

# Understanding the Intersection of Spirituality and Service Engagement Among Undergraduates From a Reasoned Action Approach

Curtis Lehmann

## Abstract

Service engagement is critical to many higher education institutions. Past research has looked at spiritual change as a result of service engagement, but few studies have looked at how spirituality might contribute to engagement in service projects, particularly from a reasoned action approach. This quantitative study looked at God concept and religious motivation as predictors of intention to serve with two particular projects being offered at a faith-based university, an inner-city experience and a tutoring service. Participants were 305 ethnically diverse undergraduates. Data were analyzed using multiple regressions. The spirituality variables were associated with attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations toward both service projects, as hypothesized. However, the spirituality variables were not significantly related with intention to serve for either service project. The findings suggest that spirituality may shape beliefs about service projects but may have little effect on intention to engage in service projects, at least in certain cases.

*Keywords: service projects, community engagement, attitudes, religion, spirituality*



Student engagement in prosocial service has emerged as an essential feature of the university experience. Many universities have indicated that developing civic-minded students is part of their mission (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008). Community service projects have even become embedded within the classroom setting in a phenomenon known as service-learning, which has been studied extensively with well-known positive outcomes (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Alternatively, service engagement can be organized outside the classroom with university-level policies, such as a service hour requirement, that uphold service project participation as a prerequisite for graduation. The current study is an investigation of how spirituality may influence engagement in community service projects among undergraduates at a Christian university.

To introduce the significance of service for higher education, a review of the service-learning literature is provided to elaborate the context of the current study. Although this study examined intention to engage in service projects required at the university, not service-learning within a classroom setting, this review may help the reader understand the purpose of engaging students in service.

## University-Based Service-Learning

Service-learning has emerged as an effective means of connecting course material with real-world experiences in higher education. Unlike typical community service volunteering, service-learning projects are part of a college course's curriculum and learning objectives (Zlotkowski, 1998). Service-learning provides reciprocal benefits for both the academic institution and for the community being served (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The academic institu-

tion benefits by an improved image in the community (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001) and improved student learning outcomes across several domains (Conway et al., 2009).

In regard to academic outcomes from service-learning, three meta-analyses have found positive impact on academic outcomes, including GPA, academic motivation, and cognitive development, regardless of whether the meta-analysis included only controlled outcome studies (Celio et al., 2011) or included less methodologically rigorous studies (Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). An illustrative example is that of a longitudinal study by Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000), who found that students who participated in service-learning projects had better GPAs, writing skills, critical thinking skills, and leadership skills than students who did not participate in service-learning courses.

Academic gains are not the only benefit of service-learning. Service-learning has also been shown, in a meta-analysis, to deepen understanding of social issues and increase personal insight (Conway et al., 2009; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Participation in service-learning can foster a strongly prosocial identity in students. Moreover, participation can improve attitudes toward self, including positive self-esteem, evaluation of one's own abilities, sense of control, and self-efficacy (Celio et al., 2011). Students who engage in service typically become involved with individuals from economic and ethnic backgrounds other than their own, allowing greater exposure to diversity and building awareness of one's own privilege (Jones & Abes, 2004). The relationships that formed between students and the community members whom they served gave the students a sense of personal responsibility to strive to make conditions more equitable for those people and others like them (Mitchell, 2015). Among alumni interviewed about their participation in service-learning courses, some reported that the experience instilled a moral obligation to serve that remained even years later (Jones & Abes, 2004).

Despite the many benefits of service-learning, some researchers have pointed out potential downsides. Grusky (2000) argued that, without reflection and intentional action, service-learning can potentially reenact historical and cultural injustices. One concern is that community partner-

ships may actually be unidirectional, with students serving and then "moving on" without building infrastructure for the agency and the population being served (Brown, 2001; Cuban & Anderson, 2007). Another concern is that students may remain oblivious to certain types of privilege, such as race and sexual orientation, even if they come to appreciate their economic privilege (Jones & Abes, 2004). Other downsides have included poor preparation by the agency, scheduling difficulties, and poor selection of sites (Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, & Bothne, 2010).

### Spirituality and Service-Learning

An additional outcome of service-learning to consider is the deepening of spirituality. Here we consider spirituality to be broadly inclusive of religious beliefs and practices, ethical integrity, sense of purpose, mysticism, and transcendence (see Welch & Koth, 2013). Evidence on spiritual outcomes of service-learning is primarily theoretical, but one quantitative study of undergraduate students that utilized structural equation modeling found that service activities were predictive of "vocational calling," which was operationalized as a sense of purposeful and meaningful involvement (Phillips, 2011). This finding indicates that service can produce effects on students' perceptions of career and work, including seeing work through a spiritual lens.

