

## Moral Reasoning and Student Perceptions of the Middle East: Observations on Student Learning from an Internet Dialog

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*This article explores the relationship between the religious based moral reasoning of Judaism and Islam and college student subjects' attitudes toward political entities involved in Middle East conflict, Israel and Arab states. Subjects learn about the moral positions by observing parts of an interactive, Internet dialog among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim scholars who discuss issues of terrorism, resistance, the United States's role in the Middle East, and the prospects for peace. After surveying an extensive literature on student attitude change, the author presents the study's methodology as well its quantitative and qualitative findings. These suggest that students' views of political entities are influenced by faith based moral reasoning in explanation of political actions.*

*One group of subjects reported changed attitudes and more favorable viewpoints toward Israel after observing Jewish moral reasoning; and another group made similar positive attitude change toward Arab countries when presented with Muslim positions. Confronted with both Jewish and Muslim arguments, however, the subjects in a third group were more divided in the number of students who changed their attitudes and in the direction of change. The study also presents anecdotal evidence involving students' own evaluation of the use of information technology and the Internet in their learning experience. More research in this area would help assess the role this technology plays in opening students' minds to unfamiliar values and changing their attitudes toward political entities.*

**Keywords** values, attitudes, religion, politics, World Wide Web

Today's students are becoming tomorrow's citizens and leaders, inheriting a world very different from the one their parents know. They must adapt to new realities of transnational terrorism brought home by the September 11th attacks; a global environment threatened by climate change, disease, and poverty; and a broadened United States national interest that includes military deployments in the Middle East and Central Asia. In response to these changing global interests and increasing problems, political science teachers must help their students learn about new cultures, policy concerns and communication capabilities.

Fortunately, three factors assist political science instructors in this endeavor. First, most students come to college ready for change. Late adolescents are in the process of separating from their families, living in different circumstances, and seeking their own identities. Returning students are making life changes as well, advancing in their existing careers or working toward different professions, and bringing

practical world experience into the classroom. Both groups look to the learning and living environment of higher education as a means of accomplishing the change they seek. Political science education may provide them with a more complete understanding of global forces and interests that affect their lives and the future of their children.

Second, the discipline of political science has made remarkable advances over the past several decades. New methodologies and better measurement capabilities permit more precise observations. Increased attention to conceptualization and the testing of hypotheses enable political scientists to make more meaningful comparisons across and among cultures. This provides the discipline with a heightened ability to analyze and predict individual, group, and state political behavior with more insight and nuance. Greater attention to the teaching and learning of these advances has also become a hallmark of the discipline in recent years, enabling instructors and students to share in an expanding body of literature.

Third, changes in information technology have drastically improved capabilities in world wide communication, including the articulation of political interests and human expression as well as the acquisition and analysis of information. Computers, digital data transmission, and the Internet open new viewpoints that provide pathways for a more complete understanding of changing global realities. Sitting at home, students can make "virtual visits" to unusual or far-off places to learn about values and perceptions directly from political actors, journalists, and scholars. They can also communicate personally with individuals from different nation states, cultures, or socioeconomic classes. With the help of their instructors, students can evaluate these views and draw conclusions about the claims of their spokespersons.

This study examines the learning experience of American students at a Jesuit, Catholic university who were exposed to religious-oriented moral reasoning based on traditions of faith different from their own. For the purpose of this study, moral reasoning is defined as the application of ethical principles based on religious beliefs to evaluate individual, group, and national actions. Scholars, teachers, and practitioners from Christianity, Islam, and Judaism were recruited to participate in an online Internet dialog, applying their faith-based principles to understand and explain issues in Middle East conflict: terrorism, resistance, the United States role in the Middle East, and the prospects for peace. These participants shared their religious, ethical positions with student subjects who observed the moral reasoning. The study used quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the effects this moral reasoning on students' attitudes toward political entities involved in Middle East conflict, "predominantly Jewish Israel" and "predominantly Muslim Arab countries." After surveying an extensive literature on student attitude change, the author presents the study's methodology as well as its quantitative and qualitative findings.

### **Literature Survey: Contents, Context, and Comparison**

Attitude change seems to be part of students' learning experience, and how it happens has become the subject of considerable study. Researchers have used a variety of educational circumstances and experiences to explain students' attitudes, and their findings seem to fit one of several categories: course content or curriculum, educational context, comparative descriptions and analysis, and emerging studies of computer-based information technology.

