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# Findings from the Fall 2017 Survey of Catholic Freshmen

**Mass attendance, private religious practices, and  
frequency of sexual intercourse**

The Role of Catholic Campus Ministries in the Formation of Young Adults

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## Introduction

The focus of this report was to find differences between students that may account for varying levels of attendance at campus ministry programming, differences in religious practices, and frequency of sexual intercourse. This information could be valuable to campus ministries in tailoring programming to specific groups of students to help promote high levels of attendance. For instance, females reported being involved in a greater number of extracurricular activities than males. If female students are involved in more extracurriculars, will this make them less likely to attend mass, since their free time may be more constricted than their male counterparts who are less involved in clubs on campus? If this is the case, how could campus ministries act to encourage female students to attend mass?

In the following findings, models were created to try to predict the following behaviors of students: mass attendance, small faith-sharing group attendance, praying outside of religious services, reading the Bible independently, and frequency of sexual intercourse. In each model, “predictors” or other characteristics of students, are used to try to predict the aforementioned behaviors. In the above example, we could say that extracurricular involvement is a statistically significant predictor of mass attendance. Therefore, by asking students how many extracurriculars other than campus ministry they are involved in, we can make predictions as to how frequently they attend mass. The statistical significance of a predictor is measured by a p-value. It is widely accepted that a p-value less than 0.05 is considered a significant predictor of the behavior of interest. In other words, the p-value represents the probability of obtaining the test result assuming that there is no difference between the means of our two variables (for example, frequency of mass attendance and number of extracurriculars). A probability of

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less than 5% indicates that the observed outcome is sufficiently unlikely to have occurred by chance alone.

## Mass Attendance

### **Mass**

No statistically significant difference between males and females in mass attendance at a Roman Catholic Church over the past 6-month period was found. In order to better understand what variables affect the frequency with which students attend mass, a model was created to test the significance of the following variables on students' reported attendance: sex, number of extracurricular activities involved in, cumulative GPA in high school, degree of religiosity, and degree of spirituality. However, only religiosity was a statistically significant predictor of mass attendance. This model using 5 predictors accounts for 34% of the variation in frequency of mass attendance amongst survey respondents. Since religiosity and spirituality are largely internally-derived traits, the model was run again only this time with these two predictors removed since campus culture may not directly influence them. When religiosity and spirituality were taken out of the model, the number of extracurriculars students are involved with became a significant predictor of mass attendance. These findings suggest that an individual's degree of religiosity which is internally-derived is a large motivating factor in frequency of mass attendance. However, when religiosity is not considered as a mediating factor in one's mass attendance, the number of extracurriculars one is involved in becomes a significant predictor of attendance. This suggests that the degree to which students are involved in other organizations on campus may significantly impact their presence at mass.

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## **Small Faith-Sharing Groups**

No statistically significant difference between males and females in small faith-sharing group attendance over the past 6-month period was found. In order to better understand what variables affect the frequency with which students attend small faith-sharing groups, a model was created to test the significance of the following variables on students' reported attendance: sex, number of extracurricular activities involved in, cumulative GPA in high school, degree of religiosity, and degree of spirituality. However, only GPA and religiosity were statistically significant predictors of small faith-sharing group attendance. This model using 5 predictors accounts for 20% of the variation in frequency of small faith-sharing group attendance amongst survey respondents. In other words, cumulative GPA in high school and religiosity were less powerful in predicting small faith-sharing group attendance than religiosity alone was at predicting mass attendance. Since religiosity and spirituality are largely internally-derived traits, the model was run again only this time with these two predictors removed since campus culture may not directly influence them. When religiosity and spirituality were taken out of the model, cumulative GPA in high school was the only significant predictor of small faith-sharing group attendance. These findings suggest that an individual's degree of religiosity and spirituality which are internally-derived are a large motivating factor in attending small faith-sharing groups. However, when religiosity and spirituality are not considered as mediating factors in attendance, cumulative high school GPA is the only significant predictor of small faith-sharing group attendance. Assuming that upon matriculating to college, students perform similarly to how they did in high school, students with higher GPA may spend more time studying for their courses, decreasing time spent at events such as small faith-sharing groups. Conversely, it could be that students with higher degrees of religiosity and spirituality have higher attendance, promoting

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positive mental health (see *Project Report and Findings on Mental Health*). An increased positive mental health as a result of higher attendance, mediated through higher religiosity and spirituality, may have downstream affects such increased academic performance. However, currently we do not have sufficient data to determine if this could be the case.

