

The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of Student Values and Beliefs
Report on Messiah College Student Responses
Ron Burwell, Professor of Sociology
Messiah College

Background to the Study

The purpose of this report is to describe some of the elements of an ongoing study of spirituality among college students. In addition to describing the study in some detail, we will report on the first wave of data which includes a significant number of students at Christian Colleges as well as the specific results for Messiah College students.

During the past fifteen years there has been a growing awareness that the topics of religion and spirituality, as they apply to higher education, have been somewhat hidden or neglected by the academy. No doubt there are a number of reasons for this fact. Nevertheless, the higher education community has now begun to ask questions about the role of religion and spirituality in higher education.

There are a number of indicators of this growing interest. One of the earliest formal indications of this interest was the establishment at Florida State University in 1991 of the Institute for the Study of College Student Values. Championed by Jon Dalton and his colleagues, this organization has been hosting a yearly conference that has provided a forum for interested people to explore student values and beliefs. More recently this group has created an on line journal, *Journal of College and Character*, that covers many of the same issues as those explored in the yearly conference. Dalton and others find their professional identity in the arena of student affairs. It is interesting that student affairs professionals in higher education may actually have been the ones pushing for consideration of spirituality prior to others in the academy.¹

While these topics may seem new to many in higher education, the Christian College community, by the very nature of the mission of these schools, has had a long standing interest in the topic of religion and/or spirituality in higher education. In the 1990's the CCCU (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities) pursued one of the earliest comprehensive attempts to study religion and values among college students. Karen Longman of the CCCU enlisted the aid of By Baylis and Ron Burwell in writing what would become two successful FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grants. These grants, under the title of "Taking Values Seriously" were the first U.S. Department of Education funded studies to include religion and faith as research variables [note: there were significant legal issues to be surmounted in gaining these grants]. For a period of approximately ten years (1991 to 2001) a consortium of upwards of 50 CCCU schools collaborated on research dealing with values, religiosity and faith development. Results from these projects were presented at a variety of national forums including AAHE's Assessment Forums and the Florida State Institute on Student Values. Alexander (Sandy) Astin and his wife Helen served as consultants for this project. In addition, the CCCU project made extensive use of Astin's Higher Education Research Institute (at UCLA) materials to gather data from students at CCCU

colleges. No doubt, this experience was important in directing the attention of Astin and others toward the topics of religion, spirituality and values.

The HERI/UCLA Project

Beginning around 2000, Alexander Astin and his colleagues received significant support from the Templeton Foundation to pursue the topic of spirituality among college students. The CCCU project had used the HERI surveys (the first year survey – CIRP and the senior year survey – CSS) with additional questions in the study of students and religiosity. Astin elected to also use a similar approach but with significantly expanded religion and spirituality questions. Because these surveys would be used with a national student population at all kinds of higher education institutions, it was important to expand the topic beyond the concept of “religion” to use, instead the concept of “spirituality.” By doing this, Astin and others were hoping to accommodate the more diverse and expanding landscape of American religious life. Based on a variety of sources, there is evidence that the concept of spirituality is broader than religion. The former allows for both institutional and non-institutional dimensions while the latter seems more closely tied to institutional settings.

Drawing together a national panel of experts, Astin and his research team created a two page survey employing a variety of religious and spiritual measures. This instrument was pilot tested between 2000 and 2003. Data were collected from 3680 students at 46 colleges and universities over a three year period. This pilot study allowed for data to be gathered from the same students as entering first year students and as juniors. This is the same pattern that Astin is using with the current national study.

Based upon this pilot survey, the actual survey questions were fine tuned and the first administration of the CSBV (College Student Beliefs and Values) Survey took place in late summer and early fall 2004. Approximately 112,232 entering first year students attending 236 colleges and universities completed the survey. The plan is the administer a similar survey to the same students in their junior year (spring 2007) to gain some longitudinal data on these issues. Astin also has created a parallel faculty survey that he is hoping the same colleges and universities will administer to their faculty.

Messiah College has committed to being part of this study. Thus, in the fall of 2004 all entering students were given the CSBV as part of the fall welcome week. The sample includes 628 new students (218 males; 410 females). In the sections below, we will report the Messiah College results as well as data on both the national sample and the sub sample identified as “Evangelical” students [note: Messiah College results are included as part of the Evangelical student sample].

