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When Bible and science interact: teachers' pedagogic and value challenges in teaching religious minority students in higher education settings

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ABSTRACT

The integration of highly religious minority students into institutions of higher education poses significant pedagogical and value challenges for students and teachers alike. We offer a framework for analyzing such challenges, distinguishing between practical concerns, identity issues and value conflicts. By contrasting a deficit perspective to 'Diversity as resource', we argue that the latter enables teachers to utilize a collaborative knowledge model in class, surmounting some of the value challenges involved. We present the case of ultra-orthodox students in Israel who have recently entered the gates of higher education for the first time in this society's history. We analyze the narratives of 30 lecturers who teach this population. Most of them adopt a deficit perspective and see their role as academic gatekeepers, minimally adjusting content and pedagogy. A smaller group fosters cross-cultural dialog via a 'Diversity as resource' perspective. These findings lead to recommendations for successfully teaching highly religious students.

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1. Introduction

The enrollment of ultra-orthodox (Haredi) students in institutes of higher education is a new and intriguing phenomenon. Being an ultraconservative religious minority that has traditionally kept away from academic institutions, these students have recently begun to enroll in college programs en masse, for the first time in this society's history. For the professors who have begun teaching them, the encounter has raised a host of pedagogical and value challenges, which this paper will discuss.

We view this case study as part of a global issue: highly religious individuals (variously labeled ultra-religious, conservative religious or fundamentalist) in Western societies, especially women, are underrepresented in higher education worldwide (Oplatka and Lapidot 2012). As such, many end up in non-professional, lower income jobs, becoming an untapped potential for their society's growth or even a financial burden on it (United Nation's Gender Inequality Index 2014). In order to enable social and economic upward

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mobility, the integration of minority religious populations into the workforce via higher education is becoming a priority for policy-makers (Malach 2014). This paper focuses on the crucial role that college and university teachers play in such integration efforts. The patterns of integration are somewhat different for males and females; this paper focuses on those of female students.

The level and affiliation of student religiosity plays an important role in student satisfaction. One study found that the lower the social status of the students' religion, the less satisfaction they report at college (Bowman and Smedley 2013). Another study indicated that the more religiously committed students of a majority religion were the more likely they were to experience a negative diversity campus climate regarding religiosity (Mayhew, Bowman, and Rockenbach 2014). Although these studies were conducted in a North American cultural context, they are relevant to the Israeli situation as well: Ultra-orthodox Jews, while belonging to the state majority religion, are viewed as an extremist, minority group, and their social status is low (Achva Index of Alienation, 5.2014). There is, therefore, a reason to believe that they, too, are at risk of feeling alienated and unsatisfied at college.

Studies have highlighted the important role that college and university teachers play in the successful integration of low-status minorities into higher education. Culturally competent teaching has a powerful impact on the success and satisfaction of such students (de Beuckelaer, Lievens, and Bücker 2012). At times, the teacher herself is the 'other' in a classroom (Garner 2008) and students may view her with suspicion and mistrust. Such is the situation in the case we are discussing. The teacher may be the lone non-religious individual in an ultra-religious class, making cultural competency an imperative.

We start by presenting the case of Israeli ultra-orthodox women in higher education. Next, we offer a general analytic framework of practical issues, identity challenges and value conflicts for highly religious students and link them to pedagogies of diversity. We then present data from a study in which 30 professors who teach ultra-orthodox students discussed their teaching experiences. Finally, we offer policy recommendations, allowing the study's conclusions to be transferrable to other settings, such as Muslim and Christian fundamentalist college students.

1.1. The context: Ultra-orthodox women in the Israeli academia

Ultra-orthodox (henceforth UO) individuals comprise about 11% of the Israeli population and are one of its lowest socioeconomic status sectors (CBS 2011). They are the most highly religious in Orthodox Judaism, which is the most religiously conservative Jewish denomination. They have been labeled 'fundamentalist' by researchers due to their separatism and religious extremism (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003; Stadler 2009). Most UO Jews live in enclave communities, demarcated from the rest of society not only geographically but also by a powerful social support and control system that includes a separate educational system, a distinct and extremely modest dress code and gender segregation in the public sphere. Religious norms dictate that UO Jews cultivate large families; the current average is 6.5 children per family (Hleihel 2011). Women have traditionally focused on home and family so that their husbands can pursue religious studies. However, due to increasing poverty,[1] UO women have gradually undertaken the dual role of caring for the home *and* supporting the family. Job training for women

has been limited; until 15 years ago, hardly any UO women attended college, primarily because they avoided mixed-gender environments.

