

# **Higher Power in Higher Education: How a South Carolina Technical College Compares Spiritually with Liberal Arts Learners**

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## **Abstract**

While increasing numbers of college students nationwide share tenets that embody spirituality, the problem is that not all types of institutions of higher learning recognize such tenets as integral to their mission or curricula. Two-year technical college graduates tend to enter (and often reenter) into socio-economic mainstream ahead of four-year liberal arts graduates; however, researchers agree institutions that foster both cognitive and affective learning environments will prepare graduates better for diversity and rapid change the future holds. This study compared spiritual beliefs of students at one technical college with students attending two liberal arts universities in South Carolina. The premise focused on identifying similarities in spirituality and religion among students in dissimilar campus environments, and if students expected their college to provide venues for spiritual enrichment.

## **Introduction**

*Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important, how to live and how to die. (Gatto, 1991, p. 75)*

*John Taylor Gatto, three times New York State Teacher of the Year*

In the wake of corporate and religious scandals crafted by individuals and groups in positions of leadership and influence, at the threshold of social reform loom our institutions of higher learning. College students today seem to be grappling with a wide range of intellectual and emotional contradictions. Some are internal, stirring an “awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 28) while others evoke external, instantly gratifying ambitions. Researchers described the internal phenomenon as spirituality, ironically rising up from within a fashionably secular culture where an individual’s sense of self and well-being is often legitimized in terms of external factors, such as financial prosperity or celebrity (Astin, 2002; DiConti, 2004; Tisdell, 2003).

National studies indicate a collective movement by scores of college students toward spiritually grounded education. However, some forms of academia fall short in fostering environments that inspire spiritual development or actualize authenticity (Astin, 2004). Our academic institutions must be concerned with the evolution of each “student’s interior life” to prepare them better to face social diversity and cultural pluralism that undeniably exists (Astin, 2002, p. 4). Further, colleges and universities have the responsibility to embrace their roles as models of social tolerance and *authentic* behavior. This charge is equal to or exceeds its mission to educate, in spite of “mainstream cultural taboos that have kept them silent about their spirituality” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 7).

UCLA professor emeritus Alexander Astin argued notwithstanding matters of business and politics, institutions of higher learning must grant adequate attention to student spirituality as a “holistic approach to student development and learning” (Schroeder, 2003, p. 15). “We don’t really understand our own or each other’s inner selves, and as a result we end up with all kinds of problems in dealing with each other” (p. 14). Subsequent to events of September 11, 2001, the profoundness of Dr. Astin’s insight, together with the paucity of data in technical higher education toward spirituality and student development was ample fodder for conducting this research.

### **The Problem**

Studies on spirituality and college students have been conducted (primarily) with liberal arts colleges on a national level. Because technical colleges have not typically been included in related studies, and assuming these students are not exposed to linked variables through curricula and campus life, by examining how students at one selected technical college viewed spirituality yielded useful data about this population. To exacerbate the problem, there appeared to be no comparisons of spirituality between technical college students and liberal arts students from within the same geographic area.

Consequently, determining how student’s value spirituality as a component of their personal, social, and professional worldview was integral to dissecting the problem in-depth. In spite of pioneering research underway at UCLA, some forms of higher education are remiss in having conducted adequate research on the topic of spiritual awareness, so that they might become “more responsive to facilitating student development in this realm” (Lindholm, 2004, p. 6). A more sobering implication in relation to the impact of spirituality and college students emerged once background researchers broached fields that focused on leadership development and societal health.

#### *Background of the Problem*

“Our belief that producing more effective leaders is essential to building a better society and better world suggests that leadership development should be a critical part of the college experience” (Astin, 2000, p. 17). “An individual’s spiritual intelligence is one of the four levels of self: the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual” (Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 591). Many educators assert that a liberal arts curriculum

better supports a freer-minded and spiritually harmonious unity among students; however, others in the field claimed the absence of vocational preparation fails to provide students with an all-inclusive educational experience. Nonetheless, research is mounting that show an equitable *blend* of liberal and technical curricula, with consideration given to an individual's spiritual needs through broadminded reflection and vocation completes the continuum of modern comprehensive education (Lagemann, 2003; Warren, 2003).

Longitudinal research at UCLA continues to survey students (and faculty) who attend as well as reside on campuses at traditional liberal arts colleges and universities across the United States. Studies indicated that although enrollment in higher education is up, majors sought in liberal arts and sciences are on a downward trend. For example, students who chose to major in the fields of computer science and technology increased by 74% in the past few years (Astin, according to DiConti, 2004). Such change in attitudes and expectations can be supported by examining historical and theoretical social ideologies.

