

For Some, Religion Is Part of the College Experience



Some students find new ways to explore and express religious attitudes, ideas and beliefs at college

FAITH LAPIDUS: Welcome to AMERICAN MOSAIC in VOA Special English.

(MUSIC)

I'm Faith Lapidus. Today on our show, we play music from singer Lana Del Rey.

We also answer a question from Burma about the way Americans elect a president.

But, first we go to real college to hear how some students combine religion with their school life.

College Religious Life

FAITH LAPIDUS: Going to college is often a chance for young adults to explore ideas and beliefs different from those they grew up with. As they do, college students are finding new ways to express their beliefs. As we hear from

Christopher Cruise, American clergy say many young people are remaining true to their religious faith.

(SOUND)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: A traditional observance gives Indian students a chance to share their faith and culture with others. Many did that at this recent event, says Chandni Raja of the Hindu Student Organization at the University of Southern California.

CHANDNI RAJA: "Meeting other groups on campus and trying to get that dialogue going, while also maintaining our own communities as a strong place where people can come together."

Varun Soni works as dean of religious life at the University of Southern California. He says many students keep religion on their own terms.

VARUN SONI: "They're more interested, I find, in making religion work for them as opposed to working for it. So they interpret their religious and spiritual traditions in a way that makes sense for them."

Scotty McLennan is dean for religious life at Stanford University in California. He is also seeing a new openness.

SCOTTY MCLENNAN: "I think the most exciting thing that's happening is that students really are learning how to listen to each other across traditions, and they really are getting more interested in that kind of empathetic listening and presence to each other, hearing each others' stories."

Some students use religious traditions to support their beliefs. Others become less observant, but many want to share their faith and culture with others.

Omer Bajwa directs Muslim religious activities at Yale University in Connecticut. He advises Muslim students. He says they have many questions about the importance of faith.

OMER BAJWA: "In a time of increasing religiosity but also increasing secularism, where are the fault lines, and what are the tensions and what are the areas of conversation? I think we find common questions coming across."

Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann is senior associate dean for religious life at Stanford University. She says discussions in the classroom and with students from different religious traditions can lead to questions in a student's faith.

PATRICIA KARLIN-NEUMANN: "The question in my mind is whether that questioning leads to a falling off of commitment or a deepening of commitment. And my experience is that people who claim their religious traditions after having or in the process of being engaged with other people are far more inclined to see what they have as something precious."

Tahera Ahmad is associate university chaplain at Northwestern University in Illinois. She says interfaith service projects and community discussions are bringing students together at schools all across the country.

TAHERA AHMAD: "What I've seen on college campuses is that the young students who are from various faith backgrounds are coming together and not necessarily leaving their faith at the door, but not also wearing their faith on their sleeve, so to say, but finding some kind of balance as to saying, 'This is who I am. I am a Muslim, I am a Christian, I am a Jew. We're all coming together towards making the world a better place.'"

These clergymen and women say college students are growing in their faith by meeting and learning from those of other religions.

Electoral College

FAITH LAPIDUS: Our question this week comes from Burma. Ko Maw Gyi wants to know about the Electoral College. This is the name of the system Americans use to elect a president.

The Electoral College is made up of representatives from all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Electors are appointed representatives who promise to vote as the people of the state guide them. Different states have different laws on the appointment of the electors. In some states, the names of the electors appear on the ballot, below the names of the candidates.

The number of electoral votes in each state equals the number of representatives and senators in Congress from that state. This depends on population. So, states with more people have more electoral votes. In all, there are five hundred thirty-eight electoral votes. To become president, a candidate must win a simple majority, at least two hundred seventy.



AP

What this means is that it is possible for a presidential candidate to win the popular vote in the country but lose the election. This has happened four times. The most recent was in two thousand, when George W. Bush was elected to his first term in office. Five hundred thousand more Americans voted for Vice President Al Gore for president. But Mr. Bush received more electoral votes.

This is because forty-eight of the fifty states have a winner-take-all electoral votes policy. The candidate who wins the highest number of popular votes in a state receives all of that state's electoral votes.

Critics of the Electoral College say it is undemocratic, difficult to understand and dangerous to the political system. Supporters say it helps to guarantee the rights of states with small populations. They say it also requires candidates to campaign in many states, not just those with large populations.

There have been hundreds of proposals in Congress to end or reform the Electoral College. But amending the Constitution is a difficult process.

Ko Maw Gyi in Burma also asked about American presidential debates. We will answer that question next week.

Lana Del Rey

FAITH LAPIDUS: Twenty-five year old singer and songwriter Lana Del Rey has an album set for release Tuesday. But, she already has been getting a lot of attention with the release of several singles and music videos. Shirley Griffith has more.

(MUSIC)

SHIRLEY GRIFFITH: Lana Del Rey's "Video Games" was first released in June of last year. Her smoky, sexy sound and the somewhat strange song became popular on the World Wide Web. So did her video that went with it. The artist says she made it herself, using film and video clips she found on the Web. The video is an interesting, piece filled with images that bring old Hollywood and new love to mind.



AP
Lana Del Rey

In October, "Video Games" was re-released as a single from her new album "Born to Die." The album is supposed to come out on January thirty-first. However, it was leaked on the Internet Tuesday.

"Blue Jeans" is another single from the new recording.

(MUSIC)

Lana Del Rey was born Elizabeth Grant in New York City. She grew up in Lake Placid, New York, but returned to the city to begin her music career. She told a reporter she often performed in small Brooklyn music clubs on nights when anyone was permitted to get on stage.

We leave you with her performing the title song from her new album, "Born to Die."

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: I'm Faith Lapidus. We're thinking about starting a new feature on American Mosaic. It would offer advice to people who have a problem in a relationship. It could be a problem in a romantic relationship, or with a family member or a friend, or at school or work.

We would talk to experts for advice and gather opinions from users of our social media sites. We would give a brief summary of the problem but never identify you. We would give our answer online and on radio during our program AMERICAN MOSAIC.

To test this idea, we need your help. If you have a relationship problem write to us about it. Give us enough details to understand the situation. Make sure you tell us how old you are, whether you're a man or a woman, and the country you live in. Write to mosaic@voanews.com and type "Relationship" in the subject line.

This program was written by Christopher Cruise and Caty Weaver, who also was our producer. We had additional reporting from Mike O'Sullivan.

Join us again next week for music and more on AMERICAN MOSAIC in VOA Special English.