As part of an effort to increase UO workforce participation, governmental agencies began making higher education accessible to this population. In 2002 Israel's Higher Education Planning and Budgeting Committee set a goal of increasing the accessibility of higher education to the UO sector, by offering gender-separate academic programs, first through private colleges and then, in 2010, via state universities. As the interests of government, academia and the UO community converged, a dramatic shift took place. Between 2003 and 2012 the number of UO individuals attending institutes of higher education increased by 630% (Malach 2014). Currently, 30% of all UO women between ages 25–39 are students or hold an academic degree (Malach 2014). Most of these programs, and consequently most of the degrees acquired, are in education, social work, therapy, nursing, graphic design and similar fields which are considered acceptable professions for UO women, mainly because they can be practiced within UO communities or from the privacy of a woman's home.

We now turn to review the challenges of integrating religious minority students into higher education, using educational diversity theories as a framework.

1.2. Challenges of integrating religious minorities into higher education settings

We divide the challenges of integrating religious minority students in academic settings into practical, identity and value-domain issues.

1.2.1. Meeting practical needs

Meeting practical needs involves managing religious students' needs in terms of religious law and traditions as well as adjusting content and level of teaching to students' previous life experience. This includes making accommodations on campus for dietary laws, religious garb (e.g. head coverings), gender issues, religious holidays and spaces for prayer. It also involves helping students fill in knowledge gaps (e.g. use of computers and Internet, language proficiency, general knowledge, etc.). For some of these groups, co-ed education is unacceptable, raising the issue of accommodating gender-separate classes.

1.2.2. Identity challenges

Identity challenges include identity preservation which enables integration without assimilation (Sivan and Caplan 2003), combating prejudice, which is known to exist on campus toward visible religious minorities (Cole and Ahmadi 2003), and addressing issues of loneliness on campus. Although identity challenges are typically part of the college experience (Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett 2005), they are often intensified for ultra-religious students, who may come from protective and homogenous communities and whose unique identity may be highly visible due to their religious garb, such as head coverings (Bryant and Astin 2008). For students who were raised in highly segregated or secluded environments, the experience of moving out of an enclave community can be overwhelming. It may be the first time a student holds a conversation with a non-religious person or is required to defer to a secular authority figure.

1.2.3. Value conflicts

Value conflicts may be less visible than the previous two domains. Values that inform higher education include support for diversity, democracy, gender equality, critical thought, scientific progress, individualism, humanism and autonomy (Barnett 1990; Morrison 2001). These values also hold a revered position in Western society (Taylor 2007). Such concepts are often at odds with conservative religious ideals, which tend to stress tradition, submission to authority, collectivism and, for some, gender essentialism and fundamentalism (Saroglou, Delpierre, and Dernelle 2004). Moreover, attending college affects a change in value priorities in the direction of openness, liberalism and tolerance, followed by a diminishment of tradition values (Myyry, Juujärvi, and Pesso 2013; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). College experience also brings about a positive change in the endorsement of critical thought, proportionally more so if the student had rarely encountered cultural diversity before attending college (Loes, Pascarella, and Umbach 2012).

In the USA, conservative religious leaders have managed this value challenge either by rejecting higher education altogether (e.g. the Amish), by forming religious colleges with an independent accreditation system (e.g. the Fundamentalist Bob Jones University),[2] or by addressing practical and identity-level needs of religious students on an ad-hoc basis. This last strategy best characterizes the way UO leaders have been negotiating the recent UO entrance into institutes of higher education. In Israel, UO leaders require general colleges with a UO track to employ a religious 'supervisor'. This person will accompany daily activity on campus and manage any practical religious issues that may come up.

