

# The Christian Life Survey 2014-2015 Administration at 22 Christian Colleges



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## Factors related to students' **focus on others**

### Introduction

Every year tens of thousands of students arrive at Christian colleges seeking to grow: to grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually. And those colleges are intentional about providing a setting where that growth is likely to happen. This research explores the factors that are associated with greater spiritual growth at 22 of those colleges.

Christian colleges and their students commonly identify spiritual formation as an area in which they want to see growth. In this research spiritual formation was defined as having a greater focus on God (Matthew 22:37), on others (Matthew 22:39), and on the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). A spiritual focus is something that is central to who you are spiritually, and Christianity regularly presents itself as a biblical calling to make God, others, and the Bible central parts of the Christian life.

This report is on the factors that are related to a greater focus on others. Other reports at [tucse.taylor.edu/research](http://tucse.taylor.edu/research) provide similar discussions for a focus on God and, more comprehensively, for scripture engagement both as a focus and as a practice.

In the 2014-2015 school year data was collected at 25 Christian colleges. For 22 of them, the data was collected in a way that allowed the results to be included here (a discussion of the students these data were collected for is in Box One). The students were surveyed using the Christian Life Survey (the specific parts of the survey used to measure the items discussed in this report are discussed in Box Two; additional information about the survey and its administration are at [tucse.taylor.edu/research](http://tucse.taylor.edu/research)).

### Box One: Who are the students in this study?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Christian Life Survey was administered to students at 25 Christian colleges in the United States. The results shown in this summary brief, however, are only for the traditional-age, traditional-program freshmen through seniors from the 22 colleges that provided population proportions that allowed representative weighting to be used. Students are weighted to be proportionately representative for sex and year in school for their colleges.

These results are for 6,074 students from 22 Christian colleges in the United States.

The students are overwhelmingly Protestant Christians who are serious about their spiritual life (they chose to attend a Christian college and they agreed to participate in a half-hour survey about their spiritual life).

The students represented here, then, are traditional-age, devout Christians attending 22 Christian colleges in the USA. Great care should be employed when generalizing these results to any other groups.

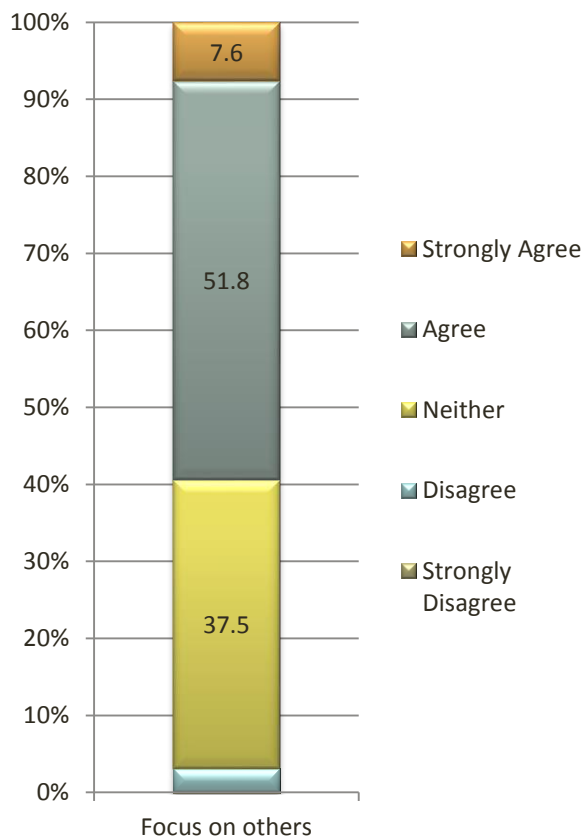
# Students' focus on others: Moderate to high

These students tended to have a moderate focus on others, but a notable proportion indicated that they are neutral regarding a focus on others. The average value (mean) for the 6,000-plus students was 3.7 on the five-point scale, which indicates a position between being neutral and having an average value of “agree” on the six questions. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile value was 4.2, which indicates that one-fourth of the students were higher than agreement with all six of the questions asked (see Box Two), and the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile is 3.3, which means a fourth of the students were neutral or had a disagreement with a focus on others.

