Agenda:
Opening of the Meeting: Meeting called to order at 7:01pm

1. Fight song and role call
   a. 12 non-WSA members present

2. Open Forum
   a. Mansoor: Bring my access to Twitter back.
   b. Christian Hosam: Commending freshman for their forum/table in Usdan.
   c. Jason Shatz: What is going on with canvassing?
      i. Chloe: We’re canvassing the 13th, 14th, 15th, Tuesday, Wed, Thurs, sign ups next meeting. You must go at least one day for attendance. Your responsibility, should go.

3. Discussion on Religion on campus
   a. Nicole Updegrove: Religion is something we don’t always talk about but can be stigmatized—it’s great that Wes is open-minded, but there are some areas where we are not. We’re going to talk about the role of religion on campus - What is accepted and what gets criticism and what can make the system better? Why are some religions treated differently? How can we change perception on campus? I want to hear your perspectives on this. What do religious students face on campus when they talk about their faith?
   b. Adam: First thought, I’m don’t see discrimination with religion—but before we start we have to remember the role of religion in western world. Consider how we should stand as WSA in terms of religion, if we should stand.
      i. Chloe: This conversation is for campus climate, this can be substituted for everything else—how we can improve inclusivity.
      ii. Nicole Updegrove: Keep in mind that we do want solutions, but in SLC we talk with administration as well, and so want to transmit information about student experience as well.
   c. Mansoor: Some religions are considered differently than others because it comes down to when there is a very distinct belief between two communities, i.e., between Wes and that religion. In Muslim community, there is backwards discrimination. Is it okay to go back along what they believe as long as they are tolerant and accepting (like for homosexuality). I have had positive experiences in combating this issue, such as going to Christian Hosam (CID), Queer Resource Center, and talking with other people—workshop set up. Professor of religion to work with us to find common ground. Not be segregated. Working against that.
d. Christian: I’m invested in and interested in inclusion of all people on campus. I’m interested in seeing if because of your religion or lack of it if you feel excluded on campus. We do have a shared campus between all of us—we are a community. We all have different experiences, we need this common understanding to make this campus more inclusive. I am also a resource for all of this at chosam@wes.

e. Mansoor: There is a lot of grey areas between culture and religion—how is religious groups treated differently versus identity groups in front of, example, SBC? The chaplains have a pool of money. The rules how we approach these situations. Role is to sort out these grey areas.

f. Jason Shatz: I agree with Chloe, other things like race and sexuality can be applied to religion. GA is questioned for the validity of this conversation, with separation of church and state. Our focus is on how religion impacts people on the individual level. Are they inhibited? Overbearing? There are also these issues on American governmental level. Define it in this context—that this community can practice whatever they feel freely.

g. Kate Cullen: Religion is an interesting way for Wes to connect with the Middletown community. Like going to services, holiday events, or a joint event with people in the Middletown community.

h. Kara Linn: I’ve studied religion a bit here, the general perception here is liberal and well-educated, people see religious people as “less evolved,” which is very damaging. This is not their whole identity just based on what they believe in—there’s always more to a person than their religion.

i. Martin Malabanan: The problem mainly is the lack of religious spaces on campus, I go to Mass every week, but our chapel is shared with a Protestant group, but there may always be something going on in Memorial Chapel, there’s no easy way to go and pray. Similar for Muslims. Permanent places of worship for all religions.

j. Lily Herman: In terms with changing the negative stigma, my old school youth group did a “pulpit swap” with a Baptist church, it opened my eyes to go to their services, opened dialogue. Helps when we can see what other religions do.

k. Ted Shabecoff: We had a world religion day, where we had a day off from school, we would go to lectures on different religions—I went to one for Islam, and I learned a lot of the values of other religions. Religion isn’t just a series of practices but also good values—here we might just see religion as “silly,” but it’s actually the ethics and the morals at the heart of religions. Educate the student body of different religions.

l. Tori Rowe: I’m part of Wesleyan Christian Fellowship. There are some difficulties, but my faith in the context of Wesleyan is much less the difficulties that I’m facing but how I can communicate my faith to you to understanding you. And how I can get it accessible to you and where I’m coming from. In Protestant
Christian community, we have connections with Middletown community, go to churches in the town. Student group to connect to broader Christian community. Our main focus as a religious group and challenge is to communicate this to others.

m. Emily: I agree with a lot, but the most discomfort and conflict when religious and nonreligious have a gap. This gap needs to be bridged and the stereotypes are hard to combat.

n. Christian Hosam: The gap between religious and nonreligious can be taken for granted, I’ve become more Christian here on campus. I’ve realized how blessed I am here. A lot of these things are not even to bridge a definite gap, but that it’s more of a spectrum here, it’s more fluid.

o. Ellen Paik: Wes doesn’t have any requirements, but if we emphasize advisors to take at least one religion course here at their time to bridge the divide a bit more—to take advantage of religion programs here (for students).

p. Arya: It would be great for one of the themes in “Feet to the Fire” to be a discussion on something not “leftist,” something like religion.

i. Christian: Next year’s theme is going to be inclusivity.

q. Lily Donahue: We have an open curriculum, students should though attend some religious service to experience different religions as required. Push people to go into religious spaces.

r. Sarah (non-WSA): The greatest resources is the diversity of experiences in the student body, in addition to the ethics or the structure of campus here is to have some training (like BiLeGaTas) during orientation so students can have a communication with each other on this topic. A way to open up talk between students by taking advantage of the resources of religion on campus.

