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SAY GOODBYE TO THE **BOX**:

Why we need to be ambassadors for
 faith acceptance in the world

No one likes to be put in a box. Northerner. Southerner. Athlete. Nerd. Fraternity brother. Independent. While there are plenty of labels people wear with pride, labels can be easily turned on their heads. This is especially true when it comes to religion. If I told you to imagine a typical Christian, Muslim or Jewish person, maybe you'd think of people you know who exemplify each of those faiths. But for some people, stereotypes of those faiths are the first things that come to mind. But what is a *typical* person in any faith? If every person is different, how can we define someone as typical? Most importantly, why do some people continue to put others in a box, stick a label on them and move on without even getting to know them first?

Because religion is such a heated topic in today's society, some people just avoid the subject completely, but cer-

tainly, many people still have stereotypes of what they think is typical behavior for someone of a certain faith. I was raised Catholic, but, even though I spent eight years in Catholic school, I'm still cautious about mentioning my faith when I'm meeting someone new because I know people are prone to make assumptions about me. Once people know I'm Catholic, I know they see me differently, whether they admit it to me (or to themselves) or not. Unfortunately, I've noticed people think a lot of things that aren't necessarily true from learning that one thing about me.

One of my friends doesn't like to say "I'm Catholic" and leave it at that but instead says: "Here's what I believe; let me explain it to you." Faith means different things to different people so you can't assume you know someone just because you can put them in a box labeled with their faith. One identifier does not define someone's whole life.

While I think universities nationwide are becoming more accepting for people of different faiths, I also think students need to step outside the our respective college bubbles for a minute and think about the world that, in a few short years, we'll be fully engulfed in. Not everyone in our country has had the chance to learn about different faiths as we have had the opportunity to do, and not every nation has religious freedom enough that students can explore other religions. As students, we need to be ambassadors to the world in terms of acceptance. We have a chance to make a difference out there, because, truth be told, the real world isn't as PC as college is. We can make the world better. We can make it more accepting. We can leave our stereotypes behind and push others to do so as well. But it all starts with us. So be the best global citizen you can be. It's time to step out of the box.

Mary Kate Brogan
 PRINT/ONLINE JOURNALISM

