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Jignesh Patel April 12, 2010

Do Students Retain Their Religious Identity in College?

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Do Students Retain Their Religious Identity in College?

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New findings suggest college may not be the secularizing force it was once thought. In 1983, sociologist James Hunter declared students abandon religious beliefs and practice in college. However today, individuals who go to college are more likely to maintain their religious identity than individuals who do not. Moreover, studies indicate that not only are students religious in college, but they feel that college is the time to further their religious identity. However, one problem is professors don't necessarily satisfy student's desires of religious and spiritual discussion in the classroom.

Many factors, such as the increase in religious organizations, women and African Americans in college, provide reason for the religious vibrancy in college. While students many not take part in as many religious practices during college, their identity does not necessarily decrease. Students also face many advantages to being religious in college, while also mentioning some detriments.

This thesis focuses on students at Emory, but also provides evidence of how students across the United States are religious.

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"Damn it feels good to be a gangsta…damn it feels good to be a gangsta, a real gangsta…"

The song blasts at full volume from her black cell phone. She stretches her slender, brown arm out from under her hot pink bed sheets and shuts off the rap song. It's 8:00 a.m., and it's time for Shalini Ramachandran to wake up.

Half-asleep, she gets out of bed, which is half layered with clean clothes she hasn't folded yet. She walks across her cluttered room, maneuvering past scattered shoes, and passing some paintings of South Africa that decorate her walls. She opens her room door and stumbles a few yards to the bathroom to brush her teeth.

Her first class is still two hours away, but for Ramachandran, her day begins with morning prayers. After taking a warm shower and putting on a fresh pair of clothes, it's 8:30 a.m. and time for Ramachandran to start her regular routine.

She sweeps dirty clothes off her desk chair where she performs *pranayam* – a Hindu form of yoga. She runs back to the bathroom to wash her hands to maintain cleanliness and is ready to begin. She applies *vibhuti* – whitesh-gray holy ash – and *kumkum* – red powder – on her forehead. Then she sits down, takes a deep breath and repeats,

"Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhmmmmmmmmmmmm.
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhmmmmmmmmmmmm.
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhmmmmmmmmmmmm."

"Ohm" is the first sound of the universe, according to Hinduism, and a way to connect with God.

She repeats this nine times, and her mind begins to relax. She feels as if she has taken the "lucky potion" from Harry Potter. This helps "direct" her to God and prepares her to mediate and connect with Him.

Next, she performs *kapalbhati pranayam*, a form of yoga in which the practitioner exhales with force. *Brahmari pranayam* follows, where Ramachandran places her hands over eyes and thumbs on top of her ears. This helps her focus and remove negative energy within her. Finally, she ends with *sukha pranayam*, another form of breathing.

She then repeats the mantra her guru gave her:

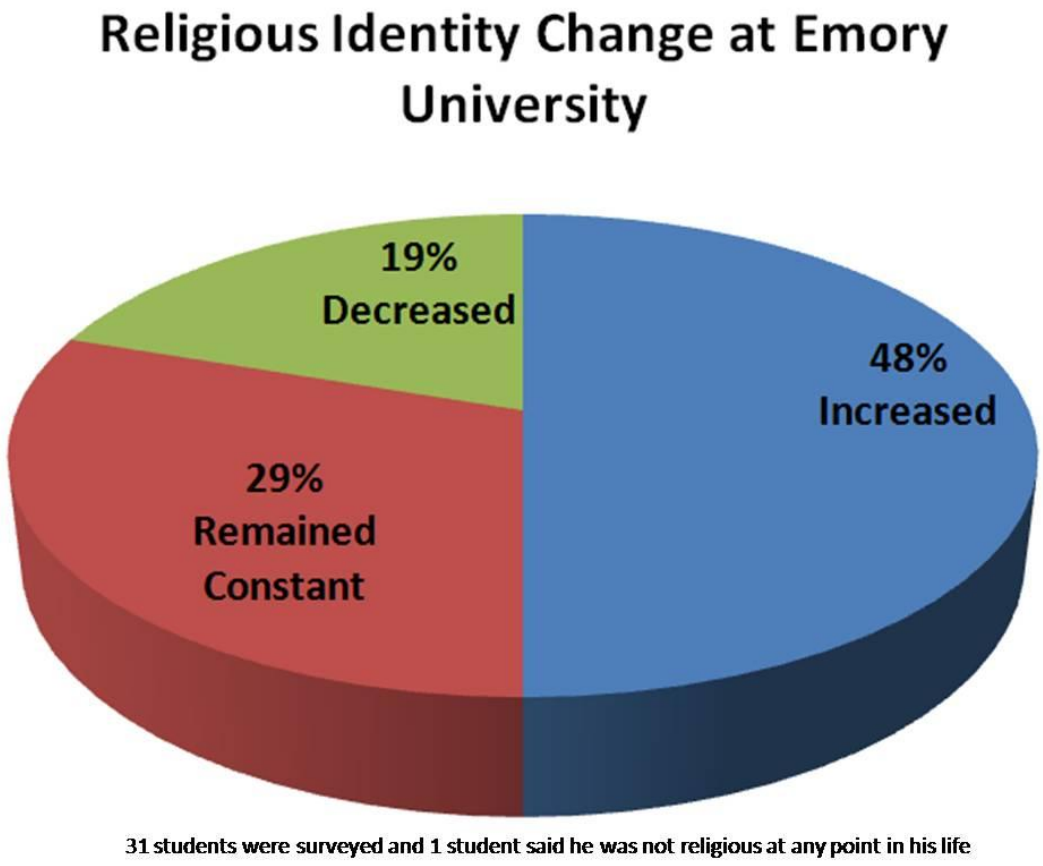
"Ohm, ayim, srim, hrim, Saraswati devyai namah" – the first four words are known as "seed letters" that vibrate her brain when she recites them. Ramachandran feels them every time she recites them. The final three words offer salutation to Goddess Saraswatiji, the symbol of knowledge, purity, peace, and wisdom, perfectly suitable to her student role.

She then continues with chanting the *Lalitha Sahasranama*, a thousand names of Mother Goddess, Lalitha. Forty-five minutes later, Ramachandran performs *sukha pranayam* again, recites three peace prayers and ends with reciting "Ohm" nine more times.

By this time, it's 9:45 a.m. After putting on her lime-green Sperry shoes, Ramachandran, a junior, grabs her red and black Ful backpack, opens the door of her dormitory room and heads over to her first class at Emory University. She feels fresh and energized for another day of school.

