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# Cross-cultural Perspectives on College Students' Beliefs, Values and Spirituality at Christian Institutions

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# **Cross-Cultural Perspectives on College Students' Beliefs, Values and Spirituality at Seventh-day Adventist Institutions**

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## **Project Background**

College student's beliefs, values, and spirituality have become the focus of a major national research project in recent years, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) housed at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and sponsored by a substantial grant from the John Templeton Foundation (HERI website). After a pilot survey conducted in 2003, the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV) was administered in the fall 2004 to 112,232 entering freshmen students of 236 colleges and universities in the United States, with a follow up sample of 15,000 of these students in spring 2007. As a nationally representative sample of institutions of higher education, the study included both quantitative and qualitative focus group interview approaches.

The results of this general national sample have demonstrated a strong demand for more support to the religious and spiritual needs and expectations of college students by their institutions, and a high percentage of students from public and private institutions reported strong convictions such as believing in God (79%), believing in the sacredness of life (83%), having an interest in spirituality (80%), searching for meaning and purpose in life (76%), seeing spirituality as a source of joy (64%), and seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually (47%) (The Spiritual Life of College Students, 2008).

Applying a shorter version of the same survey to Seventh-day Adventist institutions in two different countries (USA and Brazil), this article discusses specific findings about the spiritual and religious experience of college students at Adventist institutions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Religion and spirituality may have many faces depending on the cultural background. Since we

live in an extremely diverse world, religious and spiritual expression may be impacted by different cultural perspectives. In the United States, for example, while issues of racial and ethnic diversity are reaching milestones with the election of the nation's first black president, there are still areas of diversity that pose significant challenges to developing a society that embraces the differences of others, namely religious. Religion is complex and difficult to define because of the various ways different people can be religious. (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 42). Even the long held religious traditions in America of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism appear to be changing, as religious beliefs are becoming more eclectic and commitments are becoming more private. (Wuuthnow, 1998; Roof, 1999; Hoge, Dinges, Johnson, & Gonzales, as cited by Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 68).”

According to Laurence & Kazanjian (2002), the American college campus is the most “promising experiment in religious pluralism” (p. 71) and therefore the religious experiences of college students can no longer be ignored. The studies on the impact of values, beliefs and spirituality of college students reveal a significant interest in religious and spiritual matters among college students in different types and sizes of institutions nationwide (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). “Studies of student’s values and attitudes account for much of the voluminous literature on college impact” (Astin, 2001, p. 141).

Based on subsequent national samples of the Cooperative Institutional Program (CIRP) of the University of California at Los Angeles, Astin (2001) has done extensive research on how various college experiences relate to student responses of two sets of questions: first, attitudes about social issues, and second, the level of commitment to various values or life goals.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that “American higher education has been deeply involved in shaping student attitudes, values and beliefs” (p. 271). According to them, the multiple studies of college’s effect on student attitudes and values “provide ample evidence of the abiding interest in this topic.” (p. 271).

Lee (2002) analyzed 4,000 freshman students on 76 four-year campuses in 1994 and surveyed them again as seniors in 1998 and found that 48% of the students didn’t present any change in their religious values during the college years, in contrast with 38% who did report increases in the strength of their convictions (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 285). Another finding is the work of Professor Tim Clydesdale (2006) who proposes that the religious beliefs of most college students neither increase nor decline while in college and becomes a part of their identity “lock box”. This “lock box” protects various aspects of their identity from tampering that might affect the holder’s future entry into the American cultural mainstream. Yet, his findings suggest that while not all students use the lock box, most do because they don’t view religion as particularly relevant to their current stage as college students. Braskamp (2007) disagrees with the “lock box” theory and claims that students do not leave their personal values and faith as they enter college, but rather develop new forms of religious and spiritual engagement. For example, students in different campuses may change from traditional forms of worship (such as formal church attendance) into a more inclusive and diverse set of meditation and practice.

This current debate on religious commitment and engagement of college students needs further exploration, especially as it relates to understanding the similarities or differences exhibited by diverse cultural backgrounds and religious traditions.

