

The Christian Life Survey 2014-2015 Administration at 22 Christian Colleges



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Factors related to students' focus on God

Introduction

Every year tens of thousands of students arrive at Christian colleges seeking to grow: to grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually. And those colleges are intentional about providing a setting where that growth is likely to happen. This research explores the factors that are associated with greater spiritual growth at 22 of those colleges.

Christian colleges and their students commonly identify spiritual formation as an area in which they want to see growth. In this research spiritual formation was defined as having a greater focus on God (Matthew 22:37), on others (Matthew 22:39), and on the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). A spiritual focus is something that is central to who you are spiritually, and Christianity regularly presents itself as a biblical calling to make God, others, and the Bible central parts of the Christian life.

This report is on the factors that are related to a greater focus on God. Other reports at tucse.taylor.edu/research provide similar discussions for a focus on others and, more comprehensively, for scripture engagement both as a focus and as a practice.

In the 2014-2015 school year data was collected at 25 Christian colleges. For 22 of them, the data was collected in a way that allowed the results to be included here (a discussion of the students these data were collected for is in Box One). The students were surveyed using the Christian Life Survey (the specific parts of the survey used to measure the items discussed in this report are discussed in Box Two; additional information about the survey and its administration are at tucse.taylor.edu/research).

Box One: Who are the students in this study?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Christian Life Survey was administered to students at 25 Christian colleges in the United States. The results shown in this summary brief, however, are only for the traditional-age, traditional-program freshmen through seniors from the 22 colleges that provided population proportions that allowed representative weighting to be used. Students are weighted to be proportionately representative for sex and year in school for their colleges.

These results are for 6,074 students from 22 Christian colleges in the United States.

The students are overwhelmingly Protestant Christians who are serious about their spiritual life (they chose to attend a Christian college and they agreed to participate in a half-hour survey about their spiritual life).

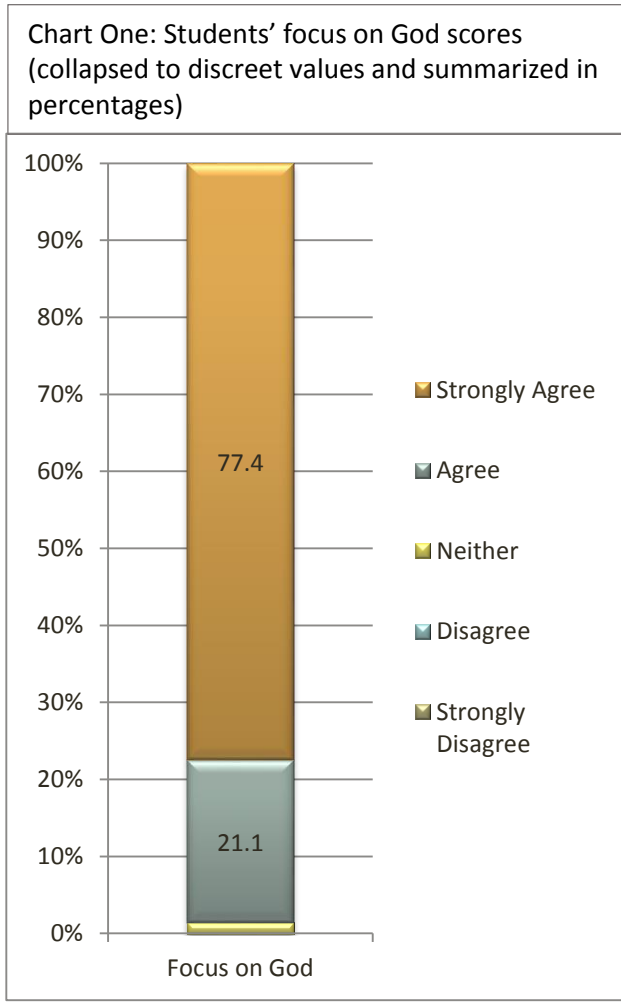
The students represented here, then, are traditional-age, devout Christians attending 22 Christian colleges in the USA. Great care should be employed when generalizing these results to any other groups.