Other analyses of service-learning have discussed various other possible benefits that may be included as a spiritual outcome. Service-learning has been seen as an opportunity for moral growth and for appreciating the connections between civic engagement and spirituality (Dalton, 2006). Louie-Badua and Wolf (2008) emphasized that service-learning provides an opportunity to experience interconnectedness, a chance for "opening your heart," and expansion of self-inquiry and self-knowledge. Service-learning projects have been perceived as good opportunities for Christian students to practice acting out their beliefs at their university, rather than merely contemplating or pondering them (Schaffer, 2004). Welch and Koth (2013) argued for a metatheory of spiritual formation through service, indicating that transformation and transcendence can occur through encounters with the unknown other. Koth (2003) has argued that failure to include spirituality in service-learning is a missed opportunity for

deepening contemplative practices among students and strengthening the long-term commitment to serve.

Of course, another important consideration regarding service-learning is how spirituality may impact initial engagement in service. Praetorius and Machtmes (2005) found in a qualitative study that spirituality was an important motivator for volunteers at a 24-hour crisis hotline. Volunteers in that study noted their desire to “give back,” to achieve a new perspective of the perceived challenges and difficulties in one’s own life, and to recognize the interconnectedness among us all as part of social fabric. Hunsberger and Platonow (1986) similarly found that volunteering was more likely among those with intrinsic religious motivation than those with extrinsic motivations.

Spirituality also is relevant for the opportunity for engagement in service-learning, as the faith beliefs of faculty have been shown to be related to the decision to initiate a service-learning component to courses (Helm-Stevens et al., 2015). Moreover, differing characteristics of the spirituality of participants may in turn impact the effectiveness of service-learning (Park, Helm, Kipley, & Hancock, 2009).

At the same time, the notion of spirituality being a motive for service bears a potential risk of seeing the community from a deficit perspective, lacking in spirituality or faith, that might reinforce structures of privilege. Volunteer service projects in general can potentially engender the belief that problems being faced require only individual, rather than sociopolitical, responses (Brown, 2001). This lack of systemic understanding can also be present when motivated by spirituality. Approaching service-learning as an exercise in spirituality or as a means of evangelism can exacerbate this misunderstanding, perhaps even leading personal spirituality to be seen as the antidote to all of life’s problems. A faith-based institution that emphasizes social justice may minimize some of these problems through missional emphasis (Cuban & Anderson, 2007), but individual volunteers may nonetheless hold spiritual commitments that do not acknowledge systemic injustice.

Spirituality as a motivator for service could thus facilitate positive engagement or perhaps lead to reinforcement of systemic injustice. Given this potentially critical role

in outcomes, spirituality ought to be studied further for its role in motivations for service.

### **Service and the Faith-Based University**

Considering the possible motivating effects of spirituality on service, as well as the academic, institutional, altruistic, and spiritual outcomes of service-learning, it is not surprising that service-learning programs would be instituted at faith-based universities. The research literature includes a number of theoretical arguments on the relevance of service-learning for faith-based institutions (Hesser, 2003; Radecke, 2007; Schaffer, 2004). However, it is important to note that students’ spirituality can vary considerably, even at a faith-based university, in a manner that might affect student perceptions of service projects.

Rather than focusing on the effects of engaging in service on spirituality, this study looks specifically at spirituality as an influence on intentions to engage in specific service projects at a Christian university. Although service at this institution is a requirement for graduation, students still have choice in the projects they participate in. Therefore, understanding the factors shaping which projects are pursued may be important in setting appropriate faith outcomes. The current study explores the relations between an individual’s spirituality and their intentions to engage in a service project at a university setting.

To properly understand this project, findings on the relationship between spirituality and prosocial behavior will first be reviewed, focusing on specific constructs within spirituality that might underlie these relationships. Following that, the theoretical lens being used in this study to explain these relations with service projects is reviewed. The primary backdrop of this study is a Judeo-Christian religious understanding of God and religion, but the aim has been to identify constructs that may apply to other religious traditions.

### **Spirituality and Relation to Prosocial Behavior**

Many social, cultural, cognitive, and developmental factors contribute to determining prosocial behaviors, but spirituality would seem to be particularly relevant. Although some have argued that there is no necessary

causal effect of religion on morality and that morality is a concept in and of itself without the obligations and beliefs of a specific kind of religion (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015), the relationship between spirituality and morality remains of interest to researchers and the general public alike. Examining the broader relationship between spirituality and various types of prosocial behavior could provide a better understanding of the relationship between spirituality and service projects.