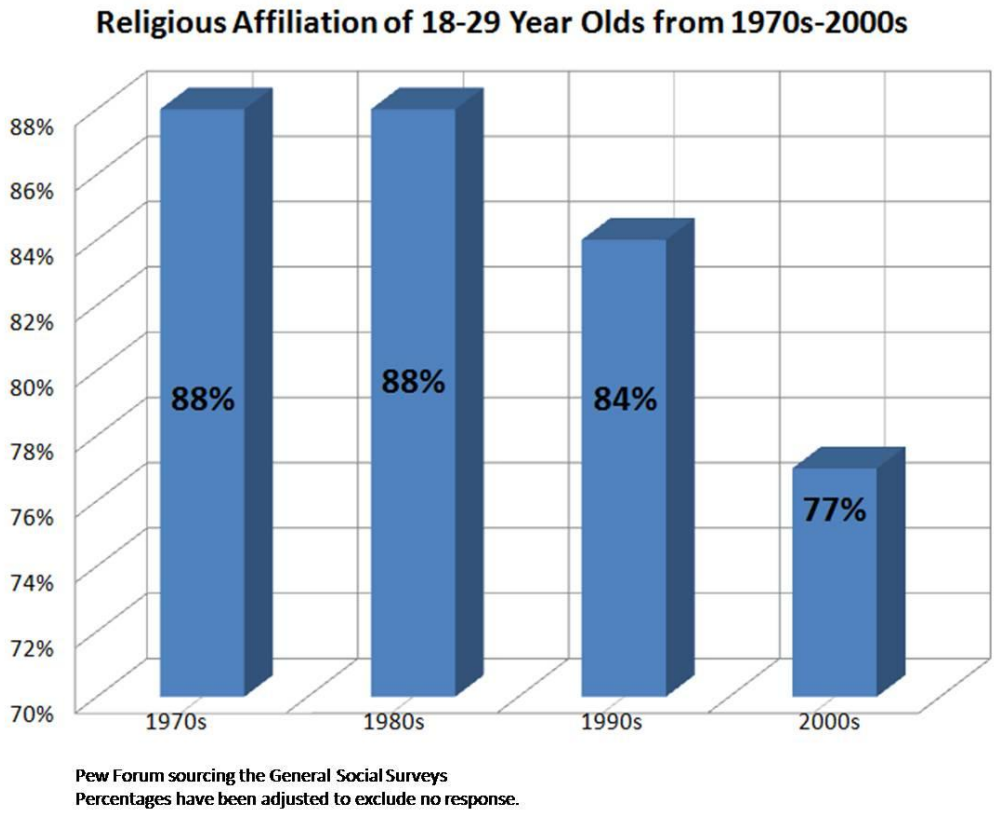
Ramachandran is just one of many students at Emory who start off their day with morning prayers or actively practice their faith in college.

At Emory, almost half of the 31 students surveyed or interviewed at length for this article said they have increased in their religious identity in college. Another 29 percent said their religious identity remained the same. Nineteen percent said their involvement in religion decreased, while one student said he was never religious at any point in his life.

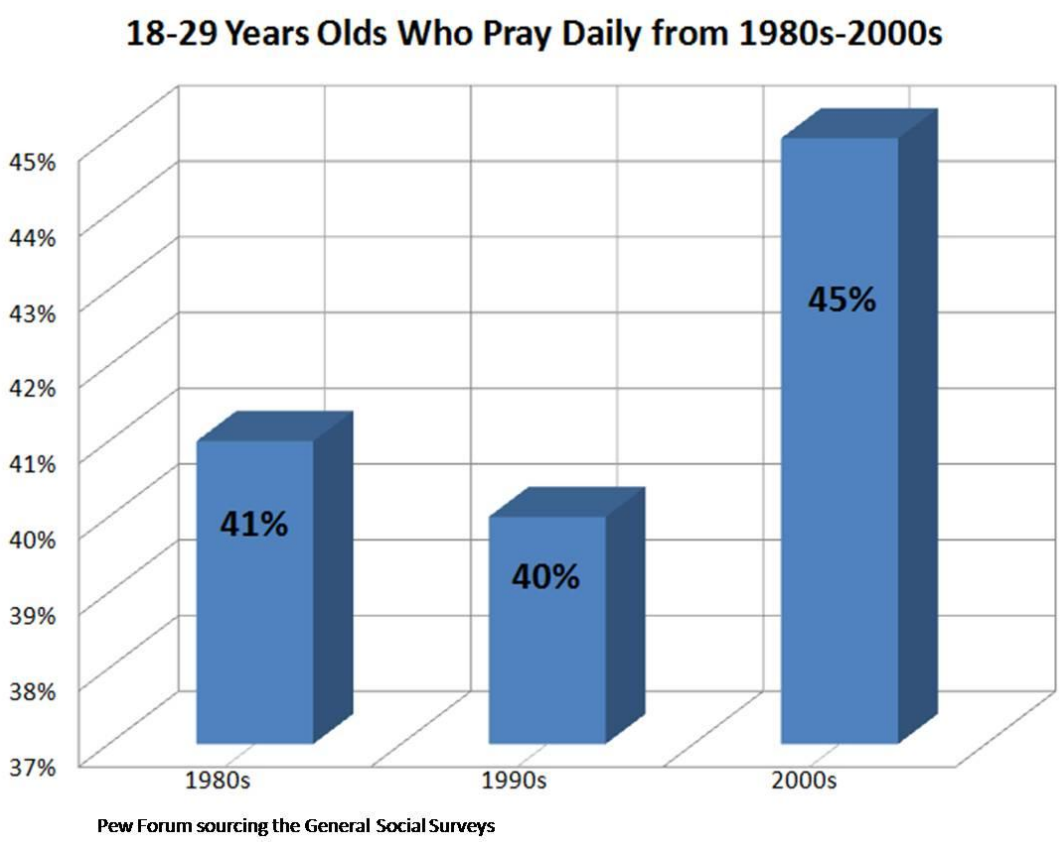


Nationally, figures correspond to the findings at Emory. Seven out of 10 college students consider religion essential in their lives, according to *The Chronicle Review*, a magazine that covers higher education. Harvard University researchers interviewed 1,200 students for this national poll in 2007.

A Pew Forum study of young adults ages 18-29 parallels the Harvard study. The 2010 survey shows continued strong religious ties even with a decrease in student religious affiliation. Seventy-seven percent of young adults in this decade said they affiliate with a religious faith. This number is a decline from 88 percent of young adults who claimed religious membership in the 1970s and 1980s and 84 percent in the previous decade. Nonetheless, the Pew findings show religion plays a role in the lives of more than three-quarters of young adults.



Furthermore, Pew found the number of student who pray daily rose in the last 20 years. Forty-five percent of young adults in this decade said they pray daily, compared to 41 percent of young adults in the 1980s and 40 percent in the previous decade. The number of young adults who say they pray less also dropped in the last two decades.



Students say college is the place to further develop their religiosity.

Fifty-one percent of students at secular schools said it was critical to develop religious understanding while in college, according to a survey conducted in 2006 by Barbara Walvoord of the University of Notre Dame. More than 12,000 students from secular and religious schools took part in the study.

New findings suggest college may not be the secularizing force it was once thought. In 1983, sociologist James Hunter declared students abandon religious beliefs and practice in college. “It is a well-established fact that education, even Christian education, secularizes,” reported Hunter, a professor of religion at the University of Virginia.

