

# Spirituality *and the* Professoriate

A National Study of Faculty Beliefs,  
Attitudes, and Behaviors



Higher Education Research Institute  
Graduate School of Education & Information Studies  
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## Spirituality in Higher Education: Overview of a National Study

In 2003, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA launched a major, multi-year program of research to examine the spiritual development of undergraduate students during the college years. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the study is designed to enhance our understanding of how college students conceive of spirituality, the role it plays in their lives, and how colleges and universities can be more effective in facilitating students' spiritual development.

Previous reports have focused on the results of several student surveys: A 2003 pilot survey of 3,680 junior year students attending 46 colleges and universities across the country, focus group interviews with students at eight diverse institutions, and a national survey that was administered to 112,232 freshmen as they entered 236 colleges and universities in Fall 2004. A follow-up survey, which will be administered to these same students in Spring 2007 when they are juniors, will be used to study changes in spiritual/religious development during the undergraduate years.

This report on Spirituality and the Professoriate summarizes findings from a survey of 40,670 faculty at 421 colleges and universities nationwide. The data are weighted to approximate as closely as possible the results that would have been obtained if all teaching faculty in all institutions had responded to the survey.

The survey was designed to discover how faculty view the intersections between spirituality and higher education and how their perspectives and practices may influence the spiritual development of students during their undergraduate years.

### Higher Education Research Institute

HERI is widely recognized as one of the premiere research and policy organizations on postsecondary education in the country. Housed at the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA, it serves as an interdisciplinary center for research, evaluation, information, policy studies, and research training in postsecondary education. Its Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) annual Survey of Entering Freshmen initiated in 1966 is one of the most widely used sources of information about colleges and college students in the nation. HERI's research program covers a variety of topics, including the outcomes of postsecondary education, leadership development, faculty performance, federal and state policy, and educational equity.

*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation*

*Additional information is available at [www.spirituality.ucla.edu](http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu).*



# Spirituality and the Professoriate

## OVERVIEW

### What Do We Know Thus Far About the Spiritual Lives of Undergraduate Students?

The national freshman survey indicates that students are very interested in spiritual and religious matters and have high expectations for the role their institutions will play in their emotional and spiritual development. About two-thirds consider it “essential” or “very important” that their undergraduate experience enhances their self-understanding (69%), prepares them for responsible citizenship (67%), develops their personal values (67%), and provides for their emotional development (63%). Moreover, nearly half (48%) say that it is “essential” or “very important” that college encourages their personal expression of spirituality.

Despite the students’ high level of interest in spiritual matters, findings from the pilot survey of third-year undergraduates show that colleges and universities appear to be doing little either to help students explore such issues or to

support their search in the sphere of values and beliefs. For example, more than half (56%) of the students who completed the pilot survey say that their professors never provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (62%) say professors never encourage discussion of spiritual or religious matters. While 39 percent indicate that their religious or spiritual beliefs have been strengthened by “new ideas encountered in class,” 53 percent report that the classroom has had no impact. Nearly half (45%) report dissatisfaction with how their college experience has provided “opportunities for religious/spiritual reflection.”

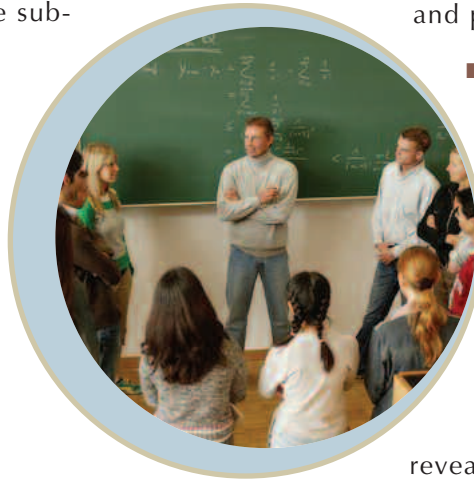
Overall, findings to date suggest that college students place a premium on their spiritual development and many of them hope—indeed, expect—that the college experience will support them in their spiritual quest. The challenge for higher education is thus to understand the priority that students place on these issues and to examine how the students’ quest can be supported.

