

Inward Journeys: Forms and Patterns of College Student Spirituality

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Abstract

There is considerable evidence that a growing number of college students today are engaged in many new forms of spiritual search and practice. The forms and patterns of contemporary college student spirituality are diverse and multifaceted and not yet well understood or documented. Consequently, there is much to be learned about this recent development in college student spirituality in order to determine its meaning and importance for today's college students as well as for the educational and student developmental efforts of colleges and universities.

This article reports on the findings of the authors' research into the contemporary forms and patterns of college student spirituality and offers an analysis and discussion of the implications of these findings for colleges and universities. The authors examine in particular the behaviors and involvements of college students related to spiritual search activities and what some colleges and universities are doing to respond to this important student trend.

A growing number of college students are participating in a variety of activities that, in one form or another, provide gateways to the inner life of reflection and self-examination (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004; Mooney, 2005; Gallup, 1998; CRRUCS/Gallup, 2003; Dalton, 2003). Perhaps the most powerful metaphors for the spirituality movement among college students today are "inward journey" and "quest." When college students write or are asked about spirituality, they consistently describe it as a journey or quest that takes them inward into the unknown, unexamined regions of their inner lives. It is a journey of introspection and reflection that students sometimes take alone and at other times in the company of others. When asked about the object or purpose of their spiritual journeys, college students often describe it as an inward search for purpose, meaning, fulfillment, depth, wholeness, and authenticity. They describe a journey of discovery that is, in the end, not only about understanding themselves in a deeper and more authentic way but also about discovering their purpose and destiny in life and how these connect to what they believe is sacred and transcendent. Sharon Parks (2000) describes the inner search of youth as a quest to answer the "big" questions of life.

College students take many paths on their inward journeys. Some make their spiritual searches within the context of a religious faith orientation. The spiritual practices in which they engage are directly connected to the community beliefs, rituals, symbols, and meanings of their personal faith tradition. Other students choose to explore paths outside the boundaries of a

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particular faith tradition and engage in spiritual searches that have little if any connection to any specific religious orientation. What is striking about the contemporary spirituality movement among college students is the wide variety of spiritual practices that students engage in and how receptive they are to exploring new forms of spiritual searching. For reasons that are not fully understood at this time, college students today seem to be very open and motivated to tackling the big questions that young people typically face during the college years.

It is important to comment briefly on why we believe it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to contribute to the moral and spiritual development of students. This topic is indeed a complex one that goes beyond the scope of this paper. We do, however, want to state some of our assumptions about why we think it is important for colleges and universities to encourage proactively students' inner development:

1. Learning in college is intrinsically connected to students' inner lives of emotions, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. Higher education that ignores the connections between the cognitive and emotional domains of students' lives will necessarily be less effective.
2. The liberal arts tradition in American higher education has always emphasized the holistic development of college students. Students develop holistically, and concern for educating the whole student continues to be an important aspect of undergraduate education in most colleges and universities.
3. The majority of undergraduates in most U.S. colleges and universities are in the traditional age group of 17 – 23 years. Parents and the general public expect that higher education will help to prepare these young adults in their transition to adult life and responsibilities in a democratic society.
4. The seriousness of student conduct on campus including alcohol abuse, academic dishonesty, abuses in athletics, racism, sexism, and materialistic values demand that colleges and universities take more accountability for guiding the ethical development of college students.
5. College students who report higher levels of spirituality and religiousness also report higher levels of physical and psychological well being.
6. The moral challenges and pressures of leadership in today's increasingly complex and competitive world require college graduates who have developed ethical integrity as well as intellectual competence.

The Importance of Religion and Spirituality for College Students Today

The Spirituality Project at UCLA (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2004) provides the most recent and comprehensive data available on what contemporary college students believe about religion and spirituality and the role that these play in their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. The data reveal the surprising importance of religion and spirituality to college students today and raise many questions about the difficulties students report that they encounter when they try to engage in spiritual search activities in the higher education setting.

For example, findings from the Spirituality Project indicate that 75% of the new students responding to the survey indicated that they were "searching for meaning/purpose in life," and

80% reported that they were at least somewhat interested in spirituality. Almost 50% of the students in the national survey suggested that they believed themselves to be on a spiritual quest and that it was important to find ways to develop spiritually while in college. Many of these students reported that they expected their colleges to provide opportunities for them to pursue their spiritual interests. Religious faith is also important to many new students. Eighty percent reported that they held a belief in God or a Higher Power, and a similar percentage indicated that they gained strength from their connection to their concept of a divine being.

In terms of spiritual practices measured by the HERI project, many religious students reported that they found value in prayer and adherence to religious teachings, and a large percentage had participated in religious services of some type in the year before they completed the survey. Having conversations with friends and family about religion and spirituality was also a common way that college students sought to clarify and deepen their spiritual search. Other spiritual practices found to be meaningful for many students included practicing self-reflection and meditation, reading sacred texts or other books with spiritual themes, and participating in retreats or attending meetings where religious and spiritual topics were examined.

Other recent research supports the important influence of religion and spirituality among youth and in the general society. Surveys conducted by Gallup (1998) indicated that in the 1990s spirituality and religion played an increasingly important role in our national life. The University of Pennsylvania reported that 86% of those between the ages of 11-18 believe religion is an important part of life (CRRUCS/Gallup, 2003). Research (Sax, Keup, Gilmartin, & Stolzenberg, 2002) on student interests and changes during the first year in college also reflects students' concern about religion and spirituality. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts (2002) documented the high interest of students in religious and spiritual activities and reported that student interest in religion, volunteering, and spiritual activities had increased significantly since the terrorist events of 9/11. Thus, some of the best empirical data on student interest and participation in spiritual search activities in college indicate that while participation in organized religion tends to decline during the early years of college, student interest and involvement in spirituality remain high.