### *Theoretical Support*

“Spirituality is distinct from religion. Organized religion is an outward process; spirituality is an internal, private one” (Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 591). A connection between morality and spirituality can be observed in behaviors of students, teachers, leaders, and activists, as well as individuals who exhibit a sense of wholeness, belonging, and a readiness to make sacrifices in order to enhance the overall social well-being. Researchers argued “the more compulsively materialistic our society becomes, the more desperate people are to find spiritual fulfillment” (p. 589). Further, an increasing emphasis on social secularism exacerbated by media creates a sense of dichotomy and uncertainty among mounting numbers of individuals and groups.

Religious icons have exhibited hypocrisy and deceit in their personal behavior, thereby failing to *practice what they preach*. Additionally, indiscretions continue to emerge from within the very entities designed to model quintessential ethics, values, and morality. Such behaviors advance an added sense of disdain and hesitation from escalating populations of impressionable students who claim to be seeking transcendence from the emptiness and isolation materialism delivers in the long term (Astin, 2004).

### **About the Study**

The study was limited to distinct, yet related groups of participants who attended selected technical, religious affiliated, and non-religious affiliated institutions of higher learning in South Carolina. A proportionate chance sampling of selected students was surveyed in order to gather data for this research. Because technical college students tend to be from among a population comprised of varying demographics, this researcher submits that an unbiased comparative analysis was achieved, because student respondents were not segmented into groups other than *college students*. To date there is no discernable evidence that research designed to specifically measure spirituality among students who attend technical colleges exists. Data collected from self-administered

questionnaires were used as instruments of measure for the specific purpose of comparative analyses.

Because of protocols in place designed to protect students' confidentiality while on campus, accessing survey participants was challenging. Permission from each school's hierarchy was required before access to randomly selected classes, organizations, or individuals where questionnaires were distributed could proceed. Future researchers pursuing similar data collection techniques should not expect unfettered access to student populations.

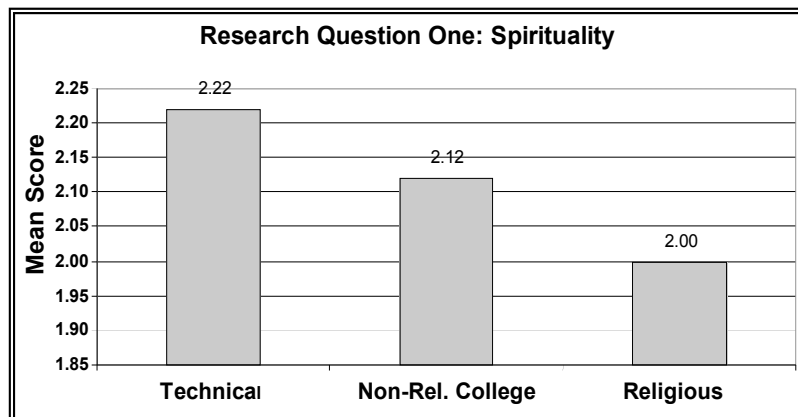
### Research Design

A descriptive design that relied on survey methodology was principally used during the course of this study so as "to describe the distribution within a population of certain characteristics, attitudes, or experiences" (Singleton & Straits, 2005, p. 223). Subsequent to administering an adapted questionnaire from a validated instrument used nationally by UCLA, raw data was quantitatively analyzed. A qualitative method was subsequently introduced in the form of one open-ended question. Randomly selected comments revealed how students from each population perceived the long term impact of their educational experience.

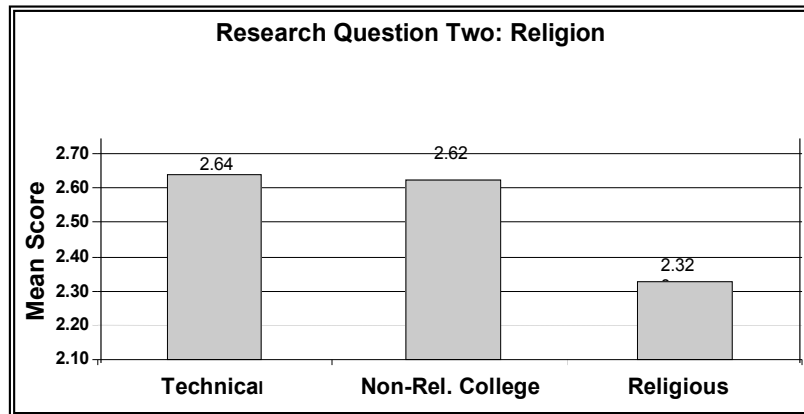
### Research Questions

Research questions were developed to reach across demographically diverse populations of students in order to determine if any one form of higher education attracted individuals with traits more closely associated with spirituality, religiosity, and expectations over another. Mean scores collected from data (weighted 1-5 from instrumentation) were statistically converted into three histograms. Lower mean scores indicated higher levels of agreement toward an assortment of indexed tenets relating to major themes from each question as shown in *Figures 1, 2, and 3* respectively.

