

**Understanding the Role of Religion and Spirituality
in the UCLA Undergraduate Experience**

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report draws upon multiple data sources to explore the range and depth of UCLA students' spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, and their relationship with student experiences. It addresses four primary questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the religious commitment and engagement of incoming college students?
2. How interested and involved are incoming students in issues of spirituality?
3. Is the spirituality and religious commitment of incoming students associated with their socio-political attitudes?
4. How do undergraduate students characterize the campus climate and their level of involvement at UCLA with respect to religion and spirituality?

In partial response, we offer several highlights from this report:

- Sources ranging from popular media to scholarly journals currently tout the increased interest in spirituality and religion among college students and in society overall. However, students entering UCLA directly from high school do not seem to follow this nationally-recognized phenomenon. In fact, they appear to be less interested and engaged in spirituality and religion than their peers at other public institutions and than previous cohorts of students entering UCLA.
- Although the new UCLA student community is not characterized by particular interest in spirituality or religion, there are other related issues that appear to be more meaningful to our students:
 - UCLA students express an interest in existential issues at a similar or slightly higher rate than their peers at other public institutions. As such, it may make the topic of spirituality more salient to our student body to approach it as an element of one's search for meaning and purpose in life.
 - Responses to various survey items representing a pluralistic world view indicate that race, ethnicity, and culture may be more important issues than religion and spirituality in students' considerations of multiple perspectives and inclusion. As such, the role of religion as a component of cultural identity may be the pathway for UCLA students to approach this issue of religion in their intellectual and personal pursuits.
- UCLA prides itself on its diversity, including religious pluralism, and effectively utilizing it as a critical component in the educational mission of the institution. However, while the findings that are discussed in this report suggest that we are achieving this aim to a degree, frequent interaction with students from other religious backgrounds is far from a universal experience at our institution and in the UC system at large.
- Just over 10 percent of the student organizations that UCLA's Center for Student Programming (CSP) supports have a spiritual or religious focus
- The findings summarized in this report indicate that there is a direct relationship between conservative socio-political viewpoints and high religious/spiritual commitment.

- The current incoming UCLA student body tends to be characterized by high levels of liberal socio-political views and historically low levels of religious affiliation.
- Perhaps due to the religious/spiritual and socio-political climate of UCLA, students who are more religious interpret UCLA's climate as less respectful of different religious viewpoints than do students who do not engage in spiritual or religious activity. However, there is not a significant relationship between religious/spiritual engagement and overall sense of belonging: the majority of all students feel that they "belong at this campus."

II. INTRODUCTION

As the UCLA campus becomes more residential, large numbers of undergraduate students will be living in close proximity to one another. In this situation, sharp differences in students' backgrounds and attitudes can have implications for maintaining a cohesive, positive environment for living and learning. Given that sources ranging from popular news magazines to scholarly literature highlight a renewed interest in religion and spirituality among the entering cohort of new college students, it is important to consider how students' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices—and their connection to their socio-political views—may prove especially significant factors in the quality of campus life.

This study analyzes the data from several surveys that have been administered at UCLA. Two of these instruments gathered a great deal of student data about spiritual and religious values, beliefs, and practices. However, these data were collected only from incoming students entering UCLA directly from high school in Fall 2004. Another survey gathered responses from students at all levels (first-year through senior) and all paths of entry to UCLA (transfer as well as high school matriculants), but only briefly asked about religion and spirituality. The following report draws upon all of these data sources to explore the range and depth of UCLA students' spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, and their relationship with student experiences. It addresses the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the religious commitment and engagement of incoming college students?¹
- How interested and involved are incoming students in issues of spirituality?
- Is the spirituality and religious commitment of incoming students associated with their socio-political attitudes?
- How do undergraduate students characterize the campus climate and their level of involvement at UCLA with respect to religion and spirituality?

¹ Because of the limitations of available data, unless transfer students are specified, reference to "incoming students" in this report refers to those entering directly from high school.

III. DATA SOURCES

Name	Conducted by	Date(s)	Sample
Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey	UCLA, through the Higher Education Research Institute	Summer/ Fall 1973- 2004	Surveys all incoming first-year students who enter directly from high school (i.e., no transfer students) and attend orientation. Response rates are well over 50%. The 2004 UCLA sample included a total of 2,989 students.
Comparison data from CIRP for other highly-selective public universities.	Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	Summer/ Fall 1994- 2004	Data from incoming first-time, full-time, first-year students at highly selective public universities ¹ that participated in the CIRP Freshman Survey and had an institutional response rate of 75% or higher.
Comparison data from CIRP for all public universities	Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	Summer/ Fall 2004	Data from 62,839 first-time, full-time, first-year students at 26 public universities that participated in the 2004 CIRP Freshman Survey and had an institutional response rate of 75% or higher.
Comparison data from CIRP for all public institutions	Higher Education Research Institute (HERI); Spirituality in Higher Education project	Summer/ Fall 2004	Data from 23,540 first-time, full-time, first-year students at 32 public institutions that participated in the "College Student Values and Beliefs" addendum to the 2004 CIRP Freshman Survey
University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES 2004)	Managed by the Center for Studies in Higher Education (UC Berkeley) in collaboration with an Institutional Research work group and Oversight Committee with representation from all campus and UCOP.	Spring 2004	Surveyed all currently enrolled undergraduates. UCLA's response rate was 20%, yielding a sample size of 6,372 students at all

Some of these sources of data represent students at various points in their college careers and are collected at different times utilizing varied methods, questions, and coding schemes. Therefore, the data generally cannot be combined across data sources. However, by pulling together the findings from several data sets, it is possible to construct a right portrait of the religious and spiritual lives of UCLA students.