Students' focus on God: Very high for nearly all respondents

These students have a very high focus on God. The average value (mean) for the 6,000-plus students was 4.7 on the five-point scale: a very high focus on God indeed. In fact, the 75th percentile value was 5, which indicates that at least one-fourth of the students strongly agreed with all seven of the questions asked (see Box Two), and the 25th percentile is 4.6, which means only a small percentage of students actually reported a low focus on God.

Visualized a different way, Chart One shows the percentage distribution of the students when their scores are rounded to the nearest whole number on the scale. Seventy-seven percent of the students' scores indicated an average value of "strongly agree" on the seven questions. Thus, over three-fourths of the students have a high focus on God. Another 21 percent of the students indicated a rounded value of 4, which shows a moderate focus on God.

	25 th percentile	Mean	75 th percentile
Focus on God	4.6	4.7	5.0



Box Two: How was this topic measured?

Participants were presented with seven statements about their focus on God:

- I believe in Jesus.*
- I believe the God of the Bible is the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*
- What God says is what is true, right, and good.*
- I believe God is actively involved in my life.*
- I want God to be pleased with me.*
- I know my mission in life is to participate in the Kingdom of God.*
- I have a personal relationship with Jesus.*

Answer options for each question were Strongly Disagree (1) through Strongly Agree (5). Focus on God values for the students were computed by averaging their responses to the seven statements. A value of 5 indicates that the student strongly agreed with all seven questions (a very high focus on God), while a value of 1 indicates that the student strongly disagreed with each statement (a very low focus on God). Values between 1 and 5 indicate some mix of agreement and disagreement.

The Christian Life Survey (CLS) is an online, half-hour survey on Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Orientation (lifestyle), and Scripture Engagement and was conducted in the 2014-2015 school year at the following Christian colleges: Bethel; Biola; California Baptist; Charleston Southern; Corban; Cornerstone; Crown; Fresno Pacific; George Fox; Gordon; Houghton; Judson; The Kings; LeTourneau; Northwest Nazarene; Nyack; Patrick Henry College; Spring Arbor; Tabor; Taylor; Union; Wheaton.

Students' focus on God: Affected slightly by political view

Even recognizing that focus on God is quite high for this group of 6,000-plus students, it is possible that there are differences between men and women, freshmen and seniors, and so forth. To see which groups differ from the others in their focus on God, nine variables were analyzed. As is shown on Chart Two, only one variable had a noticeable relationship with focus on God. While three variables can be noted—major, GPA, and political view—only political view has a strength of effect worth our attention.

Chart Three shows the average focus on God for each collection of majors and shows that there is, in fact, very little difference between the students in different majors (a categorization of the majors placed in each category is in the appendix). A post hoc test was used and found that only the students in the Bible major category differed in a statistically significant way from the other majors, and, as Chart Three shows, this is a very small difference.

GPA also has a very small effect on focus on God. Students with higher grade point averages have very slightly higher average focus on God.

Political view is, however, a variable that does have a more notable relation to focus on God. Chart Four shows that focus on God is quite high for students in every category of political view but that there is some clear variation between students with different political views. As is shown in Chart Two, almost five percent of the variation in focus on God is related to political view ($\eta^2 = 0.047$). This is based on a statistically significant difference between most political views from each other (post hoc results are provided in the appendix).

Setting aside the options of “independent,” “other,” and “no political view,” a clear pattern is evident: students with more conservative political views are slightly more likely to have a higher focus on God than students with more liberal political views. It is important to note that the average value for students in all groups is between a 4 and a 5, so all of the students from all political orientations have very high average focus on God.