Empirical studies on the relationship between spirituality and prosocial behavior have found a modest but robust relationship (for a review see Saraglou, 2013). Ruiters and DeGraaf (2006) found that religious attendance was associated with greater volunteering with both religious and nonreligious organizations. In a literature review, individual religiosity, as well as parental religiosity, was found to be associated with increased religious and secular philanthropy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). Faith maturity has been found to add unique predictive variance toward prosocial behavior above and beyond personality self-ratings (Ciarrocchi, Piedmont, & Williams, 2003). Developmentally, religion plays a role in initial volunteering, which was associated with later volunteering with both religious and nonreligious institutions (Johnston, 2013). The results of that study also indicated that increased religious belief and attendance resulted in a greater likelihood of engagement in religious institution volunteerism.

The motivational dimension of religion might affect internalization of values, as Hardy and Carlo (2005) found that prosocial values mediated the relationship between religion and prosocial behaviors. Einolf (2013) found that daily spiritual experiences were a significant predictor of volunteering, charitable giving, and helping individuals one knows personally, even among those who did not identify with a religious congregation. This suggests that spiritual motivations may be important for helping behaviors among those who are not conventionally religious.

Another paradigm for studying the relationship between spirituality and morality is cognitive priming. Numerous priming studies have investigated the effects of religious priming (e.g., using words like “church” or “God”) on prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) found

that priming concepts related to religion increased generosity in an anonymous dictator game. Similarly, Pichon, Bocatto, and Saraglou (2007) found that prosocial behaviors were more likely when positive religious words had previously been subconsciously primed. These authors found that religious concepts by themselves can unconsciously activate prosocial behavioral schemas. Although not focusing on prosocial behaviors, Randolph-Seng and Nielsen (2007) found that cheating was less likely when participants were primed with religious words. Fishbach, Friedman, and Kruglanski (2003) found that priming participants with a temptation, or a desired behavioral action, not only influenced the activation of overriding religious goals but also affected goal-congruent behavioral choices in line with the religious goals.

### **Multidimensional Approaches to Relations Between Spirituality and Prosocial Behavior**

Researchers studying spirituality have long recognized the need to study constructs related to spirituality multidimensionally (e.g., Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). The dimensions of spirituality have included closeness to God, religious motivations, and religious support (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002; Hill & Pargament, 2003), as well as God concept, religious coping, locus of control, and spiritual well-being (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004), among many others.

*God concept.* One facet of spirituality that may relate to prosocial behaviors is *God concept*. Morewedge and Clear (2008) found that anthropomorphic God concepts, whereby a person perceives God as having human characteristics such as being accepting, caring, and comforting, was related to the evaluation of violations of the Ten Commandments as being morally wrong, as well as being against their religion. The finding suggests that beliefs about God are associated with the formation of a moral code by which one lives.

Studies where concepts of God are primed have found an influence on prosocial behavior. In one study, participants who were primed with God concepts gave more money to a stranger in an anonymous dictator game, and this was not dependent on self-reported religiosity (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Similar to this finding but with an important distinction, Lin, Tong, Lee, Low,

and Gomes (2016) found that priming God concept increased intention to engage in prosocial behaviors, but only for those who professed to believe in God.

Providing a theoretical interpretation of the past research on religious beliefs and prosociality, Preston, Ritter, and Hernandez (2010) argued that a supernatural principle for prosocial actions based on belief in God can have a different effect on prosocial behavior than a religious principle that emphasizes the religious group. By following the supernatural principle, the individual is likely to consider engaging in virtuous behaviors rather than simply protecting in-group members. Thus, beliefs in God may more broadly influence prosocial behavior.

**Religious motivation.** Another relevant dimension of spirituality for prosocial behavior is the motivation for religious involvement, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Gorsuch & Venable, 1983). Hunsberger and Platonow (1986) found that intrinsic religious motivation predicted the intention to volunteer in service projects. In that study, Christian orthodoxy was not a significant predictor, indicating that motivational factors, rather than beliefs, underlay the relationship. Looking at religious motivation as a possible threat to evaluations of behaviors as moral, due to the attribution of the behavior to the religious benefit the person would receive, Gervais (2014) found that religious motivation (e.g., asking oneself, “What would Jesus do?”) for a vignette prosocial behavior was associated with decreased likelihood to perceive the prosocial act as moral. The findings suggest that religious motivation may relate to service engagement, given that it distinguishes those who participate in religion due to internalized values from those who participate for external gain.