## **College Student Values at Seventh-day Adventist Institutions**

The studies on the impact of values, beliefs and spirituality on college students reveal a significant interest in religious and spiritual matters among college students in different types and sizes of institutions nationwide (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Although there is an increasing volume of research in this area, most studies are limited to colleges and universities within the United States from public and private institutions in general, with no information of a significant study applying the same survey to college students of another culture outside the United States, nor to a specific sample of Seventh-day Adventist institutions. This lack of research-based information may prevent student affairs professionals from developing a broader cross-cultural perspective in their endeavor to provide relevant programs and services to support the spiritual development of college students at Seventh-day Adventist institutions.

The purpose of this study is to present the results of a preliminary research on the values, beliefs and spirituality of students in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) colleges and universities in North America and Brazil. Primarily, the following research questions will be investigated:

- (1) What are the values, beliefs and spirituality of this sample of US and Brazil students?
- (2) Are there differences in the values, beliefs and spirituality between US and Brazil students?

The relevance of this study resides in the potential production of research findings that will provide resources for higher education administrators and student service personnel to support values development and enrich the spiritual programming of colleges and universities in their endeavor to help diverse college students in the US and around the world. Since students are the reason for the existence of higher education institutions, the more we can know about their inner thinking and personal values, the better we can support and positively impact their spiritual growth and personal development as whole persons, and the better we can fulfill the mission of Christian higher education.

### **Methodological Overview**

The current study is part of the first phase of a larger longitudinal study on the spirituality and religiosity of students attending selected Adventist institutions around the world. The longitudinal study tracks entering freshmen through their college years in an effort to identify cross-cultural college experiences that facilitate students' spiritual and values development. The first phase of the study is a "pretest" for a subsequent longitudinal follow-up study in the senior year in an attempt to assess changes in college students' personal values and their spiritual and religious development during the undergraduate years.

Participants in the current study include freshmen students from two Adventist US institutions (Andrews University and La Sierra University) and one Adventist institution in Brazil (Brazil Adventist University, campus 2). The freshmen students were randomly selected and administered an adapted version of the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV) which was developed at the Higher Education Institute of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The adapted version consists of 34 multi-item questions designed to assess students' backgrounds, educational and occupational aspirations, search for meaning and

purpose, and values and beliefs with respect to spiritual and religious matters. According to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) website, the original survey was designed to ensure that all students – regardless of their particular theological and metaphysical perspective or belief system – are able to respond in a meaningful way (Spirituality in Higher Education). The survey was designed to assess 12 areas of interest organized into three broad categories as follows:

- 1) Spiritual Factors: Spirituality, Spiritual quest, and Equanimity
- 2) Religious Factors: Religious commitment, Religious struggle, Religious engagement, Religious/social conservatism, and Religious skepticism
- 3) Related Qualities: Charitable involvement, Ethic of caring, Ecumenical worldview, and Compassionate self-concept.

In this paper, we focused only on the eight spiritual and religious factors. These scales were developed using the item-scale specification found in the UCLA study ([http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/results/freshman/Appendix\\_Methodology.pdf](http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/results/freshman/Appendix_Methodology.pdf)). However, in this study, some items were excluded due to low item to scale correlation and hence.

The validity and reliability of the instrument is well established (HERI). Factor (subscale) mean, standard deviation, and reliability estimate are shown on Table 7. As shown in the table, internal consistency for the 8 factors range from a low of 0.61 for Religious/social conservatism to a high of 0.92 for Religious commitment.

After securing the necessary institutional approval to participate in the study, the questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of freshman of all academic areas of each institution and collected during the first year student orientation program, in accordance to the institution's administration, and in other cases, inviting freshman students who voluntarily wanted to answer the survey. In exchange, students who volunteered were included in a random drawing for winning a special prize. Instructions were given to assure the privacy of students, such as providing two separate secured boxes to collect respectively the survey responses and the student consent form. The consent form included information requesting students to participate in the senior posttest survey. Although not reported in the present study, focus groups were also conducted with participating students.

Prior to data analysis, steps were taken to deal with missing values and violation to normality. For the items used in this study, most had missing values ranging from 3 to 8 percent of the cases. Following the procedures used in the UCLA study, the multiple regression method was used to replace these missing values. We then analyzed (using Paired t-tests) whether there were differences between items with and without replaced missing values. No significant differences were found between means of the original items and items with replaced missing values.