IV. FINDINGS

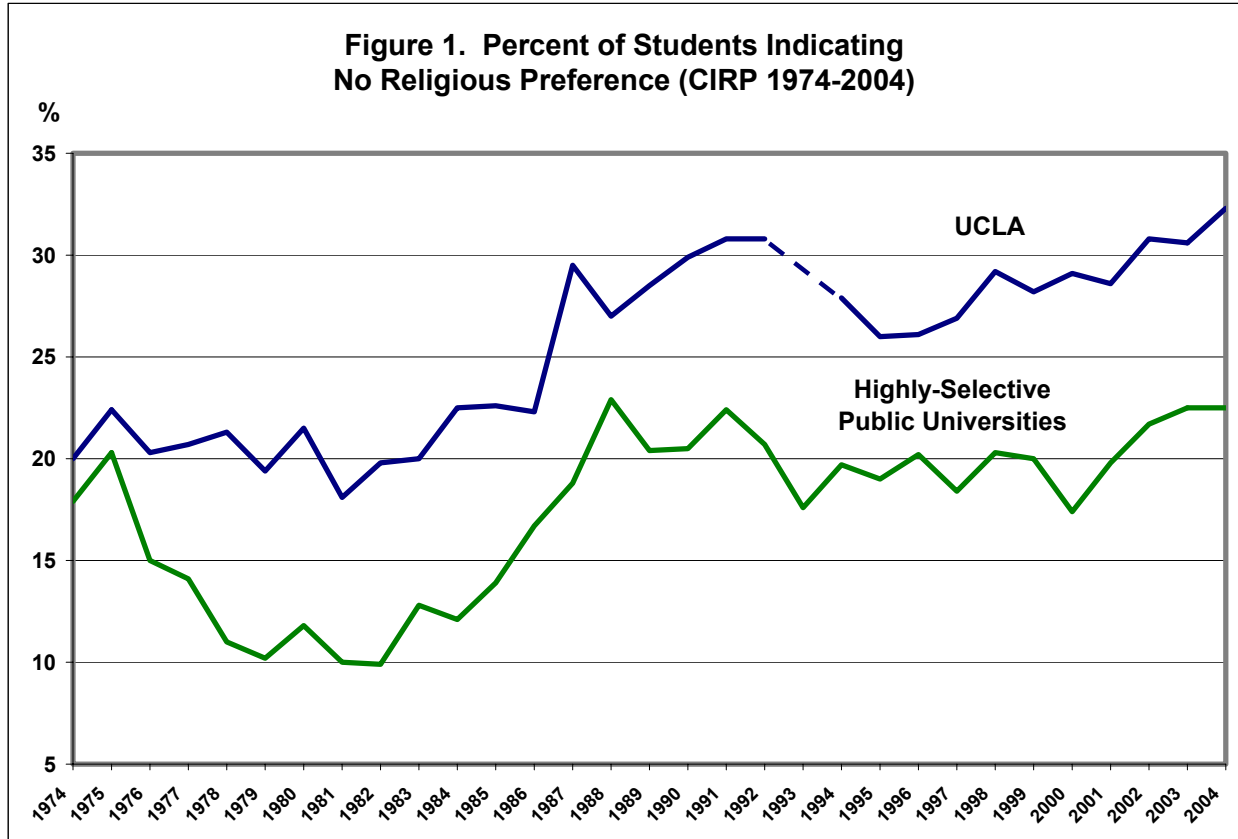
A. Religious Affiliation

- At entry, 64 percent of UCLA students indicated an affiliation with one of 19 different religious categories (Table 1). Further, nearly 14 percent of the student population identified themselves as a Born-Again Christian as well as part of a specific religious group. This statistic represents a significant decline from the record-high 19 percent of UCLA students who categorized themselves in this fashion in 1995.
- The largest category among UCLA respondents included 31 percent of students with no religious affiliation. This statistic is particularly noteworthy when one considers that only 19 percent of students at other public universities in the comparison group marked “none” when asked about their religious affiliation, a disparity that has remained relatively consistent over the past 30 years (Figure 1).
- Figure 1 also highlights the fact that UCLA students have become less committed to a particular religious group over the past three decades.

While it is impossible to tell if the students in this category are unsure of their religious leanings, non-denominational, agnostic, or atheist, it is clear that there is a significant and growing population of UCLA students who are unwilling to affiliate themselves with any particular religious tradition.

Table 1: UCLA Students' Religious Preference (CIRP 2004; N=2,989)

Religion	Percent	Religion	Percent
None	30.7	Islamic	1.8
Roman Catholic	19.9	Lutheran	1.2
Other Christian	9.8	Methodist	1.1
Jewish	5.8	Eastern Orthodox	0.9
Presbyterian	5.4	Episcopal	0.8
Decline to State	4.9	LDS (Mormon)	0.5
Buddhist	4.7	Seventh Day Adventist	0.3
Baptist	4.5	United Church of Christ	0.3
Other Religion	2.6	Unitarian/Universalist	0.2
Church of Christ	2.3	Quaker	0.1
Hindu	2.2		



