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This Is the Way: Faculty on the Camino de Santiago

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PILGRIMAGE

as Spiritual Practice

*A Handbook for Teachers,
Wayfarers, and Guides*

Editors

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Fortress Press
Minneapolis

PILGRIMAGE AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
A Handbook for Teachers, Wayfarers, and Guides

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Chapter 10

This Is the Way

Faculty on the Camino de Santiago

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Introduction: The Camino de Santiago

For nearly a millennium, pilgrims have made their way to Santiago de Compostela to visit the tomb of Saint James. These pilgrims initially journeyed from the Iberian Peninsula and then greater Europe, establishing over a dozen routes to reach the northwestern city in modern-day Galicia, a province of Spain. These routes followed established pathways connecting urban hubs, ports, and trade channels. While the number of pilgrims rose steadily in the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, the popularity of pilgrimage mirrored that of the Catholic Church and began to wane with the onset of the Enlightenment. It is not until the late twentieth century that we begin to see the Camino's revitalization and then a boom in participation in the first decades of this century.

In the fifteen years between 2004 and 2019, the Pilgrim's Office saw an increase in the number of pilgrims making the trek along the route. This office is responsible for receiving pilgrims when they arrive in Santiago and verifying that they have made a pilgrimage that qualifies for the Compostela. In 2004, 179,944 pilgrims

completed the Camino and registered with the Pilgrim's Office. By 2019, the number of pilgrims and their motivations increased dramatically. The Pilgrim's Office welcomed 347,578 pilgrims in 2019, a 93 percent increase from 2004. These numbers represent only those pilgrims who complete the Camino and register at the Pilgrim's Office. Not counted here are the pilgrims who begin their journey and cannot complete it or those who arrive in Santiago and for whatever reason do not register their journey with the church.

In this latest resurgence, a majority of pilgrims use the Camino Francés, which served as the principal pathway for pilgrims arriving from across Europe into modern-day Spain. This eight-hundred-kilometer trek begins at the French and Spanish border and stretches across northern Spain. Upon arrival in Santiago de Compostela, pilgrims often procure the Compostela from the Catholic Church. This ancient document serves as proof of the pilgrim's journey. The church sets expectations for the Compostela that correlate to the manner in which a pilgrim traveled to Santiago. Those who arrive on foot must walk at least the final one hundred kilometers of their chosen route; this mandatory distance varies for pilgrims who arrive via bicycle or horseback.

There is no doubt that many pilgrims begin their journey along the Camino with the end in mind—arrival in Santiago and procurement of the Compostela. While the end is a critical and culminating experience, pilgrims ultimately share that the journey itself holds significant meaning. As they make their journeys, pilgrims stay in communal housing, share meals, and form important social bonds with fellow pilgrims. These acts and these relationships form the basis of a distinct Camino culture.

In this chapter, we provide background and insights for university faculty who want to take students on the Camino as part of a study abroad program. While this chapter focuses on the faculty

leaders of these study abroad programs, we also discuss how students experience Camino study abroad programs, particularly through the lenses of disciplinary learning outcomes and student perceptions of spirituality. First, we examine the ways in which faculty members approach leading the pilgrimage. We achieve this through examining faculty motivations, professional identities, and pedagogical goals. This includes drawing on lessons learned from our personal experiences designing and teaching study abroad programs that incorporate the Camino. Then we offer insight into the pedagogical practices faculty leaders employ to teach both academic course content and the practice of pilgrimage. Throughout the chapter, we share personal reflections on our own experiences teaching courses while leading students on pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago.

US Study Abroad on the Camino

The first study abroad program documented in the United States was launched in 1923. Raymond Kirkbride, a University of Delaware French instructor, arranged for a group of his students to spend their junior year in France. This program, now hosted by Sweet Briar College, has run nearly every year since 1923 with the exception of the years of the Second World War. As the decades progressed, study abroad in the United States became more popular, particularly for language-based programs. The United States eventually grew into the world leader for international study. The Fulbright Act of 1946, the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, and the Marshall Plan all helped establish and perpetuate global study as a part of American higher education.

