

Long-term survey to follow college students' experiences with faith, diversity

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Incoming freshmen at more than 130 colleges and universities are taking surveys about a vital but often overlooked aspect of campus life: how students with different worldviews and religious backgrounds live, learn and work together.

This summer marks the first phase of a long-term study that will follow 100,000 students for four years, tracking changes in their attitudes and behaviors about faith and diversity through surveys at freshman orientation and during the sophomore and senior years of college.

IDEALS— short for Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey – is a collaboration of Interfaith Youth Core, a nonprofit that works with colleges and universities to foster religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation, and education researchers Alyssa Rockenbach of North Carolina State University and Matt Mayhew of New York University, who are building on five years of related work.

The new multimillion-dollar national study is funded by a non-religiously affiliated organization that supports initiatives to foster constructive dialogue across difference and has chosen to remain anonymous.

"We're trying to determine which educational experiences help students grow in their appreciation of others with diverse worldviews," says Rockenbach, an associate professor of [higher education](#) at NC State. "In a society with many perspectives and religions, we will need leaders with a pluralistic orientation that gives them an appreciation of not only

differences but also values that people have in common."

Researchers hope to answer several key questions:

- How do experiences with diversity affect students' attitudes and behaviors?
- Do students perceive their campus to be a safe and supportive place for those of differing religious and nonreligious beliefs to express themselves?
- How do students interact with others who have different worldviews?

The 2015 survey for incoming freshmen includes questions about basic tenets of major religions and leaders from different faith traditions. In addition, students are asked about their participation in experiences such as attending worship services, studying with students of another faith, discussing beliefs and taking part in volunteer service activities.

Each participating college or university will receive survey results for its campus at no cost, providing information about student perceptions and the value of educational and interfaith activities.

"We want to use a social science-based approach to inform decisions made on college campuses," says Mayhew, an associate professor of higher education with NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. "The long-term design of the study will help identify how we prepare [students](#) to be global citizens who understand other worldviews and are able to work productively across differences."

Participating institutions include both public and private universities, some with religious affiliations.

More information: For more information about the project, visit

<https://www.phys.org/news/2015-06-long-term-survey-college-students-faith.html>

Provided by New York University

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