

# REPORT

## IFYC Online Education and Community Revamp

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### Questions from IFYC

*What is the correct assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats when it comes to the energy and resources we dedicate to online learning and communities?*

*What is IFYC's optimal approach to achieving impact by transferring knowledge to college and university students, staff, and faculty through online means?*

*What is the optimal approach to forming corresponding online communities to keep them engaged with these ideas?*

## Discovery Goals

- Examine the full range of IFYC online/blended learning programming and assets
- Determine the goals and motivation of IFYC staff in growing online learning presence
- Examine how stakeholder groups engage in interfaith practices, and how they are supported on this front by programming and learning assets
- Explore how IFYC stakeholders learn, and how (and to what extent) that learning influences the interfaith work they undertake
- Review overall IFYC grasp of a blended learning construct and how its varied "resources" are potential learning assets within that blend
- Determine the ways stakeholders access and use learning assets, and where needs/interests are not addressed, therein
- Identify existing technology tools and their connection to learning and community to determine level of value in both as currently applied

## Findings

Through the discovery process, we found that IFYC is a nationally recognized and valued organization that promotes interfaith across intellectual, advocacy, action-oriented, and community-building approaches in the higher-education arena. We see how stakeholders benefit from a broad range of programs, services, and materials that aid in building, supporting, and further educating and engaging higher education interfaith leaders.

Those serving various IFYC stakeholders clearly were doing this work around a shared mission, but that the support and learning pathways could be strengthened, more cohesive, and more in alignment with each other. We noted a call from constituents for more concrete learning approaches to support interfaith leadership skills, knowledge, conversation, and collaboration.

There is excitement around the potential to repurpose existing content through the design of an online learning ecosystem in alignment with IFYC frameworks and core business objectives.

## Process

1. Researched (not market research as related to business development and planning) multiple organizations (results can be found at <https://app.xtensio.com/edit/jp8mxrr3>) to select 12 that are similar in many or most respects to IFYC in terms of mission and purpose, with a primary focus on learning offerings/assets, an eye toward how content is organized and delivered, the range and type of learning assets, and the existence/role of online communities in the context of an online learning environment. There are additional organizations listed that we briefly reviewed because they offer elements of

what IFYC is exploring as part of its potential blended learning campaign. These are to serve as models for IFYC review and consideration as it moves into the second phase of its blended learning development process. Note that there are few "comprehensive models" with all of the "desired" components. Our observation is that the organizations create online offerings to meet the very specific needs of its constituents.

2. Interviewed 20+ internal and external stakeholders (IFYC staff and leaders, students, faculty, administrators and student services staff, alumni) to get a broad understanding of what each representative constituent base does, receives, and activates in the name of interfaith work, and where/how learning/online learning/blended learning fits with and assists in this work.
3. Reviewed a range of learning assets, planning documents, strategy overviews, courses, curricula, presentations, frameworks, and associated organizational documents with an eye toward how learning is approached, delivered, packaged, recorded, delivered, etc., while at the same time considered instructional strategies and curricular alignment that could provide evidence of learner achievement or mastery.
4. Engaged IFYC staff in design thinking exercises, including empathy mapping, "how might we" design statement development, and ideation mashups to distill the essence of potential prototypes for IFYC online environments that would best meet the needs of the learner population. Explored Learner Journey Mapping with IFYC staff to promote the articulation of "touch points" to define and inform staff/constituent interactions.

## **Strengths**

- Broad base of quality digital and print materials, and interfaith development programs and services that meet high level of desire and need across constituencies, and are support action-oriented projects, community forming, training
- Capacity to internally develop myriad diverse resources/learning assets to reinforce and expand IFYC "knowledge base" and interfaith practices
- Communities are committed to IFYC and seek support, guidance, input, "resources," community, partnerships, etc.
- Engaged team with capacity to inform/design/develop/implement/monitor learning processes and practices
- Stakeholder appreciation for/reliance on IFYC learning assets
- Emerging content strategy tied to overarching frameworks
- Combination of training, guidance, ongoing support, learning assets, and communities result in influential and visible on- and off-campus interfaith leadership

