

Are Catholic Colleges Leading Students Astray?

A nationwide survey raises concerns about the impact that American colleges have on the faith and morals of Catholic students.

By PATRICK J. REILLY

Even while many Catholic colleges in the United States are making exciting progress in their efforts to renew Catholic higher education, the challenges faced by reformers just keep growing worse.

Dozens of Catholic colleges recently hosted productions of "Vagina Monologues," a vulgar play in which the lesbian seduction of a 16-year-old girl is portrayed as her "salvation." [See sidebar.] A women's center at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, funded four students' travel to a pro-abortion leadership conference in Washington, DC—at a time when thousands of pro-life college students were finding their own way to the same city for the annual March for Life. And now comes hard data that confirms the failure of many Catholic colleges to tend to their students' spiritual needs.

A survey of students at 38 Catholic colleges—including major universities like Creighton, Loyola Marymount, Notre Dame, and St. John's of New York—reveals that graduating seniors are predominantly pro-abortion, approve of homosexual "marriage," and only occasionally pray or attend religious services. Nine percent of Catholic students abandon their faith before graduation.

The annual survey of college students, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California-Los Angeles, is important because it provides the only useful data on Catholic colleges that cuts across institutions. There simply isn't any other publicly available assessment of the student experience for the 223 Catholic colleges in the United States.

Catholic World Report and the Cardinal Newman Society—the national or-



(NANCY WIEHE/CNS)

■ Students cross the campus of Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

ganization of which I am president, dedicated to restoring Catholic identity in America's Catholic colleges—commissioned HERI to analyze data on students at Catholic colleges who participated in HERI's 2001 national survey (the latest for which data is currently available). These findings have never been reported elsewhere.

Students losing their faith

The HERI report commissioned by CWR and the Cardinal Newman Society draws from a 1997 survey of incoming freshmen at American colleges, and a near-identical survey of graduating seniors in 2001. We excluded responses from students who participated only in one of the studies, thereby ensuring an accurate account of how students changed during their college experience. We included non-Catholic as well as Catholic students, but tracked each group's responses separately.

HERI compared the 38 participating Catholic colleges (including 20 four-year colleges and 18 universities) with nonsectarian four-year colleges and other religious (mostly Protestant) four-year colleges. It also provided data for Catholic four-year colleges—excluding Catholic universities to ensure a proper comparison with the other four-year college groups—but the results indicated no significant difference when Catholic universities were thrown into the mix. This was something of a surprise to me, since I expected students at the larger universities to be more liberal, but the HERI data do not indicate any significant variations. So to avoid confusion, we have not reported data from the Catholic four-year college group.

Although there is some reason to expect that the results from the surveys at 38 Catholic colleges hold up well if the survey had been conducted at all of the 223 Catholic colleges nationwide, the

HERI survey was not designed to be applied generally to all US Catholic colleges. The 38 colleges included in the survey were not selected with an eye to obtaining a representative sample of the whole group, and so the results are statistically valid only for the schools involved. (See the explanation of the HERI survey's limitations on page 46.) Still, in the absence of any other comparable material showing the performance of Catholic schools, the survey results deserve careful scrutiny. And what the available data *do* show about the 38 participating Catholic colleges is cause for alarm. The full results of the HERI survey are shown on page 42. A few of the most noteworthy findings are:

- In 1997, 45 percent of incoming freshmen at Catholic colleges said they support keeping abortion legal, with 55 percent opposed. Four years later, the same students were 57 percent pro-abortion, 43 percent pro-life. Similarly, students' support for legalizing homosexual "marriages" increased from 55 percent to 71 percent. Approval of casual sex increased from 30 percent to 49 percent.

For all three issues, the *increase* in support among students at Catholic colleges was far more dramatic than increases at other religious colleges. This difference, however, is largely explained by a disturbing trend among Catholic students generally, rather than any particular factors at the institutions involved in the survey. HERI's analysis shows that Catholic students' support for abortion, homosexual unions, and casual sex increased at roughly the same dramatic rate regardless of whether the students enrolled at a Catholic, nonsectarian, or other religious college. Support for these issues increased rapidly at Catholic colleges where most students are Catholic, while other religious colleges with fewer Catholics reported less support.

Nevertheless, Catholic colleges ought to be alarmed when most students thumb their noses at

Church teaching. The Vatican and the Catholic bishops have vocally opposed abortion, homosexual unions, and premarital sex. If significant numbers of Catholic students are turning against Church teaching, non-Catholic colleges cannot be expected to reverse the ideological drift, but Catholic colleges *should* be combating such trends in the classroom, the campus chapel, and the residence hall. By and large, students graduating from Catholic colleges ought to have views *more* in line with Catholic teaching, assuming that the Church's teaching is accurately presented and lived out by college faculty and staff.

