

# **The Impact of Study Abroad on College Student Spiritual Development**

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# Introduction

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- **Higher education should be intentional about understanding student spirituality and building programs that can enhance students' continuing search for meaning (Sandy & Helen Astin, 1999)**
- **Study abroad is a high impact activity (George Kuh, NSSE, 2008)**

# Purpose of this Research

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- **Provide empirical evidence of the effect of study abroad on students' personal and spiritual development.**
- **Determine components of study abroad experience that contribute to these forms of student development.**
- **Explore ways in which the developmental effects of study abroad programs are transferable to other student experiences**

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# Today's Presentation

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- 1. Value of study abroad**
- 2. Theoretical framework**
- 3. Research design**
- 4. Measures and results**
- 5. Implications and transferability**
- 6. Limitations and new directions**

# 1. The Value of Study Abroad

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- Significant increase in participation
  - ▣ 1986 – 44,000
  - ▣ 2006 – 223,000
- Foreign Language Proficiency
- Enhanced Cultural Understanding
- Personal Growth
  - ▣ Intellectual
  - ▣ Emotional
- External vs. Internal Educational Goals

# Foreign Language Proficiency

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- Language acquisition increases when one inhabits the foreign culture
- Students gain sense of membership
- Students gain self-awareness of language skill leading to greater interaction with host people
- Language acquisition leads to cultural understanding

# Cultural Understanding

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- Minimum timeframe – 9 weeks
- Interpersonal engagement with host culture/people
  - ▣ Increased desire to move beyond token characteristics
- Awareness of cultural norms and mores
  - ▣ Personalized view – eliminating stereotypes
- Positive views of other cultures and one's self
  - ▣ Emotional Resilience
  - ▣ Perceptual Acuity
  - ▣ Personal Autonomy

# Personal Growth

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- Emotional, Intellectual, & Professional
- Maturation, Self-Reliance, Increased desire to devote oneself to studies
- Changes
  - ▣ Beliefs
  - ▣ Values
  - ▣ Behaviors
  - ▣ Open mindedness
  - ▣ Appreciation of difference

# Joseph Campbell - The Hero's Journey

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- “And this is the basic mythological problem: Move into a landscape. Find the sanctity of that land. And then there can be a matching of your own nature with this gorgeous nature of the land. It is the first essential adaptation.”
- External change is not legitimate unless it is accompanied by internal change. We leave home and, perhaps for the first time, discover ourselves. We step outside our bodies, so to speak, and accordingly we see our own selves anew.
- When Campbell moved to Paris he came into contact with his very deepest passion, the world common to all of mankind – the world of inner transformation.

# 2. Theoretical Framework

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- ❑ **Longitudinal Hypothesis**
  - ❑ **Students who participate in study abroad programs experience significantly greater changes in faith, life purpose, and identity development than students who do not participate in such programs.**
- ❑ **Sophomore Intervention Hypothesis**
  - ❑ **Study abroad is an anthropological initiation rite**
    - ❑ **Dislocation**
    - ❑ **Initiation**
    - ❑ **Return**

# 3. Research Design

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- Longitudinal
  - ▣ Students assessed longitudinally at baseline and every year of college career via surveys assessing faith, identity, & vocation
- Sophomore
  - ▣ Sophomores in all International Programs assessed each semester via surveys with open ended writing prompts

# Longitudinal Sample Participants

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- Participants from initial sample of 300
  - Baseline – 113 - Summer 2002
  - First-Year – 191
  - Sophomore – 111
  - Junior – 132
  - Senior – 114
  
- Analyzed subsample matched on age and sex
  - IP Group = 43 students who attended an international program during their sophomore year
  - No IP Group = 43 students who did not attend an international program

# Sample Demographics

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- Participants primarily Caucasian (70%)
- Majority female (60-65%)
- Primarily Protestant (65%)
- Parental income over \$100,000 (47%)

# Independent Variable

## International Program Participation

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- Sites
  - ▣ Buenos Aires, Canberra, Hong Kong, Shanghai, London, Florence, Heidelberg, Lausanne, Uganda
- Duration
  - ▣ Summer, Fall, Spring
- Living/Learning Arrangement
  - ▣ Homestay or university owned facility
  - ▣ General education courses
  - ▣ Visiting faculty discipline courses
  - ▣ Field trips to nearby countries
  - ▣ Personal travel

# 4. Measures and Results

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- **Faith Surveys**
  - ▣ **Faith Attitudes and Experiences**
- **Identity Status**
  - ▣ **Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium, Achievement**
- **Life Purpose**
  - ▣ **Sense of Life Purpose, Calling, Discernment**
  - ▣ **Service Toward Others**

# Demographic Comparison

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- Chi-Square tests examined demographic differences between IP vs. No-IP
  - ▣ No differences in income
  - ▣ No differences in ethnicity
  - ▣ No differences in gender proportion
  - ▣ No differences in religion affiliation

# Faith Attitude Survey

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Subscales	Sample Items
<i>Strength of Beliefs</i>  ( $\alpha = 0.73$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I view myself as a religious person.</li><li>• I have doubts about whether my religious beliefs are true.</li></ul>
<i>Importance of Faith</i> ( $\alpha = 0.89$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Religion is not a very important part of my life right now.</li><li>• My faith is not very important to me.</li></ul>
<i>Life Application of Faith</i> ( $\alpha = 0.92$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I depend on my faith in God for decision-making and direction.</li><li>• I try hard to carry my religious beliefs into all other dealings in my life.</li></ul>