Four of the eight spirituality and religiosity factors were either substantially positively or negatively skewed. Using recommended transformation procedures by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) for skewed variables, the religious commitment scale was transformed using  $Lg_{10}(K-X)$  function; the religious engagement and religious conservatism scales were transformed using  $\sqrt{K-X}$  function; and the religious skepticism scale was transformed using  $1/X$  function. Further data analyses were done only after the data were 'cleaned'.

## Spiritual and Religious Experience of College Students

### The Participants

There were 584 freshmen who participated in this study with a large percentage from Brazil (79.3%). Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants. Approximately half of the respondents were female (49.4%). As expected, they were mostly within the 18-24 age range (73.1%). About 24% of the participants were non-traditional students (25 and older). Almost half (47.6%) reported they graduated from public high school. Another 40.2% reported they graduated from private religious high schools. A small percentage (9.2%) graduated from private independent high schools. When asked what academic degree they intend to obtain, 50.8% of them said ‘doctorates’. Approximately 75% of the students reported their high school grades to be B- to B+. As expected, most (85.6%) are Adventists. There appears to be some differences between the US and Brazil samples. Most of the US sample seem younger (about 85% are 19 or younger). In the Brazil sample, most (52.3%) graduated from public high schools. Relative to the US sample where half reported to hold ‘middle-of-the-road’ political views, the Brazilian sample are more spread out ranging from Far left to far right.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics*

Variable	US		Brazil		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Male	46	38.0	244	52.7	290	49.7
Female	71	58.7	218	47.1	289	49.5
Age Group						
18 or younger	57	47.1	106	22.9	163	27.9
19	19	38.0	72	15.6	118	20.2
20	4	3.3	55	11.9	59	10.1
21-24	4	3.3	94	20.3	98	16.8
25 and older	5	4.1	133	28.7	138	23.6
Ethnicity						
White/Caucasian	48	39.7	268	57.9	316	54.1
Black/African	7	5.8	46	9.9	53	9.1
Asian	20	16.5	4	0.9	24	4.1
Hispanic/Latino	20	16.5	16	13.2	81	13.9
Other	5	4.1	31	6.7	36	6.2
High School						
Public School	36	29.8	242	52.3	278	47.6
Private Religious	72	59.5	163	35.2	235	40.2
Private Independent	6	5.0	48	10.4	54	9.2
Religious Affiliation						
Catholic	2	1.7	31	6.7	33	5.7
Evangelical	2	1.7	19	4.1	21	3.6
7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventist	105	86.8	395	85.3	500	85.6
Other	8	6.6	16	3.5	24	4.1
Family Income						
< 10,000	9	7.4	38	8.2	47	8.0

10,000-19,999	15	12.4	115	24.8	130	22.3
20,000-29,999	6	5.0	75	16.2	81	13.9
30,000-39,999	6	5.0	63	13.6	69	11.8
40,000-49,999	9	7.4	56	12.1	65	11.1
≥50,000	64	52.9	111	24.0	175	30.0
<b>Political Views</b>						
Far Left	0	0.0	26	5.6	26	4.5
Liberal	25	20.7	98	21.2	123	21.1
Middle of the Road	61	50.4	89	19.2	150	25.7
Conservative	28	23.1	121	26.1	149	25.5
Far Right	1	0.8	12	2.6	13	2.2

## Views about God and Spiritual and Religious Matters

As a group, the students' dominant view of God is that of Love (81.1%), Creator (78.6%), Protector (74.3%) and Supreme Being (69.5%) (see Table 2). There appears to be some differences between the US and the Brazil sample. For example, a larger proportion of the Brazilian students viewed God as Love while larger proportion of US students viewed God as Teacher or 'Part of me'.