### Spirituality and the Reasoned Action Approach

One challenge in relating spirituality and service engagement is identifying a theoretical approach that can aid in the interpretation of findings and developing interventions for increasing enrollment. The current study utilized the reasoned action approach (RAA) as a theoretical framework. The RAA has been supported by numerous studies across various domains showing that it is highly predictive of both behavioral intentions and actual behavior (for an over-

view see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). The RAA argues that all behaviors are most strongly determined by beliefs that are specifically related to each particular behavior, rather than by broad attitudes toward general behaviors. This theory is useful precisely because it narrows down the potential pathways of influence to specific beliefs about the behavior.

In the reasoned action approach, the specific behavioral beliefs have been grouped into three categories: attitudes, social norms, and perceived control. *Attitudes* were defined as the evaluative beliefs regarding the experiential consequences of a behavior that were rooted in either a hypothetical or past response to the behavior. *Social norms* were defined as the interaction between the beliefs of how others perceive the individual’s involvement in the behavior and the individual’s motivation to comply with those norms. Finally, *perceived control* was defined as an individual’s perceived level of difficulty in performing the behavior, along with their perception of control in performing the behavior. Attitudes, social norms, and perceived control uniquely contribute to predicting intentions to engage in the behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Moreover, meta-analyses have shown that the intention to engage in a behavior is causatively linked to the actual completion of the behavior (Sheeran, 2002; Webb & Sheeran, 2006).

Although the RAA has been refined over several decades, some researchers have argued for further expansion. For instance, Augustine (2009) found that moral evaluations predicted behavioral intentions, even when controlling for attitudes. One research study that utilized this approach was conducted by Ortberg, Gorsuch, and Kim (2001), who studied the effects among a Christian congregation of two interventions targeting either attitudes or moral evaluations toward blood donation. They found that each intervention influenced only the associated predictor, confirming the independence in construct validity of attitudes and moral evaluations. Given the potential relevance of moral evaluations for engagement in service, this study included this variable alongside the RAA variables.

Although evidence supporting the theory is considerable, the aspect of the RAA that is understudied is what broader influences form and contribute to the beliefs that the RAA posits underlie behavior. These beliefs

are likely impacted by numerous sources of influence, such as media, parental influence, peer influence, academic culture, and, finally, spirituality and religion. Although religion may have little relevance to certain behaviors, behaviors with a greater moral component could be expected to be influenced by spirituality and religion.

In the current project being proposed, spirituality will be measured as God concept and religious motivation. As noted above, these constructs have been found to relate to moral behaviors, sometimes with theoretical explanations provided post hoc. By utilizing these constructs alongside the RAA variables, including moral evaluation, it might be possible to clarify the relationship of these variables to service engagement.

The significance of this project would be in identifying possible causal pathways that can be investigated experimentally in the future. By identifying how specific behavioral beliefs are related to spiritual constructs, it may be possible to conduct experiments where participants may be primed with specific spiritual constructs (by reading or listening to sermons, for example) and measure how this priming impacts the RAA variables and the behaviors or behavioral intentions to engage in service.

### Hypotheses

The study hypotheses were as follows: (1) The reasoned action approach variables would be related with intention to engage in service. (2) Moral evaluations would add unique variance in predicting intention to engage in service, after controlling for the reasoned action approach variables. (3) Spirituality, measured as God concept and religious motivation, would be associated with attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations. (4) Spirituality, measured as God concept and religious motivation, would be associated with intentions to engage in service.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were undergraduate students at a Christian faith-based university in Southern California who were recruited from the online Psychology Department Research Participation System. Study participants were enrolled in lower divi-

sion psychology courses, where there is a requirement to complete up to 3 hours of research participation or an equivalent alternative. Students were granted 0.5 hours of credit for participating in this study. There was a total of 311 participants, though four were removed due to less than 50% response and two others were removed due to being multivariate outliers, leaving a sample size of 305.

The mean age of participants was 19.1 years ( $SD = 1.78$ ), with a large majority being female (80.7%). The sample was ethnically diverse, with White (48.0%) being the largest group but Asian Americans (21.1%), Latino/as (18.4%), African Americans (4.6%), and multiple ethnicity/other (7.9%) being fairly well-represented. Reflecting the lower level classes from which they were recruited, most of the participants were freshmen (63.6%), with sophomores (17.1%), juniors (14.1%), and seniors (5.2%) also being represented.

### Procedure

The study was approved as exempt status by the institutional review board prior to collection of data. Data collection occurred in two phases. In the first phase, occurring in January through March 2016, 163 participants were collected and were asked questions related to service projects available later in the semester. In the second phase, 144 participants were surveyed from October through December about willingness to participate in service projects the following semester. This two-phase data collection process was due to low sample size during the first phase, which led to a lack of statistical power for the study. In a given semester at the university, there are approximately 450 students, so that approximately a third of all students across two semesters participated in the study.

