

## Interculturality in St. Paul University Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v4i3.739>

| Allan Peejay M. Lappay |

Director, Alumni, External  
Relations, and Advocacies  
St. Paul University Philippines

[aplappay@spup.edu.ph](mailto:aplappay@spup.edu.ph)

### ABSTRACT

*This study discusses the interculturality of St. Paul University Philippines along its educational designs. Utilizing the descriptive research method and integral approach, it relates the convergence and the interaction of the members of the academic community with diverse profile manifested through their cultural backgrounds and faith affiliations. It also demonstrates SPUP's practices along learning environment, policies and regulations, and programs and activities towards intercultural engagement. Lastly, it exhibits the ability of SPUP to foster a cultural experience integral of the Paulinian Core Values, namely: charity, charity, charism, commission, and Christ.*

### KEYWORDS

*St. Paul University Philippines; interculturality; practices; paulinian core values*

### INTRODUCTION

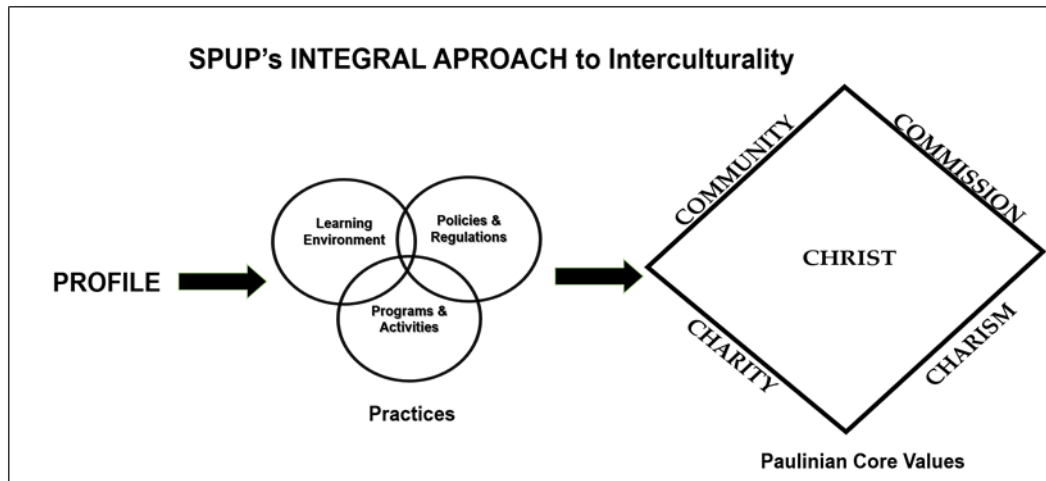
The interculturality of St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) is first and foremost, born out of the University's International and Catholic culture. It also signifies SPUP's expansion, deepening and sustainability. As the interculturality of SPUP continues to expand, its educational programs and services are geared towards the realization of enhancing compassion, respect of otherness, and acceptance of differences towards preserving and renewing cultural and religious heritage (Gordon, 2017). With SPUP's educational commitment, it fosters a learning environment where the members of the academic community collaborate to build a culture of dialogue through its interculturality practices and to integrate humane and sublime values manifested through the Paulinian Core Values.

As an academic institution, interculturality in SPUP flourishes as it is integrated with institutional norms and practices (Ray, 2012). Due to cultural and religious diversity, SPUP has become an emerging space for the advancement of intercultural as well as interfaith learning and experience (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, because of its reputable stature, offering international, affordable, accessible, and quality education, SPUP has become a place of convergence of various cultures and creeds of both local and foreign students, who have bolstered the diversity on campus.

In SPUP, intercultural diversity is part of its educational reality. It brings depth of opportunities and richness to its educational experience and culture (Viera, 2012). It also ensures that all aspects of its educational programs and services reflect a positive view on cultural diversity and enriching opportunity for self-awareness through understanding (Admirand, 2019). Furthermore, in SPUP, the convergence of culture and faith leads to developing students' knowledge, bringing learners together to work in a collegial manner, improving understanding of various cultural perspectives, fostering global and socially responsible citizens, and responding to economic and workplace imperatives (UNESCO, 2013, Griffith, et al, 2016).

SPUP's engagement towards interculturality prospers as cultural expressions from different cultures and creed meet, and where learners from varied cultural backgrounds and faith traditions work together and find ample opportunities for creative and inclusive collaboration (Negussie, 2019). Moreover, in SPUP, intercultural interaction aims at engaging learners, by activating their senses, raising their emotions, and fostering social interaction among them in the context of a learning environment towards a holistic intercultural experience (Griffith, et al, 2016).

### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1.** SPUP's Integral Approach to Interculturality

Using the Integral Approach, SPUP's Interculturality unites the following features: profile, practices, and Paulinian Core Values. Interculturality profile relates the diversity among the members of the academic community pertinent to their cultural traditions and faith backgrounds. It highlights the empowerment of people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different in terms of creed and culture (Admirand, 2019). On the other hand, interculturality practices incorporate the following aspects: SPUP's learning environment, SPUP's programs and activities, and SPUP's policies and regulations. These are the components of SPUP's intercultural engagement towards ethical dialogue and authentic learning (Lappay, 2017). Moreover, SPUP's interculturality is reflected in the Paulinian Core Values in which community, charity, charism, commission, and Christ are based on genuine information of one's own culture and curiosity towards the culture of others. The integration of Paulinian Core Values emphasizes SPUP's intercultural education as formation in terms of shaping personal identity and maintaining social relationships with others regardless of creed and culture (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018).

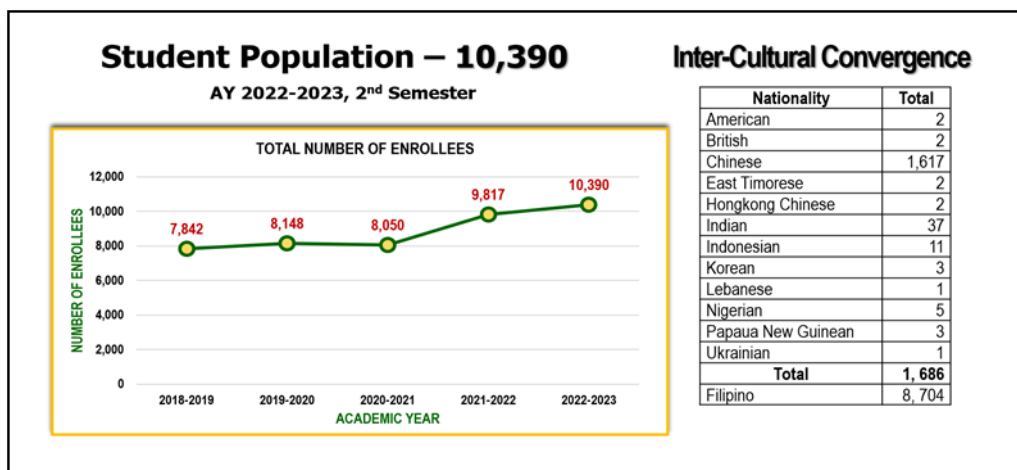
### RESEARCH METHODS

Since the study is concerned with the condition of relationships, practices, beliefs, processes, and trends that are developing pertinent to SPUP's interculturality, the qualitative descriptive method of research was employed. Moreover, an integrative literature review was endeavored to support the concepts presented in the discussion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

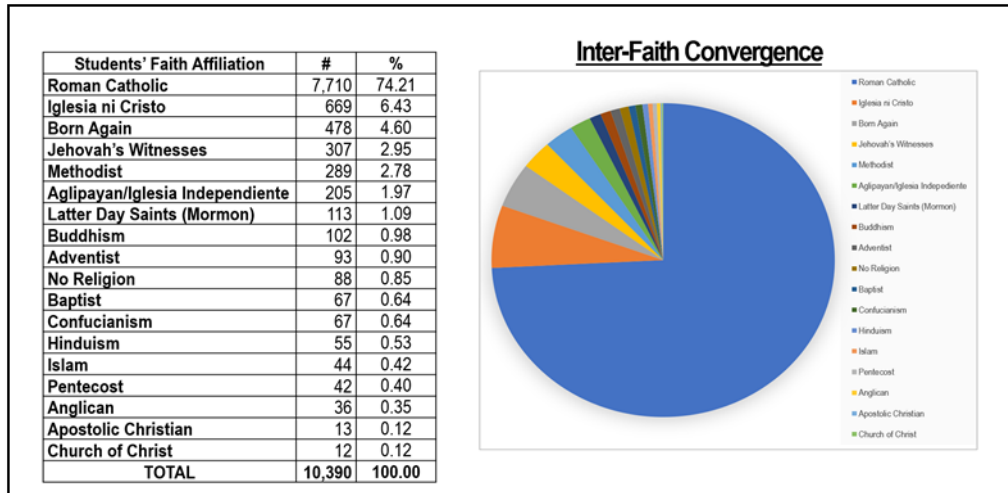
### SPUP's Interculturality Profile:

SPUP's interculturality profile demonstrates unity in diversity. It fosters an avenue for the convergence of culture and faith. This manifests the commitment of SPUP towards the integral development of the human person and the life of the members of the learning community (Tisdell, 2017).