It is also important to see the current interest in religion and spirituality among college students in the context of a broader societal religious resurgence over the past 15 years. One sees this religious awakening in such things as highly visible mega-churches, runaway best selling books on spiritual topics, a shift toward more conservative and traditional values, and increased participation of college students in campus religious organizations and activities. No doubt many college students have been affected by the evangelical movement in the U.S. that has also made its impact on campus in groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, and other non-denominational evangelical religious organizations. Non-Christian religious and spiritual groups and activities have also become much more popular on campus, and we will examine some of these later. It should also be noted that it is difficult to compare college student spirituality today with past historical periods when the U.S. society was in great social change and upheaval. Comparative data are lacking for many of those periods so we cannot easily track know how the religious and spiritual interests of college students today directly compare with past generations.

In an interesting senior thesis at the University of California-Davis (Geng, 2004), Daniel Perez offers a student's perspective on reasons for the increased interest on the part of college students in non-religious spirituality. Perez noted that the parents of current students grew up in the 1960s when traditional religious structures broke down. Parents, Perez suggested, may be less inclined to push organized religion onto their children. Moreover, college students today have a lot more access to global cultures and belief systems today than in the past, and exposure gives them much wider choices about spiritual beliefs and practices according to Perez. College students are, he argues, less likely to "buy into" a formalized system of religious absolutes than in

previous years. Add to this mix of influences a heightened sense of individual self-interest and a consumer oriented campus culture, and it is understandable why today's college students seem inclined to create their own personalized belief systems.

Developmental Factors That Prompt the Spiritual Quest in College

Research on student development during the college years suggests that there are at least five important developmental factors that contribute to the spiritual search process. Student development in these areas is stimulated by the need to respond to some powerful social-psychological forces with which traditional age college students must learn to cope and resolve. As we noted earlier, Parks (2000) suggests that the developmental concerns that press upon young adults at this time of their lives are often posed as "big questions." We identify here some of these major developmental concerns and the related big questions they pose for college students.

1. Identity: Who am I?

Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Erikson (1950), among others, have documented the central importance in young adulthood of establishing a clear sense of one's values, beliefs, and abilities, and achieving an inner sameness that gives stability and continuity to their lives. The big question that drives the search for identity is *Who am I?* The search for identity is closely connected to spiritual search since identity focuses on the inner life and requires reflection, examination, and reformulation of one's foundational beliefs, values, and purposes.

2. Destiny or Calling: Where am I Going?

For most students the college years require them to make important choices and commitments about their future work and lives. Parents, peers, employers, and society expect college students to prepare for adult life while in college. The big question posed here is *Where am I going?* It is not simply a question about what academic major or career they will choose but also involves a much broader search for their place in the world and the unique purpose or destiny they believe is intended for their lives.

Research and educational initiatives by almost 100 colleges receiving Career and Calling grants (Lilly Endowment, 2005) from the Lilly Endowment have documented the central importance of a sense of destiny or calling in the career development of college students. Students' search for their calling stimulates spiritual introspection since the search for one's special mission or destiny in life merges naturally with the personal quest for meaning and purpose.

3. Personal Faith: What Can I Believe in?

If faith is understood as the search for ultimate meaning and truth (see Parks, 2000), then it is easy to see that the search for what to trust and believe in is a pivotal concern for most college students. The big question that faith poses is *What can I believe in?* The college years are a time when many college students are reexamining inherited beliefs and values and reformulating some of their deepest personal beliefs and values. This process also connects with spirituality since both faith and spirituality involve an inner exploration of personal authenticity, wholeness, and purpose.

4. *Wholeness: How Can I be Happy?*

The social, academic, financial, and personal demands made upon young people in college today can make for a fragmented and pressure-filled lifestyle. For all the happy images associated with college life, most students struggle to maintain a balanced life amid so many pressures and expectations. The big question of *How can I be happy?* is more than time management, more than academic achievement, more than having a balanced lifestyle; it is about finding a sense of wholeness that gives enduring fulfillment, meaning, and a sense of integration. Spirituality is one of the ways in which college students seek to unify a fragmented life and discover a personal path to enduring happiness and purpose.

5. *Mattering: Will My Life Make a Difference?*

The spiritual quest among college students is also motivated by the desire to live a life that matters, that is meaningful and beneficial to others. As Schwein and Bass (2006) point out, this question is about the consequences of one's life and whether or not the life one chooses will, in the end, make a positive contribution. Living a life that matters is a concern of college students because they are at the threshold of adult life, a time of idealism and great expectations when they want their lives to make a difference in some tangible way. "Mattering" means living a life of substance that helps to change the world for the better. It is related to the spiritual quest since college students are at a time in their lives when they seek clarity and direction about what makes for a significant and consequential life.

There are, of course, many other factors that interface with spiritual search in the college years, but these five central concerns seem especially relevant and useful in understanding why college students are attracted to spirituality and how the spiritual search process helps them to resolve some of their deepest personal concerns and questions.

Student Spirituality Practices

By "practices" of spirituality we refer to the variety of behaviors and activities that college students engage in as part of their spiritual searches. We sought to examine a wide range of contemporary student spirituality practices so that a broad sample of student involvements and expressions of spirituality in the college setting could be included and considered. To our knowledge such a compilation of student spirituality practices and the forms and patterns they take are not yet available in the research literature. Identifying these practices may contribute important information to our understanding of student spirituality in the higher education setting.

