

How College Affects Students' Religious Faith and Practice: A Review of Research

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The findings from recent empirical studies question decades of prior research showing a negative effect of attending college on students' religious practices and beliefs. This study employs a narrative, synthetic review of empirical research conducted over the past 15 years. Results are discussed along with limitations of the findings. Implications for the practice of student affairs professionals, grounded in theory and research, are offered, and recommendations for further research are presented.

A recent ethnographic study of campus religious life (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001) reached this provocative conclusion: "It is possible that young people in American culture have never been more enthusiastically engaged in religious practice or with religious ideas" (pp. 294-5). The study's findings question decades of research showing a negative effect of attending college on students' religious beliefs and practice (Bowen, 1997; Feldman & Newcome, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and suggest that the trend toward the "secularization of the academy" lamented by some scholars (Burtchaell, 1998; Butler, 1989; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994) may be in check. Other recent empirical evidence (Foster & LaForce, 1999; Lee, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Ohme, 2002) supports the contention that students' religious development may in fact be strengthened by certain collegiate experiences. This renewed religious engagement among collegians is reflective of a broader social trend in American culture. According to sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1998), the resurgence of religious involvement is in part a reaction to the social and cultural shifts since the 1960s, which include the breakdown of the nuclear family, the loss of confidence in basic social institutions, and a rampant consumer-oriented marketplace. Nash (2001) contends that the revival of student interest in religion and spirituality represents the most vibrant aspect of pluralism on campus today.

This renewed spiritual engagement among college students has not gone unnoticed by student affairs professionals, as evidenced by this special issue of *The College Student Affairs Journal*. A recent New Directions series addressed *The Implications of Student Spirituality for Student Affairs Practice* (Jablonski, 2001), extending earlier observations by Collins, Hurst, and Jacobson (1987) and Butler (1989). The latest edition of the *Student Services Handbook* (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003)

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includes a new section on spiritual development. Recent studies have examined the relationship between student affairs professionals and campus ministries (Fidler, Poster, & Strickland, 1999; Pearson & Collins, 2001; Temkin & Evans, 1998). Professional conferences sponsored by NASPA and other student affairs associations have focused on the place of spirituality in the academy. What do we know from empirical research about the effect of college attendance on students' religious faith and practice? How can the work of student affairs professionals be better grounded in this research? Where are there gaps in the scholarship? This study will address these questions utilizing a synthetic review of empirical research.

Given the general interest among colleges and universities in the formation of the attitudes, beliefs, and values of their students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) it is perplexing that more research has not examined the impact of attending college on the religious faith and practice of students, a deficit noted by a number of scholars (Anderson, 1994; Collins et al., 1987; Lee, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Love & Talbot, 1999; McKinney & McKinney, 1999), and perhaps related to the increased secularization of American higher education throughout the 20th century (Burtchaell, 1998; Laurence, 1999; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994; Strange, 2000). This study will first provide a context by reviewing the religious roots of American higher education, tracing the gradual secularization of the academy. An exploration of the impact of higher education on students' religious development will then be presented, with attention to empirical findings and theoretical constructs of spiritual development. Specifically, results from research conducted over the past 15 years will be analyzed. Finally, implications for the practice of student affairs professionals, grounded in theory and research, will be offered, as well as suggestions for further research.

Background

The Secularization of American Higher Education

The first three centuries of higher education in America, from the mid-17th to the mid-20th century, were characterized by an educational system that was predominantly private and Protestant (Pace, 1972). Beginning with the founding of Harvard in 1636 by the Puritans, and spurred by sectarian rivalries, the colonial era witnessed the establishment of a number of colleges for the primary purpose of educating clergy and promoting sectarian influence (Marsden, 1994).¹ As the young nation developed, so did the need for advanced education for the training of clergy and other professionals, especially attorneys and physicians. A classical education

