

Loyola College

**Student Views on Religion:
Class of 2008**

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Student Views on Religion: Class of 2008

Introduction

In 2004, Loyola College participated in a national survey of entering first-year students—the CIRP—that is administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles. The CIRP is used to develop a national profile of entering college students and in 2004 the survey was expanded to include a set of items on religion and spirituality. HERI followed up with the students in the class of 2008 when they were juniors with the College Student Beliefs and Values (CSBV) survey that was intended to assess changes in the religious and spiritual beliefs, behaviors, and values that may have taken place in the first three years that a student has been in college. This report focuses on items related to engagement in religious/spiritual practice, students' views on God and religion, and their sense of their own abilities related to religious/spiritual attributes.

Methodology

The CIRP survey was administered to all incoming students of the class of 2008 during fall orientation in 2004. The surveys, in paper-and-pencil format, were provided to student orientation leaders (Evergreens) and were administered to the students in a group setting. Students completed the surveys in the group setting and returned them to their Evergreen.

A total of 884 students completed and returned their surveys. In the spring of 2007 all students in the class of 2008 who had provided their student id number on the CIRP were re-contacted by HERI and asked to complete a follow-up survey called the College Student Beliefs and Values survey. A total of 175 juniors completed the follow-up either on paper or online. The data reported here represent a longitudinal panel of the 175 students for whom first-year and junior-year surveys could be matched.

Based on this panel size of 175, sampling error for proportions is $\pm 7\%$. Sampling error for subgroups may be higher and the number of responses to any one question may be smaller than the total number of surveys because of student non-response. Where possible, comparisons have been made to the data for junior completers at other Catholic institutions in fall of 2007 (N=3,352). All group differences described in this report are statistically significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level unless otherwise noted.

