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Spirituality assists with student life on campus

By Brent Forgues
Special Projects Editor

Before college, Justin Mast found church a boring ritual that provided only a set of laws that he had to follow.

"The full picture didn't come together until I came to Purdue," said Mast, a senior in the College of Agriculture.

Mast is now the president of Campus Crusade for Christ, and since he began his involvement almost four years ago, he said it's helped him realize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

"Throughout that relationship, I've been able to find fulfillment, joy and satisfaction," he said.

According to a recent survey, Mast's increased spirituality is not uncommon on college campuses today.

Last week, the National Survey of Student Engagement published its 2005 annual survey results of "Exploring Different Dimensions of Student Engagement." The report analyzed various elements of campus life, such as spirituality-enhancing practices and their effects on campus.

Composed of surveys from nearly 150,000 first-year and senior students among 461 four-year colleges, the report indicated that involvement in religious activities during college is linked to a deepened sense of spirituality for all students, such as Mast.

For many students, college is a daunting experience that can invigorate previous religious understandings, which become a source of reassurance and familiarity, said Will Miller, a therapist and campus minister of University Church.

Over the last few years, Miller said he's found that this is the first generation of people who believe they won't do better than their parents.

Miller said that most parents of baby boomers were not college educated so Miller and others who received some form of higher education felt they would be more successful.

"But nowadays, there's some sense that it may be harder for your generation to assume that you're automatically going to do better," he said. "It's made your generation more focused about school and also a little bit more anxious about what the prospects are."

As a result, students may be involving themselves more in spirituality as an "anchor" to relieve that anxiety.

"If you're a person who trusts that there is order in the world, that you will be OK," he said.

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The report also found that involvement in religious activities may have beneficial effects on educational and social campus engagements and the desired outcomes of college.

Leah Yablong, a student with the Hillel Foundation $\frac{1}{2}$ Purdue's resource center for Jewish students $\frac{1}{2}$ is a member of the Health Sciences Student Council and was also involved with her residence hall club when she lived in Earhart Hall.

Yablong said when she was younger, her parents were actively involved in the Jewish community until they moved. Unfortunately, the adjustment was at the time of her bas mitzvah, and Yablong said she didn't enjoy the Jewish celebration until four years later.

"Spiritually inert" before she came to Purdue, Yablong promised herself that she would become more active in her faith. Now, as a sophomore, she's the president of the Hillel Foundation's Student Board.

"I was never really Jewish," she said. "I never really felt Jewish until I came to Purdue.

"I've met a lot of friends; I've surrounded myself with my religion a lot and it's very nice."

That religiosity can affect campus involvement was not surprising to Miller, who's co-authored a book titled "Refrigerator Rights: Creating Connections and Restoring Relationships," about engagement among Americans today.

The book addresses the fact that many Americans move every year, similar to Yablong's case, and that they gorge themselves on television.

As a result, the lives of Americans now surround individuality, singularity and self-reliance.

"We don't have the social system human beings need to be healthy and religion gives that to you," he said. "It sets a standard and rules about how to compose yourself.

"How to live the right life."



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