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## Spirituality and the Professoriate

The national survey of faculty attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that is the subject of this report explores how college professors perceive the intersections between spirituality and higher education and how they view the role of spirituality and religion in their own lives. Completed by 40,670 faculty at 421 colleges and universities, the survey aims to address the following questions:

- What role do faculty believe spirituality should play in the undergraduate experience?
- To what extent do faculty view themselves as potential facilitators of students' spiritual/religious development?
- To what extent do faculty perceive themselves as spiritual beings? What proportion are actively seeking opportunities to help them grow spiritually?
- Do faculty feel a sense of balance between their personal and professional lives? To what extent do they perceive a congruence or a divergence between their own values and institutional values?
- To what extent do faculty engage their students in curricular activities that can promote inner development such as reflective learning, journaling, and community service?



- How do faculty view their responsibility for helping students achieve a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their professional and personal lives?

- How might personal and professional characteristics (e.g., gender, race, age, field of study, type of employing institution, etc.) differentiate faculty with respect to spirituality and related perspectives?

The study reported here reveals that a substantial majority of college and university faculty consider themselves to be spiritual beings, but that faculty are divided on the questions of (a) whether undergraduate education should put a priority on students' spiritual development and (b) what priority should be given to the spiritual dimension of faculty members' lives. Faculty who are highly spiritual, compared to their less spiritual colleagues, show greater interest in students' personal development and are more likely to display a positive outlook in their work and personal life.

Once longitudinal follow-up data are collected from the 2004 cohort of entering freshmen in the Spring of 2007 when they are juniors, data collected from faculty at a selected sample of overlapping institutions will be used to examine how faculty beliefs and behaviors may influence students' spiritual development during the undergraduate years.

## FINDINGS

### The Spiritual and Religious Inclinations of College Faculty

For many faculty, the spiritual dimension of life is highly relevant. Within today's professoriate, four in five faculty describe themselves as "a spiritual person." Nearly half say that they are spiritual "to a great extent." In addition, more than two-thirds view "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" as a very important or essential goal in life. Over two-thirds say that they seek opportunities to grow spiritually to at least "some" extent and that they engage in self-reflection "to a great extent." Similarly, for

nearly half of today's faculty (47%), "integrating spirituality in my life" is an essential or very important life goal (see Table 1).

While faculty are more inclined to describe themselves as spiritual rather than as religious, religion still plays an important role in many faculty members' lives. Overall, more than three in five college professors (64%) say that they consider themselves to be "a religious person," either "to some extent" (29%) or "to a great extent" (35%). A similar number (61%) report that they pray/meditate. About one-third of the faculty (37%) say that they are "not at all" religious.

Generally speaking, women are more likely than men to characterize themselves as spiritual

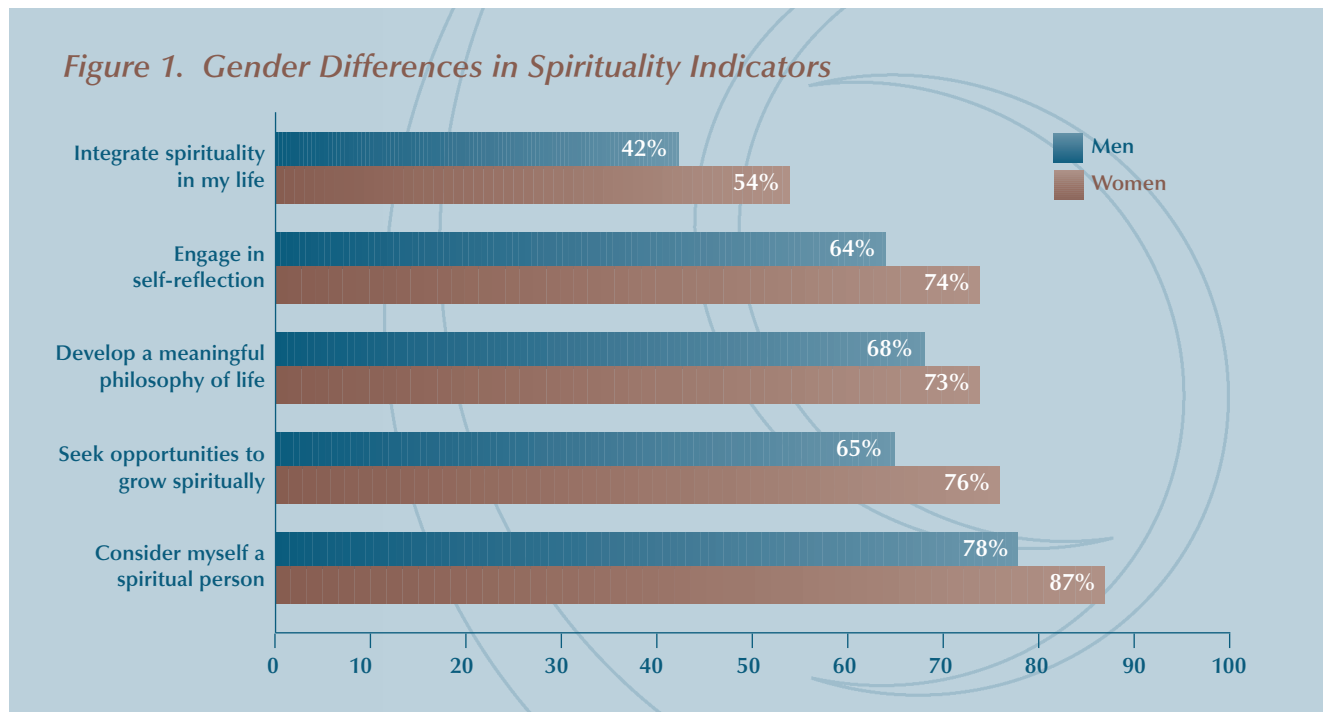
*Table 1. Indicators of Faculty Members' Spirituality*

