

BEECKEN FAITH & LEADERSHIP

Annual Report 2025-2026



@LSEfaithcentre

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The LSE Faith Centre seeks to bring religious identities from the margins of campus life to the centre of student experience and learning. The Beecken Faith & Leadership programme is the LSE Faith Centre's flagship extra-curricular student programme, designed to enable the next generation of leaders to positively engage with religious difference and build a more peaceful global society.

By drawing on the expertise of secular and religious contributors, our participants cultivate dialogue skills and imaginative religious literacy whilst critically addressing issues of global concern. Built around facilitated dialogue, participatory workshops and expert-led panels each module consists of 4-6 evening sessions and culminates in a half-day workshop. Students had the opportunity to apply and participate in any combination of the modules. Participants who completed at least one module were then invited to attend a weekend residential leadership retreat.

Delivering an interfaith programme against the backdrop of increasing global conflict and rising Antisemitism and Islamophobia has continued to be challenging yet increasingly urgent. The Faith Centre has continued to be a active participant in the LSE Campus Relations Working Group. This additional responsibility meant our team not only successfully ran the programme with 64 students, but also provided feedback directly to LSE leadership on the experiences and needs of students, contributing to wider campus relations work.

Over 90
students applied
to the
programme this
year

The religious
backgrounds of
students included:
Agnostic, Buddhist,
Christian,
Hindu, Jewish,
Muslim, Sikh,
Spiritual & non-
religious

Students from
21 countries
participated in
the BFL
modules

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PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The Beecken Faith and Leadership programme is built on four pillars: Imaginative Religious Literacy, Resilient Perspectives, Identity Formation and Relationship Building. All the programme sessions are oriented towards developing these pillars as foundational learning outcomes for participants.

OUTCOME 1: IMAGINATIVE RELIGIOUS LITERACY

Participants should:

- Develop an applied understanding of the major world faith traditions, learning beyond rote knowledge of 'core beliefs and practices' to gain an understanding of how faith perspectives shape worldviews and lived experience.
- Gain familiarity with the language and reference points of different faith traditions.

OUTCOME 2: RESILIENT PERSPECTIVES

Participants should:

- Develop holistic approaches to solving complex problems.
- Practice making decisions in charged contexts where problems may seem 'zero-sum' or unanswerable.
- Appreciate the wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives within a given situation.

OUTCOME 3: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Participants should:

- Develop lasting and meaningful relationships with their programme cohort, in particular across different perspectives and identities
- Become active within the LSE Faith Centre Alumni network of global changemakers

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OUTCOME 4: IDENTITY FORMATION

Participants should:

- Cultivate curiosity of other identities and a willingness to explore emerging aspects of their own through empathy and humility
- Develop confidence in their own identity and their willingness to share it with others

What I found most challenging was that at times I felt the need to defend my religion when it felt like it was being attacked. In the moment, some questions made me uncomfortable and I took them personally. Looking back, I realise people were asking genuine questions rather than criticising Islam. I also realised that part of the difficulty was that I did not always have the knowledge to explain my faith clearly. How I processed this was learning more about my religion, understanding why certain things are prohibited, the wisdom behind it and how to communicate this to people effectively. That process helped me improve my communications skills and engage with people more calmly.

Fatima, MSc student in Data Science



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MODULE DESCRIPTIONS **RELIGIOUS IMAGINATIONS IN** **TODAY'S WORLD**

This module builds understanding of the fundamental imaginative foundations of different religious traditions and explores how faith influences the public sphere. The module featured diverse panels on various topics and a final workshop focusing on developing skill and confidence in dialogue across difference.

Session 1: Introduction to "Religious Imaginations"

Contributor: Rev Prof James Walters, Director, LSE Faith Centre

Session 2: What is Truth?

Contributors: Rabbi David Mason, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality; Dr Iman Dawood, LSE; Sachi Patel, SOAS, Suryagupta, London Buddhist Centre

Session 3: What is Justice?

Contributors: Bishop Mike Royal, Churches Together in England; Karuna Priya, Akanista Wellbeing & Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, University of Birmingham

Session 4: What is Freedom?