We use the term "spirituality" to include all forms of reflection and introspection in which the primary goal is to explore one's relationship to the transcendent in order to deepen and enrich personal meaning, purpose, authenticity, and wholeness. Spirituality includes forms of religious practice as well as non-religious or secular beliefs and practices in which the inward search for meaning and purpose, authenticity, and wholeness is the guiding purpose. This definition of spirituality is consistent with Hufford's (2005) argument that spirituality is the more general term and includes religion. We believe this broad definition is necessary in order to capture the wide diversity of practices and patterns of college student spirituality as well as to understand the beliefs and motivations that college students reveal in their spiritual quests.

It is also important to point out that we do **not** include in our definition of spiritual practices those student behaviors that are done solely for the purpose of relaxation, stress management, recreation, or other forms of exercise and health enhancement. Many of these types of activities are popular with college students but often do not involve a spiritual search dimension. On the other hand, when a physical activity is employed as an intentional means to

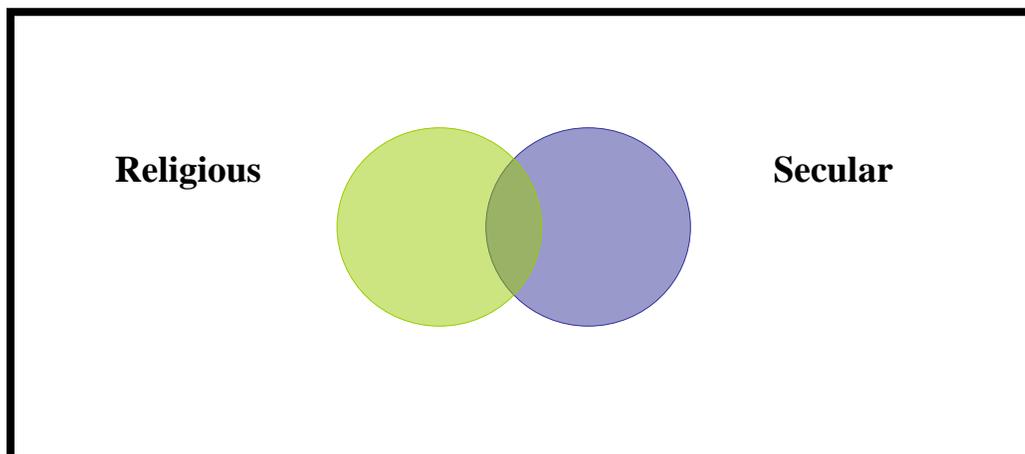
enhance the inward search for meaning, purpose, authenticity, and fulfillment, it can be a powerful aide to spirituality. Thus, it is important when considering the wide range of college student practices associated with spirituality to determine if inner spiritual search is a primary focus of the activity. Many health and wellness activities may help to create favorable physical and mental conditions in which spiritual search can occur, but if they do not incorporate spiritual search as an intentional aspect of the activity, we do not regard them as spirituality activities for the purpose of our research. Intentionality is an important criterion in defining spirituality activities.

We do acknowledge that spiritual awareness and growth can also be the unintentional result of some powerful college student experiences. For example, many college students today engage in community service activities. Often these experiences promote empathy, passion, reflection, and they lead some students to become more spiritually aware and concerned. Many experiences in college are like these: the death of someone close, powerful experiences in the arts, stimulating intellectual discussions, travel abroad, interactions with peers. While these experiences can evoke spiritual reflection, they are usually not intentionally structured and promoted primarily for the purpose of promoting spiritual growth outcomes.

Forms of Spiritual Search

We identified two primary forms of spiritual search in our examination of college student spirituality practices: a) one form of spiritual search is oriented *inside* the context of religion, either a specific religious faith tradition or a multi-faith context, and b) the other form of spiritual search occurred *outside* a direct connection to any particular religion or religions and utilized a non-religious or secular approach in the search for spiritual meaning and purpose. The first form of spirituality accepts religion as a primary and necessary framework for engaging in spiritual search. The second form of spiritual search orients itself outside the context of religion and engages in spiritual search activities through a secular context. Both forms of spiritual search are concerned with discovering and relating to what individuals judge to be sacred and transcendent, but their intellectual and psychological contexts are quite different. As we shall see, both forms of spiritual searches share a number of spirituality practices in common, but some spiritual practices are unique to each type. We use these two basic forms of spirituality search as a foundation for categorizing the variety of student spiritual search activities we identified in our research.

Table 1. Forms of Spirituality



Types of College Student Spiritual Seekers

We use the two forms of spirituality discussed above to identify four types of college student spirituality that we were able to identify in our research. There is considerable overlap in some of these types, and college students may employ several of them at the same time in their spiritual explorations, but each type has some distinguishing features that we think are useful in identifying since they can assist us in understanding how and why college students engage in spiritual activities.

a. Religious Seekers

There are two types of seekers who pursue spirituality *inside* a religious context:

- 1) *Faith centered seekers*: those who engage in spirituality *solely* within the context of their own particular religious tradition and
- 2) *Multi-religious seekers*: those who seek to deepen their religious spirituality through *interfaith* and *multi-religious* exploration, dialogue, and practice.

Both of these types of seekers pursue spirituality within a religious context, but the second type is much more open to the authenticity and relevance of religious beliefs and traditions outside their. This important difference is reflected in the types of spiritual practices and activities associated with each type of religious spirituality.

b. Secular Seekers

We call those who are engaged in spiritual search *outside* the context of religion “secular seekers.” We were able to identify two primary types of secular seekers:

- 1) *Mindfulness seekers*: those who focused in their inner search on ways to heighten self-awareness and understanding and
- 2) *Wellness seekers*: those who engaged in spirituality activities in order to achieve a more holistic, healthy and integrated way of life.

The use of these four types of spiritual seekers is intended for descriptive purposes only. They help to describe some of the defining characteristics of college student spirituality today, but because there is considerable overlap and interaction among them, they should not be regarded as exclusive categories.