Visualized a different way, Chart One shows the percentage distribution of the students when their scores are rounded to the nearest whole number on the scale. About eight percent of the students' scores indicated an average value of “strongly agree” on the six questions. Thus, only a small percentage of students had a high focus on others. Fifty-two percent have a rounded value of 4, which shows a moderate focus on others

	25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Mean	75 <sup>th</sup> percentile
<b>Focus on others</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>4.17</b>

Chart One: Students' focus on others scores (collapsed to discreet values and summarized in percentages)



## Box Two: How was this topic measured?

Participants were presented with six statements about their focus on others:

*I live in ways that help others as much as myself.*

*I have tremendous love for people I don't know.*

*I go out of my way to discover the people in need around me that I normally wouldn't see.*

*I use what I own for others as much as for myself.*

*I think about others' well-being and want what is best for them.*

*I rejoice with those who rejoice no matter how I personally feel.*

Answer options for each question were Strongly Disagree (1) through Strongly Agree (5).

Focus on others values for the students were computed by averaging their responses to the six statements.

A value of 5 indicates that the student strongly agreed with all six questions (a very high focus on God), while a value of 1 indicates that the student strongly disagreed with each statement (a very low focus on God). Values between 1 and 5 indicate some mix of agreement and disagreement.

The Christian Life Survey (CLS) is an online, half-hour survey on Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Orientation (lifestyle), and Scripture Engagement and was conducted in the 2014-2015 school year at the following Christian colleges: Bethel; Biola; California Baptist; Charleston Southern; Corban; Cornerstone; Crown; Fresno Pacific; George Fox; Gordon; Houghton; Judson; The Kings; LeTourneau; Northwest Nazarene; Nyack; Patrick Henry College; Spring Arbor; Tabor; Taylor; Union; Wheaton.

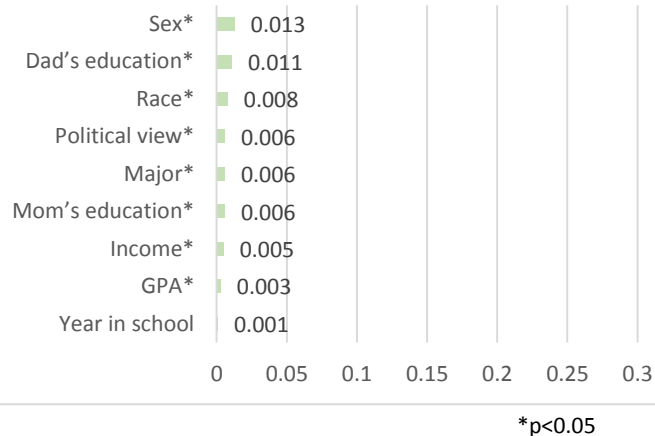
## Students' focus on others: Not affected by any demographic variables

As was noted above, there is a large amount of variation in students' focus on others. Usually, in sociological research, a large amount of variation means something demographic is causing different outcomes for people. For example, women are generally found to be more religious than men, or people of one race or another show a greater likelihood to adopt certain religious practices.

Quite surprisingly, *no demographic variable is related to different levels of focus on others*. For example, women and men have nearly identical average values (3.8 and 3.6 respectively)—and that is the greatest difference in values for any demographic category!

Chart Two provides the eta squared values for each demographic variable's effect on focus on others. These values show the proportion of variation in focus on others that is accurately predicted mathematically by the demographic variables. These values are very small indeed.

Chart Two: Focus on others relation to demographic variables ( $\eta^2$  values; GPA uses an  $r^2$  value)



## Students' focus on others: Correlated with outreach

While the demographic results were rather surprising, the analysis of how focus on others relates to other parts of the Christian life is not. Having a well matured focus on others is strongly related to being involved in outreach service and outreach evangelism.

Chart Three provides the strength of relationship results that show which other parts of spiritual life are related to a focus on others. Outreach—both as service and as evangelism—are strongly related to a focus on others. Being spiritually reflective is also strongly related to a higher focus on others. Focus on God and being spiritually plugged in (connected) are moderately related to a higher focus on others. A focus on the Bible has such a small relation to a focus on others that the two are not related.

These correlations, however, tend to see only the surface. To understand which variables are truly most related to focus on others, a net effects analysis (next page) is needed.

Chart Three: Focus on others relation to spiritual life variables ( $r^2$  values; all results are statistically significant)

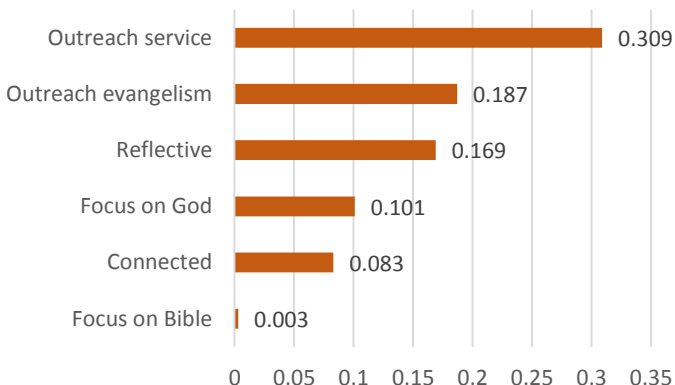


Table One: Focus on others relation to spiritual life variables ( $r$  values; all results are statistically significant)