In 1974, David Gitlitz of Indiana University led the first group of US-based college students on a study abroad program that

incorporated the Camino. Unlike Kirkbride's initial cohort, Gitlitz's seven students were all women. They spent two months hiking from the border of France and Spain across the northern Iberian Peninsula to Santiago de Compostela. During the two-month journey, students had to interpret Spanish army maps, blaze their own pathways through fields and towns, and participate in class discussions on Francoist culture, medieval pilgrimage, and Spanish life. This program in 1974 set the stage for future faculty to take their students along the Camino as a means of experiential global education.

The nearly five decades between the first study abroad program and the writing of this chapter witnessed remarkable growth in the number and diversity of study abroad programs that incorporate the Camino de Santiago. As of 2019, over thirty universities in the United States offered some sort of Camino-based educational experience. These institutions represent the vast diversity of higher education in the United States. There are programs run by two-year community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, military schools, art institutes, religiously affiliated schools, public and private universities, and large flagship state institutions.

Just as diverse as the sponsoring institutions are the programs themselves. Some programs follow in Gitlitz's footsteps—literally—and walk the eight-hundred-kilometer trail from the Pyrenees to Santiago. Other programs seek out less-developed routes, such as the Camino Portugués, which travels northward from Lisbon, or the Camino Primitivo, which treks up and down the mountain ranges across the north of Spain. There are also programs that do not involve walking the Camino; rather, students take buses and trains on various routes to visit key cities along the Way. Our own Camino study abroad program begins at the end, in Santiago. We take a train to León and then walk the three hundred kilometers back to Santiago de Compostela.

The Camino has emerged as a popular destination for US study abroad programs. What does this mean for the faculty who lead students on the Camino? There are clear differences between traditional programs that place students in homestays with families or in host-university residence halls. In these programs, faculty directors would typically teach one or two classes and perhaps arrange for weekend excursions. With Camino programs, faculty directors engage in a much more complex venture. Faculty fulfill multiple roles—providing housing, food, logistics, first aid, counseling—all while also serving in the traditional faculty role of delivering academic content. The next section addresses some of the complexities faculty face when they choose to take students on the Camino and how faculty can prepare to lead such programs.

Leading a Pilgrimage as Study Abroad

As faculty begin their preparations for leading students on the Camino, there are important considerations to undertake. This section will address faculty preparation to lead a Camino study abroad program. We begin with an overview of teaching and learning frameworks that guided our own preparation and the design of our program. Then we discuss faculty motivations for engaging the Camino. These motivations drive faculty in both their personal and professional choices related to pilgrimage and study abroad. We move to a discussion of the physical and social preparation faculty undertake to lead these programs. We base much of this discussion on our own experiences leading Camino programs and the connections we have made with faculty over the years who have shared their experiences. Finally, we address student preparation—how we as faculty ensure our students are ready for the pilgrimage experience.



Study abroad students from William & Mary relax in front of the Cathedral of Santiago at the conclusion of their pilgrimage along the Camino in 2019. Photo by James P. Barber.

Frameworks for Teaching and Learning on the Camino

Two theoretical frameworks served as foundations for our experiences as faculty members on pilgrimage: James P. Barber's integration of learning and Marcia B. Baxter Magolda's self-authorship. These two models, rooted in developmental theory, guided our approach to constructing a holistic educational experience for our students (and ourselves).

At the heart of integration of learning is the notion that students thrive when they connect what they are learning across contexts.¹ Barber's initial study found that college students used three main approaches to integrate their learning, listed here in order of increasing complexity: connection, application, and synthesis. Connection is a recognition of similarity, perhaps a fleeting reminder of a previous experience or knowledge. Application is more involved and is characterized by a student using the knowledge and skills learned in one context in another context. Finally, synthesis is the most complex form of integration. It involves bringing together ideas learned in two or more contexts to form a new insight or way of seeing the world. We used this framework of integration to conceptualize our study abroad experience and encourage students to use connection, application, and synthesis throughout the program. We believed strongly that students' prior knowledge, the three courses we taught in the program, their larger academic majors in college, the cultural experience in Spain, and our pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago needed to be integrated in order to deliver a cohesive and meaningful learning experience.

