



For Immediate Release
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College Students' Views on Hot Button Issues Could Impact Presidential Election

Findings from the first longitudinal study to document the evolution of college students' views on spiritual and moral issues during their first three years of college reveal perspectives that may impact the outcome of the current presidential race.

Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the research study, "Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," examines data collected from 14,527 students attending 136 colleges and universities nationwide.

According to the research, which surveyed students as college freshmen in 2004 and as juniors in 2007, the majority of these students:

- **SUPPORT WOMENS' RIGHT TO CHOOSE**, with 60 percent of college juniors saying they support keeping abortion legal, compared to 52 percent who said this as freshmen
- **SUPPORT SAME SEX MARRIAGE**, with 66 percent of college juniors saying they are in favor of granting legal marital status to same-sex couples, compared to 54 percent who said this as freshmen
- **DO NOT SUPPORT ABOLISHING THE DEATH PENALTY**, with only 37 percent of college juniors saying they favor the abolishment of the death penalty, compared to 32 percent who said this as freshmen
- **BELIEVE WEALTHY AMERICANS SHOULD PAY HIGHER TAXES**, with 60 percent of college juniors saying the wealthy should pay a larger share, compared to 57 percent who said this as freshmen
- **DO NOT SUPPORT INCREASED DEFENSE SPENDING**, with just 25 percent of college juniors saying they favor increased spending, compared to 34 percent who said this as freshmen
- **BELIEVE IN A CLEAR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE**, with 70 percent of college juniors saying they believe in a "distinct separation," with lower percentages saying this among Baptists (50 percent), Lutherans (55 percent), and Presbyterians (56 percent)

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- **ARE MORE LIBERAL AS THEY NEAR GRADUATION**, with 34 percent characterizing themselves as “Liberal/far left” in their political ideology in their junior year, compared to 28 percent who said this as freshmen . . . 41 percent characterizing themselves as “Middle-of-the-road” as juniors, compared to 45 percent who said this as freshmen . . . and 25 percent characterizing themselves as “Conservative/far right” as juniors, compared to 26 percent who said this as freshmen.

Study research team available for comment:

The research team for the study, UCLA Emeritus Professor **Alexander W. Astin**, UCLA Emeritus Professor **Helen S. Astin**, and **Jennifer A. Lindholm**, Special Assistant to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education for WASC Accreditation and Associate Director, Center for Educational Assessment, are available for comment on the study. To schedule interviews, please contact: Chris Beakey at chris.beakey@widmeyer.com or at 202 667 0901.

The research team can discuss:

- **Differentiation of student views by race and gender**
- **Differentiation of student views based on students’ religions**
- **Differentiation of student views in “Red States, Blue States and Swing States”**

The Higher Education Research Institute

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA is widely regarded as one of the premiere research and policy organizations on postsecondary education in the country. Along with the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), HERI was co-founded by Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, and is housed at UCLA’s Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. The Institute serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, policy studies, and research training in post-secondary education.

For more details about the project, “Spirituality in Higher Education: Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose,” visit: www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

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