Contributors: Rehman Chishti, former Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief; Josh Cass, independent FoRB consultant; Maryam Kanwer, Human Rights Activist

Session 5: Tools for Dialogue Workshop

Contributors: Jessica Hazrati, LSE Faith Centre

Session 6: What is Effective Leadership?

Contributors: Ana França-Ferreira, Centre for Theology and Community; Councillor Sunny Brar, Redbridge Council

Session 7: Navigating Controversial Conversations

Contributor: Jessica Hazrati, LSE Faith Centre

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PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

"In BFL conversations, I listened to people in a new way. It is as if I heard people talking from their soul and since then noticed this perception carry into non-religious conversations with people outside of BLF. Furthermore, my comfort level and ease in discussing the faith experiences of others grew. The programme increased my curiosity and joy for other faiths, which I believe will foster my ability me to connect with people throughout my career and life."

"BFL has given me a chance to practice engaging in and facilitating conversations across disagreements. It has helped me interact with my own faith and feel as though I'm representing my faith in a safe space where I can teach others. Above all, it's made me feel as though I am an interfaith leader."

"One of the most challenging aspects has been engaging openly with perspectives rooted in fundamentally different belief systems while resisting the urge to immediately evaluate or "solve" them. I'm used to analytical frameworks, so sitting with ambiguity and genuinely listening without reframing everything into policy or economics required a shift."



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MODULE DESCRIPTIONS

RELIGION & CLIMATE CHANGE

This module grounds participants in the reality of the climate crisis, exploring faith perspectives as an imaginative resource and developing faith-inspired initiatives across religious differences to address the major issue of our time. The module consisted of group discussions, scriptural reasoning, participatory workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities.

Session 1: Introduction to "Religion & Climate Change"

Contributors: Rev Prof James Walters & Dr Hanane Benadi, LSE Faith Centre

Session 2: Religion and Climate Policy

Contributors: Monica Maghami, Baha'i community; Shantanu Mandal, Brahma Kumaris community; Priscilla Garcia, University of Cambridge

Session 3: Interfaith Youth Summit

Hosted by Faith and Belief Forum and the LSE Faith Centre

Session 4: Faiths for Climate Justice

Contributor: Shanon Shah, Faith for the Climate

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PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

"BFL improved my confidence by giving me a structured but non-assessed space to speak about climate change through faith and values, without feeling like I had to "get it perfect." The scriptural reasoning approach helped me practise articulating my views clearly while also listening closely to others' traditions. I noticed a real shift in my leadership skills during the sessions on communication and mobilisation: I became more comfortable facilitating discussion, summarising different viewpoints, and helping the group move from reflection to action."

"After the Youth Interfaith Summit, I felt more confident about engaging in climate conversations in my own communities, and more able to think strategically about influence, partnerships, and next steps rather than just sharing opinions."

"A new concept I learnt through this module was how faith traditions can operate as policy actors rather than only moral voices. In our session with the guest speaker, the Bahá'í faith was discussed as an example of a tradition that links spiritual principles (like the oneness of humanity and justice) to practical forms of social action and public discourse. This reframed "religion and climate" for me: it is not just about personal stewardship, but about building legitimacy, coalitions, and long-term capacity for change."



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MODULE DESCRIPTIONS CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

This module explores some of the key tools and perspectives necessary to understand effective conflict transformation, particularly within religiously charged contexts. The module featured workshops exploring the work of John Paul Lederach, storytelling exercises, exploration of the Faith Centre's Tools for Dialogue and a panel discussion.

Session 1: Introduction to Conflict Transformation

Contributor: Rev Prof James Walters, LSE Faith Centre

Session 2: Facilitating those in conflict: Habit of a reconciler

Workshop led by Rose Castle Foundation

Session 3: Panel discussion: Conflict in the Algorithm: How Emerging Technology Shapes Our Behaviour

Contributors: Ella Jones, LSE Faith Centre; Dr Beatriz Lopes Buarque, LSE100; Charlie Buckley, Harper Automation; Zahed Amanullah, Institute of Strategic Dialogue

Session 4: Facilitating those in conflict: Peacebuilding in practice

Workshop led by Who is Your Neighbour?