Indicator	Percent
Consider myself a spiritual person . . . . .	81 *
Goal: Developing a meaningful philosophy of life . . . . .	70 **
Seek out opportunities to grow spiritually . . . . .	69 *
Engage in self-reflection . . . . .	68 ***
Goal: Integrating spirituality in my life . . . . .	47 **

\* To some or a great extent  
\*\* Essential or very important  
\*\*\* To a great extent

and to prioritize spiritual aspects of life (see Figure 1). Among different racial/ethnic groups, African-American faculty are most inclined (66%) to characterize themselves as spiritual “to a great extent.” Asian-American faculty, on the other hand, are least likely (37%) to describe themselves in this way (see Table 2).

When it comes to religiousness, gender and racial differences follow a similar pattern—women and African Americans are most likely, and men and Asian Americans least likely, to see themselves as religious—but the differences are somewhat smaller than is the case with spirituality.



**Table 2. “Spiritual” Describes Me “To a Great Extent,” by Race**

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
African American/Black	66
American Indian	60
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	59
Puerto Rican	57
Mexican American/Chicano	53
White/Caucasian	48
“Other” Latino	45
Asian American/Asian	37

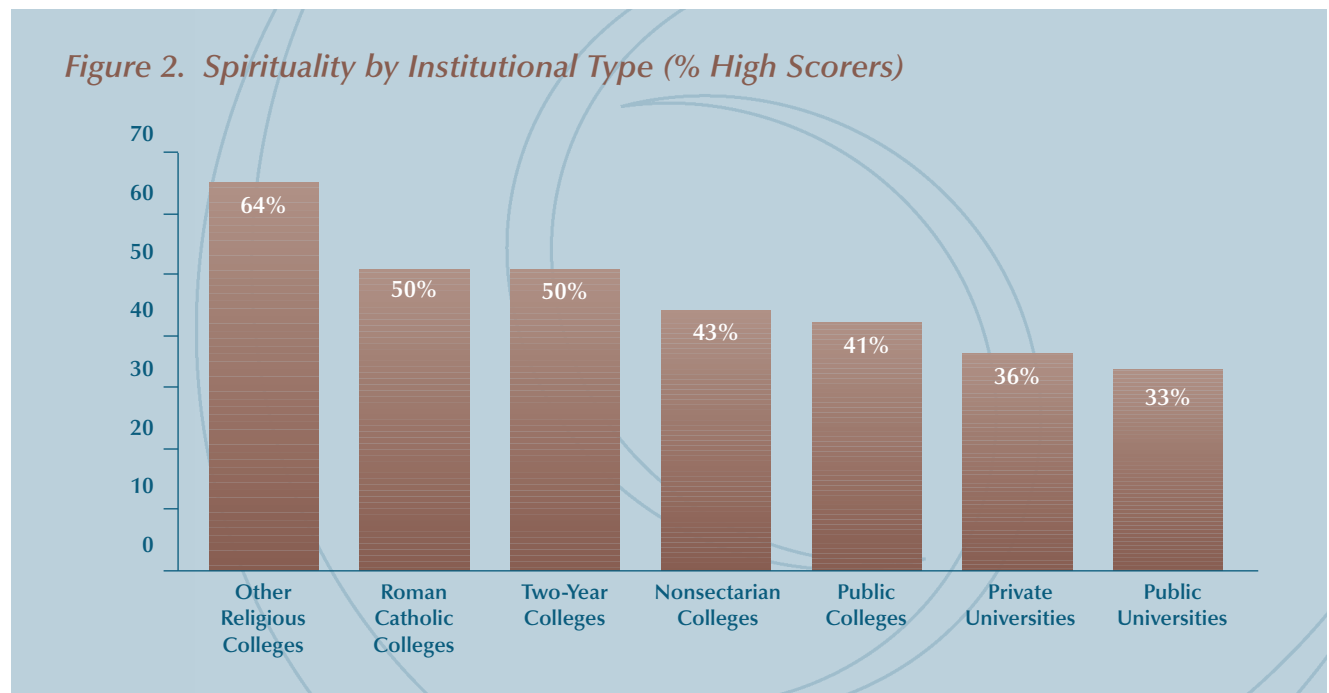
## Measuring Spirituality and Related Constructs