Table 2. Four Types of Student Spiritual Seekers

RELIGIOUS	SECULAR
Faith-Centered	Mindfulness
Multi-religious	Wellness

Individual and Social Settings of Spiritual Search

In reviewing the variety of spiritual search activities by college students, it was easy to observe that there are two quite different settings in which students engage in spiritual practices. Many of the spiritual practices are done in *solitude* with little if any social contact with others. In fact, solitude is one of the most important conditions of spiritual search since it helps to facilitate the process of introspection and reflection.

We call the other setting for spirituality “*social*” since it describes those situations in which spiritual search activities are done by college students with others in a group or social setting.

1. Solitude

Some spiritual activities are practiced in solitude and are designed for the individual seeker. These activities are highly personal, introspective, and private. Because spirituality is inherently an intensely personal, introspective process, most of the types of spiritual search we observed among colleges students were of the solitary type.

2. Social

As Sharon Parks (2000) suggests, when young adults go on a journey, they like to have traveling companions. So it is that many of the types of spiritual activities we identified among college students are designed for small and large groups and involve interaction and sharing as important aspects of the experience.

Practices and Environments That Support Religious and Secular Types of Spirituality

In our review of spiritual practices in college, we observed that some practices are closely connected with certain types of spirituality. For example, Bible study (or the study of other sacred texts) is a spiritual practice closely associated with religious spirituality. The Bible is a sacred religious text that is read by believers as a way of examining and deepening one’s faith. Many spiritual practices are of this nature such as prayer, worship, Bible study, interfaith dialogue, religious ritual observances, etc. Similarly, there are other practices more closely associated with secular spirituality. Meditation, for example, is a practice that is often used for focusing spiritual awareness, but it is usually non-religious or secular in context. Other practices such as contemplation, mindfulness, yoga, and labyrinth walks are often employed with secular spiritual search.

However, many if not most of the collegiate spiritual activities we identified can be employed with both religious and secular spiritual search. The reason is that many of these activities can support the process of spiritual search without necessarily conveying specific religious or secular content. These activities include meditation, contemplation, labyrinths, sacred space, nature retreats, spiritual retreats, yoga, and fitness-wellness exercises. They have broad usage since they help to facilitate the process of spiritual search and provide the environmental settings that are conducive to it. The intent of the spiritual seeker is what determines whether the activity is utilized for religious or non-religious purposes. This feature (the intent of the seeker) makes these spiritual practices especially useful in the higher education setting and particularly in public colleges and universities where there are legal concerns about establishing or endorsing any particular religion.

In Their Own Words: How Students describe Their Spiritual Searches

Any effort to describe student spirituality should also include some effort to listen to the voices of students as they describe their own purposes for engaging in the inward journey as well as the nature of their experiences. One of the ways in which students describe their spiritual journeys is through on-line spiritual reflections and blogs. The internet is very popular with youth today as a means of sharing their inward journeys and engaging in dialogue with others who are interested in or involved in their own personal spiritual reflections.

The following student reflections come from several internet sources. These student quotes provide revealing glimpses into their inner lives and help us to understand from the perspective of students how they conceive of spirituality, why they believe it is important, and what they hope to achieve in the process of their spiritual search. Their reflections are also useful in illustrating some of the different forms of spirituality that we have discussed above.

On a Spiritual Search

Dilys Chiew (n.d.)

(<http://www.iamnnext.com/spirituality/student1.html>)

I have a confession to make. You may think I'm here, living for the 'now,' going through my day doing all the things that a university student does -- sleeping (lots), eating, shopping, working, e-mailing, and writing term papers. But I'm not.

Half of my life revolves around the invisible and immaterial. My values, interests, and passions all take shape from it. It influences who I am. And I don't think I'm the only one. Maybe there's more...

At some point, every one of us has asked the Big Questions surrounding our existence: "What is the meaning of life? Am I headed towards a specific destination? Is my life inherently purposeful and valuable?" Through the medium of spirituality, people entertain these questions and even attempt to resolve them.

For many, university provides an environment where we can explore and even re-think their conception of spirituality. As a university student, my own spiritual awakening has led me to wonder about the spiritual state of my friends and peers.

Bits and Pieces of Many Religions

Debbie Nelson (n.d.)

(<http://calstaging.bemidjistate.edu/sites/Spirituality/profiles.html>)

My own religion. A cobbled-together, messed-up way of thinking that uses bits and pieces from every religion. Technically, it's a "universal" religion, meaning I subscribe to the basic foundations that underlie the vast majority of the world's religions.

Howard Students Talking About Religion and Spirituality

Whitney Boggs (2004), quoting Holly Jenkins

(www.BlackCollegeView.com)

It's important to be religious and spiritual in college because students need to rely on something that is unconditional and that will always be there." "We can't rely on our parents to always help us out, so relying on faith can solve any problem.

The Art of Becoming Yourself

"Anne-Marie," (2004).

(<http://senseofself.blogspot.com>)

We already have what we need to live a life of bliss... we simply need to open up, let go of the past, be mindful of the present, and listen to our inner voice... and all this is done simply in the "now". It does not require any fancy gadgets or even "enlightened teachers". As we listen to the words of wisdom around us, it reminds us to listen to the words of guidance and wisdom of our own inner teacher.

In the Garden Where Trees Have Names

Andrea Florescu, (2001).

(<http://www.selfknowledge.org/symposium/symdec01/symdec01.htm#a>)

For us human beings, thirsty for the absolute, this relativity is just not enough though. We want a world that doesn't slip through our fingers; we want to be able to hold on to something solid. In this case, we need some universal measure for our tears and perhaps an answer that can erase the immense 'why' that keeps our souls suspended with sadness and fear.