Participants were able to select the study from the online Psychology Department Research Participation System, where they were linked to an online survey. The questionnaire began with an opportunity for informed consent. Participation was voluntary and all participants were offered alternative methods of earning credit through their courses. Those who consented were presented with a questionnaire that consisted of 52 closed-ended items and generally took less than 15 minutes to complete. No identifying information was collected.

## Measures

The questionnaire, available online at <http://bit.ly/2XwvocB>, included the measures in the following order: demographic, inner-city project items (i.e., attitudes, social norms, perceived behavioral control, moral evaluations, and intentions toward inner-city service project), tutoring project items, single-item measures of spirituality, a God concept scale, and the Age-Universal Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religiousness Scale. Demographic data included the participant's gender, age, ethnicity, class level, living situation, and total number of university service units acquired so far.

**Intentions.** The intention to engage in the service project was challenging to assess, as participants were likely to have varied in their prior knowledge of what the service project encompassed. For this reason, participants were given a description of the service project, which was provided by the university office responsible for service projects. The Inner City Project was described as follows:

This urban immersion provides an opportunity for students to embark on a four-day experiential learning trip in the heart of [Inner City]. Participants become acquainted with the social realities of diverse communities in [Inner City], while developing a biblical understanding of justice, compassion, reconciliation, and stewardship. Open to students of all backgrounds and interests, [Inner City Project] challenges participants to think critically about issues that affect the disenfranchised while learning about their involvement or contribution to these problems. [Inner City Project] endeavors to encourage a more comprehensive understanding of the world around us, and examine the implications of the privilege or disadvantage that social location provides.

Likewise, the Tutoring Project was described as follows (identifying information is excluded):

[Tutoring Project] has a long-standing relationship with [the university]. The mission . . . is to establish and sustain neighborhood based learning centers . . . where

at-risk children and their families are equipped to thrive academically, socially, and spiritually. The [Tutoring Project] is located at [Church] and serves K-12th-grade students daily. Students commit to serving for 10 weeks at one of the following time periods. . . . [Specific days of the week and times were provided.]

Providing details about each project allowed the students to become acquainted with the service project and to form beliefs related to their intention to engage in these projects. The inner city was Los Angeles, located about 25 miles from the university, and thus most students who attended did not have extensive familiarity with the cultural context. This program had been in existence at the university since the LA riots but was altered prior to the study to include three service projects, rather than only cultural immersion, to encourage service-oriented learning (Ender, 2016). The tutoring project was located in a building about half a mile from the university. Note that it is possible, and perhaps likely, that prior knowledge about these projects existed (e.g., based on experiences of friends) and so the related behavioral beliefs may not reflect only the descriptions. The study did not assess whether the participants had any prior familiarity with the service project.

The intention to engage in the project was assessed by a single item querying the participant's intent to volunteer on specific dates within the upcoming semester on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). As an example, intention to serve on Inner City Project was assessed, "I will volunteer with the [Inner City Project] this semester, on either March 19-22 (Saturday to Tuesday) or April 9-12 (Saturday to Tuesday)." Previous research has shown that intentions are strongly related to actual behavior (Sheeran, 2002; Webb & Sheeran, 2006), suggesting that intentions to engage in service projects would be informative of actual behavior.

**Attitudes.** Attitudes were assessed with semantic differential scales utilizing discrepant adjectives to describe the engagement in the service project (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Participants rated how they felt about volunteering for each of the service projects on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 with two sets of polar anchors: *boring/fun* and *pleasant/un-*

*pleasant*. As an example, “Volunteering with [Inner City Project] would be (Unsatisfying/Satisfying),” with *unsatisfying* being a 1 and *satisfying* being a 7. The attitude toward each service project was then calculated as the average of the two items, after being reverse scored as appropriate, with higher values indicating greater favorability.

**Social norms.** Social norms toward each service project were assessed with two items that assessed the participant’s perceived norms among a group they were likely motivated to conform with (i.e., “people close to [him/her]”). Responses were on a 7-point scale with polar anchors of “inappropriate/appropriate” and “should/should not.” For example, “Most people whose opinion I value would think it is (inappropriate/appropriate) to volunteer with [Inner City Project].” The social norm toward each service project was then calculated as the average of these two items, after being reverse scored as appropriate, with higher values indicating more favorable social norms.

**Perceived behavioral control.** The participant’s perception of their behavioral control over volunteering for the service project was assessed with two items. Responses were on a 7-point scale with polar anchors of “easy/difficult” and “no time/plenty of time.” After reverse scoring the items as appropriate, the perceived behavioral control score for each service project was computed as the average of these two items, with higher values indicating higher perception of control. An example item was “I think that I would have (No Time/Plenty of Time) to volunteer with [Inner City Project].”