The first category of studies involves course content and the students' academic majors. Jones and Jacklin (1988) report that participants in an introductory gender studies course scored significantly lower in measures of sexism at the end of the course than at the beginning. Male students were higher than females in the sexism measure at the start, but both declined by equivalent amounts. Stake and Hoffmann (2001) indicate that women's studies students showed greater activism in socio-political causes and intentions to become more politically active. In a study of attitude change in a large number of women's and gender studies classes, Sevelius and Stake (2003) found that students who have prior attitudes discordant with the class-relevant views are more resistant to change. Bryant (2003) found that students' traditionalist values decline during college, the result of women's studies courses as well as the relevance of peers, academic engagement, and experiences of diversity.

Fowler (1995) examined the effect of religious studies courses on female student attitudes toward religion. She reports that students taking the courses showed a significant increase in their willingness to question their religious convictions while maintaining their basic faith. Keljo (1996) reports changed attitudes in students taking a freshman class on moral values.

In a three-year comparison of social science and business students, Guimond and Palmer (1996) found that social science majors maintained more liberal attitudes and attributed poverty and unemployment to systemic causes. Business majors became more favorable to "capitalists," less favorable to "unions" and attributed poverty and unemployment to personal factors.

A second category of research looks at the context in which the learning process takes place. These studies include factors outside the classroom such as membership in social groups, years of enrollment in college, religious belief, and interaction with peers and faculty.

Loeb and Magee (1992) report decreased prejudices and greater concerns about politics and environmental issues in their study of potential areas of change during the first two years of college. Lottes and Kuriloff (1994) examined changes in sociopolitical attitudes at an elite university, looking at the contextual influences of fraternity and sorority membership, years in college, and religious background. They report that seniors scored higher on measures of social conscience, liberalism, tolerance toward homosexuality, and feminism than they did as freshmen with no significant differences in the degree of changes between male and female students, religious affiliation or membership in fraternities-sororities. Wilder (1986) looked at the development of students' intellectual values, comparing fraternity members, former members, and independents. He reports that the year of enrollment was a more prominent explanation than membership in a fraternity. Robinson, Gibson, and Schwartz (2004) found that fraternity members held more stereotypical gender attitudes when compared to members of a sorority or nonfraternity and nonsorority members.

Other studies focus on religion as a learning context associated with attitude change. Juergensmeyer introduces his book about the global rise of religious violence by recognizing "the power of religion to provide a transformative vision of human potential" (2000, xiii). Appleby describes religious teachers' opportunity to "guide an ongoing, organic interpretive process" (2000, 56). Foster and La Force report that students who continued enrollment in a "Christian liberal arts" college made "greater gains in moral reasoning and greater movement toward identity achievement than those who did not continue enrollment" (1999, 52). Lee (2002) studied

factors in college life that might influence students' religious beliefs. She found that students tended toward changes in their beliefs; but a greater number experienced a strengthening rather than a decline in their convictions.

Students' interaction among peers and faculty are the subject of several other contextual studies. Dey (1996) reports that changed political attitudes were influenced in equal measure by students' interaction with peers and with faculty, and the changes occurred in the direction of institutional norms. Milem (1998) also examined sociopolitical attitude change but concludes that peer influence is more instrumental than faculty norms in explaining the phenomena. Angelique, Reischl, and Davidson (2002) studied the effects of an intervention to help students become politically empowered. Those who participated in the intervention showed greater feelings of political commitment but a lesser sense of political efficacy when compared to a control group.

A third category in the literature examining students' attitudes reports on transnational comparisons. Much of this work is descriptive in nature neither exploring nor explaining change, but it does offer useful insights and comparative data. The broadest in scope is Inglehart, Basanez, and Moreno's (1998) source book for cross-national data. This extensive study examined values and beliefs in forty countries, including those of youth as well as individuals with differing levels of education. More narrowly, Lu Deping (2003) describes Chinese students' views of Japanese culture, economy, and politics; Chen Shengluo (2003a) presents the students' perceptions toward Russia's political-economic system and reform efforts; and he assesses their views of the United States both as a "hegemonist" as well as an "advanced . . . , developed" country (2003b, 29). Commeyras and Mazile (2001) compared students in Georgia with those in Botswana, discussing their efforts at visualizing each others' lives, then exploring the differences and similarities between visualization and reality. Sodowsky, Maguire, and Johnson (1994) examined the world views of American, Taiwanese, Chinese, and African students, reporting that international students were more similar to each other than to native-born American counterparts, and that international students' world views often differ from the traditional values of their own cultures.