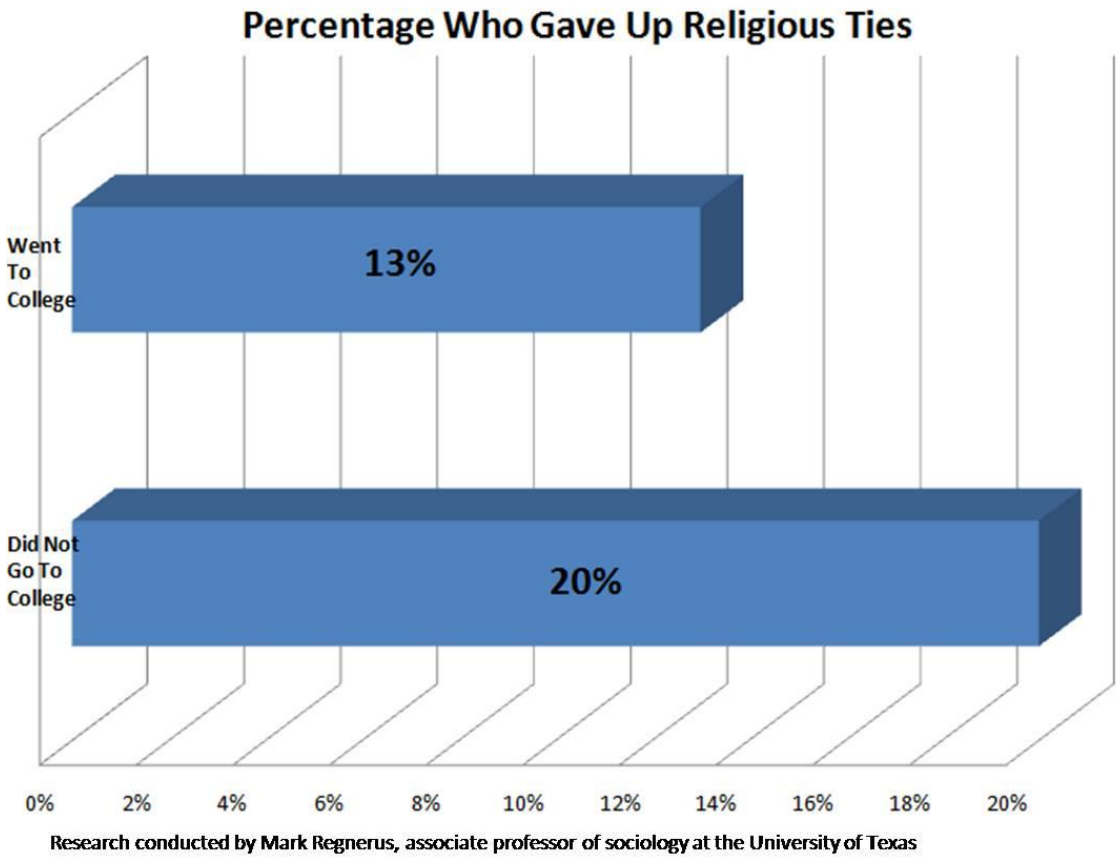
In 1977, Fred Sherrow and sociologist David Caplovitz concurred that education is "a breeding ground for apostasy." According to Caplovitz and Sherrow, "Apostasy, defined as a matter of self-identity, may result from either a 'loss of religious faith' or a 'rejection of a particular ascriptive community.'" They based their findings on a 1961 National Opinion Research Center survey of college graduates.

University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus, who studies religion in American teenagers, notes the previous studies are based on data from the 1960s and 1970s, a peak time for "sexual and countercultural revolutions on campus." In a 2007 report, Regnerus argues an update on college students and their religiosity is needed.

Emory sophomore Aurora Muhuza, who is non-denominational Christian majoring in biology, exemplifies Regernus' point. Her father, who is a pastor, and other family members and peers feared she would lose her religiosity while in college. They advised her to remain strong in her religious beliefs, especially because of her religious upbringing.

However, after spending her first few months at Emory, Muhuza feels such advice has been "absolutely unnecessary." At home, she went to church once a week. At Emory, she engages in a variety of religious activities beyond church attendance, such as youth group and Bible study.

College students tend to me more religious than those not in school, according to Regnerus. More than 25 percent of non-college adults decrease their religious involvement compared to 19 percent of young college adults. Furthermore, while 20 percent of non-college adults abandon their religion, only 13 percent of students attending a four-year college followed the same path.



Regnerus rejects the idea that students lose their religion because of college. "Higher education is *not* the enemy of religiosity," Regnerus says.

Instead, college is what many scholars call a diversification process. Students at Emory agree. Diversification means students learn about other religious faiths, and in turn, incorporate that knowledge to strengthen beliefs in their own religious traditions.

"College is where you get to look at others' ideas and concepts and go back and question yours if you are not concrete in your foundations," says Maulik Patel, a senior majoring in biology at Emory. "You ask yourself, 'How does this compare with what I have?' and you search for the answer until you find it. This intensifies your religion more, and you get to understand your faith better."

Muhuza has met "so many cool people with different backgrounds" as well. She has attended Jewish events at Emory, and her best friend is Muslim.

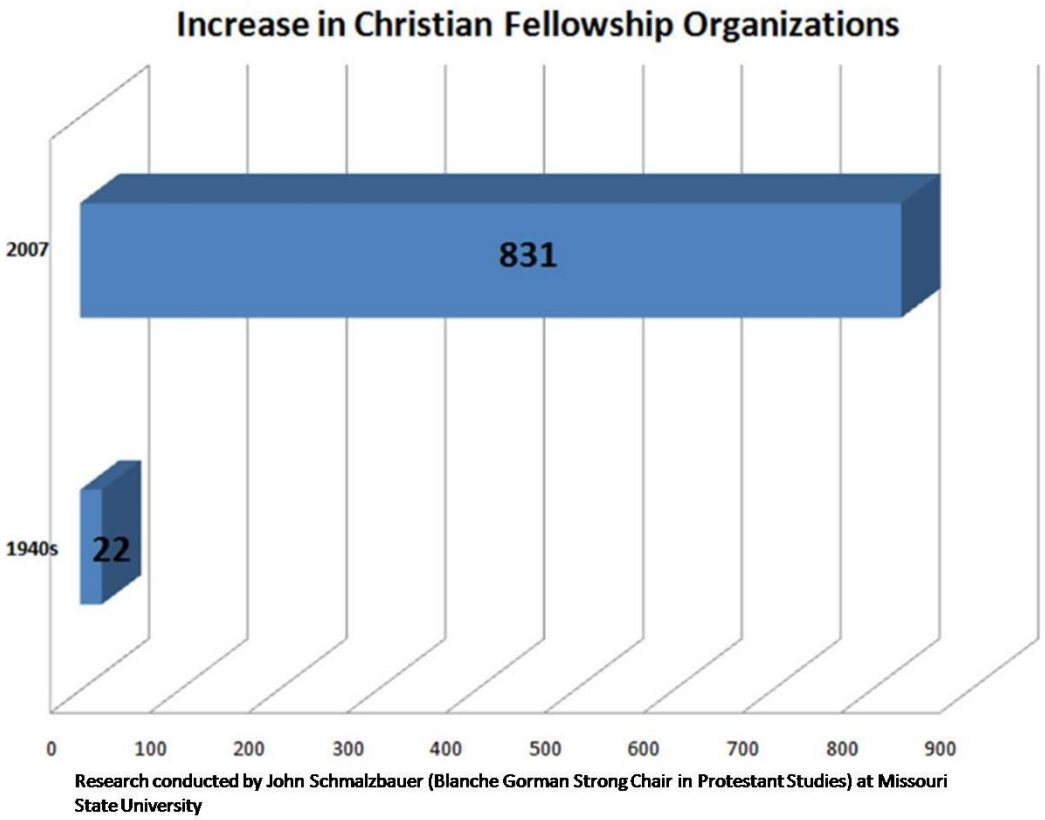
Diana Holden, a 2009 journalism and anthropology graduate of Emory from Bloomington, Ind., says coming to college was her first encounter with followers of other faiths.

"Growing up in a small town, a lot of people had the same views, so coming to college has allowed me to become knowledgeable about others and ask myself questions about my religion and answer them," Holden says.

"College showed me why I am what I am or why not something else," says Heena Jiwani, a junior majoring in religious studies at Emory. "That is what college is all about."