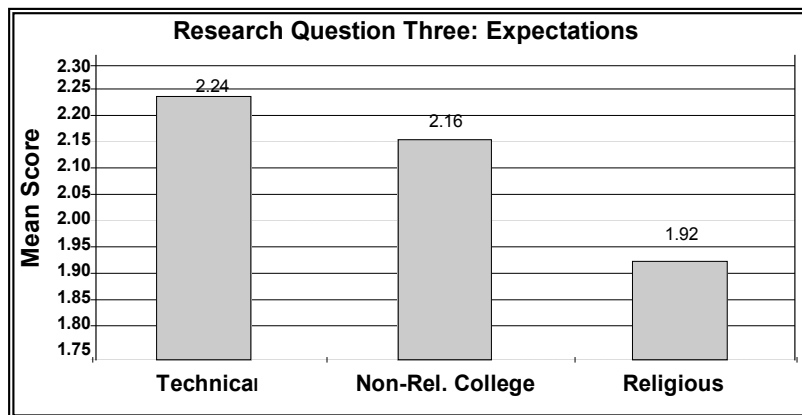
One: What differing views regarding *spirituality* exist between student populations that attend three dissimilar types of selected colleges in South Carolina? (See *Figure 1*)



Two: How does each selected college student population in South Carolina differ on various characteristics related to *religion*? (See *Figure 2*)



Three: In what ways do selected college student populations in South Carolina differ with regard to *expectations* about their college experience as a vehicle for fostering their spiritual development? (See *Figure 3*)



### Significance

The significance of this study may not be realized without passage of time and additional examination. One aim, however, was to raise awareness within the academic community that growing numbers of college students claim that knowledge attained from higher education is incomplete unless the *soul* is equally nurtured. Further, it is significant to note that technical college students have not been among populations selected for national studies as holding *like* spiritual tenets compared with non-technical or liberal arts academic institutions. Conclusions from this study should be useful to academic leaders who design curricula and develop programs for the majority of today's colleges and universities.

While higher education is the medium that can best integrate spiritual behavior alongside leadership, professional, and life-skill development, not all academic venues currently offer such diverse curricula or recognize its personal and social significance. In literature, the fundamental mission for higher education is presented through the eyes of researchers and authors who acknowledged the intrinsic role of spirituality as a component of leadership development, authentic behavior, and a comprehensive higher learning experience.

## **Literature Review**

One of the primary goals of this investigation was to demonstrate through literature a correlation between higher education and the *affective* side of humanity. These characteristics include spiritual consciousness, self-awareness, and the development of authenticity; each a tool of enlightenment that support and accompany numbers of graduates into their personal and professional relationships, as well as influence their life-long well-being. Because such themes are tacit, personal, and often awkward for some individuals to articulate or share with others, spiritual development as a primary objective in higher education is typically viewed as extraneous by some academics (Astin, 2004; Barnett, Krell, & Sendry, 2000).

Although spirituality is invariably associated with the occult, Astin and various colleagues agreed that every individual is by nature a spiritual being. According to Lindholm (2004) and prior polling, “In 1998, for example, 82 percent of Americans expressed a need to “experience spiritual growth,” up from 54 percent just four years earlier” (p.4). Researchers maintained that spiritual development is at the heart of resolving an array of complex issues plaguing society today (Astin, 2004; Lindholm, 2004; Tisdell, 2003).

One researcher argued “Spirituality in education, then, has to do with going beyond the acquisition of knowledge and entering the realms of meaning and purpose” (Laurence, 1999, p. 14). Because approximately 65% of high school graduates in the United States attend some form of post-secondary education, and this statistic is increasing, the meaning and purpose in which future citizenry will view social change is shaped while in the classroom. However, only 16% of the 65% of high school graduates who pursue higher learning support the hundreds of traditional, liberal arts campus-based college and university systems in the United States (Lee, 1999; Marcy, 2004, & Morey, 2004).

Society’s infatuation with science and technology impact how students make personal decisions about their higher education. Innovations in technology have facilitated varieties of academia, thus widening the “digital divide” and forging distinctions between liberal arts and technical forms of education (Marcy, 2004, p. 213; Reingold, 1997). Perhaps the idea of social and economic supremacy was instilled into the Baby-Boomer generation who pursued ambitions of financial prosperity after World War II (Burns, 2002). These hard working traditionalists seemed to put aside intrinsic aspirations in order to attain a more tangible way of life, such as career, home, and

economic security; achievements that came to be known as the American dream. With primary hierarchical needs met, offspring of this generation appear more conflicted while searching for something deeper and more satisfying.

