



## Exploring First-Year Students' Readiness to Engage Worldview Differences

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With divisive rhetoric dominating United States politics and, thus, reverberating into citizens' daily interactions, it is all the more important that institutions of higher education heed to call to develop citizens capable of reaching across lines of difference to address society's complex problems.<sup>1</sup> Although religion is sometimes seen as divisive, it is a deep-seeded component of U.S. society and has great power to catalyze individuals toward positive aims. Thus, what do college and university educators know about how incoming first-year students make meaning of their worldview identities and how do they perceive others of diverse worldviews? This document outlines findings from the Interfaith Diversity Experiences & Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS) that can inform practice for engaging religious diversity in higher education.

### Terms

**Worldview** – a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, a nonreligious perspective, ideological views, aspects of one's cultural background and personal identity, or some combination of these.

**Worldview Majority** – Protestant, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or other Christians

**Worldview Minority** – formal traditions that are a minority in the U.S. (e.g., Baha'i, Judaism, Paganism, Native American traditions, etc.)

**Non-Religious** – agnostic, atheist, non-religious, "none", or Secular Humanist

**Another Worldview** – write-in identities that span worldview categories or cannot be categorized

**Pluralism Orientation** – extent to which students are accepting of others with different worldviews, believe that worldviews share many common values, consider it important to understand the differences between world religions, and believe it is possible to have strong relationships with diverse others and still hold to their own worldviews.

**Appreciative Attitudes** – the extent to which students hold positive views of atheists, Evangelical Christians, Jews, Latter-day Saints, and Muslims.

### IDEALS Sample

122 Participating institutions in the United States

20,436 first-term students

Participants by institution

- 41% from public institutions
- 23% from private – nonsectarian institutions
- 21% from Protestant institutions
- 8% from Catholic institutions
- 7% from Evangelical Protestant institutions

Participants by worldview identification

- 55% Worldview majority
- 28% Nonreligious
- 15% Worldview minority
- 2% Another worldview

Participants by gender

- 65% Female
- 34% Male
- 1% Another gender identity

Participants by race

- 60% White
- 13% Asian/ Pacific Islander
- 10% Multiracial
- 8% Latino
- 7% African American/ Black
- 1% Another race
- <1% Native American

Participants by sexual orientation

- 89% Heterosexual
- 5% Bisexual
- 3% Another sexual orientation
- 1% Gay
- 1% Lesbian
- 1% Queer

Participants by political leaning

- 3% Very conservative
- 17% Conservative
- 41% Moderate
- 28% Liberal
- 11% Very liberal

<sup>1</sup>American Associate of College and Universities (2007). *College learning for the new global century*. Washington D.C.: Author.

### General Findings

IDEALS will track a cohort of students for four years of their collegiate career. In fall 2015, the first of three surveys was administered to incoming, first-year students. Results point to four high-level findings that can inform practices for first year experiences.

- Entering students have high expectations that institutions provide welcoming campus environments.
  - A majority of students say it is important for campuses to provide welcoming environments for racial diversity (89%), worldview diversity (85%), and sexual orientation/gender identity (77%)
- Students are poised for interfaith engagement.
  - Majority of students agree: we can overcome the world’s major problems when diverse worldviews work together (83%); their worldview inspires them to serve with others on issues of common concern (78%); they respect people of other worldview perspectives (91%); and there are people of other faiths whom they admire (84%)
- Yet fewer students report participation in interfaith engagement before college.
  - 50% worked with people of other worldviews on service projects; 35% attended religious services for traditions other than their own; and 19% participated in interfaith dialogue
- Additionally, levels of appreciative attitudes toward specific worldview populations vary.
  - A slight majority of students report “high” appreciative attitudes toward: Buddhists (55%), Jews (53%), and Evangelical Christians (52%)
  - Fewer students report “high” appreciative attitudes toward: atheists (47%), Hindus (46%), Muslims (43%), and Mormons (39%)

### Expectations by Institution Type

Students entering different institutions types reported varying levels of expectations.

- Percent of students who believe it is important to provide welcoming environments for diverse religious/ nonreligious perspectives:
  - 89% Catholic; 86% Private-Nonsectarian; 86% Public; 83% Protestant; 72% Evangelical Protestant
- Percent of students who stated it is important they have opportunities to get to know students of other religious and nonreligious perspectives:
  - 77% Catholic; 74% Private-Nonsectarian; 71% Protestant; 70% Public; 62% Evangelical Protestant
- Percent of students who reported it is important they have opportunities to participate in community service with students of diverse religious/ nonreligious perspectives:
  - 78% Catholic; 68% Private-Nonsectarian; 68% Protestant; 68% Public; 61% Evangelical Protestant
- Percent of students who believe it is important that they have courses and other educational programs to help them learn about different religious tradition around the world:
  - 72% Catholic; 65% Evangelical Protestant; 65% Protestant; 64% Private-Nonsectarian; 63% Public

### Appreciative Attitudes by Institution Type

When looking at appreciative attitudes toward certain groups, percentages of students who have high appreciative attitude fluctuated by institution type.

Percent of students with high appreciative attitudes toward...	Institution Type				
	Catholic	Evangelical Protestant	Protestant	Private-Nonsectarian	Public
Atheists	47%	25%	42%	51%	50%
Buddhists	61%	30%	50%	58%	58%
Evangelical Christian	59%	62%	52%	48%	51%
Hindus	55%	28%	42%	48%	48%
Jews	61%	42%	49%	55%	54%
LDS/ Mormons	47%	30%	39%	37%	42%
Muslims	53%	29%	36%	45%	44%
Politically Conservative People	46%	41%	42%	38%	41%
Politically Liberal People	56%	32%	49%	56%	56%
Gay/ Lesbian/ Bisexual people	56%	30%	49%	55%	53%
Transgender people	52%	26%	45%	49%	48%
People of a race different than their own	72%	63%	67%	70%	71%
People of a country different than their own	73%	63%	66%	63%	73%