Chart Two: Focus on God relation to demographic variables (η^2 values; GPA uses an r^2 value)

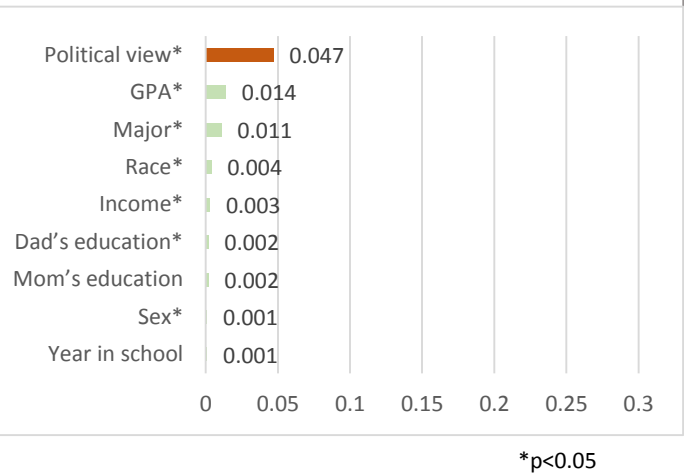


Chart Three: Focus on God by major (means)

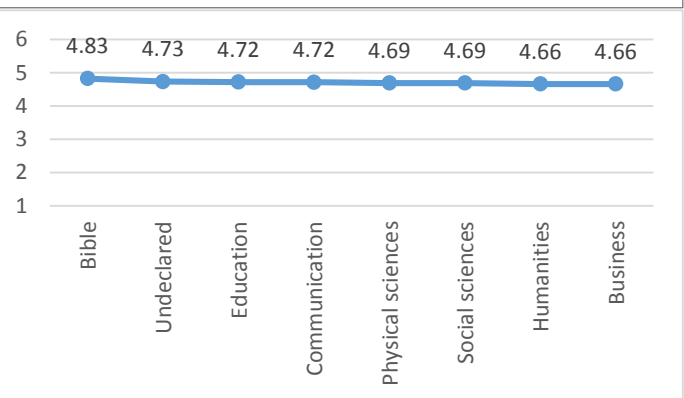
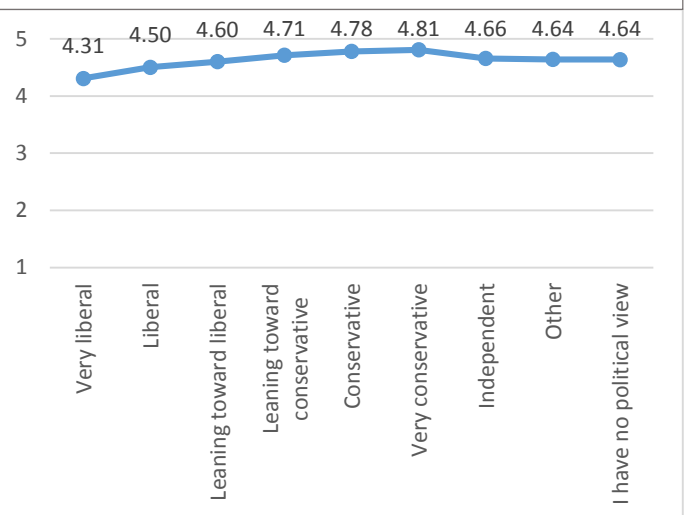


Chart Four: Focus on God by political view (means)



Students' focus on God: Increased by a focus on the Bible more than outreach

A person's spiritual life is not just a focus on God. The Christian Life Survey measures scripture engagement, three focus points (focus on God, focus on others, and focus on the Bible), and four kinds of spiritual orientation (connectedness, reflectiveness, two types of outreach, and asceticism—although this year's research had to set asceticism aside). The parts of the Christian life that we measured are interrelated, but some are more related to each other than others.

Without using any statistical controls (see the next section for that), Chart Five (and Table One) shows that all of the measures have a clear relationship to focus on God. Further, focus on God is most strongly related to a focus on the Bible, being connected into traditional religion, and having a reflective orientation toward spiritual life. Each of these three aspects of spiritual life explains 20 percent or more of the variation in focus on God. Once they are entered into a statistical process that identifies the net effects of each variable (having controlled for the others), the numbers will be smaller, but these results do allow us to see that a focus on God is not as closely related with outreach and a focus on others as it is related to a focus on the Bible, connectedness, and reflectivity.

