

What Does IT all Mean?: A Conversation on Students' Spiritual Development

First Year Experience National Conference

San Antonio, TX

February 20, 2012

Facilitators:

Karen Hauschild & Jennah Jones

First Year College, NC State University

Key Points of data for consideration from:

Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives

Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, Jennifer A. Lindholm

Jossey-Bass: 2011

"[The] emphasis in this book is on how students *as a whole* tend to change during college and on what aspects of, and experience within, the college environment tend to facilitate or hinder that change." (p. 35)

- "The main objectives of the study reported in this book are to document how students change spiritually and religiously during the college years, and to identify ways in which colleges can contribute to this developmental process (p. 9)
- Ten Measures of Spirituality and Religiousness: Charitable Involvement, Spiritual Quest, Ecumenical Worldview, Ethic of Caring, Equanimity, Religious Struggle, Religious Commitment, Religious Engagement, Religious Skepticism, Religious/Social Conservatism (p 23).
- "How students perceived their position in the world, develop a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and seek inner harmony and self-awareness are all critical components of healthy identity development and mature psychological well-being." (p. 29) and "for many young adults questions of meaning and purpose become increasingly more salient over the course of their undergraduate careers." (p. 31)
- "A spiritual quest is not synonymous with being committed to a particular faith tradition or being otherwise settled in one's religious perspectives" (p. 29)
- They found that "the experiences that positively affect both religiousness and spirituality are meditation, self-reflection, donating money to charity, reading sacred texts, reading other spiritual/religious material, engaging in discussions of religion with professors, students, or staff, going on a religious mission trip, and having professors who encourage student discussions of religious spiritual matters." (p. 100)

Spirituality: *"involving our inner, subjective life...--the meaning we see in our lives." It is also about "our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us."* (p. 63)

- "...interaction with faculty, selected academic courses of study and curricular experiences, working and other personal practices that students may partake in during college play influential roles in shaping students propensity toward spiritual questing." (p. 37)
- Key indicators on spiritual quest development: course-based community service, regular self-reflection, reading sacred texts or other material on spiritual or religious matters, ,discussing religions, donating money to charity, helping friends with personal problems, and having a paying job. (p. 40-44)
- Impediments to spiritual questions: time pressures, overcommitment ('busyness')
- These researchers found "experiences that positively affect spiritual development but have little or no effect on religiousness: study abroad, leadership training, interracial interaction, taking interdisciplinary courses, taking service learning courses, talking with faculty outside of the class, and having professors who encourage students to explore questions of meaning and purpose." (p. 100)

Religiousness: *"involves devotion to, and practice of some kind of faith tradition."* (p. 83)

- They found that some opportunities have positive effects on religious development, yet little to none on spirituality. These are: "praying, attending religious services, religious singing/chanting, and participating in a campus religious organization." Whereas drinking and partying behaviors had a negative effect on

religiousness. (p. 100)

- "The relationships between prayer and changes in religious commitment during college is one of the strongest "experiential effects" found in the entire study." (p. 86) The more frequently a student prays the higher his/her religious commitment. In addition, self-reflection and meditation have a positive effect on religious commitment. (p. 87)
- Religious engagement varies based on institution type, but overall they see a decline in this engagement while students are at college. This could be attributed to less time spent with family and under parent's influences. The order (from most to least) of religious engagement based on institution type is: evangelical, non-Catholic Christians, Catholic, private, and finally public. (p. 89-97)
- "Increased levels of Religious Skepticism: partying, alcohol consumption, watching television, study abroad, participation in ROTC, and having parents go through a separation or divorce." (p.112)

Negative influences on or declines in:

- Equanimity: playing video or computer games & majoring in engineering. (p. 60)
- Caring & Connectedness: watching television. (p. 80)
- Religious Commitment: playing video games, alcohol consumption and partying, partying appearing to have a more critical role. (p. 88)
- Religious engagement if high levels of religious skepticism. (p. 111)
- "Partying and drinking...are negatively related in religiousness and watching television is negatively related to growth in spirituality." (p. 112)

What the university can do:

- Promoting equanimity ("self-transcendence, the ability to rise above or move beyond the limits of personal experience." (p. 50): "greater use of reflective, meditative, and contemplative practices both in and out of the classroom, and participation in group activities that are designed to serve others--community service, leadership training, and participation in student clubs and groups." (p. 62)
- Faculty play a significant role in student caring and connectedness. "Giving students responsibility for selecting topics of study or evaluating each other's work is self-empowering in cooperative learning, and evaluating each other's work all help students develop an understanding of others and a sense of responsibility and caring." (74)
- Faculty serving as spiritual and/or religious role models for students and engaging in conversation with students.
- "One of the surest ways to enhance the spiritual development of undergraduate students is to encourage them to engage in almost any form of charitable or altruistic activity." (p. 147)
- Continue with initiatives in the areas of: foreign language studies, service learning, diversity, interdisciplinary courses (p. 156)
- Incorporate a culture to explore spiritual development on campus, by focusing on opportunities for both students and faculty/staff through faculty/staff orientation/professional development, guest speakers on campus, interfaith forums, and integration into learning community environments (p. 152)