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News from Institutional Research

Part of the analysis of the College Student Values and Beliefs data completed by the staff at the Higher Education Research Institute involved developing "scales" that measured various aspects of students' spirituality and religiousness by combining questionnaire items with similar content.

This issue of "News", examines differences between Creighton freshmen and those at other Jesuit institutions (Fairfield, Loyola Baltimore, University of San Francisco and Wheeling Jesuit) on the scales developed by HERI. It then looks at the political divide between students at different levels of Spirituality and Religious Engagement on both their self-described political orientation and their attitudes toward various social issues.

The Spiritual Life of the 2004 Creighton Freshman, Part II

Measuring Spirituality and Religiousness

The mean scores of Creighton freshmen on Spirituality, Religious Engagement, Religious Commitment, Religious/Social Conservatism, Equanimity, Ethic of Caring, Charitable Involvement and Religious Struggle were significantly higher than the mean scores of the 2004 freshmen at other Jesuit institutions on those scales. There were no statistically significant differences between the means of the two groups on Spiritual Quest, Ecumenical World View or Religious Skepticism.

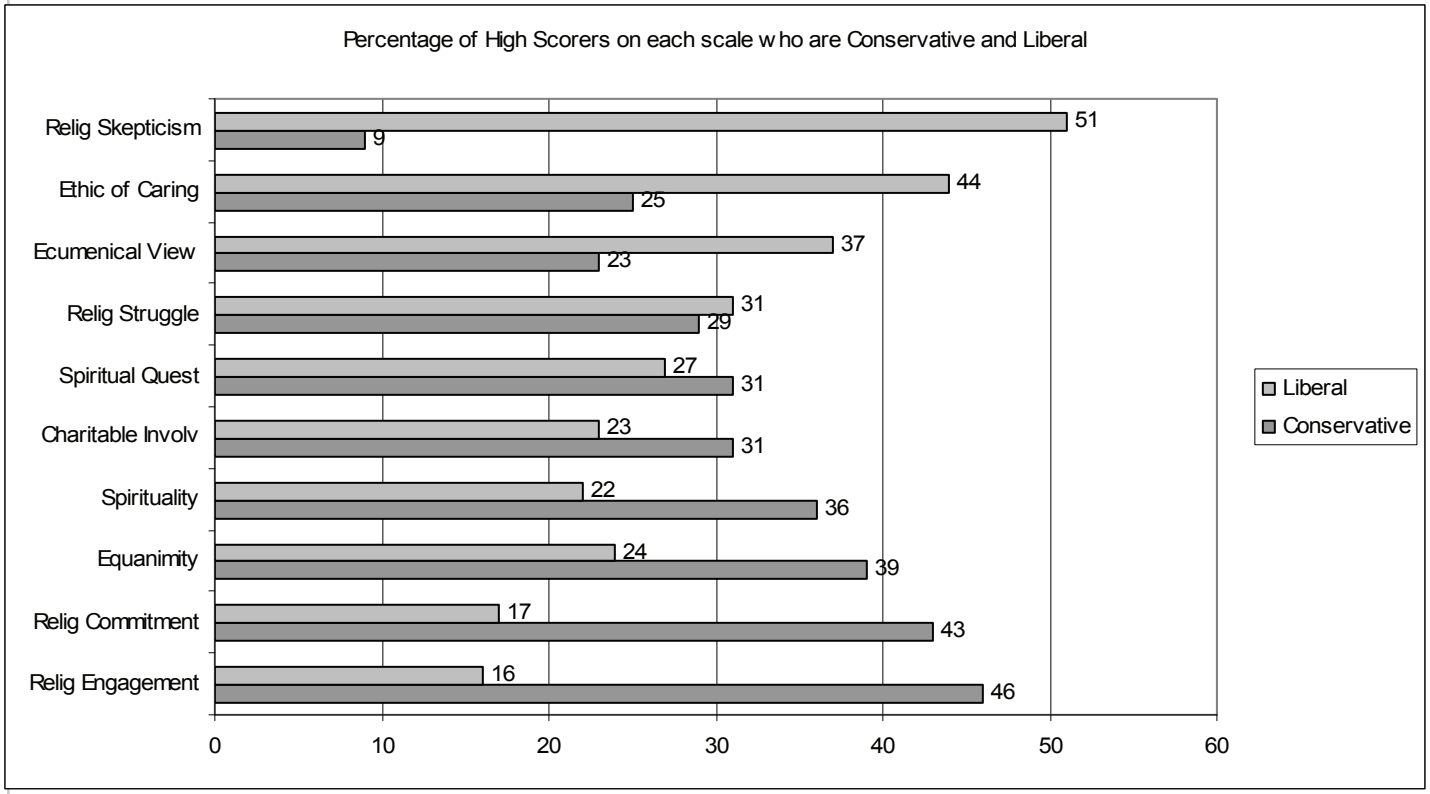
No doubt reflecting their mainly Midwestern roots, the Creighton freshmen attach more importance to religious and community involvement as well as spirituality than the freshmen on the east and west coast. The Creighton freshmen also are more conservative of social issues and more willing to admit feeling, at times, unsettled about religious matters.