1. The Congregationalists established Yale in 1701 as a more appropriate venue for the training of their ministers. The Presbyterians in turn founded Princeton in 1746, originally as the College of New Jersey. The Anglicans, with Presbyterian support, established King's College in 1754, which was to become Columbia, and the College of Philadelphia in 1755, now the University of Pennsylvania. Brown was established in 1764 by the Baptists; Queens, later to become Rutgers, in 1766 by the Dutch Reformed; and Dartmouth, in 1769, by the Congregationalists (Marsden, 1994).

following the European model, permeated with religious studies and moral philosophy, was considered essential for raising up an indigenous generation of leaders and professionals for the new nation (Marsden, 1994; Pattillo & Mackenzie, 1966). Educators "believed that a thorough grounding in religious principles and biblical knowledge supported advances across the educational spectrum" (Cherry et al., 2001, p. 2). Even publicly-supported institutions through most of the 1800s had a distinctly religious character, and were as likely to be led by clergy-presidents and devout male faculty as were their religiously-founded counterparts (Perko, 1991).

The 20th century, however, witnessed a dramatic shift as religion as a core element of the curriculum and the church as a predominant influence in mission, governance, and campus ethos became increasingly marginalized in the academy (Burtchaell, 1998; Haynes, 2002; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994). The secularization of higher education in America was a slow and complex process beginning roughly in 1860 and nearly complete by 1940, aided by the steady advance of scientific inquiry and changes to the academic curriculum, (Marsden, 1994; Perko, 1991; Sloan, 1994). As noted by numerous chroniclers (Eisenmann, 1999; Hofstadter, 1955/1996; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994) the early Protestant embrace of the new methods of scientific inquiry, while well-intentioned, ultimately led to the marginalization of religious influence and orthodoxy. "The rise of science was the most impressive aspect of curricular change in the eighteenth century," noted Hofstadter (p. 194), leading to "the *discovery* of knowledge [in] the classroom," a significant departure from the old prescribed curriculum of the classics (p. 196, emphasis in the original).

Under the strains of pluralistic and secular pressures, the religious character of the academy eventually changed. Ties between the institutions and their founding churches weakened. Course requirements in religion and moral philosophy were lessened, if not abolished. Mandatory chapel attendance was eliminated (Haynes, 2002; Marsden, 1994; Pattillo & Mackenzie, 1966). In many ways, contended Sloan (1994), "the university itself became a major religious phenomenon," becoming the "secular religion" of American culture by the 20th century (p. 21). The effects of secularization remain with the academy today.

Despite claims of religious interference with, and thus unsuitability for, the academic enterprise (Veysey, 1965), and dour predictions of the certain demise of religious influence in higher education (Burtchaell, 1998), religiously-affiliated colleges persist in American higher education. The survival of these unique institutions, in spite of uncertainty regarding their religious identity, may be due in part to their adaptability and determination to succeed in the academic marketplace. As Dovre (2002) has noted, "from a material point of view most of them prospered; from an academic point of view most of them improved; and from a cultural perspective the graduates of these institutions exercised a positive impact" (pp. ix-x). Such a pragmatic assessment of the success of religious colleges

and universities is affirmed by Marsden (2002) who contends that many are simply “doing their jobs well.”

The divorce of personal, subjective belief from engagement in the “value-free” arena of objective science, according to Marsden (1994) and Sloan (1994), has limited not only the answers, but more importantly, the questions, in the academy’s search for truth. The influence of postmodernism on the academy presents new opportunities for reopening the dialog between religion and science. Both Sloan and Marsden cite recent feminist critiques as an example of the subjectivity of the scholarly endeavor, and ask why then religion should not be included as another legitimate point of reference.² In the past decade a resurgence of scholarly activity regarding religion and higher education accompanied by significant developments of the postmodern era questioning the exclusive claims of the scientific method has created a new opportunity for religion and the church to re-engage the academy in a significant manner. As Haynes (2002) has noted, “American higher education is once again a hospitable environment for conversations about faith and learning” (p. 30).

