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Research Report #6

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Foster, J. D., & LaForce, B. (1999). A longitudinal study of moral, religious, and identity

development in a Christian liberal arts environment. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *27*(1), 52-68.

1. **Need.** Studies have not been done to assess the effects of Christian liberal arts education on the development of students’ moral, religious, and identity development.
2. **Purpose.** To look at the development of students at a Christian liberal arts college and see if the focus on specific qualities (moral, religious, and identity development) benefit from study at that type of institution.
3. **Sample.** 402 students at a Christian college. 55% continued throughout the study and 94 participated in the second survey during senior year (43% from original sample; *persistors*). Only 19% of those who left college (*nonpersistors)* were able to be contacted. Sample was approximately 70% female and not racially diverse.
4. **Methods.** Surveyed using several scales. Participants surveyed freshman year and senior year. Participants were encouraged through opportunities for cash prizes or course participation points.
5. **Results.** Little change in theological beliefs over time, though reported faith tradition changed to include more nondenominational participants in senior year. 39% of persistors became more mature in their identity status.
6. **Conclusions.** Compared to secular college results, significantly fewer freshmen and even fewer persitor seniors were in identity foreclosure. Most were in moratorium. Nonpersistors did not show the same changes. Increases in moral reasoning, clearly not inhibited as others had posited. Reduction of religious well-bring and religiosity (meaning they are challenging their faiths).
7. **Limitations.** Study was only conducted at one Christian college and there was a large attrition rate in participants. Further, the majority of participants were female.
8. **Implications.** Christian education contributes to identity development. Further research required to replicate this result across age groups and faith traditions.