	Creighton	Jesuit
Spirituality ("Includes believing in the sacredness of life, seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually, and believing that we are all spiritual beings.") Fourteen questions; maximum score = 53, minimum score = 14	31.29	29.52***
Religious Engagement ("Involves attending religious services, praying, and reading sacred texts.") Nine questions; maximum score = 44, minimum score = 9	22.98	19.60***
Religious Commitment ("Includes following religious teachings in everyday life, finding religion to be personally helpful, and gaining personal strength by trusting in a higher power.") Fourteen questions; maximum score = 53, minimum score = 14	41.33	39.60***
Religious/Social Conservatism ("Reflects opposition to such things as casual sex and abortion, the use of prayer to receive forgiveness, and the belief that people who don't believe in God will be punished.") Seven questions; maximum score = 24, minimum score = 7	16.87	15.34***
Equanimity ("Involves feeling at peace/centered, being able to find meaning in times of hardship, and feeling a strong connection to all of humanity.") Six questions; maximum score = 18, minimum score = 6	13.79	13.49***
Charitable Involvement ("Assesses behaviors such as participating in community service, donating money to charity, and helping friends with personal problems.") Nineteen questions; maximum score = 50, minimum score = 19	30.90	30.02***
Ethic of Caring ("Measures degree of commitment to values such as helping others in difficultly, reducing pain and suffering in the world, and making the world a better place.") Nine questions; maximum score = 33, minimum score = 9	18.25	17.77***
Religious Struggle ("Indicates feeling unsettled about religious matters, feeling distant from God, and questioning religioous beliefs.") Seven questions; maximum score = 21, minimum score = 7	12.63	12.36*
Spiritual Quest ("Reflects interest in the meaning/purpose of life, finding answers to the mysteries of life, and developing a meaningful philosophy.") Ten questions; maximum score =38, minimum score = 10	25.66	25.31
Ecumenical Worldview ("Reflects interest in different religious traditions, seeking to understand other countries and cultures, and believing that love is at the root of all geat religions.") Twelve questions; maximum score = 44, minimum score = 12	33.58	33.66
Religious Skepticism ("Includes beliefs such as 'the universe arose by chance' and 'in the future science will be able to explain everything' and disbelief in the notion of life after death.") Nine questions; maximum score = 33, minimum score = 9	23.29	23.31

***p<.001/p<.005, *p<.05

Political Orientation and Attitudes

When asked to describe their political views, thirty-one percent of the 2004 Creighton freshmen described themselves as conservative or far right and twenty-three percent described themselves as liberal or far left. However, when we examine the political views of those scoring high on the nine scales listed below, only Charitable Involvement reflects the actual conservative/liberal breakdown in the class. Among students who scored high on Religious Skepticism, for example, liberals outnumber conservatives by five to one. As might be expected, the figures are almost reversed when we look at Religious/ Engagement where conservatives outnumber liberals by three to one. Conservatives outnumber liberals among students with high scores on Religious Commitment, Equanimity and Spirituality although the differences are not as pronounced. Liberals outnumber conservatives among those who score high on Ethic of Caring and Ecumenical Worldview.



Differences in political orientation among students with high and low scores on Religious Engagement and Spirituality are also reflected in the divergence of attitudes toward social issues. Casual sex, abortion, legal sanctioning of same-sex relationships and the legalization of marijuana are highly divisive issues for Creighton students who fall at the high and low ends of religious engagement and spirituality. As seen below, students reporting high levels on these scales, compared to classmates with low levels, are much less likely to support keeping abortion legal, casual sex, legal sanctioning of same-sex relationships, the legalization of marijuana and abolishment of the death penalty.

	Level of Religious Engagement			Level of Spirituality		
	High	Low	Difference	High	Low	Difference
Sex is okay if people really like each other.	12%	74%	62	17%	61%	44
Abortion should be legal.	17%	72%	55	23%	56%	33
Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.	31%	84%	53	41%	64%	23
It's important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships.	44%	14%	30	36%	24%	12
Marijuana should be legalized.	17%	48%	31	20%	39%	19
Death penalty should be abolished.	57%	26%	31	60%	23%	37
Activities of married women are best confined to the home.	24%	7%	17	18%	16%	2
Federal military spending should be increased.	40%	27%	13	35%	32%	3

The outline for this issue of "News" is taken from "The Spiritual Life of College Students", a monograph produced by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.