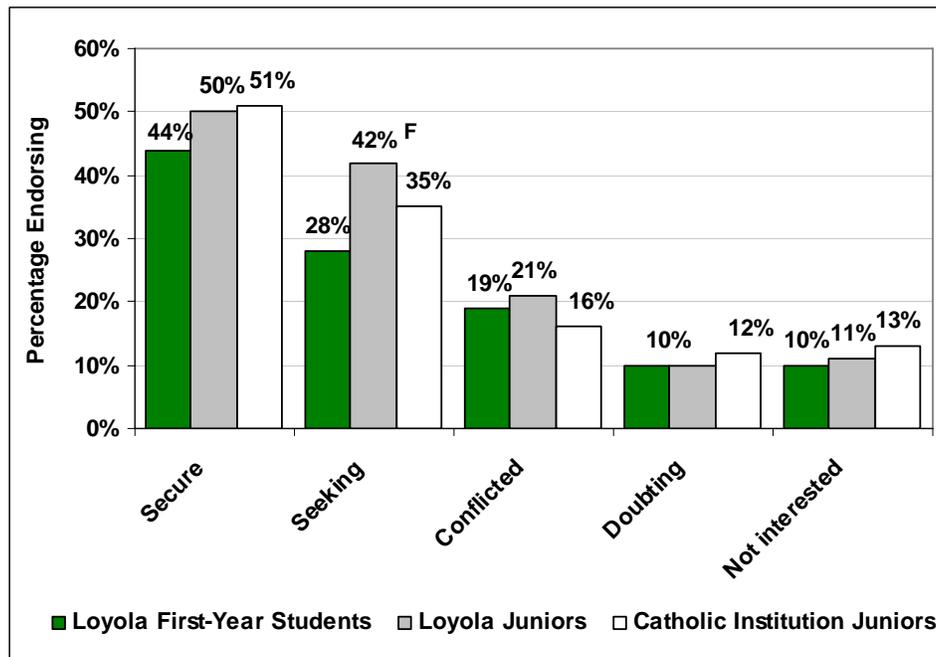
Executive Summary

- ◆ Half of the class of 2008 as juniors reported that they are “secure” in their religious/spiritual beliefs and values.
 - The proportion of students that reported they are “seeking” their religious and spiritual beliefs and values increased over their time at Loyola and is more present among Loyola juniors than juniors at other Catholic institutions.
- ◆ Although large proportions of the class of 2008 reported having discussions about the “meaning of life with friends” as both first-year and junior students, the search for “meaning/purpose in life” seems to become more prevalent as students progress through their studies at Loyola.
- ◆ Over half of the students in the class of 2008—both as entering students and as juniors—reported that it was either very important or essential to them personally to seek opportunities to “grow spiritually” and to integrate spirituality in their lives.
- ◆ The belief that “we are all spiritual beings” grew over time for the class of 2008 and Loyola juniors hold the belief that they “gain spiritual strength by trusting a higher power” in greater proportion than do juniors at other Catholic institutions.
- ◆ Loyola juniors are more open than their counterparts at other Catholic institutions about the connection between spirituality, morality, and religion.
- ◆ Over eight out of ten of Loyola’s entering and junior students believe in God.
 - The most common conception of God is as “love” and “creator.”
- ◆ While the majority of students think of God as love, fewer than half reported that they frequently feel “loved” by God and many of them feel “distant” and “angry” with God.
- ◆ The belief in the benefits of prayer and the proportion of students who indicated that they engage in prayer increased over their time at Loyola. Proportionally more Loyola juniors in the class of 2008 pray as compared to juniors at other Catholic institutions.
- ◆ Loyola students’ attendance at religious services dropped between high school and their junior year of college, but the rate of religious service attendance among juniors in the class of 2008 is consistent with other Catholic institutions’ junior-year students.
- ◆ When asked about the relationship between science and religion, approximately half of the class of 2008 reported that they felt the two were in collaboration with each supporting the other. At the same time, over half of the students indicated that “only religion can truly explain existence.”

Detailed Findings

The most common reply when students were asked about their current views on religious/spiritual matters was that they were “secure” but many of them reported that they were “seeking.” The proportion of the class of 2008 who were seeking increased over the time that they were at Loyola—28% of entering students and 42% of those students as juniors reported that they were seeking. See Figure 1.

Somewhat related, 88% of juniors indicated that they are personally “searching for meaning/purpose in life” to *some* or a *great extent*, this is an increase compared to the 78% of those same respondents as entering first-year students who said they were searching for meaning. Just under half of entering first-year students (42%) and those same students as juniors (45%) reported that *most* or *all* of their close friends were “searching for meaning/purpose in life.” In addition, nearly three-quarters indicated that they have discussions “about the meaning of life with friends” either to *some* or a *great extent*—71% of entering students and 74% of those students as juniors.



F – indicates significant difference between students in their junior year and those same students at orientation.

Figure 1. Students’ current views on religion/spirituality

Over half of the students in the class of 2008 both as entering students and as juniors reported that it was either *very important* or *essential* to them personally to seek opportunities to “grow spiritually” and to integrate spirituality in their lives. A slightly smaller proportion of students indicated that it was equally important to “follow religious teachings in everyday life.” See Figure 2.