The Effect of College on Students’ Spiritual Development

Institutional mission statements frequently stress the importance of fostering intellectual and personal growth, and the development of civic virtues, such as service for the good of society and concern for others. While these basic values would be affirmed by most religious traditions, thus lending support for stated institutional goals, paradoxically faith development and religious affiliation have not been nurtured on many campuses. Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) landmark synthesis of 20 years of research, *How College Affects Students*, found “statistically significant declines in religious attitudes, values, and behaviors” (pp. 280-281) among college students, confirming the earlier findings of Feldman and Newcome (1969). Studies revealed that college in general has a liberalizing effect on students’ values and attitudes. Religious views became more individual and less dogmatic, and the tolerance for the religious beliefs of others increased as a result of attending college.

Specifically the researchers found that college graduates possessed more secular attitudes than those young adults who had some college or no college at all (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This change toward secularization they found to be “a function of both normal maturation and college influence” (p. 293), noting that maturation alone could not explain the effects. Citing Hoge’s (1970, 1974, 1976) series of cross-sectional studies that found greater change between cohorts than within them, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested that some of the change in religious attitudes might be explained by shifts in societal values.

2. Citing the postmodern influence on a wide range of scholarly endeavors, Alan Wolfe (1997) called for a “renegotiation” (p. B4) of the divorce between religion and the secular academy.

When examining changes in religious values and behaviors among various types of college environments, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that institutional characteristics do have an effect on student development. They noted that declines in religious values and practices were less marked at Protestant and Catholic institutions. Furthermore, when examining selective colleges and universities they found "significantly greater than expected decreases in conventional religious affiliation and in religiousness" (p. 303). They concluded "institutional characteristics probably do play a role in the degree to which religious preferences, attitudes, values, and behaviors change during college" (p. 303).

A student's place of residence had a noticeable effect on changes in religious values (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Declines were less pronounced among students who lived at home, suggesting that students' parents reinforced traditional value systems, and that students were less likely to encounter or explore other value and belief systems. Studies by Moos (1979) and Moos and Lee (1979) found that certain residence hall environments, namely those that promote socializing and personal relationships, encouraged students' religious values and interests. A study examining student interactions with faculty and peers (Clark, Heist, McConnell, Trow, & Yonge, 1972) found a positive correlation between the maintenance of students' entering religious beliefs and the strength of religious commitments of faculty and peers.

Theoretical Understandings of Spiritual Development

The seeds of a more complete understanding of religious faith development are embedded in a number of student development theories that address morals, values, and ethical development (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Associates, 1981; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Perry, 1970, 1981). Love and Talbot (1999) and Love (2001, 2002) have attempted to integrate these student development theories with the faith development theories of Fowler (1981), Parks (1986, 2000; who drew heavily on Perry's work), and to a lesser extent Helminiak (1987), into a more complete understanding of college student faith development.³

Changes in students' religious beliefs and convictions are not unexpected during the period of late adolescence and young adulthood, as confirmed by the developmental constructs of Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986, 2000). Developmentally, most students are transitioning between a conventionally assumed faith (Fowler's Stage 3) they have inherited from family and culture, to a more adult, critically appropriated faith (Fowler's Stage 4) individually formed in the crucible of exploring and questioning meaning and identity (see also Anderson,

3. The terms religion, faith, and spirituality are often used interchangeably. For a helpful differentiation among these constructs, refer to Leanne Lewis Newman's preceding article in this issue.

1994; and Hodges, 1999). Tisdell (2003) affirms that developing an authentic spiritual identity involves moving away or deeply questioning one's childhood religious tradition, a critical-reflective process that typically occurs in young adulthood. Add to this developmental struggle the rarified environment of analytical scrutiny common in higher education and you have a situation ripe for change. The academic community has the potential to enhance or inhibit this process of faith development. As Parks (1986) points out, "higher education—selfconsciously or unselfconsciously—serves the young adult as his or her primary community of imagination, within which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith" (pp. 133-134).

Love and Talbot (1999) defined five interrelated processes in spiritual development:

1. Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centrality.
3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.
4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.
5. Spiritual development involves increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing. (p. 364)

Religious development was found to be positively correlated with both moral development and developing a sense of meaning or purpose in life (Astin, 1993; Dalton, 1997; Parks, 1986, 2000; Young, Cashwell, & Woolington, 1998). Religious development was also found to be positively associated with efforts to enhance multiculturalism (Hodges, 1999; Pascarella et al., 1996).