1.3. Cross-cultural pedagogical teaching choices

Cross-cultural competence involves culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, as well as skills for effective interaction with individuals from other cultures (de Beuckelaer, Lievens, and Bücker 2012). Such competence among teachers has important implications for the students, as cross-cultural clashes are likely to impede effective learning while a high level of cultural empathy, open-mindedness and a culturally sensitive pedagogical strategy contributes to culturally diverse students' satisfaction (de Beuckelaer, Lievens, and Bücker 2012).

What does teaching in a culturally diverse environment look like? Gordon, Reid, and Petocz (2010) found that teachers who work with students of diverse backgrounds utilize one of three strategies. They either *ignore* student diversity and expect minority students to 'fit in', *compensate* for the diverse characteristics of students by appropriate pedagogical action such as extra materials or exam time, or *utilize* the diversity of students as an essential pedagogical resource in class. Haggis (2006) suggested that some teachers hold a 'deficit view' of minority students and are concerned that they are 'dumbing down' their teaching, while others see in these students a resource and education opportunity, enabling others in the class to experience diversity firsthand.

Most policy recommendations (Ali and Bagheri 2009; Blumenfeld and Klein 2009; Oplatka and Lapidot 2012; Watt 2013) highlight the importance of providing for religious students' religious needs (the practical domain) and of creating religious support groups (the identity domain). Virtually no discussion to date has focused on value conflicts, which, to our assessment, lies at the heart of the integration process.

When considering the value domain in higher education in the context of religious diversity, a teacher can make various choices. One choice is to engage in 'value-neutral teaching', attempting to steer away from topics that imply value judgments or conflicts. This choice may minimize class conflict, but limits the applicability of the learning process to students' lives. It also leads, inevitably, to a focus on knowledge transfer, a strategy which Northedge (2003) specifically targets as ineffective in climates of higher education diversity. A second choice is to employ a deliberative approach and discuss value discrepancies openly. As part of this, teachers may construe the class as a joint knowledge-creating community, drawing on the experience of both teacher and students (Northedge 2003). A third possibility is to adapt the curriculum to the values and beliefs of the students while allowing the teacher's values to take a back seat. In the case of highly religious students, this may mean finding alternatives to such topics as evolution or psychoanalysis, and minimizing the role of critical thinking in class. Such a choice may compromise the teacher's integrity, while maximizing consideration for student values. With these options in mind, we turn to our study, to describe the value and pedagogical choices reported by lecturers of UO female students.

2. Method

The sample for this study included 30 non-UO academic professors of UO female students in two colleges: Ashkelon Academic College (henceforth AAC) – a general (non-religious) college with a special track for the UO population; and Mivchar College (henceforth MC) – a fully UO college which 'imports' lecturers from Haifa University and is under its academic management. Both colleges offer gender-separate tracks, but differ in policy and underlying ideology. MC is fully religious, whereas AAC is a general college where religious students meet non-religious ones around campus; MC requires all of its teachers to dress modestly, whereas AAC has no formal dress code for teachers. Respondents answered a web-based survey that included multiple-choice and open-ended questions about their experiences teaching UO. Answers were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, and combined in a mixed-methods analysis.

2.1. Sample

The sample had the following characteristics (see Table 1).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Religiosity

We measured the religiosity of the teachers with a single item asking them to self-report as secular, secular-traditional, religious-traditional, liberal religious, Modern Orthodox, or non-denominational (No UO teachers were included in the study, to test for cross-cultural interaction.). Further analysis showed that religious categories could be collapsed into non-religious (secular and secular-traditional) and religious (religious-traditional, liberal religious and Modern Orthodox), so we used these for further analyses.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by demographics, in % or *M* (SD).