Initial Findings

The Higher Education Research Institute has released a report on the first year student data (“The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College

Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose"). This report is available on the UCLA/HERI website (heri@ucla.edu). It is the source for the national data in this report. In addition, the actual Messiah College data were received in a specific report similar to that given to all participating colleges.

The survey covers a variety of topics including student spiritual and religious goals; students' self-description; opinions on a variety of possible religious and spiritual beliefs; self-reported behavior or activity that involves religious or spiritual practices; views on the relationship between religion and science; and activities that may have spiritual or religious significance. In all there are approximately 145 variables in addition to the normal variables gathered from all students (the CIRP annual survey). Astin has conducted factor analyses on the 145 variables (and a few other items) and derived the following twelve factor scales:

- Spirituality
- Spiritual Quest
- Equanimity
- Religious Commitment
- Religious Engagement
- Religious/Social Conservatism
- Religious Skepticism
- Religious Struggle
- Charitable Involvement
- Compassionate Self-Concept
- Ethic of Caring
- Ecumenical Worldview

These twelve scales are used to analyze some of the results of the survey. [Note: in the results reported below NS = National Sample; MC = Messiah College; and E = Evangelical Sample].

Students Spiritual Search and Religious Engagement. The survey results indicate that entering college students in 2004 report high levels of spiritual and religious interest. About 80% indicate "an interest in spirituality" and a similar number report attending religious services in the past year (e.g., while in high school). The majority (NS:79%; MC: 99%) say they believe in God and 69% (NS) say they pray (MC: 98.9%). Between 70% and 80% (NS) of the students say they discuss religion/spirituality with friends and family. This relatively high level of interest in religion and spirituality is consonant with earlier national student surveys conducted by HERI.

The students report that they get a great deal of comfort from their spiritual/religious beliefs with about 69% (NS) saying that these beliefs "provide strength, support and guidance" (MC: 97.1%). When given the choice of one word to describe the current status of their religious/spiritual commitments (the words were provided by the researchers), the most popular choice was "secure" (NS:42%; MC:68.2%) followed by "seeking" (NS:23%; MC:38.5%) and "conflicted" (NS:15%; MC:12.6%). Another 15% (NS) said they were "not interested" (MC:0.8%) and 10% (NS) opted for the word "doubting" (MC:4.8%).

Spirituality versus Religiosity. The survey incorporates measures of both spirituality and religiosity. Although these two concepts are closely linked (e.g., strongly religious students also tend to be highly spiritual) they are not the same. Note how the two concepts relate to some of the other factors:

Spirituality is associated with:
Spiritual Quest
Ethic of Caring
Compassionate Self Concept
Ecumenical World View

Religiosity is associated with:
Religious Commitment
Religious Engagement
Religious/Social Conservatism
(-) Religious Skepticism

It would seem that these two domains are best seen as two overlapping circles that share an area in common but which also have distinctive differences.

Political Orientation and Attitudes. Using a question that asks students to describe their political orientation (with options from far right to far left), it is possible to draw some observations concerning political orientation and religion or spirituality. Using the scales, it appears that self described conservative students are higher in religious engagement, and spirituality than those who identify as liberals. Students who scored high in compassionate self concept and charitable involvement were equally split between conservatives and liberals. However, liberal students were more likely to score higher on an ethic of caring and ecumenical worldview.

There were significant differences on a number of social issues that separated those high in spirituality and religiosity from those low in those areas. As might be expected, students who were engaged religiously were more opposed to legalized abortion, engaging in casual sex, same-sex marriage and legalizing marijuana. They also were more likely to support military spending and reduced taxation. Nevertheless, highly religious students also support opinions that might be viewed as more liberal such as opposition to the death penalty and support for affirmative action. Finally, the degree of religious or spiritual engagement did not seem to make much difference to opinions regarding issues such as race relations, criminals' rights, gun control and the role of women.

Spirituality, Religiousness and Well-being. Astin and his colleagues explored the connections between levels of religious/spiritual engagement and well-being (both physical and psychological well being). There was a slight decrease in reported psychological well-being among students who were more spiritually oriented. On the other hand, these same students reported a greater level of being at peace or having "equanimity." Both spirituality and religiousness generally have positive correlations with measures of physical well-being. Thus, those high in either spirituality or religiousness are more likely to have a healthy diet, to abstain from alcohol and cigarettes and the report "above average" physical health relative to peers. In contrast those who report that they are struggling with religious issues are more likely to report use of alcohol, cigarettes, staying up late and missing school because of illness.