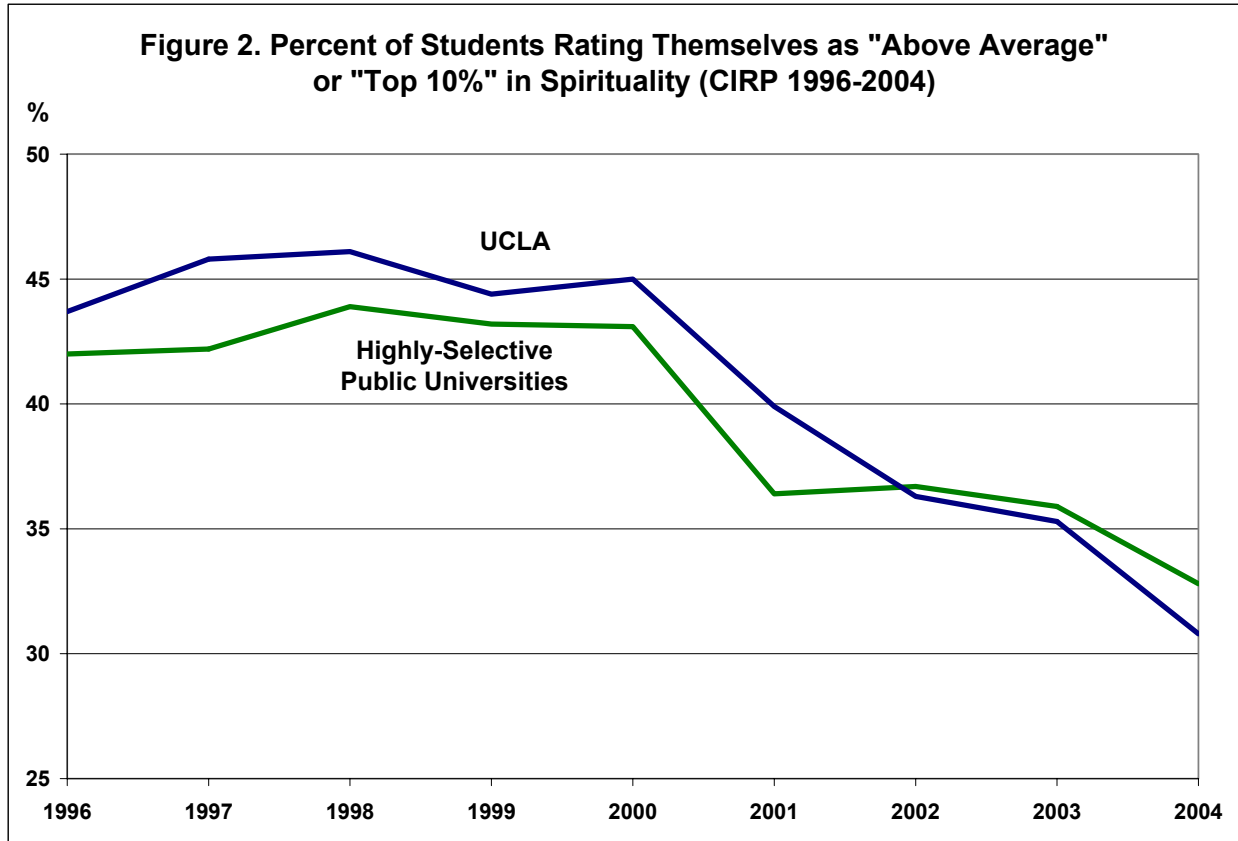
B. Spirituality

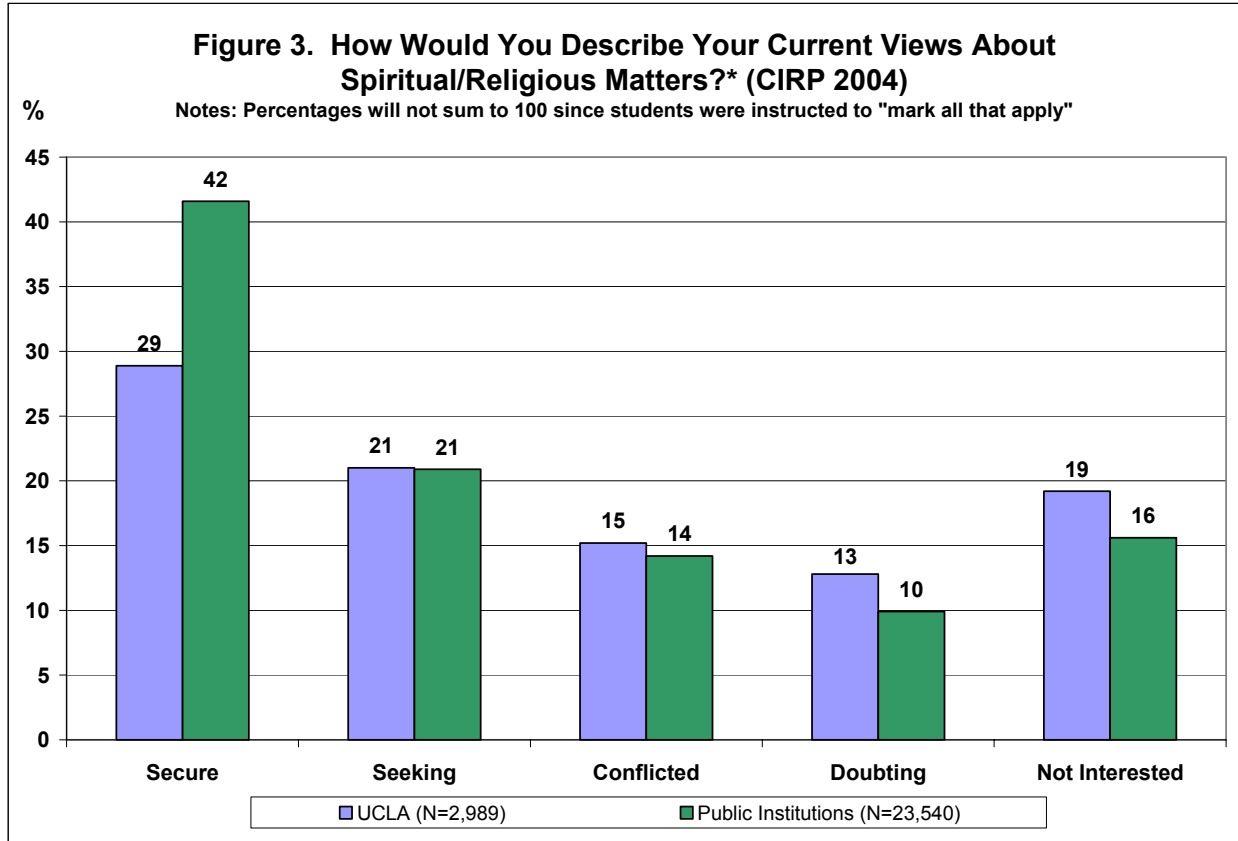
While most adolescents have explored spiritual issues prior to college within the boundaries of religious practice, it is important to understand religion and spirituality as separate constructs in the lives of college students.

- Beyond the more rigid boundaries of religious doctrine, less than one-third of these students rate their spirituality as “above average” or in the “top 10%” as compared with their peers. Further, as shown in Figure 2, this current characterization of UCLA students’ spirituality:
 - is lower than it has been in the past 30 years
 - represents a 15 percentage-point decline from 46 percent reported by the 1998 cohort of entering UCLA students
 - represents the third consecutive year when UCLA has posted a lower average spirituality self-rating than students at other highly-selective public universities
- When students are probed further about how they would describe their views on spiritual/religious matters, less than one-third of the UCLA respondents described their views as “secure,” a level of response that falls far below the 42 percent of respondents from other public institutions who described their religiosity/spirituality in this manner (Figure 3).
- While nearly identical percentages of students at UCLA and at other public colleges and universities indicate that they are “seeking” when it comes to

spiritual/religious matters, UCLA students more often reported that they were uninterested in spirituality and religion and more frequently identify their beliefs as “doubting” or “conflicted” than students at other public institutions (Figure 3).

In sum, these data suggest that spirituality is decreasing among college students overall, but that lower levels of spiritual interest and self-concept are particularly characteristic of UCLA students.





C. Spiritual/Religious Beliefs and Practices

- With respect to religious beliefs and practices, Table 2 shows that a majority of UCLA students entering in 2004 had a history of attending a religious service, prayed or meditated at least weekly during the year before entering college, and found religion to be personally helpful. In addition, 30 percent felt strongly about following religious teachings in everyday life.
- Analyses of students' spirituality reveal that over half of the 2004 cohort of entering UCLA students feel that "personal spirituality is a source of joy" and over one-third feel that it is important for the college experience and environment to facilitate their own spiritual efforts by "encouraging personal expression of spirituality."
- Given their less-secure views on spiritual/religious matters, it is perhaps not surprising that 77 percent of students entering UCLA directly from high school characterized themselves as on "a spiritual quest" (Table 2).
- The most consistent finding from the data contained in Table 2 is that UCLA students evidence significantly lower rates of participation and engagement in religious/spiritual activities and beliefs than their peers at other public institutions.

Table 2: Indicators of Students' Religiousness and Spirituality (CIRP 2004)

	UCLA (N = 2,989)	Public Universities (N = 23,540)	Diff
Attended a religious service in the past year	68	80 ^a	-12 **
Prayed or meditated at least weekly	52	61 ^a	-9 **
Felt it is "essential" or "very important" to follow religious teachings in everyday life	30	39	-9 **
Find religion to be personally helpful	59	68	-9 **
Feel that personal spirituality is a source of joy	54	63	-9 **
"Very important" or "essential" that college encourages personal expression of spirituality	37	45	-8 **
On a "spiritual quest"	77	83	-5 **

Notes: *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ^aindicates a larger national comparison group of 62,839 at 26 public universities that participated in the 2004 CIRP Freshman Survey.

D. Religious and Spiritual Commitment by Background Characteristics

While it is important to get a sense of the UCLA community at large, it is also valuable to understand the religious and spiritual commitment of particular student subgroups as well. Analyses of these subcategories by gender, race/ethnicity, and religious affiliation yielded the following findings:

