

SFA Student Involvement in Religion and Spirituality

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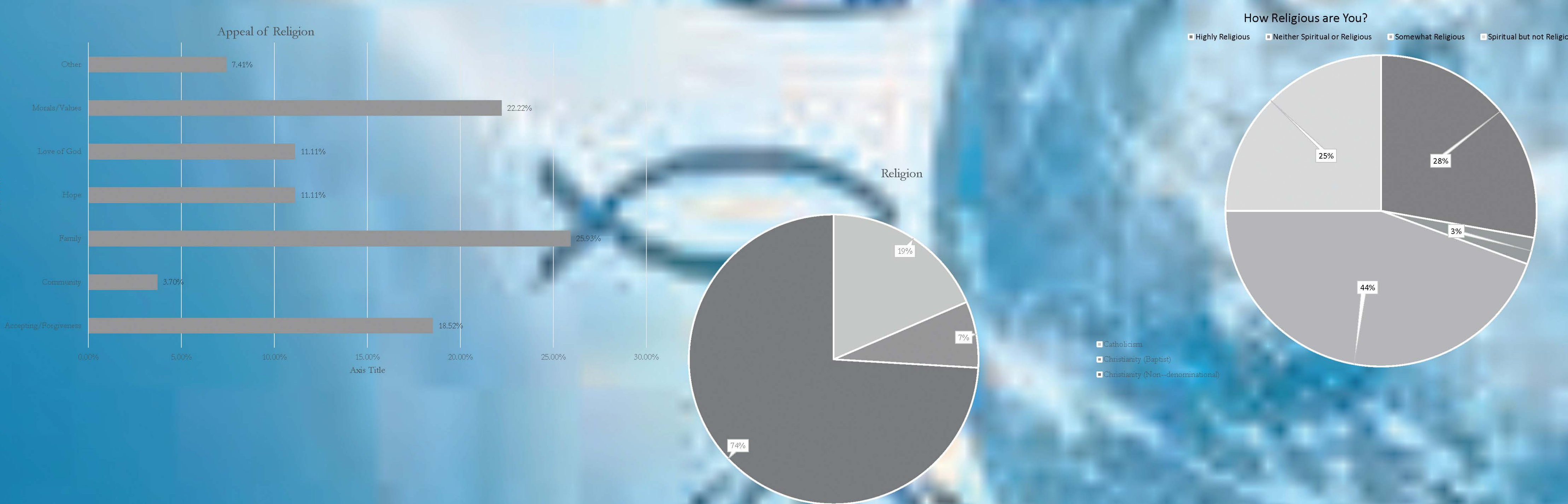
Faculty Sponsor: Joe Ballenger

Development of Idea: Understanding how others interact with religion and spirituality in both broad and narrow terms can aid in successfully reaching a captive audience. Here, information regarding relationships with religion and spirituality will be reported to understand trends in spiritual involvement among SFA students. The latter of these two is a potentially useful resource for campus spiritual organizations looking to understand and expand their current audience and increase service attendance.

Methodology: For our purposes, a form of descriptive research using personal interview was best. The population of interest was defined as students enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University in the 2018 Fall Semester who primarily attend classes on campus. While demographic information was collected, no other qualifying questions were required, and the number of students within a certain age range or demographic were not specified given that our objective is to understand religion and spirituality of students as a whole. For this same reason, surveying locations were not specified.

What religious and spiritual paths do SFA students follow and Why?

Respondents were questioned on whether they felt highly religious, somewhat religious, spiritual but not religious, or neither spiritual or religious. Of the respondents who identified as either highly religious or somewhat religious, all respondents gave Christianity as their answer. When asked why they follow their specific religion, these were the responses we received:



Is there a difference in spiritual involvement among SFA students based on class, ethnicity, religious background, and other demographics?