1. James P. Barber, *Facilitating the Integration of Learning: Five Research-Based Practices to Help College Students Connect Learning across Disciplines and Lived Experience* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2020).

The theory of self-authorship was also influential in the construction of our study abroad program. Self-authorship is a human developmental model that has broad appeal in higher education. It is part of a larger model of development across the life span created by Robert Kegan, the orders of consciousness. Self-authorship, popularized by Baxter Magolda's work focused on college student development, posits that people are on a journey from external frameworks, in which meaning is dictated by authorities, to internal foundations, where meaning is created by oneself.² Baxter Magolda found that students developed toward self-authorship in three domains: epistemological (how they see the world around them), intrapersonal (how they see themselves), and interpersonal (how they see themselves in relationships with others).

The three domains of development in Baxter Magolda's model mapped onto our program of study quite well. The epistemological domain correlated with a course we offered on regional and cultural contexts of the Camino de Santiago, the intrapersonal domain matched with the course on identity and pilgrimage, and the interpersonal domain included the *communitas*, or sense of community, encountered with other pilgrims as we walked along the way.

The frameworks of integration of learning and self-authorship complemented one another and, when taken together, informed our efforts to create a holistic study abroad experience that would join traditional academic courses and embed them within our lived experience of a three-hundred-kilometer pilgrimage.

Faculty Preparation

For most faculty, leading students on pilgrimage is unlike any other faculty role they engage on their home campuses. Faculty must

2. Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, *Authoring Your Life: Developing an Internal Voice to Navigate Life's Challenges* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009).

physically prepare to walk at least one hundred kilometers while carrying their belongings. In addition to the typical pilgrim physical demands, faculty must also prepare mentally for leading students. Student-faculty relationships will be quite different on the Camino from on campus. We explore how these relationships unfold and ways that faculty can embrace the Camino culture while still serving as the academic authority in the program.

Motivations

In his 2019 dissertation study, Benjamin I. Boone found that faculty program leaders drew motivation for leading these programs from both internal and external sources.³ Faculty described internal motivations related to their personal lives and experiences. These included reflections on their faith traditions and the desire for discernment during the Camino as well as seeing the Camino as a means to achieve deeper healing and recovery from tragedy and major life transitions. While these internal motivations may be incredibly personal in nature, they carried through into the professional lives of the faculty members. This blend of personal and professional identities created a unique experience for faculty as they prepared to lead their students.

External sources of inspiration emerged around three specific areas. First, faculty expressed a desire to immerse students in an authentic Spanish environment. Faculty found that students had varied and often romanticized perceptions of Spanish society involving sangria, beaches, and a robust nightlife. They wanted students to experience Galicia and the day-to-day life within the region. A second source of inspiration related to the pedagogical

3. Benjamin I. Boone, "Teaching along the Way: An Ethnographic Study of Faculty Growth and Sensemaking on the Camino de Santiago" (PhD diss., William & Mary, 2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.25774/w4-drs8-nx23>.

possibilities that faculty saw in teaching in a Camino program. These possibilities included different means for assessment of learning, opportunities to teach course materials in a new environment, and ways for faculty to engage the real world in their day-to-day teaching. Finally, faculty found motivation in providing a study abroad opportunity that was affordable and accessible for their students. This manifested in their careful planning of the programs to maximize financial efficiency and time spent on the Camino so that students would gain as much as possible.

Communitas and Teaching on the Camino

As we discuss above, Camino culture creates a sense of *communitas* wherein power dynamics shift and pilgrims associate as coequal members of a “Camino family.” This phenomenon occurs in many contexts along the Camino. Kathleen Jenkins discusses how parents and their adult children experience shifts in responsibilities and expectations while walking the Camino.⁴ Likewise, on study abroad, faculty participants in Boone’s dissertation study expressed a leveling effect on the Camino. Faculty began to see students as more than just learners in a classroom. They saw them as whole persons outside the educational context.