- At non-Catholic religious colleges, 24 percent of seniors reported much stronger religious beliefs and convictions than when they were freshmen. Even liberal Protestant colleges are known for placing a high priority on the spiritual development of their students. But at Catholic colleges, only 15 percent of students reported the same sort of spiritual growth. Catholic educators should be asking how they can achieve better results by emphasizing the



■ **Students at a September 11, 2001 prayer service at Marquette University in Milwaukee.**

needs of Catholic students.

The HERI study also found that 9 percent of Catholic students at Catholic colleges leave the Church. That is a frightening statistic—even though defections were almost twice as common at nonsectarian and other religious colleges.

One welcome development is shown in the fact that 11 percent of non-Catholic students enrolled at Catholic colleges reported converting to the Catholic faith during their undergraduate years. Still, despite that influx of converts, the much greater number of students dropping away from the active practice of their faith left the Catholic colleges with a net 4 percent loss in the number of practicing Catholics enrolled.

- In 1997, more than two-thirds of Catholic freshmen at Catholic colleges attended religious services frequently, while the remaining third attended occasionally. By senior year, 13 percent stopped attending services altogether, and nearly half attended only occasionally.

Similarly, only 37 percent of seniors at Catholic colleges said they prayed or meditated more than one hour a week. Almost one-third of the students reported that they do not pray at all.

Are the colleges to blame?

Michael James, assistant executive director of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), dismisses the HERI survey results as having little importance for anyone beyond the participating colleges. "In terms of this being representative of the Catholic student population," James says, "I find it difficult to make that case."

Certainly there is no scientific basis for the assumption that the HERI data from 38 Catholic colleges would apply without modification to America's 223 Catholic colleges. But the set of 38 colleges seems sufficiently varied by size, location, and controlling religious order or diocese to resemble the national set,

CATHOLIC COLLEGES PRESENT OFFENSIVE "MONOLOGUES"

While the Church agonizes over revelations of priests' predatory seduction of young men, dozens of Catholic colleges in the United States were scheduled in February and March to present the vulgar play "Vagina Monologues," complete with a favorable reminiscence about the lesbian seduction of a 16-year-old girl.

Each year, the "V-Day College Campaign" encourages campus productions of "Vagina Monologues" to raise funds for charities that prevent violence against women. This year students and faculty announced plans to present the play at 656 colleges worldwide, including 43 Catholic colleges in the US. Among them are several of America's most prominent Catholic institutions: Boston College; the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts; DePaul University in Chicago; Fordham University in New York; Georgetown University in Washington, DC; Loyola University of Chicago; Saint Louis University; the University of Dayton in Ohio; the University of Detroit-Mercy; the University of Notre Dame in Indiana; and the University of San Francisco.

"Vagina Monologues" is a collection of feisty narratives by women celebrating their sexuality, replete with vulgarity and explicit discussions of sexual encounters including lesbian activity and masturbation. In one scene, a woman describes her seduction by a lesbian woman when she was 16 years old, declaring the incident her "salvation." (This scene, as it is now performed, represents a departure from the original script, in which the girl was only 13 and the seduction was called "a good rape.")

An academic-freedom issue?

Father Edward Malloy, CSC, president of the University of Notre Dame, defends the on-campus production scheduled for March 3 and 4 as an exercise of academic freedom, arguing that "a responsible academic setting is precisely the place where controversial topics should be examined and discussed." But Notre Dame alumni and students who have organized under the name Mary's Advocates to protest the play don't agree that "Vagina Monologues" can be justified as an academic exercise. One of the Advocates is Mary Lake, who graduated from Notre Dame Law School in 1991. She says the university owes students its "protection" from an ultra-feminist play that aims to "cheat young women out of a normal sexual life with their future husbands."

"As a parent, I would not want my college-age daughter to be exposed to that play, because it glorifies in a humorous way masturbation and lesbian seduction," Lake says.

University of Dayton president Daniel Curran doesn't try to justify the play's content, but he defends his university's production as a fundraiser for local charities. "While I have some concerns about some of the material in the play, I see great value in the discussion of the larger issue of violence against women," Curran told protesters, ignoring the fact that

the play glorifies sexual deviancy and the seduction of girls by older women.

At the University of Detroit-Mercy, "Vagina Monologues" is being organized in the middle of Lent by a nun, Sister Sandra Yost, CSJ, an associate professor of electrical engineering. At other colleges, faculty members are also involved in the play through women's studies programs. On the Internet one can find that Dominican University of California "is proud to announce" its production involving students and faculty.

Few cancellations

Despite a nationwide protest led by the Cardinal Newman Society (www.cardinalnewmansociety.org), as this article is written only four colleges are known to have banned students from presenting the play. The College of New Rochelle in New York told students the play "is not an appropriate vehicle for the college." Nearby Iona College also told students that "Vagina Monologues" was inconsistent with the college's "history, traditions, and community composition." At Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, the student organizer canceled plans for the play after the college refused permission to present it on campus. The University of Portland's president banned the play after reading the script.

