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UCLA Launches Study on Spirituality National Study to Track College Students' Spiritual Growth

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA announced today that it is initiating a comprehensive study of spirituality on the nation's college campuses.

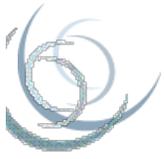
Called, "Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," the multi-year project will study the trends, patterns and principles of spirituality and religiousness among college students, and how the college experience influences spiritual development. A major component of the project will be a survey of 90,000 students on 150 campuses representing all types of institutions to be administered during the Fall 2004. A pilot survey was conducted this spring, with results to be released in late summer.

"This study will provide a much-needed framework to help colleges expand opportunities for students to explore spirituality," said HERI's Director, Professor Alexander W. Astin, the Co-Principal Investigator for the project. "Higher education today has increasingly neglected students' 'inner' development – the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality and self-awareness that are fundamental to their capacity to understand others."

The project will assess and track the level and intensity of spiritual experiences among today's college students, determine how spiritual searching and behavior is changing on campus, and identify the implications for higher education institutions and students.

The findings are expected to be used by a variety of institutions and communities concerned about the spiritual and academic life of today's youth. The findings will be distributed broadly to interested scholars, institutions of higher learning, religious organizations, policymakers, the media and others.

"The great traditions at the core of a liberal arts education were grounded in the maxim, 'know thyself,'" Astin said. "But today developing self-awareness receives little attention on campuses, and academic work has become divorced from students' most deeply felt values. At the same time, the spiritual growth of students, in the broadest sense, receives virtually no attention in discussions about educational reform."



The pilot survey, completed this spring by 3,700 juniors at a representative sample of 46 colleges and universities that participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) annual Survey of Entering Freshmen three years earlier, will provide preliminary longitudinal data. A revised survey will be administered to entering freshmen at a nationally representative sample of 150 colleges and universities during Fall 2004.

The long-range design of the project anticipates additional follow-ups and new freshman surveys to be conducted every three years to chart changes and trends in the spiritual development of college students. The study also involves a qualitative component designed to assess the spiritual life of college students in more depth through individual and focus-group interviews.

“This survey will bring to light the beliefs, behaviors and attitudes of a wide range of students,” Astin said. “And the findings may lead to curricular and other transformations in higher education.”

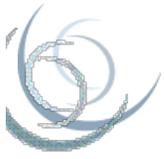
The project is led by UCLA Professors Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin. Dr. Jennifer A. Lindholm is the Project Director. HERI researchers are guided by a National Advisory Board and a Technical Advisory Panel.

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

The three-year project is funded by a \$1.9 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation, which was 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 information, please visit the project Web site at www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

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Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose

The survey is designed to ensure that all students, regardless of their religious affiliation or particular system of beliefs, are able to complete the survey in a meaningful way.

Following is a brief sampling of research questions guiding the survey:

- How many students are actively searching and curious about spiritual issues and questions such as the nature of God/Divine/Universal Spirit and the meaning of life and work? 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, honesty, optimism, and humility? How is their academic and career development affected by such self-perceptions?
- What spiritual/religious practices and behaviors (e.g. rituals, prayer/meditation, service to others, etc.) are students most or 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 (e.g. peer pressures, school pressures, work commitments, etc.)?