**Moral evaluations.** Moral evaluations were determined with two items, scored on a 7-point scale, that had polar anchors of “moral/immoral” and “no good young people should do/all good young people should do.” One such item read, “Volunteering with [Inner City Project] is (moral/immoral).” For each service project, a moral evaluations score was calculated as the average of the two items, with the moral/immoral item being reverse scored. Higher scores on this scale thus indicated higher perception of the morality of the action.

**God concept.** This study utilized a 10-item God concept scale (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004, adapted by Lehmann, 2009; Lehmann & Gorsuch, 2017). This scale was

found to have two distinct factors, resulting in a 7-item Christian God concept subscale and a 3-item wrathfulness subscale (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004). For this scale, adjectives are presented with synonyms in parentheses to help clarify the intended adjective (e.g., God is kind [loving and forgiving]; God is fierce [critical and cruel]). Each item was rated on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), with certain items reverse scored as appropriate.

Using the data obtained from this study, an exploratory principal axis factor analysis was conducted, and the results were consistent with a two-factor structure with items loading on the expected factors. The Christian God concept and wrathfulness scales correlated at  $-.16$ . The alpha reliabilities of the 7-item Christian God concept scale and the 3-item wrathfulness scale were  $.87$  and  $.69$ , respectively.

**Religious motivation.** The study also included the Age-Universal Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religiousness Scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Gorsuch & Venable, 1983), which used a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to measure motivations for religiousness. The scale included items such as “I go to church because it helps me to make friends” and “Prayer is for peace and happiness.” In this study, the alpha reliability was  $.81$  for the 8-item intrinsic subscale,  $.77$  for the 3-item extrinsic personal subscale, and  $.64$  for the 3-item extrinsic social subscale.

## Results

In order to ensure generalizable results, responses were tested for multivariate outliers using the full set of variables and robust estimates of center and dispersion. Two outliers were removed due to Mahalanobis distance scores greater than 10. Removal of these two participants left a sample of 305 participants.

Descriptive statistics of the study variables were computed and are presented in Table 1. Mean scores on the intent variables indicate that participants tended to be neutral or undecided in regard to their intent to volunteer for both service projects, with an overall trend toward being slightly unlikely to participate. Mean scores on measures of attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations toward both projects tended to be favorable, but perceived behavioral control



**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Inner City</i>		
Intentions	3.31	1.53
Attitudes	5.35	1.19
Social norms	5.48	1.18
Perceived behavioral control	3.99	1.16
Moral evaluations	5.81	0.89
<i>Homework Tutor</i>		
Intentions	3.82	1.65
Attitudes	5.70 <sup>a</sup>	1.21
Social norms	5.89 <sup>b</sup>	1.16
Perceived behavioral control	4.19	1.23
Moral evaluations	6.14 <sup>a</sup>	0.79
<i>God concept</i>		
Christian God concept	6.61 <sup>b</sup>	0.61
Wrathful God concept	3.70	1.50
<i>Religious motivation</i>		
Intrinsic	5.32	1.00
Extrinsic personal	4.81	1.29
Extrinsic social	3.07	1.22
<i>Note. All of the scales above had a range of 1–7. N = 305.</i>		
<i><sup>a</sup>M &lt; 1.25 SD from range endpoint. <sup>b</sup>M &lt; 1.0 SD from range endpoint.</i>		

was lower, indicating that participants perceived their ability to serve on these projects to be limited. Also note that the sample was highly religious, as expected at a Christian college, although variance can be seen in religious motivations among the sample.

To investigate the bivariate relationships of the RAA and spirituality constructs with intention to serve on each project, correlation coefficients were calculated and are presented in Table 2. These correlations show that each of the RAA constructs, including moral evaluation, was significantly related both to the Inner City intention and the Tutoring intention. Moreover, this analysis revealed that the measures of spirituality utilized were not significantly related to the intentions, except extrinsic social and Tutoring intention.

To test the hypothesis that the reasoned action model would predict intent to volunteer for the service projects, multiple re-

gression analyses were run; the results are presented in Table 2. The reasoned action approach model, identified as Model 1, was significant and strongly predicted both service project intentions. In this model, attitudes and perceived behavioral control (PBC) were the strongest predictors, with social norms being a marginal predictor of inner city intention and not significant in predicting tutoring intention.