	Focus on Others
Outreach service	.556
Outreach evangelism	.432
Reflective	.411
Focus on God	.318
Connected	.288
Focus on Bible	-.057

# Students' focus on God: Aspects of spiritual life with the greatest effect on focus on others

Focus on others is most likely to be increased by

- Outreach as service*
- A focus on the Bible, and*
- A focus on God.*

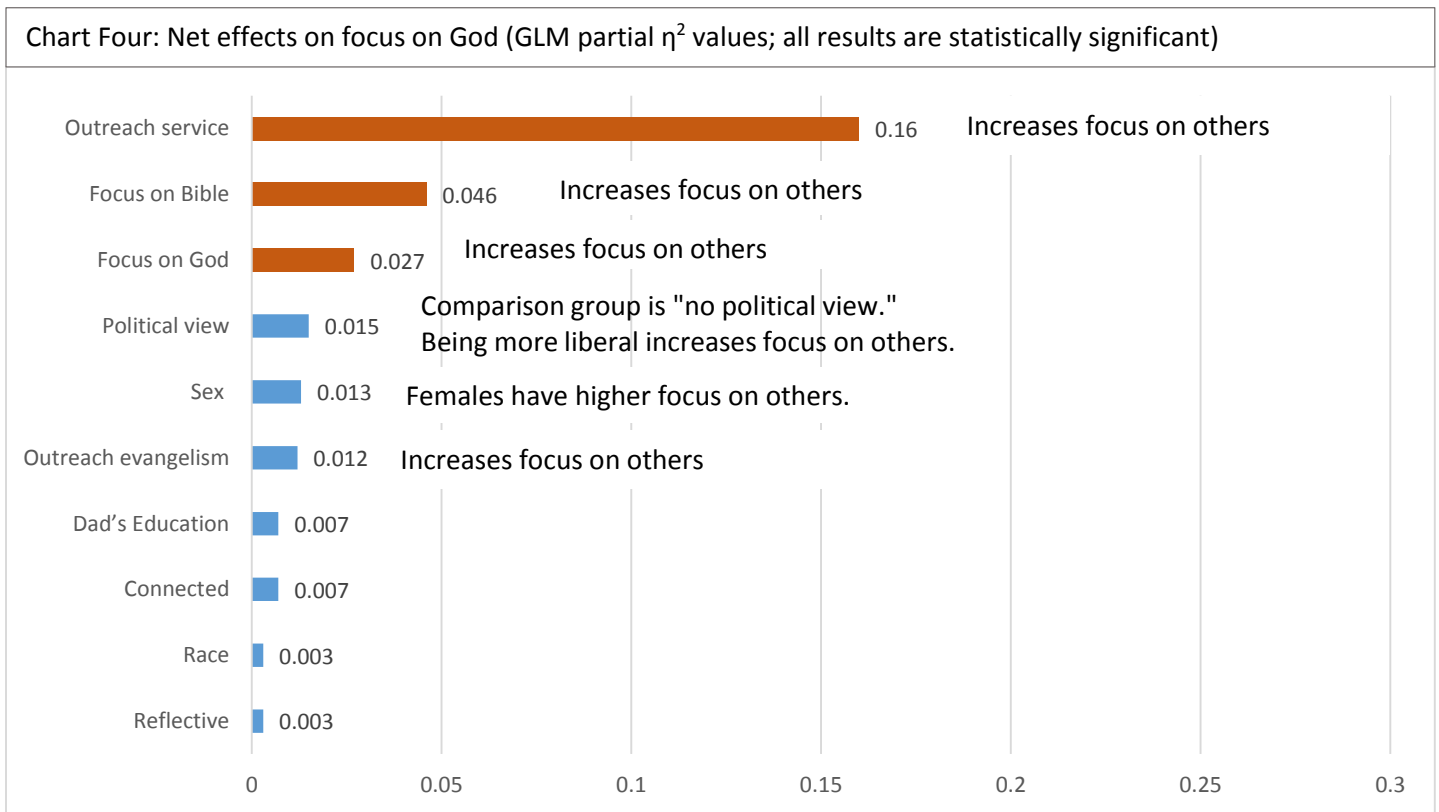
The outreach (service) effect is moderately strong. The focus on the Bible effect is small. The effect of focus on God is very small. Focus on others is not likely to be increased by any of the other variables discussed in this report.