s. Lili Borland (non-WSA): Doing something during orientation to bring up the topic of religion, mention to students to say it’s okay to be yourself in terms of campus on this leftist campus. Orientation is important because it is a transitional time to this new campus and to learn or pick up new things. We can get a lot from all diversity—even religious diversity. I was raised Mormon—no place of worship here on campus, it would be a great idea during orientation for self-expression, even in conversations with people. Explore other religions.

t. Emily???: I agree with Sarah, increasing inclusivity is better by having conversations with people. You can’t always change peoples minds, but make it something people can at least talk about.

u. Jason Shatz: I want to dispute the notion that people characterize religion based on fringe elements, make sure that is not the case in our community. Religious groups publicize their services, open to other faiths. Holidays can grasp religions more than just what people learn in a classroom. Channels that exist should push for more student involvement
Miryam: I’m interested in focusing on the stereotypes of religion on campus—we are very stereotypical for religion—bringing many people of different faiths or no faith to talk about these stereotypes that don’t need and should not exist. Interested in other people’s experiences. They come up, but don’t get confronted like other stereotypes are confronted here.


Syed Ali: Thanks to the people of religious groups who are here, intersection of religion and academics is interesting. We don’t accommodate for most group’s religious holidays. Clarifying the policy on missing classes and academic acceptance of religion is interesting avenue to explore.

Lydia Rex: Something interesting for the holidays of these religions is to have those religious people to bring friends to their holiday celebrations to experience something new, to bring other people along to learn more about different religions.

Sarah (non-WSA): I was thinking about if I was discriminated against for being religious—I can’t put my finger on anything until Miryam brought up her point—have other people have an experience like this based on stereotypes? It shows what conversations that can’t really happen because of the environment—create an open space for more dialogue.

Sam Ebb: I like the open talks for stereotypes, but how to get people who have the stereotypes and aren’t part of the group to come and talk? It’s a good idea, but how to start, how to make that next step after getting word out is the question.

Martin Malabanan: Talked to Catholic Student Organization, students here are afraid to admit they are Catholics. In WesAdmits 2016 Facebook page, people were bashing a post by the CSO for saying they have a table during orientation. People would be afraid to “come out” as religious. People are more willing to not show their religion just to save face. We are supposed to be accepting.

Christian Hosam: That post on Facebook was uncomfortable and weird. I’d never thought it was difficult to “come out” as religious—but to have that normalized on campus to make it “easier” on others makes it dangerous. Need to give people spaces to assert every part of their identity.

Sarah (non-WSA): To have leaders in religious communities to have a “teach-in” where the entire student body is invited to be able to ask any questions at all, even if they may be offensive seeming—but a safe place they can ask and learn.

Nicole Updegrove: The casual discourse of religion tends to be negative; orientation stuff can be useful, but what other ways can we elevate the level of talking about these things in normal day-to-day life? WeSpeaks? RA talks encouraging openness?
Christian Hosam: How to change culture is difficult to talk about and figure out, to make this a continuous thing and not just a one time thing is important. Consistent thing to change the culture slowly. It’s not a fast process—takes time.

Sarah (non-WSA): I think that a way to change culture is to give people exposure. It’s important for us who are religious to not be afraid to talk about our beliefs. People don’t know the positive aspects of religion. One-on-one conversations is the way to go.

Zach Malter: There is a disconnect between the religion department academically and the culture on campus where religion becomes taboo for certain groups of people. Get those religion professor to have more personal perspectives. Students might want to hear that. They have expertise on multicultural things, more so than chaplains.

Mansoor: In this conversation, there needs to be an understanding that college is a new thing for everybody—of faith and those not of. Especially for international students, there is a cultural aspect. What is culture v. religion difference? How one person may be different religious from another is a topic. To respect a person going through changes is important. Look at them more as individuals and not just as part of a religious community.

Christian Hosam: Many faculty members are willing to talk about this on a more personal level. Can’t force students to learn things, but perhaps a seminar or things during orientation would be better.

Emily (non-WSA): As a religion major, I know the religion department isn’t really a place to talk about your beliefs. A religion class might not be a place to improve the culture. The line between study v. practice of religion needs more discussion.

Abraham (non-WSA): I am a Christian, we have a forum that involves two faculty to have a discussion about religion. Office of Religious and Spiritual Life chair is of one religion, but the other chaplains are on a more temporary setting. Questioning the hiring process of this person, institutionally.

Tori (non-WSA): I work with freshmen to characterize the context of religion in their own lives. I have worked with a multitude of students in this context. It is something that is happening in some level.

Syed Ali: Some people think coming to Wesleyan means they can’t practice their religion and they cannot keep their faith. Even structurally, there are faculty members are deeply involved in their faith communities. Some groups on campus have institutionalized lists of faculty or staff of these communities where students can access these people.

Sarah (non-WSA): More academic support of religion, with more experimental classes with professors that are both practitioners and academics. Academic weight should be given for students to explore religion.
Christian Hosam: I am identity group liaison for groups on campus.

Chloe: Thanks for guests, please email if there’s anything.

4. Questions about teachable skills
   a. Nicole Updegrove: We don’t have many core requirements here—none, actually—but that means we get very different educations that don’t necessarily all teach any workplace skills or any practical life skills. There are many things we graduate not knowing. Please write down one to three things that people haven’t learned - we have institutional support to make this happen.
   b. *People write down ideas.*

5. Committee Reports

6. New Business and Announcements

Meeting Adjourned: 08:24pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Alton Wang ‘16 & Grant Tanenbaum ‘15