

Summary of the Psychology Department's Recent
Assessment of Christian Beliefs, Values, Affections, and Practices

PLO - Values and Character: *Faith and Openness to Experience:* Students will be able to articulate the interactions between psychology and faith. Students will be able to understand the importance and desirability of a diversity of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds (including ethnic, sociocultural, and gender diversity). They will also embrace ambiguity, being comfortable without closure or black-and-white answers, and valuing questions as much as answers.

- Assessment: The Christian Orientation survey (see Appendix A) was adapted from the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey, one of the instruments used to evaluate religiosity and spirituality in higher education by the Higher Education Research Institute. This survey was emailed to all psychology and neuroscience alumni who graduated between 2006 and 2012 ($N = 142$). All respondents were entered into a drawing for one of three \$25.00 Amazon gift cards. The survey items were presented on five web pages:

The first page asked whether religious beliefs and practices, spirituality, and various other social values had been changed by the alumnus' education at Westmont. The second page asked whether religious beliefs and practices, spirituality, and various other social values had changed between the alumnus' senior year at Westmont and the present. Both sets of items were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from -3, *Significant Negative Change*, to +3, *Significant Positive Change*.

The third page asked alumni to rate the importance of various community, spiritual, religious, and social values on a 7-point scale, ranging from -3, *Very Unimportant*, to +3, *Very Important*.

The fourth page asked alumni to report the frequency with which they engaged in activities related to the values identified by the third set of items on a 5-point scale, ranging from 0, *Never*, to 4, *Frequently*.

The final set of items asked about the purpose or usefulness of spiritual and religious beliefs. Again, alumni were asked to rate items on a 7-point scale, this time from -3, *Strongly Disagree*, to +3, *Strongly Agree*.

- What We Learned: Relatively recent alumni who graduated with a neuroscience or psychology major experienced positive changes in their religious and spiritual understanding, beliefs, and practices while they were at Westmont, and since they have graduated from Westmont. Changes since graduating from Westmont were smaller than those while at Westmont, ranging from .68 to 1.68, but this is not necessarily surprising. These religious and spiritual changes are associated with changes in social values, affections, and behaviors that indicate an openness to understanding and accepting others who are different on a number of dimensions. In addition, their religious and spiritual beliefs provide meaning, comfort, healing, and peace in their present lives and a foundation for living. Congruence of alumni's values and behavior is not only important to them in value (2.75/3.00; small SD), but it is manifested by the high correlations (.30 to .80+) between their rated importance of all but one activity and the frequency of engaging in those activities. Finally, they value the importance of both local community involvement and attention to broader social structures and issues.
- Changes We Have Made and Plan to Make: The department discussed these results and were happy to find that mean ratings of changes, both at Westmont and after Westmont, all indicate positive change (Benchmark #1), and that correlations of all values and frequency of behavior relating to the values, except for *Influencing Social Values*, are significantly positively correlated (Benchmark #2: Majority of correlations are significantly positively correlated). Our plan is discuss the value and importance of focusing more explicitly on *Influencing Social Values*.

Appendix A

To what extent were the following changed by your education at Westmont?

Religious beliefs and convictions

Religious practice

Ability to get along with different races/cultures

Understanding the problems facing community

Understanding the social problems facing nation
Understanding global issues
Acceptance of people with different religious/spiritual views
Acceptance of people with different lifestyles
Spirituality

Compared to when you were a senior, how would you describe your current . . .

Religious beliefs and convictions
Religious practice
Ability to get along with different races/cultures
Understanding the problems facing community
Understanding the social problems facing nation
Understanding global issues
Acceptance of people with different religious/spiritual views
Acceptance of people with different lifestyles
Spirituality

Please indicate the importance of the following to you personally:

Influencing political structure
Influencing social values
Helping others who are in difficulty
Being involved in environmental projects
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life
Participating in a community action program
Helping to promote racial understanding
Being a community leader
Integrating spirituality into your life
Developing your spiritual formation
Developing your spiritual practices
Reading about today's Church
Reading about Church doctrine or theology
Reading about and reflecting on the connections between psychology and your life
Reading about and reflecting on the connections between your profession and faith
Reading about and reflecting on the connections among family, community, and faith
Making sure your values and behavior are congruent
Supporting your church's programs
Reading about and reflecting on Scripture
Spending time with people who are not like you--racially, religiously, socioeconomically
Financially supporting charities

How frequently in the last year have you engaged in the following activities?

Influencing political structure
Influencing social values
Helping others who are in difficulty
Being involved in environmental projects
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life
Participating in a community action program
Helping to promote racial understanding
Being a community leader
Integrating spirituality into your life
Developing your spiritual formation
Developing your spiritual practices
Reading about today's Church
Reading about Church doctrine or theology
Reading about and reflecting on the connections between psychology and your life
Reading about and reflecting on the connections between your profession and faith

Reading about and reflecting on the connections among family, community, and faith
Making sure your values and behavior are congruent
Supporting your church's programs
Reading about and reflecting on Scripture
Spending time with people who are not like you--racially, religiously, socioeconomically
Financially supporting charities

My spiritual/religious beliefs . . . _____

Helped develop my identity
Are one of the most important things in my life
Provided comfort, healing, and peace when I needed them
Helped me deal with doubt and uncertainty
Give meaning/purpose to my life
Make it difficult for me to enjoy life
Help define the goals I set for myself
Provide me with strength, support, and guidance
Sometimes make me ashamed
Lie behind my whole approach to life
Are the foundation for all of my behavior