Table 2  
*Views about God and Spiritual/Religious Matters*

<b>Current Views</b>	<b>US</b>		<b>Brazil</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
...about who God is						
Universal spirit	38	31.4	109	23.5	147	25.2
Love	87	71.9	386	83.4	473	81.0
Father-figure	73	60.3	265	57.2	338	57.9
Mother-figure	17	14.0	129	27.9	146	25.0
Teacher	66	54.5	146	31.5	212	36.3
Part of me	50	41.3	129	27.9	179	30.7
Divine Mystery	51	42.1	163	35.2	214	36.6
Protector	81	66.9	353	76.2	434	74.3
Creator	87	71.9	372	80.3	459	78.6
Nature	44	36.4	172	37.1	216	37.0
Supreme Being	75	62.0	331	71.5	406	69.5
Judge	58	47.9	255	55.1	313	53.6
Enlightenment	37	30.6	172	37.1	209	35.9
...about Spiritual/Religious matters						
Conflicted*	20	16.5	117	25.3	137	23.5
Secure**	69	57.0	333	71.9	402	68.8
Doubting	16	13.2	41	8.9	57	9.8
Seeking**	63	52.1	151	32.6	214	36.6
Not interested	4	3.3	11	2.4	15	2.6
Other**	13	10.7	19	4.1	32	5.5

\*P<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

When asked what their current views are of spiritual and religious matters, most (68.8%) reported it to be ‘secure’ (see Table 2). A smaller percentage reported it to be ‘seeking’ (36.6%) or ‘conflicted’ (23.5%). However, there are apparent differences between the US and the Brazilian samples. A larger proportion of Brazilian students (71.9%) reported their views about spiritual/religious matters as being secure. Only 57.0% of US students reported it to be secure. A larger percentage of US students reported their views as ‘seeking’ (52.1%) compared to the Brazilian sample at 32.6%.

### Spiritual and Religious Experiences

As summarized in Table 3, most students reported spiritual experiences from various events: praying (83.4%), listening to beautiful music (80.8%), in the house of worship (78.6%), while witnessing the beauty of nature (77.6%) and while meditating (72.6%). There appears slight differences between the US and Brazil samples. There are larger percentages of Brazilian students reporting ‘occasionally to frequently’ having spiritual experiences while in the house of worship, listening to music, meditating and participating in retreat. Larger percentages of US students have spiritual experiences while participating in music and art.

Table 3  
*Spiritual/Religious Experiences.*

Events	US		Brazil		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Had spiritual experiences while <sup>a</sup> ....						
In a house of worship	84	69.4	375	81.0	459	78.6
Listening to music	89	73.6	383	82.7	472	80.8
Viewing great work of art	41	33.9	172	37.1	213	36.5
Participating in music/art	78	64.5	247	53.3	325	55.7
Engaging in athletics	36	29.8	119	25.7	155	26.5
Witnessing beauty of nature	85	70.2	268	79.5	453	77.6
Meditating	62	51.2	362	78.2	424	72.6
Praying	86	71.1	401	86.6	487	83.4
Participating in retreat	69	57.0	343	74.1	412	70.5
Events that changed spiritual/religious beliefs <sup>b</sup>						
New ideas encountered in class	64	52.9	242	52.3	306	52.4
Romantic relationships	35	28.9	145	31.3	180	30.8
Personal injury or illness	25	20.7	216	46.7	241	41.3
Parents’ divorce or separation	9	7.9	70	15.1	79	13.5
Death of a close friend or relative	27	22.3	179	38.7	206	35.3
Natural disaster	23	19.0	277	59.8	300	51.4
Terrorist attacks worldwide	43	35.5	285	61.6	328	53.2
The war in Iraq	26	21.5	251	54.2	277	47.4

<sup>a</sup>Percent ‘occasionally to Frequently’.

<sup>b</sup>Percent indicating event ‘strengthened’ their beliefs.

It is encouraging to note that at least half (52.4%) of the students had their religious/spiritual beliefs strengthened from new ideas they learned in class. However, at least half of them also



reported their beliefs strengthened by natural disasters and terrorist attacks. Even the war in Iraq strengthened the beliefs of at least 47% of the respondents. Some differences between the two samples are apparent. There seems to be larger percentages of Brazilian students whose spiritual and religious beliefs were strengthened by such events as personal injury or illness, natural disaster, worldwide terrorist attacks and the war in Iraq.

## Prayer

From the results on Table 4, it is evident that this is a group of praying students. Over 93% reported they pray regularly with some differences between the US (84.3%) and the Brazilian (95.5%) samples. Most pray for a variety of reasons: for forgiveness (92.8%), for help in solving problems (92.6%), to express gratitude (92.5%), for loved ones (92.5%), to be in communion with God (91.6%) and for wisdom (91.6%). Again, there appears to be higher percentages of the Brazil sample who pray for these reasons.