The HERI research team has developed a faculty spirituality “scale,” along with a number of additional scales that measure related perspectives and behaviors. In this report, we highlight seven of these scales: Spirituality, Focus on Students' Personal Development, Civic-Minded Values, Civic-Minded Practice, Positive Outlook in Work and Life, Student-Centered Pedagogy, and Diversity Advocacy (see insert for descriptions of each scale).

The range of possible scores on the Spirituality scale was 3-10. A faculty member who scored 8 or above was considered to be a

“high” scorer,<sup>1</sup> while anyone with a score of 3 was considered to be a “low” scorer. Under these definitions, 43% of faculty achieved high scores, and 15% obtained low scores. (In the next sections, we examine how faculty members with high and low Spirituality scores compare in their responses to other survey questions.)

There are substantial differences among various types of institutions in the proportions of their faculties who obtain high scores on the Spirituality scale. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the faculty in “other religious” colleges (mostly Baptist, mainline Protestant-affiliated, or Evangelical) have high scores, compared to only one-third (33%) of faculty in public universities (see Figure 2).



<sup>1</sup>Note that even if a person responded “to a great extent” on both of the first two questions—considering oneself a spiritual person and seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually—that person would still have to answer at least “somewhat important” to the integrating spirituality question in order to qualify as a high scorer. Similarly, even if the person responded “very important” to the integrating spirituality question, to qualify as a high scorer that person would have to answer “to a great extent” to at least one of the other two questions.

## SPIRITUALITY AND RELATED SCALES

The following provides brief descriptions of the types of items that comprise each scale. Following each description are the percentages of all faculty who score either high or low on that scale. More information on these scales is available at [www.spirituality.ucla.edu](http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu).

**SPIRITUALITY** is defined as seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually, considering oneself a spiritual person, and having an interest in integrating spirituality into one's life. 43% scored high, 15% low.

### **FOCUS ON STUDENTS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

reflects the degree of emphasis placed on developing students' moral character, enhancing their self-understanding, helping them develop personal values, providing for their emotional development, facilitating their search for meaning and purpose in life, and enhancing their spiritual development. 25% scored high, 17% low.

**CIVIC-MINDED VALUES** includes several beliefs: that students should be encouraged to do community service, that colleges have a responsibility to work with surrounding communities, and that colleges should be active in solving social problems. It also reflects the priority placed on preparing students for responsible citizenship and on instilling a commitment to community service, as well as a personal commitment by the faculty member to influencing social values and to influencing the political structure. 30% scored high, 14% low.

**CIVIC-MINDED PRACTICE** relates to using one's scholarship to address local community needs, collaborating with the local community

in research/teaching, engaging in public service without pay, incorporating community service in courses, teaching a service learning course, advising student groups in service/volunteer work, and engaging in community service. 18% scored high, 29% low.

### **POSITIVE OUTLOOK IN WORK AND LIFE**

characterizes those who experience joy in their work, feel that work adds meaning to their life, experience close alignment between their work values and personal values, feel good about the direction their life is heading, and feel that they achieve a healthy work/life balance. 47% score high, 7% low.

**STUDENT-CENTERED PEDAGOGY** includes use of class discussions, student presentations, group projects, cooperative learning, student self-evaluation, reflective writing, student evaluations of each other's work, and student-selected course topics. 22% scored high, 21% low.

