

Thriving in College: The Role of Spirituality



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WHAT DESCRIBES COLLEGE STUDENTS ON EACH END OF THIS CONTINUUM?

What are they **FEELING**, **DOING**, and **THINKING**?



Floundering

Thriving

Where Does Spirituality Fit?





What *is* spirituality?

- “feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from the search for the sacred” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66)
- “the values we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here – the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and the world around us” (Astin, 2004, p. 34)

Approaches to Student Success



- Behaviors that lead to learning outcomes
- Institutional supports for engagement
- Programs and services
- Entering student characteristics predictive of success
- Individual motivation and psychological processes that lead to engagement behaviors



Positive Psychology

The Fulfilled Individual
The Thriving Community

Thriving Quotient Study

Goal:

- To expand the identification of the psychosocial processes within students that are most predictive of their academic success and persistence

Ultimately:

- To design interventions that help students get the most out of their college experience



Conceptual Framework

Flourishing =
Emotional Vitality
+
Positive Functioning

(Keyes, 2002, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003)

Definition of Flourishing

Rising to meet life's challenges

Involved in healthy relationships

Engaged and productive

Looking beyond oneself to the greater
good of others

Why “Thriving”?



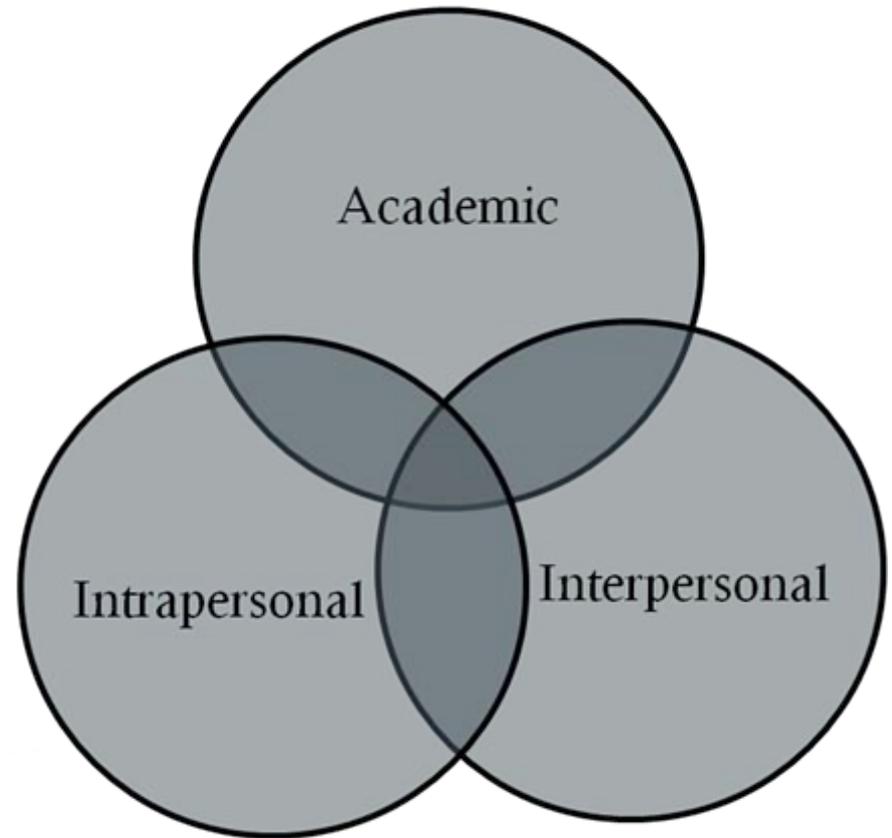
Goes beyond psychological well-being
inherent in flourishing

More holistic construct that adds

- Engaged learning and academic success
- Sense of community and citizenship



THRIVING



Criteria for Including a Construct

Measurable

Empirically connected to student success (grades, graduation, fit, etc.)