Methodology

This study employs a narrative, explanatory synthesis to analyze empirical research findings from studies conducted over the past 15 years that examine the impact of attending college on students' religious faith and practice. Such a synthetic methodology has been effectively utilized by previous analytical reviews of research (Bowen, 1997; Feldman & Newcome, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and was found to be superior to the more statistically complex method of meta-analysis when examining studies of varying methodologies and theoretical conceptualizations (Pascarella & Terenzini). Studies are compared and contrasted by research design, methodology, and population of interest. As recommended by Pascarella and Terenzini, particular attention is paid to the dynamic of change

versus development; in this case, change in students' faith and practice in relationship to the faith development constructs of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000).

Specific questions guiding this research were: (a) What conclusions can be drawn from empirical studies conducted since 1987 that assess the effect of college attendance on students' religious faith and spiritual practice? (b) How do these conclusions compare with the findings of previous syntheses of research, most notably those conducted by Feldman and Newcome (1969), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991)? (c) Based on these conclusions, what gaps in the literature remain, and what directions are suggested for future research? (d) What are the implications for student affairs practice suggested by results from recent research?

Results

Declines in religious activity among students during the time of college attendance have been found in studies spanning several decades. Confirming the results of Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) meta-findings, Astin (1993) and Bowen (1997) also found decreases in student involvement in religious activity, such as worship attendance. O'Neill and Grandy (1994) found that losses in participation were greatest among liberal Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Other recent studies, however, offer a more complex understanding of change in students' religious faith and practice during the time of college attendance and offer clues to the environmental factors and other influencers that support positive religious growth.

Anderson (1994) engaged in qualitative study of fourth-year students attending a large public research university. Employing narrative inquiry, Anderson interviewed three women to better understand the process of religious identity development while attending college. All three struggled to integrate their emerging beliefs as feminist Christians with broader public understandings of Christianity. These women found support for their developing religious identities through participating in a campus ministry program and attending religious services. There was evidence that the reflective activity of participating in the narrative inquiry further supported the process of faith integration.

Foster and LaForce's (1999) quantitative longitudinal study of students attending a Christian liberal arts college found that students who persisted until their senior year exhibited more positive changes in religious development than did their non-persisting peers.⁴ This study analyzed data collected from 402 first-year students

4. A distinction is frequently made between "Christian" and "religiously-affiliated" colleges. The former are typically members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, affiliated with evangelical Christian denominations or independent churches, often mandate that faculty assent to specific doctrinal formulations, and frequently require student attendance at campus worship services, though most open enrollment to non-Christian students. These Christian colleges pride themselves in their particular faith-based mission and campus ethos. The latter are typically affiliated

during their first semester, with a follow-up collection of data three-and-a-half years later. Persisters (55% of the original sample) were compared with those who dropped out of the faith-based institution. Five instruments measuring religiosity, spiritual well-being, moral reasoning, and ego identity status were administered at both the initial and subsequent data collection points.⁵ Those students who persisted exhibited continued religious commitment, as well as declines in extrinsic religiosity and religious well-being (both positive outcomes indicating engagement with religious issues and identity). Additional evidence pointed toward greater gains for persisters in achieving more mature identity status and advanced moral reasoning. The study noted, however, that nonpersisters exhibited greater gains in intrinsic religiosity, suggesting that engagement in a more secular environment fostered greater integration of individual beliefs and practices.

A case analysis conducted in a small Minnesota town at a regional branch of the state's public research university revealed that specific program interventions could provide support for minority religious beliefs and spiritual practices (Hodges, 1999). This qualitative study examined the impact of the Spiritual Pathways series that offered forums where faculty or staff from religious minorities shared their beliefs and spiritual practices with other members of the campus community. The study examined the impact on all members of the campus community—students, faculty, and staff—concluding that members of under-represented religious groups found support and encouragement for their faith. Furthermore, the program offered broader support for diversity and multiculturalism efforts on campus.

