

# Trends

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## CSB/SJU Students Expect Diversity in Spiritual and Religious Practice

In December 2009, *Companions on a Journey* at the College of Saint Benedict and *Corad: Heart Speaks to Heart* at Saint John's University administered a Spiritual and Religious Engagement survey to CSB/SJU students. 724 students completed the survey. Respondents represented a fairly even distribution across class years. 63% of respondents were female and 37% were male. Survey topics included: the importance of particular spiritual/religious practices; engagement in particular practices; satisfaction with spiritual/religious formation; and, engagement with Benedictine, Catholic, and other faith traditions. The survey had several goals:

- To get a fuller picture of students' spiritual/religious experiences at CSB/SJU
- To improve spiritual/religious programming opportunities for students
- To assess spiritual/religious development at CSB/SJU.

### Key Findings

When asked which current on-campus spiritual and religious opportunities were most important to them, students most frequently cited student Masses, Journey Groups/Men's Spirituality Groups, Magis, and retreats and volunteer opportunities.

Students ranked *making a difference in someone's life*, *being committed to the key people in my life*, and *feeling grateful* as "very important" spiritual and religious practices. When compared to what they reported in actual practice, *commitment to important people* was the highest-ranking daily activity, while *making a difference in another's life* was most highly ranked as a weekly practice. Nearly half also reported *feeling grateful* on a daily basis.

Many qualitative responses acknowledged the tension between our Catholic and Benedictine institutional identity and the exploration of other traditions:

- 75% of respondents reported that they have integrated the Benedictine values into their lives.
- 90% reported questioning or challenging the Catholic faith.
- 66% reported feeling affirmed in their faith.
- 98% report having had opportunities to learn about the Catholic faith.
- 49% reported having studied Islam and 40% having studied Judaism.

Survey respondents were as likely to have reported interacting with others who do *not* identify themselves as Catholic (98%) as having interacted with others who *do* identify themselves as Catholic (99%).

Students consistently reported interest in engaging diverse faith traditions, including non-Catholic Christian perspectives as well as non-Christian perspectives. In particular, students suggested that more diverse spiritual and religious engagement opportunities be made available through academic courses and out-of-classroom events such as speakers and worship services.

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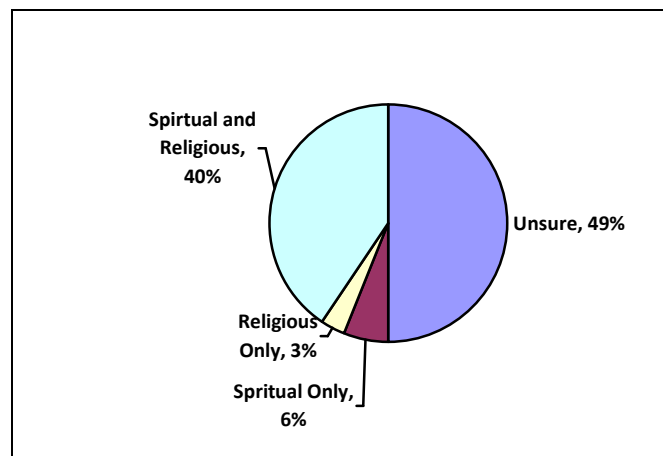
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Time management significantly influences the changes students experience during college related to spiritual and religious engagement. Student noted an increase in engagement in order to “offer a sense of balance to my busy life”, as well as a decrease in engagement because “I haven’t found time.”

Very few students reported that they were either “only religious” or “only spiritual.” Four in ten labeled themselves as “spiritual and religious,” while almost half labeled themselves as “unsure.”



The three *most appealing* criteria cited by students for interesting spiritual and religious programming included engaging, accepting, and reflective activities. The three *least appealing* characteristics cited by students include programs and activities that are close-minded, too long, or boring.

Another distinct trend within the qualitative responses was students’ experiences related to exploration of their beliefs and practices. In particular, students commented widely on the benefits of being able to choose for themselves how to practice their faith and what to believe while in college. Students also appreciated that many spiritual/religious opportunities exist on the CSB/SJU campuses, but “are not forced on us.”

If you have questions or are interested in more data related to the survey, contact Christine Munger at [cmunger@csbsju.edu](mailto:cmunger@csbsju.edu) or Marian Diaz at [mkdiaz@csbsju.edu](mailto:mkdiaz@csbsju.edu). If you would like to read past issues of *Trends*, please visit our website at <http://www.csbsju.edu/institutionalresearch/trends/>.