# Faith Experience Survey

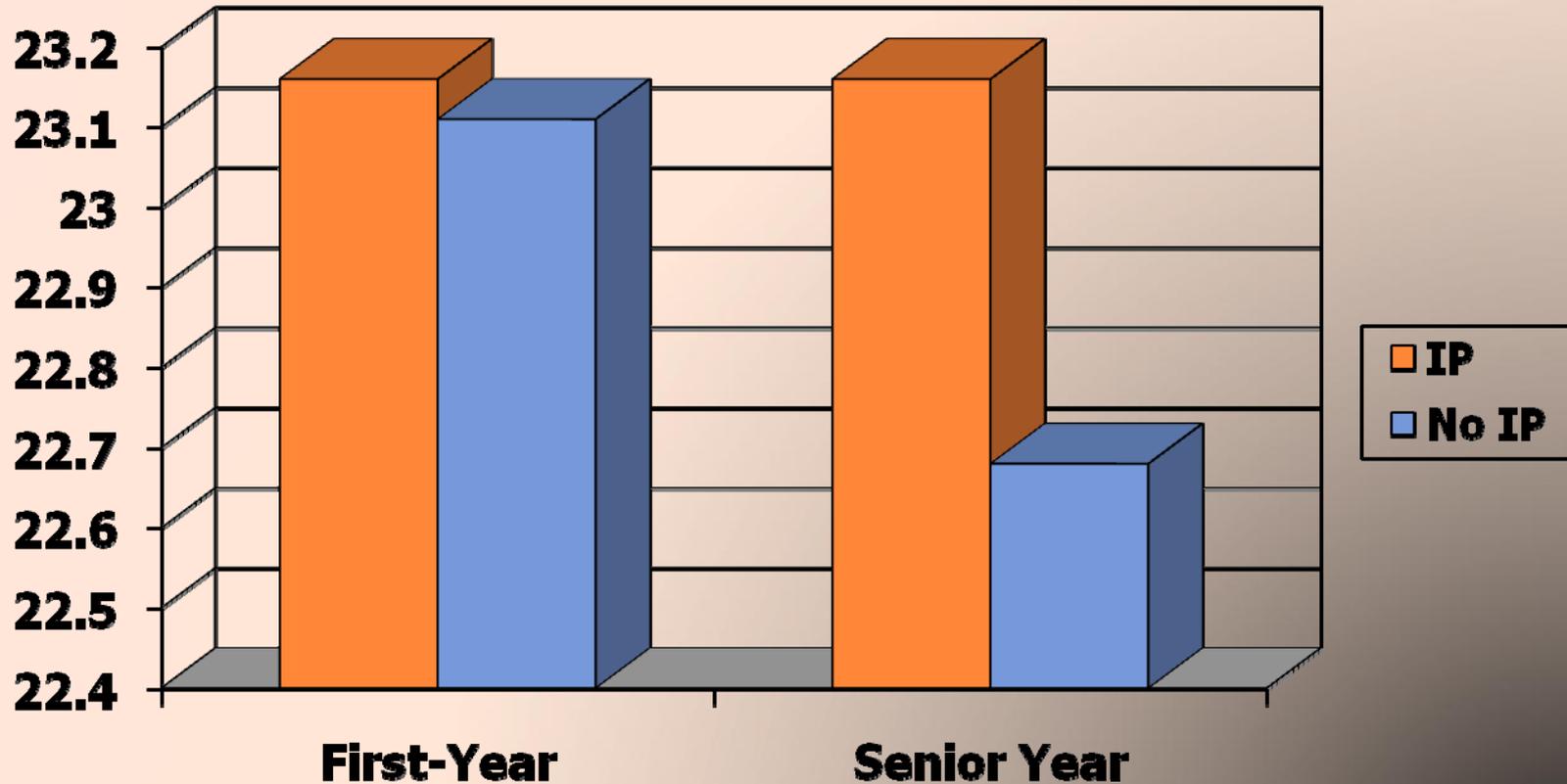
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Subscales	Sample Items
<i>Faith Behavior</i>  ( $\alpha = 0.75$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How often do you attend religious services?</li><li>• How often have you read the Bible in the last year?</li><li>• Within your religious or spiritual tradition, how often do you meditate?</li></ul>
<i>Spiritual Feelings</i>  ( $\alpha = 0.87$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I find strength and comfort in my religion or faith</li><li>• I feel God's love for me, directly or through others</li></ul>

# Strength of Belief Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

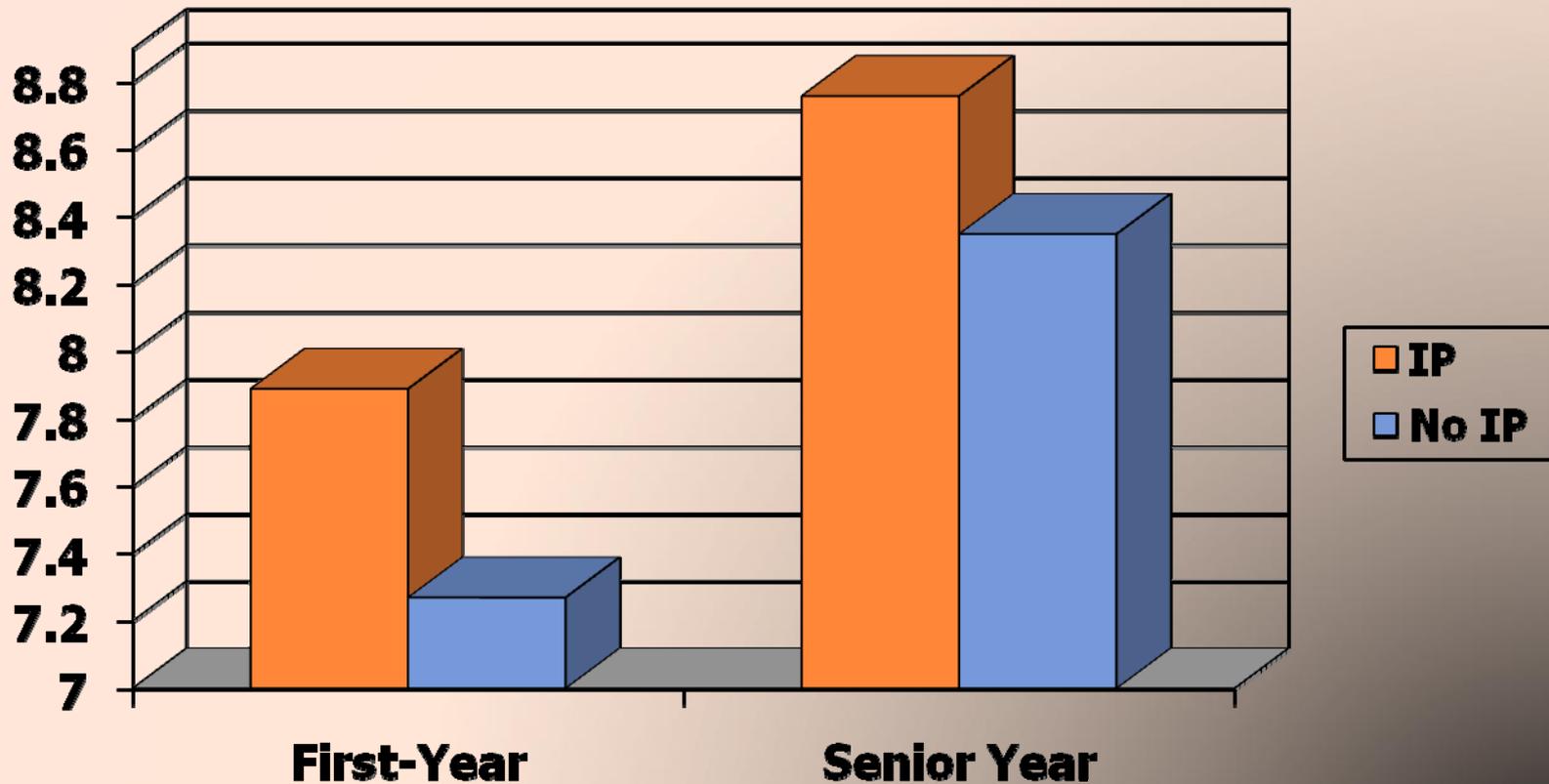
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# Faith Importance Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