Preparing for this shift in social dynamics is important for faculty considering leading a program on the Camino. Faculty should understand that on the trail, they will be with their students constantly, oftentimes sharing space in ways that would rarely if ever happen on a college campus. As we have spent time with students on the Camino, we have come to embrace these opportunities to get to know students in a deeper way that enriches our pedagogical work. Faculty should embrace students as colearners along the Camino

4. Kathleen E. Jenkins, *Walking the Way Together: How Families Connect on the Camino de Santiago* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

and help them find deeper meaning in the academic and physical work of the Camino study abroad program. The next section highlights how faculty can help students prepare for this undertaking.

Student Preparation

A key role for faculty leaders is to prepare their students to embark on a Camino journey. Much like in their own preparation, faculty orient students' thinking toward the physical demands of walking as well as newly negotiated social spaces. In this section, we provide recommendations based on our own experiences preparing students. These preparations also include managing expectations for relationships with technology and for academic engagement during the pilgrimage. We also address the role that spirituality played in our students' experiences on the Camino.

Students in our study abroad program enrolled in a one-credit academic course in the semester prior to our pilgrimage. In this course, we had four distinct objectives: (a) introduce the concept of pilgrimage and position it within the context of Spain, (b) prepare students for the physical aspects of hiking the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route, (c) explain the uses and formats of a learning portfolio, which was our central assignment for the program, and (d) develop a sense of community among the group of student-pilgrims and faculty. We met as a group seven times before we traveled to Spain, including one class meeting that was an early morning practice hike around campus and the local community to model and foreshadow the ways that we would soon interact on our journey. These preprogram connections were critical in establishing trust with our students. We recognized that when they enroll in our program, students are putting their trust in us to provide a safe and meaningful structure unlike any learning experience they have encountered on campus. In addition to the goals mentioned above,

we also helped students acquire the necessary equipment for the program, oftentimes coordinating field trips with university-owned vans for students who did not have their own cars on campus. The intense involvement we had with our students in preparing for the program created the necessary trust and confidence that was critical for a successful Camino program.

Equally important to preparing students physically for the Camino is preparing them mentally for the time on the trail. We have found that preparing our students to reframe their relationship with technology while hiking helps with the transition into an immersive Camino experience. Our experience working with students on campus during the traditional academic year has taught us that students rely on technology in nearly every aspect of their lives. They use devices to establish and maintain social relationships, manage financial transactions, and complete their coursework. When we are walking the Camino with our students, they experience an interruption in their relationship with their devices that can cause some discomfort if they are not prepared for it.

Our approach to technology on the Camino is to encourage students to be as present in the experience as possible. Without mandating a policy on technology usage, we try to help students see the value in setting aside the distractions of social media, texting, and other forms of constant connection. While on the Camino, we shift our academic content delivery so that students do not have to be connected in order to engage in their coursework. Negotiating a revised relationship with technology can be challenging for some students, and recognizing that each student may have different needs related to their access to technology is important for faculty leaders. By encouraging students to be present in the world around them, we find that they are more able to engage in conversations with their peers and with other pilgrims. They also have the space

to engage in deep reflection, which oftentimes connects to their orientation toward spirituality.

Spirituality on the Camino

Spirituality is not a formal part of our program or curriculum, but it certainly is a factor in our journeys with students on the Camino de Santiago. Early in our preparation and introductions, some students begin to share their reasons for wanting to participate in this study abroad program. For some, it is the physical challenge of walking a three-hundred-kilometer section of the ancient pilgrimage route. For others, it is a time to disconnect from their college life and reconnect with nature and themselves. Still others see the Camino as a religious pilgrimage in concert with the Catholic Church or another Christian denomination. Many students have a combination of these and other motivations.

The influence of religion and spirituality is unavoidable on a study abroad program such as the Camino de Santiago. In a literal sense, we are walking across Spain to arrive at the tomb of Saint James, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. Whether or not students have a religious background or worldview, this is the historical origin of the Camino. At each city and town along the route, there is generally at least one Catholic Church, sometimes several, and all offer daily Pilgrims' Masses to welcome those passing through on their way to Santiago and offer them a blessing. As we wrote earlier in this chapter, many pilgrims register with the Pilgrim's Office (operated by the Catholic diocese) to obtain their Compostela as evidence of their journey.