Sample characteristics	% or *M* (SD) of sample
Teaching institution	
AAC	60
MC	40
Teaching experience – general	
5 years or less	37
6–10 years	26
Over 10 years	37
Teaching experience – UO students	*M* = 3.3 (SD = 2.35)
No. of courses taught to UO students	*M* = 5 (SD = 3.51)
No. of students taught	
Fewer than 40 students	36
41–100 students	31
Over 1000 students	33
Subject of courses	Social work, education and psychology – 96
Religious affiliation of teacher	
Jewish secular	50
Jewish traditional	26.6
Jewish Modern Orthodox	24.4
Unaffiliated	10

2.2.2. Attitudes toward and assessment of students

We measured how teachers assessed their UO students in comparison to non-religious students that they teach, on 6 parameters, rated on a scale of 1 (much weaker than general student population) to 5 (much stronger than general student population): intellectual ability, academic conscientiousness, respectfulness to teacher, agreeableness in class, academic background and critical thinking. These made up a single measure of comparison to non-UO students (alpha = .78).

We also asked respondents about class homogeneity, about any change of values or worldview that may have taken place among students or in their own worldview, and their recommendations to policy-makers following their experience.

2.2.3. Teacher behaviors

We measured teaching behavior by a Teacher Adjustment scale, which we developed for this purpose. Adjustment was measured by four self-report items indicating to what extent respondents modified their courses relative to the same courses taught elsewhere, in terms of content, level of teaching, pedagogy and values. Response options ranged from 0 (no change) to 5 (completely revised the courses). A single three-item subscale reflecting ideological adjustment was computed by taking the mean of the latter three items (alpha = .76) and the remaining item (level adjustment) was retained as a single-item measure. We also elicited open-ended descriptions of teachers' adjustment to UO students and their attitudes to these adjustments.

2.2.4. Experiences of conflict and dilemmas

Respondents were asked to indicate how much conflict or dilemmas they experienced regarding values, worldviews and teacher–student interactions on a scale of 0 (none) to 5 (a great amount). A single three-item subscale reflecting conflict experience was computed by taking the mean of these items (alpha = .80). Additionally, we elicited open-ended responses about teaching dilemmas, conflicts and management strategies.

3. Results

To identify significant interactions between teachers' descriptive variables and their behavior, attitudes and experiences, we conducted a series of chi-square or t-test analyses.

3.1. Profile of the ultra-orthodox students

We found a discrepancy between policy-makers' intentions and the reality of UO tracks. While the intention was to enable UO students to study in religiously homogeneous classes, in practice, most classes included Modern Orthodox students as well. This probably reflects the competitive reality of higher education in Israel wherein students with lower grade point averages apply to smaller and less elitist colleges; UO tracks often have minimal entrance requirements and therefore some non-UO students turn to them. At the time when UO tracks opened, the applications of Modern Orthodox students seemed to benefit the UO population, as it assured the colleges of enough students to open gender-separate classes. Since 2014, realizing that the disadvantages of mixed-religious classes might offset the benefits for UO students, a more stringent separatist policy was enforced, but UO tracks still accept some Modern Orthodox students. Thus, most respondents assessed their UO-track classes to be mixed religious, rather than entirely ultra-orthodox (see Table 2).

3.2. Attitudes

Ultra-orthodox students were valued as more respectful (M = 3.93, SD = 0.84) and agreeable (M = 3.67, SD = 0.88), but as less knowledgeable and with less academic background (M = 1.63, SD = 0.72) than non-UO students. Overall assessment of UO students was track dependent: AAC teachers rated their UO students significantly lower in comparison to non-UO ones, than did the teachers at MC ($t = 0.02$).

3.3. Teacher behaviors

On average, respondents reported making only minor adjustments to their courses in all aspects, with 20% reporting no adjustments on any teaching parameter. Most adjustments were made to the level of the course (M = 1.52, SD = 1.15) and fewer were made to content, values and pedagogy (M = 1.1, SD = 1.1). When teachers did modify the courses, they tended to focus on content changes, rather than on value adjustments: They omitted topics that might hurt students' feelings, but did not change their emphasis on critical

Table 2. Track-dependent differences in class composition and teaching experience (in %).

