



## Substance Abuse and Daily Spiritual Experience in College Students: What is the Relationship?

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### Purpose of the Study at FGCU

This study of FGCU resident college students concentrates on one component of the socio-emotional dimension towards well being, the spiritual dimension and one health enhancing behavioral lifestyle pattern, moderate to no use of alcohol or other drugs. In the former, a discipline is added to one's lifestyle and in the latter, a behavior pattern is reduced or eliminated. Can there be an association between the two?

Fortunately, much work has occurred in this area. For example, O'Hare (1997a; 1997b) and Harrell (2008) concluded from the use of college survey data, students tend to seek intimacy, privacy, and escape from stress and depressive symptoms through coping by use of alcohol. She also concluded from her assessments, the two greatest sources of relief from perceived stressors fell within the realms of socio-emotional, and community support. Larimer, and Crouce (2002) concur and support the use of skill building interventions which screen and target high risk students, perhaps using a comprehensive partnership between the university and community for sober activities as alternative to the alcohol use.

Underwood and Teresi (2002) posit the construct of daily spirituality in one's life may moderate perceived social stressors and promote health and well-being. In addition, a disposition of spiritual peace may reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, and elevate mood by promoting optimism and self esteem.

A spiritually based lifestyle alternative to addictive behaviors should provide reinforcement either through the community (group membership) direct physical action (jogging, health promoting activities) or through enhanced efficacy and perception of control (Fidler, 1982) and evoke and maintain

generative changes leading to a turning away from self harming behavior, as well as turning towards behaviors leading to self efficacy, self-esteem, and futurity.

Therefore our Research Questions:

1. Is there a relationship between routine spiritual practice and alcohol and drug use?
2. Can this relationship become apparent in an instrument which combines two validated scales, one for substance abuse screening and the other for a daily spiritual discipline?

### Method

We thank the FGCU Office of Student Affairs which we engaged in a collaborative effort utilizing through licensure, a web based internet site, Student Voice; a platform that allows university and college campuses to receive ongoing support when conducting assessment initiatives. The authors, in consultation with design coordinators at Student Voice, established the format for the invitation of participants, completion of the consent form and the survey instruments. All freshman students over the age of 18 (666) residing on campus were invited by email to participate in this study for a 100 percent sample of that cohort.

The authors utilize an electronic survey document, comprised of the DSES, the UNCOPE and eight (8) additional questions, designed by the authors, to gather data on intervention programs for campus use, the Substance Abuse and Spirituality Discipline Survey (SASDS).

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale. The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale or DSES is designed to provide researchers a self-report measure of daily spiritual experiences. The sixteen-item scale includes constructs such as awe, gratitude, mercy, sense of connection with the transcendent, compassionate

### A Message From:

*Dr. Mike Rollo, Vice President of Student Affairs*

We were pleased to collaborate on this research project with Dr. Scott Anstadt and Dr. Patricia Coccoma from the Division of Social Work. In Student Affairs, our mission is to enhance our students' ability to learn and promote their development as productive members of the greater community. Research of this nature helps us better understand our students and their needs. In addition, we have purchased the license to use StudentVoice, a software platform designed specifically for higher education assessment. The system also assists in design and administration of assessment projects, and provides opportunities for benchmarking with peer campuses. We welcome opportunities to collaborate, so feel free to contact me if you have any research ideas you would like to discuss.

### For comments or suggestions regarding this issue, please contact:

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love, desire for closeness to God and includes measures of awareness of discernment/ inspiration and transcendent sense of self. It has been developed using a construct validation by deriving the spiritual meaning embedded in a variety of religious and cultural traditions, thus intended to be non-biased towards any particular religious faith (Underwood, 2002).

UNCOPE. The UNCOPE is a six question screening instrument which taps into the DSM IV TR criteria for abuse/dependence with alcohol. It asks about: excessive use, possible neglect of responsibilities, attempts to cut down, objections to use, preoccupation with use, and use to relieve emotional discomfort. The instrument has been validated irrespective of gender or ethnicity with a variety of populations (Hoffman, Hunt, Rhodes, & Riley, 2003).

Additional questions. The authors designed 8 questions to gather data relevant for potential intervention programs on the FGCU campus. The first 5 questions queried information on types of potential intervention programs on campus to address the need for education on spirituality and substance abuse. The remaining 3 questions, queried information on the degree of substance use/abuse by the respondents.

During spring 2009 semester, faculty from the Division of Social Work and Student Affairs conducted the online survey of freshman student residing on campus to determine the association between substance use and abuse and a daily spiritual regiment. The survey combined two previously validated instruments. The first instrument, The Daily Spiritual Discipline Survey taps the frequency of use of a daily form of spiritually based discipline and the other, the UNCOPE, a screening instrument for substance abuse. The survey was conducted through the Student Voice

web based program available to all FGCU students.

Precautions for the assurance to the confidentiality of respondents who completed the survey was taken and viewed of great importance.

### Outcomes

Survey results from over 100 respondents indicated that the more students incorporate a daily spiritual discipline of some form in their lives, the less they choose substance abuse behaviors (which also may lead to addiction). Put another way, results reflected a low use of substance if one utilized a daily spiritual regime. This would including certain health related introspective and communing activities such as yoga, jogging, meditation, philanthropic service, as well as traditional and non-traditional religious practice. The survey also determined that 47% of the respondents would attend an educational program on activities that support one's spirituality than attend a treatment program for substance abuse.

Do know that:

1. Health and spiritually based practices can serve as both an alternative diversion away from abuse of substances on campus and a means of personal health promotion
2. Campus support for such skill building in the form of workshops and resources can offer a means to develop a health promoting lifestyle.

### Implications of Findings

The findings indicated a negative correlation between the use of a daily regime or daily spirituality practice and its relationship with abusing a substance such as alcohol or drugs. Meaning, the more one endorsed a lifestyle of exercise, jogging, mediation, yoga or faith based practices, there was a diminished use of alcohol and drugs. If one routinely used alcohol or drugs, there was less of

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a use of an endorsed lifestyle as stated above.

The findings also implied that 40% of students who completed the survey stated they use drugs

or alcohol one – three times per week. The researchers considered this to be a significant result. While 42% stated they would attend an educational program on spirituality and nearly 47% (shown above) stated if available, they would attend spirituality program if available is also a significant result. These outcomes support the development and availability of educational programs and related events on campus for students.

To encourage diversion from the use of alcohol and drugs, prevention programs, while important, may not be sufficient on a college campus. Additional programming via workshops that provide students with the skills of mediation, yoga, jogging etc. and also providing programming where students can join as a group to participate in these activities is encouraged.

### Directions for Further Study

Encouraged by our initial results, we have replicated the study this current semester (fall 2009) and included a random sample of all FGCU students both on and off campus. This may shed some light on the question of what effect the college ambiance may have on a cross section of student attitudes towards spirituality and to the use of alcohol/drugs over time of academic study.

Where more validation and replication is necessary in answering the question of what in common motivates students to use alcohol/ drugs and/or use a daily spiritual discipline, the seeking of emotional well being stands out as an overarching construct to be further explored and translated into campus activities, and academic programming.

For references used in study, contact lead investigator, Dr. Scott Anstadt at 239-590-7497.

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