Messiah College, Evangelical Students and the National Sample

Astin and his colleagues recruited 236 colleges and universities to participate in this study of spirituality. These institutions have been subdivided into 14 different types. This is somewhat like the subdivisions normally used in the CIRP project. However, because a number of schools were distinctively “evangelical,” the UCLA team created an Evangelical subgroup. This group contains 53 colleges and universities (see Appendix A for a complete listing of these schools). As a result, Astin has reported the results for this group and it is possible to compare the student responses at these 53 schools with the national sample (note: in the data reported below the evangelical colleges and universities are also included in the national sample). The student sample for Evangelical institutions includes 14,084 respondents with 5450 men (38.7%) and 8634 (61.3%) women. Messiah College is part of the Evangelical college subgroup. In the sections below we will summarize the data for three different groups: Messiah College Students (MC), Evangelical College Students (E) and “all Baccalaureate institutions” (NS). Each section of the report follows the order of the questions in the actual CSVB survey.

Spiritual Goals and Objectives

From a list of nine possible objectives, students were asked to mark how important (essential to not important) the goal or objective was to them. As might be expected there were some clear differences between the groups, but there were also some similarities. Here are the top three goals for each group and the percent who said the goal was “essential” or “very important”:

Goal	Messiah	Evangelical	National Sample
Seeking to follow religious teachings in everyday life	91.7%	84%	-
Seeking out opportunities to help me grow Spiritually	90.3%	86%	-
Attaining wisdom	89.6%	84%	77%
Becoming a more loving person	-	-	67%
Reducing pain and suffering in the world	-	-	55%

Both groups of students listed as the least essential goal “finding answers to the mystery of life.” In general, for all the goals or objectives, evangelicals tended to rank them “essential” at higher rates than the national sample. The Messiah College students were similar to other evangelical students in choosing the same top three goals.

Spiritual Beliefs

A group of fourteen belief statements which incorporated various ideas about spirituality was presented and students were asked the extent to which they agreed or

disagreed with the statements. The three statements with the greatest degree of difference between the groups were the following beliefs:

- Most people can grow spirituality without being religious – evangelicals disagreed to a much greater extent (MC – 30.2% agree; E - 34% agree; NS - 64% agree).
- People who don't believe in God will be punished – evangelicals and Messiah students agreed to a greater extent (MC – 78.4% agree; E - 78% agree; NS - 7% agree).
- While science can provide important information about the physical world, only religion can truly explain existence – Messiah students had the highest level of agreement with this statement (MC – 95.4% agree; E - 88% agree; NS - 55% agree).

All students (MC, E and NS) tend to reject the idea that the “universe arose by chance” and that science will be “able to explain everything.” In a number of areas there were only minor (less than 10%) differences among the three groups of students.

Science and Religion

The survey included several items which tapped attitudes toward the relationship between religion and science. Given four choices, here is how evangelicals and all others responded:

Pick one: For me, the relationship between religion and science is one of:

	MC	E	NS
Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of religion	24.4%	29.7%	18.1%
Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of science	0.6%	1.6%	12.7%
Independence; they refer to different aspects of reality	11.2%	12.8%	31.9%
Collaboration: each can be used to help support the other	63.7%	55.9%	37.3%

It is interesting that the majorities of all student groups reject the idea of “conflict” between religion and science. Messiah students, however, are more optimistic about collaboration between the two areas.

Praying

Prayer is clearly a central religious and spiritual activity in Western culture. The survey explored this area via a two step process. First, students were asked simply if they prayed. Second, if they responded yes, then they were asked to select among ten possible reasons for prayer which ones they embraced (thus, multiple answers are possible). Here are the results for both groups:

	Messiah	Evangelical	Nat. Sample
Do you pray? (% yes)	98.9%	96.2%	68.9%
Reasons for prayer? (% frequently)			
Help in solving problems	81.9%*	77%*	57.9%
Being in communion with God	73.5%	74.4%	50.2%

	Messiah	Evangelical	Nat. Sample
Expressing gratitude	78.0%*	77.9%*	58.8%*
For emotional strength	75.8*	72.7	57.1
For forgiveness	74.8	75.8	58*
To relieve the suffering of others	54.1	58.7	49
For loved ones	75.2	78.3*	67.9*
For wisdom	60.7	63.6	44.5
To praise God	70.2	73.3	52.1