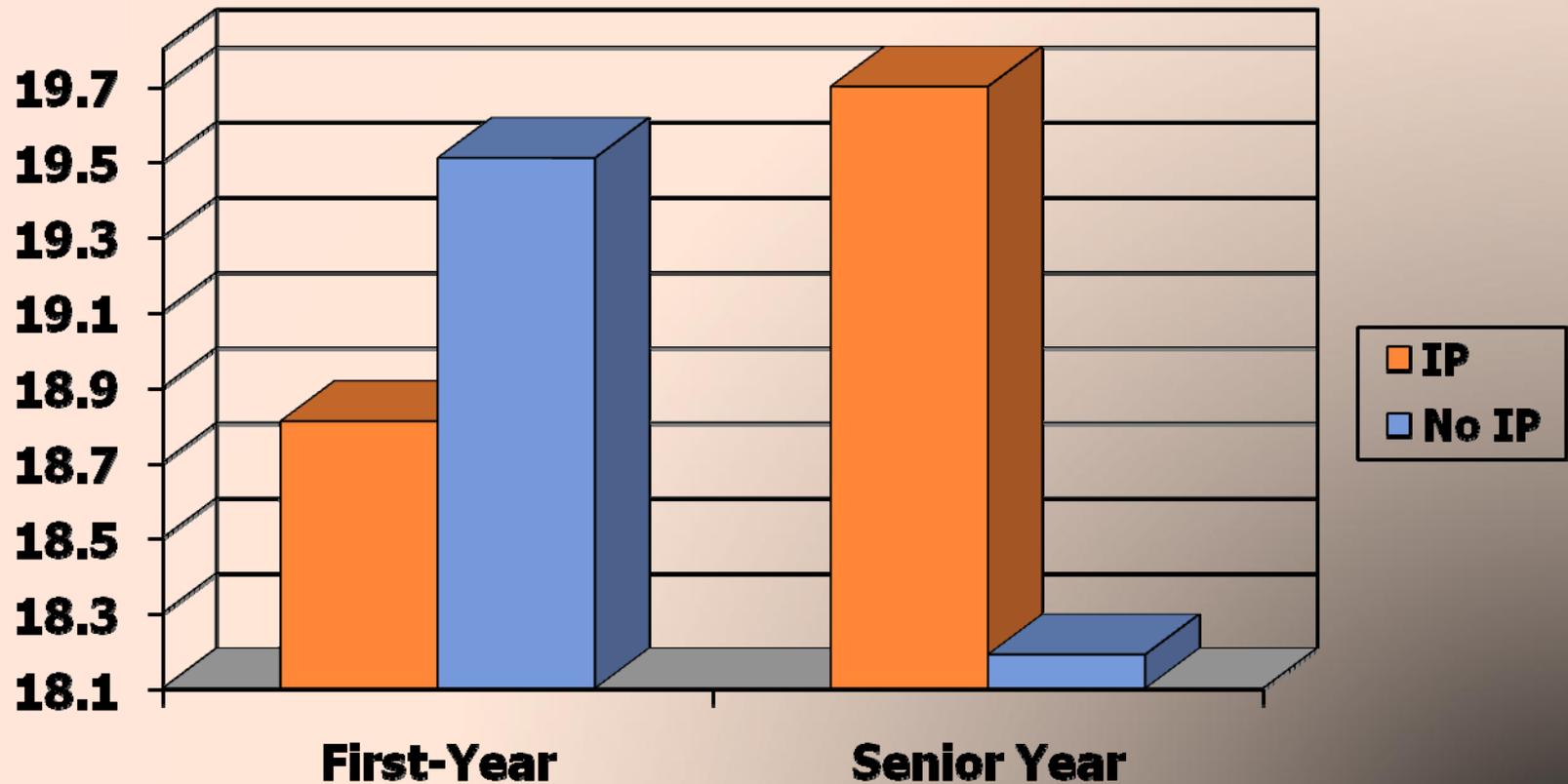
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# Faith Application Scores

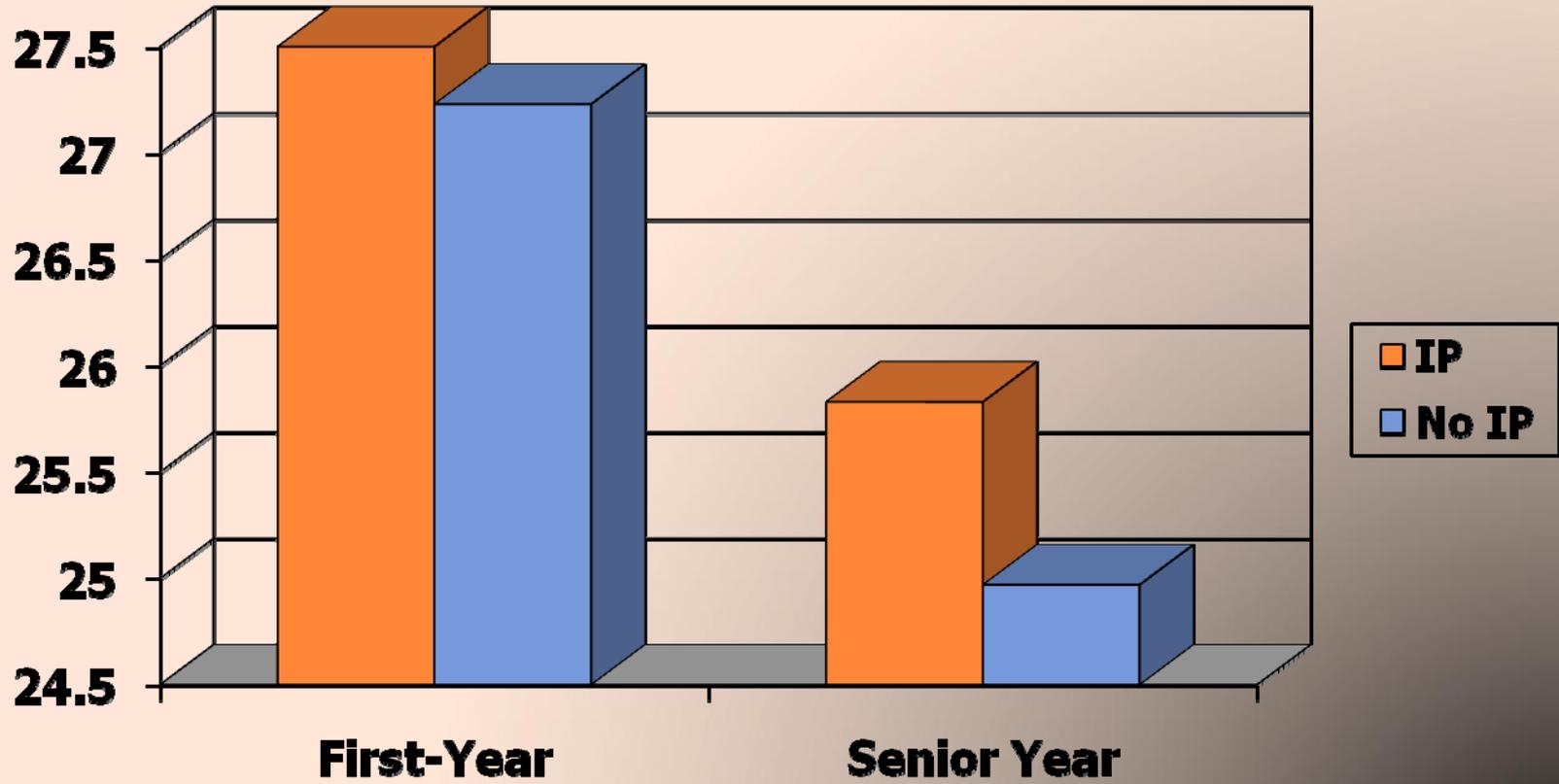
## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