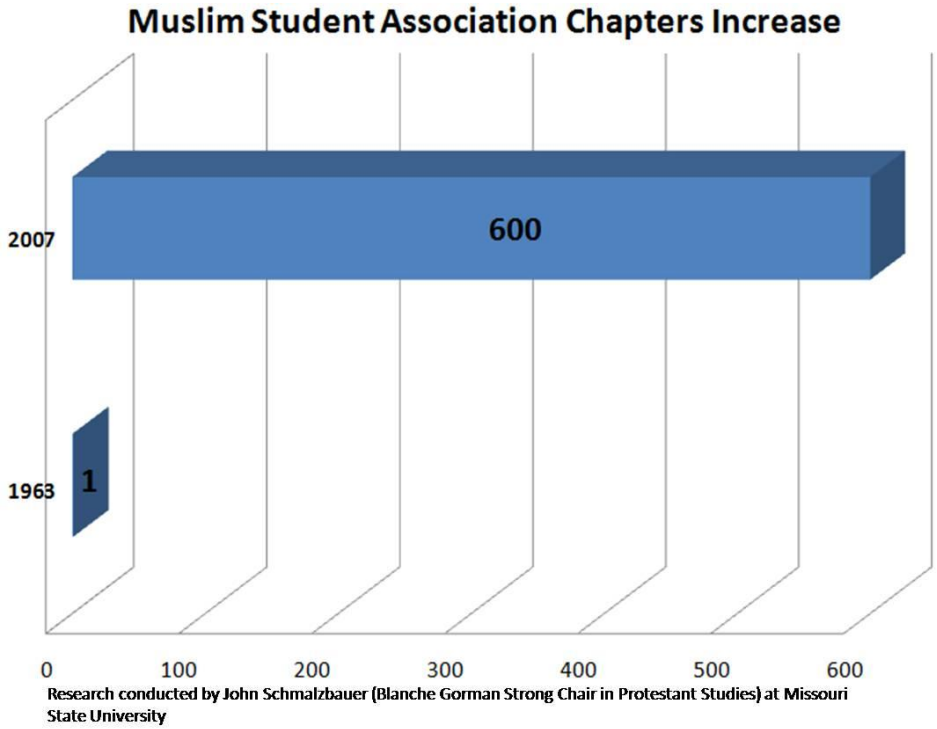
Jiwani, an Ismaili Muslim, thought of herself as different from mainstream Muslims. But after attending Muslim Student Association (MSA) events and discussions, she realizes they are not too different. She also attends Hindu events, which allow her to see the similarities between Hinduism and Islam. This in turn has strengthened her own faith.

Diversification results from the increase in religiously-affiliated organizations on the college landscape. John Schmalzbauer, a religion professor at Missouri State University, found student religious organizations have proliferated over the years. InterVarsity chapters, which are Christian organizations, jumped from 22 in the 1940s to 831 in 2007. These Christian fellowship organizations service 32,000 students on 564 college campuses. Campus Crusade for Christ involves more than 55,272 students on 1,300 campuses. Its budget soared to $450 million.



A 2003 study found that three-fourths of the 1,351 Catholic campus ministries are located at non-Catholic universities in the United States, according to Schmalzbauer. These ministries reach a potential audience of 5.3 million Catholic students. Thirty-four percent of the 400,000 Jewish students in the United States have been involved in one of the 251 Hillel Centers, Foundations, and Jewish American Organizations in North America.

From its first chapter in 1963, MSA now has 600 chapters in North America, extending a haven to the approximate 75,000 Muslim students in the United States, Schmalzbauer reports. With less Hindu students in America, seventy chapters of Hindu Students Councils exist today.



These organizations also help students further their beliefs through discussions and major religious events in the surrounding community. Emory recently hired a rabbi last year to help satisfy student demand.

Ramachandran is more involved in her faith in college through her involvement with Hindu Students Association, where she served as the discussion chair for two years and was the freshman liaison. As discussion chair, she was responsible for organizing and leading frequently discussions on Hindu scriptures and important concepts, such as *ahimsa*, the law of non-violence.

The same is true for Madiha Raees, a 2009 neuroscience and behavioral biology graduate of Emory. “MSA has been really instrumental in maintaining my faith,” Raees says. “MSA has a lot of resources, so we have Friday prayers at the DUC [a building at Emory]. The community is strong and seeing each other regularly has been important for me.”

For religious studies senior Jiwani, going to MSA events and seeing everyone pray, even though the prayers she says are different for Ismailis, remind her is it time for her own devotions. Seeing others pray has allowed her to realize she too can be religious on campus.

For other students, such as senior Neelaj Shah, a native of Louisiana, Emory provided his first opportunity to interact with a sizable Hindu community.

"My hometown has a rather small population that shares my religion," Shah says. "By contrast, Atlanta and Emory have a much larger population that shares my religion. With the increase in population, I'm able to share my views and ideals more openly."

Shah, similar to Ramachandran, offers daily morning prayers as well. After showering, he reserves 15 minutes to sing mantras and prayers, meditate, and think about life in general. Throughout the day, he listens to *bhajans*, melodious Hindu hymns. He prays before he goes to sleep and first thing after waking up. Shah's motto is "start the day with God's name and end the day with God's name."

Following religious practices away from the family setting allows students to be more responsible for their religion. At home, parents are usually a major driving force when it comes to religion. At college, that motivation has to come from the student.

"Away from parents, the responsibility for doing religion lies on me, making it a more personal commitment," Raees says. "I know I should pray, so I do it."

Alok Tripathi, a senior, majoring in biology at Emory, agrees.

"Back at home, you just do everything that the family is doing. You go with the flow," Tripathi says. "But coming to Emory, living on your own, you make your own

decisions, and seeing how I have maintained my religious identity at Emory shows me my religious identity is a part of who I am."

Even though Emory is a big research institute, it has not compromised its religious openness. Its Methodist affiliation and other factors help students maintain or increase their religious identity.

"Emory is a United Methodist affiliated school but non-sectarian, so rooted in Methodism and Christianity but in a broad way," says the Reverend Susan Henry-Crowe, dean of the chapel and religious life at Emory, in an interview. "This background keeps the ground fertile for a lot of different religions."

The university's Methodist ties forced it to preserve the "ancient American higher education tradition that there is something about the moral and spiritual conversation that is part of the liberal arts," Bobbi Patterson, professor of religion at Emory, says in an interview.

And despite bishops being on the board and Emory receiving a small amount of financial assistance from the Methodist Church, students of other faiths do not feel disturbed or marginalized.

Raees remembers feeling unease as a Muslim in America right after September 11. At Emory, though, she felt safe.

"Emory is one of the safest places to show your religion," Raees says. "Emory prides itself on the safe space thing."

"Emory is such a diverse campus," Jiwani continues. "People are genuinely interested. I wish I had a sign to show others that I am Ismaili."

These signs would be welcome in the South and in a private institution like Emory.

“At Emory, you can be a very intense anything,” says Laurie Patton, professor of religion at Emory, in an interview. “You don’t have to hide it, but you also have to acknowledge the plurality. In the South, there is an intensity of religious feeling that translates.”

“The intensity of the pursuit matters,” she continues, “as Atlanta becomes more religious and culturally plural, that intensity continues across religious boundaries.”

“Being in Atlanta and the South, most do not have an antipathy for religion, so the culture is one that is conducive for exploration and practice and thinking about religious things,” Henry-Crowe adds.

Patterson says Emory’s background pressures the administration to make sure it handles religious matters on campus with care.

“As a private institution, we have a lot more freedom and a lot more pressure to do that well and do that within healthy boundaries,” Patterson says. “State schools can get off the hook by saying they can’t do the religion thing when something major happens, but here, we take it as an opportunity.”

In fact, Emory takes the first opportunity it gets to ensure students understand this message. At freshman convocation, all the religious organizations at Emory say a religious prayer, along with a civic prayer at the end. During this time, President James Wagner of Emory University is present.

"It gives people at Emory the freedom to be authentic in their religion," says Gary Hauk, vice president and deputy to the president of Emory, in an interview. Hauk says that reflects President Wagner's views.

"Practicing your religious tradition does not have to be a private matter. It is encouraged," Henry-Crowe says.

Patterson adds the ceremony tells students to "get ready to open up" because Emory is a place about engaging in intellectual activity and respecting diverse traditions.

Students receive this message loud and clear.

"It's welcoming. It's not hostile and whatever you believe is okay by me," biology sophomore Muhuza says.