**Figure 2.** SPUP's Inter-Cultural Convergence

1. There is an *inter-cultural convergence* in SPUP as gleaned in its student population of 10,390. SPUP's local students are mostly from the culturally rich provinces in the Philippines, namely: Cagayan, Isabela, Kalinga, Apayao and Nueva Vizcaya. With SPUP's strategic location in Tuguegarao City as a Regional Center, students from Batanes, Ilocos, Benguet, Pangasinan, Mindoro, Bulacan, Metro Manila, Cebu, Tacloban, Davao, Zamboanga, and Cagayan de Oro are now studying in the University. There are also Filipino students, residing or working in the United States of America, Canada, Cambodia, Middle East, Taiwan, Thailand, and Japan, who are also currently enrolled in the University. Moreover, the cultural diversity in SPUP flourishes with the presence of foreign students. At present, there are 1,686 foreign students or 16.23% of the total student population are enrolled in SPUP. These students are from India, United States of America, China, Korea, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Ukraine, Nigeria, United Kingdom, Lebanon, and Papua New Guinea. This means that SPUP is totally committed to providing optimum access to SPUP education and service to all in an atmosphere of caring without prejudice to race and culture (Ang, 2017).

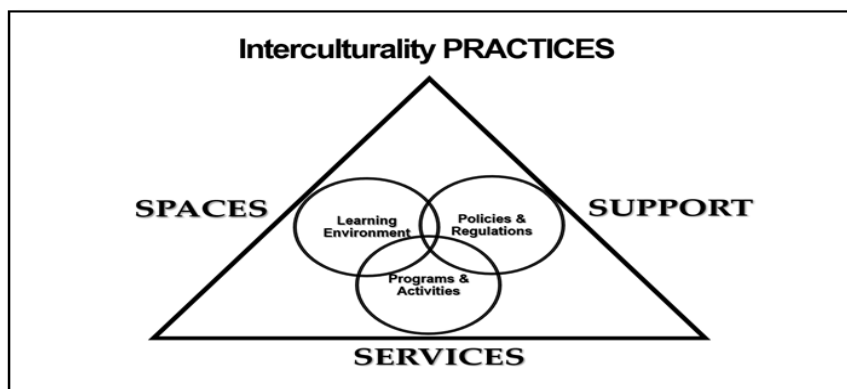


**Figure 3.** SPUP's Inter-Faith Convergence

- With culturally diverse students, there is also *inter-faith convergence* in SPUP. While it is true that majority of the students are Catholics, there are also those who belong to other Christian denominations, such as Born-Again Christians, Latter Day Saints, Methodist Christians, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and other faith-systems like Iglesia ni Cristo, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Anglican, and Aglipayan. It is also noteworthy to consider that there are students who do not subscribe to any religion at all. This affirms that SPUP, as a Catholic University, upholds religious and academic freedom (Gordon, 2017). It does not proselytize but promotes interfaith dialogue and intercultural understanding (Lappay, 2017).

**SPUP's Interculturality Practices:**

SPUP's interculturality practices affirm the capacity of the University towards intercultural undertakings amidst diversity on campus. SPUP provides a learning environment conducive for intercultural as well as interfaith experiences. On the other hand, SPUP's policies and regulations are geared towards the advancement of interculturality along ethical and authentic learning (Heckman, 2018). Moreover, the programs and services demonstrate the proficiency of SPUP to employ varied approaches to promote intercultural undertakings in its academic and community engagement activities.