Other presidents have tried to minimize public criticism of student productions. Father Robert Spitzer, SJ, president of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, told students they could not present the play on campus, although the Gonzaga Women's Studies Program was allowed to sponsor the play at a nearby hotel. Boston College allowed the play on campus, but told students they could not advertise it to anyone outside the student body itself.

Eight other colleges where productions were planned by students—including La Salle University in Philadelphia; Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania; and Wheeling Jesuit University in West Virginia—have told the Cardinal Newman Society that the performances are canceled. But they did not explain whether students simply abandoned their plans or college administrators intervened.

Father Michael Garanzini, SJ, president of Loyola University of Chicago, told protesters "we are not presenting" the play—"at least not that I know." He made this statement despite announcements of the event on the university calendar and the website of Loyola's Women's Studies Program, which sponsored the play on February 14 and 15. Other college officials have denied reports that "Vagina Monologues" would be presented on their campuses, only to discover that students had indeed organized productions.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae, the apostolic constitution for Catholic higher education, requires that a Catholic college "informs and carries out its research, teaching, and all other activities with Catholic ideals, principles, and attitudes." That "Vagina Monologues" is presented at even a single Catholic college is reason enough for Catholic parents to take notice. ■ —Patrick J. Reilly

so that we might draw some inferences about what a national survey of students at Catholic colleges might find. We may never know.

Strong similarities among most Catholic colleges' approaches to teaching, curriculum, campus life, campus ministry, and extracurricular activities also contribute to the case for drawing national inferences from the HERI data. For example, in my experience working with Catholic colleges, I have seen that most require similar types of core courses, provide similar campus ministry programs and sacramental opportunities, and have similar policies for allowing dissident speakers on campus. Most Catholic colleges are becoming increasingly homogenized, often mimicking prestigious secular colleges.

Even the recurring scandals on many Catholic campuses suggest strong commonalities. The pro-abortion politician who is given an opportunity to gain some favorable publicity on a Catholic campus by speaking on world peace, the environment, or women's rights seems almost obligatory for many colleges—as does the harassment of a pro-life speaker who may not even intend to discuss abortion. Sometimes even the names of the guest speakers are the same, from one school to another. Leon Panetta, the former chief of staff in the Clinton White House, makes the rounds at Jesuit colleges; former Senator George Mitchell and author Garry Wills also make regular appearances on the Catholic-college lecture circuit. Dozens of Catholic colleges presented "Vagina Monologues" this year. Liturgical abuses at Mass are common, as are referrals to Planned Parenthood for contraception and abortions. The campus culture of excessive drinking and sexual activity is near universal.

Given similar problems, policies, and programs at most Catholic colleges, the HERI study might indicate broader concerns for all of Catholic higher education. But even if there is no attempt to generalize the HERI data beyond the 38 participating colleges, it is certain that the survey results are appalling. Are Catholic colleges to blame?

The ACCU's Michael James argues



■ **Students dance during a gathering of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. The orthodox college outreach trains recent graduates to return to campus as faith leaders.**

that even a college that receives disappointing survey responses from its students might blame those responses in part on "mitigating factors" such as the broad diversity of students who attend Catholic colleges, many of them poorly formed in the faith and not much different from students at non-Catholic colleges. "We have some real challenges when those students come to Catholic colleges and universities," James says.

That much is certain. The lack of spiritual formation among Catholic youth prior to college is well documented. In *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame Press, 2001), noted researcher Dean Hoge and his co-

Catholic students' support for abortion, homosexual unions, and casual sex increased at roughly the same dramatic rate regardless of whether the students enrolled at a Catholic, nonsectarian, or other religious college.

authors summarize national surveys of young Catholics showing overwhelming dissent with Church teaching on sexual ethics and weak allegiance to the Vatican and bishops.

Hoge, a sociology professor and director of the Life Cycle Institute at the Catholic University of America, acknowledges that one would hope to see Catholic colleges producing better results than what the HERI data indicates, especially on issues like abortion—where the Church's teaching is clear and more widely embraced by lay Catholics, unlike issues such as contraception and homosexuality on which there is more widespread dissent. But Hoge suspects that the changing opinions of students

on moral issues is primarily a result of their entry into adulthood and integration into American society. Catholic colleges are comprised largely of Catholic students, and Hoge is not surprised that young Catholics experience a more dramatic swing toward views that are prevalent in American society, reasoning that they start as freshmen with more traditional attitudes than their peers. "College students are more volatile to making changes in attitudes than older people," Hoge says.