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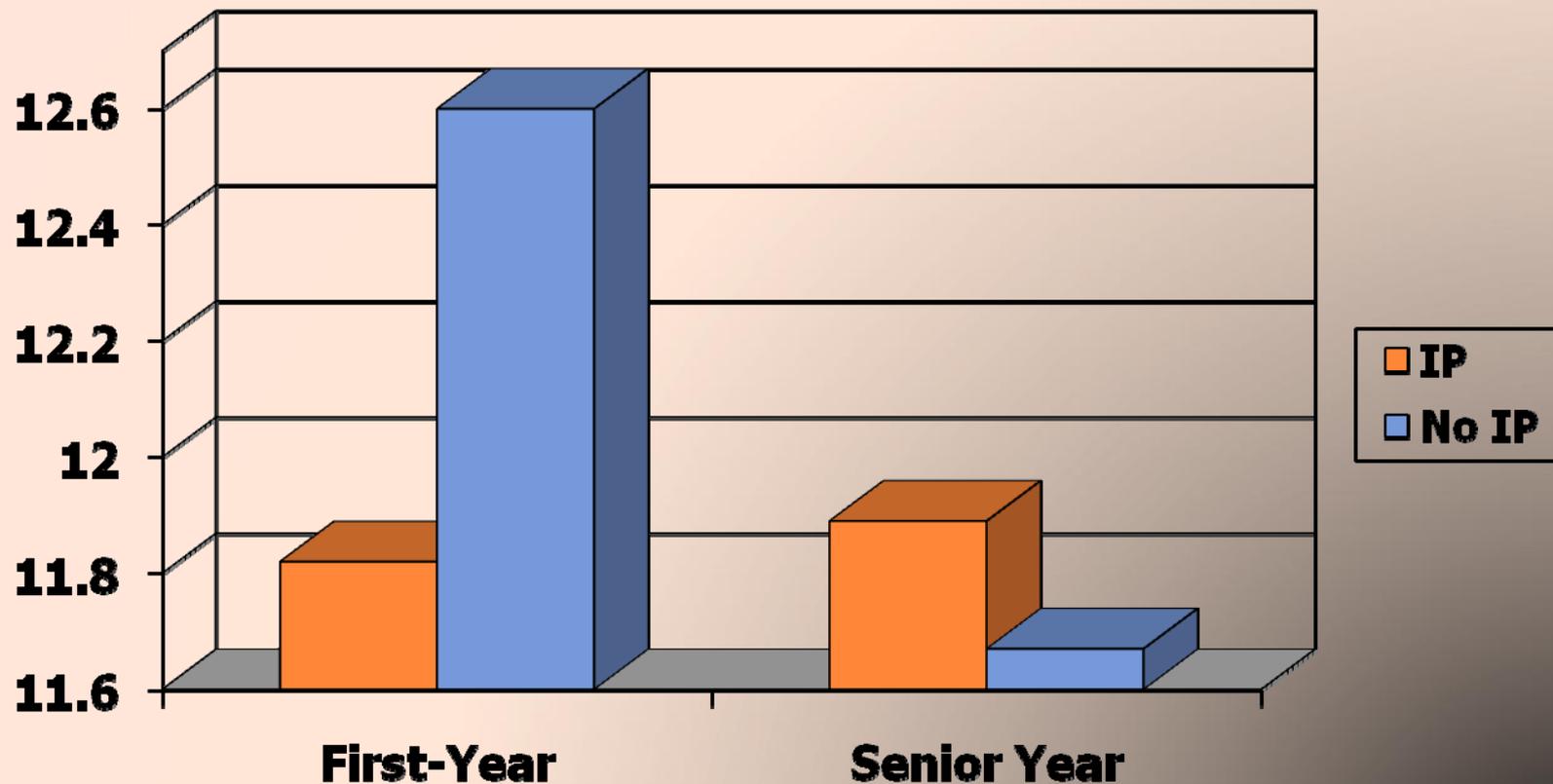
# Faith Behavior Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods



# Spiritual Feelings Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods



# Ego Identity Status Measure

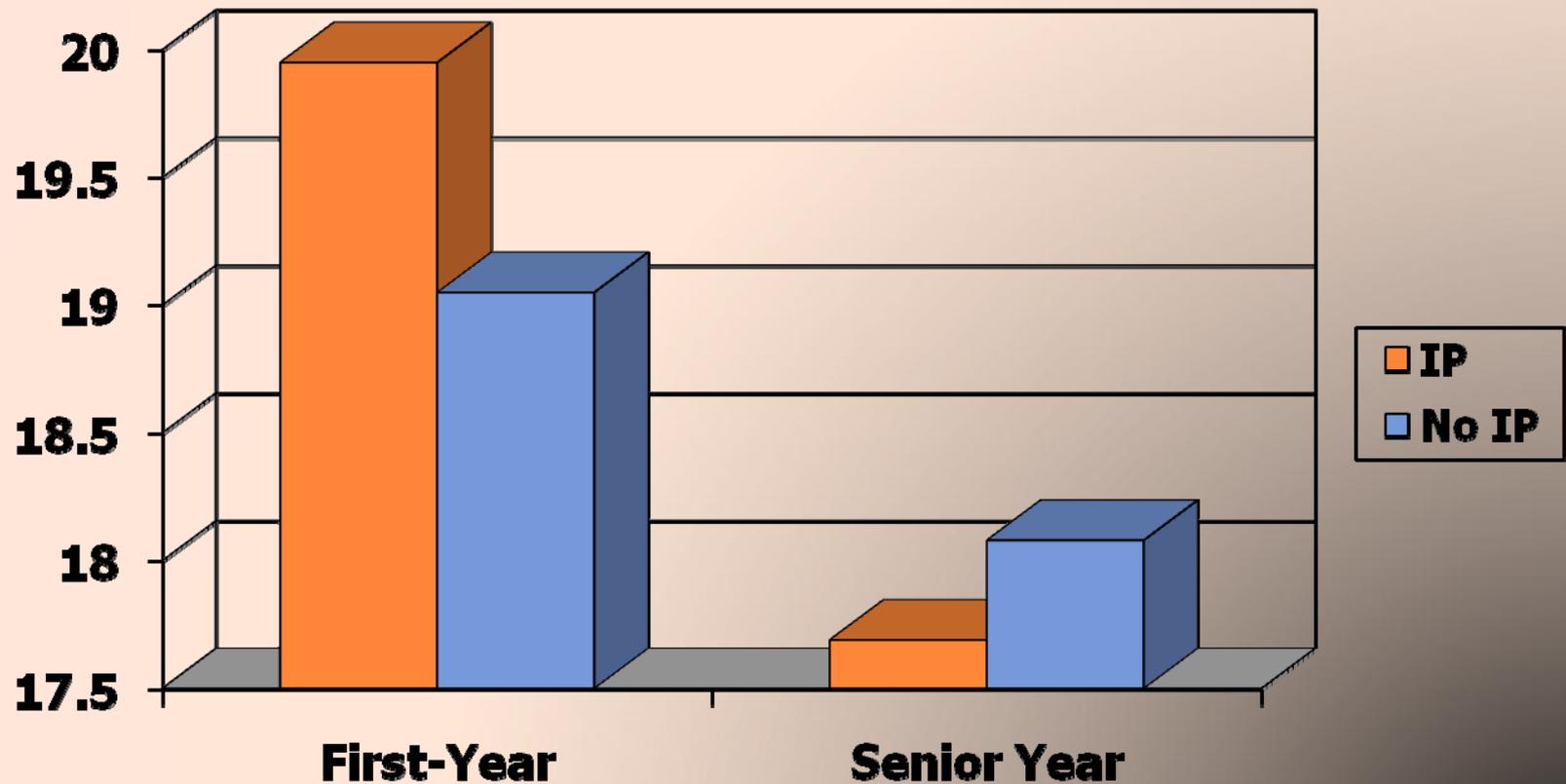
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- Provides score for each of four identity statuses:
  - Diffusion: no exploration or commitment
    - “I haven’t really considered politics. It just doesn’t excite me much.”
  - Foreclosure: no exploration, but commitment
    - “My parents decided a long time ago what I should go into for employment and I’m following through with their plans.”
  - Moratorium: exploration without commitment
    - “Religion is confusing to me right now. I keep changing my views on what is right and wrong for me.”
  - Achievement: exploration and commitment
    - “It took me a while to figure it out, but now I really know what I want for a career.”

# Diffusion Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

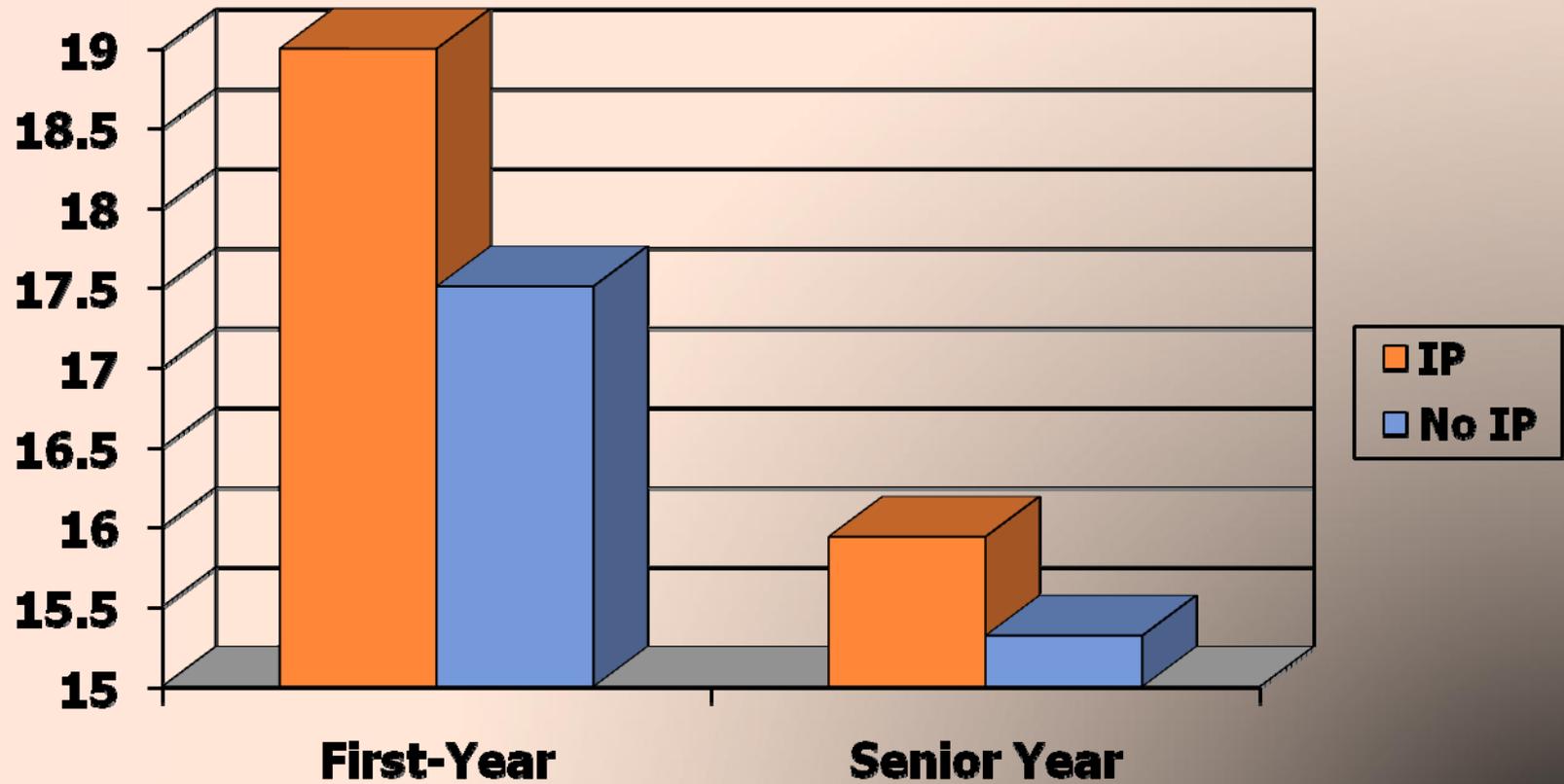
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# Foreclosure Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

