



**MUSLIM
CAMPUS LIFE**

2026

**Muslim Campus Life Summit
Formal Report**

University of Southern California | February 1-3, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summaries	3
Key Takeaways	7

Executive Summary

The 2026 Muslim Campus Life Summit (MCLS) brought together Muslim administrators, chaplains, faculty, and campus life professionals from across the United States to explore the state of Muslim life in higher education. Organized by Muslim Campus Life (MCL), in partnership with the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC), the summit convened seven sessions spanning data, policy, campus governance, and community care. Discussions ranged from the findings of MCL's inaugural Muslim Student Experience Survey to practical strategies for building institutional networks and leadership, navigating inclusion efforts and discrimination, and sustaining the work of higher ed professionals in a resource-constrained environment.

A central thread throughout the summit was the need to move beyond reactive crisis management toward proactive, data-driven, and coalition-based advocacy. Participants emphasized the importance of understanding how university governance works, building authentic relationships with institutional decision-makers, and empowering students with the knowledge and tools to advocate effectively for themselves. Equally, the summit surfaced a recognition that the wellbeing of students and campus professionals alike must be centered alongside institutional advocacy.

Session 1: Introduction to MCL and CRCC

The opening session grounded participants in MCL's organizational vision and three core areas of work:

- **Advocacy:** maintaining the Campus Islamophobia tracker, conducting training sessions, and providing individual campus evaluations and student support.
- **Coalition Building:** developing partnerships with organizations like NASPA, NADOHE, AMC, MSA National, and Manara West; building alumni networks; and tabling at national conferences.
- **Education:** producing resources such as the annual Ramadan webinar, the Muslim College Guide, the Muslim Campus Index, Ramadan posters, and the Confronting Islamophobia on Campus Toolkit.

Session 2: Data Dive — MCL's Inaugural Muslim Student Experience Survey

This session presented findings from MCL's inaugural Muslim Student Experience Survey and sparked wide-ranging conversation about what the data reveals, what it misses, and how to use it strategically. Some needs brought up in the data were around physical infrastructure, food services, religious accommodations, sustained faculty and staff support and academic programs, as well as more institutional support. Participants identified several other themes to be explored in future data analyses, such as strategic alignment between Muslim student demands with institutional priorities; institutional memory and documentation of past advocacy efforts across various communities; community diversity and the reality that Muslim and Muslim adjacent students are not a monolith; and discrimination, i.e. how under-reported incidents of Islamophobia need to be surfaced and addressed through safer reporting mechanisms.

Session 3: Panel Discussion: A Changing Landscape

This session examined how universities are navigating the shift in DEI programs, the aftermath of the Harvard admissions ruling, and growing threats to academic freedom. Following the Supreme Court ruling limiting race-conscious admissions, participants noted a roughly 10% decrease in students of color at some surveyed institutions, with variation across schools. Muslims, as an intersectional community spanning multiple racial categories, face particular challenges in how they are counted and represented in admissions data. Additionally, federal directives and guidelines around DEI have led institutions to rebrand or eliminate programs, which also impact Muslims student experience on campus. Finally, faculty doxxing and outside organizational pressure were identified as growing threats. Participants shared examples of professors facing rapid administrative scrutiny after single student complaints.

Session 4: Holding Space — Lived Realities in Higher Education

This session centered on emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Through facilitated sharing, participants named the psychological weight of navigating hostile institutional environments while serving communities under stress. The session underscored that chaplains and campus professionals cannot sustain others without attention to their own care. Creating "communities of rahma" — spaces of mercy and mutual support — was affirmed as central to the mission of Muslim Campus Life, not peripheral to it.