**DIVERSITY ADVOCACY** includes the belief that a racially diverse student body enhances educational experiences for all students, the priority given to enhancing students' knowledge/understanding of other races, and the personal importance that the faculty member places on helping to promote racial understanding. 28% scored high, 18% low.



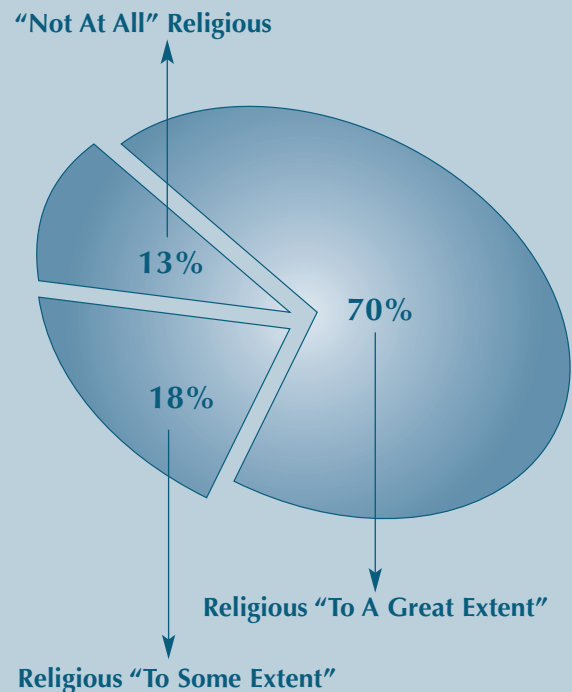
## Spirituality and Religiousness

Figure 3 illustrates the religious self-identifications of faculty who are high scorers on the Spirituality scale. As might be expected, more than two-thirds of highly spiritual faculty (70%) also describe themselves as religious “to a great extent,” and an additional 18% say they are religious “to some extent.” However, it is important to realize that better than one in ten (13%) among highly spiritual faculty say they are “not at all” religious. In other words, despite the strong positive relationship between spirituality and religiousness, a significant minority of highly spiritual college and university faculty are not religious.

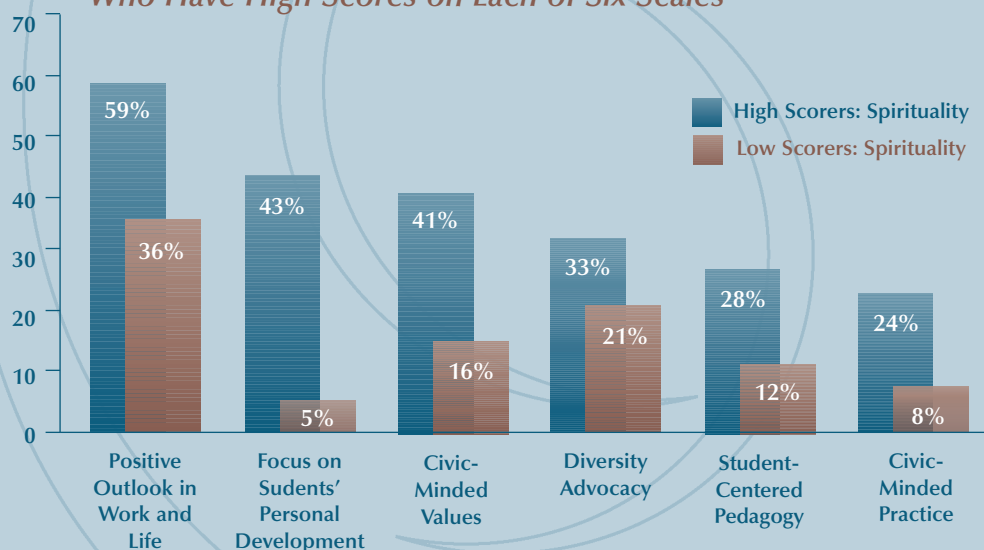
## Spirituality and Other Related Qualities

Figure 4 compares faculty with high versus low Spirituality scores in terms of their scores on six related qualities. In every instance, highly

**Figure 3. Degrees of Religiousness Among Highly Spiritual Faculty**



**Figure 4. Percentages of High and Low Scorers on Spirituality Who Have High Scores on Each of Six Scales**



spiritual faculty are much more likely than their less spiritual counterparts to be high scorers on these other qualities. By far the largest difference—in both absolute and relative terms—occurs on the scale measuring the extent of the faculty member’s Focus on Students’ Personal Development (43% versus 5%). Differences of better than two to one can be found on three of the other scales: Student-Centered Pedagogy, Civic-Minded Practice, and Civic-Minded Values. It should also be noted that Positive Outlook in Work and Life produced one of the largest absolute differences (23%) between highly spiritual and less spiritual faculty members.