Table 2 presents analyses of the expanded reasoned action approach, which included moral evaluation, under Model 2. Moral evaluation did not add significant variance in predicting either of the service projects. This was contrary to hypothesis, which predicted that this variable would add unique variance for predicting intentions. Table 2 also presents, under Model 3, the results of a regression analysis of the spirituality variables to predict service project intention. Contrary to hypothesis, this analysis

**Table 2. Intention to Volunteer: Raw Correlations, Standardized Betas, and Multiple R<sup>2</sup>**

Inner City Project—Intention					Homework Tutoring—Intention			
Parameter Estimates					Parameter Estimates			
Predictor	<i>r</i>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	<i>r</i>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Attitudes	.490***	.33***	.31***		.368***	.19**	.20**	
Social norms	.386***	.10*	.07		.249***	-.04	-.03	
PBC	.461***	.32***	.32***		.605***	.55***	.55***	
Moral evaluations	.334***		.08		.121*		-.04	
Christian God concept	.045			-.03	-.058			-.05
Wrathful God concept	-.076			-.07	-.085			-.09
Intrinsic	.050			.04	-.051			-.03
Extrinsic personal	.107			.13*	.054			.04
Extrinsic social	-.100			-.12	.124*			.11
Whole Model (R <sup>2</sup> )		.35***	.35***	.03		.39***	.39***	.03

Note. Model 1 is the established reasoned action approach model. Model 2 is the RAA model with moral evaluations included. Model 3 is the set of spirituality predictors included in the study. Parameter estimates are standardized betas. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

was not significant for both service projects, indicating that spirituality was not predictive of intention.

To investigate the relationship between measures of spirituality and the reasoned action predictor variables, multiple regressions were run with Christian God concept, wrathfulness, intrinsic, extrinsic personal, extrinsic social, and certainty of belief in God as independent variables, with the attitudes, social norms, perceived behavioral control, and moral evaluation toward each service project as dependent variables. The results of these regressions are presented in Table 3. As hypothesized, the regressions were significant for predicting attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations toward both service projects. Additionally, the regressions were not significant for the perceived behavioral control toward each intention, consistent with the hypothesis.

### Discussion

The results supported the hypotheses that spirituality would be associated with attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations, but not perceived behavioral control, toward engaging in two particular service projects available at a university. In the current

analyses, God concept and religious motivation accounted for 5–10% of the variance in these variables. This finding is consistent with past research findings that spirituality is interconnected with prosocial behavior, providing ethical justifications (Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008), moral communities (Graham & Haidt, 2010), and moral decision making (Szekely, Opre, & Miu, 2015).

The current study expands on past findings by contextualizing the effect of spirituality from the reasoned action approach. The RAA highlights that behaviors are the product of intentions, and that intentions are dynamically influenced by beliefs about the anticipated experience of engaging in the behavior (i.e., attitudes), perceived evaluations of valued social groups (i.e., social norms), and personal beliefs about the ability of the individual to engage in the behavior (i.e., perceived behavioral control). Though conclusions based on these results must be tentative, given that this study is cross-sectional and specific to a particular context, the findings are consistent with the notion that spirituality may shape the underlying attitudinal and normative perceptions of service projects, but not the perceptions of behavioral control.

**Table 3. Standardized Betas and Multiple R<sup>2</sup> of Spirituality Variables With Attitudes, Social Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Moral Evaluations**

Predictor	Attitudes		Social Norms		Perceived Behavioral Control		Moral Evaluations	
	Inner City	Tutoring	Inner City	Tutoring	Inner City	Tutoring	Inner City	Tutoring
Christian God concept	.119	.113	.202**	.128	-.020	.008	.100	.149*
Wrathful God concept	.016	-.020	.037	-.046	.007	-.083	.092	.066
Intrinsic	.229**	.130	.025	.092	.094	-.064	.165*	.038
Extrinsic personal	.004	-.049	-.030	.003	.112	.061	.107	.078
Extrinsic social	-.041	.075	-.070	-.015	-.041	.025	-.090	-.063
<b>Total spirituality (R<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>.103***</b>	<b>.048*</b>	<b>.055**</b>	<b>.045*</b>	<b>.020</b>	<b>.014</b>	<b>.087***</b>	<b>.049**</b>

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The intentions to engage in the service project were strongly predicted by perceived behavioral control and attitudes toward the service project. The findings indicate that the perception that one would enjoy the service and that one had control in regard to one's ability to participate were strong determinants. For the tutoring project, the role of attitudes, although significant, was surpassed by the effect of behavioral control, which included the belief that the tutoring experience would be easy and that the individual had "plenty of time" for the service. To put it tersely, if they believed they "could," then they most likely "would," at least in intention.

The current study tested an expanded reasoned action approach, including moral evaluation as a predictor, but this variable did not improve on the standard RAA model of intention. The findings indicated that moral evaluations of service projects did not play a significant role in determining intention to engage in the service project, which is surprising given that service is often perceived to be a moral action. Thus, the participants did not seem to intend to participate for overly moralistic reasons, such as a desire to "save the world." Similarly, a variable that often provides a unique effect, social norms, was not a significant predictor in the model. These findings may have been a unique factor of the context of the study and the particular service projects involved.