* = top three reasons

Religious Practices

Along with prayer, there are a number of other possible religious activities and practices. Here are the religious practices and the percentage who say they engage in these practices at least “once a week”:

	Messiah	Evangelical	National Sample
Self-reflection	80.6%	77.3% ³	64.1% ¹
Prayer	98.2 ¹	93.8 ¹	60.9 ²
Meditation	43.2	43.1	22.3
Yoga, Tai Chi or similar	2.1	5.1	8.0
Religious singing/chanting	88.6 ²	80.5 ²	30
Reading sacred texts	81.8 ³	73.2	26.5 ³
Other reading on religion, etc.	57.5	58.0	21.2

1 etc. 1st, 2nd, 3rd rank

Note that there are substantial differences between Messiah and the national sample in the frequency of certain practices (prayer, singing, and reading) that exceed 30% or more. On the other hand, the Messiah students are very much like the other evangelical students in their responses. Both Messiah students and evangelical students report engaging in much higher rates in certain religious practices. It should also be remembered that these responses tap religious practices prior to beginning college.

Self Descriptions

Students were asked which of a set of fourteen statements that relate to religion and spirituality described them “to a great extent.” More than some of the other items, this set of questions separated the students into discrete clusters. Messiah students and the evangelical sample were significantly different from the national sample. Below are some of the items that had significant differences between the Messiah and the national sample. In every case the Messiah students reported higher levels of religious and spiritual self-descriptions.

Differences (with % differences) Messiah versus National Sample

Having an interest in spirituality	49.5% (higher)
Believing in life after death	43.6%
Feeling a sense of connection with God	38.1%
Believing in the sacredness of life	36.8%
Being committed to introducing people to my Faith	28.8%
Being thankful for all that has happened to me	23.6%
Seeing each day, good or bad as a gift	20.0%

Similarities (with % differences)

Feeling good about my direction in life	11.5% (higher)
Having an interest in different religions	7.2%
Feeling obligated to follow parents' religion	4.7%
Feeling disillusioned about my rel. upbringing	4.6%
Feeling a strong connection with all humanity	3.2%
Feeling unsettled about spiritual religious matters	0.5%

There are several interesting aspects about these self descriptions. One might expect students who report an interest in religion or spirituality having more opportunity to be “unsettled about spiritual matters.” Likewise, one might expect more parental pressure on students who report a higher level of religious commitment. However, there is virtually no difference between evangelical students and all other students in the extent to which they feel obligated to follow their parents’ religious or spiritual upbringing.

Conceptions of God

There have been a number of studies that have explored the conceptions of God possessed by various groups of people (Lawrence, 1997; Hill & Hood, 1999). Typically, respondents are given a list of possible terms to describe God and are asked to select the terms that describe their current view of God. The CSVB survey used this approach and it is possible to compare Messiah students’ views of God with the national sample.

Here are the top six descriptors for God, ranked according to the three groups:

	Messiah	Evangelical	All
Creator	1	2	1
Love	2	1	2
Protector	3	3	3
Father-figure	4	4	6
Teacher	5	5	5
Supreme Being	6	6	4

As can be seen, the three groups have a fair degree of overlap in their conceptions of God. All the students ranked the concepts of God as Love or Creator at the top of their list. There are slight differences in the ranking of the other top concepts but the top six are the same for all three samples. The actual numbers of students selecting each term is consistent in the direction that Messiah students chose various terms in consistently higher numbers than the wider student population. For example, 90.0% of the Messiah students chose the concept of God as “love” while only 56% of the national sample did so. And yet, the concept of God as “love” was the second most frequently chosen concept of God. Part of the reason for a lower response rate for the national sample is that only 79% of those students said they believed in God while fully 98% of the evangelical students said they believed in God.

Spiritual Experiences

One of the characteristics of the modern context is that religion and spirituality find expression and meaning in a variety of places. With this in mind, the researchers asked students about the location or setting for spiritual experiences. From a list of possibilities, students were asked “Have you ever had a spiritual experience while.....?”. Interestingly all three groups of students identified the same top five locations for spiritual experiences (in slightly different order). Here are the rankings:

Experience while....	Messiah	Evangelical	National Sample
Praying	1	1	1
In a house of worship	2	2	2
Participating in a retreat	3	3	5
Listening to beautiful music	4	4	4
Witnessing beauty/harmony in nature	5	5	3

As is the pattern, although the rankings for these experiences are similar, the number of students indicating actually having such an experience is consistently higher for the evangelical students (by over 20% for all of these areas).