Knocking on Heaven's Door

By Evan Harrison

(<http://www.selfknowledge.org/symposium/symdec00/symdec00.htm#b>)

My ideas of God have been piling up. For the last few years or so, I have felt like I have to climb over questions every time I must act. Think of it like Heaven's door. Instead of knocking and waiting for an answer, I either knock and run away, or I decide to learn everything I can about God before I knock on the door, so that when the door is answered I will be ready. But my idea of God has changed from thinking I know it all, to realizing that I don't know much of anything. With that change, my search for God is now scary and very urgent.

An Inquiring and Discerning Heart

Georg Buehler (2000).

(<http://www.selfknowledge.org/symposium/symdec00/symdec00.htm#a>)

I am hard-pressed now to say what I believe. I still remain quiet in the hush of the sanctuary. I pray to God, though the only prayers that make sense anymore are "Thank you" and "Thy will be done." Anything more than that, and I am once again lost in doubt and skepticism. But I do believe in "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy strength..." I think that's what I was doing, in those years of roadside rituals and prayers at dusk. Perhaps it is not necessary to believe in God in order to love him. Some people argue that I am not a Christian, if I cannot profess belief in Him. But to that I say, "Take it up with Him." I'm fairly confident in His decision on the matter.

In these student quotes we see reflected their concerns about looking inside, searching one's own inner life for answers to life's pressing concerns and questions. There are also reflected a sense of restlessness and uncertainty about the meaning and permanence of things and the desire to find more enduring, trustworthy and satisfying answers. Another important theme one notices in these quotes is the concern with identity, finding one's true and authentic self, and figuring out where the process of becoming is taking them. It is also clear that there are a lot of

influences that trigger a spiritual search among young people, but the themes of identity, destiny, faith, wholeness, and mattering are among the most common.

How Colleges and Universities are Responding to the Spirituality Movement

Kuh and Gonyea (2005, p. 1) note that “One of the more intriguing trends at the turn of the 21st century is the prominent influence of religion in various aspects of American life.” Colleges and universities, they argue, are now engaged in seeking ways to understand better and respond to this phenomenon. Our research suggests that colleges and universities are responding to the student spirituality movement in a variety of ways that reflect their institutional missions and their concern for students’ holistic learning and development. In an earlier study (Dalton, 2003) of a national sample of vice presidents of student affairs, most reported that they had observed increasing interest in spirituality on the part of students and especially in such areas as new student organizations with a spiritual focus, requests for speakers and programs on spirituality topics, the need for more quiet space on campus, and more opportunities for yoga, meditation, and contemplation.

When we examined the responses of the vice presidents, it was evident that their approaches to dealing with student spirituality reflected their institution’s type and mission. Private faith-oriented colleges and universities, for example, were among the most active in responding to faith seekers through traditional activities such as worship, study or religious texts, religious speakers, prayer groups, retreats, etc. These activities were typically provided within the context of a particular faith centered tradition. Private non-sectarian colleges also supported faith seekers but generally through an emphasis on interfaith and inter-religious programs and services and interdenominational worship activities. Public colleges and universities supported faith seeking students through a variety of indirect student support services. Public institutions provided information about campus and community religious organizations associated with the institution as well as access to campus meeting facilities and student information. Public institutions also sponsored programs and provided facilities for secular forms of spirituality such as meditation, contemplation, yoga, and wellness activities. All three types of institutions provide support for secular seekers, but private non-sectarian and public institutions were most active in this area since this form of spirituality seeks to avoid any direct affiliation with religion.

Educators and administrators in public universities perhaps have the greatest uncertainty about whether they should be engaged in supporting students’ spiritual search activities. The sometimes indistinct boundaries that separate religion and spirituality make many educators in public higher education unsure of just how student spirituality should be approached. But it seems clear that public institutions have less concern about providing support for secular seekers than religious seekers for the reasons indicated above.

Following are some examples of the ways in which colleges and universities are seeking to respond to the spiritual search interests of their students. This information was gathered from several sources: a recent (July, 2006) survey of members of the National Association of College and University Chaplains, information submitted to the *Journal of College and Character*, and internet website searches.

- Online spiritual retreat (Creighton University)
 - Weekly inter-faith prayer (Iona College)
 - Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, Eisenhower All-Faith Chapel, and Meditation Chapel (Penn State University)
 - Interfaith Dialogue Program (Princeton University)
 - Pres House, a student residence for Spirituality and Religion (University of Wisconsin).
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- Faith and Film Series, Faithworks, a community service program (Texas Christian University)
- Multi-faith library and meditation room (University of Puget Sound)
- Spiritual Formation Plan (Eastern Mennonite University)
- Contemporary Perspectives on Buddhist Spirituality (Villanova University)
- Spirituality and Service Fellowships (Stanford University)
- Private meditation room (Swarthmore College)
- Self-Knowledge Symposium (Student led spirituality group at Duke University, University of North Carolina, and North Carolina State University)
- Labyrinth walks (Central Oklahoma University)
- Mime Ministry (Prairie View State University)
- Tai Chi and Buddhist Meditation (Amherst College)
- Sacred Grounds Coffee Shop (Colorado College)
- Interfaith prayer, meditation, and worship (American University)
- Center for Ethics and Spirituality (University of California-San Diego)
- Spirituality Center (Salisbury State University)
- Tulane Meditation Club (Tulane University)
- Baccalaureate Speech Contest on Spirituality Themes (Stanford University)
- Spirituality of Running (Merrimack College)
- Sacred Shooters (a photography group) (Virginia Wesleyan College)
- Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (Amherst College)
- Sacred Space on campus, Multi-faith Student Connections (Northeastern University)

In a workshop on spirituality (Dalton, Eberhardt , & Crosby, 2006) held prior to the 2006 Institute on College Student Values, over 40 faculty and student affairs staff from private and public institutions reported on the spirituality activities on their campuses. Following is a summary of some of their reported activities:

- Designated space on campus for meditation and reflections such as chapels, spirituality centers, outdoor gardens, and labyrinths
 - Spirituality programs incorporating speakers, retreats, symposia, student-led groups, conferences, films, music, drama, service projects
 - Wellness and recreation activities including yoga, meditation, relaxation, self-realization, stress reduction, dieting, enlightenment, happiness and renewal, self-improvement
 - Interfaith dialogue and interaction incorporating interfaith conversations, celebrations, study groups, living-learning groups, worship, study of Eastern religions
 - Spiritual practices incorporating prayer circles, guided meditation, personal retreats, readings, devotionals, practicing silence, on-line spirituality groups and self-directed spiritual search
 - Campus climate and ethos incorporating campus covenants
 - New administrative structures and titles, incorporating deans, coordinators of spiritual life, character development, centers for sport and spirituality, leadership and ethics, moral development, career and calling
 - Classes and curriculum incorporating spirituality theme residences
 - Travel, pilgrimages and other journeys of the spirit
 - New student organizations and groups incorporating spirituality themes, projects and purposes
 - Spirituality conveyed through the arts, music, film, and drama
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Many spirituality activities one finds on some campuses today are incorporated into traditional student activities, such as campus speakers, student organizations, music, films, campus celebrations, living-learning groups, interfaith activities, and leadership and service programs. Many other types of spirituality activities are, however, non-traditional such as Sufi dancing, martial arts and meditation, sweat lodges, story telling, channeling, self-realization, breathing exercises, diet and spirituality, and on-line spirituality groups. Some of these activities range from the funky and fun to the fanatical. There may be no arena of college life today that is as diverse and experimental as student spirituality. The almost limitless range of activities that are connected to student spiritual searches reflects the intense interest, energy, and creativity that college students bring to this aspect of their lives.

The Importance of Physical Space for College Student Spirituality

Many private and public institutions have created multi-faith spaces on campus that are available to diverse spiritual and religious organizations for religious services and meetings. The University of Maryland, for example, has a Memorial Chapel and surrounding gardens and courtyards that serve as quiet places for relaxation and religious and spiritual activities as well as academic and community programs. The Chapel is a non-denominational interfaith facility utilized by all recognized campus religious groups. In addition to these multi-faith places on campus, many campuses are now creating what may be called “sacred” spaces for prayer and meditation that provide campus places for private reflection and contemplation by individual students. This type of facility appeals to students who seek a more solitary form of spiritual search. Northeastern University provides students with a unique and beautiful space reserved for individual and small-group reflection and meditation ([Northeastern University](#)).

Penn State University is a leader among public universities in providing facilities that support the religious and spiritual lives of students. The Helen Eakin Eisenhower All-Faith Chapel seats about 125 people and was developed over 50 years ago. In reflecting on the chapel’s influence on Penn State students and staff, Penn State president Graham Spanier said, “With ... much hard work, and diligence and patience, Penn State’s Helen Eakin Eisenhower Chapel has contributed significantly to making Penn State whole” (Spanier, 1996). Penn State has also created a new Pasquerilla Spiritual Center that seats 450 people. In addition, a small Meditation Chapel accommodates 12 individuals. These facilities incorporate a variety of sacred settings in which students can participate in worship, celebrations, interfaith activities, weddings, memorial services, meditation and reflection.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) provides the MIT Chapel for students’ private meditation. The University describes the chapel as “sacred ground to many religions” on campus. Stanford University is creating a new multi-faith center that will include a sanctuary, prayer rooms, and other facilities. Kansas State University has a Danforth Chapel that seats about 65 and its beautiful stained glass windows help to create a setting conducive for relaxation and meditation. Amherst College has a Japanese Tea Garden that creates a respectful place for quiet and reflection. On some campuses these sacred spaces are also often located in Student Unions or campus centers that house student activities and services. Princeton University has one of the largest chapels in the nation, and it is used for ecumenical worship, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and as a gathering place for the entire campus on occasion. The chapel serves as a bridge between the campus and community and helps to integrate the many different academic communities within the university. The chapel also helps to connect students to religion and spirituality through participation in activities such as Opening Exercises, Baccalaureate Services, and annual memorial services for alumni and staff ([Princeton University](#)).

An interesting example of a campus effort to create sacred space is Colorado College. Students at the college have created “Sacred Grounds Coffee Shop,” a makeshift community center, concert hall, and movie theater in the basement of the college’s Shove Memorial Chapel. A student at the college explains the purpose of the project:

There’s a lot of spirituality on campus, but it’s directed more at the wilderness and community and friendships,” said Louise Sanseau, a 21-year-old senior who heads Sacred Grounds, which opened in November. She hopes the coffee house will foster community and deeper friendships and serve as a bridge between the college and Colorado Springs — an “outreach,” of a kind. These aspirations give Sacred Grounds a mellow spiritual aftertaste.

Administrative and Staffing Responses to College Student Spirituality

Another indicator of the growing student interest in spirituality is the emergence of college staff positions and administrative structures dedicated to serving students’ needs and interests in spirituality. Not surprisingly, faith-based, private colleges have created a number of new initiatives designed to facilitate the spiritual growth of student faith seekers. Point Loma Nazarene University, for example, has an Office of Spiritual Development supervised by a Director of Discipleship Ministries. The center provides religious and social-based programs for students, including retreats, accountability groups, and discussions of spiritually-related themes in movies ([Point Loma Nazarene University](#)). Eckerd College created the position of Director of the Center for Spiritual Life in 2002 ([Eckerd College](#)).