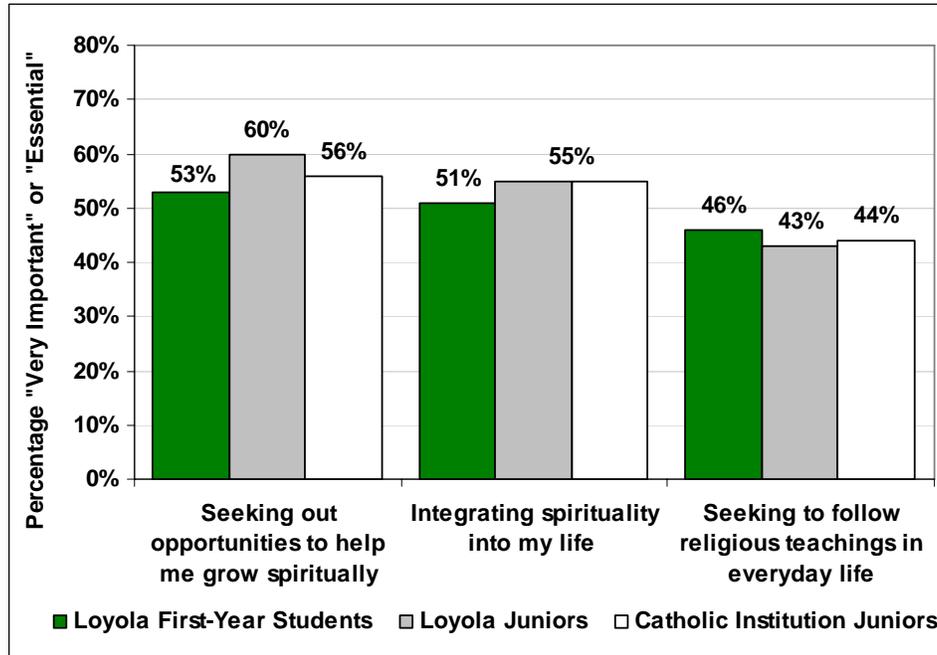
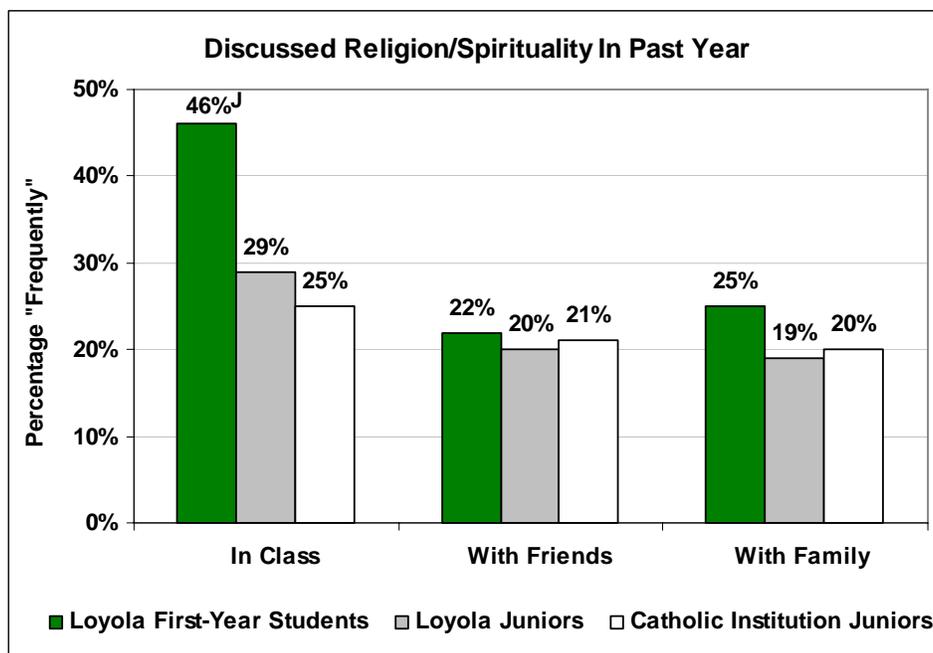


Figure 2. Importance of religion and spirituality

When asked how often they had discussed matters of religion or spirituality in the previous year, almost half (46%) of the entering first-year students indicated that they had frequent discussions in class while only 29% of those same students as juniors said the same. The frequency with which Loyola juniors engage in discussions of religion/spirituality are similar to the rates among students at other Catholic institutions. See Figure 3.



J – indicates significant difference between students at orientation and the same students in their junior year.

Figure 3. Discussions about religion/spirituality in class, with friends, and with family