Religious Quest and Current Views

A major strand in research on religious measures is the idea of religion being a “quest. Those holding this view have a significantly different profile than those who think about religion as a set of beliefs to be adopted. Researchers have found that those who see their religion or spirituality as a more open “quest” have many positive attributes (Burris, 1999; Batson & Schoenrade, 1991). Students were asked three different questions that tap the nature and role of religious beliefs.

The first question simply invited respondents to choose one of the following descriptions that best described their current views. In this case they were allowed to choose only one answer.

Current views:	Messiah	Evangelical	National Sample
Conflicted	12.6%	9.9%	14.6%
Secure	68.2	65.1	41.8
Doubting	4.8	5.4	9.7
Seeking	38.5	33.6	22.6
Not interested	0.8	2.0	15.3

The second question asked students to choose one phrase to describe what the “ultimate spiritual quest for me is.”

	Messiah	Evangelical	National Sample
Ultimate spiritual quest:			
To discover who I really am	3.4%	5.4%	18.7%
To follow God’s plan for me	69.6	66.4	27.7
To become a better person	3.2	3.6	15.3
To know my purpose in life	3.5	4.7	9.5
To make the world a better place	1.6	1.3	5.1
To know God	18.1	16.3	6.6
I do not consider myself to be on a spiritual quest	0.6	2.2	17.1

While the national sample is more diverse in their choices, a clear majority of evangelical students saw the ultimate spiritual quest as following God’s plan for their lives.

The last question in this section explicitly asks how religious beliefs might affect the student. In this case the respondents could check all that apply. Across the board, evangelical students by substantial margins (varying from 24% to 41%) saw more value in religious beliefs than students in general. For example, 93% of the evangelical students and 95.8% of the Messiah students agreed that religious beliefs “give meaning and purpose to my life” while only 63% of the national sample agreed.

Life experiences

Various life experiences have the potential to either strengthen or weaken a person’s religion or spirituality. The UCLA study identified eight potentially important life experiences and asked the students to respond by indicating whether or not the experience “weakened” or “strengthened” their faith. Both Messiah students and others all agreed that the death of a close friend or family member was likely to strengthen their beliefs. Likewise, the events of Sept. 11, a romantic relationship, and personal injury or illness had potential to change religious beliefs. One striking difference between the Messiah students and the national sample was their view of the possible impact of ideas encountered in classes. Note the following difference in the percentage of students who said that “new ideas encountered in classes” strengthened their religious/spiritual beliefs:

Messiah students – 49.2% agreed with the statement
 Evangelical students – 52.2% agreed with the statement
 All students - 30.7% agreed with the statement

It would appear that evangelical students (and Messiah College students) are coming into their college experience believing that what they encounter in their educational experience will have potential to strengthen their religious beliefs. This may be due to the context (e.g., evangelical colleges and universities) or to a prior commitment to the idea that learning is not necessarily inimical to religious commitments.

Beliefs about spirituality and religion

Like an earlier set of questions, students were asked to indicate whether or not they agreed with a group of twelve statements about spirituality and religion. For many of the items there were disagreements between the Messiah students and the wider student population. Here are the top five areas of disagreement:

	Messiah	National Sample	Diff
<i>Student “agrees”</i>			
It doesn’t matter what I believe.... if I am moral	4.8%	51.8%	-47.0%
I gain strength by trusting in a higher power	97.1	65.0	+32.1
My spirituality is a source of joy	94.4	64.1	+30.3
What happens in my life is determined by larger forces	89.6	63.3	+26.3
I know someone I can turn to for spiritual guidance	95.7	71.6	+24.1

This pattern continues the consistent profile with Messiah students responding by agreeing to positive statements about religion and spirituality (e.g., a source of joy) while disagreeing with statements that minimize the importance of religious/spiritual beliefs (e.g., doesn’t matter what I believe).