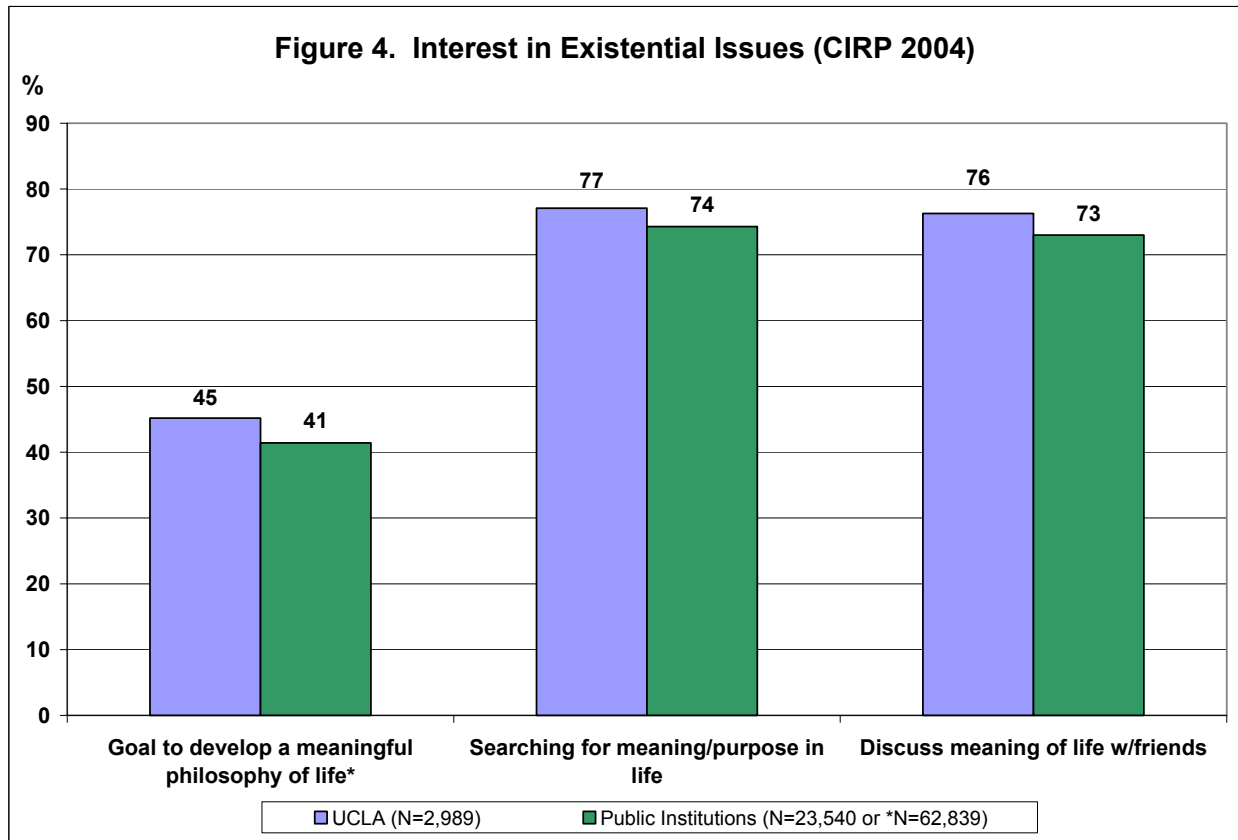
- **Gender** appears to have a relationship with religion and spirituality: More young **women** than young **men** entering UCLA in 2004 reported high levels of religious commitment and spiritual beliefs.
- **Racial/ethnic background** data indicate that **African-American** students report higher levels of religious commitment and spirituality than do students from other demographic categories. Conversely, the greatest percentages of individuals with low levels of religious commitment and spirituality are concentrated among **White** and **Asian-American** students as well as those who categorize themselves in the "**Other**" racial category or **declined to respond** to the question about race/ethnicity.
- As one might expect, those students who indicated **no religious affiliation** or **declined to respond** to the question about religious background were the least religious and spiritual. **Jewish** students and students from **non-western religions** (i.e., Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic) also tended to have lower levels of spirituality and religious commitment. At the other end of the spectrum, **Protestant** students reported the highest levels of spiritual engagement and religious commitment.

E. Interest in Existential Matters

While overall UCLA students are less religiously engaged than their peers at similar institutions and previous cohorts of entering UCLA students, there is strong evidence that they are interested in existential issues, which represent an important element of one's spiritual quest.

- In 2004, over three-quarters of first-time first-year students (i.e., no transfer students) reported that they were “searching for meaning/purpose in life” to some extent or to a great extent and that they engaged in discussions about the meaning of life with their friends (Figure 4).
- Forty-five percent described the personal goal of “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” as “very important” or “essential.”
- Unlike previous comparisons, the UCLA statistics for all three measures are actually slightly higher than their peers at other public institutions.

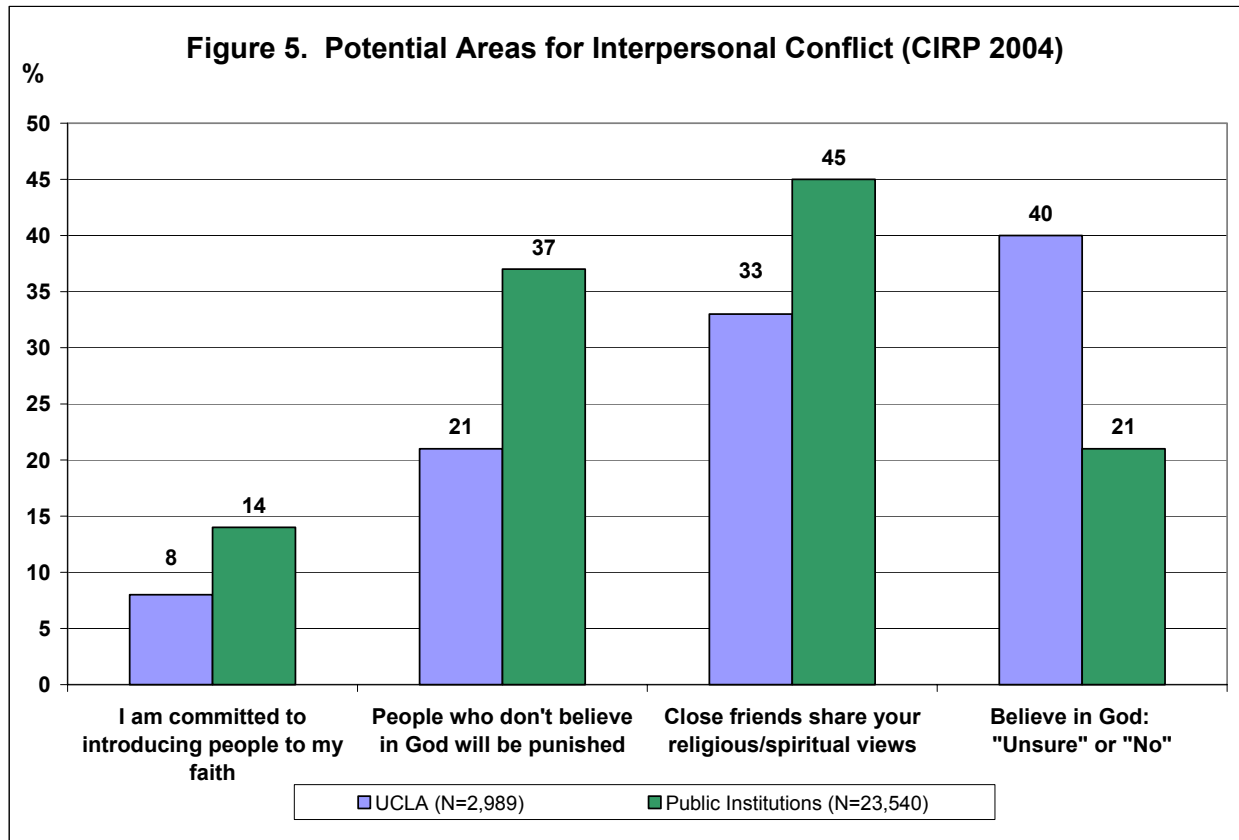
As such, it is important to remember that while UCLA students may not be particularly religious, they are committed to exploring issues of meaning and purpose in their personal lives.