Malleable (state vs. trait)

Interventions make a difference

The Thriving Quotient (TQ)

- TQ was constructed from public domain instruments with proven validity and reliability that were adapted for college students after input from student focus groups
- 32-item instrument with responses ranging on a 6-point Likert-type scale of *1=strongly agree* to *6 = strongly disagree*
- Coefficient alpha = .91
- Confirmatory factor analysis: five-factor model with a higher-order latent construct of thriving

Methods

- 18 private and 9 public four-year colleges and universities administered the Thriving Quotient
- Surveys were administered on-line – response rates of 7-37% (average of 18%)
- After eliminating outliers and students over age 25, final sample consisted of 4,602 participants
 - 71% female
 - 19% first-generation
 - 88% Caucasian

Five Factors of Thriving

ACADEMICALLY:

- **Engaged Learning**
 - Meaningful processing, focused attention, active participation in the learning process
- **Academic Determination**
 - Self-regulated learning, effort, coping skills, goal-directedness (hope)

INTERPERSONALLY:

- **Diverse Citizenship**
 - Making a contribution, appreciation of differences, growth mindset
- **Social Connectedness**
 - Positive relationships and access to friendships

INTRAPERSONALLY:

- **Positive Perspective**
 - Optimism and subjective well-being

Data Analysis

- **Four separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted**
 - Block 1: Institutional features
 - Block 2: Student demographic characteristics
 - Block 3: Thriving factor scores
 - Block 4: Involvement on campus
 - Block 5: Satisfaction levels
- **Four criterion variables:**
 - Intent to graduate from the institution
 - Would choose the institution again
 - Institutional fit
 - Self-reported college grades

Findings

- Models explained from 16% to 37% of the variance in outcomes
- Institutional features explained 1-3% of variance
- Student demographics explained 3-7% of variance in persistence outcomes and 26% of grade variation
- **Thriving scales added 8-18% to explanation of variance in outcomes (grades → fit)**
- Student involvement added 1-3% (grades → fit)
- Satisfaction levels added 1-6% (grades → fit)

Connection to Satisfaction with College

Thriving scales also predict overall satisfaction with college (Total model $R^2 = .45$)

Block 1: Institutional features ($R^2 = .00$)

Block 2: Demographic variables ($R^2 = .04$)

Block 3: Thriving scales ($R^2 = .35$)

Block 4: Campus involvement variables ($R^2 = .06$)

What Contributes to Thriving?



1. Students' satisfaction with their learning
2. Satisfaction with peer interaction
3. Faculty interaction
4. Involvement in campus activities
5. Involvement in community service
6. Involvement in student organizations
7. Students' satisfaction with their living arrangements
8. Students' satisfaction with advising

Spirituality Items

- My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength when life is difficult.
- My spiritual or religious beliefs are the foundation of my approach to life.
- I gain spiritual strength by trusting in a higher power beyond myself.

Coefficient alpha = .95



What Role Does Spirituality Play?

