



For Immediate Release

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NEW RESEARCH WILL ILLUMINATE FURTHER STUDENTS' SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE UNDERGRADUATE YEARS

(Los Angeles, June 23, 2009) -- Why are college students who struggle with questions about their faith and purpose in life more likely to use alcohol and tobacco? Are students who are civically engaged and involved in community service activities more apt to change their views of spirituality and religion? Does exposure to worldview diversity lead today's college students to become more accepting of others who come from different faith traditions? Are college students who are religiously conservative more or less inclined to help others? In the months ahead, these and other questions will be answered by research teams at eleven colleges and universities.

These inquiries mark a new phase in ongoing research at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). In 2004, the "Spirituality in Higher Education" research team conducted a national survey of 112,232 entering freshmen attending 236 colleges and universities. To learn how students' undergraduate experiences may influence their spiritual development, the researchers surveyed 14,527 of these students again in the late spring of 2007 when the students were completing their junior year. The UCLA research team for the study included Alexander W. Astin, principal investigator, Helen S. Astin, principal investigator, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, project director.

"We're excited to see the growing number of scholars who are interested in this area of inquiry," says Alexander Astin, co-principal investigator for the project. "Their work will make an important contribution to our understanding of how the college experience helps to shape students' spiritual development."

Students' attendance at religious services declined during the first three years of college but, per the original longitudinal study, they grew in a wide spectrum of spiritual and ethical considerations. To view full results of the data and learn more about the project, please visit www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

Teams of researchers from schools as varied as the University of Notre Dame to New York University will conduct new analyses of the data from the survey, focusing on different aspects of the undergraduate experience:

- **Are college students who are religiously conservative more or less inclined to help others? What about those who become less religious during the college years – will they likewise become less altruistic?**

This research will be conducted by representatives of **BELOIT COLLEGE**, including Debra Majeed, Associate Professor & Chair of the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies, Greg Buchanan, Associate Professor & Chair of the Department of Psychology, and Bill Conover, Director of Beloit's Spiritual Life Program.

- **How do interactions with faculty affect students' understanding of their ethical responsibilities to care for others?**

This research will be conducted by representatives of **BOSTON COLLEGE**, including James J. Fleming, S.J., Ph.D. and Jennie Purnell, Ph.D.

- **Why are college students who struggle with questions about their faith and purpose in life more apt to use alcohol and tobacco?**

This research will be conducted by Carol Ann Faigin, MA, of **BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY**.

- **Is there a link between a sense of spirituality and/or religiosity and attitudes concerning social justice among young adults? Do spirituality and/or religion have a positive, negative, or mixed effect on attitudes toward those who are underrepresented or oppressed in society?**

This research will be conducted by David K. Chenot and Hansung S. Kim from the **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY FULLERTON** Master of Social Work Program.

- **What factors lead Catholics to choose Catholic colleges? And once they enroll, how does their faith evolve during the undergraduate years?**

This research will be conducted by Mark M. Gray and Melissa A. Cidade from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY**.

- **What can colleges and universities do to help students become more open to others' spiritual and religious views?**

This research will be conducted by Dr. Matthew J. Mayhew of **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**.

- **Does exposure to worldview diversity lead today's college students to become more accepting of others who come from different faith traditions? Do students' personal struggles related to spirituality influence their openness to religious diversity in the world?**

This research will be conducted by **NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY** Assistant Professor Alyssa N. Bryant.

- **Are college undergraduates who earn a natural science degree more apt to experience a decline in religiosity or spirituality than those who acquire other degrees?**

This research will be conducted by Christopher P. Scheitle, a Postdoctoral Fellow at **THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY**.

- **Do college students who identify themselves as religious minorities face greater spiritual challenges?**

This research will be conducted by a team led by Nicholas A. Bowman, Ph.D. and Jenny L. Small Ph.D., from the Center for Social Concerns at the **UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**.

- **Are college students with strong spiritual and religious beliefs more apt to develop a strong sense of social responsibility and show compassion toward others?**

This research will be conducted by a team led by Jay Brandenberger, Ph.D., from the Center for Social Concerns at the **UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**.

- **Do students attending Christian colleges tend to become more accepting of other perspectives on religion and spirituality during their undergraduate college years?**

This research will be conducted by P. Jesse Rine at the **UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**.

- **Are students who are civically engaged and involved in community service activities more apt to change their views of spirituality and religion? Are these changes more pronounced among students from some racial and ethnic groups than others?**

This research will be conducted by Sean J. Gehrke, Assistant Director of Residence Life and Housing at **WHITMAN COLLEGE**.

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.

The "Spirituality in Higher Education" research study is a multi-year project funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, established in 1987 by philanthropist and

renowned international investor, Sir John Templeton, to encourage a fresh appreciation of the critical importance—for all peoples and cultures—of the moral and spiritual dimensions of life. The Templeton Foundation seeks to act as a critical catalyst for progress, especially by supporting studies that demonstrate the benefits of an open, humble, and progressive approach to learning in these areas.

For more details about the “Spirituality in Higher Education” study, or to learn more about the individual research projects highlighted here, please contact Charles Martin at 202 667 0901 or at charles.martin@widmeyer.com.

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