F. Potential for Interpersonal Conflict

- One-third of incoming students report that most or all of their closest friends share their religious and spiritual views.
- Over 20 percent of survey respondents agree “somewhat” or “strongly” that people who don’t believe in God will be punished.
- Only a very small percentage of the 2004 cohort of entering students (8%) expressed a commitment to introduce others to their faith.
- UCLA students consistently report lower responses than their peers at other public institutions for these items that suggest conservative religious view points.

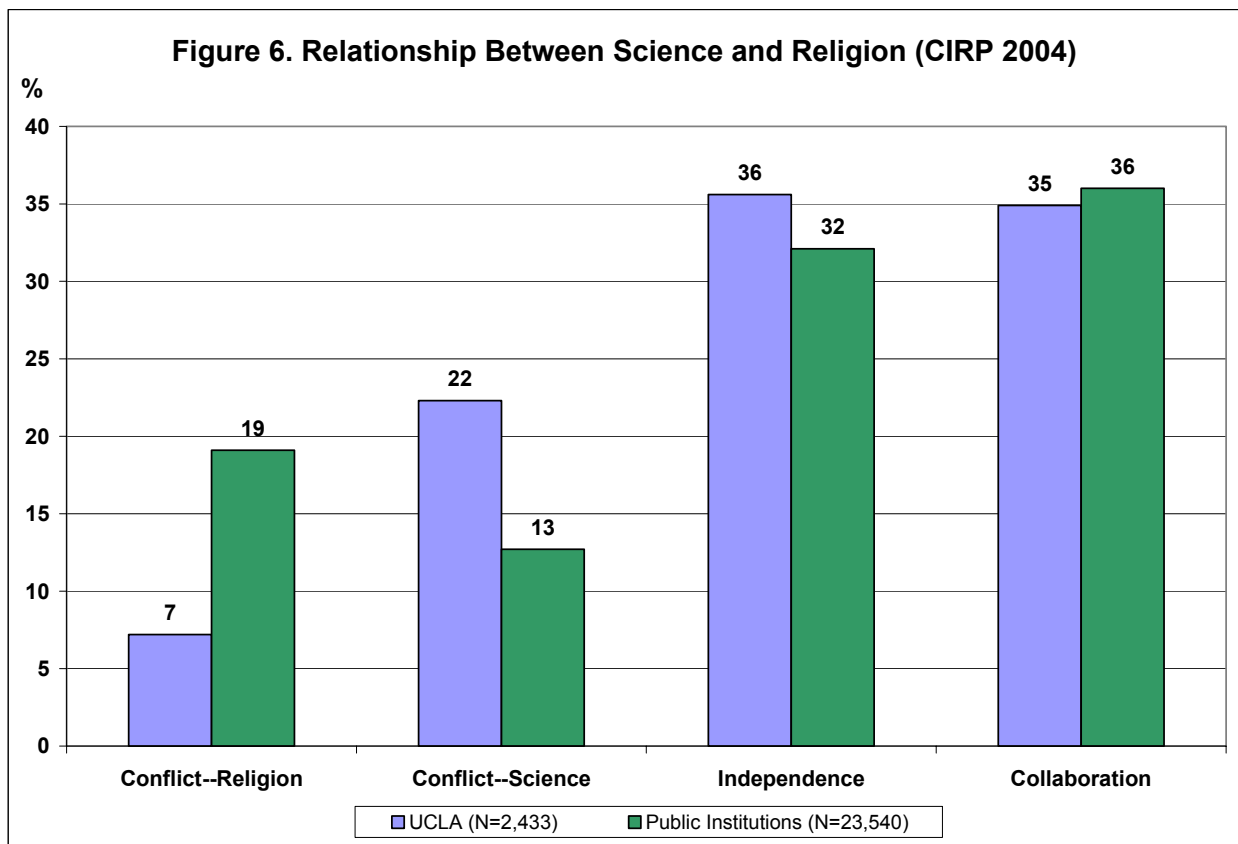
When we view these data regarding religious conservatism within the context of a population in which 13 percent of first-year students do not believe in God and another 27 percent are unsure of their belief, we can see the potential for interpersonal conflict among students of differing levels of religious commitment within the UCLA community.



G. Religion/Spirituality and Science

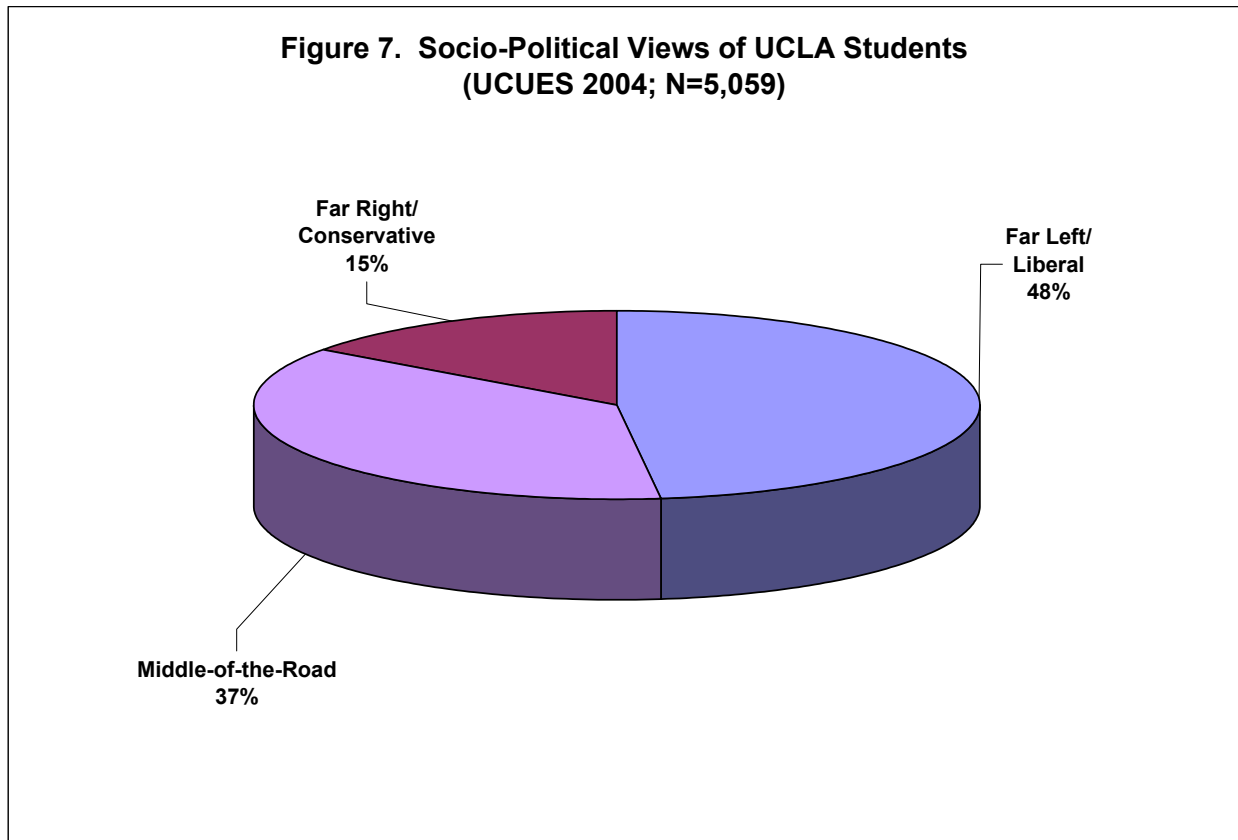
As a research university UCLA is dedicated to critical inquiry. This orientation may have implications for our understanding of students' spirituality, particularly as it relates to the balance between the foundational values of science and religion. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of responses for the 2004 entering cohort of recent high school graduates to a question about the relationship between science and religion.