Activities and Practices

In contrast to an earlier collection of religious practices, these questions ask about activities which, while in the abstract are not necessarily religious, may have religious significance. In general, there are fewer differences between Messiah students and other students and the differences that do exist are less substantial. From a list of sixteen activities here are some of the ones that students said they engaged in frequently or occasionally:

	Messiah	National Sample
Activities		
Spending time with people who share religious views	98.2 (1)	83.9 (3)
Helping friends with personal problems	98.1% (2)	95.8 (1)
Been able to find meaning in times of hardship	95.5 (3)	84.6 (2)
Felt that my life was filled with stress and anxiety	88.0 (4)	82.6 (4)
Felt distant from God	85.2 (5)	64.9 (7)
Felt loved by God (% who say freq.)	81.4 (6)	44.3 (12)*

[Items are ranked from highest]

*= item with the largest difference

The items that are more neutral are likely to be ranked in a similar position (e.g., helping friends with personal problems) while more explicitly religious items (e.g., feeling loved by God) were more likely to be ranked in a different order by the two samples.

Factor Scales

As mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, Astin and his team have developed some twelve different factor scales. Below are the twelve factor scales and the percentage of students who scored “HI” on the scale. As might be expected there are some significant differences between the two groups of students.

Scale	Messiah	National	Difference
Spirituality	53.6%	17.2%	36.4%*
Religious Commitment	79.6	37.4	42.2*
Equanimity	40.9	22.4	18.5
Spiritual Struggle	8.9	10.8	-1.9
Religious Engagement	77.6	19.5	58.1*
Religious Skepticism	0.5	17.2	-16.7
Spiritual Quest	34.4	25.0	9.4
Compassionate Self-Concept	26.2	29.8	-3.6
Charitable Involvement	23.4	15.4	8.0
Religious/Social Conservatism	73.9	23.3	50.6*
Social Activism	11.1	13.1	-2.0
Pluralistic Worldview	8.3	13.6	-5.3

Much of the difference between the Messiah students and all other students can be explained by noting the four factors that most differentiate between the two groups: religious engagement, religious/social conservatism, religious commitment and spirituality (*). Messiah students consistently display more commitment to religious beliefs and practices than college students in general. In addition, when given a choice of

viewpoints that might be seen as conservative versus liberal, they will most likely embrace a more conservative position (although we have noted some exceptions to this pattern). Note also that the pattern for the Evangelical student sample is very similar to that of the Messiah College students.

Local Questions

Each school that used the CSVB survey had the option of adding up to twenty local questions of their own choice. At Messiah College, we elected to use a set of twelve questions that had previously been used with entering students. These questions constitute an “orthodoxy scale” (Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis, 1993:168-171) that allows us to see the level of traditional orthodox beliefs held by entering students. As might be expected, the responses of the Messiah College students represent strong agreement with the beliefs contained in the scale. Appendix B contains these optional questions and the results for Messiah College students.

Concluding Observations

Having surveyed this data on first year college students and spirituality, what is the significance of this study? Some of the most interesting results from this research project await the acquisition of longitudinal data. Astin and his colleagues anticipate gathering similar types of information from the class of 2008 during the spring of their junior year (2007). With this in hand, we will be able to see some of the changes that are taking place in students’ spirituality and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, even this preliminary data from fall 2004 is valuable and provides an excellent baseline for study of college student values and beliefs. Here are some observations about the data thus far.

1. In general, it is clear that US college students enter college with a relatively high level of commitment to religion and spirituality. The majority of students report praying and holding a number of beliefs in the areas of spirituality and religion. What remains to be seen, is whether or not there is a significant reduction in these areas over the course of the college years.

2. Messiah College students and Evangelical students, in comparison to the national sample of students, are consistently higher in virtually all measures of religious beliefs and practices. It seems that these students are more akin to Weber’s “religious virtuosos” – people who have an above average commitment to their faith. When presented with almost any positive statement about religion (and spirituality) these students are more likely to agree and embrace the concepts. They are, in the words of Gordon Allport “indiscriminately pro-religious” (Hill, 1999; Pargament, 1987). They too, will be interesting to follow longitudinally. Will their levels of religious engagement or commitment change in three years? Will the nature of their beliefs undergo modification? If so, in what directions will these beliefs change?

3. Spirituality versus Religiosity. One of the interesting research questions is whether or not spirituality is a substantially different concept than religion. A number of researchers in the psychology and sociology of religion have pursued measurement strategies that work with one or both of these concepts. This dual approach is evident in the way Astin has constructed this study. Thus, it is interesting to see if students sort into two different groups (“spiritual students” versus “religious students”). Certainly one might suspect that Messiah College (and Evangelical) students might be more likely to resonate with the concept of religion rather than spiritual. The reason for this suspicion is that religion, for these students, seems more fitted to the institutional context of evangelicalism in the United States. In contrast, spirituality may seem less evangelical and more in tune with amorphous, new age sorts of beliefs and activities.

