

Week 4 Report

What Other Groups Did & Group Dynamics

This past week, facilitators report that groups are seeing a healthy level of conflict as students connect the political to the personal, and explore their differences constructively. The majority groups began their sessions with the Pair Activity. During this activity, students were broken up into smaller groups of twos or threes, allowing them to focus and deepen their engagement with one or two other individuals. These smaller forums tend to make them bolder in their interactions and strengthen the beginning of a cross-regional relationship. The format in each group varies; some facilitators ask students to pick a topic they would like to explore together, while other groups select a topic for each pair to discuss.

This activity was most often followed by free-flowing discussions based on the readings about the role of religion. In some groups, this led to heated discussions on issues related to religion and social issues, such as the practice of hijab and the veil ban in different parts of the world, how homosexuality is viewed by different religions, the impact of religion on creating / upholding human rights, and whether or not religious minorities are able to freely practice their religion in different countries. In other groups, students discussed topics highlighting religion and governance, such as the application of Shari'a Law, whether or not Islam and democracy are compatible, and the how religious views affect students' political views.

Attendance & Technology Update

I'm happy to share that attendance levels have improved significantly with 85% of students present in their sessions. The level of technical issues was also lower than last week with around 10% of students experiencing technical difficulties, the majority of which were resolved in-session. We are grateful for your support in ensuring better attendance and commitment from your students this week, and would like to ask that you continue **to remind your students that their attendance and participation remain crucial to the group's dynamic and to making the most out of their Soliya experience.**

This Week

This coming week we are recommending all groups do an activity entitled "Life Stories", in which we ask students to share with each other the three events that shaped their views on the relationship between Western and predominantly Muslim societies. This activity has consistently been cited as one of the high points in students' end of semester feedback, and can lead to a wide variety of follow-up conversations ranging from discussions on the events of 9/11 to explorations of the effect family members have on shaping students' perspectives.