It can also be noted that all of the relations are in a positive direction: as you see an increase in a focus on the Bible, or connectedness, or reflectivity, there will also be an increase in focus on God. Similarly, those aspects of spiritual life that have weaker relationships with focus on God also are in a positive direction. None of the aspects of spiritual life measured here lead to a decrease in focus on God.

An analysis like this begs the question: what net effect does each of these variables have on focus on God? Put another way, which of these variables has the largest effect, having controlled for the effects of the others? We turn to that next.

Chart Five: Focus on God relation to spiritual life variables (r^2 values; all results are statistically significant)

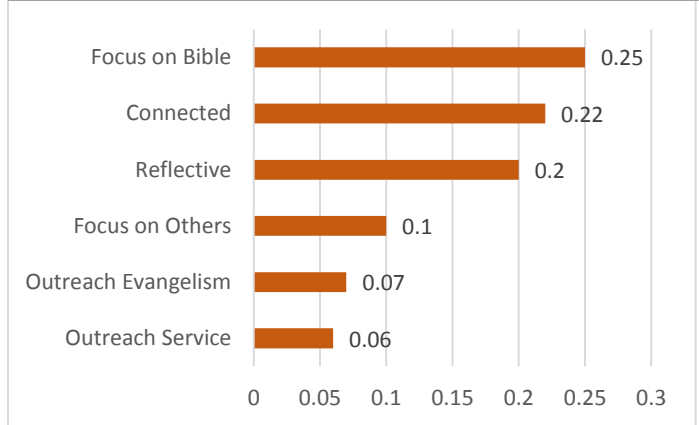


Table One: Focus on God relation to spiritual life variables (r values; all results are statistically significant)

	Focus on God
Focus on Bible	.504
Connected	.470
Reflective	.447
Focus on Others	.318
Outreach Evangelism	.273
Outreach Service	.245

Students' focus on God: Aspects of spiritual life with the greatest effect on focus on God

Focus on God is most likely to be increased by

- An increased focus on the Bible*
- A more conservative political view*
- A connected spiritual orientation*
- A focus on others, and*
- A reflective spiritual orientation.*

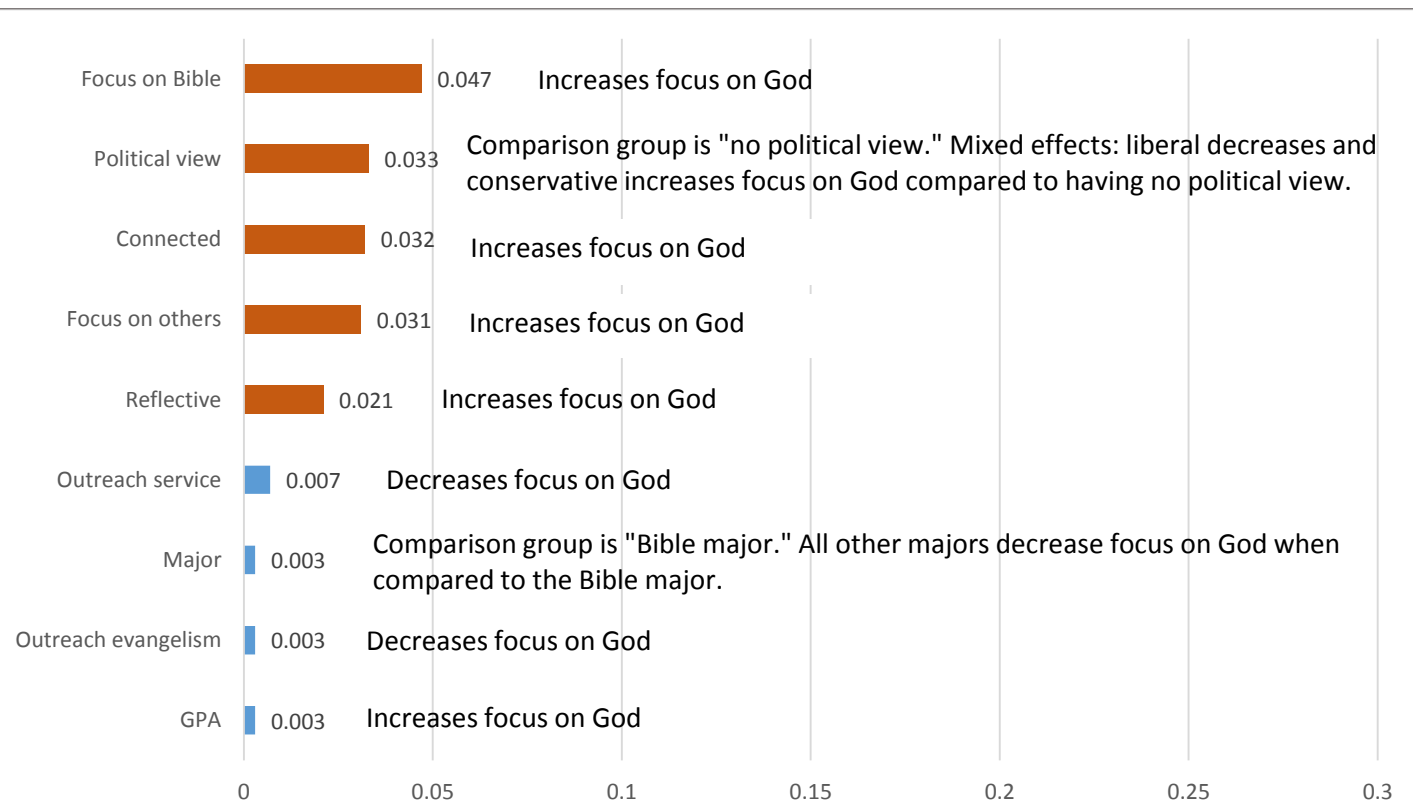
These effects are small but significant.