Some comparative investigators present more analytical studies. Hazeltine and Rezvanian compared "world-mindedness scores" (1998, 344-346) for undergraduate business majors in the Russian Urals with those in the United States midwest, finding differences in both regions based on gender, plans for graduate school, and foreign language ability. Ellis (1998) writes that perceptions of New Zealand students toward the United States are associated with the shared experience of historical events like World War II and the Vietnam War. Kitsantas (2004) examined the development of global understanding in study abroad students and reports that change can be predicted by measuring their cross-cultural competence.

This literature suggests that attitude change is affected by course content as well as the context in which learning occurs: the college experience, including students' membership in social groups, peer and faculty interaction as well as the historical, cultural, and religious environment. However, the distinction between educational context and course content is eroding. Students leave the classroom to participate in study abroad programs, service-learning, and internships. Kelleher (2003) recognizes this in his study of service-learning and its impact on political attitudes and participation. In some classes, information and viewpoints from the broader social and political context are included directly in course content through

the use of mass media or guest participants from outside the academic community. Koch (1994) refers to this in his study about the effects of reading a daily newspaper, the *New York Times*, on students' political behavior. Guest participants in a course may also play a role in attitude change, but their effect has not been studied.

Finally, a potential explanation for changing student attitudes may unfold through research on the use of computers and the Internet in the learning process. Information technology and the World Wide Web affect the way students acquire information, permitting them to consider directly viewpoints that may have remained foreign to previous generations. Studies of these more recent phenomena are just beginning to emerge. Anecdotal in nature, they are limited to a narrow range of educational activity. For example, Zhang (2003) writes that students use the Internet frequently, often on a daily basis. Their feelings of enjoyment and usefulness of the Internet are associated with lessened anxiety about going online. Lunsford (1998) explores students' perceptions about the reliability of the Internet, finding they view it as accurate as other information sources such as scholarly journals, newspapers, and magazines. Longhurst (2003) finds that students express satisfaction with an internet text in world history, but they have concerns about the difficulty of reading from a computer screen. Smith, Ferguson, and Caris (2001) note that Internet-based classes require a different style of communication than traditional lecture courses, involving greater equality between instructors and students, the need for explicit written instructions, more work for instructors, and students' initial anonymity followed by their development of online identities.

Several studies are particularly useful in discussing the potential of this communication and information network for teaching and learning. Kiasatpour (1999) describes his use of the World Wide WebBoard to facilitate communication and information acquisition in a comparative Middle East politics course. He notes that most students found use of the Internet increased "their understanding of concepts and prepared them for class" (Kiasatpour 1999, 85). Blake (2000) reports favorably on Internet use in a journalism course that links students with each other and the instructor for information, critique, and in-class communication. Agarwal and Day (1998) suggest that the Internet may contribute to teaching effectiveness; and Sabry and Baldwin (2003) find that it is associated with interactive learning and greater understanding. Ward and Newlands (1998) discuss the potential of information technology to benefit student learning while recognizing the investment necessary to implement its utilization.

Finally, Botsch, and Botsch (2001) compare an Internet-based approach to teaching American government with the traditional method and report that the web-based mode is equally effective in developing students' knowledge without lessening grades or leading to higher dropout rates. The authors conclude that "web classes may be even more effective in improving the general factual knowledge of lower GPA students, because such classes . . . place more responsibility on students who are likely to be passive in more traditional classes" (Botsch and Botsch 2001, 141).

The present study is informed by several themes in this literature on student attitude change. It provides students with academic content involving religious-based moral positions from Judaism and Islam. Scholars, teachers, and practitioners of their faiths from outside the college community context are brought into the classroom as "virtual" guests to present these positions through information technology and the Internet. The study compares the effects of the experience on students' attitudes toward political entities in the Middle East, Israel, and Arab countries.

Finally, using the Internet to provide access to the content of these moral positions, the study presents anecdotal evidence involving the students' own evaluation of the medium.

## Methodology

During the spring of 2004, Santa Clara University brought together on the Internet religious teachers and practitioners from the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths to discuss issues associated with Middle East conflict. Supported by the Bannan Center for Jesuit Education, these Internet conversations aimed at helping all parties better understand one another's concerns, values, and commitment to peace.