## Weaknesses

- No consensus across IFYC staff/leadership and stakeholders of what constitutes online learning and how it can be used to support and build out interfaith principles and practices
- Learning materials are not strategically connected to outcomes-based learning pathways and lack a “how-to” or “why-to” strategy
- Learning materials (“resources”) are created readily, yet lack contextualization, and/or connected purpose (not scaffolded)
- Overlapping resources that might better serve, at times, multiple purposes across stakeholders
- In response to requests, learning materials often developed on demand for and by individuals rather than within programs or within broader stakeholder/constituent communities
- Existing online/live communities are not connected to learning pathways/opportunities nor formally projected as part of an online/blended learning solution; their collaborative potential, especially in terms of interfaith action across campuses, has not been fully tapped into
- Knowledge base often equated with learning community, but in theory and practice are very different, and thus confound the notion of blended learning as a contributor to the knowledge base
- While IFYC frameworks may be reflected in learning assets/programs, this reflection seems not to be intentional (neither for the developers nor the users)

## Opportunities

- Use content strategy to drive the organization of learning resources for access and needs relevance
- Design resources into clearly defined learning pathways (i.e., begin with live interfaith engagement, supported through resources)
- Align content along the moments of interfaith connections toward more focused, scaffolded outcomes
- Establish active blended learning communities with access to a full range of learning assets that support learning pathways and lead to action.
- Link refined, aligned, thoughtfully selected learning assets with targeted communities to engage learners, foster connections, encourage contribution and facilitate collaboration
- Market a ‘cutting-edge’ online learning ecosystem framework focused on interfaith across college campuses

## Threats

- Focus on content development, without a focus on contextualization and/or a robust curation practice, reduces the potential for leadership development, and lends itself to more of a "resource" clearinghouse that supports random need instead of scaffolded interfaith growth and engagement
- Lack of established technology integration protocol has led to interoperability vulnerabilities that affect user engagement, organizational network security, accessibility, oversight and management, and programmatic cohesion/collaboration
- Drive to meet the needs of individual constituent groups before consideration of how solutions would best align with overall strategies dilutes interfaith leadership and development efforts, as well as collaboration across stakeholders and the programs serving them
- Potential focus on blended learning within context of marketing and business planning/goals strays from immediate need to provide for existing stakeholders (consider that quality blended learning is a tool for building loyalty and fuller engagement, which can build a customer base moving forward)
- Potential for greater reliance on the virtual environment that reduces the face-to-face, authentic interfaith dialogue (discussions, conversations) that are the primary engagement driver; focus on digital involvement might propel expansion but undermine philosophy

**Outstanding strength:** IFYC's propelling power is its ability to initially invite people into authentic (face-to-face, live, real time) interfaith dialogue and launches greater interfaith practice, collaboration, interaction, and action

**Outstanding weakness:** There is a lack of instructional design, curricular alignment, and direct instruction throughout all learning materials and experiences – both formal and informal.

**Outstanding opportunity:** IFYC is poised to offer a unique learning experience in support of interfaith education and outreach.

**Outstanding threat:** There is a potential for IFYC programs and stakeholders to work in independent silos on the learning front, which is counter-intuitive to its interfaith leadership development process

## Recommendations

Essentially, IFYC should take a step back and clearly articulate a definition of online/blended learning that aligns with business goals as well as learner needs/preferences. With an extensive amount of quality learning content IFYC is well poised to transition that material into a robust blended learning ecosystem. Careful consideration of content types, curricular alignment with key focus areas, and the establishment of measurable learning goals and objectives will help shape that ecosystem.

IFYC has had success with online community building in the past (Building Bridges). We recommend revisiting what worked best in that community, as well as integrating community interaction into all online learning throughout the instructional design and strategy process. Community interactions should be woven into the exploration of knowledge content, implementation of practices, and continuous relationship building – as students transition to alumni, take on leadership positions and/or become potential donors.

Specific guidance:

- Categorize and tag content using a taxonomy that mirrors the emerging content strategy focus areas.
- Consider moments of need as a framework for curricular alignment and scaffolded learning.
- Intentionally integrate instructional design and strategy practices into all learning asset development.
- Define measurable curricular goals and objectives in alignment with business goals to guide all online initiatives (learning and community).
- Establish learning pathways and curated learning content playlists in alignment with curricular goals.
- Define community engagements and behaviors that would characterize the ideal online community for IFYC constituents.
- Continue and further explore the value of learning experience design work to gain insight and better understand the online learning and community needs of constituents.
- More closely analyze the needs of IFYC's primary stakeholders to identify and address specific learning asset gaps, and how those gaps interfere with expanded interfaith action on and beyond campus.
- Establish an institution-wide protocol for technology exploration, evaluation, piloting, adoption, and reporting.