Session 5: Panel Discussion: Building Power Beyond Crisis

This session examined how Muslim communities can build lasting institutional networks and contributions at universities – moving from reactive advocacy to proactive stakeholder presence. Panelists with experience on university boards and investment committees emphasized that institutional change requires long-term relationship-building and credibility – not just advocacy from the outside. Experts also explained how universities actually manage money, for example that they roughly break-even as nonprofits, and so they cannot simply reallocate funds at will. In addition, university leaders manage different types of funds: restricted funds (designated for specific purposes), unrestricted funds, and discretionary funds. Only the last category gives leaders flexibility to act on new priorities. Finally, experts explained how university endowments and investments work, primarily in terms of ROI mandates.

Session 6: From Insight to Action: Goals for 2026

This session translated the summit's discussions into actionable priorities for participants to bring back to their campuses and communities. Some areas for further discussion and research:

- Overemphasis on Ivy League and elite institutions: public universities, schools of scale, and community colleges were underrepresented in discussions.
- Treatment of chaplains as monolithic: participants emphasized that chaplains operate in vastly different institutional environments – from pluralistic settings with thousands of Muslim students to small Catholic colleges with a handful of students.
- CILRU-model expansion: working toward establishing similar Muslim campus life centers at universities across the country.

Session 7: Assessment and Conclusion

The closing session gathered suggestions for future MCL summits and surfaced what participants found most valuable from this year's convening. Closing reflections centered on gratitude: for belonging to a national network, for the emotional honesty of the sessions, for the professional connections formed, and for the renewed sense of purpose. Participants spoke of returning to their campuses with concrete tools, a clearer strategic lens, and — crucially — the knowledge that they are not navigating these challenges alone.

Key Takeaways

1. **Data is a Strategic Asset:** Muslim communities on campuses have historically lacked the data needed to advocate effectively. MCL's inaugural student experience survey is a critical first step, but participants called for deeper, more representative data.
2. **Understand How Universities Actually Work:** Effective advocacy requires understanding university governance, budget structures, and the difference between what presidents, deans, and board members can and cannot do. Students and advocates who understand restricted versus discretionary funds, and who sits on what boards, are better positioned to make winnable demands.
3. **Build Long-Term Institutional Relationships:** Lasting change comes from being present in decision-making spaces before crises occur. This means investing years in building trust and credibility — through service on nonprofit and university boards, through alumni engagement, through sustained community presence — not just mobilizing reactively.
4. **Navigate Diversity and Inclusion Strategically:** The erosion of DEI infrastructure is real but uneven. Some institutions are gutting programs; others are preserving the substance in different ways. Muslim campus advocates should evaluate whether the framework has helped or hinder Muslim inclusion on campuses, what kind of equity work makes more sense for enhancing Muslim student experience and belonging on campus, and leveraging existing systems on campus such as faculty senates, legal frameworks as recourse for discrimination, etc.

5. **Muslim Communities Must Invest Financially in Higher Education:** Donor-directed giving — through endowed chairs, scholarships, and named centers — is one of the most durable tools for shaping university priorities. The infrastructure for Muslim life that exists today at many universities was funded by community donors generations ago. The same opportunity exists now, particularly at public universities.
6. **Don't Treat Muslim Communities as Monolithic:** The needs, resources, and institutional contexts of Muslim campus communities vary enormously, e.g. a large public research university, a small Catholic college, and a community college operates in fundamentally different environments. Strategies and toolkits must be adaptable to these differences.
7. **Build Communities of Care — For Students and for Advocates:** The emotional and spiritual wellbeing of chaplains, administrators, and campus life professionals is not a peripheral concern. Burnout is pervasive. Cultivating rahma — mercy, compassion, and mutual support — within MCL's own network and within campus Muslim communities is not separate from the advocacy mission; it is foundational to it.
8. **MCL is Building a National Infrastructure:** One of the most tangible outcomes of the conference is the emergence of a national network of Muslim campus professionals who are experts and can serve as each other's resources. Participants left with a clearer sense of who to call when facing a crisis, anti-Muslim discrimination, a doxxing attack, or the question of better understanding Muslim student needs at their campus.