Since 1966, a longitudinal study conducted by UCLA yielded results indicating that many students had transposed their values about the significance of a college education. Decades ago, seeking to develop “a meaningful philosophy of life” was ranked “essential” by a majority of entering freshmen; however, 80% of today’s college students barely recognized the need for “a meaningful philosophy of life” and ranked “being very well off financially” as paramount (Astin, 1998, p. 5). The nature of today’s more capricious and secular society promotes an atmosphere where discourse surrounding matters of authenticity are quelled and replaced with attitudes that advances materialism and individual recognition. Astin suspected the influence of mass media, in particular television, to be responsible for advancing attitudinal changes that ultimately led to “contrasting values—the material and the existential” (p. 36).

Relating to higher education, Parker Palmer (1999) claimed “Spirituality—the quest for connectedness—is not something that needs to be “brought into” or “added into” the curriculum”. The author continued “It is at the heart of every subject we teach, where it waits to be brought forth” (p. 8). Researchers argued that a number of today’s undergraduates do not consider higher education as essential to their lives. Instead, it’s “just one of a multiplicity of activities in which they are engaged every day” (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 15). As such, our academic institutions whether traditional, technical, or virtual, are reduced to commodities that serve no greater good than simply means for gaining employment. “The real threat to higher education is that it will focus solely on the short-term gain...at the expense of the longer-term purposes that have formed the backbone of higher education for centuries” (Newman, 2000, p. 23).

Technical or vocational skills provide graduates with quicker access into today’s specialized and technology-propelled marketplace. Nevertheless, by simply accommodating immediate aspirations, colleges in general are failing to prepare its graduates for future challenges they will likely encounter. DiConti (2004) predicted “30% of college students may eventually work in jobs that do not yet exist” (p. 170). Readers may ask which form(s) of higher education will provide students with skills that transcend both long and short term ambitions, meet expectations for building a career, as well as satisfy their often tacit, yet innate need to bond with something greater than self (Astin, 2004). The answer lies in venues where both liberal and technical education conjoins and preparation for real-life challenges can be attained.

There is little doubt individuals well trained in a number of technical fields soon find gainful employment post-graduation in today’s globally enriched marketplace. Higher education has a fundamental responsibility to provide balance between the “interior and exterior aspects” of students’ educational experiences (Astin, 2004, p. 34). A liberal arts education is the environment that encourages student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions. This learning process mimics the changing work

environment and the increasing value of general cognitive, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills over specific and technical skills” (Carnevale & Strohl, 2001, p. 2).

A number of authors agreed effective student learning requires participation from both the institution and student. Albeit schools furnish classes, faculty, and support functions that facilitate goal attainment, Newman et al. (2004) argued “For successful learning, the student must take responsibility, but so must the institution” (p. 135). Researchers encouraged the development of learning environments where invisible boundaries separating academic disciplines are penetrated, thereby creating seamless connections that foster open, interactive communications from one field of study into another. It appears the extension of the classroom into community is fundamental in providing a comprehensive education that allows students to confront a variety of truths head on (Haycock, 1996; Koth, 2003).

Although mastering skills in math and science spawn technical expertise that often affords lucrative access into many fields currently in demand, some researchers claimed at the end of the day, material gain may fail to satisfy an individuals’ suppressed and most fundamental sense of meaning and purpose. Astin (2004) cautioned that focusing simply on what students “do” as opposed to how they “feel” may have significant implications as to how colleges and universities comprehensively prepare students to reflect upon their own humanity, as well as cope with others in the midst of a progressively more diverse society and global economy (pp. 36-37). Acknowledging the significance of individuality, fostering creativity, and recognizing a duty to become conscientious contributors to social well-being are among the most critical and formidable responsibilities of “liberal learning” (p. 39).

### **Methodology**

In an attempt to understand the impact of spirituality as a component of student behavior today, a comparison study between representative South Carolina colleges was conducted alongside, but not in conjunction with a 2004 “full-scale assessment of 90,000 students enrolling at 150 institutions” performed by researchers with UCLA (Astin, 2004, p. 41). Although the 2003 UCLA pilot study yielded comparable results, this researcher contrasted local data alongside the 2004 assessment. This section describes the research design, population, sampling procedure, sample selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The use of surveys afforded an opportunity to obtain certain information about heterogeneous groups of individuals that often include “characteristics, opinions, attitudes, or previous experiences” by basically posing questions and tabulating responses (Morgan, 1998, p.183). The *anonymous* construct of the adapted questionnaire encouraged participants to respond openly so that answers would be truthful, and thereby representative of each selected population (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

Because research teams with UCLA conducted experimental trials prior and subsequent to administering the full-scaled College Students Beliefs and Values (CSBV) assessment in 2004, there appeared to be no scientific need to replicate their pre and

posttests. This study was not designed to prove or disprove the existence of spirituality as a present-day phenomenon; but instead, determine if students who attend selected forms of higher education in South Carolina shared similarities about their spiritual beliefs, values, and religiosity with respondents from national studies conducted at UCLA.