All this is natural at Catholic colleges that showcase dissenters as campus lecturers, subsidize student clubs that dissent from Church teaching, and do little to stem sexual activity in residence halls. But Hoge embraces the typical line of American Catholic academics, arguing that colleges should allow free and open discussion of all issues, and saying that this process inevitably allow Catholic students to encounter and possibly embrace views contrary to Catholic teaching. (More conservative observers reply that open debate should be distinguished from outright propaganda, and by observing that Catholic institutions

have no duty to invite speakers whose conduct is notoriously immoral, or whose views are incompatible with fundamental Catholic doctrine.)

Not taking faith seriously

But while free and open discussion among students is vital to higher education, and while many freshmen entering Catholic colleges may be ready quickly to abandon their parents' religious principles because they lack a strong spiritual formation, Catholic colleges still have the option of being authentically and firmly Catholic, thus shoring up their students' faith. The sad fact is that the HERI survey results show *increasing* dissent and *declining* morality among

SPECIAL REPORT

CATHOLIC COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES NONSECTARIAN 4-YEAR COLLEGES OTHER RELIGIOUS 4-YEAR COLLEGES

		CATHOLIC COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES			NONSECTARIAN 4-YEAR COLLEGES			OTHER RELIGIOUS 4-YEAR COLLEGES		
		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
Number of Respondents		7,197	5,199	1,998	5,153	1,520	3,623	2,747	395	2,352
<i>Abortion should be legal.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	44.9	37.9	62.8	61.1	49.5	66.1	39.8	42.5	39.3
	2001	57.3	51.7	71.9	71.6	65.5	74.3	47.6	56.8	46.0
	Change	12.4	13.8	9.1	10.5	16.0	8.2	7.8	14.3	6.7
<i>If two people really like each other, it's all right for them to have sex even if they've known each other for only a very short time.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	29.9	27.5	36.3	40.2	38.7	40.8	22.2	28.3	21.2
	2001	49.4	48.0	53.3	58.8	59.8	58.4	34.4	47.5	32.1
	Change	19.5	20.5	17.0	18.6	21.1	17.6	12.2	19.2	10.9
<i>Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	54.6	52.4	60.2	62.8	62.0	63.1	39.8	53.8	37.5
	2001	70.6	69.5	73.7	72.2	76.9	70.2	48.1	69.1	44.6
	Change	16.0	17.1	13.5	9.4	14.9	7.1	8.3	15.3	7.1
<i>The death penalty should be abolished.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	32.2	35.5	23.5	27.4	28.9	26.8	25.2	25.0	25.3
	2001	46.3	49.5	38.1	39.9	37.7	40.9	36.2	35.3	36.3
	Change	14.1	14.0	14.6	12.5	8.8	14.1	11.0	10.3	11.0
<i>Religious Preference—Roman Catholic</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	73.4	100.0	0.0	30.8	100.0	0.0	14.7	100.0	0.0
	2001	69.0	91.0	11.0	27.8	84.0	3.7	13.1	83.9	1.3
	Change	-4.4	-9.0	11.0	-3.0	-16.0	3.7	-1.6	-16.1	1.3
<i>Religious Preference—None</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997	6.6	0.0	24.8	17.8	0.0	25.8	7.6	0.0	8.9
	2001	10.9	5.5	25.0	22.8	9.8	28.3	11.4	9.5	11.7
	Change	4.3	5.5	0.2	5.0	9.8	2.5	3.8	9.5	2.8
<i>Have attended a religious service.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997—Not at all	7.4	2.8	19.6	18.1	6.5	23.1	8.2	6.1	8.6
	1997—Occasionally	33.1	28.9	44.4	37.6	37.2	37.7	24.9	36.5	22.9
	1997—Frequently	59.4	68.3	36.1	44.4	56.4	39.2	66.9	57.4	68.5
	2001—Not at all	19.6	12.8	37.4	41.2	27.8	46.9	18.7	23.5	17.9
	2001—Occasionally	45.1	44.7	46.3	37.3	50.2	31.8	34.6	52.6	31.6
	2001—Frequently	35.3	42.6	16.3	21.5	22.1	21.2	46.6	24.0	50.4
<i>Reported much stronger religious beliefs and convictions since entering college as a freshman.</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	2001 ONLY	15.2	15.9	13.3	11.9	7.8	13.6	24.3	12.2	26.3
<i>Hours per week spent: Prayer/Meditation</i>		All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic	All	Catholic	non-Catholic
	1997—None	20.7	14.4	37.5	35.9	25.2	40.6	18.1	20.7	17.6
	1997—<1	38.3	39.8	34.2	33.4	38.8	31.0	31.6	37.6	30.6
	1997—1-2	30.9	35.2	19.6	21.6	29.1	18.4	30.1	32.5	29.7
	1997—3-5	7.5	8.2	5.9	6.2	4.9	6.7	13.0	7.3	13.9
	1997—6-10	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.8	1.2	2.0	4.8	1.1	5.4
	1997—11-15	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.6	1.4	0.5	1.5
	1997—16-20	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.5
	1997—>20	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.8
	2001—None	31.2	25.9	44.8	48.2	41.9	50.8	23.6	35.9	21.5
	2001—<1	32.1	32.6	30.7	25.6	31.8	22.9	29.4	31.8	29.0
	2001—1-2	25.8	29.9	15.0	17.4	19.9	16.3	25.7	21.2	26.5
	2001—3-5	7.2	7.9	5.5	5.9	4.4	6.5	13.1	6.5	14.2
	2001—6-10	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.0	1.5	2.1	5.0	2.8	5.4
	2001—11-15	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.1	0.7	1.2	0.8	1.3
	2001—16-20	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.8
	2001—>20	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.4	1.3	1.0	1.4

Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California—Los Angeles; 2001 College Student Survey; 1997 Cooperative Institution Research Program.

students during their four years of a Catholic college education. Regardless of where the students *begin* their college journey, Catholic colleges should be helping students move *closer* to Christ, and certainly doing a better job of moving students toward the Catholic faith than secular colleges do. In fact, the HERI data show that the Catholic colleges are not significantly different from the secular schools in terms of their effect on students' beliefs and conduct.

"When students graduate from a Catholic college with less understanding of the Church, or with beliefs incompatible with Church teaching, such as being pro-abortion, then I would call into question what that college has done or failed to do," says David House, president of St. Joseph's College of Maine. "To be fair, it may not necessarily be the fault of the college, but I would still wonder what happened over a four-year period."

House says he is surprised by the number of parents he meets who send their children to Catholic colleges expecting at least basic instruction in Catholic teachings and intellectual traditions. "That this often doesn't occur would be occasion for consumer-fraud lawsuits in just about any other industry," House says.

Thomas Dillon, president of Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, agrees that many Catholic colleges do not seem to be adequately pursuing the mission of Catholic higher education. Dillon says:

In general, a turning away by students from the Catholic faith seems to be the inevitable result of an education that does not take seriously the intellectual underpinnings of the faith. In addition, students only rarely witness in the academic or administrative staff the living out of the principles of our faith. All too often they find, instead, outright disdain for the faith.

In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the apostolic constitution on Catholic higher education, Pope John Paul II instructs colleges to ensure that students "realize the responsibility . . . of being witnesses to Christ in whatever place they may exer-

Given similar problems, policies, and programs at most Catholic colleges, the HERI study might indicate broader concerns for all of Catholic higher education.

cise their profession." He also calls for the combination of "academic and professional development with formation in moral and religious principles and the social teachings of the Church" as well as "ethical formation" in each discipline.

The Holy Father's use of the word "formation" is a reminder that colleges should provide more than simple textbook instruction in Catholic teachings, which could theoretically be accomplished without any faith commitment. The Pope places some emphasis on outcomes, reasoning that colleges should graduate students who are well formed and active in their faith, and embrace the Church's teaching as truth that must be lived.

David House of St. Joseph's College argues:

I think the notion of, "Here's Catholic teaching; take it or leave it," is better than nothing, but it is still far from the mark, and doesn't really approach formation. Ultimately, of course, each human being is free to exercise his will, but to present Church teaching at a Catholic college as neutral or as one of many offerings in the cafeteria of belief systems is more than just



■ A Franciscan sister meets with students at Clark College in Oregon preparing to enter the Catholic Church.

weak. It's wrong.

Active Catholic students enrolled at Catholic colleges often complain that core curriculum requirements are inadequate, and fail to give most students a college-level understanding of the Catholic faith. "The required theology classes for all students don't necessarily cover Catholic teaching," complains Christina Dehan, a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame. She continues:

Everyone [at Notre Dame] has to take a Scripture class, but mine was taught by a Protestant graduate student who knew nothing about Catholic teaching. The second theology requirement can be completed by any of a wide variety of classes that don't normally pertain to Church teaching specifically.

Dennis Martin, associate professor of theology at Loyola University of Chicago, says the problem is not only whether students are assigned Catholic theology courses, but what is being taught in those classrooms. "Many major Catholic colleges do teach students to appreciate 'Catholicism Lite' and to take offense at the magisterium's teaching on sexuality and marriage," Martin says, "because any self-respecting American intellectual simply 'knows' these things are hopelessly out of date, and Catholics have been hungry for respect for more than two centuries on this continent."

There are problems outside the classroom as well. David Endres, a graduate student in religious studies at the Catholic University of America, sees classroom instruction as only one aspect of students' spiritual formation at a Catholic college. What students experience outside the classroom—including campus lectures, student clubs, social events, peer encounters, dating, community service, the liturgy—can have a significant impact on students' spiritual lives. "Catholic colleges should work to build a culture that encourages spiritual and moral growth at every level," Endres says. Of special importance is avoiding even the appearance of accepting inappropriate student conduct, notably including premarital sex and substance abuse.

Thomas Kneier, dean of student life

at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, notes that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* requires that “all the basic academic activities of a Catholic university are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church.”