Focus on God is not likely to be increased by any of the other variables discussed in this report and is decreased a very small amount by a spiritual orientation toward outreach evangelism or outreach service (remembering that even for those who are prone to outreach of either sort, the focus on God is still very high).

The results shown in Chart Six are for a general linear model analysis (full results are in the appendix). The difference between these results and the results in Charts Two and Five is the use of statistical controls—a process which determines which factors matter most, having controlled for the effects of the others. The five variables listed above each explain from two to five percent of the variation in focus on God, after controlling for the effects of the other variables.

Interestingly, after controlling for other aspects of spiritual life, an increased orientation toward outreach—either outreach evangelism or outreach service—led to a small decrease in focus on God. The students in this research who are strongly oriented toward outreach still have a high focus on God, but it is a bit lower than it would be if they did not have an orientation toward outreach.

Chart Six: Net effects on focus on God (GLM partial η^2 values; all results except major are statistically significant)



APPENDIX

Major categorization

	category	
I have not declared a major	0	Undeclared
Accounting	1	Business
Business administration	1	
Finance	1	
International business	1	
Management	1	
Marketing	1	
Anthropology	2		Social sciences
Criminal justice or criminology	2	
Economics	2	
Political science	2	
Psychology	2	
Social work	2	
Sociology	2	
Art, fine or applied	3	Humanities
English, literature or creative writing	3	
History	3	
Languages	3	
Music	3	
Theater	3	
Biology	4	Physical sciences
Chemistry	4	
Computer science	4	
Earth science	4	
Engineering	4	
Environmental science	4	
Health sciences	4	
Mathematics	4	
Nursing	4	
Physics	4	
Elementary education	5		Education
Music or art education (elementary)	5	
Physical education or recreation (elementary)	5	
Secondary education	5	
Special education	5	
Communication	6	Communication
Journalism	6	
Philosophy	7	Bible
Theology, biblical studies, or religion	7	