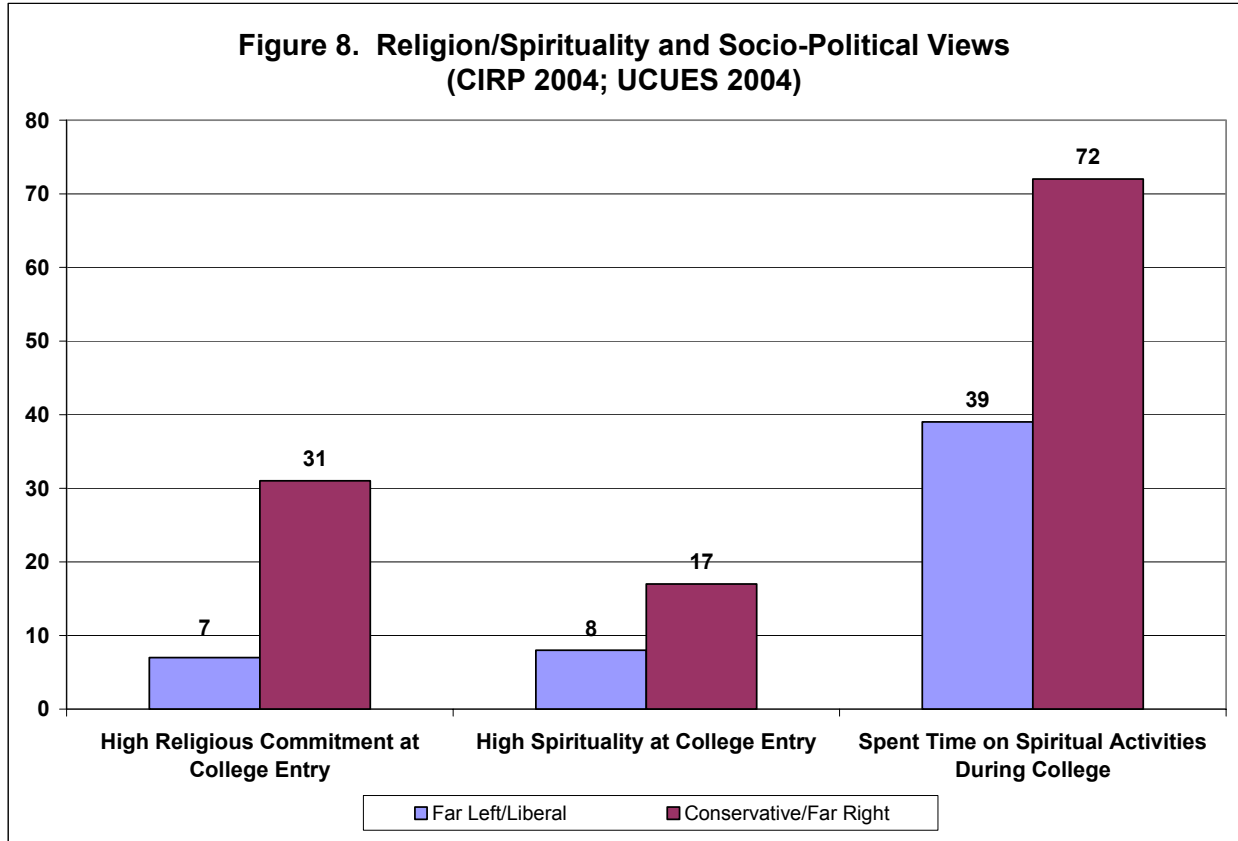
- The majority of students do not feel that science and religion represent conflicting ideals: 36% believe that they are independent constructs and 35% think that they operate in collaboration.
- Those UCLA students who do conceptualize science and religion as opposite ends of a philosophical continuum tend to consider themselves on the side of science more often than on the side of religion.
- As a result, UCLA's research-oriented environment may make it more attractive to students who are less dedicated to religious ideals, which may help explain the tendency toward lack of religious commitment and spirituality.



H. Religion/Spirituality and Socio-Political View

- As shown by Figure 7, the UCLA student community tends to be skewed toward a liberal socio-political viewpoint.
- There is generally a significant relationship between religious/spiritual commitment and socio-political perspectives among UCLA students. In other words, students who are committed to religious or spiritual ideals are more likely to label themselves as “conservative” or “far right.” Conversely, those who are less committed to religion and spirituality are more likely to consider themselves “liberal” or “far left.”
- Figure 8 illustrates the relationship between religion/spirituality and socio-political views illustrated with respect to religious commitment and spirituality among students at college entry and time spent on spiritual activities (e.g., meditation, prayer, religious services) throughout college. Specifically, students who are conservative report much higher levels of engagement on these three measures than those who are liberal.





I. Religion/Spirituality and Pluralistic World View

Table 3 shows the responses of entering UCLA students and a comparison group of respondents from other public institutions on seven survey items. Because these items reflect an awareness of cultural diversity, “interest in different religious traditions [*and*] seeking to understand other countries and cultures” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005, p. 8), they represent an ecumenical set of perspectives.

- Unlike previous comparisons, the responses of UCLA students on the majority of these items actually exceed those of their peers at other similar institutions.
- The largest differences between students at UCLA and other public universities come from comparisons of students’ values and previous experiences with respect to multiculturalism and diversity. However, analyses of measures of spirituality, religion, and morality yield only slightly more moderate differences for several survey items.
- These data indicate that UCLA students tend to be pluralistic in their world view and ecumenical in their approach to religion. This finding supports results that suggest low levels of religious commitment among UCLA students in the previous section.

Table 3: Pluralistic World View (CIRP 2004)

	UCLA (N=2,989)	Public Universities (23,540)	Diff
Experience: Socialized with someone of another race/ethnicity	85	67 ^a	18 **
Personal goal: Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures	54	43 ^a	11 **
Important that this college: Respect diverse perspectives	80	69	11 **
Reason to attend college: To make me a more cultured person	50	40 ^a	10 **
Belief: Non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers	91	82	9 **
Belief: Most people can grow spiritually without being religious	73	64	9 **
Belief: All life is interconnected	85	78	7 **
Engaged in: Accepting others as they are	97	94	3 **
Self-rating: Understanding of others	64	63 ^a	1
Self-description: Interest in different religious traditions	14	14	0
Self-description: Believing in the goodness of all people	30	30	0
Belief: Love is at the root of all the great religions	68	72	-4 **

Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ^aindicates a larger national comparison group of 62,839 at 26 Public Universities that participated in the 2004 CIRP Freshman Survey

J. Engagement in Religious & Spiritual Activities at UCLA

- Nearly half of UCLA students are not dedicating any time to spiritual activities (e.g., meditation, prayer, attending religious services) in a given week (Figure 9). An additional 30 percent spend less than three hours involved in spiritual pursuits. Further, only a very small percentage of UCLA students report spending more than six hours of their time engaged in spiritual activities.
- It is interesting to note that amount of time that UCLA students spend on spiritual activities during college is generally lower than the hours per week entering students reported spending at religious services and engaged in prayer or meditation in their last year of high school. This finding suggests that time spent on these activities may decline during college.
- As shown in Figure 10, over 30 percent of UCLA students indicated that they “often” or “very often” had “in-depth conversations with students whose religious beliefs were different” from their own. Overall, well over half of students reported that this type of interaction with fellow students happened at least “occasionally” during their time at UCLA.
- As shown in Figure 11, the overwhelming majority of UCLA students are not taking advantage of Religious Affairs at UCLA because they do not feel that they are in need of this service.
- The patterns of responses to these three measures of engagement from the 2004 UCUES are nearly identical to that of students at other University of California campuses (Tables 9, 10, & 11).