Students	AAC	MC	Total sample
Composition			
UO	61.9	43.3	56
Modern Orthodox and National UO	38.1	56.7	44
Level of homogeneity			
Mixed religious (under 40% UO)	20	63.6	38.5*
Mostly UO (over 70% UO)	80	36.4	61.5*

*Difference significant at $\alpha < .05$.

thought, individuality and democratic values. Open-ended descriptions by respondents revealed three main types of adjustments:

3.3.1. Adjusting for level and background

About half of the teachers (52%) reported making the readings simpler, adding introductions, teaching computer literacy, going slower and simplifying the content:

> I used simpler language, more basic explanations and a lot of repetitions until the material was digested. I also needed a lot of patience for all of the questions which stemmed from a basic lack of understanding, which is way beyond the content of the course itself.

3.3.2. Value accommodations

A third (32%) of the teachers reported avoiding or modifying content that may offend, self-censoring pedagogical tools and adjusting clothing to religious modesty norms:

> I avoided screening a TED talk, which is a key talk for understanding the field of positive psychology, because there is a picture in it of Pamela Anderson in skimpy dress. I avoided reading the play 'Oedipus Rex' by Sophocles to the women, after being advised […] not to do so.

> I skipped the class on Freud, which I thought would just be too provocative. When I taught cultural psychology I toned down all the relativistic messages.

> Naturally, I wore long skirts and long sleeved shirts, even in summer. I did not wear bright coloured clothes. I wanted them to feel comfortable with me.

3.3.3. Utilizing diversity

Sixteen percent of teachers reported making use of religious diversity, by giving examples taken from the world of ultra-orthodoxy, using religious content and discussing issues pertinent to the students' worldview:

> I related to topics which occupy the UO population. […] I adjusted the content to the world of UO women. I tried in some cases to bring examples from a content world that is more familiar to UO women.

> the adjustments were mainly in the clinical examples I gave. I used many examples from the UO world to make the material meaningful to them. Also, when suitable, I supplemented the course with religious material to illustrate an idea we were discussing.

For half of this last group (8% of overall sample), utilizing diversity meant mobilizing students' unique knowledge as a pedagogical resource and using it as an opportunity for mutual learning:

> They bring with them so much life-experience and an amazing depth […] I try to get to know this unique population as much as possible and so I express interest, ask for explanations when I don't understand. I will note these differences in class sometimes, when I feel it explains something about the cultural differences between us.

> I always come from the position of someone who has part of the knowledge they need for their clinical work, and I expect them to broaden and complete it with their own knowledge of their community and its values. An attitude of humbleness from my side and from theirs creates, I feel, a very fruitful dialogue.

Fifty nine percent of respondents were comfortable with the adjustments they made, feeling that they were important and justified. However, 41% made adjustments reluctantly or were ambivalent about making them. Some were resentful of having to simplify their courses; others did not like having to modify content to suit UO sensibilities.

3.4. Conflict experiences

Overall, respondents reported experiencing a moderate level of ideological conflict, with conflict over content being the highest (M = 2.45, SD = 1), and conflict over teacher–student interaction being the lowest (M = 1.38, SD = .56). This did not vary significantly by respondents' religiosity, institution or experience. However, the interaction between conflict and class homogeneity was highly significant: the more heterogeneous the class, the more respondents experienced conflict ($\chi^2 = 0.009$, DF = 1). This may reflect the finding that the more culturally diverse the classroom is, the more challenging it is to handle value conflicts (Dey et al. 2010). In heterogeneous classes one can expect to find quite a bit of religious ideological variety, which would make it more challenging for a teacher to identify and address the consensus.

The types of conflict situations reported by respondents varied. Some described conflicts pertaining to knowledge discrepancies:

> I was once teaching a class on neuropsychology. I began explaining about the brain and one student said: 'Do you mean to say that thinking takes place in the brain? That's impossible! It clearly takes place in the heart, as the Bible tells us!' I was not sure how to respond. […] I once mentioned that philosophers disagreed on a certain topic. A student raised her hand: 'Excuse me, what are philosophers?' when I explained, she asked with interest: 'Do they still exist?' I know these can seem like funny anecdotes but they reflect a lack of common language between us, which at times made me feel like we were aliens searching for a common ground.