### *Population*

The population for this study consisted of three institutions of higher learning in the state of South Carolina and a representative sample of college students (a) currently enrolled and attending class, (b) who ambulated in common areas on campus, and (c) involved with campus sponsored organizations.

The selected technical college is state assisted and maintains an enrollment between 10,000 and 11,000 students across regional campuses in the midlands, and is one of South Carolina's largest two-year colleges. Although 70 % of courses offered pertain to areas that support technical careers, mounting numbers of associates graduates are transferring to four-year liberal arts institutions.

The selected nonreligious affiliated college afforded access to a diverse array of students who ambulate around campus. This state supported university located in upstate South Carolina maintains an enrollment of approximately 5, 200 students. Although curricula are fundamentally rooted in liberal arts, mounting numbers of business, laboratory sciences, and information technology degrees are conferred each year.

The selected religious affiliated or sectarian college is a private institution located in the low country of South Carolina and maintains a diverse student population of approximately 3,000 students. Grounded in liberal arts and what is regarded as a values-based curriculum, this school is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Association.

### *Sampling*

Sampling procedures most fitting for this study was a combination of probability and non-probability methods. Proportionate random sampling yielded the most desirable distribution of student respondents. Students surveyed from participating colleges were considered homogeneous and representative of that population within each frame. The frame is "*the population* that provides the basis for sampling" (Singleton & Straits, 2005, p. 116). Sampling frames yielded a distribution of selected classes, individuals, or groups within campus organizations from each participating college.

Divergent demographics or a stratum was not considered as relevant in the selection process for this study. Further, the total numbers of students that comprised the entire survey population were approximately 19,200 individuals. Based on scientific guidelines from literature, this researcher sampled 10% of students from each population frame. Relevant information pertaining to the collection procedure applied for each selected population is depicted in *Table 1*.

*Table 1: Collection Procedures*

<b>Technical College</b> Total Population: 10,000	<b>Religious Affiliated (Sectarian)</b> Total Population: 3,000	<b>Non-religious Affiliated</b> Total Population: 5,200
Sample Frame: Classes Population Percentage: 1,100 students Number of Frames: 40	Sample Frame: Student Organizations Population Percentage: 300 students Number of Frames: 10	Sample Frame: College Students Population Percentage: 520 students Number of Frames: N/A
Classes offered during the spring 2006 term were assigned a number. A computer generated list of random numbers was used to determine which class frames would be selected and presented with questionnaires.	Questionnaires were conveniently distributed to assorted campus organizations. From these selected organizations, data were collected.	Questionnaires were distributed by chance to students on campus while in designated common areas such as a cafeteria or the student center.

Because external factors can often influence responses, from the point of distribution to collection, a span of no more than ten business days passed. Given that completing questionnaires was strictly voluntary, attempting to predict response ratios would have been ineffective. Nonetheless, an adequate proportion of instruments were returned to form representative conclusions about each population.

### *Instrumentation*

Ten factor scales were developed combining items from the questionnaire with related content shown in *Table 2*. All items from the adapted instrument were posed in a manner so that responses could be weighted and measured as intervals. Common to Likert scale constructs, a number was assigned to each possible answer with 1 representing the most favorable response (*strongly agree*) to 5, the least favorable response (*strongly disagree*). The use of numbers or weights provided this researcher with means to mathematically score responses, and thus convert raw data into information that could be statistically examined. The Likert scale supported the types of statistical data analyses used for this research (Jaccard & Wan, 1996). Each factor had high Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from .65 to .97, 1 the highest measure of "agreement among components" and 0 the lowest (Singleton & Straits, 2005, p.96). Question 51 from the instrument was open-ended, thereby allowing each participant an opportunity to briefly express what he or she considered the most remarkable aspect gained from their higher educational experience. Responses were analyzed qualitatively using *key words* that corresponded to major themes or indices predetermined by UCLA and this researcher.