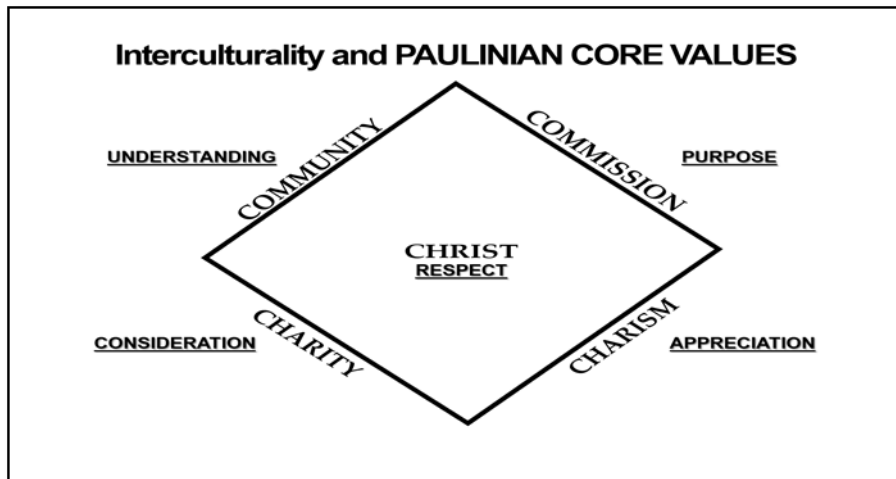


**Figure 4.** SPUP's Interculturality Practices

1. In SPUP's interculturality practices, *spaces* refer to the learning environment as an avenue for intercultural as well as interfaith interaction. Due to growing cultural and religious diversity, SPUP campus is an emerging space for the advancement of intercultural and interfaith learning. Members of the academic community respect the Catholic nature of SPUP as the University accords reverence to their respective creed and culture (Shaefer, 2013). SPUP also advocates for free expression of thoughts and opinions in the spirit of academic exchange and discussion inside the classroom (Lambert, 2014). This approach in the academic setting helps students to authentically interact across cultural and religious traditions (Terenzini & Reason, 2015). There are designated areas for interfaith and intercultural interaction on campus. These are the Interfaith rooms at the St. Paul Home Complex; the Peace corner at the Guidance Office; the Our Lady of Chartres Chapel; the Labyrinth; the Plaza de Martires; the Grotto, the parks; the activity centers and classrooms; and the well-landscaped gardens on campus. These areas are designed to support intercultural as well as interfaith activities and create opportunities for interaction across differences (Beck & Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, these locations on campus are vital as they are venues where members of diverse religion and traditions can practice and deepen their understanding of their own faith and most importantly, participate in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, cooperation, and education (Patel and Meyer, 2011).
2. In SPUP's interculturality practices, *support* is reflective of the policies and regulations sustaining intercultural and interfaith initiatives. Institutional policies and regulations serve as the foundation of intercultural as well as interfaith programs (Pew, 2018). In SPUP, policies are clearly articulated. The University subscribes to "Open Admission Policy," (SPUP Student Handbook, 2017) this means that students may enroll in SPUP regardless of cultural affiliation and religious beliefs. Moreover, policies relevant to the Catholic Identity of the University are emphasized during orientation activities and in student fora. The regulations highlight that proselytization is an illicit act in the University (SPUP Student Handbook, 2017). This supports the idea that for interfaith and intercultural activities to prosper there must be a common understanding or persuasion of the inherent integrity and validity of all religious beliefs and cultural affiliations (Ray, 2012). Moreover, these policies and regulations define the creative formulation and proactive implementation of interfaith and intercultural programs (Putnam & Campbel, 2018) in the University.
3. In SPUP's interculturality practices, *services* indicate the University's academic programs and community activities. These are avenues for interaction, collaboration, and cooperation between and among the students regardless of their creed and culture (Heckman, 2018). In SPUP, programs and activities that promote interfaith and intercultural undertakings include conversation groups, collaborative projects, joint service programs, and thematic dialogues (Thetamanil, 2019). These are manifested in students' participation in classroom and community apostolate, service-learning program of their respective courses and outreach activities of their organizations. Moreover, students of other culture and religion are also encouraged to participate in religious and cultural activities; while others are also given opportunity to lead prayers in class and other occasions. As the cultural and religious diversity in SPUP is growing, programs and activities facilitate the preparation of students for leadership and service as a response to the challenges of global citizenship (Baxter, 2013).

### **SPUP's Interculturality and Paulinian Core Values:**

The integration of the Paulinian Core Values in SPUP's interculturality essentially aims to integrate individuals into a dynamic world. This contributes to the development of individuality by valuing individual traits which must be recognized and evolved, thus supporting society, and ensuring coherence, functionality, and solidarity (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018).



**Figure 5.** SPUP's Interculturality and Paulinian Core Values

1. Charity: SPUP's interculturality is manifested through compassionate service. This is reflective of SPUP's service-learning activities advancing prime *consideration* for others (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018). The University's partner communities are hubs for intercultural service learning. Local, international and exchange students experience serving to learn and learning to serve. This intercultural service learning in SPUP fosters an avenue for the students to actively participate in community activities reflective of being "competent leaders and responsible citizens of their communities, country and the world" (SPUP Student Handbook, 2017). Moreover, regardless of faiths and cultures, SPUP College students participate in various apostolate and outreach activities through the Christian Formation Office. These activities include catechesis in public schools, prison ministry, apostolate to the youth in conflict with the law, and outreach services to the orphans and abused women.
2. Community: SPUP's interculturality is geared towards social development. It is built on an in-depth *understanding* of the needs of others (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018). As SPUP's Community Development Programs are accredited by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), SPUP extends its services to the Indigenous People's Groups in the Provinces of Cagayan and Apayao. They are recipients of SPUP's Health Education, Functional Literacy, Technology and Livelihood Education, Family-Based Disaster Education and Child Protect Programs. Moreover, aside from being an International and a Catholic learning institution, SPUP has been designated as a Historical Landmark by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines; Center for Catholic Culture by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines; a Regional Art Center by the Cultural Center of the Philippines; and a Regional Hub for Global Citizenship Education by UNESCO-Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding and the Philippine Normal University. Thus, SPUP is in a noble position to advance its educational mission towards the

