our campus climates (Astin, 2004; Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 2006; Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm, 2006; Nash and Murray, 2010; Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner, 2010). Taking this work a step further, I argue that we can actually *enhance* spiritual capital, both on individual levels and the larger institutional level, based on the individual and collective action we undertake today.

Zohar (2010) defines *spiritual capital* as the wealth, the power, and the influence that we gain by acting from a deep sense of meaning, our deepest values, and a sense of higher purpose. She further explains that by developing *spiritual intelligence* – the intelligence by which we build spiritual capital – we can seek meaning in our lives and act in accordance with our deepest values as we lead lives committed to service.

Taking these concepts of spiritual intelligence and spiritual capital and creating space for them to flourish within our institutions is imperative for the short- and long-term health and vitality of higher education. By intentionally considering one's current campus climate and specific spiritual practices that can be integrated and implemented on various institutional levels, the groundwork can be laid to transform our colleges and universities into spiritual strongholds, starting on the individual level with personal awareness and initiative.

Creating A Spirituality Action Plan

Take a moment to consider your current campus climate. What does it feel like to work there as a faculty or staff member? Are you spiritually encouraged and enlivened on a daily basis? Are you engaged in work that *really* matters to you and to your students? What about how students feel on campus? Are they free to express their core spiritual and religious identities without judgment or consequence? Is there an attitude of curiosity that exists so issues of religious, faith, and spirituality can be openly discussed and explored in and outside the classroom? Sit with these questions for a moment and really get a sense of what atmosphere currently exists on campus.

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, there is room to improve the spiritual climate on your campus. The following five components are practical action steps that educators and administrators can use to begin this work today to help *clarify, consider, collaborate, connect, and create* their own spiritual practices. The following sections of this article detail steps and strategies to create a personal, departmental, or even campus-wide Spirituality Action Plan. While it takes time for the roots to grow deep to support sustainable institutional transformation, the seeds that are planted now within our institutions are a necessary starting point for future growth.

Action Step #1: Clarify Our Own Thinking About Spirituality

To begin this work on campus, we must first do our own “self work” to determine what we truly believe about spirituality and its place within higher education. The views on

this topic run the gamut, from those that strongly feel there is no place for individual spiritual expression to others who seek a true integration between their spiritual practices and their work. Knowing how you feel about this topic will lay the groundwork for whatever you do moving forward. Consider the following reflection questions to help you clarify your personal thoughts:

- *Why spirituality is important to you within your current role on campus?*
- *How does exploring spirituality, meaning, and purpose connect to undergraduate student development?*
- *What kinds of spiritual expression are appropriate on a college campus by faculty, staff, and students? What do you consider inappropriate?*

Action Step #2: Consider What Entry Points Exist

After we have clarified our own personal views on spirituality, it is time to consider what entry point exist in our departments or fields for integrating spirituality into our current responsibilities or spearheading new initiatives. Put yourself in the space of creative idealism for a moment: *What vision do you have for your campus as it relates to spiritual practices?* This could be something as simple as asking all the faculty in your department to consider using more reflective and contemplative practices in their pedagogy, or as broad as opening an interfaith center on campus so all students, faculty, and staff would have a safe place to share their spiritual identities and educate others. Whatever your vision is, take it and break it down into feasible steps so you can begin to make headway to create it. You may find the following reflection questions helpful as you get started:

- *What is your institution currently doing to promote spiritual exploration on campus? What gaps exist that need to be filled to make your vision a reality?*
- *What opportunities do you have within your institutional role/position to foster students' search for meaning, purpose, and faith?*
- *What programs, policies, and practices can be implemented on your campus to include spirituality in the higher education curriculum and co-curriculum?*

Action Step #3: Collaborate With Other Colleagues

Now that we have an idea of where we want to go, it's time to get others invested and excited about this vision for enhancing spiritual capital on campus! Consider what colleagues on campus would be helpful to collaborate with to brainstorm these entry points and create action plans for moving forward. Finding someone who shares your vision and can add to it to make it even stronger will help you as you begin this work. You may consider the following reflection questions to guide you as you connect with others:

- *Who else is engaged and involved in this work on your campus?*
- *What types of individuals would help make your vision a sustainable success on campus?*
- *How will you approach these colleagues to share your vision for campus? Be prepared for them to resist collaborating or supporting you just as much as you should be prepared for them to share in your excitement.*

Action Step #4: Connect With The Appropriate Administrators And Stakeholders

Creating successful collaborative partnerships will further grow and sustain this work within our institutions. Once you have garnered support for your vision, it is also helpful to consider other administrators and stakeholders that you will need to get on board in order to turn your vision into a reality. With the colleagues you are collaborating with, determine others that you will need to connect with to help move this work forward. Together you can use the following reflection questions to help you brainstorm:

- *Who are the power players that would make or break your vision?*
- *What is the best way to approach these individuals and share your vision with them?*
- *How will you handle rejection of your vision and reframe your work so it doesn't stay at a standstill if it is not supported by others at this time?*

Action Step #5: Create Spiritual Practices

Depending on how the conversations go with the administrators and stakeholders you identified in step four, you may need to regroup with your colleagues in order to figure out where to go from here to move this work forward. If you received negative responses, don't let other individuals' disapproval of your vision halt this important work; your creativity and resourcefulness combined with the vision you have for your campus is crucial for enhancing students' success and spiritual development.

However, you must also abide by the wishes of your supervisors and those around you in order to build positive awareness around spirituality on campus and not stifle this work before it starts. Rather than taking on the entire campus at this time, this is a unique opportunity to refine your vision and start smaller by taking steps that are within your power and control, such as tailoring a course you already teach to include topics that help students clarify their own beliefs and values; asking students "Big Questions" around meaning, purpose, faith, and spirituality as you advise them (Parks, 2000); and sharing your personal spiritual journey when appropriate with colleagues and students, among others.

If you received positive responses from the conversations you had, continue working with your colleagues and administrators to implement your vision, one step at a time, as you enhance the campus spiritual climate. The following reflection questions may help you clarify your plan as you move forward with this work:

- *What is the next step in this work? Consider what is realistic for your campus at this time.*
- *What is the scope and timeline for implementing our vision?*
- *How will you evaluate this new endeavor to measure how the campus spiritual climate and spiritual capital is impacted in the short- and long-term?*

The table below also may provide a helpful resource along with these reflection questions to help you start creating a Spirituality Action Plan that is feasible to implement at your institution given your current campus climate.

TABLE 1: Spirituality Action Planning Guide

Questions	Notes	Next Steps
1. What seems realistic for your particular campus? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe how you start this work given your institution's needs and campus climate.</i> 		
2. Are there colleagues here or on your campus that you can collaborate with to get this work started? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consider who you will need to connect with and when you can do this.</i> 		
3. What obstacles, challenges, or barriers currently exist in your campus climate to prevent new initiatives from starting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brainstorm strategies for overcoming these issues given your available resources</i> 		
4. What is a realistic timeframe for implementation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>...next 6 months?</i> • <i>...next year?</i> • <i>...next five years?</i> 		
5. What is one thing you can do today to get this work started?		

Spirituality Starving Or Spiritually Hungry?

Based on our current higher education context and challenges we are facing, one might ask: Are our college and universities spiritually *starving* or spirituality *hungry*? Our research and practice has led us to see both angles through engaging with institutions who are hesitant to integrate spirituality on campus and those that welcome spiritual initiatives with open arms. Determining where your institution falls on this spectrum is important when considering what institutional entry points exist and what other individuals you can collaborate with as you move forward.

These five action steps and Spirituality Action Planning Guide offer starting points for you as you begin to consider your personal role in fostering spiritual capital on campus. You may use these steps and reflection questions in ways that are helpful for you and your campus as you move forward with this important work. Another helpful resource is the forthcoming institutional guidebook on *Promising Practices for Integrating Spiritual into Higher Education* that will be available through the *Spirituality in Higher Education* Project in the near future.

If you have any thoughts, reflections, or examples of spiritual practices you are integrating into your campus that you'd like to share, please contact us at spirit@ucla.edu. We wish you luck as you continue to be positive change agents on your campuses. Your students, faculty, and staff will be better because of all you do today.

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