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Survey finds large majorities who pray, attend services, believe in God

Religiosity rising on campus

By Ann McFeatters
Post-Gazette National Bureau

WASHINGTON — Today's colleges are hotbeds of religiosity and prayer where compassion may be on its first major campus upswing since the 1960s, according to a survey released yesterday by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The poll of 112,232 freshmen at 236 colleges and universities found eight in 10 saying they attend religious services, believe in God and care about spirituality. More than two-thirds pray.

The survey suggested that while spirituality is increasing, affiliation with mainstream religions is declining. And students who said they regularly attend church or otherwise

engage in religious practices were three times more likely to be politically conservative than liberal, a pronounced trend among the general American public, as well.

"In some ways our study has taken us by surprise. It has given me a new appreciation for college students," said Helen Astin, a co-director of

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the study, which was released yesterday at the National Press Club in Washington.

Calling herself a Greek Orthodox who prays but does not go to church, Astin said, "This is a very interesting generation of college students. They are compassionate and caring."

The UCLA institute has been surveying college students for 38 years. A follow-up study is planned in 2007 when today's freshmen are juniors to see if their attitudes have changed.

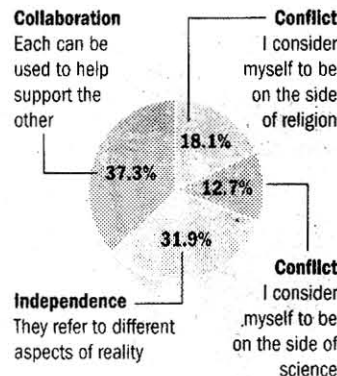
There seems to be no benchmark study that would indicate whether students today are different spiritually from previous generations, said David Scott of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. But 30-year cycles of "caring" and "selfishness" on college campuses have been documented, and the last time "caring" peaked was in the 1960s, he said. "This study shows this cycle may be a much bigger one."

According to the UCLA survey, 80 percent of students are interested in spirituality, 76 percent are searching for meaning in life, 74 percent discuss

Young adults and spirituality

A survey of more than 100,000 freshmen who started college last fall found that four in five reported an interest in spirituality.

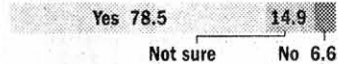
For me the relationship between science and religion is one of ...



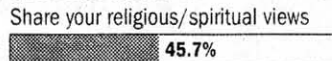
Do you pray?



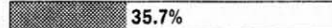
Do you believe in God?



"Most" or "all" of your close friends ...



Are searching for meaning/purpose in life



Go to church/temple/other house or worship



Source: Higher Education Research Institute

Associated Press

life philosophies with friends, 81 percent attend religious services, 79 percent believe in God, and 69 percent pray.

Sixty-four percent said their spirituality was a source of personal joy, but nearly half said they sometimes "felt angry with

God" and 52 percent said they disagreed with their families about religious matters.

Alexander Astin, who headed the survey, said religious affiliation with mainstream religions is declining while spirituality is increasing. The study differenti-

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ated spirituality from commitment to a particular religious belief. Spirituality was defined as being involved in a spiritual quest, an ethic of caring, a compassionate self-concept and an ecumenical world view.

Students broke down into two "clear cut religious clusters" at opposite ends of the spectrum, Astin said. One included religions such as Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists and "other Christians," all of whom evinced a lively religious engagement and little religious skepticism. At the other extreme were Unitarians, Episcopalians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Eastern Orthodox believers, who scored high on charitable involvement but showed significantly more skepticism about religion.

Skepticism was defined as including disbelief in life after death and acceptance of views such as: the universe arose by chance and science eventually will explain everything.

As for religious preference,

28 percent of the freshmen said they were Catholic, 17 percent professed no religion, 13 percent were Baptist, 11 percent checked "other Christian," 6 percent said Methodist, 5 percent said Lutheran, 4 percent said Presbyterian, 3 percent said Church of Christ, 3 percent checked "other religion," 2 percent said Episcopalian, 2 percent said Jewish, and one percent or fewer checked Buddhist, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Islamic, United Church of Christ, latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian and Quaker.

While students regularly engaged in religious practices were far more likely to be politically conservative than liberal, religious skeptics were more likely to be liberal. Those who go regularly to church are much less likely to believe that abortion should be legal, that sex out of marriage is permissible, that gays should be married or that marijuana should be legalized. Forty-four percent of

those highly engaged in their religions favor increased military spending, compared with 30 percent who are less involved in religious practices.

Survey analysts said the more spiritual and religious students tended to be physically healthier and to have better eating habits. They also tended not to smoke.

But these students were no more psychologically healthy than other students. Only a third of freshmen overall counted their emotional health as above average or said they didn't sometimes feel overwhelmed or depressed.

The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA began surveying college students in 2003 and asked students in the current academic year to answer a six-page questionnaire on their spiritual beliefs. The study is funded by the John Templeton Foundation.

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