

Dear [redacted],

As I approach the end of my undergraduate studies at Harvard College and reflect fondly upon the ways in which my high school years at JIS, both inside and outside the classroom, have built who I am today, I can say that JIS' mission of developing students to embody the "4 Rs"—resourceful, resilient, relating, and reflective—have aided me well throughout my liberal arts education. In this letter I wish to propose a change from my experiences that I believe has been highly accretive to my development as a student and global citizen and would serve JIS students well in their personal development.

As an Indonesian at JIS, I attended weekly religion classes after school, in which I was able to learn more about Catholicism under a framework of devotional expression. While this adheres to Indonesia's 2013 curriculum which aimed to use religious studies as a means of moral development for young Indonesians, I had always felt a sense of curiosity on learning more about other religions, and how they fit into both Indonesia and the world. When I took "Understanding Islam and Contemporary Muslim Societies" with Professor Asani this past semester, I realized that there was more to religion than just learning about past traditions and expressing one's faith. Professor Asani introduced the study of religion as one that "uses the tools of the humanities and social sciences to understand why there is a particular construction of religion"¹, noting that devotional expression is not always analytical.

I humbly propose an update to the ways in which religion is taught at JIS: the introduction of a cross-religion class that aims to teach all students a cultural studies approach to religion via a combination of lecture-style and Socratic classes. The cultural studies approach, which treats religion as dynamically embedded throughout all kinds of contexts², parses what we know about religion by placing information within context to construct arguments describing how people generate meaning³. I believe that this aspect helps round out the concrete skills one learns in the sciences or social studies, while allowing students to have exposure towards religions other than their own.

The core value add I claim this course provides is to invite students to think more critically about how the world works—not from traditional frameworks as taught in IB/AP classes where facts

¹ Lecture 1, 48:34

² Lecture 1, 52:30 and accompanying slide

³ Believer vs Academic Study of Religion (Week 1 reading)

tend to have been established, but from an angle where what is correct is a matter of interpretation and dualities of concepts coexist. While JIS's graduation requirements cover a wide range across different subjects, the diversity in choice leads to nonuniform course loads that develop different skillsets for each student, and only a small number of students are exposed to environments that challenge them to synthesize opposing views together.

I stand by focusing the addition to prepare students to face a global society. JIS's approach to high school provides students with freedom that remains scoped and allows students to continue building general principles before paths fully diverge past high school. Using religion as a medium for analytical studies beneficially complements the national curriculum's use of religious studies for moral development, which remains somewhat sectarian, with a pluralistic view towards religious literacy that helps students understand contexts of the past, present, and future—one that remains relevant as Indonesia's secularism becomes often times intermingled with religion. Equipping students with religious literacy via exposure to the development of religions over time (similar to how I have studied about Islam as a Catholic) marries an objective and subjective approach to understanding an ongoing civilizational construct that is prevalent in communities worldwide⁴. This places students in a position to better understand an important driver of both politics and culture in Indonesia and critically assess where they can add to the discourse and create a positive change in our communities.

As an alumni, I have grown significantly throughout my time both at and after JIS, and would love for future classes to have the same opportunities to grow. I sincerely hope that you may consider my proposal and look forward to working with the team to further JIS's mission of fostering students to be the best for the world.

Sincerely,

Moses

(Word count excluding footnotes: 699)

⁴ Karamustafa, Islam as a Civilizational Project, p.109