The results shown in Chart Four are for a general linear model analysis (full results are in the appendix). The difference between these results and the results in Charts Two and Three is the use of statistical controls, a process which determines which factors matter most, having controlled for the effects of the others.

Outreach service, after controlling for the other variables, explains 16 percent of the variation in focus on others, focus on the Bible explains almost five percent, and focus on God explains almost three percent.

It is very interesting that the implementation of statistical controls clarified such a key role for a focus on the Bible to affect focus on others. Where focus on the Bible had no effect in the correlations, implementing the controls allowed the real effect to be seen. Conversely, outreach evangelism and a reflective spiritual orientation proved to not make any difference for a focus on others after the overlapping effects of other variables were removed.

To increase students' focus on others, then, programs that help them develop a lifestyle of service, a focus on the Bible, and a focus on God would accomplish the most.



# APPENDIX

## General linear model results

Dependent variable: Focus on others

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	841.147 <sup>a</sup>	26	32.352	155.302	.000	.414
Intercept	36.847	1	36.847	176.883	.000	.030
Outreach service	227.284	1	227.284	1091.056	.000	.160
Focus on Bible	57.698	1	57.698	276.973	.000	.046
Focus on God	32.403	1	32.403	155.546	.000	.027
Political view	17.562	8	2.195	10.538	.000	.015
Sex	15.441	1	15.441	74.121	.000	.013
Outreach evangelism	13.957	1	13.957	67.000	.000	.012
Connected	8.899	1	8.899	42.717	.000	.007
Dad's education	7.862	5	1.572	7.548	.000	.007
Reflective	3.967	1	3.967	19.043	.000	.003
Race	3.871	6	.645	3.097	.005	.003
Error	1189.277	5709	.208			
Total	81337.417	5736				
Corrected total	2030.424	5735				

<sup>a</sup> R Squared = .414 (Adjusted R Squared = .412)

Parameter estimates are given on the next page.

**Parameter Estimates**

Dependent variable: Focus on others

Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Intercept	1.170	.085	13.689	.000	1.002	1.337	.032
Focus on Bible	.178	.011	16.643	.000	.157	.199	.046
Connected	-.052	.008	-6.536	.000	-.067	-.036	.007
Outreach service	.182	.006	33.031	.000	.171	.193	.160
Outreach evangelism	.035	.004	8.185	.000	.027	.044	.012
Reflective	-.030	.007	-4.364	.000	-.044	-.017	.003
[Sex = male]	-.109	.013	-8.609	.000	-.133	-.084	.013
[Sex = female]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.	.	.	.
[Dad's degree = did not finish high school]	.079	.039	2.029	.043	.003	.154	.001
[Dad's degree = high school]	.118	.023	5.026	.000	.072	.164	.004
[Dad's degree = two year or technical degree]	.072	.026	2.817	.005	.022	.123	.001
[Dad's degree = bachelor's]	.055	.022	2.482	.013	.012	.098	.001
[Dad's degree = master's]	.021	.023	.891	.373	-.025	.067	.000
[Dad's degree = doctorate]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.	.	.	.
[Race = white]	.031	.020	1.532	.126	-.009	.070	.000
[Race = black]	.111	.042	2.620	.009	.028	.194	.001
[Race = Asian]	-.002	.030	-.064	.949	-.062	.058	.000
[Race = Native American]	.461	.324	1.424	.154	-.174	1.095	.000
[Race = Hispanic]	.111	.034	3.265	.001	.044	.177	.002
[Race = other]	.048	.061	.800	.424	-.070	.167	.000
[Race = multiracial]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.	.	.	.
[Political view = very liberal]	.074	.091	.806	.420	-.105	.253	.000
[Political view = liberal]	.021	.036	.573	.566	-.050	.091	.000
[Political view = leaning liberal]	-.028	.026	-1.049	.294	-.079	.024	.000
[Political view = leaning conservative]	-.090	.021	-4.312	.000	-.131	-.049	.003
[Political view = conservative]	-.133	.019	-7.074	.000	-.170	-.096	.009
[Political view = very conservative]	-.168	.028	-6.083	.000	-.222	-.114	.006
[Political view = independent]	-.028	.025	-1.093	.274	-.077	.022	.000
[Political view = other]	-.105	.037	-2.861	.004	-.177	-.033	.001
[Political view = no political view]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.	.	.	.
Focus on God	.249	.020	12.472	.000	.210	.288	.027

<sup>a</sup> This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.