Figure 9. Time Spent on Spiritual Activities Per Week (UCUES 2004)

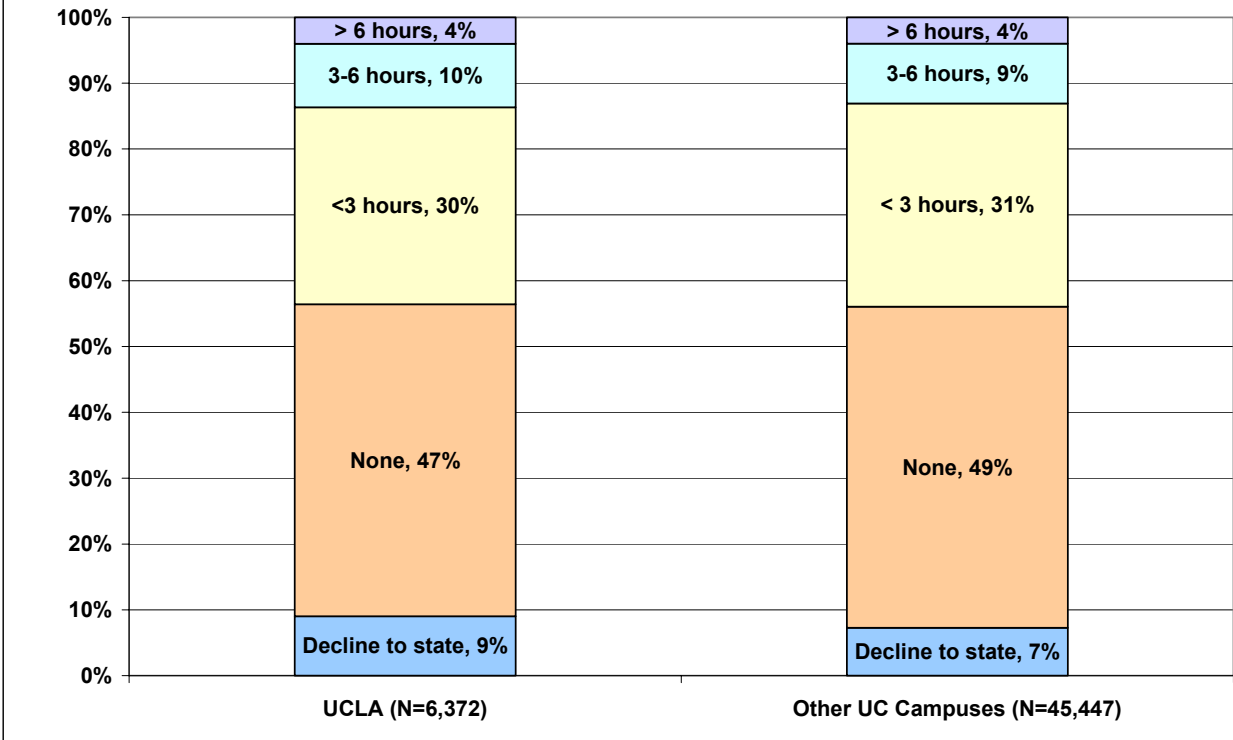
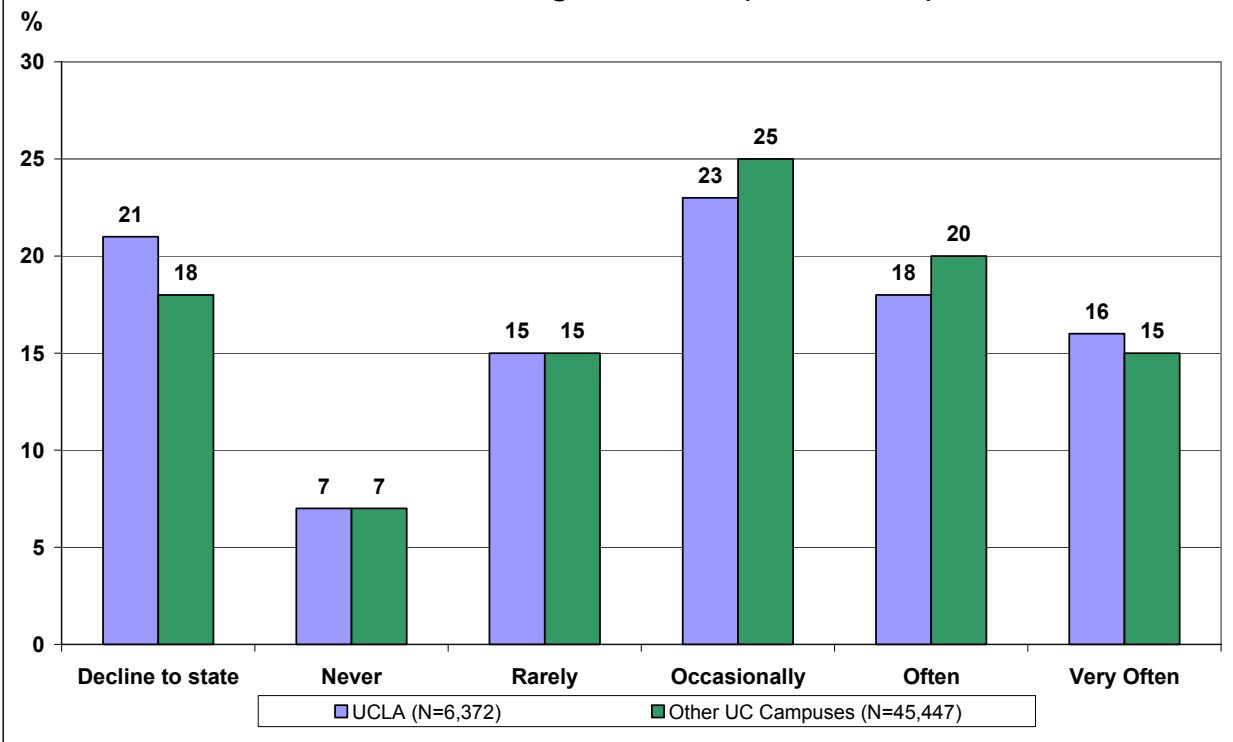
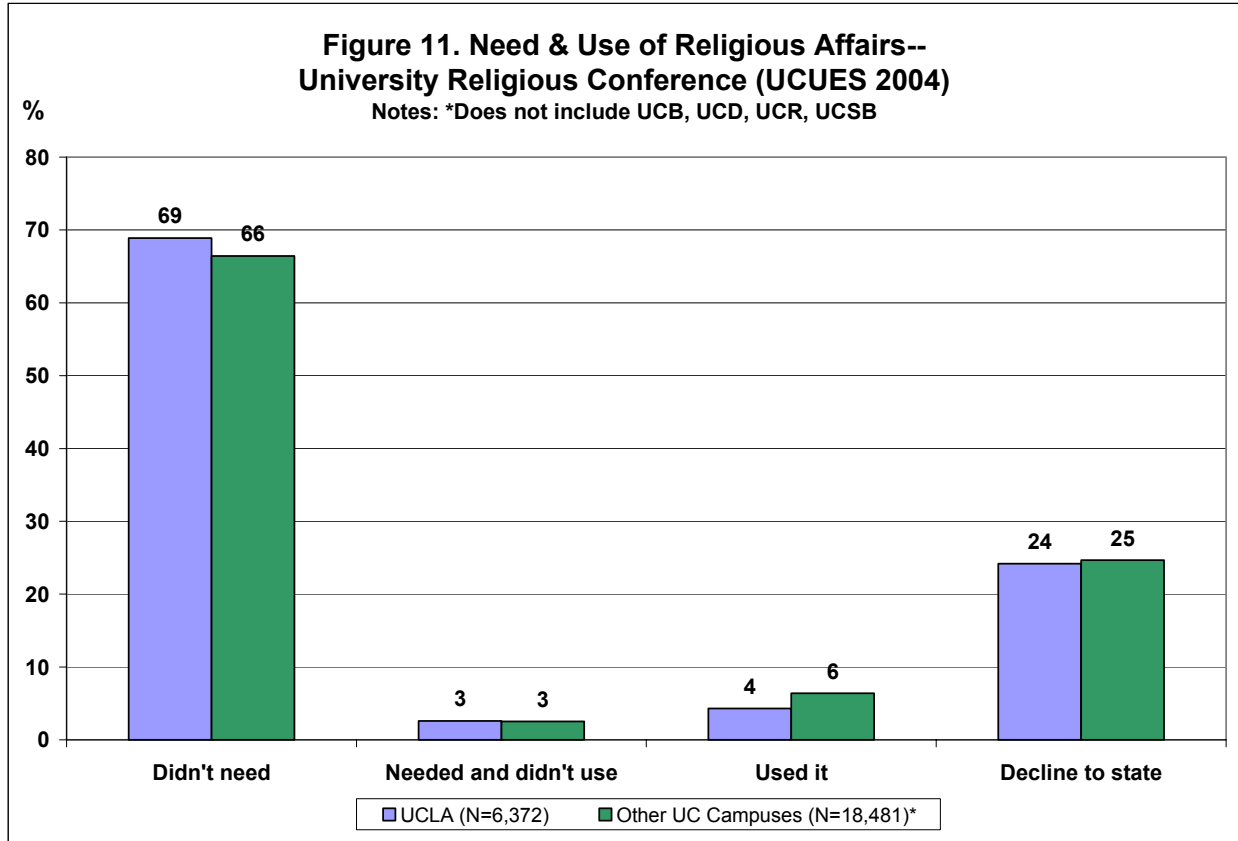