In preparation for this online dialog, the author made two trips to the Middle East (also supported by the Bannan Center), one to Israel, and the other to Lebanon, Syria, and Morocco, recruiting participants who are scholars and practitioners of their religions. As a result of this effort, the online dialog involved participants that included four Jews, two of whom are nationals of Israel; nine Muslims, five of whom are nationals of Arab countries; and six Christians, two of whom are from the Middle East, one from Rome, and the remainder from the United States. This provided the "dialog of faith" Web site with participants who have a wide variety of experience, beliefs, and opinions. The dialog also involved students at several universities who observed the interaction, and students at Santa Clara University who agreed to be subjects in the study.

Using a Santa Clara University Web site, the project contained several web pages. One introduced the purpose of the project—the presentation of an "online conversation among clergy, teachers and scholars from Islam, Judaism, and Christianity to provide moral insight on Middle East conflict;" a second introduced the participants, giving their names, religious and professional affiliations; a third posed questions for the participants' consideration. Other pages provided a means for guest observers to register, a bibliography, directions for the participants, and information about the author.

The dialog content was managed as a threaded discussion (a rolling forum) using WebBoard. This enables an online conversation in the form of a series of linked messages. The series is created over time as users read and reply to existing messages, permitting each participant to respond to any others' comments. Typically, messages in a given thread share a common subject line. Specifically, in the dialog of faith, each thread was one of four sets of questions, with the messages linked to each other in the order of their creation and presented as a response to one of the questions.

This threaded discussion method is particularly useful in online venues where multiple discussions unfold at the same time. Without threaded discussion, the reader would confront a chaotic, unsorted list of messages on many different topics. By hyperlinking messages that share a common subject line, the threaded discussion makes it easier for the reader to focus on one conversation and avoid the distractions of unrelated postings. In short, participants are able to answer the questions, and question the answers that others give. Using a "chat room" or video conference approach in which individuals could exchange their views in real time was rejected by the participants. They felt it would be impractical due to the time differences in the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

Students in different venues followed the dialog as observers. These included classes at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, Santa Clara University in California,

the American University in Beirut, and Loyola University in New Orleans. To help students better understand the conversation, the Web site presented an extensive bibliography dealing with war, morality, and justice from the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions. These included online citations, classical texts, journal articles, and bibliographic sources as well as links to other sites on the World Wide Web. As a result, visitors to the Web site had easy access to literature dealing with the topics under discussion. Guests were also invited to join the Internet exchange, observing the dialog through reading the conversations of our participants on the Web site. Over 33 individuals registered as guests, formally "visiting" the Web site from Morocco, Israel, Palestine, the United Kingdom, Jordan, Lebanon, and Canada as well as the United States. Other guests may have also viewed the exchange without formally registering.

For two weeks (March 1–15, 2004), the participants replied to a series of questions, and then questioned each others' replies: How does your religion view resistance to oppression or to occupation? What do your religious beliefs teach about homicide/suicide bombing? What religious principles might inform policy makers and concerned citizens about the United States role in the Middle East? Who or what should that country support or oppose? What is your vision of peace between Arabs and Israelis? What steps might lead these two nations in the right direction? During this time period, the Palestinian-Israeli peace process seemed dormant, and the level of violence between the two parties remained tragically constant, with no extraordinary events to dominate American media headlines. In Iraq, the interim constitution's approval provided positive news while violence continued with massive terror attacks in Karbala and Baghdad.

Occurring within this context, the dialog revealed areas of agreement and discord. All participants supported the idea that any armed resistance should exclude attacks on noncombatants. Muslims argued that civil resistance was the right of oppressed people. Armed struggle was justified morally against an occupying military power as well as against settlers armed to protect their settlements. After millennia of experience with oppression, Jews felt resistance could only be justified if the minority were denied their right to worship according to their conscience. Christians spoke of nonviolent, civil disobedience but recognized the patience and difficulty this entails.

All condemned suicide bombing but expressed differences in analyzing why this phenomenon has become prevalent during the past few years. Muslims and Christians focused on the plight of the Palestinian people leading to despondency and depression. Jewish respondents pointed out that the bombings seemed to increase just as peace became possible, and they explained this in terms of a strategy to force more concessions from Israel. According to these participants, it was less the moral responsibility of young people who surrendered to this despondency by killing themselves and others, and more the responsibility of leaders who recruited them to do so. There was widespread agreement that any act that causes the deaths of innocent civilians should be condemned whether carried out by soldiers or suicide bombers.