It is perhaps to be expected that highly spiritual faculty would place a premium both on enhancing students’ Civic-Minded Values (community service, citizenship) and contributing to students’ “personal development” (self-understanding, personal values, moral character, and the search for meaning and purpose, as well as spiritual development). However, it is also of interest that highly spiritual faculty support the use of “student-centered” pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning, group projects, and reflective writing (see Table 3). It seems likely

that such approaches would be likely to enhance many of these “personal development” qualities. Recent research has shown, for example, that reflective writing is one of the key ingredients in an effective service-learning course and that service-learning promotes the development of civic values.

Why highly spiritual faculty should also express a much more positive outlook about their jobs and their lives than their less spiritual colleagues do is not entirely clear. The content of this scale (see the insert) suggests that highly spiritual faculty have been better able to integrate their personal and professional lives and to effect a better alignment between academic work and personal values. Whatever the explanation for this positive relationship between spirituality and having a positive outlook on work and life may be, these results suggest that institutions might want to consider giving greater priority to their faculty’s personal and “spiritual” development. Such a conclusion is consistent with the finding that more than half of college and university faculty (57%) disagree with the statement that “The spiritual dimension of faculty members’ lives has no place in the academy.”

**Table 3. Student-Centered Pedagogy: Use by Faculty with High and Low Levels of Spirituality**

Used in “All” or “Most” Classes	In Percentages		
	High	Low	Difference
Cooperative learning . . . . .	.54	.35	.19
Student self-evaluation . . . . .	.25	.11	.14
Reflective writing . . . . .	.24	.10	.14
Group projects . . . . .	.37	.24	.13
Community service . . . . .	.11	.2	.9
Student evaluations of each other’s work . . . . .	.19	.11	.8

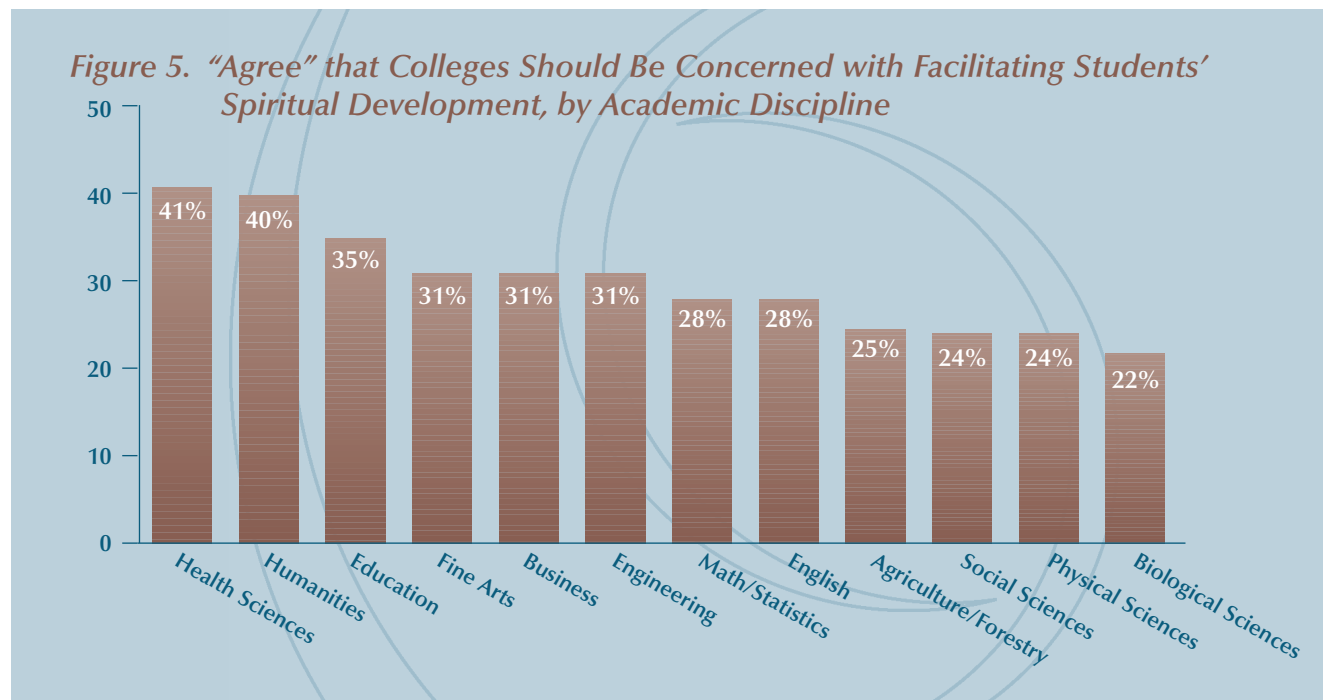
## How Faculty View the Place of Spirituality in the Academy

