

# Faith Identity: Exploring the Lives of Non-Christian Identifying Students at a Private, Religiously-Based University

By Daniel Wilson

Advisor: Dr. Graham F. Hunter



## Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate the lived experiences and sense of belonging of non-Christian identifying students at the University of Dayton.

## Research Questions

- What are the experiences of non-Christian students at a private, Christian institution?
- How have these students' experiences shaped their sense of belonging on campus?

## Methodology & Methods

- *Phenomenological approach* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)
  - Individual interviews
  - Seven participants
- Convenience and snowball sampling
- Member checking and thick description

## References

Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2011). Assessing students' spiritual and religious qualities. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*, 39-61.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Goodman, D. (2014). The tapestry model. In Mitchell, D. (Ed.), *Intersectionality & higher education: Theory, research, & praxis* (pp. 99-108). Peter Lang.

Nielsen, J. C., & Small, J. L. (2019). Four pillars for supporting religious, secular, and spiritual student identities. *Journal of College and Character, 20*(2), 180-186.

Smith, S. R., & Sosin, M. R. (2001). The varieties of faith-related agencies. *Public Administration Review, 61*(6), 651-670. <http://www.istor.org/stable/3110001>

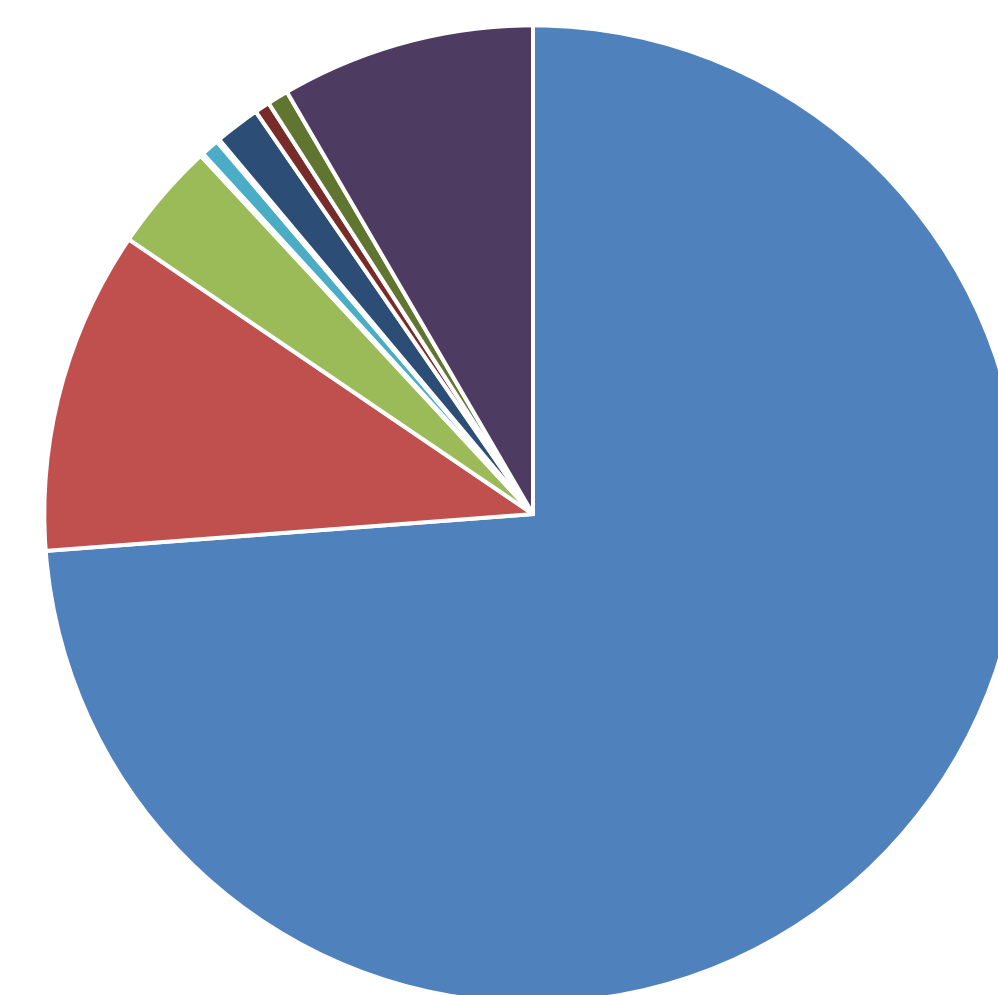
Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

University of Dayton (2021). Multi Institutional Study of Student Leadership. [Data set]. University of Dayton.

## Literature Review

- Sense of belonging is “a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 28)
- Interactions with external factors such as society or peers are integral to religious development (Nielsen & Small, 2019)
- Religiousness and spirituality form the bedrock for meaning-making and build on existing identities (Astin & Astin, 2011)

Name	Religious Identity	Year in School
Molly	Agnostic/Atheist	Sophomore
Tyler	Buddhist	Sophomore
Lilliana	Jewish/Spiritual	Junior
Robert	Agnostic	Sophomore
Ryan	Agnostic/Atheist	Sophomore
Daphne	Agnostic/Atheist	First Year
Suzanne	Muslim	Junior



■ Christian ■ Agnostic ■ Atheist ■ Bahai ■ Buddhist  
■ Hindu ■ Muslim ■ Jewish ■ Other ■ None

## UD Religious Affiliation Demographics

- Information does not indicate strength of identity nor regularity of practice (University of Dayton, 2021)

## Results

### Pre-Collegiate Experiences

- Reverse stigma against Christianity
- Religious development occurs prior to attending college
- Religion did not play a role in attending UD

### Collegiate Experiences

- Generally pleased with the university's acceptance of their identity
- Religion intersecting with other identities
- Numbness to their situation
- Impact of Campus Ministry and other resources

“I don't know how to represent non-belief, but I do know how to represent my other identities.”

### Representation and Belonging

- Mention of religious iconography
- Grew more comfortable with sharing their identity

”Be bold. Places where you don't feel like you belong are places you need to be.”

## Discussion

### Connections to Existing Literature

- *Intersectionality* (Goodman, 2014) providing outlet
- External factors influence religious perception and identity
- Differing perception of institutional *coupling* with religion (Smith & Sosin, 2001)

### Limitations

- Marianist background of university
- Lack of other religious identities
- Time and other resources

### Implications for Practice

- Religion roundtable
- Emphasis on values based work

### Implications for Research

- Identify influence of external factors
- Pre-collegiate development