Many private, non-sectarian institutions have also created new administrative and educational services aimed at student spirituality. The University of New England assigns administrators to work with religious organizations and to serve as connection points to local faith communities ([UNE](#)). Other non-religious, private higher education institutions, such as Williams College ([Williams College](#)) have created special spaces for the religious activities of major religious groups on campus. Williams College created a Muslim Prayer Room for Islamic students that faces toward Mecca and has prayer mats on which student can kneel for their daily prayers. Jewish students have access to a special Jewish Religious Center where services and other religious gatherings are held. Williams maintains a unique Zendo (meditation room or hall) as well, where Buddhist students may find a familiar space for engaging in their contemplative-oriented practices. A special Catholic Chapel for students of that faith is also available. The Chaplain’s office website at Williams also acknowledges that nature also serves as a sanctuary and displays pictures of sunsets from the local area and encourages students to recognize and find meaning in the beauty of nature that surrounds them at the college.

Public colleges and universities represent a large, diverse group of institutions that have traditionally accommodated religious and spirituality activities on campus but usually did not create formal institutional programs and facilities for these purposes. There is some evidence that public institutions are now much more actively engaged in supporting religion and spirituality on campus. Previously mentioned was Penn State University ([Penn State](#)), that has initiated a Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs and constructed the Pasquirilla Center for Religion and Spirituality, a unique public structure for supporting student spiritual life on campus. The University of South Carolina ([Univ of South Carolina](#)) offers another model, in which the student affairs division connects to chaplains who work for various faith communities through an official liaison or contact person. Bowling Green State University has created a Values Initiative that includes a number of academic and co-curricular efforts to encourage reflection on moral and

ethical issues and to integrate students' concerns about purpose and meaning into their university experience ([Bowling Green State University](#)).

Spirituality in the Curriculum

Another important indicator of the growing influence of student spirituality in higher education is the proliferation of credit and non-credit courses related to spirituality topics. These courses are often very popular with students and frequently offered in freshman year classes and living-learning programs that help to prepare new students for academic and social life in the university. Examples of classes on spirituality can be found in both private and public colleges and universities.

Following are a few examples of college credit courses that include a focus on spirituality, contemplation, and meditation:

- The Philosophy Department at Texas Christian University offers a freshman course on the "Meaning of Life." The course is offered in two sections and is reportedly always filled.
- Smith College has a Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, an academic program that seeks to promote better living and a better society through meditation and yoga.
- Amherst College also offers a first year seminar entitled "Eros and Insight." The purpose of this course is to introduce students to contemplative knowing and to provide them with a foundation for transformative learning (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006).
- A course on "Care of the Soul" is offered through the Philosophy Department at the University of California-Riverside ([UC-Riverside](#)).
- Swarthmore College offers a first year seminar on "Religion and the Meaning of Life."
- Stanford University's offering of courses includes "Spirituality and Nonviolent Social Transformation" through the Urban Studies Program.
- The University of Notre Dame offers a course on "Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace."

Courses on spirituality are often linked to study of the arts as the following examples illustrate:

- The University of Central Florida offers an honors course on "Religion and Spirituality Through Popular Music" ([UCF](#)). A description of the course outlines how the focus on spirituality is incorporated in the class:

What do Bob Marley, The Beatles, Rage Against the Machine, Creed, P.O.D, The Grateful Dead, Jim Morrison, Madonna and many other popular bands/musicians of the past and present have in common? They are performers/musicians that have succeeded in weaving various religious and spiritual philosophies into their music. As such, their music becomes a vehicle to expound their own religious and spiritual thoughts and values to a captivated audience. This course is an exploration of the contemporary spiritual sensibilities encountered at the intersection of religion, philosophy and popular music.

- Brigham Young University incorporates spirituality and film into a freshman seminar class that examines the relationship between philosophy and film in order to encourage intellectual and personal growth ([BYU](#)).

*This course will explore the capacity of film and philosophy to aid us in our quest for spiritual, intellectual and interpersonal growth. We will review some of the fundamental conventions and concepts that define these two increasingly entangled disciplines—both of which are now considered crucial to a well-rounded general education. We will also participate in group analyses of films that are considered milestones of religious and spiritual cinema—international classics like Majidi’s *The Color of Paradise* (Iran), Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (Russia), Dreyer’s *Ordet* (Denmark), Zhang’s *Not One Less* (China), and Ghandi (US). This course is designed not only to introduce you to a few of the world’s great philosophers and film directors, but to open your eyes and hearts to the largely untapped capacity of philosophically well-grounded films to help us grasp otherwise illusive spiritual truths, achieve exciting new intellectual heights, and discover the secrets to life’s most rewarding interpersonal relationships.*

- Duke University also sponsors a course on “Spirituality and Film” ([Self-Knowledge Symposium](#)). A Duke student explains why she is interested in the course:

Right now I am at a place where I do faith, but yet I can't seem to find myself spiritually. I am hoping that this house course can help fill that void in my life. The fact that this course will be taught through some films really excited me. I have never done such a thing, and I think this will be a wonderful new learning experience for me. I think I am a visual learner, so films will be great.

- The University of Dayton provides opportunities for students to explore their spirituality through involvements in theater ([Univ of Dayton](#)). Students have opportunities to write, direct, and perform a play that explores their spirituality and options to faith and spirituality. Student performed plays are scheduled during the Advent and Lenten seasons.
- Spirituality is also a topic that is examined through a variety of academic disciplines as the following example illustrates:

Santa Clara University provides an opportunity for its business students to explore the spiritual aspects of business leadership through a course on “Spirituality and Business Leadership.” The course examines business leadership as a calling into the spiritual journey and includes discussion of the centrality of prayer, meditation and reflection (Chickering, et. al., 2006).

