

What We're Asking

The student survey is designed to ensure that all students—regardless of their particular theological/metaphysical perspective or belief system—are able to respond to the questions in a meaningful way. Survey items cover 11 broad areas: Spiritual outlook/orientation/worldview; Spiritual well being; Spiritual/religious behavior/practice; Self-assessments of spirituality and related traits; Spiritual quest; Spiritual/mystical experiences; Attitudes toward religion/spirituality; Religious affiliation/identity; Theological/metaphysical beliefs; Facilitators/inhibitors of spiritual development; and Compassionate behavior.

Questions include:

- ▶ How many students are actively searching and curious about spiritual issues and questions? What kinds of curricular and co-curricular experiences facilitate this spiritual quest?
- ▶ How do students view themselves in terms of spirituality and related qualities or virtues such as compassion, generosity, kindness, and humility? How is their academic and career development affected by such self-perceptions?
- ▶ What spiritual/religious practices/behaviors (rituals, prayer/meditation, service to others, etc.) are students most/least attracted to? How do such practices relate to other aspects of students' academic and personal development?
- ▶ What is the connection between traditional religious practice and spiritual development?
- ▶ What effect does religious doubt have on students' spiritual development?
- ▶ What most gets in the way of students' spiritual/religious quest (peer pressures, school pressures, work commitments, etc.)?
- ▶ How do faculty perspectives and practices facilitate or hinder students' spiritual development?
- ▶ What is the role of faculty in assisting students in their spiritual quest?

Research Team

The project's Co-Principal Investigators are UCLA Professors Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, founding directors of HERI. Dr. Jennifer A. Lindholm is the Project Director.

A National Advisory Board is providing general oversight for the entire project, and a Technical Advisory Panel is assisting the research team with aspects of the project related to survey design, methodology, and data analysis.

HERI is widely regarded as one of the premiere research and policy organizations on postsecondary education in the country. Housed at the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA, the Institute serves as an inter-disciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in post-secondary education.



**THE SURVEY'S
AUTHORS challenged
American colleges and
universities to be more responsive to
the spiritual hunger of their students.**

—Associated Press, April 2005

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SPIRITUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A National Study of College Students'
Search for Meaning and Purpose

*For more information about the
Spirituality in Higher Education project,
please visit www.spirituality.ucla.edu*

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www.spirituality.ucla.edu

The Project

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies (GSEIS) is conducting a comprehensive multi-year project to study the trends, patterns, and principles of spirituality and religiousness among college students, and how the college experience influences spiritual development. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the study was launched in 2003. The project, called "Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," has thus far provided considerable insight into students' levels of interest and involvement in spirituality, what they expect from colleges and universities in terms of spiritual development, and how faculty view the place of spirituality in the academy.

The first phase of the project had three main components:

- A pilot survey completed by 3,700 juniors at 46 colleges and universities;
- A revised survey administered to more than 112,000 entering freshmen at 236 colleges and universities; and
- A survey of more than 65,000 faculty at 511 colleges and universities nationwide.

The Spiritual Life of College Students

The 2003 pilot survey revealed a high level of spiritual engagement and commitment among third-year college students, but students reported that most professors provide little opportunity to discuss spirituality in class, and that their institutions typically do little to foster or encourage students' interest.

In the Spring of 2004, HERI released a report, *The Spiritual Life of College Students*, based on data from the survey of more than 112,000 freshmen. The study found that students show strong interest and involvement in spirituality and religion, are actively engaged in a spiritual quest, and have high expectations for the role their universities will play in their spiritual and emotional

development. More than two-thirds say that it is "essential" or "very important" that their college enhances their self-understanding and rate highly the role they want their college to play in developing their personal values. Nearly half also say that it is "essential" or "very important" that colleges encourage their personal expression of spirituality.

Spirituality and the Professoriate

The faculty study was designed to discover how college professors view the intersections between spirituality and higher education, and how their perspectives and practices may influence the spiritual development of students during the undergraduate years. The findings, released in February 2006, indicated that the majority of professors (81%) consider themselves to be spiritual persons. In addition, more than two-thirds of faculty are actively seeking out opportunities for spiritual development, and a similar number embrace "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" as an "essential" or "very important" personal goal. The study also showed that a majority of faculty believe that their own spirituality does have a place in the academy, and more than half believe that each of the following should be among the "essential" or "very important" goals of an undergraduate education:

- Enhancing students' self-understanding (60%);
- Developing moral character (59%); and
- Helping students develop personal values (53%).

HOW OFTEN do we encounter a research program that addresses a set of questions so central, so pivotal, so critical, and in retrospect, so obvious, that we wonder aloud why no one thought to ask these questions before?

—Lee S. Shulman, President, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Overall Findings

The research so far provides an informative first look at spirituality on campus. The surveys show that entering college students view their spiritual development as a critical part of the college experience. Also, most faculty members are highly spiritual individuals, and believe many of the elements of spirituality should be addressed on campus. However, since relatively few students have actually received such encouragement from their professors, there is much more colleges can do to facilitate students' spiritual development and provide an environment that engages students in their search for meaning and purpose.

Moving Ahead

The second phase of the project will feature elements designed to track the spiritual experience of students on campus over time, and engage colleges and universities in considering how to support this aspect of students' personal development more effectively through the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Key components of this phase of the project will include:

A longitudinal follow-up survey of the 2004 entering freshmen in Spring 2007.

The follow-up survey will allow the project team to assess change and growth in spiritual development during the undergraduate years. The analyses will focus on determining whether, and how, students' spiritual development is shaped by the types of colleges they attend, the kinds of faculty who teach them, and the types of academic and co-curricular experiences they encounter during their first three years of college.

A National Institute on Spirituality in Higher Education.

The Institute will be designed to engage college and university faculty and administrators in creating and implementing programs that incorporate spiritual issues and perspectives into campus life. It will also serve to develop and test materials that are appropriate for initiating appropriate curricular and co-curricular changes on campus.

STEREOTYPE HAS IT THAT FRESHMEN arrive at colleges looking for good parties or good career paths. Most, however, are also looking for meaning in life.

—Inside Higher Ed, April 2005

A second survey of entering freshmen in Fall 2008.

Surveying another freshmen class will allow trends in the spiritual characteristics and development to be assessed.

As the project continues, the research team hopes to involve colleges and universities in efforts to expand and enhance opportunities for college students to grow spiritually.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality points to our interiors, our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of material events and objects. Our spirituality is reflected in the values and ideals that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose we see in our lives—and our connectedness to each other and to the world around us.

Spirituality also captures those aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such as inspiration, creativity, the mysterious, the sacred, and the mystical. Within this very broad perspective, we believe spirituality is a universal impulse and reality.

We acknowledge that each student will view his or her spirituality in a unique way. For some, traditional religious beliefs will significantly form the core of their spirituality; for others, such beliefs or traditions may play little or no part. What the research program aims to discern, however, is the level and intensity of spiritual experience among college students.