*Table 2: Factors Table with Corresponding Numbers from Questionnaire and Research Questions*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Corresponding Responses from Instrumentation</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
1. Spirituality	1-5	One and Two
2. Religious Commitment	6-11	Two
3. Equanimity	12-17	Two and Three
4. Religious Struggle	18-22	Two
5. Charitable-Altruistic	23-26	One
6. Religious-Social Conservatism	27-28	Two
7. Religious Skepticism	29-36	Two
8. Spiritual Quest	37-40	One, Two, and Three
9. Ethic of Caring	41-45	One
10. Ecumenical Worldview	46-50	One and Three

### *Analysis*

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was selected as the primary testing method “for determining the existence of differences among several population means” (Aczel & Sounderpandian, 2002, p. 374). ANOVA reveals if at least one significant difference in the mean scores of each dependent variable or index exists. In this study, a post-hoc Tukey test was performed as a pair-wise analysis between population means. Post-hoc assessments such as Tukey tests interpret where differences are most statistically significant.

Mean scores analysis proved to be a useful method to identify differences within and among populations. Principle components factors and indices analyses were performed by using the STATISTICA program (by STATSOFT, Inc.). Results from testing validated that responses from the questionnaire corresponded to assigned factors, and that selected groups of factors had been appropriately indexed. It is critical that each index accurately identify with one common theme, and this theme strongly relate to its corresponding research question. Assuming a 95% level of confidence, (or a statistical significance of .05), a  $p$ -value of  $< (.05)$  served as a cut-off point for determining the significance of the relationship between dependent variables (spirituality, religious commitment, religious-social conservatism, spiritual quest, ecumenical worldview) and fixed variables (student populations at selected colleges in South Carolina). Further, if a factor’s relationship with a fixed variable appeared significant ( $p < .05$ ); post-hoc analyses such as Tukey tests determined which differences were most statistically significant. Because this study was about variable relationships and college student populations, three possible combinations exist; A-B, A-C, and B-C.

The  $F$  ratio statistically tests for significance differences between mean scores. When the calculated  $F$  value  $<$  the critical value of  $F$ , this researcher assumed that no

significant differences among variables or sets of variables existed. If variations between groups are suspected, *F* scores allow researchers to determine if occurrences are due to cause or random error (Aczel & Sounderpandian, 2002). See *Table 3*.

*Table 3: ANOVA and Post-hoc Tests Table*

ANOVA and Tukey test

<u>Research Questions Index</u>	<u><i>p</i></u>	<u><i>F</i> Calculated</u>	<u>Critical</u>	<u>Tukey test</u>
<u>RQ One</u> Spirituality, Charitable-Altruistic, Spiritual Quest, Ethic of Caring, Ecumenical Worldview	4.55E-06	12.54	3.00	R = 2.95 NR = 2.75 T = 4.90*
<u>RQ Two</u> Religious Commitment, Equanimity, Religious Struggle, Religious-Social Conservatism, Religious Skepticism	4.82E-13	29.64	3.00	R = 0.74* NR = 6.91 T = 7.30
<u>RQ Three</u> Equanimity, Spiritual Quest, Ecumenical Worldview	9.55E-10	21.45	3.00	R = 2.22 NR = 4.98 T = 6.53*

*Note.* (Religious Affiliated: R) (Nonreligious affiliated: NR) (Technical: T)  
Tukey test results reveal where specific relationships between and among each population means occur. The symbol \* is placed beside scores where calculated values were significantly different from the critical value (2.38) at (.05) level of significance.

### Results

A total of 1,920 surveys were distributed and 680 were returned (35.4%). Response ratios by college were calculated based on percentages of completed/returned questionnaires and the selected college population's sample size (10%). Ratios: non-religious affiliated college, 57% or 294 responses from 520 questionnaires distributed; religious affiliated college, 37% or 111 responses from 300 questionnaires distributed; technical college, 28% or 275 responses from 1,100 questionnaires distributed. (Students enrolled in the technical college during the semester this survey was conducted were down by approximately 1,100). Approximately 5% of questionnaires collected from each population were discarded because respondents failed to answer one or more questions, or if patterns in responses appeared contrived.

Response ratios varied by college. For example, the religious affiliated and technical college samples returned surveys at 37% and 28% respectively. However, the return ratio for the nonreligious affiliated sample was 57%. This researcher attributed inconsistency in return ratios to be the result of distribution and collection methods used at each college.

A pilot study was conducted in 2005 for the purpose of testing the questionnaire for reliability, stability, and comprehension on a small sample of college students before distributing surveys to the research sample of 1,920 college students. From the pilot sample illustrated in *Table 4*, a 23.3% response ratio was obtained. Results indicated that instrumentation was satisfactory to proceed with the data collection stage. Additionally, *Table 4* illustrates how pilot results compared with national averages from data collected by UCLA researchers.