Session 5: Facilitating those in conflict: Tools for negotiation

Workshop led by Rodeemos el Dialogo

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PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

"What I found most challenging was the difference between the Climate Change and Conflict Transformation modules. In the climate module, there was often more shared ground. In the conflict module, I encountered views I did not agree with, which pushed me to question some of my own assumptions. Hearing from people personally connected to regions affected by conflict was especially important. I processed this by listening more carefully, reflecting after discussions, and accepting that disagreement does not prevent collaboration."

"I really enjoyed the panel on AI because we had a broad range of backgrounds on the panel, which made for an insightful conversation."

"Hearing about how people have used inter-faith dialogue to transform conflicts has given me a greater appreciation for the way that leaders may be most effective by bringing people together and inviting difficult conversations when necessary."

"BFL creates space to engage with many of the issues we explore in our classes, such as inequality and injustice, but through a lens that invites the whole of a person's identity into the conversation. It moves beyond simply saying, 'I believe in justice,' to 'I believe in justice because of my background, experiences, and values.'"



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RESIDENTIAL RETREAT

Students who had completed one or more modules were invited to a weekend retreat at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine. The weekend focused on developing leadership skills and the participants' commitment to the values of the Beecken Faith & Leadership programme, ensuring that they felt prepared to take the next steps in their leadership journey and confident about how their faith will motivate the work they do.

Day 1

Session 1: Sociogram Icebreaker & Jungian Leadership Archetypes

Led by Revd Prof James Walters

Session 2: Sharing our Stories of Formation, Function, and Flux

Led by Jessica Hazrati

Session 3: Exploring Leadership through Scriptural Reasoning

Led by Revd Prof James Walters

Day 2

Session 4: Hold a Radical Center in Divided Times

Led by Rebecca Brierly, St Ethelburga's

Session 5: Reflection and Leadership Pledges

Led by Jessica Hazrati

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PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

My highlights from the retreat were Jungian Archetypes activity - I felt empowered and supported, the Storytelling and Scriptural Reasoning sessions - I felt expanded, and the Depolarisation workshop - I loved the framework and practice and left feeling grounded.

The most transformative and novel exercise was scriptural reasoning. I have never done something like that and don't think there are any circles that I know wherein such an exercise is done, it was very valuable to have it.

I've really enjoyed BFL overall. It has been a great opportunity to meet new people, hear new perspectives, and learn about new techniques and frameworks to incorporate into dialogue. I look forward to sharing my faith with others outside of the programme and holding space for others to share theirs.

My experiences at LSE have encouraged me to think more critically about my own understanding of my faith. Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds has helped me recognise that faith is sustained not only through logical reasoning but also through emotional conviction and lived experience. Engaging with others has deepened, rather than weakened, my belief.