"It sends a message that Emory is very open and willing to different points of view, and Emory is a very diverse place," Holden, the anthropology graduate, says.

"Right off the bat, Emory is making sure religion will be an option and definitely a part of college life," adds Jeffrey Schram, a 2009 psychology graduate of Emory.

This explains, says Henry-Crowe, why 13,700 students attended a religious event on campus during the first two months in 2008. While some of these events included faculty and friends, Henry-Crowe says 95 percent were students. Some students also attended more than one event.

Furthermore, out of the 6,980 undergraduate students at Emory, the Student Government Association reports at least 1,286 are either members or actively involved in a religious organization at Emory. However, many more students participate. For example, approximately 145 students per week are active in Emory Christian Fellowship,

Asian Christian Fellowship, and Brothers and Sisters of Christ. However, more than 250 students attend their special events.

Moreover, women and African Americans are greatly more religious than Anglo Americans and men, Darren Sherkat, Southern Illinois University sociologist, says. In the last few decades, the number of women and African Americans attending colleges has increased substantially. Some universities have more women than men, reports Sherkat.

At Emory, from Fall 1984 to 2008, the number of women increased 77 percent, according to Emory's Registrar's Office. During that same time, there was a 200 percent increase of African Americans.

Looking at Emory's history can help explain the religious fervor seen on its campus. Hauk is also the author of *A Legacy of Heart and Mind: Emory Since 1836*, Emory's most recent history. He also co-edited the upcoming collection of essays on Emory's history titled, *Where Courageous Inquiry Leads*.

Throughout the 19th century, when Emory was a small Methodist college in Oxford, Ga., Hauk says "religious practice was emphasized and religious instruction was very much a part of the curriculum, so there were Bible studies and study of Christian evidences." That, however, changed when Emory moved to Atlanta and became a more modern university, he says.

Through the 1920s and into the 1930s, religious practice at Emory remained strong.

"What is now the Office of Religious Life, the Dean of the Chapel, and the inter-religious council, in the 19-teens and 1920s was actually run by the YMCA, so there was a YMCA office on campus with very much an emphasis on Christian chapel, Christian

Bible study, Christian expression," Hauk says. "It was very active so there were a lot of students participating in that."

Revival services were part of campus life in the 1920s, and some of the faculty members from the theology school preached there, Hauk adds.

"In an earlier day, when all of society was different, there was a freedom and expectation that religious life would be a part of the life of students and others on campus," Hauk continues.

That culture continued in the 1950s, according to Hauk, because students were expected to attend chapel. "It was not a religious chapel – more on moral instruction and uplift – but once a week, students were expected to go to Glenn," he adds.

However, in the 1960s, chapel service was discontinued and society in general moved toward secularization, Hauk says. Nonetheless, there was a lot of controversy at Emory in the 1960s when Tom Altizer, professor at the Candler School of Theology at Emory, published a couple of books in the "God is Dead" movement. Some alumni and trustees found this offensive and disagreed, Hauk adds.

In the 1970s, Emory began to emerge as what it is today, Hauk says. Jim Laney, president of Emory from 1978-1993, spearheaded an expansion of religious diversity on campus.

"One of the things he did," Hauk says, "was to elevate the sense that the university is a place where the conversation about morals, values, about the deepest well-springs of our motivations and aspirations should be freely talked about." This, according to Hauk, pervaded the university in profound ways and allowed students to freely and openly express their views.

Emory's Inter-Religious Council (IRC) has played a central role in fostering religious openness on campus. This council consists of one representative from each of the religious organizations on campus.

The mission statement for this organization reads, "The mission of the Emory University Inter-Religious Council is to foster inter-religious conversation and create a safe space for affirming one's own tradition while understanding the religious practices and beliefs of others."

The IRC organizes weekly discussions on any religion of interest to students. Café Unity, another sponsored event, brings students of different faiths together. At the monthly Café Unity, students and faculty members share parts of their religions with others. They read poems, chant, and pray.

For psychology graduate Schram, his growth in Judaism came primarily through this inter-faith work.

"Being a part of the Inter-Religious Council and the discussions, preparing them, and talking about religion once a week reminded me to think of Judaism and to keep questioning it," Schram says.

The same holds for Ramachandran. Prior to coming to Emory, she wanted to learn about other faiths, but could not find others who were interested. On campus, she found similar seekers via the IRC.

This type of discussion is an example of what Patterson, the religion professor at Emory, believes adds an important component to the college process.

"It is about intellectual clarity in the American higher education tradition," Patterson says. "It is not just about being in the South."

"Great schools have always understood spirituality as core," she adds. "It is about intellectual growth compared to academic growth. An intellectual person is asking questions about religion."

However, one problem is many professors are either uncomfortable with student questions about religion or are ill-equipped to answer them.

"Professors are rewarded not in the classroom for being great teachers, but more for their research," Regnerus, the University of Texas sociologist, says in an interview. "So they become less intellectual so to speak and more about being specialists. Those intellectuals are the ones that talk more about religion."

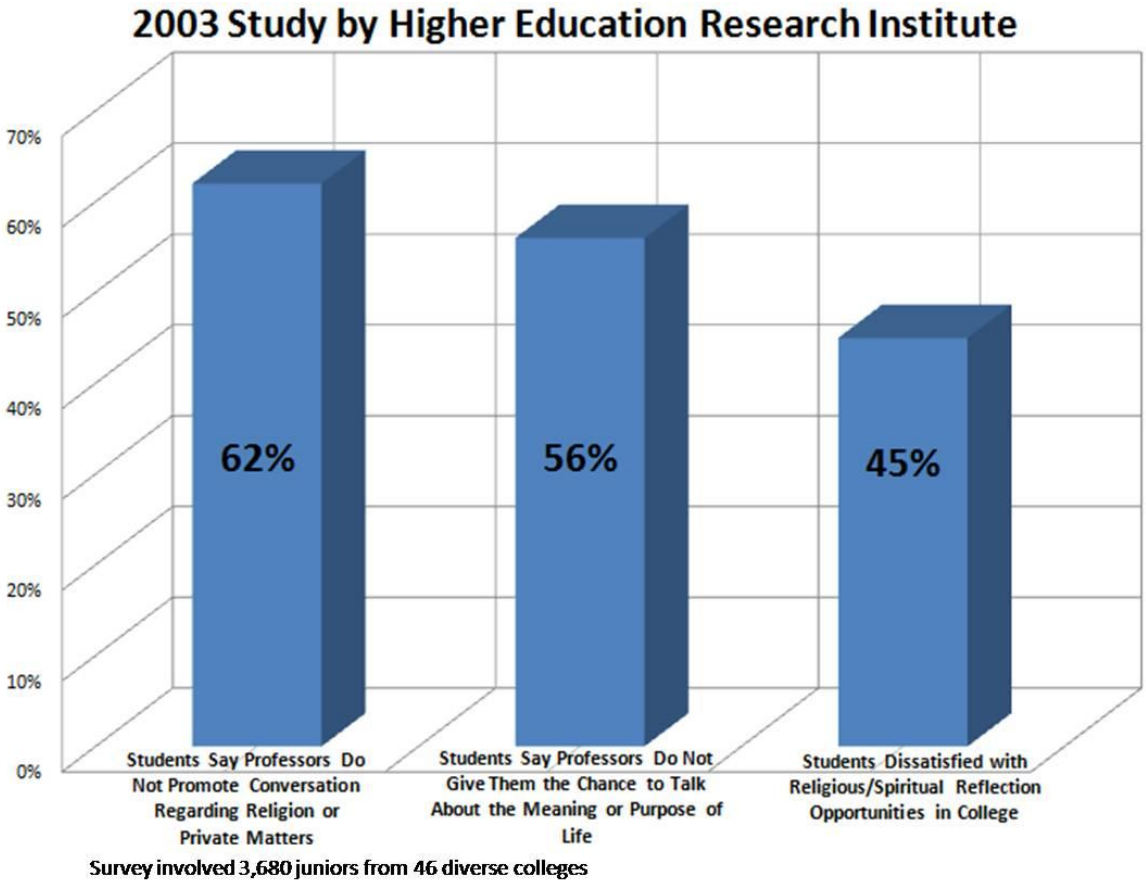
He adds professors are paid for their biology or chemistry. Religious questions don't get addressed. Instead, they are discussed in dormitories and in the cafeterias.