appreciation, transmission, and preservation of culture. Through these designations, SPUP is tasked to collaborate in the conservation of the patrimony of the Church and Nation; and to promote greater awareness of the heritage of the church and country through intercultural education (Negussie, 2019).

3. Commission: SPUP's interculturality involves collaborative engagement. It puts premium on the *purpose* of engaging in intercultural engagement (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018). SPUP forged working and operational partnerships with internationally renowned institutions in Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Australia, Taiwan, Spain, France, India, Cambodia, United States of America, and Thailand. With SPUP as one of the 13 participating schools in the Philippines for International Mobility for Students Program by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), local students are also given opportunity for intercultural experiences while learning. SPUP students bounded to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, Taiwan and United States of America for academic and cultural exchange, and work and travel program. These are offered to Junior High School to Graduate School Students. SPUP also hosted inbound students for their academic and cultural immersion to the Philippines. Universities like Naresuan University and Rang-Sit University (in Thailand), Chang Jung Christian University (in Taiwan), Tokushima University (in Japan), Health Polytechnic of Palangka Raya, STIKES Sari Mulia Banjarmasin and Diponegoro University (in Indonesia) have sent their students for such program in SPUP. SPUP Employees are also given opportunities for intercultural learning and experience as they are sent for research presentations in the country and abroad; grants and benchmarking in Taiwan, Italy, Spain, France, China, Singapore, Canada, USA; and annual tour in countries in Southeast Asia.
4. Charism: SPUP's interculturality is anchored in holistic development. It fosters a sense of *appreciation* of cultural and faith traditions (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018). SPUP has developed intercultural competencies and instituted proactive strategies that provide learning opportunities for intercultural values promotive of interfaith dialogue and ecumenical understanding (Ang, 2017). Through these, SPUP fosters experiences to its students, faculty, and staff to conscientiously discern and to overcome hesitations, paving the way to progress and peace, developing the best in themselves, with the cultural riches they can and should preserve (Biglem, 2007). Indeed, the synergy of the mind and heart can transcend the difference in culture and religion.
5. Christ: SPUP's interculturality fosters maturity in faith. The University is not only a place where culture and faith converge but in SPUP, "faith is in itself culture" (John Paul II, 1998). With the faith-culture of the members of the academic community, interculturality flourishes as *respect* for each other despite of creed and culture is upheld with high esteem (Argentina & Panciuc, 2018). Interculturality in SPUP education is geared towards the integral development of both the corporal and spiritual well – being of the human person (Bryant, 2012). In SPUP, faith is taught and learned through intercultural mingling in which it formed an entire structure of life, a community, and the interaction of one another to the world and God (Ratzinger, 1993). Through this value, SPUP sustains its initiatives and innovative undertakings relevant to the University's international and Catholic education, which is enriched through an encounter of cultures and religions under the mediating power of faith (Ratzinger, 1993).

## CONCLUSION

SPUP's Interculturality demonstrates the University's core values and beliefs, shaped by collaborative spirit and openness for intercultural and interfaith dialogue. SPUP adopts an "all to all" stance through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other culture and religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life. Thus, students recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values of their respective creed and culture. While the cultural and spiritual animation of SPUP is encapsulated in the reflection and realization of the University's vision-mission, its integral approach towards interculturality fortifies every effort to build and celebrate relationships in a flourishing international community.

As SPUP's Interculturality program is both developmental and adaptive, the following pathways are considered towards its sustainability, deepening, and expansion: 1) Inclusion of cultural and religious issues which transcend contemporary ways of looking at nature and the human being from the standpoint of responsibility and freedom. 2) Provision of time to engage in teaching the different creeds and culture of the students on campus towards the growing significance of cultural diversity and interfaith relations. 3) Promotion of models in teaching religion and culture from an outlook that treats religion as a cultural fact which plays an inspiring role for humanity and accepts diversity as a source full of chances.

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