*Table 4: Factors Table Comparing Local Pilot Study Results with National Trends*

\* Suggests a Variance of Plus or Minus Ten Points

<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>PILOT STUDY</b>	<b>UCLA</b>
Spirituality*	67%*	62%*
Religious Commitment*	65%*	71%*
Equanimity*	64%*	58%*
Religious Struggle	37%	48%
Charitable Commitment	48%	32%
Religious Skepticism*	52%*	48%*
Spiritual Quest	46%	60%
Ethic of Caring	41%	29%
Ecumenical Worldview*	39%*	30%*

### *Mean Score*

The application of mean scores in this study was germane in producing results from selected testing procedures. For example, principle components factor analyses validated relationships between response options from instrumentation and dependent variables (factors) described by using mean scores generated from individual responses produced by each population. This test confirmed that groups of factors from the instrument comprised a valid index that could be strongly linked to each primary category from research questions (spirituality, religion, and expectations).

### *Responses from Instrumentation*

*Spirituality*: 81% of students surveyed from the religious affiliated college strongly agreed that *having an interest in spirituality is important*; whereas, approximately half the respondents from the nonreligious affiliated and technical colleges strongly agreed, 52.3% and 50.1% respectively.

*Religious Commitment:* 85.5% of students surveyed from the religious affiliated college strongly agreed that *spiritual/religious beliefs give meaning and purpose to their lives*. Less than half the respondents from the nonreligious affiliated and technical student samples strongly agreed to the same, or 49.6% and 46.9% respectively.

*Religious-Social Conservatism:* 55.8% of respondents from the religious affiliated college strongly agreed that *people who do not believe in God will be punished*, contrasting 18.5% of respondents from the technical college. 20.7% from the nonreligious affiliated college strongly agreed with the statement.

*Spiritual Quest:* 63% of students surveyed at the religious affiliated college strongly agreed that *courses were offered at their college that helps them realize what spirituality is all about*. One third fewer student respondents (18%) attending the nonreligious affiliated college strongly agreed with the statement next to 9.4% of respondents who attend the technical college.

*Ecumenical Worldview:* Approximately 59% of student respondents with the religious affiliated college strongly agreed they are *able to share their spirituality with fellow students*. 29.2% of respondents from the nonreligious affiliated college strongly agreed compared with 16% of technical college respondents who strongly agreed. While readers may expect students who attend religious affiliated colleges to score high on matters relating to spirituality and religion, it is noteworthy that selected secular institutions scored in upper percentiles for these factors compared with national averages ranked by UCLA as shown in *Table 4*. Concepts of spirituality and religion may be indistinguishable to many college students who participated in the study. Further, some questions on the instrument combined the two concepts in a phrase so that differentiation by the respondent would not be possible.

### *Students Comments*

From the total 680 completed and returned questionnaires, 391 students (57.5%) responded to Question 51 (the open-ended question from the instrument) that asked:

*“What is the most important experience(s) or idea(s) you intend to carry forward as a result of your higher education? (Please briefly explain)* Approximately 15% of students’ comments from the questionnaire were chance selected by this researcher to compare responses by key word illustrated in *Table 5*.

*Table 5: College Students Comments by Key Word*

Key Words	Religious Affiliated	Non-religious Affiliated	Technical
Spirituality	25%	65%*	45%
Religion	60%*	15%	15%
Expectations	10%	20%	35%*
Unrelated	5%	0%	5%

## Conclusion

Successful membership in today's global network requires citizens to possess affective traits such as tolerance, acceptance, and authenticity; behaviors often deemed passive or dispensable in competitive corporate environments. However, researchers argued "Colleges and universities are the only social institutions that can help educate a citizenry able to function at the levels of cognitive and affective complexity the problems require" (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 27).

While curricula at technical and career colleges typically center on professional skill development for placement in the competitive work force, this researcher examined the notion that all students share comparable spiritual attributes that impact feelings of *self* as well as the capacity for positive social interaction. Because technical college graduates typically enter the work force (and socially interact) in advance of their liberal arts counterparts, it seemed timely to establish if differences in spirituality, religion, and students' expectations relative to each population could be scientifically compared and validated.

Results indicated that significant differences existed within and among all three student populations with regard to spirituality, religion, and expectations. While students enrolled in the selected technical college scored the most extreme in each index compared with the religious affiliated and nonreligious affiliated colleges, these findings do not suggest that technical college students are not spiritual, nonreligious, or have no expectations from their college regarding spiritual development. In fact, technical college students scored greater than national averages on many variables examined in this study.