"Religion today is not under fire," Regnerus continues. "College education is not based around liberal arts ideas. When it is, then there is more discussion on faiths. Today, the focus is on grants, books, and research."

In an interview, Arthur Zajonc, professor of physics at Amherst who teaches on science, religion and spirituality, says, "Students have an interest of religious and spiritual questions but are not able to discuss them on campus. But they do try to find it outside the campus and with clergy."

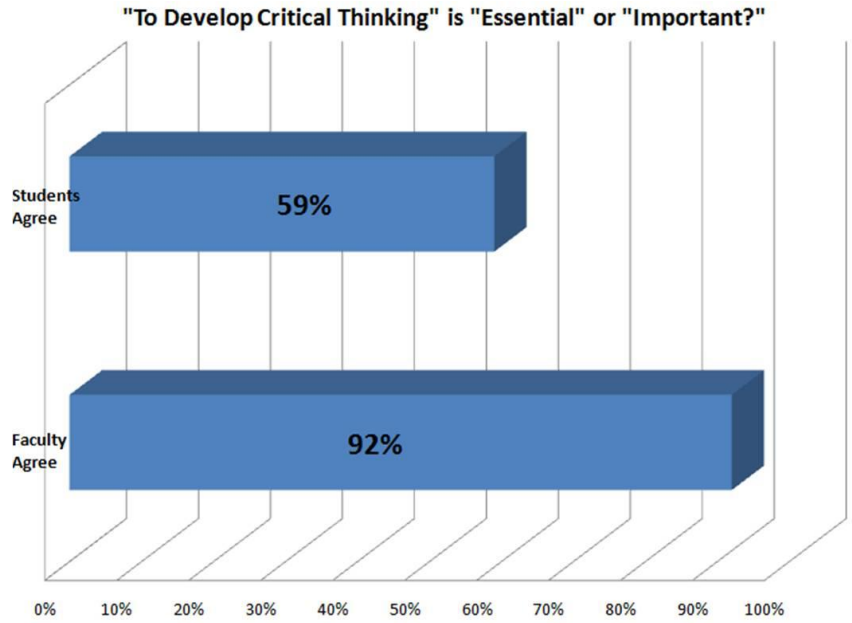
Students are unhappy about this. Forty-five percent are dissatisfied with religious/spiritual reflection opportunities in college; 62 percent of students say professors do not promote conversation regarding religion or private matters; and 56 percent say that professors do not give them the chance to talk about the meaning or purpose of life, according to a survey conducted in 2003 by the Higher Education

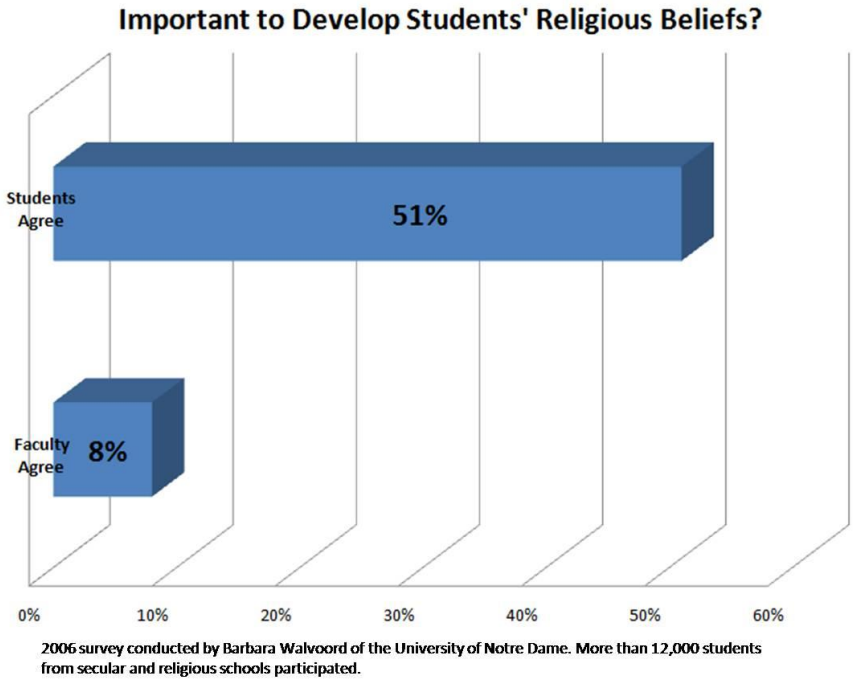
Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA that involved 3,680 juniors from 46 diverse colleges in the United States.



The disparity between what students want and what professors are providing is also evident through the Walvoord study. This demonstrates the "great divide" between students and professors, according to the SSRC in an article entitled, "Religion in the College Curriculum."

Ninety-two percent of faculty surveyed at secular colleges felt the goal to develop critical thinking was significant or vital. However, only 59 percent of students agreed. In contrast, while 51 percent of students felt it was critical to develop students' religious understanding, only eight percent of faculty felt the same way.





As a result, W. Robert Connor, president of the Teagle Foundation, which provides financial and intellectual support for liberal education, decided to take action. He realized, through surveys conducted by his foundation and from other research, that students yearn for opportunities to think about religious and spiritual questions and want

to explore them in guided ways. Some of these questions deal with suffering, death, and values.

To help reduce this gap, Connor welcomed colleges to create plans of how to address religious and spiritual questions on campus and to submit them to the Teagle Foundation for funding and other support. The foundation received more than 60 proposals.

Emory professors also decided to foster more religious exchange on campus. To help educate themselves on religion, professors at Emory held faculty discussions on the relationship between science and religion. These discussions, which began in 1999 and continued for three to four years, attracted close to 100 professors, says P. Venugopala Rao, professor in physics and a participant. Thanks to these discussions and the help of the John Templeton Foundation, Emory now offers new religion courses to its students, such as "Science and Religion" and "Philosophy and Spirituality," Rao adds.

Nonetheless, Connor says many faculty hesitate to address religion and spirituality in the classroom because students may not agree with a professor's views or manner of discussion. Faculty fear student responses that could lead to negative classroom evaluations and impact tenure and salary decisions.

However, professors do not have to answer every religious question posed to them, Connor says. "Rather, their role is just to help students think about them," he explains.

A professor at a university known for its religiously conservative methods takes a different approach, Connor says. At the beginning of each course, the professor clearly outlines his plan for the semester, the reason for it, and the benefits of having one's

beliefs challenged by opposing viewpoints. While some students drop his course, others respond positively. The professor reduces the possibility of placing his career at risk, Connor says.

A lack of religious engagement in the classroom could be a reason why more students are maintaining their religious faith in college.

According to Regnerus, the University of Texas sociologist, campuses had more philosophers and more thinking about religion in the 1960s. Today, there are more engineers and other hard sciences. This shift discourages classroom discussion on faith, he says.

At the same time, according to an interview with Elaine Ecklund, a sociologist researching spirituality and religion among scientists, 50 percent of scientists at the most elite schools either associate with a religious organization or are attracted to spirituality. This was a statistic Ecklund herself found striking. If students realize the religiosity of their professors, this could lead to further religious development of their own.