The United States should have a major role in the Middle East, according to the participants. This includes impartial mediation to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the restraint of the disputant parties from extremist acts; the establishment of a viable, hopefully moral and democratic regime in Iraq, at least fixing what the Americans broke; the enforcement of agreements that disputant parties accepted;

and underwriting the cost of peace. Many expressed considerable doubt that the present American administration could achieve any of these goals.

Finally, there was much discussion about the future shape of peace. All agreed that attitudes must change, respect for each other must be encouraged through social and cultural interaction, and education should point toward the common values of peace and human development. Muslims and Christians argued for a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders, while Jews felt these borders should be negotiated and that the pre-1967 "green line" formula might preclude creative efforts at peacemaking. One such creative suggestion was the administration of Jerusalem's holy places by the United Nations in some form of shared sovereignty among Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community.

With this Internet event as a forum, the author sought to examine the effect of the experience on students' attitudes toward "predominantly Muslim Arab countries" and "predominantly Jewish Israel." Fifty-nine students in two Santa Clara University classes, a lower-division Introduction to International Relations course and an upper-division International Law course, agreed to take part in the research project. These 59 subjects were then randomly placed into four groups.

Each group had access to the Web site, attended classes that included discussions of the questions under consideration, and agreed to take pretests and posttests. However, group one had access only to the Jewish moral reasoning. Their pretests and posttests examined their attitudes toward "predominantly Jewish Israel." Group two had access only to the Muslim moral arguments, and their tests examined attitudes toward "predominantly Muslim Arab countries." Group three had access to both Jewish and Muslim moral reasoning, taking tests that examined their attitudes toward both groups. Team four served as a control group, engaging in class discussions without access to any of the participants' moral reasoning. This routing of the Internet exchange among the participants was accomplished through WebBoard software that permits withholding postings, and then linking them to one of the university's course management systems, Angel. The latter also offered subjects the quantitative and qualitative survey instruments. The study hypothesized that subjects exposed to the moral reasoning of a religious tradition would experience a positive change in their attitudes towards countries that represent predominantly that tradition, Israel for Judaism and Arab states for Islam.

None of the subjects in the study viewed statements presented by the Christian participants in the dialog. The research sought to investigate changes in attitudes toward Israel and Arab states as a result of considering moral reasoning from a religious tradition different from the students' own beliefs. The student subjects were themselves overwhelmingly Christian in their religious beliefs and practices. (Two of the 59 subjects were Jewish, one was a Muslim, and three considered themselves "other".) One of the Christian participants was an Arab, Jesuit priest articulating a Palestinian perspective largely opposed to Israeli political action in the West Bank. Other Christian participants took similar positions. Thus, exposure to the Christian participants was eliminated to avoid influencing the predominantly Christian subjects. The study instead sought to measure changes as a result of exposure to Muslim or Jewish positions, although all subjects were encouraged to view the entire dialog after the study was finished.

The pretests and posttests to determine quantitative measures of attitudes involved sets of paired adjectives, presented as follows:

**Table 1.** Student attitude (quantitative) surveys

Consider your perceptions about the **political** activities of predominantly Jewish Israel/Muslim (Arab) countries in world affairs.

As you think about the **political** activities of Israel/Muslim (Arab) countries in the world, check the response that most closely corresponds to your perceptions about their **political** behavior in international relations.

	5	4	3	2	1	
HOSTILE	-	-	-	-	-	FRIENDLY
AGGRESSIVE	-	-	-	-	-	DEFENSIVE
WARLIKE	-	-	-	-	-	PEACE LOVING
IMMORAL	-	-	-	-	-	MORAL
DECEITFUL						TRUSTWORTHY

In addition to these quantitative measures, the study included a qualitative instrument as well:

### **Open-Ended (Qualitative) Responses toward Israel/Arab States**

Consider your perceptions about the **political** activities of predominately Jewish Israel/Muslim (Arab) countries in world affairs.

List several words that describe your attitudes toward Israel/Muslim (Arab) countries' political behavior when you began the class, discussing your own personal stereotypes.