Responding to Spirituality on Campus: Some Recommendations for Educators

It is important for educators to recognize the changing forms of college student spirituality today and to deepen their resources, understanding, and commitment to spiritual growth as an important aspect of their mission to promote students’ holistic development. It is important to take these initiatives for at least two reasons. First, any serious educational effort to foster the holistic learning and development of students in college must include serious attention to the religious and spiritual lives of students. The evidence is clear that most college students are

engaged in a search for meaning, purpose, and authenticity and look to higher education institutions to support them in these efforts and to create educational environments that are welcoming to their concerns about faith and spirituality. Second, there is growing evidence that religion and spirituality are positively correlated with some educationally beneficial qualities and behaviors such as equanimity, student involvement, and positive mental health. These factors may have some important implications for collegiate efforts to promote retention, student satisfaction, and academic achievement.

We believe the following strategies (see also Chickering, Dalton, Stamm, 2005) will assist educators and administrators in responding to the spirituality movement on campus. We have arranged these strategies in four categories:

1. Awareness and Advocacy

- Take a stronger role in advocating for the place of spirituality in the mission and culture of higher education and as an essential aspect of holistic student learning.
- Clarify the meaning of “spirituality” for young adult development in the higher education setting. Spirituality is commonly described as “transformation,” “authenticity,” “life force,” “transcendence,” and “peak experience” to mention a few. Such terms capture a sense of the ineffable nature of spirituality but also convey the notion that spiritual experience can be anything that expresses deep meaning. “Spirituality” can be a slippery terrain unless its meaning is clearly defined and distinguished from religion.
- Publicize, especially to new students, the spiritual resources and activities of the campus including religious organizations, student groups, and speakers and events with a spiritual focus or content.
- Integrate spirituality into current theories and research on college student development. The lack of attention to spirituality is especially apparent in the theoretical constructs of student development that have guided our understanding and practice about how students learn and grow in college. This omission has contributed to an enduring silence about spirituality among many student affairs scholars and practitioners.

2. Supportive Environments

- Provide a campus environment that encourages opportunities for student reflection, prayer, contemplation, and introspection including the availability of sacred spaces and places on campus.
 - Create more structured opportunities in classroom and out of class settings for students to explore topics related to their spiritual search for meaning, purpose, and authenticity.
 - Conduct an institutional audit of the facilities, programmatic resources, and support services needed to respond adequately to the spiritual interests and needs of today’s college students.
 - Provide an institutional office or staff role that provides information and resources on religious and spiritual life on campus. A staff member should be available who has expertise and experience in the religious and spiritual development of college students.
 - Provide opportunities for interfaith contact and dialogue as an important component of campus diversity efforts. This aspect of diversity is often neglected, particularly in public colleges and universities, and evidence (Light, 2000) suggests that students are very interested in learning about the religious beliefs and practices of others. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has available a very useful resource on religious diversity compiled by Dr. Peter Laurence.
 - Strengthen collaboration with campus ministers and local clergy to support student opportunities for religious life activities.
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3. Educational Programs

- Provide courses, especially during the first year, in which students can explore the relationship of spirituality to learning and development in college.
- Incorporate spirituality as a component of student health and wellness programs. There is some evidence (Mooney, 2005, Astin, 2005) that spirituality is positively associated with greater personal satisfaction, happiness, and equanimity in college students. Educators and administrators should also be interested in reports (Mooney, 2005) that religious students are more satisfied with college, study more, and have higher college GPAs. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) report that students who engaged in spirituality-enhancing practices exercised more, partied less, and were more likely to perform community service.
- Integrate spirituality as a component of student leadership programs and experiences.
- Include spirituality as a major theme or topic for campus activities programming.

4. Staff/Faculty Development

- Strengthen the orientation and education of faculty and staff to work with college student spirituality and faith development. The faith development theory of James Fowler may be especially useful in this effort as well as the national and local research data on student spiritual beliefs and behaviors now available through the Spirituality Project at UCLA.
- Work with faculty colleagues to develop faculty-student mentorship programs.
- Provide opportunities for faculty to explore with other faculty colleagues the relationship of spirituality to teaching and learning in higher education and in the lives of faculty.
- Include spirituality as a component in student affairs staff development and training. Since student affairs staff are often responsible for responding to students' spirituality interests staff need to be able to describe their own spiritual lives and beliefs in their interactions with students and colleagues.

Because of its historic commitment to holistic educational and personal development, higher education must play a stronger role in advocating the place of spirituality in the academy. Colleges and universities must be cautious about honoring the life of the mind while relegating the spiritual and religious concerns of students' to the purely private domain. The damage is, as Gutierrez-Zamano and Yasuno (2002) note, that students are encouraged "to lead duplicitous lives" when reason is prized "above emotion and detachment above connection (p. 3)."

It is also important to see the issue of spirituality as an issue of student welfare. Students pay a price in psychological wholeness and wellness when they are required to have separate public and private personas in order to function successfully in the higher education setting. Providing a supportive environment in college for students to explore meaning, purpose, and wholeness will serve not only to enrich their lives but also to deepen learning and scholarship.

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Citations to Institutional Web Sites

- Bowling Green State University: <http://bgsu.edu/offices/president/page654.html>
- Brigham Young University: <http://fye.byu.edu/FYE/classinfo.html>
- Colorado College: <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/Bulletin/March2006/?sacredGrounds>
- Duke University: <http://www.selfknowledge.org/resources/press/film-2-2004.htm>
- Eckerd College: <http://www.eckerd.edu/cls/index.shtml>
- Northeastern University: http://www.northeastern.edu/spiritual_life/sacred_space.html
- Pennsylvania State University: <http://www.sa.psu.edu/cera/>
- Point Loma Nazarene University: <http://www.ptloma.edu/SpiritualDevelopment/>
- Princeton University: <http://www.princeton.edu/~choir/Chapel.htm>
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- University of Dayton: <http://artssciences.udayton.edu/opportunities/campusministry.asp>
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