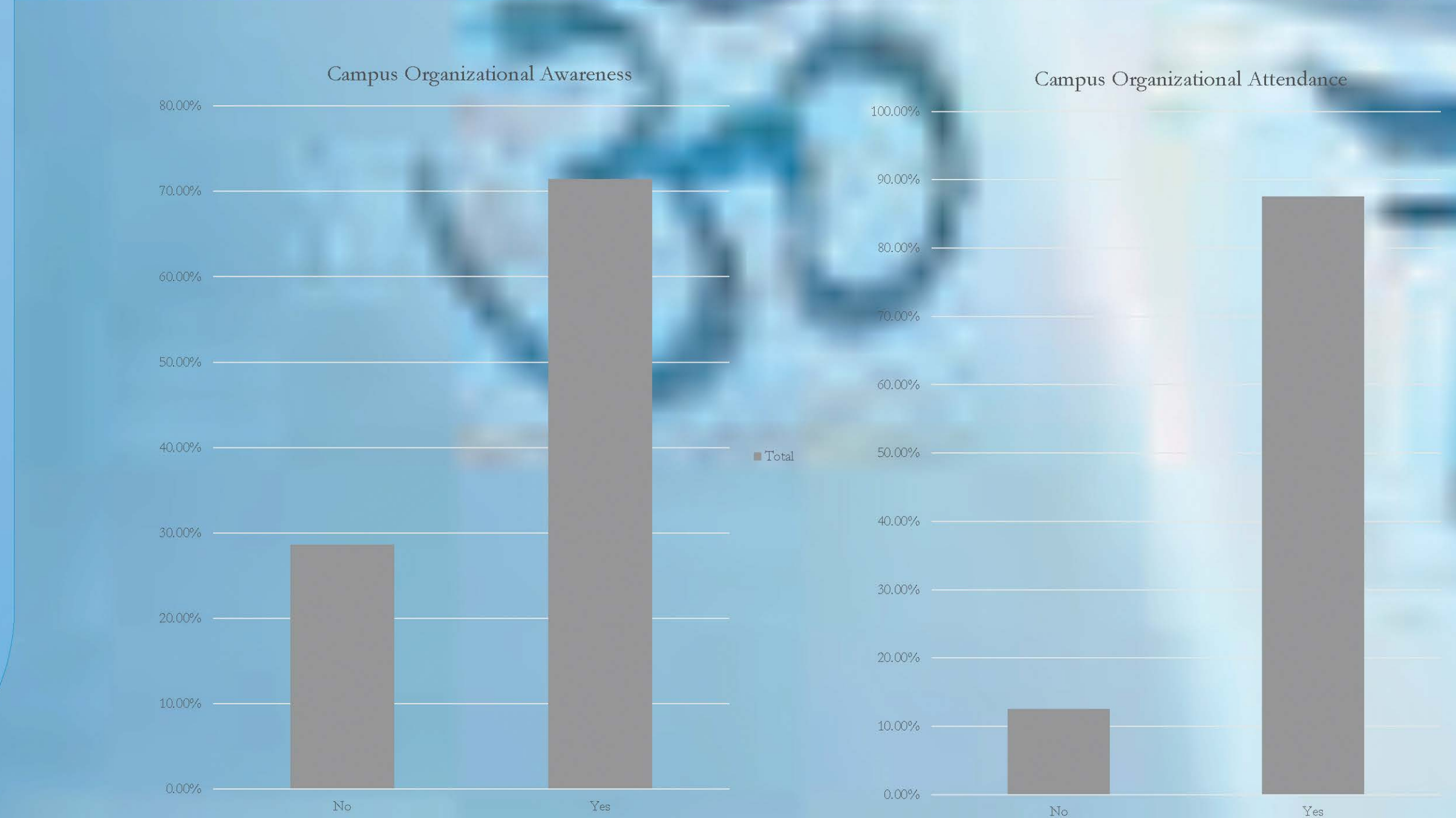
Information involving demographics varied. Primary research seems to correlate with secondary findings regarding the spiritual inclinations of women, who held higher degrees of religiosity compared to male respondents, but not enough male respondents were collected for data to be conclusive. Data regarding ethnicity indicates that a higher number of White respondents consider themselves highly religious, in stark contrast to secondary findings, but again, not enough respondents this time of differing ethnic minorities were collected for data to be conclusive.

Age, however, partially mirrored secondary findings, indicating that respondents ages 18-25 are somewhat religious, but less so than their elders. Religious background appears to heavily influence current beliefs, providing a foundational understanding of religion from which respondents scarcely deviated.



How involved or uninvolved do SFA students consider themselves in their respective faiths?

Respondents who reported feeling highly religious and somewhat religious were asked if they were familiar with organizations that catered to their beliefs in and around campus. Reasons for attendance varied and were given as part of three separate questions but have been consolidated here. The most popular reasons included gaining knowledge, closeness/love of God, faith, fellowship and encouragement/peace. Most respondents were aware of religious and spiritual organizations on SFA's main campus, a majority of whom attended at least one service this semester, indicating partial involvement at best.



How do peer groups influence SFA students personal religious and spiritual belief?

Results from primary research seems to indicate that respondents are largely indifferent regarding the religious and spiritual inclinations of others, with the next highest majority feeling that a foundational understanding of religion/moral foundation is needed, regardless of the religion it comes from. Peer groups might influence religion and spirituality, as half of respondents reported feeling closer to friends who share their beliefs, while the other half did not.

Thoughts on Friends' Religion	Respondents
Indifferent	28
Interested	5
Other	3
Total	36