Religion and the Individual

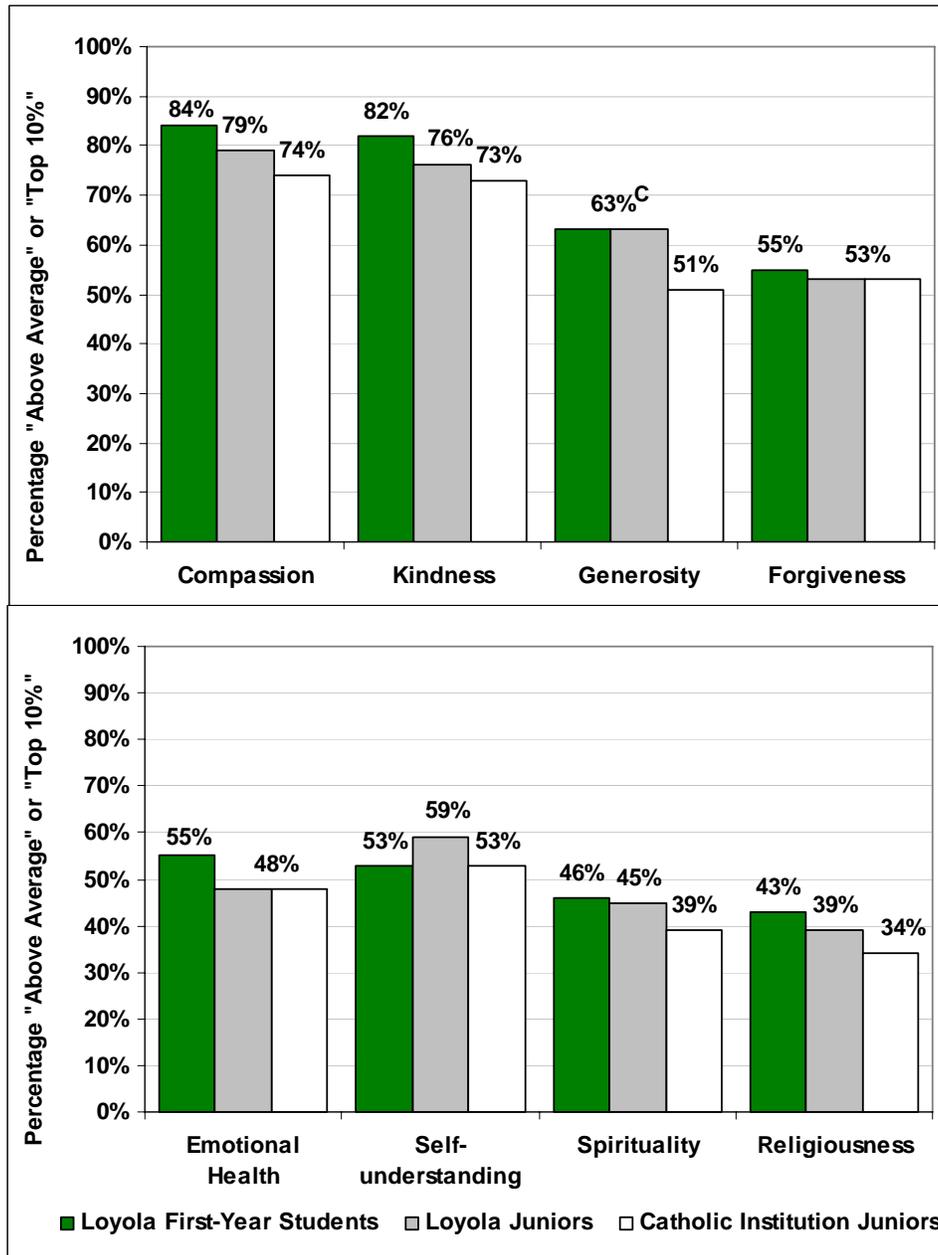
Eighty-four percent of juniors indicated that “we are all spiritual beings,” this belief grew over their time at Loyola as only 75% of those same students were in agreement with that statements when they entered the College as first-year students. Over two-thirds of Loyola students either *somewhat* or *strongly* agreed that they “gain spiritual strength by trusting in a higher power” (75% of first-year and 78% of juniors); only 70% of juniors at other Catholic institutions responded the same.

Similar proportions of students agreed that they find religion to be “personally helpful”—78% of Loyola first-years, 77% of Loyola juniors, and 75% of juniors at other Catholic institutions. Nearly two-thirds, however, also indicated that “it does not matter what [they] believe as long as they live a moral life”—63% of Loyola first-years, 61% of Loyola juniors, and 61% of juniors at other Catholic institutions.

The majority of the class of 2008 indicated that they either *somewhat* or *strongly* agreed with the statements that “most people can grow spiritually without being religious” (75% of first-year and 81% of juniors) and that “non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers” (90% of first-year and 95% of juniors). In both cases, Loyola juniors were more open than their counterparts at other Catholic institutions about the connection between spirituality, morality, and religion where just 75% of juniors agreed that spiritual growth was possible without religion and 91% agreed that non-religious people could be as moral as religious believers.