“This says to me that the mission of a Catholic university goes beyond intellectual formation and includes what Cardinal Ratzinger describes as the heart of evangelization: namely, ‘teaching the art of living,’” Kneier says. But for many

CATHOLIC COLLEGES PARTICIPATING IN THE 2001 HERI STUDENT SURVEY

Alvernia College (Reading, PA)
 Avila University (Kansas City, MO)
 Cabrini College (Radnor, PA)
 College of Mount Saint Vincent (Bronx, NY)
 College of New Rochelle (New Rochelle, NY)
 College of Saint Catherine (St. Paul, MN)
 College of Saint Mary (Omaha, NE)
 College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA)
 Creighton University (Omaha, NE)
 Fairfield University (Fairfield, CT)
 Gannon University (Erie, PA)
 Gonzaga University (Spokane, WA)
 John Carroll University (University Heights, OH)
 Loyola College in Maryland (Baltimore, MD)
 Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA)
 Marian College (Indianapolis, IN)
 Marywood University (Scranton, PA)
 Mercyhurst College (Erie, PA)
 Molloy College (Rockville Centre, NY)
 Mount Saint Mary College (Newburgh, NY)
 Mount Saint Mary's College (Emmitsburg, MD)
 Notre Dame College (Cleveland, OH)
 Regis University (Denver, CO)
 Sacred Heart University (Fairfield, CT)
 Saint Bonaventure Univ. (St. Bonaventure, NY)
 Saint Francis College (Brooklyn, NY)
 Saint John's University (Jamaica, NY)
 Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, IN)
 Saint Mary's College of California (Moraga, CA)
 Saint Mary's University (San Antonio, TX)
 Saint Norbert College (De Pere, WI)
 Saint Vincent College (Latrobe, PA)
 Salve Regina University (Newport, RI)
 Santa Clara University (Santa Clara, CA)
 University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN)
 Viterbo University (LaCrosse, WI)
 Wheeling Jesuit University (Wheeling, West VA)
 Xavier University (Cincinnati, OH) ■



■ Students at Jesuit-run Boston College carry mock coffins last December as they protest a possible US-led military action in Iraq.

floundering campus life programs, “the standard is mediocrity.”

Kneier make his case this way:

Oranges grow best in Florida because of the ideal climate and conditions. A Catholic university with a strong Catholic culture that pervades campus life is the best climate for students to grow spiritually. The truth taught in the classroom is reinforced and applied outside the classroom.

Whether in the classroom or the residence hall or the cafeteria, what is needed is a genuine commitment to helping students live moral lives.

“Professing to be a Catholic college, but then tacitly allowing or tolerating openly immoral behavior, is worse than a secular institution that, after all, makes no particular claim to a religious tradition or a religious belief,” agrees David House.

More information, please

In the debate over whether Catholic colleges can and should have a more positive impact on students’ spiritual growth, one important missing ingredient is solid, reliable information about the effects of Catholic campus life on undergraduate students. There is simply a dearth of good research on the outcomes produced by Catholic institutions of higher education. The limitations of the HERI study—and a controversy that arose out of the premature use of some HERI findings—have made that shortage of hard data all the more noticeable.

The controversy over the HERI data began when Deal Hudson, the editor of

Crisis magazine, sent out an email newsletter in which he used the HERI results as the basis for some sweeping and unjustified criticism of American Catholic colleges. His criticism in turn was based on a preliminary summary of HERI data, prepared by the Cardinal Newman Society but not intended for broad public distribution. Unfortunately Hudson was unaware of, and thus failed to explain, the facts that only 38 Catholic colleges participated in the survey, and that the original HERI data included results from many students who participated in the survey only once, either as freshmen or as seniors. Those responses from one-time participants obviously did not, and could not, offer any information about how the students’ attitudes were influenced by their years in college; only the before-and-after interviews afforded such information on the outcomes of undergraduate education.

Critics of Hudson’s analysis, and defenders of the American Catholic colleges, pounced on this methodological error as a reason to dismiss his argument. Ironically, the heated debate that ensued almost resulted in a decision to shelve the only available study of Catholic college outcomes. HERI researchers angrily protested the misuse of their findings. Catholic college leaders denounced the public embarrassment caused by the premature release of incomplete findings. The *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* both reportedly canceled plans for articles describing the HERI results.

Only *Catholic World Report* and the Cardinal Newman Society insisted on taking a closer look. Together we persuaded the HERI researchers to prepare a report using fully accurate and complete data. This HERI report analyzed only the responses from students who had participated in the survey twice—thus eliminating the methodological flaw in Hudson’s analysis, and offering the best available study of Catholic college outcomes.