Outcome: Thriving Scores $R^2 = .35$

Block 1: $R^2 = .059$

Race, gender, generation status (n.s.), high school grades, degree aspirations

Block 2: R^2 change = .082

Spirituality mean $\beta = .291$

Block 3: R^2 change = .207

Faculty interaction $\beta = .331$

Time spent studying $\beta = .159$

Community service $\beta = .134$

Campus activities $\beta = .073$

Student organizations $\beta = .024$



	Low Spirituality	High Spirituality
Low Thriving	1075	252
High Thriving	441	896

By Type of Institution

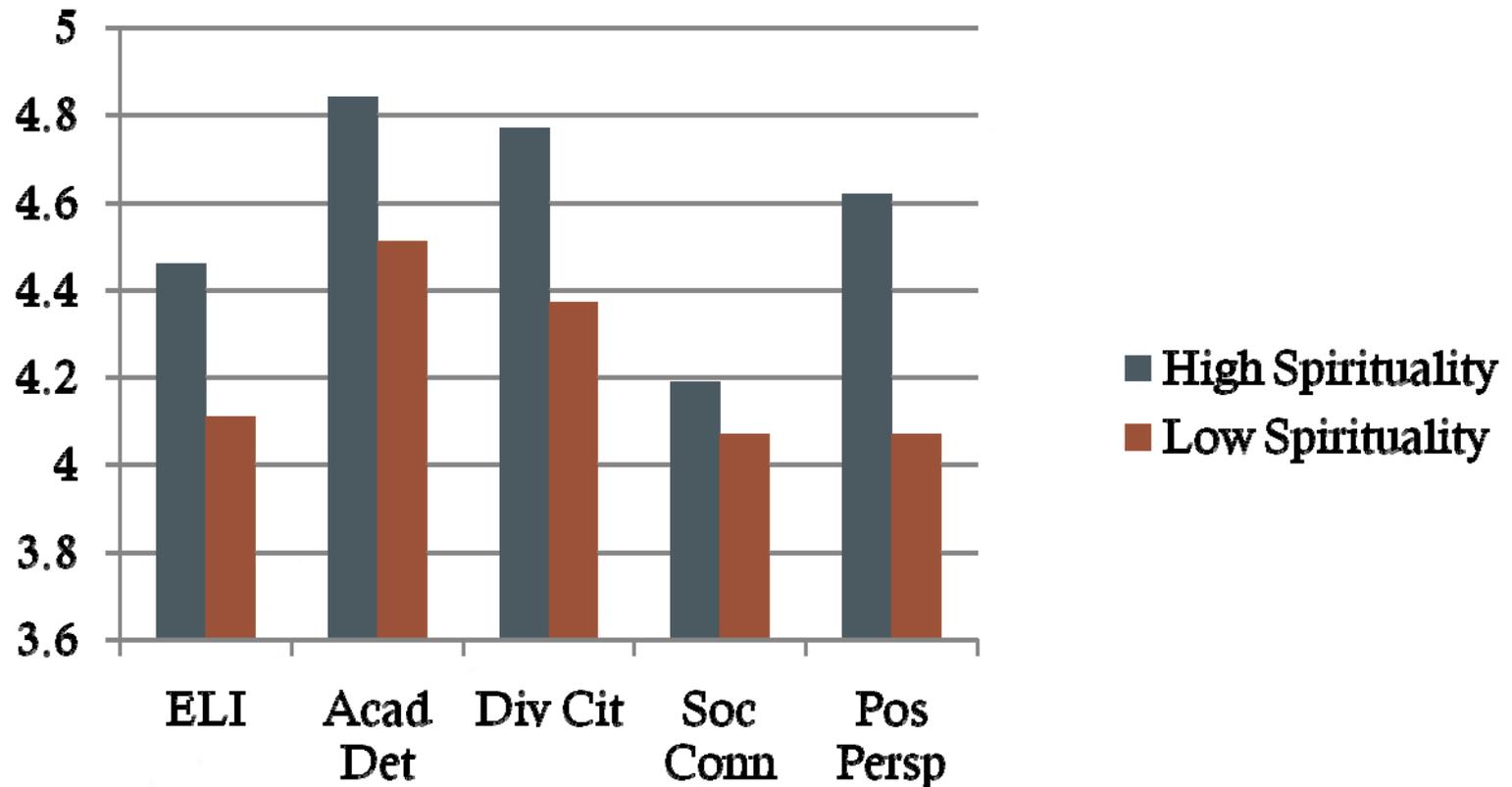
		Public	Private
Low Spirituality	Low Thriving	690	385
	High Thriving	215	226
High Spirituality	Low Thriving	108	144
	High Thriving	297	599

27 four-year institutions; 18 private, 9 public

Wide range of Carnegie classifications, size, geographic distribution

Good range of selectivity

After controlling for type of institution, selectivity, high school grades, degree aspirations, gender, student involvement, and faculty interaction



Students of Color

Spirituality is more predictive of thriving in students of color than in white students – it explains 12% of the variation in their thriving, compared to 7.6% for white students, after controlling for entering characteristics

Involvement in campus activities and student organizations does NOT contribute to thriving in students of color, although faculty interaction, community service, and study time do



Benson & Scales' (2009) study of adolescent thriving

- Spiritual development is a marker of thriving
- *“It does not require religiosity, a belief in God, or adherence to a particular faith tradition. It is defined more as the degree to which a young person affirms and honors a sacred or transcendent force in their life...that shapes their compassionate engagement in the world”* (p. 91).

Implications for Practice

- **Individual student level:**
 - How do we support students' search for the sacred?
 - What can we do to encourage students' spiritual development?
How do we nuance that for students of color at PWIs?
 - Connection to service learning
- **Institutional level:**
 - Knowing the areas where our students are thriving or floundering can help us design appropriate programs and services that span the campus and meet different students' needs
 - Faculty interaction is one of the biggest predictors of thriving – how to encourage this interaction across a wider variety of students? Early—frequent—rewarding

QUESTIONS?