List several words that describe your feelings toward Israel/Muslim (Arab) countries now.

Have your personal stereotypes changed?

To what do you attribute the change, if any?

### **Results**

In the study's control group, there was no statistically significant change in any of the paired adjectives used in the quantitative analysis. However, in the qualitative questionnaire, four of twelve control group subjects (33%) reported change in their attitudes toward "predominantly Jewish Israel," one of whom identified his religion as "other." Half of the 12 indicated change in their attitudes toward "predominantly Muslim Arab countries," one of whom identified her religion as "other." The control groups' self-reported change may have been due to in-class discussions of the dialog, a form of peer group influence suggested by Milem (1998).

The following tables indicate the change in attitude for the three groups:

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the paired adjective scales before and after the subjects' exposure to Jewish moral reasoning. The data suggests a trend indicating a more favorable attitude toward predominantly Jewish Israel by subjects who observed the Jewish moral arguments. The paired t-test computed in SPSS indicates

**Table 2.** Group 1 Jewish moral reasoning and attitudes toward predominantly Jewish Israel

	Before		After			df = 14
	5	4	3	2		
HOSTILE	3.667			3.267	FRIENDLY	t = -1.702, p = .111
AGGRESSIVE	4.133			2.867	DEFENSIVE	t = -6.141, p < .001
WARLIKE	3.600			3.200	PEACE LOVING	t = -3.005, p < .05
IMMORAL	3.200			2.667	MORAL	t = -3.228, p < .05
DECEITFUL	3.467			2.867	TRUSTWORTHY	t = -2.806, p < .05

n = 15.  
 t = 6.406.  
 df = 14.  
 p < .001.

the highest level of statistical significance. In four categories of paired adjectives, there is statistically significant trend in which subjects viewed Israel more favorably after their experience.

Table 3 shows the mean scores of the paired adjective scales before and after the subjects' exposure to the Muslim moral positions. The data suggests a trend that indicates a more favorable attitude toward predominantly Muslim Arab states by subjects who observed Muslim moral reasoning. The paired t-test also indicates a high level of statistical significance. In three of the five categories of paired adjectives, the trend suggests that subjects viewed the Arab states more favorably after their experience, and the overall scores suggest a positive change.

Table 4 presents data from subjects who were exposed to both Muslim and Jewish moral reasoning, showing their mean scores of the paired adjective scales toward Israel. The paired t-test still indicates a trend toward changed attitudes, but at a lesser level of statistical significance. In three of the five categories of paired

**Table 3.** Group 2 Muslim moral reasoning and attitudes toward predominantly Muslim Arab states

	Before		After			df = 13
	5	4	3	2		
HOSTILE	3.571			3.429	FRIENDLY	t = -0.694, p = .500
AGGRESSIVE	3.214			2.643	DEFENSIVE	t = -2.828, p < .05
WARLIKE	3.571			3.000	PEACE LOVING	t = -2.828, p < .05
IMMORAL	3.143			2.643	MORAL	t = -1.455, p = .170
DECEITFUL	3.071			2.857	TRUSTWORTHY	t = -1.147, p < .05

n = 14.  
 t = 3.137.  
 df = 13.  
 p < .05.

**Table 4.** Group 3 combined Jewish and Muslim moral reasoning and attitudes toward predominantly Jewish Israel

	Before			After			df = 13
	5	4	3	2	1		
HOSTILE	3.786			3.214		FRIENDLY	$t = -4.163, p < .001$
AGGRESSIVE	3.429			3.071		DEFENSIVE	$t = -0.862, p = .404$
WARLIKE	3.857			3.071		PEACE LOVING	$t = -2.797, p < .05$
IMMORAL	2.929			3.000		MORAL	$t = 0.234, p = .818$
DECEITFUL	3.429			3.000		TRUSTWORTHY	$t = -2.482, p < .05$

n = 14.

t = 2.421.

df = 13.

p &lt; .05.

adjectives as well as in the overall scores, the trend suggests that subjects viewed Israel more favorably after their experience.

Table 5 also presents data from subjects who were exposed to both Muslim and Jewish moral reasoning, showing their mean scores of the paired adjective scales toward Arab countries. While the paired t-test indicates little if any statistical significance, it is interesting to note a seemingly reversed trend from those in the other tables. In each category of paired adjectives, the subjects seemed to view the Arab states less favorably after their experience, and the overall scores seem negative.