This researcher concluded that mounting numbers of college students consider themselves to be spiritual; however, it may be difficult to differentiate spirituality from religiosity with the method used in this study. Results from technical college respondents indicated higher levels of *tolerance* than student respondents at the religious affiliated and nonreligious affiliated colleges. Technical college students appeared to show a greater *acceptance of diversity* as well as *open-mindedness* toward people who claimed to be both moral and spiritual without having a connection to religion. In contrast, results showed that technical college students relied least on their college as a source for spiritual development; whereas, student respondents at the nonreligious affiliated college were statistically more convinced that resources for spiritual development at their college were offered.

More than 50% of technical college respondents expressed 'no opinion' when presented, *there are courses offered at my college that could help me realize what spirituality is all about*. Such a high percentage might be interpreted that technical college students are unaware of such courses, or they find no relevance in pursuing them while on a career track. Fewer student participants with the religious affiliated and nonreligious affiliated expressed 'no opinion', 6.3% and 32.3% respectively, (a near five to one ratio) in response to this question. Because colleges "reflect and perpetuate the

values and practices of the larger society in which they are embedded”, development of self and vocation must be viewed as an ensemble in order to achieve long-term success in today’s culturally rich and diverse social environment (Astin, 2004; Chickering et al., 2006, p. 3).

Comments provided indicated that students possess a wide range of expectations from their college experiences. As a whole, religious affiliated respondents viewed college as a means for advancing and sharing their faith; whereas, nonreligious affiliated respondents indicated their higher education has helped them to better accept diversity. Numbers of students attending the technical college indicated that higher education is helping them to meet career goals so as to better provide for their families.

Nonetheless, this researcher concluded that most students who responded had a clear understanding of the purpose for their college experience; to serve as a vehicle to help achieve various forms of personal enrichment. Once *self* is deepened, individuals can do more to improve plights of greater numbers of people. Perhaps social change is advancing more rapidly today than ever before; however, college students-future leaders need to possess strong feelings of *self* in addition to an understanding of societal diversity. Today’s colleges must recognize the importance of self improvement. Spiritual students cannot help or inspire others unless they are first comfortable inside their own skin.

The classroom is much larger than four walls. Both community and its colleges benefit when students engage in programs and initiatives where spirituality is nurtured and shared. Today’s college students necessitate academic environments that not only prepare them for careers, but for interaction with our culturally diverse society (Buendia & Morales, 2003; DiConti, 2004). Whether opportunities take on forms of courses or organizations, outlets where spiritually-actualized students can learn life skills, build self-esteem, or learn to work together as teams must be advanced.

“An individual’s spiritual intelligence is one of the four levels of self: the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual” (Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 591). Therefore, colleges should revisit programs (that may have been dropped because of funding deficits) and recreate environments where students can physically exercise and participate in sensitivity training classes such as yoga and meditation. Emphasis on nutrition should be advanced, and frequent health screens for all students and faculty should be made available free of charge.

### *Social Impact*

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood concepts today is that mounting numbers of college students claim to possess ‘spirituality’. While its premise is grounded in traditional family values, ethics, and authentic behavior, spiritual individuals may be caught in the wake of social pressure that focuses solely on financial prosperity or other forms of materialism (Astin, 1998; Lindholm, 2004). From conclusions developed, technical college administrators might realize that similarities do exist between its student

base and those of traditional liberal arts institutions across the state and nationwide. Results from this study may help to reshape curricula so that students enrolled in *like* venues everywhere may be reached, touched, and better prepared to cope with certain change.

### *Reflections*

The United States has the potential to cultivate and produce the greatest numbers of educated individuals than any country on the planet. Although the situation may be slowly improving, we seem to have fallen behind many countries in our capacity to cultivate team building, practice the art of collaboration, or fully appreciate authentic contributions made by individuals. Students learn from examples set in classrooms and carry these experiences into their own families and work place environments. Perhaps this aspect is the most important because our colleges are mirrors of the greater society and must reflect positive and more accepting ways to deal with differences (Reeley, 2006).

As for spirituality, history books teach us that the founding fathers separated church and state so the controlling religious establishment could not interfere with state affairs. While spirituality and religion are often viewed as distinct from one another, each share tenets that influence how we act and treat each other as human beings. The result, over time, has seemed to produce a mutation from the original concept the founding fathers likely envisioned. Our evolved and enlightened society has seemed to take a myopic view toward matters that increasing numbers of individuals believe may be at the heart of our humanity. Streams of consciousness once considered freedoms are today being challenged by a prevailing societal secularism.

Today, more than ever, we as a collective body must understand the importance of accepting each other as equal contributing members of the human race, regardless the color of our skin, our language, our ancestry, or how much money we make. These elements are superficial, unimportant, and divide our social order from the possibility of spiritual unity. Such a spiritual awakening could bring balance, compromise, and peace to our troubled society so that feelings of isolation might be vanquished and our similarities once again recognized and restored.

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