Drawing upon the religious narratives told by his students over the past 30-plus years as a professor at the University of Vermont, Nash (2001) reports that since the mid-1990s these stories present a definitive cry for moral, religious, and spiritual meaning. Over the past decade, he found that most students at this “public ivy” “possess a genuine sense of religious wonder” (p. 2). Nash classifies six “religio-spiritual” narratives exhibited in the stories his students tell: (a) orthodoxy, (b) wounded belief, (c) mainline belief, (d) activism, (e) exploration, and (f) secular humanism. He argues that encouraging a robust dialogue of divergent religious (and non-religious) views on campus fosters genuine religious liberty. Nash is one of the few scholars to incorporate the views of students from a wide range of religious, including non-Christian, traditions, as well as from non-religious backgrounds.

with so-called “mainline” Protestant or Catholic denominations, and while claiming at least an historical connection with the sponsoring church, do not place religious restrictions on student enrollment or on faculty hiring or teaching. The character of the religious climate at these religiously-affiliated institutions can vary widely.

5. The specific instruments administered were the Religious Orientation Scale, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, the Defining Issues Test, the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, and the Shepherd Scale, the latter designed by researchers to measure a distinctly Christian life-style. Demographic data were also collected (Foster & LaForce, 1999).

Lee (2002a) conducted a qualitative study of traditional-aged Catholic students attending UCLA. Utilizing narrative inquiry, Lee conducted in-depth interviews with four students to explore the development of the religious self in the diverse and at times hostile environment of a large urban public research university. Both social and academic campus engagement contributed to changes in redefining the religious identities of these four students. Although their beliefs were challenged, the students did not abandon their faith, but rather experienced progression in their faith development, consistent with Fowler's (1981) and Parks's (2000) theoretical constructs. Based on her findings, Lee introduced the concept of a contextualized self: "the self as an agent of change and the self as an individual—that further shapes and influences the redefined spiritual self" (p. 355). The study also found that college environments, faculty support, and academic courses and co-curricular programs that offer exploration of religious issues can positively influence the development of students' religious identities.

A substantial quantitative study, also conducted by Lee (2000, 2002b), found an overall strengthening of students' religious beliefs and convictions when measured across a four-year period of college attendance. This study provides the strongest evidence to date that questions the secularizing impact of attending college found in prior research. Lee examined a large longitudinal data set from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) consisting of more than 4,000 students from 76 four-year institutions. Students were surveyed in 1994 at the time of entry in their freshman year utilizing the annual instrument administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. A follow-up HERI study was conducted in the spring of 1998. Lee found that attending religious services led to a strengthening of religious beliefs and convictions. Other factors contributing to faith development included attending college with peers who were involved in religious activities, interactions with faculty, and leadership training. This study also revealed that religiously-affiliated institutions did not have a greater impact on students' religious convictions than did their public counterparts, in contrast to the earlier findings of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). It should be noted that Lee's study was not designed to determine whether this finding of a strengthening of religious beliefs and convictions was due to changes in the effects of higher education, or generational and societal differences between the students she studied and the subjects of previous research.

Also questioning the impact of secularization in the academy, Cherry et al. (2001) set out to determine the contemporary character of religion in higher education. Utilizing detailed ethnographies, the scholars examined the state of religion on four diverse campuses, North College, a Lutheran liberal arts college; South University, a historically Black institution with Presbyterian roots; East University, a Roman Catholic university; and West University, a large public campus. They examined the religious programming on campus, the spiritual practices of students, the formal teaching of religion in the classroom, and the overall campus ethos at each institution. Citing the changing shape of religion in America, the "protean flexibility" that has characterized religious perseverance in this country, recent

sociological evidence contending that American culture is indeed very religious, and their own personal encounters with campus life, the researchers sought to paint a more accurate and contemporary picture of religion in the academy.

