

# Changes in religious affiliation between high school and college

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## Introduction

This research is being conducted because there relatively few studies observing changes in religious beliefs and activity between high school and college. College students tend to shy away from their religion, especially if they are a part of a minority religious group (Bowman & Small, 2012). Other research by Stoppa (2010) found that activity in student's religion decreased but strength of beliefs remained constant. However, this study also demonstrated that changes were very individual.

The first study was exploratory in nature and collected data on the religious beliefs and level of activity within their religion. Even though LaGrange College is associated with the Methodist faith, we were not sure how religious the student population was. The information gathered in Study 1 guided the direction of Study 2, which added Rotter's Locus of Control scale (1966) and investigated the change in beliefs between high school and college.

I hypothesized that the religious beliefs and level of activity in the student's religion would be consistent between high school and college. This is mainly due to the fact that the students are all from a region of the country in which religion is emphasized. I also hypothesized that students with a high level of external locus of control would also have a high level of religious activity and strong beliefs. This research might lead to further understanding of religious importance and variability in this unique population.

## Methods

### Study #1 (21 questions)

**Religious activity and beliefs.** 19 questions were included to gather information on religious beliefs. Some questions were created for this study and some were taken from Bowman's study (2012). Questions were formatted as statements (i.e. I have a relationship with God) and participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements in a Likert-type answer format.

**Demographics.** 3 questions regarding GPA, age, and gender were also included.

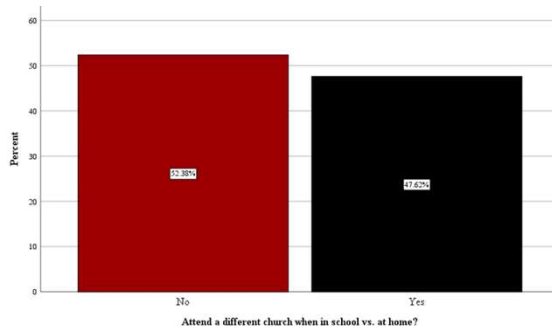
### Study #2 (48 questions)

**Religious activity and beliefs.** 16 questions were included to gather information on religious beliefs. Some questions were created for this study and some were taken from Bowman's study (2012). 13 questions were formatted as statements (i.e. I have a relationship with God) and participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements in a Likert-type answer format. 8 of these questions were specifically about their time in high school and 5 were specifically about their time in college. 3 questions were asking about their current religious activity.

**Demographics.** 3 questions regarding age, gender, and religious denomination were also included.

**Locus of Control.** 29 questions assessed the participants locus of control using Rotter's LoC scale (1966).

**Data collection and Participants.** Data was collected using the Psychological Science Research Pool associated with our Introduction to Psychology course. All participants were enrolled at LaGrange College. The project was approved by LaGrange College's IRB.



	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. HS Religiosity	1					
2. College Religiosity	0.921**	1				
3. Locus of Control	-0.267	-0.339	1			
4. Groups	0.678**	0.743**	0.005	1		
5. Attend	0.805**	0.884**	-0.150	0.841**	1	
6. Church	0.311	0.324	0.130	0.432	0.246	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Relationship with God	1											
2. Sense of Importance	0.687**	1										
3. God Appreciates Me	0.287	0.666**	1									
4. God will help me	0.729**	0.637**	0.281	1								
5. God Values me	0.425	0.601**	0.629**	0.559**	1							
6. God for Advice	0.827**	0.576**	0.325	0.637**	0.610**	1						
7. God cares for me	0.678**	0.589**	0.356	0.621**	0.705**	0.732**	1					
8. Disappointed with God	-0.259	-0.098	0.053	-0.277	-0.084	-0.238	-0.183	1				
9. Relationship to continue	0.760**	0.530*	0.391	0.552**	0.616**	0.794**	0.798**	-0.333	1			
10. Feeling of fulfillment	0.642*	0.664**	0.272	0.803**	0.736**	0.724**	0.778**	-0.162	0.634**	1		
11. Strengthen relationship	0.475*	0.354	0.048	0.404	0.462*	0.664**	0.536*	-0.141	0.631**	0.624**	1	
12. Maintaining relationship	0.746**	0.554**	0.339	0.669**	0.683**	0.897**	0.792**	-0.158	0.775**	0.801**	0.763**	1

\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Results

### Study 1

**21 college undergraduate students at a small, liberal arts, private college participated.** There were 9 males and 12 females. The ages ranged from 18 to 27, with the mean age between 21 and 22.

### Study 2

**17 college undergraduate students at a small, liberal arts, private college participated.** There were 6 males and 11 females. The ages ranged from 18 to 27, with the mean age between 21 and 22.

**11.8% of the students were associated with Catholicism, while 58.8% were Protestant.** The remaining 29.4% identified as Other.

**Religious beliefs in college.** Both Study 1 and Study 2 included the same 5 Likert-type questions about religious beliefs. These were compiled into a measure of religious beliefs ranging from 5 (low levels of religious beliefs) and 20 (high levels of religious beliefs). These 5 questions had high reliability scores ( $\alpha = .978$ ). The mean for both studies combined ( $N=38$ ) was 16.47 ( $STD=3.79$ ), indicating that students were more inclined to agree with religious statements.

**Changes in religious beliefs between high school and college.** The results indicate no difference in student's religious beliefs between high school and college ( $r=0.39$ ,  $p=0.7$ ,  $N=17$ ).

**Locus of Control.** In Rotter's LoC scale, high scores indicate more external locus of control. The mean score was 12.06 ( $N=17$ ,  $STD=2.68$ ) ranging from 8 to 16. This measure did not correlate with the religious beliefs composite score for college ( $r=-0.34$ ,  $p=0.18$ ) or high school ( $r=-0.27$ ,  $p=0.3$ ).

## Conclusion

We supported our hypothesis by finding that religious behaviors did not change between high school and college. We also discovered that the majority of our sample rated themselves relatively strong on religious beliefs.

We did not support our hypothesis in regards to Locus of Control. There was no relationship between the religious belief composite score and the LoC scale.

## Limitations

- Small sample size.
- Small, religiously affiliated, private college

## Future Research

- There could be a longitudinal study starting with high school and following the participants throughout college to better analyze their change in beliefs and activities.