Tukey HSD post hoc results for focus on God by major

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent variable: Focus on God						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Major	(J) Major	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Undeclared	Business	.07495	.03140	.248	-.0202	.1701
	Social sciences	.04659	.03038	.789	-.0455	.1387
	Humanities	.07329	.03107	.262	-.0209	.1675
	Physical sciences	.04369	.02887	.800	-.0438	.1312
	Education	.01777	.03210	.999	-.0796	.1151
	Communication	.01911	.03608	1.000	-.0903	.1285
	Bible	-.09185	.03470	.140	-.1971	.0134
Business	Undeclared	-.07495	.03140	.248	-.1701	.0202
	Social sciences	-.02836	.02047	.864	-.0904	.0337
	Humanities	-.00166	.02147	1.000	-.0668	.0634
	Physical sciences	-.03125	.01814	.672	-.0863	.0238
	Education	-.05718	.02294	.199	-.1267	.0124
	Communication	-.05584	.02825	.498	-.1415	.0298
	Bible	-.16679*	.02646	.000	-.2470	-.0866
Social sciences	Undeclared	-.04659	.03038	.789	-.1387	.0455
	Business	.02836	.02047	.864	-.0337	.0904
	Humanities	.02670	.01996	.884	-.0338	.0872
	Physical sciences	-.00289	.01633	1.000	-.0524	.0466
	Education	-.02882	.02154	.884	-.0941	.0365
	Communication	-.02748	.02712	.973	-.1097	.0547
	Bible	-.13843*	.02525	.000	-.2150	-.0619
Humanities	Undeclared	-.07329	.03107	.262	-.1675	.0209
	Business	.00166	.02147	1.000	-.0634	.0668
	Social sciences	-.02670	.01996	.884	-.0872	.0338
	Physical sciences	-.02960	.01757	.697	-.0829	.0237
	Education	-.05552	.02249	.209	-.1237	.0127
	Communication	-.05418	.02788	.521	-.1387	.0304
	Bible	-.16514*	.02607	.000	-.2442	-.0861
Physical sciences	Undeclared	-.04369	.02887	.800	-.1312	.0438
	Business	.03125	.01814	.672	-.0238	.0863
	Social sciences	.00289	.01633	1.000	-.0466	.0524
	Humanities	.02960	.01757	.697	-.0237	.0829
	Education	-.02593	.01934	.883	-.0846	.0327
	Communication	-.02459	.02541	.979	-.1016	.0525
	Bible	-.13554*	.02340	.000	-.2065	-.0646

Education	Undeclared	-.01777	.03210	.999	-.1151	.0796
	Business	.05718	.02294	.199	-.0124	.1267
	Social sciences	.02882	.02154	.884	-.0365	.0941
	Humanities	.05552	.02249	.209	-.0127	.1237
	Physical sciences	.02593	.01934	.883	-.0327	.0846
	Communication	.00134	.02903	1.000	-.0867	.0894
	Bible	-.10961*	.02729	.002	-.1924	-.0269
Communication	Undeclared	-.01911	.03608	1.000	-.1285	.0903
	Business	.05584	.02825	.498	-.0298	.1415
	Social sciences	.02748	.02712	.973	-.0547	.1097
	Humanities	.05418	.02788	.521	-.0304	.1387
	Physical sciences	.02459	.02541	.979	-.0525	.1016
	Education	-.00134	.02903	1.000	-.0894	.0867
	Bible	-.11095*	.03188	.012	-.2076	-.0143
Bible	Undeclared	.09185	.03470	.140	-.0134	.1971
	Business	.16679*	.02646	.000	.0866	.2470
	Social sciences	.13843*	.02525	.000	.0619	.2150
	Humanities	.16514*	.02607	.000	.0861	.2442
	Physical sciences	.13554*	.02340	.000	.0646	.2065
	Education	.10961*	.02729	.002	.0269	.1924
	Communication	.11095*	.03188	.012	.0143	.2076
* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Tukey HSD post hoc results for focus on God by political view