While noting the limitations of studying only four campuses, diverse as they may be, Cherry et al. (2001) found robust expressions of religious life on each campus coupled with engaging religious study in the classroom. The three institutions with denominational connections evidenced higher proportions of students engaged in religious practice, due in part to a campus ethos supportive of religious expression. Even so, religious practice at the public university in their study was not “disadvantaged.” On all four campuses they found vital connections between volunteerism and personal spirituality, more public and communal than private and individual expressions of faith, great respect for religious diversity, and an abundance of opportunities for religious practice that exceeded student need. The researchers noted, however, that new forms of faith expression may have missed their observation. “Given the students’ proclivity to define themselves as ‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religious,’ as seekers rather than dwellers, attendance at traditional worship services and other events of religious organizations does not capture the full meaning of their spiritual quest” (p. 283).

In summarizing their findings, Cherry et al. (2001) noted that while religious expression was vibrant on all four campuses, in contrast to previous eras, it appeared more optional and more pluralistic. Such voluntary opportunity for wider religious choice, they contended, stimulated greater interest in and enthusiasm for religious expression. Such findings led them to conclude, “the ethos of decentered, diverse, religiously tolerant institutions of higher education is a breeding ground for vital religious practice and teaching” (pp. 294-295). Although this study is more descriptive than explanatory, the results lend support to the contention that certain campus environments and experiences foster students’ religious faith and practice.

There is additional evidence that the posture of the academy toward matters of religious faith and practice is shifting. As noted by a number of scholars (Haynes, 2002; Marsden, 1994; Sloan, 1994) the postmodern critique has reopened the doors of the academy to other, non-objective, non-scientific epistemologies, including religious faith. Furthermore, the blossoming array of religious traditions represented in American culture—now the most religiously diverse in the world (Eck, 2001)—which is most vividly portrayed on college campuses (Cherry et al, 2001; Nash, 2001) has encouraged academic communities valuing diversity to reconsider the role of more traditional religious expression. This shift in the academy’s openness to religious influence and the reengagement of students with faith and spiritual practice provide an opportunity for student affairs professionals to assist the academic community in understanding this often-ignored aspect of diversity and supporting the spiritual quests of their students.

A final vein of inquiry links the study of religion and spirituality with the study of culture, finding that religion frequently exerts a more potent force among historically underrepresented or marginalized cultures within the academy (Tisdell,

2003). Latino scholar David Abalos (1998) includes the sacred as one of four faces of cultural identity. He contends that religion and spirituality play a positive role in overcoming internalized oppression and redeveloping a positive self and cultural identity by "casting out the demons" of oppression. Native American students attending tribal colleges that maintain tribal traditions and expectations, including spiritual practices, exhibit better academic success than their Native American peers attending predominantly White institutions (Tierney, 1992). A study by Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that among Hispanic students, on-campus socialization that supported on-going external-to-campus religious affiliations strengthened students' sense of belonging, or social integration, to the campus culture.

Discussion

Limitations of Recent Studies

In addition to the limited number of studies examining the effect of college on students' spiritual development, there are deficiencies in the studies that do exist. First among these limitations is the nearly exclusive focus on monotheistic religions. Nash's (2001) examination of religious narratives is a notable exception. Lee (2000, 2002b), for example, grouped her students into four categories, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Eastern (a composite of various religions, including Buddhist and Islamic). Eck (2001) has identified more than 200 religious traditions currently being practiced in the United States. College campus populations are increasingly reflective of this diversity. Additionally, the faith development constructs of Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986, 2001) were derived largely from the examination of the spiritual journeys of Christian students. Tisdell's (2003) recent work helps to broaden our understanding of the spiritual dynamics of different faith traditions by relating how the spiritual activity of meaning-making is mediated by cultural context.

Other limitations include insufficient study designs and measures to adequately capture the complexity and pattern of change in students' spiritual beliefs and practices. We know change occurs in students' spiritual journeys, but we know little about how and when such change occurs, what influences these changes, and how these changes differ among students by gender, race or ethnicity, religious affiliation, or other characteristics. Part of the difficulty in measuring students' spiritual practices is the growing indication (Cherry et al., 2001) that such activity no longer conforms to traditional religious practice. A better understanding of students' devotional practices will yield more potent measures.

