

Universities Have More Majors in Religion

Some officials are attributing this surge to the prominence of the religious right in politics, catastrophic events and evangelical students enrolling in secular colleges.



Many American universities are seeing a surge in students interested in religion. Compared with the last decade, “there is a greater interest in religion on campus, both intellectually and spiritually,” Charles L. Cohen, a professor of history and religious studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, told *The New York Times*. Dozens of interviews with various universities showed that more students are choosing to live in dormitories where religion and spirituality are a part of the everyday conversation, and some are joining discussion groups that address topics such as what happens after death, *The Times* reported. In a 2004 study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, two-thirds of 112,000 freshmen surveyed said they prayed and nearly 80 percent said they believed in God. The survey also showed that half the respondents were searching for spiritual growth. Some university officials attribute the surge in religious interest to the prominence of the religious right in politics. Others believe catastrophic events—such as hurricanes, tsunamis and Sept. 11—have caused students to turn more to religion. An increase in evangelical students who now attend secular universities is also a contributing factor. Although some sociologists say there hasn't been enough research to proclaim that students' attitudes toward religion have dramatically changed, others say there has been a noticeable shift. “All I hear from everybody is yes, there is growing interest in religion and spirituality and an openness on college campuses,” said University of Notre Dame sociology professor Christian Smith. “Everybody who is talking about it says something seems to be going on.”