Table 4  
*Prayer and Reasons for Prayer*

Variable	US		Brazil		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you pray?						
Yes	102	84.3	442	95.5	544	93.2
Why do you pray?						
For help in solving problems	103	85.1	438	94.6	541	92.6
To be in communion with God	98	81.0	437	94.4	535	91.6
To express gratitude	101	83.5	441	95.2	542	92.5
For emotional strength	98	81.0	435	94.0	533	91.3
For forgiveness	103	85.1	439	94.8	542	92.8
To relieve the suffering of others	96	79.3	422	91.1	518	88.7
For loved ones	102	84.3	438	94.6	540	92.5
For wisdom	100	82.6	438	94.6	535	91.6
To praise God	101	83.5	429	92.7	530	90.8

## Indicators of Spirituality and Religiosity

In the UCLA study, several indicators of spirituality and religiosity were listed. Tables 5 and 6 compare what is reported in this study and what was reported in the UCLA's national study. The UCLA study was based on a sample of over 100,000 subjects from over 200 institutions. In all indicators of spirituality, there are larger percentages of students in the SDA sample who believe in the sacredness of life (94.5%), who have an interest in spirituality (93.2%) and who are searching for the meaning and purpose of life (91.4%). Proportionally, almost twice as many students in the SDA sample (85.2% vs. 47%) seek out opportunities to help them grow spiritually. Compared to the national sample, there were over 20% more students in the SDA sample who reported that their spirituality is a source of joy.

Table 5  
*Indicators of Students' Spirituality*

Indicator	SDA sample		National (US) <sup>a</sup>
	n	%	%
Believe in the sacredness of life	553	94.5	83.0
Have an interest in spirituality	545	93.2	80.0
Search for meaning/purpose in life	535	91.4	76.0
Have discussions about meaning of life with friends	506	86.4	74.0
My spirituality is a source of joy	506	86.4	64.0
Seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually	498	85.2	47.0

<sup>a</sup>Source: *The spiritual life of college students: A national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose*. Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles.

On every indicator of religiosity (see Table 6), relative to the national sample, there were higher percentages of students in the SDA sample who pray (93.0% vs. 69%), attend religious services (96.3% vs. 81.0%), and follow religious teachings in everyday life (83.4% vs. 40.0%). Larger percentages of students in this sample believe in God (87.5% vs. 79.0%), discuss religion and spirituality with friends (93.0% vs. 80.0%).

Table 6  
*Indicators of Students' Religiosity*

Indicator	SDA sample		National (US) <sup>a</sup>
	n	%	%
Believe in God	511	87.5	79.0
Pray	544	93.0	69.0
Attended religious services	553	96.3	81.0
Discussed religion/spirituality with friends	544	93.0	80.0
Discussed religion/spirituality with family	525	89.7	76.0
Religious beliefs provide strength, support & guidance	543	92.9	69.0
Follow religious teachings in everyday life	488	83.4	40.0

<sup>a</sup>Source: *The spiritual life of college students: A national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose*. Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles.

## Spirituality and Religiosity

In the UCLA study, three spiritual factors (spirituality, equanimity, spiritual quest) and five religious factors (religious commitment, religious struggle, religious engagement, religious/social conservatism, and religious skepticism) were examined. Spirituality reflects ways in which students describe their spirituality (e.g. having interest in spirituality, seeking opportunities to grow spiritually, and believing in the sacredness of life). Equanimity reflects students' self-description and behavior (e.g. being able to find meaning in times of hardness, and

feeling a strong connection to all humanity). Spiritual quest describes students' spiritual goals and behavior (e.g. searching for meaning and purpose in life, attaining wisdom, and seeking beauty in my life). Religious commitment describes the various ways students describe their commitment to religion (e.g. finding religion to be personally helpful, felt loved by God, feeling a connection with God, and religion as defining the goals they set for themselves). Religious struggle examines the manner in which students are struggling with their current religion (e.g. felt angry with God, felt distant from God). Religious engagement describes students' involvement in their current religion (e.g. attend religious services, read sacred texts, pray). Religious/social conservatism describes values and beliefs that may be viewed as religiously and socially conservative (e.g. abortion should be illegal; people who don't believe in God should be punished). Religious skepticism describes ways that students may have become skeptical about their religion (e.g. the universe arose by chance, it doesn't matter what I believe as long as I lead a moral life).