Finally, most studies tell us little about the effects of specific campus environments. Large data sets, such as those utilized by Lee (2000, 2002b), do not provide analysis of individual campus cultures. In-depth ethnographies, such as those conducted by Cherry et al. (2001), while providing important clues, do not capture the diversity and complexity of environments within campus types. We do not know, for example, if other historically Black colleges and

universities (HBCUs) exhibit patterns of student religious involvement similar to the “South” university of the *Religion on Campus* study.

Implications for Practice

The religious development of college students has long been on the radar screen of student affairs professionals in the academy. In one of the first documents to standardize norms of the profession, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937), the definition of human development explicitly included religious development. To be sure, the spiritual aspect of human development has not been a major focus of the profession until recently. It is increasingly common to find spirituality incorporated in student affairs programs across the country, especially in those utilizing a wellness model (Jablonski, 2001). In the wake of the attacks on September 11th, campuses are searching for new ways to foster religious understanding and tolerance (Kantrowitz & Naughton, 2001).

Parks (2000) has noted the importance of mentoring communities for the faith formation of college students. A mentoring community “offers a network of belonging in which young adults feel recognized as who they really are, and as who they are becoming. It offers both challenge and support and thus offers good company for both the emerging strength and the distinctive vulnerability of the young adult” (p. 95). She cites residence halls as having the potential to be mentoring communities. Love (2001) also suggests learning communities and living-learning centers as possible venues for fostering student spiritual growth.

Involvement in religious activities was, not surprisingly, found to be positively correlated with strengthening religious beliefs and commitments. Various researchers have found such evidence for worship, as well as participation in a campus ministry program (Anderson, 1994; Cherry et al., 2001; Lee, 2000, 2002a, 2002b). Strengthening religious conviction, however, does not necessarily mean greater affiliation with religious groups (Laurence, 1999). Indeed, it is not uncommon for young adults to disassociate from traditional religious communities (Lee, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tisdell, 2003).

Other influencers of forming religious identity and belief are supportive peer cultures (Astin, 1993; Dalton, 1989; Pascarella, 1997), attending college with a peer group (Astin, 1993; Lee, 2000, 2002b; Pascarella et al., 1996), on-campus residence (Moos, 1979; Moos & Lee, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1996), interaction with faculty and student peers who express their religious views (Astin, 1993; Clark et al., 1972; Lee, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella et al., 1996), and leadership training (Lee, 2000, 2002b). Kuh (2000) found “a powerful, conforming campus culture” (p. 10) to be influential, though in the case of more conservative religious institutions, it can also inhibit changes in religious views. Laurence (1999) suggests that spirituality plays an integrating role in those higher education institutions “that interconnect educational initiatives such as student values, moral and ethical development, experiential education, health and wellness, and community service” (p. 13).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) in their review of research on the retention of minority students developed the construct of "sense of belonging," based on theories of group cohesion. Social integration, they contended, is a subjective, internal phenomenon.

If students make sense of their environments through memberships in multiple peer groups that help them acquire the skills they need in college ... then particular activities and groups can both meet students' immediate needs and link students to the larger whole of campus life. (p. 338)

Certain activities may provide a sense of belonging even when students' assessment of wider campus culture is negative. It is reasonable to assume that students who find peer support for their religious faith and practice will experience a similar sense of belonging.