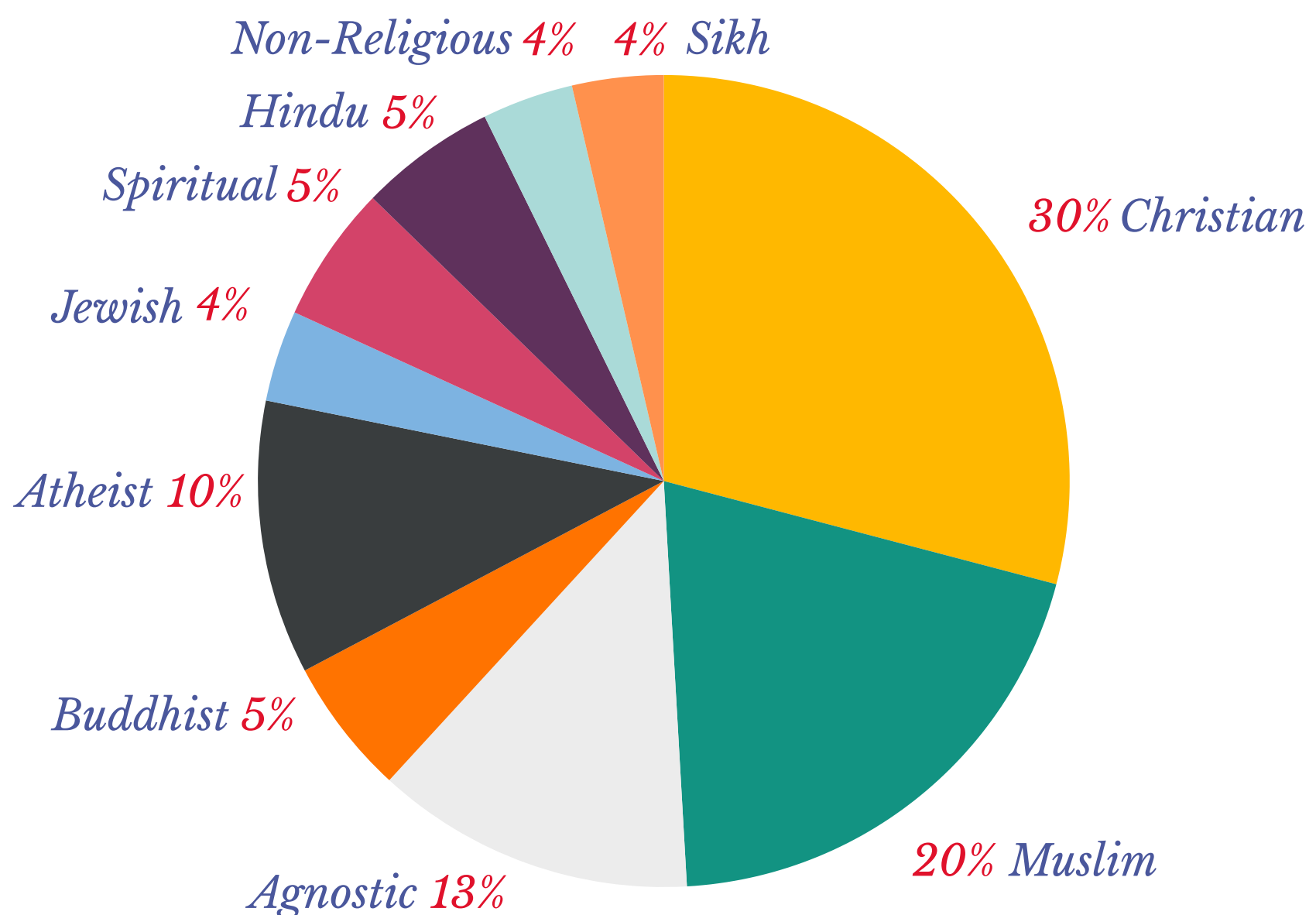
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PARTICIPATION

Over the whole course 64 students completed at least one BFL module. Of these, 27 students participated in at least 2 or more modules (a 50% increase) and 17 participated in the residential retreat.

9 faith and non-religious belief groups were represented: Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Christian (Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal, Protestant), Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Non-Religious.

The breakdown of students by faith:

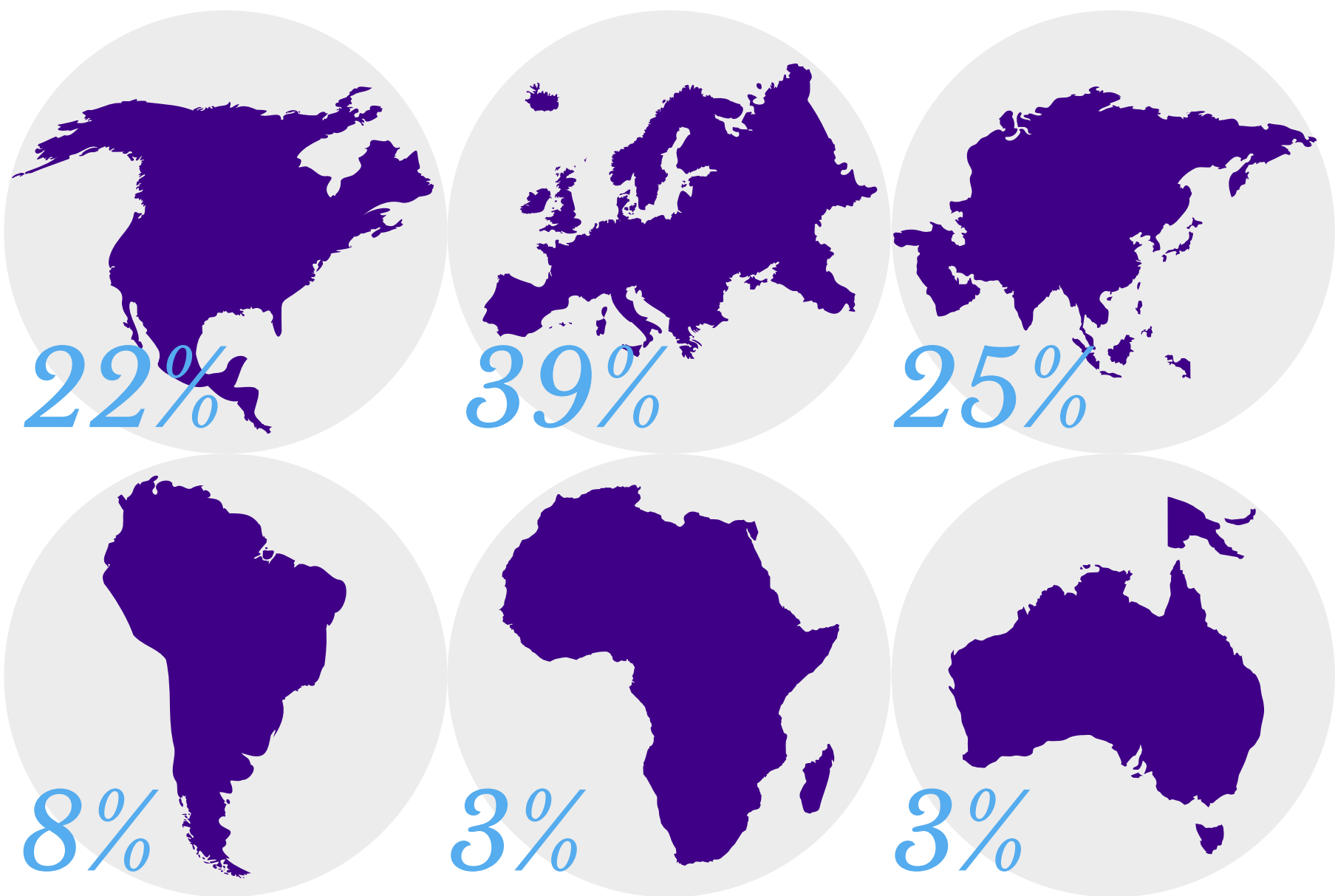


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PARTICIPATION

21 nationalities or national identities were represented:

- American
- Australian
- Botswanan
- British
- Canadian
- Catalan
- Chinese
- Colombian
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Hong Kong
- Indian
- Italian
- Kenyan
- Pakistani
- Singaporean
- Slovakian
- Taiwanese
- Turkish



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PARTICIPATION

A breakdown of participation in each module, with additional demographic information is provided in the table below.

Modules	1: Religious Imagination	2: Faith-based Climate Action	3: Conflict Transformation	4: Residential retreat
No of applications	54	39	41	21
No of participants	36	28	34	17
Type of study	5% UG 95% PG	20% UG 80% PG	15% UG 85% PG	6% UG 94% PG
Faith background	Agnostic: 6% Atheist: 9% Buddhist: 6% Christian: 33% Hindu: 6% Jewish: 3% Muslim: 21% Sikh: 6% Spiritual: 6%	Agnostic: 8% Atheist: 12% Buddhist: 4% Christian: 42% Hindu: 8% Jewish: 4% Muslim: 20% Spiritual: 8%	Agnostic: 15% Atheist: 15% Buddhist: 3% Christian: 41% Hindu: 6% Jewish: 6% Muslim: 15% Spiritual: 3%	Atheist: 12% Christian: 50% Muslim: 31% Sikh: 3%
Members of Faith Societies	40%	32%	18%	18%

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PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

At the end of each module participants were invited to fill in a feedback form. We asked them to rate the following statements on a scale of “1 – strongly disagree” to “5 – strongly agree”.