Table 7  
*Scale Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability Estimates for Spirituality and Religiosity.*

Subscale	Mean	SD	#of Items	Range of Possible Scores	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Spirituality</b>					
Spirituality	26.07	5.87	11	11 - 37	0.81
Equanimity	12.34	1.89	5	5 - 15	0.66
Spiritual Quest	27.91	3.80	9	9 - 34	0.76
<b>Religiosity</b>					
Religious ...					
Commitment	38.65	5.10	11	11 - 42	0.92
Struggle	10.90	2.49	7	7 - 21	0.67
Engagement	28.29	5.09	9	9 - 37	0.79
Social conservatism	15.00	2.22	5	5 - 18	0.61
Skepticism	7.94	2.58	6	6 - 23	0.69

Table 7 shows the mean and standard deviation for each of the spiritual and religious factors for the 584 students in this study. Given the range of possible scores, the students in this study are moderately spiritual (M=26.07, SD=5.87), highly committed to their faith (M=38.65, SD=5.10), and moderately engaged in their religion (M=28.29, SD=5.09). It is encouraging to note that religious struggle (M=10.90, SD=2.49) and religious skepticism (M=7.94, SD=2.58) are quite low.

Multivariate analysis of variance was used to examine differences between the US and the Brazilian sample on the linear combination of spiritual and religious factors. The assumption for equality of variance-covariance matrices was met (Box's M=47.20,  $F_{(36,166902)}=1.28$ ,  $p=0.122$ ). The result of the MANOVA is found on Table 8 and indicates that the linear combination of spiritual and religious factors significantly differentiated the US and the Brazilian samples ( $\lambda=0.69$ ,  $F_{(8,575)}=32.23$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\eta^2=0.31$ ).

Table 8

*Comparison between US and Brazil Samples on Spirituality and Religiosity*

Variables	Group				F	p	$\eta^2$
	US (n=121)		Brazil (n=463)				
	M	SD	M	SD			
<b>Spirituality</b>							
Spirituality	24.29	6.42	26.54	5.64	14.35	0.000	0.024
Equanimity	11.82	1.96	12.47	1.84	11.48	0.001	0.019
Spiritual Quest	24.86	3.91	28.70	3.35	117.36	0.000	0.170
<b>Religiosity</b>							
<b>Religious...</b>							
Commitment	36.14	5.66	39.31	4.73	60.33	0.000	0.094
Struggle	12.05	2.59	10.30	2.37	34.59	0.000	0.056
Engagement	26.05	4.89	28.88	4.99	35.06	0.000	0.057
Social conservatism	14.52	1.88	15.14	2.28	11.16	0.001	0.019
Skepticism	9.43	2.65	7.55	2.42	86.83	0.000	0.130

Wilks' Lamda=0.690,  $F_{(8,575)}=32.23$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\eta^2=0.31$

Approximately 31% of the group difference can be explained by the linear combination of the spiritual and religious factors. The Brazilian sample scored significantly higher on spirituality (M=26.54, SD=5.64), equanimity (M=12.47, SD=1.84), spiritual quest (M=28.70, SD=3.35), religious commitment (M=39.31, SD=4.73), religious engagement (M=28.88, SD=4.99), and religious/social conservatism (M=15.14, SD=2.28). However, the US sample scored significantly higher on religious struggle (M=12.05, SD=2.59) and religious skepticism (M=9.43, SD=2.65). By convention, the magnitude of the difference is small for spirituality, equanimity and conservatism; medium for religious commitment, religious struggle, and religious engagement; and large for religious skepticism and spiritual quest (Green and Salkind, 2008).