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent variable: Focus on God						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Q30	(J) Q30	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 Very liberal	2 Liberal	-.19338	.07362	.176	-.4218	.0351
	3 Leaning liberal	-.29171*	.07107	.001	-.5122	-.0712
	4 Leaning conservative	-.40452*	.06982	.000	-.6212	-.1879
	5 Conservative	-.47065*	.06944	.000	-.6861	-.2552
	6 Very conservative	-.50094*	.07123	.000	-.7220	-.2799
	7 Independent	-.34930*	.07082	.000	-.5690	-.1296
	8 Other	-.33225*	.07363	.000	-.5607	-.1038
	9 No political view	-.32863*	.06991	.000	-.5455	-.1117
2 Liberal	1 Very liberal	.19338	.07362	.176	-.0351	.4218
	3 Leaning liberal	-.09833*	.03106	.041	-.1947	-.0020
	4 Leaning conservative	-.21114*	.02809	.000	-.2983	-.1240
	5 Conservative	-.27727*	.02712	.000	-.3614	-.1931

	6 Very Conservative	-.30757*	.03142	.000	-.4051	-.2101
	7 Independent	-.15592*	.03049	.000	-.2505	-.0613
	8 Other	-.13888*	.03654	.005	-.2523	-.0255
	9 No political view	-.13525*	.02831	.000	-.2231	-.0474
3 Leaning toward liberal	1 Very liberal	.29171*	.07107	.001	.0712	.5122
	2 Liberal	.09833*	.03106	.041	.0020	.1947
	4 Leaning conservative	-.11281*	.02047	.000	-.1763	-.0493
	5 Conservative	-.17894*	.01911	.000	-.2382	-.1196
	6 Very Conservative	-.20924*	.02485	.000	-.2863	-.1321
	7 Independent	-.05759	.02365	.265	-.1310	.0158
	8 Other	-.04055	.03107	.930	-.1370	.0559
	9 No political view	-.03692	.02076	.697	-.1014	.0275
4 Leaning toward conservative	1 Very liberal	.40452*	.06982	.000	.1879	.6212
	2 Liberal	.21114*	.02809	.000	.1240	.2983
	3 Leaning liberal	.11281*	.02047	.000	.0493	.1763
	5 Conservative	-.06613*	.01378	.000	-.1089	-.0234
	6 Very conservative	-.09643*	.02102	.000	-.1617	-.0312
	7 Independent	.05522	.01959	.110	-.0056	.1160
	8 Other	.07226	.02810	.199	-.0149	.1595
	9 No political view	.07589*	.01599	.000	.0263	.1255
5 Conservative	1 Very liberal	.47065*	.06944	.000	.2552	.6861
	2 Liberal	.27727*	.02712	.000	.1931	.3614
	3 Leaning liberal	.17894*	.01911	.000	.1196	.2382
	4 Leaning conservative	.06613*	.01378	.000	.0234	.1089
	6 Very conservative	-.03030	.01971	.838	-.0915	.0309
	7 Independent	.12135*	.01818	.000	.0649	.1777
	8 Other	.13839*	.02713	.000	.0542	.2226
	9 No political view	.14201*	.01422	.000	.0979	.1861
6 Very Conservative	1 Very liberal	.50094*	.07123	.000	.2799	.7220
	2 Liberal	.30757*	.03142	.000	.2101	.4051
	3 Leaning liberal	.20924*	.02485	.000	.1321	.2863
	4 Leaning conservative	.09643*	.02102	.000	.0312	.1617
	5 Conservative	.03030	.01971	.838	-.0309	.0915
	7 Independent	.15165*	.02414	.000	.0768	.2265
	8 Other	.16869*	.03144	.000	.0711	.2662
	9 No political view	.17231*	.02131	.000	.1062	.2384
7 Independent	1 Very liberal	.34930*	.07082	.000	.1296	.5690
	2 Liberal	.15592*	.03049	.000	.0613	.2505
	3 Leaning liberal	.05759	.02365	.265	-.0158	.1310
	4 Leaning conservative	-.05522	.01959	.110	-.1160	.0056
	5 Conservative	-.12135*	.01818	.000	-.1777	-.0649
	6 Very conservative	-.15165*	.02414	.000	-.2265	-.0768
	8 Other	.01704	.03050	1.000	-.0776	.1117