Most respondents focused on content and value conflicts between Ultra-Orthodoxy and academia. The following examples show how challenging such moments can be for both students and teacher:

> When I once wrote the word 'Darwin' on the board students rebelled and said there is no place for that name in their studies. When I spoke of transference in therapy, they said it is immoral for a female therapist to treat a male patient and vice versa. Then when I raised the possibility that a man may fall in love with a man and a woman with a woman, the response was that it is psychology's fault that what was once considered deviant is now seen as normal.

> There was a dilemma in class once around the ethics of social work versus that of the Haredi [UO] community. For example, what do they do when someone must be reported to the authorities (e.g. when a child is at risk) but the rabbi instructs them not to do so? My message was clear, but it was not accepted by all of the students. Also, we had a hard time talking about the gay community and its needs.

> I once tried to organise an encounter between Ultra-Orthodox women students and the other students as an opportunity for mutual learning and way of an in-depth learning about communities in Israel, but because a quarter of the class refused, I had to give up the plan. In another setting, I would have never asked for their permission. There is a feeling you constantly need to get their approval.

A painful area of contention related to perception of the 'other'. 'Others' for UO communities include non-Jews, secular Jews, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and people of different ethnicities and races. Because UO communities are so close-knit and homogeneous, 'others' tend to be rejected, and this led teachers to experience educational dilemmas:

> The biggest conflict for me pertained to their opinions about non-Jews. I come from a Jewish tradition where difference is cherished, and here it was very different. I once showed a video-clip of an interview with a researcher about a study he conducted on values. A student stood up and said she will not listen, because 'How dare a non-Jew teach us about morality? We learn that from the Bible.' For her, the crisis was resolved when another student noted that this particular researcher happened to be Jewish, but for me the sense of heaviness remained. I tried to teach them tolerance while wondering if that was even within my mandate.

An analysis of the answers to questions about value and attitude changes of teachers and students following their mutual encounter pointed to a limited perceived effect of one group on the beliefs of the other. Forty three percent of the teachers did not feel that either group's values were affected. A further 43% thought that the ultra-orthodox women became more open to others, more accepting and less judgmental, as well as more empowered and more focused on self-realization:

> They are now more open to the surrounding world and to understanding the others. They are possibly willing to listen to opinions different from their own.

Only about a quarter (23%) of the teachers reported changes in their own value-structure following the encounter; typically, they experienced an increased understanding and appreciation of the ultra-orthodox world and its values:

> I feel I am more open, understanding and tolerant. Much more so.

> I don't feel more religious, but the dialogue with UO students highlights for me the price which Western society pays for its individuality, in social cohesiveness and responsibility for the other. Our materialism, lack of respect and the price we pay for being exposed to 'everything' – it's as if the age of innocence is over for us, and maybe we should backtrack a little.

Finally, respondents' recommendations for further work with UO students in colleges included the following: raising the academic level by offering pre-college training courses and changing entrance-level requirements (50% of respondents), adjusting to the needs of mothers and computer-illiterate students (36.6% of respondents), setting limits on what can and cannot be discussed in class (16.6% of respondents), engaging in dialog with UO community leadership (10% of respondents) and offering multicultural training for teachers (3%).

4. Discussion

Integrating religious minority students into higher education institutions poses significant pedagogical and value-related challenges for higher education frameworks and especially for teachers. Previous studies indicated that female religious students, in particular, did not feel that their needs and values were being addressed sensitively enough in academic

frameworks. Researchers have suggested various organizational changes in order to promote the integration of religious minorities into academia (Ahmad 2001; Ali and Bagheri 2009; Bowman and Smedley 2013; Cole and Ahmadi 2003; Modood 2006; Nasir and Al-Amin 2006) and have focused on the crucial role of teachers in this endeavor. Some of the tools suggested for successfully integrating minorities include increasing the opportunities for student–teacher dialogs beyond class hours and fostering a sense of cultural empathy and open-mindedness in class (de Beuckelaer, Lievens, and Bücker 2012; Dey et al. 2010; Gurin et al. 2002). Those few who address the underlying issue of value discrepancies between academic institutions and religious cultures recommend shifting from an individual deficit approach (as in 'This student lacks democratic values and will have to replace her obedience to authority with critical thinking in order to succeed in college.') toward a cultural resources approach. In it, teachers attempt to understand minority students' culture and values, make use of their cultural resources in class and perceive of the learning process as mutual. However, the question remains: Is this strategy practiced by teachers?