## Essential Questions

As IFYC continues its exploration of blended learning and its value to its stakeholders, it should consider reflecting on and thoughtfully discussing the following questions as they will drive a substantial piece of the decision making about IFYC's learning community:

- What is the most influential venue/medium/environment for conversations/discussions of interfaith?
- How can blended learning encourage and support on-the-ground interfaith action?
- What is intentional learning in IFYC? What is intentional practice?
- How does IFYC identify and respond to learning entry points?
- What is the big picture vision of enhanced learning engagement in IFYC as an organization (business goals, stakeholders, fundraising, expansion, partnerships, etc.?)
- How are the key principles of practices outline in the IFYC framework of frameworks reflected in learning assets? How does one (learner and developer) know that they are reflected?
- What metrics need to be considered when measuring the success of IFYC's online learning and community initiatives?
- Is a formal (certification), learning environment something that IFYC wants to embrace? In what context?

## Next Steps: Part One

### A. Further Organizational Introspection

- Review all of the discovery phase findings/documents to identify patterns, gaps, improvement areas, etc.
- Debrief with staff that participated in the discovery phase to:
  - Identify what they grasped from the exploration (do they know why IFYC needs this learning environment?)
  - Discuss questions and concerns; flesh out ideas (use the "how might we questions" and the learner journey maps from the discovery process, etc.
  - Find out where they are all at and what they are thinking (i.e., Do they think learning pathways are the right way to go? Do they want to envision IFYC as a community of learning vs. the knowledge base used to define IFYC currently?)
  - Clarify what they want (or perceive) stakeholders to have from blended learning experience.
- Continue to explore the learning needs/preferences/processes of IFYC's primary constituent groups (students, faculty/staff, administrators, alumni). We modeled several practices on this front, including learner personas, empathy mapping, and learner journey mapping. If these are not practical, consider other tools (from surveys to conference calls to small-group gatherings). This step is especially necessary for campus administrators and alumni.
- If expanding the constituent base is a consideration (i.e., donors) reflect on how a blended learning program/learning community will benefit each new group, with a very discerning eye toward purpose and desired outcomes.
- Drive consensus building among executive leadership, especially in terms of marketing/business goals. Essentially, what are the organizational drivers/goals on this front? This is key.
- If blended learning is the route taken, establish clear goals, objectives, and outcomes. This should focus on the essence of interfaith leadership (what that looks like, what it sets out to do, what it accomplishes across stakeholders).
- Examine blended learning and community models presented in benchmarking to focus on preferred models and to recognize what a learning pathway uniquely designed for IFYC's audience could look like. Follow up with conversations with these organizations to talk more about the why and how of construct, impact, etc.

## **B. Ideate Blended Learning**

- Discuss and flesh out with relevant parties how the components of an IFYC blended strategy might fit together as a whole in alignment with frameworks (consider moments of interfaith engagement, levers of change, leadership practices, if relevant). Perhaps use the student group as a model and pilot.
- Reflect on how communities can be incorporated into this blended learning strategy (or whether that is a desire). Also consider ways to build community, when this is appropriate for the audience and content. Make interaction and engagement part of the blended approach. Social learning is powerful.
- Use instructional design methodology to envision, design, and prototype what learning pathways would meet the needs of each constituent group.
- Use instructional strategy methodology to determine how each piece of learning content might best be packaged and delivered, and how it aligns with goals, objectives, and outcomes.
- Develop a learning content build plan that outlines the process of how content will be developed in the future, including requests, ownership, lifecycle, archiving, etc.
- Come to some basic consensus on the goals and objectives in order to move forward through Phase II with a consultant. Establish a clear vision, with the understanding that you may need to adapt as process invites.

## **C. Address Technology Usage and Policies**

- Closely review existing technology use and internal policies regarding these technologies, through a lens of cross-team interoperability.
- Determine whether streamlining apps and social media is a critical need, especially when it comes to incorporating online communities into blended learning.
- Research community-oriented apps/tools that can accommodate needs and services across programs and constituents.

## **Next Steps: Part Two**

### **A. Design and Develop IFYC Online**

- Hire a content strategy consultant who can help implement a comprehensive learning content strategy based on the finding/decisions drawn from Phase I.
- Hire an instructional design consultant who will work with existing learning materials and determine what additional materials would be needed to design, develop, and