

Week 4 Report

What Other Groups Did & Group Dynamics

Last week, facilitators reported that groups are seeing a healthy level of conflict as students connect the political to the personal, and explore their differences constructively. The majority of facilitators have also reported good or excellent dynamics in their sessions, and that students are now more open to discussing controversial / emotionally charged topics, which is great to see. Groups began their sessions with the second set of small-group discussions related to the final project. During this activity, students were broken up into smaller groups of twos or threes, allowing them to deepen their engagement with one or two other individuals, and continue exploring and engaging with a “difference” that exists in their respective communities in greater depth with their partner(s).

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 society or governance, such as different countries’ laws related to religion, the treatment of religious minorities, the separation of church and state, why religious violence exists, and Islam in Europe. In other groups, students discussed topics related to religion in their personal lives, such as whether or not it is possible to be moral and ethical without religion, the role religion plays in students’ personal lives, stereotypes of different religions, and personal stories on students’ experiences with religious intolerance.

Attendance & Technology Update

As some universities were on break last week and others were going through midterm exams, we saw a dip in attendance levels with almost 30% of students absent from their sessions. If your students are on break this week, please encourage them to login remotely for their sessions, and contact our tech team if they anticipate any technical difficulties. Their attendance is crucial for their groups' dynamics and learning process, and we would be grateful if you could **please 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.** The technical logistics in students’ groups continue to improve, with around 13% of students experiencing technical difficulties, more than half of which were resolved in-session.

This Week

This 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 of the world. 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 how students’ political views have been impacted by personal experiences, to explorations of the effect family members have on shaping students’ perspectives. Some groups, particularly those that will be impacted by attendance issues due to university holidays this week, will do the Life Stories activity later in the semester, and will focus on digging deeper into students’ topics of choice this week.