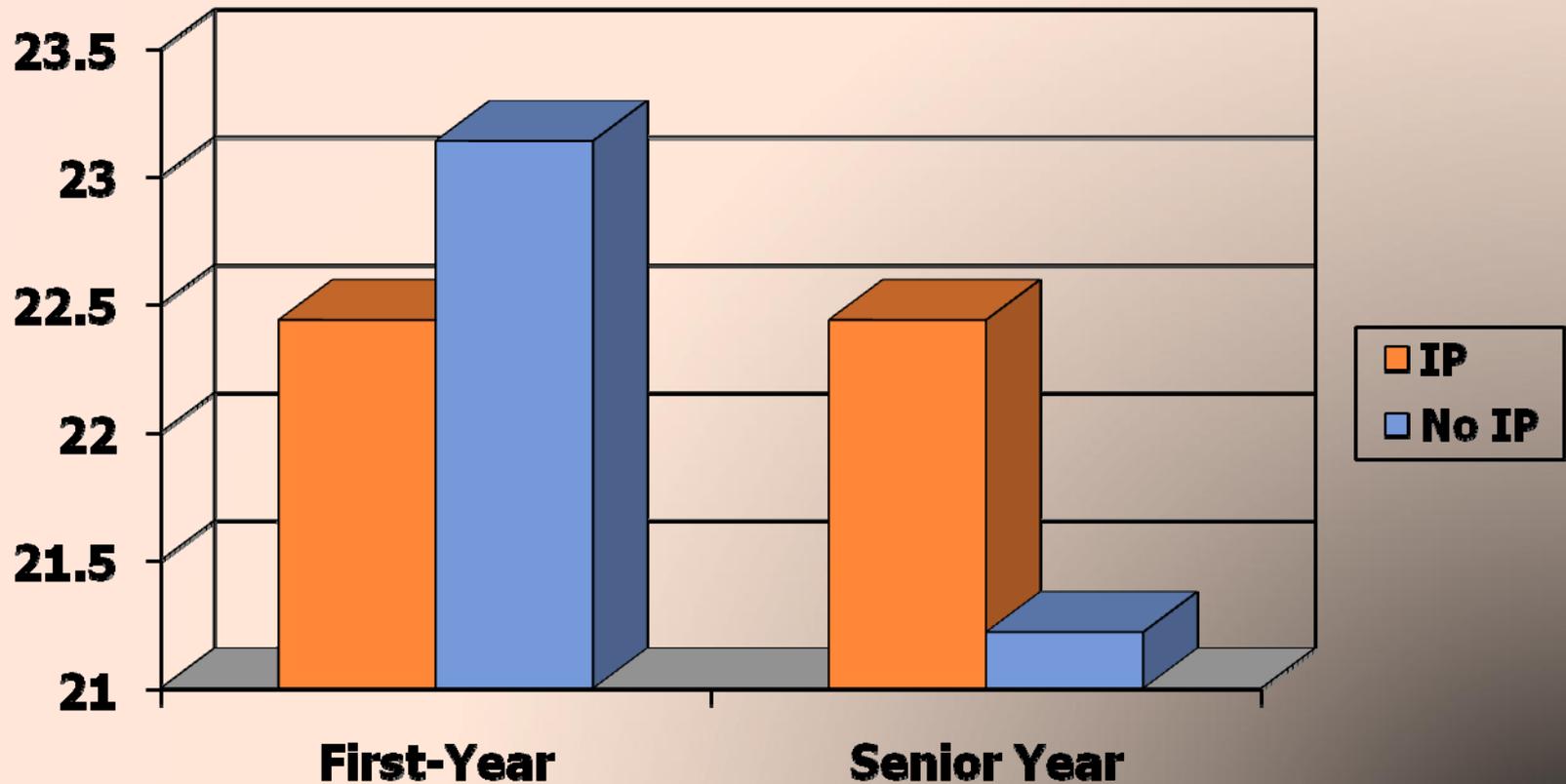
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# Moratorium Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

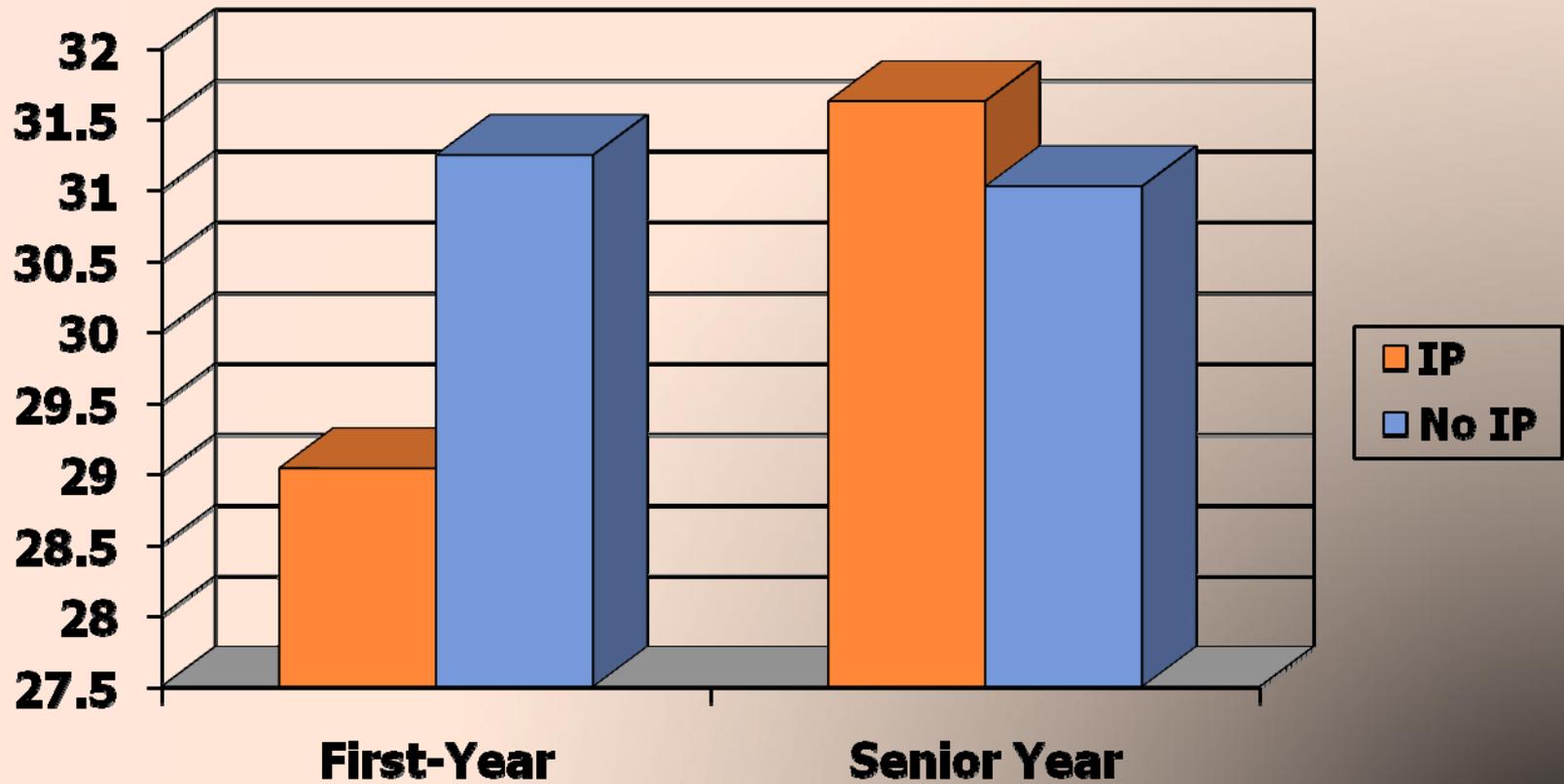
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# Achievement Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