Nash (2001) argues for a robust moral conversation, an "unbounded religious dialogue," in the academy to foster the religious identification and development of students, and to enhance a campus climate of pluralism and tolerance. He recommends both academic (e.g., capstone courses) and co-curricular (e.g., campus-wide conversations) strategies to broaden understandings of pluralism and religious difference, establishing six principles for moral discourse:

1. Declarations of beliefs are not necessarily conversations about beliefs.
2. All views in moral conversation deserve at least an initial respect.
3. The golden rule of moral conversation is a willingness to find the truth in what we oppose and the error in what we espouse, before we presume to acknowledge the truth in what we espouse and the error in what we oppose.
4. Either-or, all-or-nothing thinking is always a threat to destroy moral conversation.
5. In matters of religion, we do not live in reality itself. We live in stories about reality.
6. Moral conversation is not without internal contradictions, however, as its basic premises tend to lean leftward toward a liberal-postmodern view of the world. (pp. 176-185)

Nash champions student affairs professionals as "a powerful, albeit hidden, educational force in the academy" who are more likely to be present "whenever students experience the gnawing pain, confusion, and tongue-tied inarticulateness that comes from seeking meaning" (p. 7). Additional strategies for cultivating—and managing—religious pluralism on campus can be found in works edited by Kazanjian and Laurence (2000), and Miller and Ryan (2001).

Recommendations for Further Research

Although research on students' spiritual beliefs and practices has been conducted for more than half a century, the character of this research is still weak. More recent studies, such as those conducted by Foster and LaForce (1999), Cherry et al. (2001), and Lee (2000, 2002a, 2002b), present a promising trend. Yet, as already noted, these studies possess their own limitations. Furthermore, the findings of these more recent studies are inconsistent, and in some important ways, contradict earlier findings. For example, Cherry et al. (2001) found more vibrant religious expression on the private, religiously-affiliated campuses they studied, confirming the results of studies reviewed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) that religiously-affiliated institutions provided more support for students' spiritual development. Yet Lee's (2000, 2002b) study found no difference between students at public or religiously-affiliated institutions. Why is this so?

Additional study is needed to better understand the diversity of spiritual life on campus, paying particular attention to non-monotheistic religious expression. Better understanding of students' spiritual journeys will enable us to better assess the adequacy of present theories of spiritual development. Do non-Christian students exhibit similar patterns of faith development? Are the factors that influence development similar? What about students who do not profess any religious tradition? The works of Nash (2001) and Tisdell (2003) are helpful in this regard. Additional testing of faith development theories among more diverse student populations may provide answers to these important questions.

A further avenue of inquiry is to better understand the effect various campus environments and cultures have on students' spiritual development. American higher education is well known for its diversity. That diversity can yield important between-campus differences, even across campuses of similar type, classification, and size. Study findings thus far are inconsistent regarding even the broadest categorization of institutions, as previously noted.

Yet another little-examined dynamic is the role religious faith and practice play in student retention. In addition to the previously cited studies by Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Tierney (1992), a study of first year law students at religiously-affiliated Trinity Law School (Frost, 1999) found that religion promoted a sense of community, thereby enhancing retention. More exploration of this relationship is needed.

There are important research design and methodological considerations for all future studies. As noted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), little attention is paid to the net effects of college attendance. Only by examining similar cohorts of non-attending young adults can we understand if the changes exhibited are due to college impact. Future studies will also benefit from randomized sampling. All too often, subjects of interest are selected for convenience. At least, limitations of findings from such studies should be carefully noted. Additional design matters to consider are the need for better measures to capture the breadth, complexity and pattern of change in spiritual beliefs and

practices. The latest project by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA studying student spirituality offer much promise (Young, 2003). Studies of qualitative, as well as quantitative, and mixed method design will assist in deepening our understanding of the effect of college on students' religious development.

Conclusion

If recent research findings are correct, students today are more interested in "things spiritual" and more involved in religious activities. Today's students also exhibit more diverse religious affiliations and expressions of those affiliations. Decades of campus neglect of, or at least disinterest in, students' religious development may suggest that the academy remains an inhospitable environment for fostering spiritual growth. The growing interest among students—and student affairs professionals—in faith development provides an opportunity for campuses to renew their commitment to supporting the spiritual journeys of their students. Research suggests that attending college does impact students' religious faith and practice. Indeed, some campus experiences and environments appear more supportive than others. Attention to faith development theory and findings from empirical research will enable student affairs professionals to develop better grounded policies and programs that will foster the religious development of their students and a broadly-inclusive, pluralistic climate on their campuses.

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