The approach to spirituality in our program is to encourage discussion of multiple worldviews, religions, and ways of making meaning. We acknowledge the overt religiosity of the Catholic influences and invite students who share Christian religious beliefs

and those who do not to enter into conversation about their individual perspectives. We invite students to participate in church services as cultural celebrations but do not require it. Often in our program, these shared experiences lead to in-depth, respectful conversations about students' beliefs and critiques of religion.

Critical Religious Pluralism

In considering the delivery of an academic program to an audience with diverse worldviews, critical religious pluralism theory (CRPT) is a useful tool to consider. Exploring the historical and contemporary ways that religion has been used to perpetuate inequality is essential in an experience like the Camino that centers on both the individual and collective journeys of pilgrims over time. Students are often curious about how their own religious or spiritual backgrounds connect with the millennia-long traditions of the pilgrimage to Santiago.

In our group, paintings and sculptures we encountered portraying Saint James as Matamoros, a legendary figure who miraculously appeared to assist Catholics in conquering the Muslim Moors, prompted discussions about religious persecution, privilege, and power in terms of worldviews. Some students were surprised to see violent and racist depictions in religious art; others noted connections to current discussions of social justice and antiracism. Jenny L. Small's critical religious pluralism theory and her earlier work examining faith frames (which include atheist and agnostic college students) are practical tools for guiding students in dialogue about their own personal faiths and worldviews and the larger narratives about religious pluralism.⁵

5. Jenny L. Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education: A Social Justice Framework to Support Religious Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

Just as faculty must prepare physically to lead and participate in the pilgrimage to Santiago, they also need to prepare mentally and emotionally to engage students in conversations about faith, religion, and worldview. Amanda Armstrong found that college educators' awareness of worldview diversity has a great deal of influence on student engagement with these topics. She noted that students' level of comfort discussing their experiences of religious prejudice or discrimination was often entangled with educators' own awareness (or unawareness) of bias and inequity related to worldview.⁶ Educators who have the capacity to promote pluralism and interfaith engagement may create a more favorable environment for students to do the same.

Reflection as Spirituality

One of the ways that we encouraged a pluralistic spirituality on the Camino de Santiago was through formal and informal opportunities for reflection. Prayer, meditation, yoga, and free-writing are all ways in which students and faculty may choose to reflect. We encouraged students to reflect in a way that was meaningful and comfortable to them, and we were intentional in establishing time for reflection in our formal and informal activities. In more formal class experiences, we often reserved ten to fifteen minutes for written reflection. In less formal group meetings or conversations as we were walking "the Way," we asked students to think and process information for a few minutes before talking. Students of course had their own ways of reflecting as well, including drawing, listening to music, and studying religious texts. The ways in which students reflected were not as important as the practice of

6. Amanda R. Armstrong, "It Put Me in a Really Uncomfortable Situation": A Need for Critically Conscious Educators in Interworldview Efforts," *Journal of College and Character* 20, no. 2 (2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2194587x.2019.1591287>.

reflection. Students (and faculty) need intentional time to reflect in study abroad experiences such as this where they are examining multiple perspectives that may conflict with their previous ways of thinking. It is important to acknowledge that faculty on the Camino are physically and mentally challenged in a manner that is different from their normal teaching in a campus setting; reflection is essential for them to be able to process their own experiences and support their students as well.

Delivering Academic Content on the Camino

In the vast majority of Camino programs hosted by US institutions, students receive academic credit for their participation. The delivery of content for these credits varies among programs. Some Camino experiences serve as a capstone to a spring semester course. Other programs choose to blend content with the Camino experience, and students receive credit for a summer course. Our own program functions in this way. We teach our own course that lasts the duration of our five-week program—including content delivery while walking the Camino.

Our content mirrors our distinct but complementary interests in the Camino. Barber's course focuses on identity development and self-authorship in the context of pilgrimage. Relying on both academic texts and works of fiction, Barber engages students in thinking about the context and growth of an individual as it relates to pilgrimage. In the second course within our program, Boone focuses on the external experiences of pilgrimage—the culture and traditions of the Camino in both historical and contemporary frameworks. The two courses together provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own experiences and constructs of self within the larger context of the Camino and the shared experience of pilgrimage.