	9 No political view	.02067	.01991	.982	-.0411	.0824
8 Other	1 Very liberal	.33225*	.07363	.000	.1038	.5607
	2 Liberal	.13888*	.03654	.005	.0255	.2523
	3 Leaning liberal	.04055	.03107	.930	-.0559	.1370
	4 Leaning conservative	-.07226	.02810	.199	-.1595	.0149
	5 Conservative	-.13839*	.02713	.000	-.2226	-.0542
	6 Very conservative	-.16869*	.03144	.000	-.2662	-.0711
	7 Independent	-.01704	.03050	1.000	-.1117	.0776
	9 No political view	.00362	.02832	1.000	-.0843	.0915
9 I have no political view	1 Very liberal	.32863*	.06991	.000	.1117	.5455
	2 Liberal	.13525*	.02831	.000	.0474	.2231
	3 Leaning liberal	.03692	.02076	.697	-.0275	.1014
	4 Leaning conservative	-.07589*	.01599	.000	-.1255	-.0263
	5 Conservative	-.14201*	.01422	.000	-.1861	-.0979
	6 Very conservative	-.17231*	.02131	.000	-.2384	-.1062
	7 Independent	-.02067	.01991	.982	-.0824	.0411
	8 Other	-.00362	.02832	1.000	-.0915	.0843

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

General linear model results

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent variable: Focus on God

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected model	218.604 ^a	22	9.937	107.957	.000	.358
Intercept	350.890	1	350.890	3812.306	.000	.472
Focus on Bible	19.158	1	19.158	208.148	.000	.047
Political view	13.253	8	1.657	17.999	.000	.033
Connected	12.792	1	12.792	138.977	.000	.032
Focus on others	12.449	1	12.449	135.256	.000	.031
Reflective	8.600	1	8.600	93.437	.000	.021
Outreach service	2.886	1	2.886	31.354	.000	.007
GPA	1.140	1	1.140	12.388	.000	.003
Outreach evangelism	1.246	1	1.246	13.542	.000	.003
Major	1.094	7	.156	1.697	.105	.003
Error	392.556	4265	.092			
Total	95273.735	4288				
Corrected total	611.160	4287				

a. R Squared = .358 (Adjusted R Squared = .354)

Parameter Estimates

Dependent variable: Focus on God

Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		Partial Eta Squared
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Intercept	3.024	.053	57.210	.000	2.920	3.128	.434
[Political view = very liberal]	-.413	.063	-6.523	.000	-.538	-.289	.010
[Political view = liberal]	-.063	.027	-2.341	.019	-.116	-.010	.001
[Political view = leaning liberal]	-.033	.020	-1.648	.099	-.072	.006	.001
[Political view = leaning conservative]	.035	.016	2.174	.030	.003	.066	.001
[Political view = conservative]	.076	.014	5.241	.000	.048	.104	.006
[Political view = very conservative]	.112	.021	5.291	.000	.070	.153	.007
[Political view = independent]	-.014	.020	-.712	.476	-.052	.024	.000
[Political view = other]	-.035	.029	-1.208	.227	-.091	.022	.000
[Political view = no political view]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[Major = undeclared]	-.024	.033	-.727	.467	-.088	.040	.000
[Major = business]	-.036	.023	-1.553	.120	-.082	.009	.001
[Major = social sciences]	-.010	.022	-.441	.659	-.052	.033	.000
[Major = humanities]	-.054	.022	-2.421	.016	-.099	-.010	.001
[Major = physical sciences]	-.013	.020	-.636	.525	-.053	.027	.000
[Major = education]	-.015	.023	-.627	.531	-.061	.031	.000
[Major = communication]	-.009	.027	-.331	.741	-.062	.044	.000
[Major = Bible]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
Focus on Bible	.121	.008	14.427	.000	.105	.138	.047
Connected	.071	.006	11.789	.000	.059	.083	.032
Focus on others	.115	.010	11.630	.000	.096	.135	.031
Outreach service	-.026	.005	-5.599	.000	-.035	-.017	.007
Outreach evangelism	-.012	.003	-3.680	.000	-.019	-.006	.003
Reflective	.052	.005	9.666	.000	.042	.063	.021
GPA	.028	.008	3.520	.000	.012	.044	.003

^a This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.