### Qualitative Analysis

This part of the study presents brief, open-ended responses about subjects' attitudes in their own words, edited for grammar and spelling but not content. The comments lend support to the quantitative data indicating attitude change and provide some possible explanations.

**Table 5.** Group 3 combined Jewish and Muslim moral reasoning and attitudes toward predominantly Muslim Arab states

	Before			After			df = 13
	5	4	3	2	1		
HOSTILE	3.500			3.643		FRIENDLY	$t = 0.520, p = .612$
AGGRESSIVE	3.429			3.643		DEFENSIVE	$t = 0.616, p = .551$
WARLIKE	3.286			3.571		PEACE LOVING	$t = 0.888, p = .391$
IMMORAL	2.643			3.071		MORAL	$t = 2.482, p < .05$
DECEITFUL	3.000			3.286		TRUSTWORTHY	$t = 1.794, p = .104$

n = 14.

t = -1.470.

df = 13.

p = .165.

Of the 15 subjects in group one exposed only to Jewish moral reasoning, nine students (60%) reported favorable changes in their attitudes toward Israel. Their comments are as follows: "The Web site (was) fascinating and presented a side of the conflict I had not previously (seen)." "After . . . the assignment, I realized that Israel is not as aggressive as I first thought. Instead they are in a conflict that doesn't look like it will end, and they are actively looking for peace." "I feel like Israel is more defensive than aggressive because they have been trampled over . . . They must be strong because they know what happened to them . . . through history." One of the students who reported no change of attitude said his views were formed during a previous class and had not changed. Israelis "like all people are scared for their security and engage in (violence) to protect themselves." This group contained a Jewish and a Muslim subject, both of whom reported favorable change toward Israel.

Of the 14 subjects in group two exposed only to Muslim moral arguments, 10 (over 70%) reported favorably changed attitudes toward Arab states. Their comments included the following: "The Web site was different from things I've read and it certainly influenced me." "Being able to see what members of the Muslim community believe has changed my perception about Arab nations." "The writers on the Web site presented a clearer picture of the motivation and ideology behind Islamic resistance." "By reading the Web site, I realized that many Muslims are concerned with needless violence. Even those who endorse violence only do so as a last possible resort, and it should not be targeted at innocent people." "I associated extreme Muslim beliefs and beliefs held by terrorists with the whole of the Arab region . . . With media coverage of the Arab world, it all seems to melt together." "Before viewing the Web site I felt Muslim countries' political behavior was irrational and warlike, based on unrealistic expectations . . . I now feel more sympathetic toward Muslim countries who are striving for peace but seem unwilling to make sacrifices and compromises to reach (it)." One of the students who said there was no attitude change wrote, "My negative stereotypes describe the political leaders of many Arab nations. This has nothing to do with the people of these countries who only want peace and security without being greedy and violent." Another respondent who reported no change wrote, "While my attitudes did not change, I realized that individuals in these countries disagree with what their leaders say just like I disagree with many things our leader says. I now think of these countries as filled with individuals that want peace just like we do." This group contained a Jewish subject who reported favorable change toward Arab states.

The 14 students in group three exposed to both Muslim and Jewish moral arguments are almost evenly divided in the number who changed their views and less decisive in their new attitudes. Seven (50%) reported changed attitudes favorable toward Israel, one of whom identified his religion as "other." Eight (57%) said they changed their views toward Arab States.

Why did the quantitative data suggest a possible negative change toward the predominantly Muslim Arab countries after experiencing the Jewish-Muslim dialog? Several explanations are possible. First, eight of the fourteen subjects in this group indicated that they were favorable toward Israel at the beginning of the study, and three subjects indicated that they were suspicious of Arab countries at the start. These attitudes are reflected in Table 5. The positive feelings toward Israel are not surprising. The United States and Israel have been allies for over half a century, and popular support for Israel in the United States has been consistently strong. Confronted with differing moral reasoning from Jewish and Muslim participants,

the subjects may have reverted to their original views, a phenomena suggested by Sevelius and Stake (2003) in their study of prior attitudes in the effectiveness of a persuasive message. Second, the content of the moral reasoning itself must be considered. Readers are invited to judge the quality of these arguments by visiting the Web site at <http://itrs.scu.edu/stover/dof> or reading an article about the content of the dialog (Stover 2005). Finally, the students themselves help to explain this trend in their own words.