Still, Ecklund, a professor at the University of Buffalo, notes scientists feel pressure from administration and colleagues to reject religion. She is doing more research into this, but knows pressure can influence the way classes are taught.

“Sometimes faculty do things in classrooms that make students feel as if it is less or more okay to be religious,” Ecklund says. This depends on the culture created in the classroom and faculty response to religious matters.

But even when professors challenge students on religion, biology senior Patel, takes that challenge to research more deeply into what he believes.

"A lot of the times I find views conflict with professors, but that helped because I go back and study my own views and solidify them further within myself," Patel says. "When I find views that conflict, I go back to scriptures and other sources."

Patel recalls one instance learning about the Aryan Invasion theory. Researching into it, Patel found information that supported his religious views on this matter but contradicted what he learned in the classroom. Patel's professor was surprised at learning what Patel found, since she was not aware of this other information.

Patel also remembers a class discussion on the number of gurus in India and how they cannot be trusted. Patel disagreed and presented what he learned at temple in using logic to find the ideal guru.

Nonetheless, other students may participate in religious practices less often in college. For example, there might not be time to go to church because a class conflicts or time to pray in the morning during exam week. This may be why, according to the HERI study, only 9 percent of students reported that their religiosity increases a lot after beginning college.

Ramachandran, for example, tries to follow her morning routine every day, but usually succeeds five days of the week. During exam week, her meditation might be cut down to 15-20 minutes.

The same is true for Aman Ali, a neuroscience and behavioral biology senior at Emory.

"There are things in college that prevent you from following your religious ways, maybe a lab or a meeting during the time of prayer or going to *Jamat Khana* [the place of worship for Ismaili Muslims]," Ali says.

"When this happened to me, I realized I might not be able to maintain the timings always, so when the right time comes, I say a smaller prayer and then say the full one afterwards," Ali continues. "It's your personal decision, and this decision has made me more responsible."

However, for other students, even if there is nothing conflicting, they may decide not to go. According to Regnerus, the low point of weekly or more frequent church attendance is at the age of 22. This is based on 30 years of data from the General Social Survey. This does not necessarily mean, though, that students believe less or abandon their faith.

"People don't want to seem hyper-religious, goody two shoes," Regnerus says. "College is for having fun, and you associate religion with not having fun, so who wants to seem over-religious."

"The reason kids may lose their religiosity is not because they don't believe but because behaviors in college are related to not being religion-friendly, such as drinking and sex," Regnerus continues.

Churches recognize and accept this because they know marriage will bring people back. "So they are not losing their identity; just bagging their practice for several years," Regnerus concludes.

However, Patterson, the religion professor at Emory, says there is more to it than just bagging one's religious practices while in college.

"There is a kind of consciousness among more students today of their religious heritage and tradition," Patterson says. "So even if they put it aside, in that negotiation,

they don't fully put it aside, they are aware. The negation is pretty conscious, and that consciousness helps them form more informed decisions."

Ali, Jiwani, and Holden fit this description.

At home, religious studies senior Jiwani would go to *Jamat Khana* every day. However, at Emory, sometimes she can't go for weeks. While she does feel different, not going to *Jamat Khana* makes her reflect more. That helps strengthen her beliefs.

Anthropology graduate Holden, on the other hand, could not find a religious niche. She practices less but says her religious identity is uncompromised.

"I'm still as Christian as I've ever been," Holden says. "Once I leave college, I will still definitely be Christian."

Regnerus believes students who enter college with doubts are the ones most likely to lose their religion in college.

"Some people say 'I went to college and lost my faith.' Generally speaking, they were at risk of that before they got to college," Regnerus says. "The number of people who try hard not to lose their faith and still do in college, you won't see it."

"I don't see them [universities] making profound changes to religious identity or converting people to a completely secular or atheist position. I think that takes place quite seldom," Zajonc, the Amherst professor who teaches on science, religion, and spirituality, concurs.

Students may practice less in college but not stop altogether.

Neuroscience and behavioral biology senior Ali may not be able to go to formal services because of class, but he still prays three times a day. These prayers last five minutes.

Biology sophomore Muhuza does prayer and scriptural reading for 20-30 minutes every day, especially because of the Bible study group at Emory. She also prays before meals and listens to religious music as well.

Pratik Oswal, a senior at Emory who is an international Jain student, prays two times a day. He recites a Sanskrit *shloka* – verse – after he wakes up in the morning. He also would like to fast more often as a way to develop self-discipline but finds the demands of school interfere. He fasted once during an eight-day Jain festival and went without food and water for 36 hours.

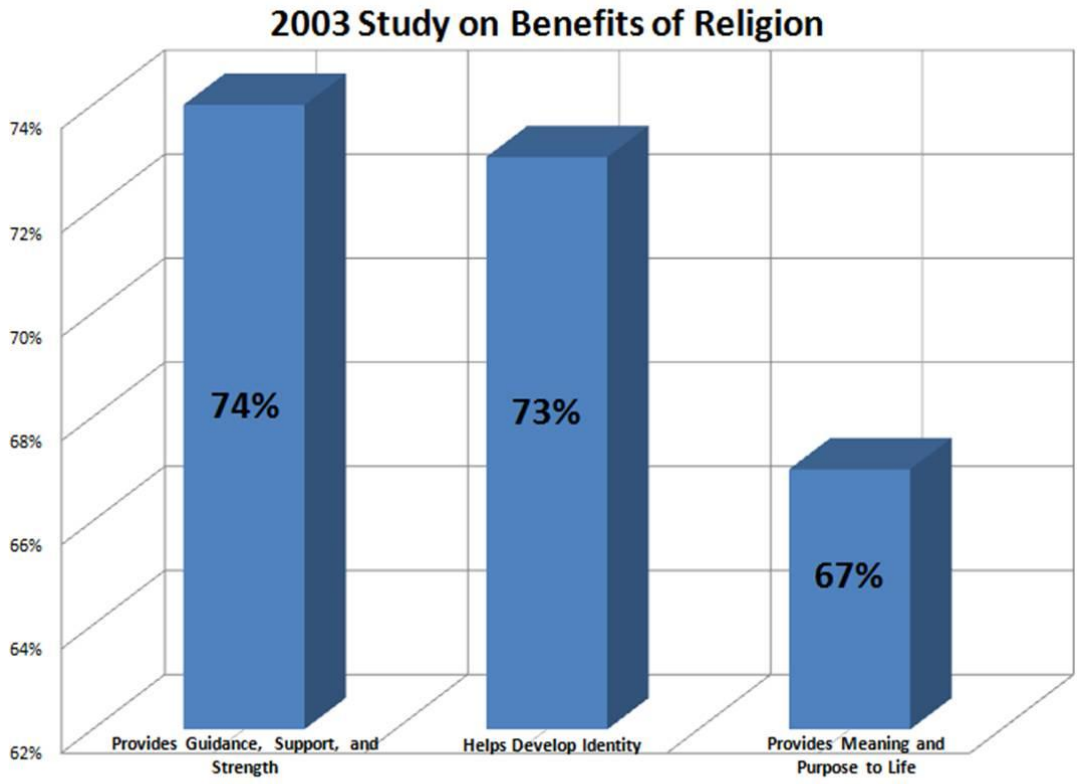
Observing religious practice in college carries other benefits, studies show. Students involved in weekly religious rituals were likely to study longer and report higher grade-point averages, according to a study by Margarita Mooney, a demographic research fellow in the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. They also were happier in college. This study involved approximately 4,000 students from 28 highly selective universities.