### **Conclusions: What can we learn?**

In spite of tendency by tertiary educational institutions to deemphasize beliefs, values, and spiritual growth as a marketing tactic (Hamilton, 2005, p.35), a general comparison of the results of this study with the similar study surveying a random sample of college students of public and private American colleges and universities, conducted by the Higher Education Institute, reveals that both in the American national sample and in the sample of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) institutions, today's college students have high levels of spiritual interest and involvement.

The results reveal illuminating differences between the Higher Education Institute sample and the SDA institutions sample on the one hand, and the Brazilian students and the US students in this study sample. The SDA sample scored about 20 % higher than the US national sample when students were asked to describe how they see their current views on spiritual and religious matters, as more students in the SDA sample felt secure in their religious quest, in response to the question, "How would you describe your current views about spiritual/religious matters?" This is an indication that even though students in both samples show high levels of interest in

spiritual growth, those in Christian institutions like SDA colleges and universities consider such growth a cornerstone of their overall college experience. The differences in the national sample and SDA sample could be explained by differences in philosophy and mission. Students in Adventist colleges and universities have explained their choice of Adventist education as deliberate and based on their desire to benefit from a Christian curriculum which helps them to find meaning in their Christ centered faith (Knight, 2006; Smith & Mngo, 2007).

Interesting, the study also reveals that even among SDA institutions, informative differences exist in college students' levels of interest in the quest for moral and spiritual development. Overall, the Brazilian sample indicates higher pursuance of values, spiritual, and religious matters than the US sample. The Brazilian students also seemed to be more secure in their religious views (71.9%) than the US students (57.0%). These differences can be associated with cultural differences and societal influences on higher educational institutions, including Christian institutions. Wilhoit et al. (2009) underscore that "the development of collegiate character and spiritual sensitivity has become more challenging in recent years" with the intensity of the challenges varying from one socio-cultural and/or religious context to another. According to Holmes (1987), the major distinctive feature of a Christian college should be its ability to "cultivate the creative and active integration" not only of faith and learning but of faith and culture. Active integration will only be possible if Christian educators take into consideration students' individual backgrounds and contexts in the formulation of programs aimed at nurturing students' beliefs, values and spirituality.

The cross-cultural examination of college students' beliefs, values, and spirituality is relevant now more than ever before because of the increasing multicultural and diverse nature of college campuses around the world. Research on diversity on college campuses suggest that several types of diversity experiences (ethnic, socio-economical, religious, and political) are positively related to several developmental outcomes (Bowman, 2010). The socio-cultural make up of campuses has to be taken into consideration in the design of programs targeting a broad spectrum of value, attitudinal, psychosocial, and moral dimensions of student growth known to occur from freshman to senior year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Hilliard (1992) proposes that if the larger community and by extension the educational community is composed of a mosaic of cultures, then a multicultural approach to education should be adopted. This means that educators (leaders and faculty) must show sensitivity to the needs of the educational community. When issues involving elements of culture occur within a Christian religious and/or academic community, educators must be at the forefront of these activities to provide leadership and compassion for their students.

This study recognizes that for institutional leaders and faculty to actively and effectively promote both the exterior (physical) and interior (values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality, and self-understanding) growth of students, they have to understand how background influences college students' conception of values, beliefs, and spirituality development. In the case of Christian colleges, this consideration is essential if they want to succeed in keeping student spiritual and character formation at the center of the curriculum in Christian higher education (Robinson & Jeynes, 2010; Wilhoit et al., 2009).

According to Arthur (2008), universities today are increasingly complicated places serving multiple constituencies that have conflicting agendas. Secularization of Christian colleges has remained a current trend and some of these institutions over the years have made chapel policy,

an important component in the spiritual and religious growth of students, optional or voluntary (Brackney, 2001). Research attests that college is a formative time for development of values, commitments, identity, and life purpose (Wilhoit, J. C. & al., 2009), and the results of this study demonstrate that Christian colleges and universities, particularly Seventh-day Adventists institutions, play a leading role. Compared with the UCLA study which uses a national sample, the sample in this study indicates that over twenty percent more students see their spirituality a source of happiness. Significant cross-cultural differences in the perspectives of North American versus Brazilian students in Seventh-day Adventists institutions emphasize the need to take into consideration students' socio-cultural and religious backgrounds and adopt a differentiated approach in the development and implementation of programs that foster students' beliefs, values, and spiritual growth.

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