- "Other religious traditions have a unique perspective on the way we should live our lives that my religion or belief system can learn from."
– Religious literacy measurement
- "I feel confident expressing and sharing my faith and belief with those outside of my religion or worldview."
• "I feel comfortable listening to worldviews or opinions that I disagree with."
– Interfaith confidence measurement
- "I understand how my values and/or religious ethos can shape my leadership."
• "I feel I have the skills to lead across difference."
- Leadership confidence measurement

The table below lists the average rate per measurement

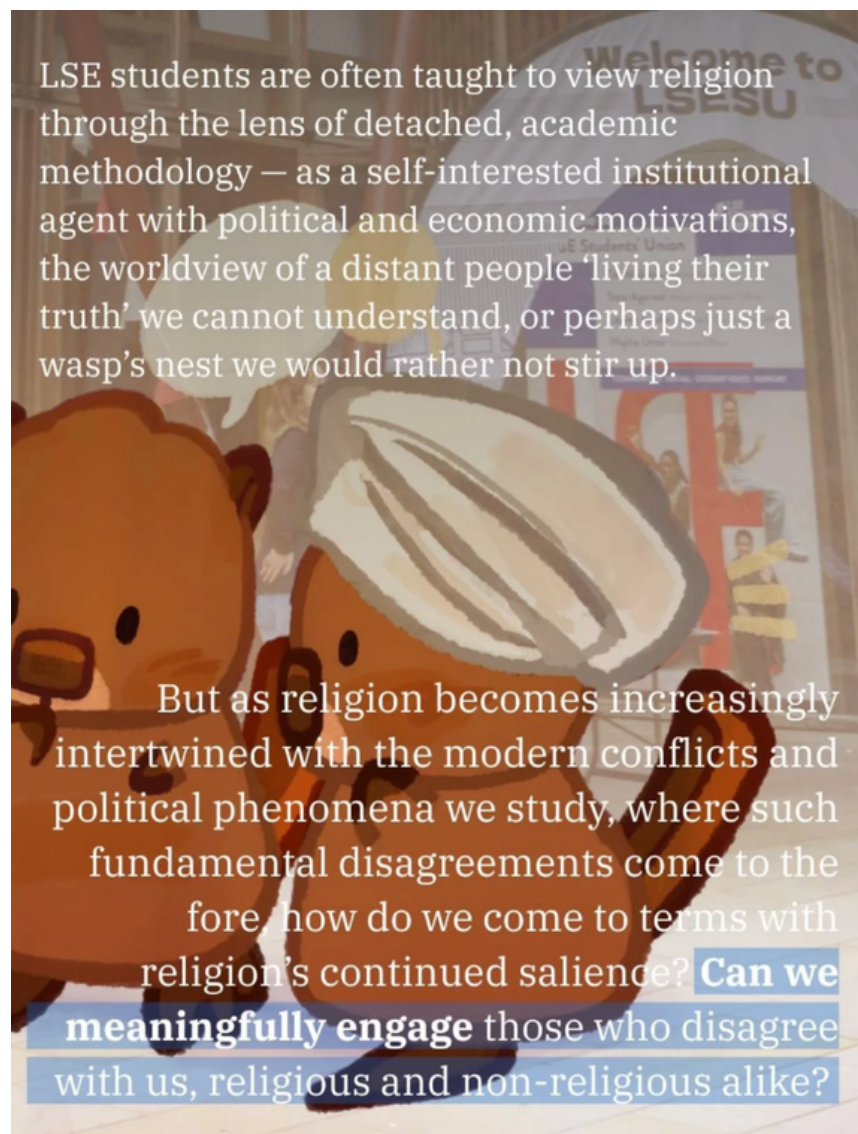
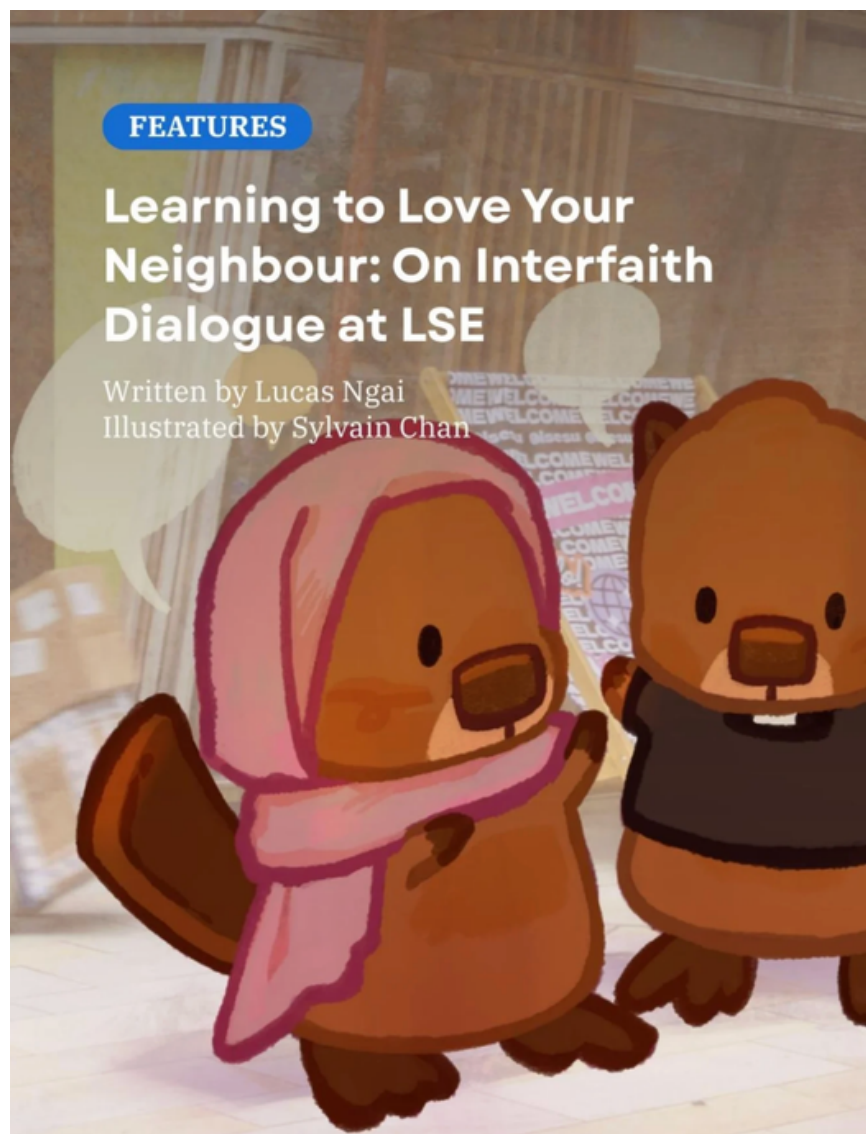
Module	No of responses	Religious literacy	Interfaith confidence	Leadership confidence
Baseline	107	4	4.5	4.3
1: Religious Imagination	16	4.4	4.9	4.8
2: Faith-based Climate Action	13	4.1	4.5	4.5
3. Conflict Transformation	7	4.7	5	4.9

100% agreed with the following statement, “If an alumni from this BFL module reaches out in 15 years to ask for a professional meeting, I would agree to meet.”

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BEAVER FEATURE

The BFL programme was covered by *The Beaver*, a student-run newspaper with high impact and trust amongst the students. Rev Prof James Walters was interviewed by the editor, along with several students from different religious backgrounds who provided their perspectives.



Interfaith dialogue is not only for people of faith. Jim acknowledges the potential difficulty for people with negative experiences of religion to engage in interfaith dialogue: “Those can be extremely damaging and that requires its own journey of healing [...] but [there’s also more to] this aspect of human life and identity.”

Amaiya, a Christian first-year Social Policy student, tells me how the questions her Muslim friends ask have only made her faith stronger: “It doesn’t make my faith weaker because I then do more research and have more evidence for the reasons I believe what I believe [...] If you do anything from a place of relationship and love, it’s so much easier to have conversations about this.”



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