This paper analyzed the integration of UO female students into two higher education institutions in Israel. To study for academic degrees, UO students require gender-separate classes and academic teaching that does not clash with their values. One of the institutions that we studied addresses these challenges by creating a higher education environment for UO students only (MC) and the other offers a gender-separate track within a general college (AAC). In the course of this study, 30 non-UO faculty members who teach UO students at one of the two programs shared their teaching experiences. Our findings point to several main trends:

(1) A sizeable majority of the teachers tend *not* to relate to the special context in which they lecture, instead expecting 'completely equal treatment' of academic content, pedagogical strategies and level of teaching. In a manner similar to that found by Gordon, Reid, and Petocz (2010), they do so in order to avoid 'dumbing down' the academic level.
(2) When teachers do adjust, they mainly make minor content-level adjustments, based on a deficit approach toward UO students.
(3) Following the inter-cultural exchange between lecturers and UO students, teachers assess that about half of their students undergo a change of values, while only a quarter of them report any value shift in their own worldview. These proportions might be different if teachers were encouraged to think of cross-cultural teaching as an opportunity for mutual learning and dialog (Northedge 2003).
(4) Teachers' recommendations about how to improve programs pertain mainly to 'raising the level of students', the underlying assumption being that UO students are of a lower academic level than the general student population. In recommending to 'set limits on where we as teachers/as a college will not compromise any further', teachers are functioning as academic gatekeepers.
(5) A much smaller group of teachers recommended that colleges and teachers give voice to UO students by conducting focus-group discussions with students to assess their needs, paying attention to diversity and making use of the cultural resources of the students themselves.

Our findings highlight the complex interaction between UO students and non-UO teachers in Israel, uncovering a situation of structural inequality. Students are expected to conform to academic values, while lecturers are not expected to make use of the values and intellectual and spiritual properties of their students.

When considering how to integrate ultra-conservative religious students into academic settings, we offer the following recommendations, based on our findings:

(1) On an institutional level, it is important to maximize equal opportunity for religious minority students, women in particular, who do not yet attend academic institutions. This means creating opportunities for mutual exposure between religious communities and academic institutions and promoting open dialog about the needs, expectations and goals of each group regarding the other.
(2) On a class level, teachers should be provided with the tools and skills necessary for managing classes under conditions of cultural and religious diversity. This could include training-workshops run by advisors who have expertise in understanding and working with religious communities. Teachers should be encouraged to replace their deficit view of religious minority students with a cultural resources perspective. The institutional expectation from the faculty staff to be committed to fostering an open, tolerant and mutually respectful teaching setting, needs to be backed up by practical tools and applications. These may include encouraging contact between student and faculty beyond the classroom, promoting active learning and setting up small group discussions in order to engage students who are unacquainted with the academic learning style.
(3) On a personal level, teachers should reflect upon their personal attitudes to highly religious students in higher education. A position of enabling – helping students acquire academic tools that they can then use within their own value-frames – rather than an expectation of fostering value change among students, might be more ethically defensible in culturally diverse educational settings.

Creating opportunities for meaningful dialog between teachers and students within the context of cultural and religious diversity could turn values difference into a teaching resource, and lead to parallel processes of student and teacher transformation. Inculcating habits of openness to religious diversity may promote a more general change in the way teachers enter into dialog with religious students in their classrooms. As a follow-up to this study, we propose testing some of these interventions and measuring the ensuing satisfaction of students and teachers in such settings.

Notes

1. Over half (56%) of the UO community today live below Israel's poverty line (Pfefferman and Malchi 2010).
2. Consider the following policy statement from the American Christian Fundamentalist Bob Jones University: "No subject is so important in the curriculum that it must be included if the school cannot find a dedicated, born-again, Bible believing Christian who can teach it" (Jones, 1985 in Schultze 1993, 498).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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