As we designed our courses, we took into account much of what we have discussed so far in this chapter—our motivations, the unique learning environment of the Camino, and our knowledge of how students engage the world around them. Our program begins with a week of traditional, classroom-based learning in Santiago de Compostela. This involves lectures, group discussions, and field excursions to museums. As we transition to weeks two through four, our coursework shifts to a more applied focus with students reflecting on and engaging with the Camino. Finally, when we return to Santiago de Compostela, students begin to synthesize their learning and create their portfolios. These portfolios serve as a capstone to the program and integrate learning from both academic courses.

When designing the coursework associated with a study abroad program on the Camino, faculty should keep in mind the environment in which they will be teaching. Students learn differently in experiential settings, and course content and delivery methods should reflect that reality. Accounting for the unique nature of learning on the Camino, faculty have the opportunity to design and deliver engaging academic coursework that proves fulfilling for both the students and the instructor.

Conclusion

In closing, we highlight the need for more established resources on teaching students while walking the Camino. In a practical sense, faculty need nuanced support from their institutions for logistics, budgeting, and planning. Faculty also need to feel empowered to lead these programs without concern that there may be negative implications for their promotion and retention reviews. Future research should explore the ways in which students and faculty process their Camino experiences in the semesters and years following the program. This type of longitudinal examination will help us

understand better how institutions can best support and prepare faculty and students for not only Camino-based programs but also other experiential global learning opportunities.

When faculty use the concept of integration of learning in developing their study abroad programs on the Camino, individual course assignments and readings synthesize with motivations, observations, and conversations along the route. Those conversations and musings while hiking become building blocks for the assignments, and perhaps the readings are fodder for dialogue with a walking partner. In this way, the educational experience becomes more than the sum of its parts, emerging as both meaningful and transformational for students.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are your personal motivations for undertaking the pilgrimage? Will the leader be able to devote time to honoring these motivations while leading a group of students?
2. What distinctive steps can pilgrims and guides take to best prepare themselves physically and emotionally before the journey?
3. In the case of a study abroad program, are there specific learning objectives that you or your institution would want to see students achieve?
4. As a leader, how would you process the experience of the journey—both personally and professionally—with your group?

Select Annotated Bibliography

Barber, James P. *Facilitating the Integration of Learning: Five Research-Based Practices to Help College Students Connect Learning across Disciplines and Lived Experience*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2020.

Barber's book offers practical strategies for college educators to help students connect knowledge and insights across various contexts, experiences, and disciplinary boundaries.

Baxter Magolda, Marcia B. *Authoring Your Life: Developing an Internal Voice to Navigate Life's Challenges*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009.

This book offers a comprehensive description of the theory of self-authorship. Baxter Magolda illustrates her theory of human development by drawing upon the life stories of thirty-five individuals.

Boone, Benjamin I. "Teaching along the Way: An Ethnographic Study of Faculty Growth and Sensemaking on the Camino de Santiago." PhD diss., William & Mary, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25774/w4-drs8-nx23>.

Boone's dissertation provides an understanding of how faculty who lead students on the Camino de Santiago make sense of their roles and how they engage the Camino as an educational environment.

Frey, Nancy. *Pilgrim Stories: On and off the Road to Santiago*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Frey's seminal work delves deep into the lives of the pilgrims and people along the Camino. Her work is the first in-depth ethnography related to the Camino de Santiago.

Jenkins, Kathleen E. *Walking the Way Together: How Families Connect on the Camino de Santiago*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Jenkins explores the relationships of parents and their adult children who walk the Camino together. Chapter 4 deals with technology along the Camino.

Small, Jenny L. *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education: A Social Justice Framework to Support Religious Diversity*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

In this volume, Small details the seven tenets of her critical religious pluralism theory, developed to support religious, secular, and spiritual diversity in higher education.

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This collection of essays showcases young adults' experiences on the Camino.