## Private Religious Practices

### **Praying Outside of Religious Services**

There was a statistically significant difference between males and females in frequency of praying outside of religious services, with females reporting praying more frequently than males outside of religious services. In order to better understand what variables affect the frequency with which students pray independently, a model was created to test the significance of the following variables on students' reported frequencies of praying: sex, number of extracurricular activities involved in, cumulative GPA in high school, degree of religiosity, and degree of spirituality. However, only religiosity and spirituality were statistically significant predictors of frequency of prayer outside of religious services. This model using 5 predictors accounts for 33% of the variation in frequency of prayer amongst survey respondents. Since religiosity and spirituality are largely internally-derived traits, the model was run again only this time with these two predictors removed since campus culture may not directly influence them. When religiosity and spirituality were taken out of the model, the number of extracurriculars students are involved with became a significant predictor of praying outside of religious services. This suggests that the degree to which students are involved in other organizations on campus may significantly impact the amount of time devoted to prayer. Interestingly, females reported spending more time praying outside of religious services than males, but were less likely to have considered a religious vocation. An area that may be

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beneficial for Catholic campus ministries to explore, is making clearer the roles women can play in the Church. College-aged women, more so than men in this study, devote more time to private prayer life. Therefore, women may feel more called to a religious vocation, but not know their options in terms of pursuing one.

### **Reading the Bible**

There was a statistically significant difference between males and females in frequency of reading the Bible, with males reporting reading the Bible than females. In order to better understand what variables affect the frequency with which students read the bible independently, a linear model was created to test the significance of the following variables on students' reported frequencies of reading the Bible: sex, number of extracurricular activities involved in, cumulative GPA in high school, degree of religiosity, and degree of spirituality. However, only religiosity was a statistically significant predictor of the frequency of which students' read the Bible independently. This model using 5 predictors accounts for 14% of the variation in frequency of reading the Bible amongst survey respondents. Since religiosity and spirituality are largely internally-derived traits, the model was run again only this time with these two predictors removed since campus culture may not directly influence them. When religiosity and spirituality were taken out of the model, the number of extracurriculars students are involved with became a significant predictor of reading the Bible. This suggests that the degree to which students are involved in other organizations on campus may significantly impact time spent reading the Bible. In studies pertaining to gender patterns in religions, it has been widely established that females are more likely to be religious than males. In this wave of the survey, males reported reading religious texts and the Bible more frequently than females, which is not in accordance with this pattern. This

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anomaly may be the result of a small sample size, as more data points are collected it is likely that this difference between the sexes in our survey will dissipate.

## Predicting Frequency of Sexual Intercourse

There was a statistically significant difference between males and females in frequency of sexual intercourse, with males reporting having sex more frequently than females. To better understand which types of students are more likely to have frequent sexual experiences, we tested a more complex model which added religious measures (such as self-rated religiosity and influence of religion in day-to-day life), academic variables (such as GPA), parental characteristics (such as parents' marital status), mental health characteristics (such as resiliency, depression, and anxiety), and other behaviors (such as alcohol consumption and frequency of pornography use).

After accounting for these various factors, only cumulative GPA in high school, having a significant other, and frequency of using pornographic media were statistically significant predictors of frequency of sexual intercourse. This model using 24 predictors accounts for 41% of the variation in frequency of sexual frequency amongst survey respondents. Additionally, males reported having sexual intercourse and using pornographic media more frequently than females. But males reported receiving the sacrament of reconciliation more frequently than females did. This may suggest that males are cognizant that their behaviors go against the Church's teachings, and seek repentance after the fact.

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## Conclusion

When considering the behaviors of Catholic students, it is important to place their religious practices in the context of the campus climate. Students' behavior may change a lot both upon entry into college and throughout college, as other professional opportunities and activities may distract or draw people away from their faith lives. While internal factors, such as religiosity and spirituality, may have a large influence on behavior, it is important to also quantify the extent to which other external factors may influence attendance and religious behaviors. Especially given the pervasiveness of hook-up culture on college campuses, it is important to understand what factors influence Catholic students' sexual behaviors both in accordance with and against the Church's teachings.