Students were asked to rate themselves relative to the average person their age on a number of attributes that are associated with religiosity. Loyola students, as well as students at other Catholic institutions, rated themselves most favorably with regard to “compassion” and “kindness.” At 63%, Loyola juniors rated themselves as more “generous” than did juniors at

other Catholic institutions. Less than half of Loyola juniors rated themselves as at least above average with regard to “spirituality” or “religiousness.” See Figure 4.



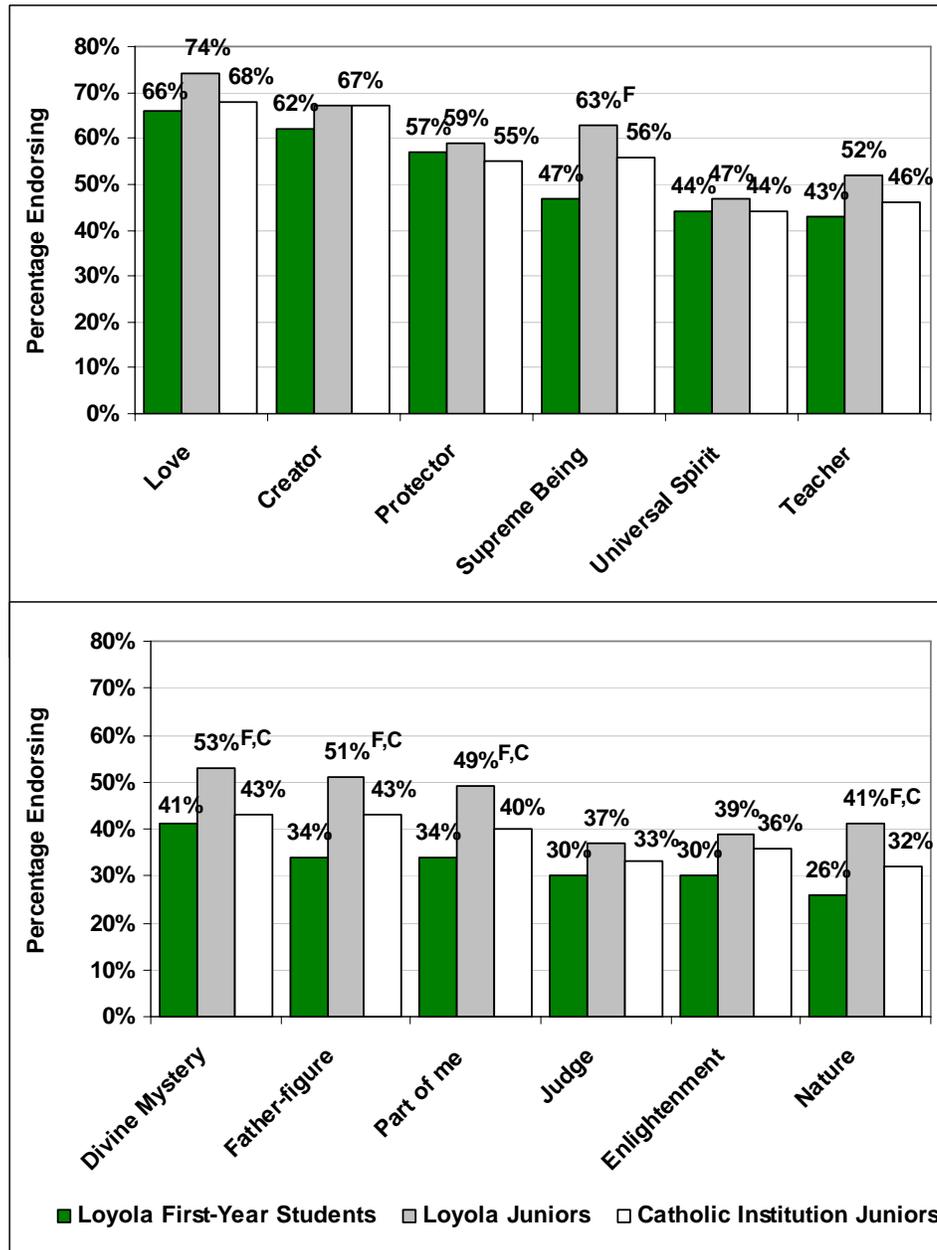
C – indicates a significant difference between Loyola juniors and juniors at other Catholic institutions.