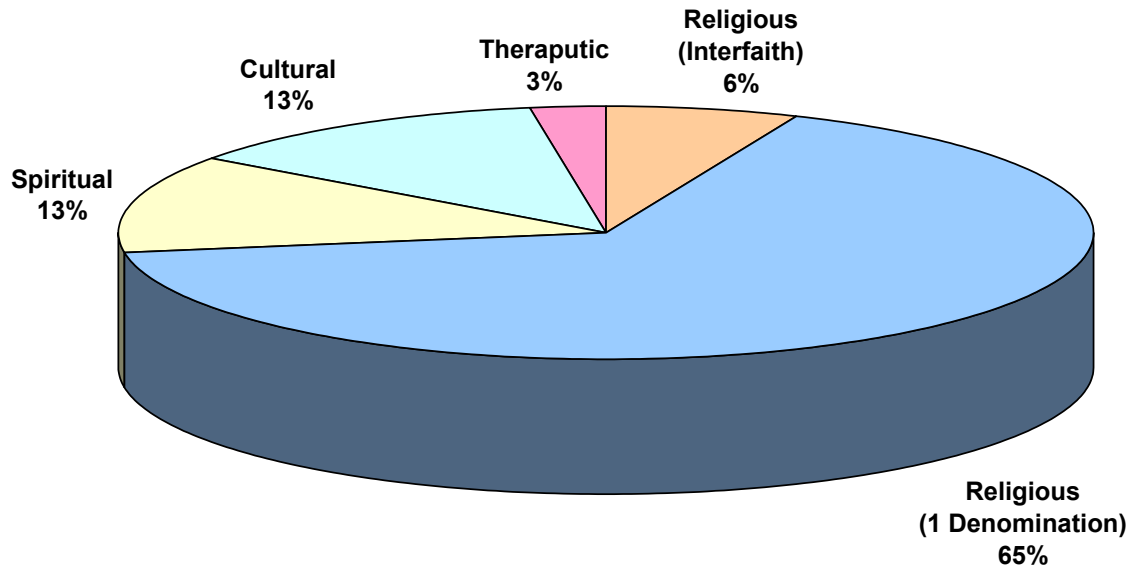
Figure 10. Had In-Depth Conversations with Students with Different Religious Beliefs (UCUES 2004)





- The Center for Student Programming (CSP) supports 80 UCLA student organizations that have mission statements that directly or indirectly reference religion or spirituality (Figure 21).
 - The majority of these student organizations is focused primarily on religious issues and is dedicated to one faith or denomination.
 - Smaller percentages of these student organizations represent groups that are committed to spiritual identity and development, cultural elements of religion and spirituality (primarily related to the Jewish faith), interfaith dialogue, and therapy groups that draw upon spiritual or religious teachings (i.e., Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon).
- Just over half of the UCLA student groups dedicated to religion or spirituality did not have a dedicated web site that could be accessed through the CSP main web site. Thirty-two of the 80 religious/spiritual student organizations at UCLA had web sites that allowed open access to UCLA students and the general public. Seven other of these student organizations also had web sites, but they were restricted in their access, thereby suggesting a more exclusive focus of the organization's activities.

Figure 12. Primary Focus of Religious/Spiritual Student Organizations at UCLA (CSP Website 2005; N = 80)



K. Religion/Spirituality and Perceptions of Campus Climate

Students' spiritual and religious beliefs and practices can also have a relationship with how they view the campus climate. Table 13 illustrates the relationship between engagement in spiritual and religious activities (e.g., religious services, meditation, prayer) and two such measures of climate at UCLA.

- Just under half (48.2%) of all UCLA respondents to the 2004 UCUES engage in some sort of spiritual or religious activity on a weekly basis.
- Those students who spend time on spiritual and religious activities are significantly less likely to report that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that students are respected at UCLA regardless of their religious beliefs. While not conclusive, these findings suggest that students who are religious and/or spiritual may feel slightly marginalized at UCLA within the context of these ideological beliefs.
- However, over half of both groups of students (i.e., those who engage in religious/spiritual activities and those who do not) “agree” or “strongly agree” that they feel a sense of belonging at UCLA. In fact, students who engage in spiritual/religious activities report slightly higher levels of belonging, although the difference between the groups is not statistically significant.

Figure 13. Religion/Spirituality and Campus Climate (UCUES 2004)