Given the high priority, mentioned earlier, that students place on spirituality, it is important to understand how faculty view the place of spirituality in the academy, both for themselves and for their students. Combining these survey results with our earlier research on students' views on spirituality provides a more complete picture of the spiritual development of students during their undergraduate years.

When it comes to the place of spirituality in higher education, we find a considerable division of opinion within the faculty. For example, when asked whether "colleges should be concerned with facilitating students' spiritual development," only a minority of faculty (30%) agree. This is consistent with the finding, also mentioned earlier, that most college juniors report that their professors have never encouraged discussion of spiritual or religious matters, and never provide opportunities for discussing the meaning or

purpose of life. However, many faculty also believe that the following educational goals for undergraduate students are "essential" or "very important": enhancing self-understanding (60%), developing moral character (59%), and helping students develop personal value (53%).

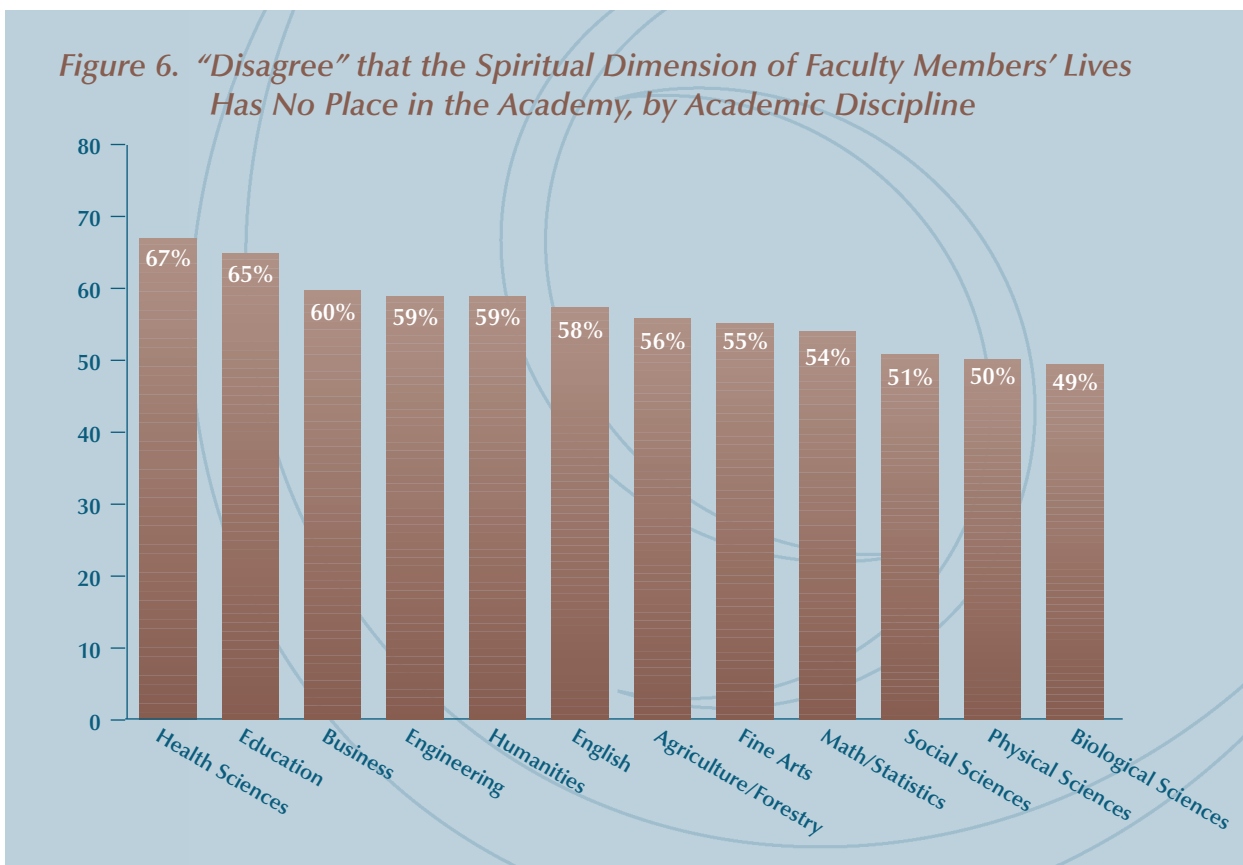
When the question of facilitating students' spiritual development is examined in relation to the faculty member's academic field, we find substantial differences. The highest levels of agreement with the notion that colleges should be involved in facilitating students' spiritual development are found in the health sciences (41%) and humanities (40%), while the lowest levels are found in the biological sciences (22%), social sciences (24%), physical sciences (24%), and agriculture/forestry (25%) (see Figure 5). Even larger differences occur among different institutional types, with faculty in "other religious" colleges (68%) and Catholic colleges (62%) evidencing the highest levels of agreement, and faculty in public universities (18%) and public colleges (23%) showing the lowest levels.