Figure 4. Self-assessment of pro-social, emotional, and spiritual attributes

Ideas About God

Eighty-one percent of the class of 2008—both when they were entering first-years and when they were juniors—said that they believe in God. The rate of belief among juniors at other Catholic institutions was 81% as well.

When asked what characterizes their “conception or experience with God,” the top two responses among students both as entering students and as juniors were “love” and “creator.” The way that juniors think about God did change over their time at Loyola with juniors conceiving of God as a “supreme being,” “divine mystery,” “father-figure,” “part of me,” and “nature” in greater proportion than they did as entering students. Loyola juniors view God differently than do juniors at other Catholic institutions with more Loyola students as compared to others conceiving of God as a divine mystery, father-figure, part of me, and nature. See Figure 5.



F – indicates significant difference between students in their junior year and those same students at orientation. *C* – indicates a significant difference between Loyola juniors and juniors at other Catholic institutions.

Figure 5. How students think of God

While the majority of students think of God as love, only 49% of entering students in the class of 2008 stated that they had *frequently* felt “loved” by God during their last year in high school. Forty-eight percent of the class of 2008 juniors indicated that they had *frequently* felt loved by God since entering college. In addition, nearly two thirds of the class of 2008—both as entering first-year students and juniors—stated that they had either *occasionally* or *frequently* felt “distant” from God and over half of them indicated feeling “angry” with God. See Table 1.

Table 1. Student Experiences with God

	Loyola Class of 2008 as Entering First- Year Students	Loyola Class of 2008 as Juniors	Class of 2008 Juniors at Catholic Institutions
Felt Loved*	49%	48%	47%
Felt Distant^	71%	71%	65%
Felt Angry^	58%	54%	47%

Entering first-year students were asked to respond relative to their final year in high school. Juniors were asked to respond relative to their time in college.

**Responses represent those students who indicated “frequently.”*

^ Responses represent those students who indicated “occasionally” or “frequently.”

Almost half of the students surveyed stated that they have difficulty reconciling the “existence of a loving God with all of the pain and suffering in the world”—43% of entering students and 42% of juniors from the class of 2008 indicated that they *somewhat* or *strongly agreed* with that statement. When asked if they felt a “sense of connection with God/Higher Power that transcends [their] personal self,” approximately one-third of students agreed with 33% of entering students and 32% of those students as juniors indicating that this would describe them to a *great extent*.

Prayer and Reflection

The belief among students that people can gain a “higher spiritual plane of consciousness through meditation and prayer” increased over their time at Loyola with 90% of juniors either *somewhat* or *strongly agree[ing]* while only 79% of them as entering first-year students said the same. Loyola juniors also agree with this statement in greater proportion than juniors at other Catholic institutions (81%). This difference in belief is reflected in behavior with 79% of first-year students stating that they pray increasing to 82% as juniors, which is also greater than the incidence of prayer among juniors at other Catholic colleges/universities (75%).

Approximately one-half of students stated that they pray several times a week and roughly one-quarter of them pray daily. The frequency of prayer did not change over the time that a student was at Loyola but the frequency of “self-reflection” did increase with more juniors reporting daily reflection than they did as entering students. See

Table 2, next page.

Over one-third of the class of 2008 as entering students and juniors reported spending at least one hour a week in prayer/meditation. See Table 3, next page.

Students who said that they engage in prayer were asked why. The most common reasons for prayer were for “loved ones,” “to express gratitude,” for “help solving problems,” and for

“emotional strength.” More students as juniors (52%) reported praying for “wisdom” than they did as entering first-year students (41%). See Figure 6.