About a decade ago, institutional researchers attempted to design a national survey for Catholic colleges, according to Michael James of the ACCU. But the project fell apart because of disagree-

ments about the data to be collected, a lack of sufficient funding at some colleges and “some sensitivity” among college leaders about the collection of potentially embarrassing data. “We need to continue to look for ways to assess ourselves and be honest with ourselves,” James says. James was one of the readers who were unhappy with Hudson’s analysis of the incomplete HERI results. “When I saw those numbers, I asked myself, what other data can we rely on to put these numbers in perspective?” he reports. “But there’s nothing.”

But it is evidence of negligence bordering on irresponsibility that Catholic colleges have not yet developed any instrument for tracking students’ four-year experiences across all 223 Catholic colleges, and across relevant subsets of that large group, such as the country’s Jesuit-run colleges. And there seems to be a plethora of competing explanations for this failure to gauge outcomes—which continues to this day, more than a decade after *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* called for a movement toward reform of Catholic colleges.

Thomas Dillon of Thomas Aquinas College thinks the absence of data reflects the fact that there is simply no motivation to study the essential characteristics of a Catholic institution at colleges, since those characteristics have faded away in recent decades. Dennis Martin of Loyola doubts that Catholic college leaders in the past few decades would have had much use for survey results, and he suggests that any surveys they did produce would have been shaped by what he calls ‘Catholicism Lite,’ and thus would not have truly measured fidelity to the Church. Thomas Kneier of Steubenville notes that research requires time and money, and “perhaps there has not been a felt need for such an investment until now.”

David House believes that most Catholic colleges are interested in comparing themselves to national norms, so that administrators put their focus on comparisons with secular institutions, leaving little room for consideration of their Catholic identity. “Of course, the result is that Catholic colleges are then gauged by secular norms, which then



(AMY BUCKENS)

■ **Young people join in the celebrations at “Mount 2000 and Beyond,” an annual Eucharistic prayer festival held at Mount St. Mary’s College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.**

reinforce the notion that if they waver too much they are abnormal,” House says. “Or, conversely, if the attitudes and behaviors of students at Catholic colleges are well within the national, secular norms, this is used to affirm the institutional culture, not to challenge it.”

If a survey instrument were designed to test students’ beliefs and behaviors, would the results help spur needed reforms at Catholic colleges? Is better data a solution to the lack of spiritual formation?

House suspects that many college leaders and even many American bishops are already “fully aware of the deleterious effects of college on the spiritual and religious lives of students.” Unfortunately, he continues, “I don’t think many of them care about it, otherwise there would be more done to address the issue.”

Endres also doubts that many Catholic college leaders would recognize student views and behavior as connected to their essential educational mission. “It seems that ‘belief’ is not considered an essential determination of a Catholic college’s strength,” Endres says.

But it is difficult to believe that there are not many administrators and researchers who would make good use

of hard data on students at Catholic colleges. So again, why is that data still lacking? Jennie Bradley, a junior at the University of Notre Dame, asks whether other administrators are deliberately avoiding public embarrassment. “As long as you keep on talking about a problem, you have an excuse not to take action,” Bradley says. A national survey of students at Catholic colleges “would highlight the desperate need for reform at these schools, and then there could no longer be any excuses.”

Hope for reform

Without any plan in sight for further research, is there any hope that Catholic colleges will be convinced that they need to do a better job of helping students develop spiritually as well as academically?

There are some promising signs. Significant efforts are underway at many Catholic colleges to review their campus life policies in light of their Catholic mission. The ACCU last year sponsored a workshop for student affairs personnel, and the Cardinal Newman Society’s national conference on “Catholic Campus Life” gathered student affairs and campus ministry personnel, college leaders and students to discuss voluntary

guidelines for student life policies and programs.

“What I find truly noteworthy are the Catholic colleges and universities that are struggling—successfully, I might add, and often spurred by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*—to return to Catholic orthodoxy,” House says. He continues:

These institutions face odds that seem insurmountable in today’s relativistic, New Age culture of mediocrity, yet they are succeeding in reforming their institutions, including student life, and in returning to values rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and in the doctrines and heritage of the Roman Catholic Church.

In other colleges that are slow to reform, great hope lies in the influence of faithful Catholic students, whether act-

The HERI survey results show increasing dissent and declining morality among students during their four years of a Catholic college education.

ing alone to be an example for their peers or working with student organizations like the Association of Students at Catholic Colleges (ASCC), COMPASS, and the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). The ASCC is about to launch a major effort to help establish Eucharistic adoration programs on

Catholic campuses: just one example of what students can accomplish. “Even a small number of faithful and faith-filled students can be a leaven to the whole campus that gives rise to a dynamic Catholic environment,” Kneier says.

But tackling the problems indicated by the HERI survey and building a new commitment to students’ spiritual formation is no small task. For every student or faculty member seeking reform, many others will be comfortable with the status quo. Recent books like Sandra Estanek’s *Understanding Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities* (Sheed & Ward, 2002) and David Guthrie’s *Student Affairs Reconsidered* (University Press of America, 2002) are only beginning steps toward building effective campus life programs that address students’ needs beyond the classroom.