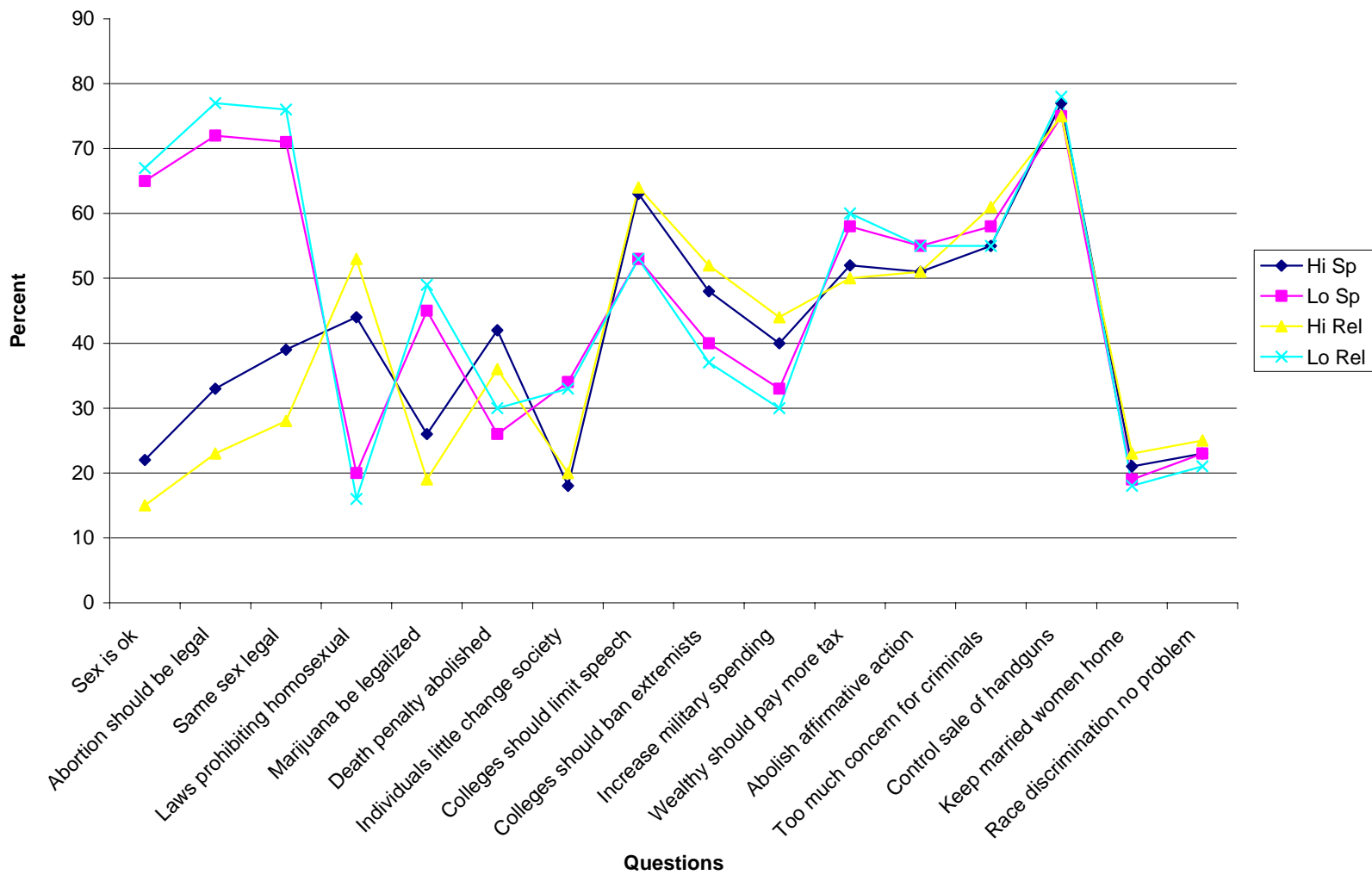
In an attempt to pursue this question, there are some preliminary data in the full report from UCLA on the first year students that may help to provide an indication as to whether or not there is a difference between “religious students” and “spiritual students.” Over the years, the CIRP instrument has consistently posed a series of social and political opinion questions to entering students (and also to seniors). Students are asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the statements. In the case of those students who completed the CSVB sample, Astin has provided the results for these statements broken down by those who were high in “spirituality” and high in “religiosity.” Figure 1 below charts the differences among four groups: those high in spirituality measures; those low in spirituality measures; those high in religious measures; those low in religious measures. As is evident from a review of this figure, those students who were high in spirituality were nearly identical to those students who were high in religiosity. Likewise, those students who were low in spirituality were very similar to those who were low in religiosity. On the other hand, for some of the opinions, there is little if any difference regardless of whether the students are high or low on either religion or spirituality (e.g., note the last three items).