Table 2. Frequency of Prayer, Self-Reflection, and Meditation

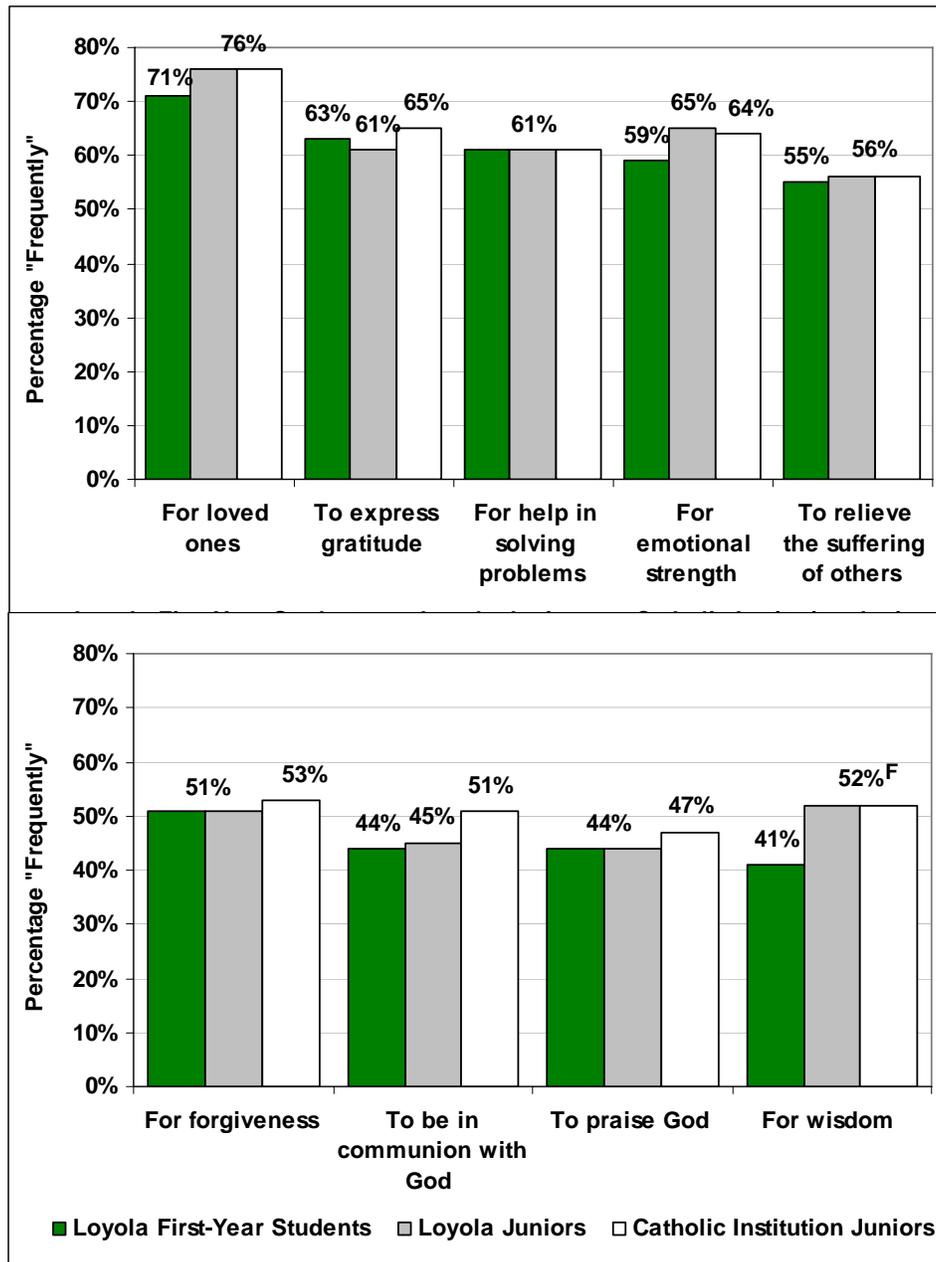
	Loyola Class of 2008 as Entering First- Year Students	Loyola Class of 2008 as Juniors	Class of 2008 Juniors at Catholic Institutions
Prayer			
Daily	24%	27%	26%
Several times a week	30%	28%	24%
Once a week	18%	19%	16%
Monthly or less often	28%	26%	34%
Self-Reflection			
Daily	18%	30% ^F	30%
Several times a week	27%	29%	28%
Once a week	18%	20%	18%
Monthly or less often	37%	21% ^F	24%
Meditation			
Daily	4%	6%	5%
Several times a week	10%	8%	10%
Once a week	13%	13%	14%
Monthly or less often	73%	73%	71%

F – indicates significant difference between students in their junior year and those same students at orientation.