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# Vocational Discernment and Action

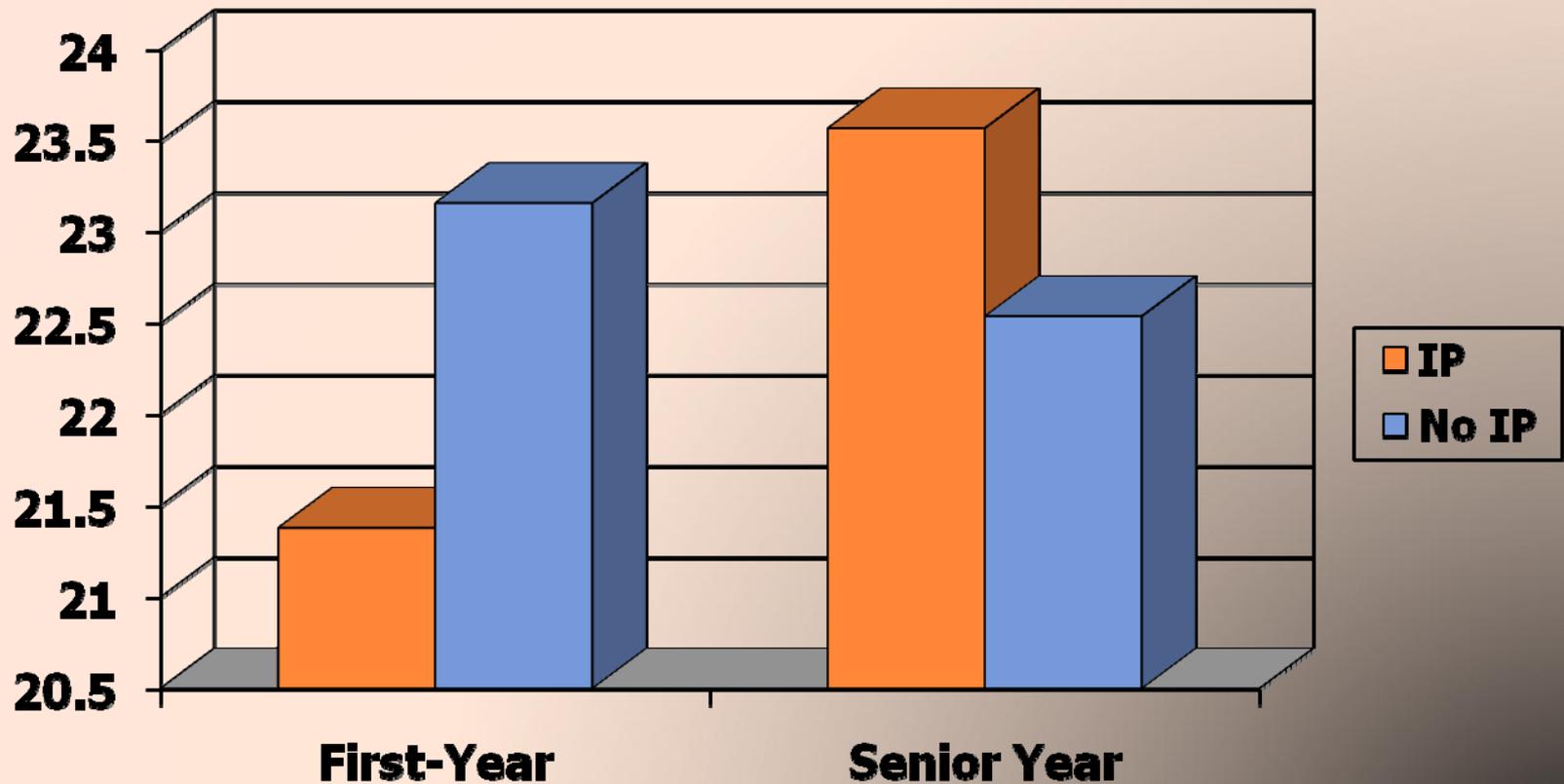
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<b>Subscales</b>	<b>Sample Items</b>
<b>Discernment and Purpose</b> ( $\alpha = .76$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have a good sense for my life purpose.</li><li>• I know of the many ways that I can use my gifts and talents within the context of my professional career.</li><li>• I am unsure about what God is specifically calling me to do.</li></ul>
<b>Service to Others</b> ( $\alpha = .68$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am motivated to choose a career that will enable me to provide some type of service to others.</li><li>• I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.</li></ul>