For several decades now, Catholic college leaders have followed the example of secular colleges, paying little serious attention to student life concerns following the abandonment of the *in loco parentis* approach to administration of undergraduate life. What is needed today is a major shift in the way most Catholic colleges are managed, with more resources, personnel, and research dedicated to those aspects of “educating the whole person” that have been short-changed in recent years.

“Interestingly, in the early stages of higher education in this country, it was widely accepted that things such as a strong sense of morality, wisdom in decision making, and ‘life skills’ were meant to be the outcomes of any college or university experience,” Bradley says. “Higher education was meant to produce not just young people with a good and useful body of knowledge, but gentlemen: people who were respectful and respectable in every way.”

Only by embracing those goals once again can the renewal of Catholic higher education truly succeed. ■

Patrick J. Reilly is founder and president of the Cardinal Newman Society (www.cardinalnewmansociety.org), a national organization dedicated to the renewal of Catholic higher education.

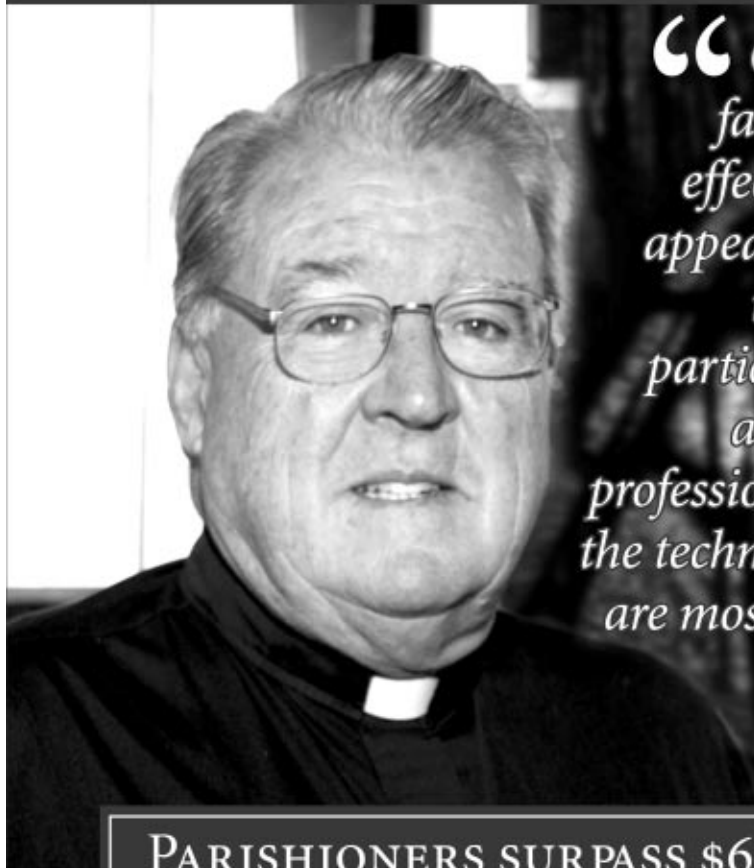
LIMITATIONS OF HERI DATA

Although the HERI survey of students at 38 Catholic colleges raises concerns about the colleges’ impact on students and suggests possible trends throughout Catholic higher education, the colleges and universities that participated in the survey were not intended to comprise a representative sample of American Catholic institutions of higher learning. Only a survey carefully designed to achieve such a representative sample could provide fully accurate data on the views and habits of students at all Catholic colleges nationwide. Because the HERI survey was not designed for this purpose, the results have certain limitations including:

1. The institutions represented in the study are not perfectly representative of all 223 Catholic colleges in the US. For example, more than a quarter of the institutions in the HERI study are Jesuit-run. Jesuit schools, which are generally considered to be more liberal than the other Catholic colleges, make up just 13 percent of all US Catholic colleges. On the other hand, none of the participants in the HERI survey came from among those colleges commonly recognized as thoroughly orthodox, such as Thomas Aquinas College in California or Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio; responses from those students might have balanced out any liberal bias from the Jesuit institutions. Moreover, the 38 colleges are geographically diverse and represent varied forms of administrative control (including religious orders and dioceses). The split among four-year colleges (20) and the usually larger universities (18) is reasonably close to the split among all Catholic institutions.

2. Each participating institution selects students for the survey according to its own methods—probably not always by random selection. The number of students that participate may also vary regardless of total student population. So there is the likelihood of sampling error even within institutions.

3. The HERI data reported here is aggregate data for the 38 participating colleges and the comparison groups. Although we have identified the 38 colleges, assumptions cannot be made about the survey responses for individual institutions. It is likely that the results from some of the 38 colleges indicated no particular cause for concern about students’ spiritual development, while other colleges demonstrated much worse problems than the group as a whole. ■



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