Table 3. Amount of Time in a Typical Week During the Prior Year Spent in Prayer or Meditation

	Loyola Class of 2008 as Entering First- Year Students	Loyola Class of 2008 as Juniors	Class of 2008 Juniors at Catholic Institutions
None	21%	23% ^C	30%
Less than 1 hour	39%	41%	34%
One to Two Hours	31%	25%	26%
Three hours or more	9%	11%	10%

C – indicates a significant difference between Loyola juniors and juniors at other Catholic institutions.



F – indicates significant difference between students in their junior year and those same students at orientation.

Figure 6. The reasons that students pray

Attendance at Religious Services and Events

Attendance at religious/spiritual services dropped between high school and the junior year with 88% of entering first-year students indicating that they attend religious/spiritual services *occasionally* or *frequently* while only 75% of those students as juniors said the same. The rate of attending services by Loyola juniors is consistent with that of juniors at other Catholic institutions.

While attendance at services declined, participation in classes, workshops, or retreats related to religious or spiritual matters stayed relatively stable over time with 61% of entering first-year students and 68% of juniors indicating that they had *occasionally* or *frequently* participated in such events. These data are similar to the rates of participation among students at other Catholic institutions of 66%.

Religion and Science

When asked about the relationship between science and religion, nearly half of class of 2008—both as entering students and as juniors—reported that they felt the two were in collaboration with each supporting the other (51% of first-years and 49% of juniors). Just over one-third indicated that religion and science were independent of each other with each “referring to different aspects of reality” (35% of first-years and 34% of juniors).

Over half of the students surveyed indicated that “only religion can truly explain existence” while less than one-third responded that “in the future, science will be able to explain everything.” See Table 4.

Table 4. Student Views on Religion and Science

	Loyola Class of 2008 as Entering First- Year Students	Loyola Class of 2008 as Juniors	Class of 2008 Juniors at Catholic Institutions
While science can provide important information about the physical world, only religion can truly explain existence	57%	52%	50%
In the future, science will be able to explain everything	31%	23%	25%

Summary

These data collected from members of the Class of 2008 when they entered Loyola and again in the spring of their junior year reveal that many of their views about spiritual and religious matters did change over their time at the College. Not only are more students as juniors seeking out their religious/spiritual beliefs and values, the proportion of students who are pursuing opportunities to grow spiritually and integrate spirituality into their lives grew between their first and junior years. Further, more students as juniors compared when they were entering students believe that religious practices can lead to a higher plan of consciousness. Openness to multiple ways to spiritual growth and the connections between religion and morality are also views that Loyola students tend to develop over time.

While there are many positive changes in students views about religion and spirituality, fewer students as juniors attend religious services than they did before arriving at Loyola. Since the trend of decreased attendance at religious services at Loyola mirrors the trend at Catholic institutions nationally, this is most likely a result of general student development and being away from home. Interestingly, while service attendance declined from first-to-third year, the proportion of students that pray and the frequency with which students engage in self-reflection increased over the same time.

It is important to note that a high proportion of Loyola students believe in God and conceptualize and experience God in multifaceted ways. Loyola's juniors endorsed some attributes related to their conception of God more frequently than when they first entered the College, indicating that their experiences at college influenced their thinking about God. While most students conceive of God in positive ways, substantial numbers of students do not commonly feel loved by God and many are distant from and angry with God.

While these data reassure Loyola that our students are not less religiously engaged than students at other Catholic institutions and, in fact, make gains in some areas related to religious and spiritual beliefs that are not seen at other Catholic institutions, they also illuminate a challenge for the College. At the same time that students are seeking answers to spiritual questions and have conflicting beliefs about and experiences with God they are seeking on their own—through prayer and self-reflection—or with their friends who are also seeking. The challenge for Loyola is to engage students in group activities or with mentors that can help them find the answers they seek and more fully integrate religion or spirituality into their lives.