Another study conducted by George D. Kuh, a professor of higher education at Indiana University in Bloomington, found that worship, meditation, and prayer do not hurt student academics. This study survey of 150,000 students from 461 four-year colleges studied the impact of religious and spiritual practices on college learning.

Other studies support these conclusions.

African-American students say prayer, Bible reading, church services, and mediation are essential to dealing with stress, according to the SSRC on the Religious Engagement Among American Undergraduates. This may be true for more than just African-Americans.

Seventy-four percent of students said their religious/spiritual beliefs provided them with guidance, support, and strength; 73 percent said it helped them develop their identity; and 67 percent said it gave them meaning and purpose to their life, according to the study conducted by the HERI. Emory students say the findings parallel their experiences.



Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA and involved 3,680 juniors from 46 diverse colleges

"Knowing there is someone up there watching over you helps you get through tough times, like a test," psychology graduate Schram says. "These thoughts definitely helped me cope with stress and knowing how my grandparents went through the Holocaust helps keep things in perspective for me."

"At Oxford, I got a horrible grade on an organic test, and I was in tears since my career was on the line," biology senior Patel adds. "The only place I got peace was at the *mandir* [Hindu place of worship], so religion has been a support factor."

Religion connects Ramachandran to family. "It's something that gives you that extra hope or courage in the face of anything; the thing you fall back on, so it has definitely helped."

Jeanne Delgado, a sophomore at Emory, concurs with Ramachandran.

"When I am in God's presence, I feel like I am with my family back at home. It's a great comforting power," Delgado says. "Religion relieves my anxieties because I know that everything happens for a reason and God has something bigger and better waiting for me."

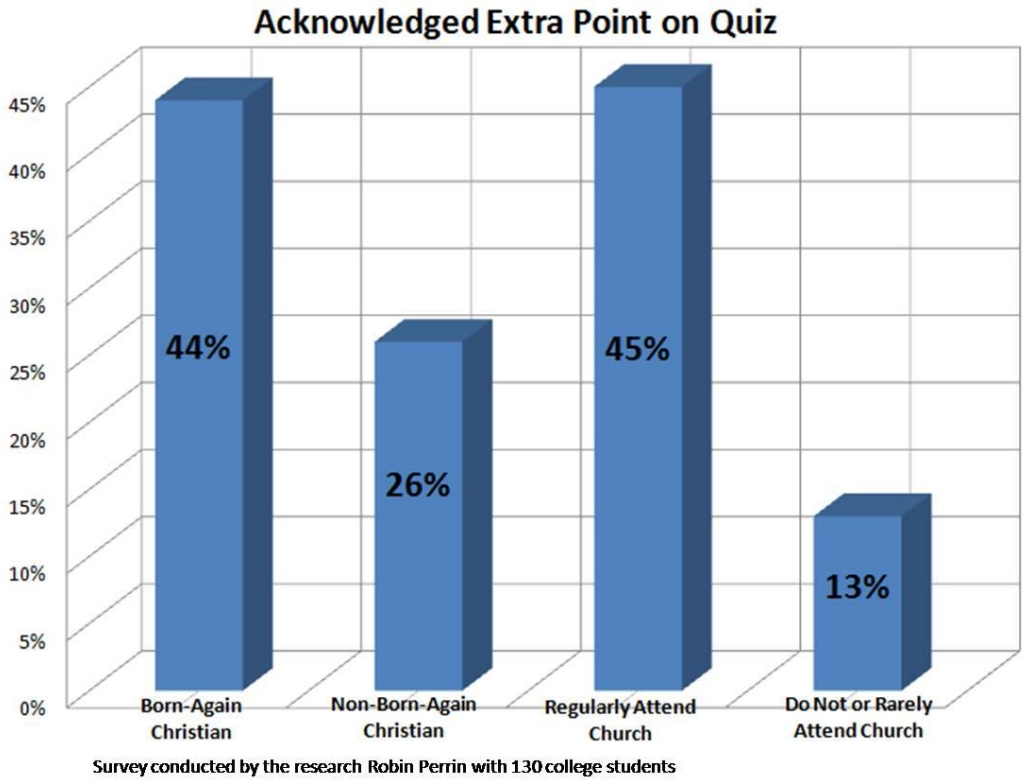
This "power" has been vital for biology senior Tripathi as well.

"Religion is something comforting when you may find yourself lonely in college or questioning the world of what is going on," Tripathi says.

Regnerus, the University of Texas sociologist, says religion assists students with decisions on sexuality. Stress has a variety of causes, but those who are virgins or have one sexual partner are the happiest. Religious students also are less prone to drink, use drugs, and party, he says.

Religion helps keep students honest. Researcher Robin Perrin conducted a test with 130 college students that presented each an opportunity to be dishonest. Perrin had a teacher's assistant return a quiz to the class with one extra point added to every grade. He asked if any corrections were needed.

While 44 percent of "born-again Christians" acknowledged they received an extra point, only 26 percent of students who were not born-again did. Only 13 percent of those who do not or rarely attend religious services acknowledged the extra point compared to 45 percent of students who regularly attend.



Religious studies senior Jiwani agrees religious beliefs guide students.

"Subconsciously, religion does help. Regardless of what religion you are, each promotes doing good things and studying hard," Jiwani says. "When you have a test, and you might think of cheating, you realize you should not maybe because of your religion or your parents' upbringing."

"In our religion, we are taught that studying is worship," neuroscience and behavioral biology graduate Raees continues. "So being religious and studying are the same. I never felt that I had to prioritize either of the two; they just came together."

"The character our guru asks us to have has made me a better student," Patel adds. "Academics and religion don't have to be separate; you can do your homework at *mandir* or think about religious thoughts while walking from class to class."

These findings indicate that students are not anti-intellectual. Scholars say religion and intellectual capacity are connected.

Zajonc, the Amherst professor who teaches on science, religion, and spirituality, says that there have been equally brilliant individuals on both sides – those who are religious and those who are not. Religion does not necessarily discourage intellectual development.

Emory students agree. While students may regard religion as a detriment to critical thinking, others claim it fosters a richer intellectual life.

"They can live in harmony," neuroscience and behavioral biology senior Ali says. "You want to question faith so you can be stronger in that faith, so you can explain to yourself why something is the way it is."

Biology sophomore Muhuza, who has met religious professors, thinks religion and being intellectual are part of the same sphere.

"I think they are intertwined to the extent that they are almost the same thing," Jiwani says. "It is not blind faith, but intellectually reasoned belief. The imam says to use one's intellect to get through daily life." Nonetheless, Regnerus says being religious carries a social cost. If a student is perceived as being too religious, that student may have difficulty making friends. Zajonc contends socializing can go either way. Students belonging to a religious community can quickly become friends and enjoy a more positive experience, he says.

Nicole Coyne, a junior at Emory, is one example. Her religiosity allowed her to make more friends through "religious similarities." This increased her involvement in religion.

For others, though, gravitating to those of the same faith can narrow a student's options and prevent religious exploration, Zajonc says. He believes going beyond an individual's comfort zone can be good at times. One approach is to journey outside one's faith tradition.

Ramachandran has sought out other points of view. Her best friend is an atheist. She enjoys surrounding herself with people who actively question her beliefs. By searching for the answers, she strengthens her beliefs. She considers this "healthy questioning."

Initially, she says it was awkward to perform her morning prayers in front of her roommate. She sought refuge in the upper floors of the library every morning. She would involve friends in her meditation, which made her feel better about what she was doing. But as she spent more and more time at Emory, she realized she did not have to pray secretly.

What is the future of religion among students in America and at Emory?

"In general, there is a free-market of religion in the United States, so as long as that remains the case, you have campus ministry groups that are active," Regnerus says. "Religion is here to stay. It is not going away. It has never gone away."

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