

Students worship less, but spiritual search up: An ecumenical worldview

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Though college students' attendance at worship services declines, an interest in spiritual matters grows for many during their time on campus, a new study shows.

UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute compared the views of students who were freshmen in the fall of 2004 with the same students' thoughts in the spring of 2007, when they were juniors.

The survey of over 14,000 students found that more than 50 percent of them considered "integrating spirituality into my life" very important or essential in 2007—an increase of almost 10 percentage points from 2004. Likewise, more students thought "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" was essential or very important.

While their spiritual interests increased, their worship attendance did not.

Slightly more than half the students said they attended services in college at about the same rate as they attended them in high school. Almost 40 percent, however, said they worshiped less frequently. Seven percent said they worshiped more.

Researchers also concluded that an increasing percentage of students had an "ecumenical worldview." In 2004, 42 percent said they endorsed "improving my understanding of other countries and cultures"; 55 percent said the same in 2007.

Students showed increasing agreement over time with the idea that nonreligious people can lead lives as moral as those of religious believers, with 90 percent approving the statement this year.

"The data suggest that college is influencing students in positive ways that will better prepare them for leadership roles in our global society," said UCLA emeritus professor Alexander W. Astin, coprincipal investigator for the research.

The research included 14,527 students at 136 U.S. colleges and universities. Its margin of error is between 1 and 2 percentage points. The project, which is in its fifth year, is funded by the John Templeton Foundation. -*Religion News Service*