# Discernment Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

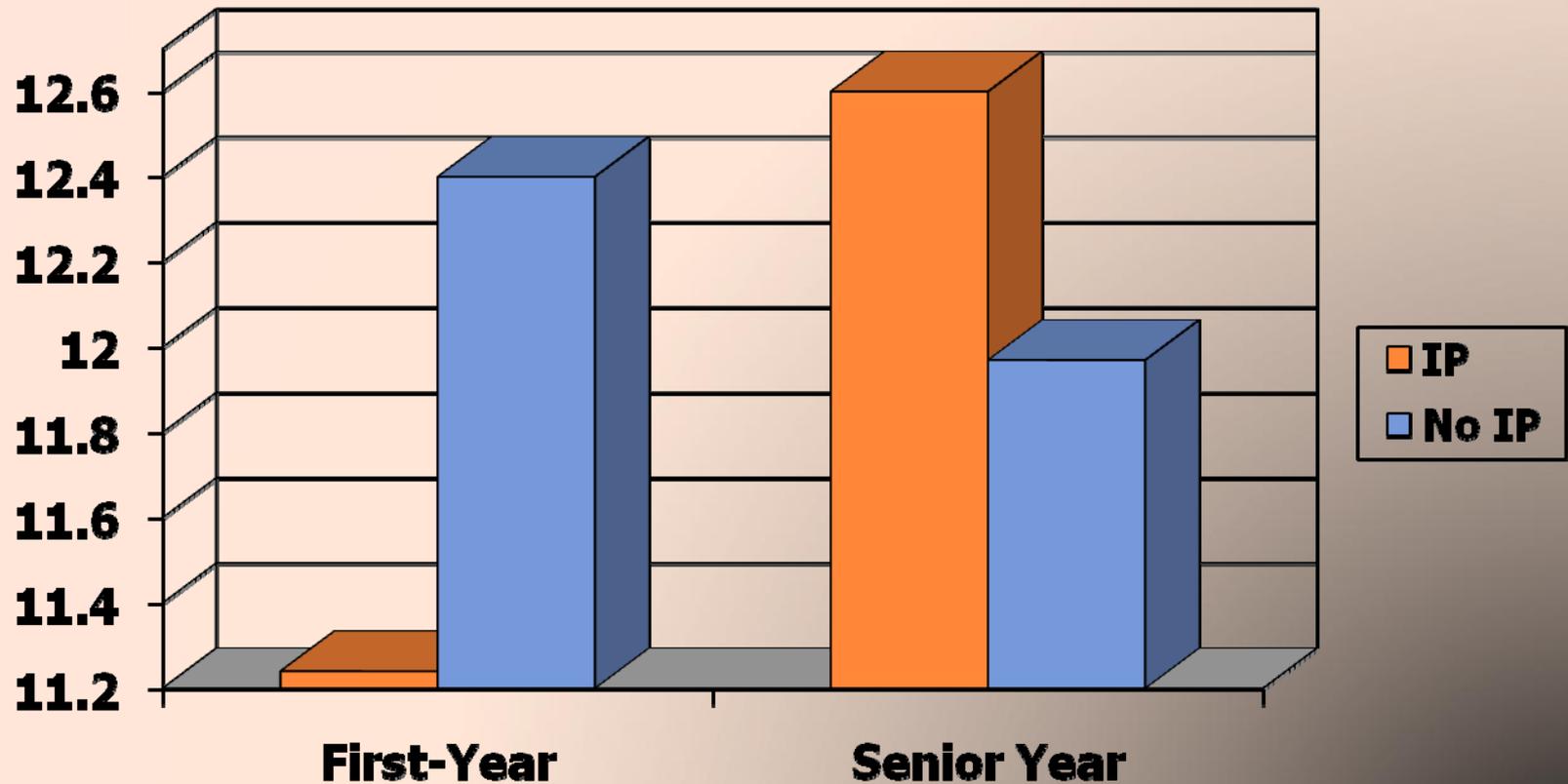
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# Service Scores

## First-Year and Senior Time Periods

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# Sophomores Studying Abroad

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Programming Features in  
Study Abroad Programs  
that Contribute to Student  
Development

# Sophomore Study Abroad Participants

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- Program Evaluation & Reflection Survey
- 300 Sophomores sampled from several Study Abroad Programs – Spring 2004
- 80-100% response rate

# Factors Contributing to Spiritual Growth in International Programs

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- Travel
  - ▣ Departure & Initiation
- Mentoring
  - ▣ Initiation
- Community
  - ▣ Initiation & Return

# Travel

**What has been the most spiritually challenging part of your International Program experience?**

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- This has been the hardest but also the best year of my life. Living overseas forced me to either embrace or reject what I have believed all my life. It removed my safety nets.**
- I have grown through having to lean on God in almost every situation: from traveling to school to just living in a different culture, speaking another language.**
- My month long trip to Africa between semesters challenged my sense of self.**
- Traveling alone over Christmas Vacation showed me how to depend on the grace of God for support.**
- A person I met in Greece helped me realize my selfishness, making me want to be more generous.**

# Mentoring

## Who has been most instrumental in helping you grow spiritually? Why?

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- **One of the other students in the program made me challenge myself and helped me grow spiritually.**
- **The host family impacted me the most because we are in worship with them and they are the leaders that we look up to in the house.**
- **When I felt weak, my faculty “mom” knew and was someone that would come up to me and ask what was wrong. She would help me understand and trust in God.**
- **The host family made me feel at home and always made time to check on me and how I was doing.**
- **The program assistant had a great impact on me spiritually this semester through her incredible yet humble display of faith. She is such an inspirational woman of God.**

# Community

How has the community of the international program experience enhanced your spiritual growth?

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- **Our weekly, student led Bible studies & student run worship have had the greatest spiritual impact on me.**
- **Women's small group and student-led worship were an AMAZING support system. The best community I've ever had. This is my home away from home.**
- **The guys' small group was a time where we could be open and honest.**
- **I have grown more here in my spirituality than I did at home and all of that growth was due to other students.**
- **Simply by living with and engaging with such incredible individuals, who have not only helped me through difficult times, but who have encouraged me to seek God more, I've experienced a growth in spirituality.**

# Research Results Summary

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- **Over time, international living and learning experiences enhance**
  - **Faith Attitudes & Experiences**
  - **Identity Achievement**
  - **Vocational Discernment**
  - **Vocational Service**
- **Over time, for all students**
  - **Faith importance increases**
  - **Faith behavior decreases**
  - **Identity foreclosure decreases**
- **Sophomore Sample from International Programs**
  - **Travel, Mentoring, and Community Experiences contribute to spiritual growth**

# Conclusions

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- **International living and learning experiences facilitate greater growth in faith, sense of life purpose, and identity**
- **Significant opportunities for personal growth occur when students leave their cultural comfort zone and rely on communities with mentoring support**

# 5. Implications and Transferability

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**Shake students loose. Introduce them to an experience, preferably in another culture, that demands that they question life assumptions.**

**Facilitate a sense of community, requiring mutual dependency and trust.**

**Practice mentoring. Train faculty and staff. Provide opportunities for the mentor-protégé connection.**

**Transformation will occur – watch for and nurture it.**

# 6. Flaws and New Directions

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- **Flaws of this study**
  - **Sample size**
- **Future directions**
  - **Existing model**
    - **Life purpose develops as identity and faith develop**
  - **New model**
    - **Life purpose develops as identity and faith develop, mediated by challenges & experiences of suffering**
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