While it is possible to raise a number of questions about the details of the UCLA/HERI study on college student spirituality, it is important to recognize the path breaking nature of this study. A major research institute with a forty year history of survey research on college students has decided to turn its attention to the topics of spirituality and religion. The results of this study will offer a number of rich insights into the current landscape of religion and spirituality in the United States and Christian scholars would do well to become aware of the study as it unfolds. It is good that Messiah College is an active participant in this study. No doubt there will be interesting and valuable insights gained from our involvement.

Endnotes

¹ The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has established a “knowledge community” entitled “Spirituality in Higher Education.”

Comparisons - Religion and Spirituality



References

- Batson, C.D. & Schoenrade, P. (1991). Measuring religion as quest: 2. Reliability concerns. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 430-447.
- Batson, C.D., Schoenrade, P., & Ventis, W.L. (1993). *Religion and the individual: A social psychological perspective*. New York: Oxford.
- Baylis, B. O., Burwell, R.J. & Dewey, C.C. (1994). The Christian College Freshman and the National College Student Population. In D. J. Lee & G.G. Stronks, (Eds), *Assessment in Christian Higher Education: Rhetoric and Reality* (pp. 201-218). Lanham, MD.: University Press of America.
- Burris, C.T. (1999). Quest scale. In P.C. Hill & R. W. Hood, Jr. (Eds), *Measures of religiosity* (pp. 138-141). Birmingham, AL.: Religious Education Press
- HERI. (2004). *The spiritual life of college students: a national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose*. Los Angeles, CA.:University of California, Higher Education Research Institute.
- HERI. (2005). Report on CBSV results for Messiah College. Los Angeles, CA.: University of California, Higher Education Research Institute.
- Hill, P.C., & Hood, R.W. (1999). *Measures of Religiosity*. Birmingham, AL.:Religious Education Press.
- Hill, P.C. (1999). Indiscriminate proreligiosness scale. In P.C. Hill & R. W. Hood, Jr. (Eds), *Measures of religiosity* (pp. 132-135). Birmingham, AL.: Religious Education Press.
- Lawrence, R. T. (1997). Measuring the image of God: the God Image Inventory and the God Image Scales, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25(2), 214-226.
- Lee, D. J. & Stronks, G.G. (1994). *Assessment in Christian Higher Education: Rhetoric and Reality*. Lanham, MD.: University Press of America.
- Pargament, K.I. et. al. (1987). Indiscriminate proreligiosness: conceptualization and measurement. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26, 182-200.

Appendix A

Evangelical Colleges and Universities Stratification Cell 13 – UCLA/HERI College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV)

Abilene Christian University
Alderson-Broaddus College
Anderson University
Asbury College
Azusa Pacific University
Belmont University
Bethel College (Indiana)
Biola University
Bluffton College
California Baptist University
Calvin College
Carson-Newman College
Cedarville University
Cornerstone University
East Texas Baptist University
Eastern Mennonite University
Fresno Pacific University
Gardner-Webb University
Geneva College
Gordon College
Greenville College
Hope College
Houston Baptist University
Indiana Wesleyan University
Lee University
Lubbock Christian University
Malone College
Master's College
Messiah College
North Central University
North Greenville College
Northwest Christian College
Northwest Nazarene University
Northwestern College (Iowa)
Northwestern College (Minnesota)
Nyack College & Alliance Theological Seminary
Oklahoma Baptist University
Ottawa University
Palm Beach Atlantic University
Pepperdine University

Point Loma Nazarene University
Roberts Wesleyan College
Shorter College
Simpson University
Southeastern College of Assembly of God
Southern Wesleyan University
Southwest Baptist University
Taylor University
Trinity Christian College
Trinity Western University
Union University
Western Baptist College
Westmont College

N=53