Note: Percentages indicate those who agree strongly or somewhat.

When it comes to the proposition that “the spiritual dimension of faculty members’ lives has no place in the academy,” a majority of faculty (57%) disagree. As shown in Figure 6, differences by academic discipline follow a slightly different pattern, with the highest levels of disagreement occurring in the health sciences (67%), education (65%), and business (60%), and the lowest level occurring in the social sciences (51%), physical sciences (50%), and biological sciences (49%). In other words, roughly half or more faculty in every academic discipline disagree with this proposition.

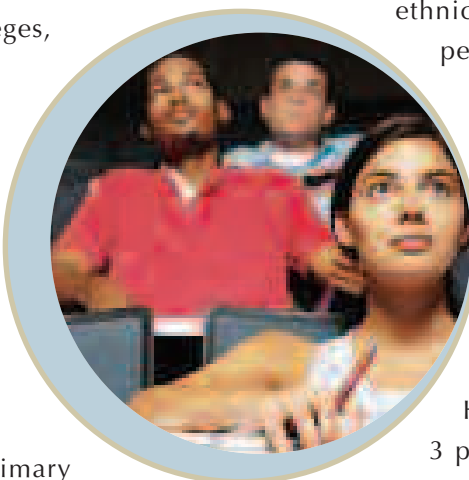
Differences by type of institution are, once again, much larger. By far the highest levels of disagreement with the proposition that “the spiritual dimension of faculty members’ lives has no place in the academy” occur in “other religious” (79%) and Catholic (71%) colleges, while the lowest level is found in the public universities (49%). Thus, with the exception of public universities, a majority of faculty in all types of institutions disagree with this proposition.



Note: Percentages indicate those who disagree strongly or somewhat.

## METHODOLOGY

The 2004-2005 Faculty Survey is the sixth survey of undergraduate teaching faculty that HERI has conducted triennially since 1989. In each administration, faculty at some 500 two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities participate. In addition to demographic information, the questionnaire focuses heavily on topics such as how faculty members spend their time, how they interact with their students, their preferred methods of teaching, their values, beliefs, and attitudes, their perceptions of institutional climate, and their primary sources of stress and satisfaction. In 2004-2005, 65,124 faculty at 511 institutions responded to the survey. Of these, 40,670 faculty at 421 institutions were included in the normative sample. The data are weighted to approximate as closely as possible the results that would have been obtained if all college and university teaching faculty in all institutions had responded to the survey. For more methodological



details, please consult *The American College Teacher: National Norms for the 2004-2005 HERI Faculty Survey*.

The normative population includes 61 percent men and 39 percent women. The ethnic/racial distribution is: 89 percent White; 5 percent Asian American/Asian; 3 percent African American/Black; 2 percent Mexican American/Chicano; 2 percent American Indian/Alaska Native; 2 percent Other Latino; 1 percent Puerto Rican; 1 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and 3 percent Other.\* Respondents were employed at Public Colleges (28%), Nonsectarian Colleges (16%), Public Universities (15%), Private Universities (15%), and Two-Year Colleges (7%). An additional 8 percent were employed at Roman Catholic Colleges and 13 percent at Other Religious Colleges.

*\*Percentages will sum to more than 100 if any respondent marked more than one category.*

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