"Before the assignment I saw Arab countries as hostile, stubborn, and reactionary. I still view their effort as divided and flawed (with a) lack of flexibility for seeking peace, but I am more sympathetic to them." "I find it difficult to say who's right or wrong because both are locked in a stalemate of stubbornness. Islam like most religions can be used to promote different things, and hopefully in the future it will be used to promote peace." "I often linked Muslim countries to... suicide bombers and other terrorist activity due to the media's focus... I wasn't aware that suicide bombers were considered immoral by Muslims, but (now I understand) that they are acting out of personal choice." Reporting about their changed views toward Israel, subjects in this group wrote: "I know people are fighting for causes they really believe in, and I try to understand Israel's views. By seeing this Web site I know I'm not alone." "The Web site helped me understand (my stereotype of) Israel's entrenched mind set as more defensive in nature." "I saw Israel as a country American agreed with so their political actions seem justified. Use of the Web site made me see a deeper reason for their acts."

A number of students in this group reported no change in their attitudes. Typical are the comments of one student who writes, "I am an Israeli supporter because I believe they are being treated unfairly. The comments on the Web site just confirmed my views." Another states: "It's impossible to say who is right or wrong. Sacrifice is required by both sides, but both are locked in a stalemate." Finally, one student concludes, "My stereotypes haven't changed...but my understanding of different points of view have improved. I don't think either side should be using violence against civilians... Strong faith can be an excuse for violence, (but that) will end in all out war. We can only hope that leaders who seek peace and are willing to (negotiate) will come to power in the future."

In the qualitative questionnaire, subjects were asked: "To what do you attribute the change (in your personal stereotypes), if any?" It is interesting to note that most students—22 of the 24 reporting changed attitudes—replied in terms attributing their change to "the Internet," "use of the Web site," "Internet use," or "Web site use." Students also explained their change in attitude by referring to the content of the moral arguments, but they seemed drawn to the medium as well as the message in their own description on the reasons for their changed attitudes. The study's methodology is unable to determine the degree to which change resulted from the moral content of the message or the means of communication. To do so, the research design would have to divide each of the groups in half, presenting some subjects with printed material, and others with the electronic medium. This would make the analysis of such a small number of subjects in each group more difficult and probably less meaningful.

During the in-class debriefing of the study, however, students were asked why they included the Internet as an explanation for their changed attitudes. Their responses provide anecdotal evidence for its importance in generating enthusiasm for learning. One student said that it was exciting to get material "posted by

participants so far away." Another explained that the experience "made us feel important, as if the whole event was meant for us." Others said the online experience provided "testimonies" that presented "other sides of the story," giving a "clearer picture of motivation" and inducing "sympathy and empathy." Two students reported using links on the Web site to investigate further sources of information, and one said the Web site helped her respect people with whom she doesn't necessarily agree.

Of course, the entire educational experience could not have taken place without the World Wide Web, given the geographical locations of the participants and their difficulty in personal communication. This technology is becoming an important tool in the learning process, one whose possibilities are only beginning to be realized. More research is needed to determine the potential of Internet communication in teaching and learning as well as facilitating global communication, empathy, and understanding.

## Conclusion

The online conversations upon which this study is based were in themselves an important accomplishment. Conducted over so great a distance and tall a barrier, the "dialog of faith" brought together many participants who could not visit each others' homes due to governmental exclusion, refusal to recognize their state, or outright hostility. Yet they could exchange viewpoints in this Internet forum, respecting one another, listening, being heard, and sharing their ideas with students.

In this study, one group of subjects reported changed attitudes and more favorable viewpoints toward Israel after experiencing Jewish moral reasoning; and another group made similar positive attitude changes toward Arab countries when presented with Muslim positions. Confronted with both Jewish and Muslim arguments, however, the subjects in a third group were more divided in the number of students who changed their attitudes, and they expressed favorable change only toward Israel. The attitude changes in groups one and two seem to indicate how easily students can be influenced by considering only one system of new values. This highlights the need for instructors to present multiple world views in the teaching and learning process of political science and international relations. Without such balance, the presentation of new information may take on the nature of indoctrination.

The study also directs attention to an important technological means of student learning, the Internet. Subjects indicate that the Internet played a part in their learning experience, but more research is needed to assess the role of information technology in opening students' minds to unfamiliar values and changing their attitudes toward political entities.

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