



## Religion on Campus

Allen Proctor

To cite this article: Allen Proctor (2002) Religion on Campus, Journal of College and Character, 3:4, , DOI: [10.2202/1940-1639.1321](https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1321)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1321>



© 2002 The Authors



Published online: 01 May 2002.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 681



View related articles [↗](#)

# *Journal of College and Character*

---

*Volume 3, Issue 4*

2002

*Article 4*

---

## Religion on Campus

Allen Proctor\*

\*North Carolina State University

Copyright ©2002 by the authors. All rights reserved.  
<http://journals.naspa.org/jcc>

# Religion on Campus

Allen Proctor

## **Abstract**

Religion on Campus is a valuable and unique resource for all who are interested in what is actually happening in the religious life of students and faculty on college campuses today. Are you interested in getting inside a meeting of Campus Crusade for Christ to see all that is said and done? What happens during a gathering of the Lutheran Student Movement and what feelings and thoughts do students report in interviews following those gatherings? Why do some students join the Pagan Society and what do they gain spiritually and socially from their membership? What is the state of the academic study of religion on public and private campuses and how does it affect the faith and practice of individual students and faculty? What is the impact of classroom religious studies and the practice of religion on the overall ethos of the campus?

**KEYWORDS:** religion, campus, students, faculty

# Religion on Campus

*Review by Allen Proctor*

-- May 28, 2002

*This book is reviewed by Allen Proctor, Presbyterian campus minister at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C. The book review was first published on [Presbyterian Outlook Web Site](http://www.presbyterianoutlook.org/web-site). Reprint with permission. More information about this book can be found on [http://www.ibiblio.org/uncpress/chapters/cherry\\_religion.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/uncpress/chapters/cherry_religion.html)*

---

Religion on Campus is a valuable and unique resource for all who are interested in what is actually happening in the religious life of students and faculty on college campuses today. Are you interested in getting inside a meeting of Campus Crusade for Christ to see all that is said and done? What happens during a gathering of the Lutheran Student Movement and what feelings and thoughts do students report in interviews following those gatherings? Why do some students join the Pagan Society and what do they gain spiritually and socially from their membership? What is the state of the academic study of religion on public and private campuses and how does it affect the faith and practice of individual students and faculty? What is the impact of classroom religious studies and the practice of religion on the overall ethos of the campus?

This book is packed with data that addresses these and other questions. And all of this information has been collected and is reported with a remarkable degree of objectivity and insight by three professors of religion.

The authors selected four different types of schools and sought to protect the identity of persons and places, and of the schools themselves in order to get full and candid cooperation. They included a large public state university in the west; a Lutheran liberal arts college in the north; a Roman Catholic school in the eastern United States; and a traditionally African-American college with Presbyterian roots in the south. With the help of two postdoctoral research assistants, the authors used the methods of ethnography, including "interviews, observation, key informants and extensive field notes to get inside the schools and understand them on their own terms." Although most of the book is devoted to the reporting of this research data, the authors also venture to make what many would consider to be surprising conclusions about the robust health and vitality of religious study and practice on today's campuses.

For example, the state of religion on the campus of the 30,000-student, public state university was characterized not so much by its secularization, as by a lively diversity and pluralism. Parachurch ministries reflected concerns about alcohol and drug use and sex outside of heterosexual marriage, as well as the pressures of time and resources that make it difficult for students to take time for prayer, Bible reading, worship and fellowship with

other Christians. Mainline ministries were concerned that students would collapse under the pressure to make good grades, get good jobs and achieve a comfortable lifestyle, or would sell out to lucrative and meaningless careers to the neglect of their own spiritual health and the plight of those less fortunate.

Students often reported joining religious groups for social reasons: "close friends with similar values, dependable and attentive adults, a variety of social events and programs and a pool of good potential mates." An ethic of inclusion and objectivity characterized the academic teaching of religion, and a wide variety of options were available to students. Overall, the university "seemed to provide a rather friendly environment for the practice and academic study of religion. From the perspective of the vast majority of undergraduate students, the university's academic and extracurricular programs must have seemed far more interested in religion than they were." There was a healthy "supply" of religious offerings, but only about 10 percent of the student body took advantage of these opportunities.

Each of the four schools that were studied had unique, complex and often fascinating religious cultures. Yet despite their distinctiveness, the authors were able to draw some general conclusions about the state of religion on campus. Although a higher percentage of students were religiously involved at the three schools with denominational connections, the opportunity for undergraduates to study and practice religion was widely available at all four schools. Shifts in American culture have "resulted in a religious posture characterized more by seeking, nomadic wandering and choosing among diverse options (spirituality) than by the more stable posture of dwelling in or inhabiting safe, sacred places (religion)."

There were significant connections between personal spirituality and volunteer social service, with more instances of personal spirituality being related to public responsibilities among students, than occasions of retreat into a privatized spirituality. Religion is more optional than in the past, when student behavior was more closely supervised, yet respect for religious difference was "pervasive at both the academic and practical levels." Although church oversight in higher education has declined, campus life has not become more secular, rather religion has become more diverse, optional and pluralistic. And the practice and study of religion by young adults has never been more vital or more connected with personal responsibility for society.

### **Book Information**

Cherry, C., DeBerg, B. A., & Porterfield, A. (2001). *Religion on campus*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.