Given that spirituality was associated with these underlying RAA variables, except for perceived behavioral control, one would expect that spirituality would be associated with intent to engage in the service project. However, the association of the spirituality variables with the intentions to serve was found to be not significant. Thus, the hypothesized relationship between spirituality and intention to serve was not supported.

Two interconnected explanations for the lack of association between spirituality and intentions seem reasonable. The first is that the effect of spirituality on attitudes, social norms, and moral evaluations ranged in effect size from 5% to 10% of the variance explained, which reflects that these variables are shaped by numerous other factors. The second is that intentions were uniquely predicted by perceived behavioral control, with which spirituality was not associated. Therefore, it seems reasonable that a small, trivial relationship between spirituality and intentions may exist but may not have been

detected due to lack of statistical power.

Given that the projects occurred midsemester, students may have found that their schedules were already full, and they could not make this commitment. If the study had investigated service projects that were less subject to perceived behavioral control—for example, projects available during spring break—a small to moderate effect of spirituality on intentions might have been apparent. Other factors may have shaped perceived behavioral control, such as self-efficacy in regard to tutoring or parental restrictions about traveling to an inner-city setting. From the onset, it was not expected that spirituality would be directly associated with perceived behavioral control, so it was not surprising, given the importance of perceived behavioral control for predicting intention to serve, that spirituality would not be strongly associated with intention to serve.

The low association between spirituality and service intentions indicated that students were not motivated primarily or strongly by a desire to enact their spirituality in the context of the service project, such as through evangelism or social justice. Thus, students as a whole, despite high levels of intrinsic religious motivation, were not approaching the service project simply as a spiritual mission; rather, they had multiple motivating factors. Numerous other factors likely affect intention to engage, including the university mandate to complete 120 hours of service projects, the perceptions of alternative options, and the relevance of the project for career goals, among many other influences.

Moreover, given that past research has theorized (Hesser, 2003; Radecke, 2007; Schaffer, 2004; Welch & Koth, 2013) and demonstrated empirically (Park et al., 2009) that engagement in service-learning can have positive effects on spirituality, the finding that spirituality may not influence intention to engage in a service project, at least in certain circumstances, might actually be perceived as a positive, as this indicates that these opportunities for spiritual growth will not be limited only to those who already have a more developed spirituality. If spirituality is not related to volunteering, then all people, regardless of their level of spirituality, might be able to experience spiritual growth and change through service.

## Limitations and Future Directions

The primary limitation of the study is the uncertainty of whether its findings are generalizable to other service projects and university contexts. The study was conducted with particular existing service projects, rather than generic descriptions of volunteering opportunities. This methodology served to ground the project in a real context and to possibly reduce social desirability bias due to vague notions of volunteering. Moreover, the university where the research took place has a mandate for students to participate in service projects. This university also has strong commitments to the Christian faith, holding chapel three times per week, though it remains open to students of any religious tradition. Thus, the findings apply to students at Christian universities and may not be generalizable to students of other religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that spirituality may play some role in influencing perceptions of service projects. Researchers should continue to investigate this topic, utilizing various other study designs to investigate the role of spirituality and religion in influencing willingness to volunteer for service projects. In particular, it is important to investigate the effect that certain spiritual perspectives, such as fundamentalism or wrathful God concept, might have on the outcomes for the agencies and those being served, including the possibility of reinforcing hierarchies.

A secondary limitation is the use of intentions as a proxy for actual engagement. Although the author initially had hoped to assess actual engagement, doing so proved too cumbersome to accomplish in this study, given challenges in obtaining participation records from the relevant campus department. Future research should attempt to study actual service engagement, to investigate whether spirituality is associated with this volunteering and rule out the possibility that spirituality may be related to the underlying RAA variables solely due to social desirability.

Finally, the study did not give clarity in regard to the specific dimensions of religiousness that are associated with the particular constructs of the RAA. The selection of God concept and religious motivation as predictors was conceived in the notion that beliefs about God would shape perceptions of actions, including both attitudes and moral evaluations, and that religious motivation would shape social norms and moral evaluations. However, the inconsistency in the significance of the predictors did not bring clarity in regard to the role of these variables. Future research would benefit from utilizing measures of spirituality that are more proximal to the service projects, such as religious support, fundamentalism, and daily spiritual experiences.

## Conclusion

This research study advances the understanding of the role of spirituality in forming the beliefs that underlie the intention, and subsequently the behavior, to engage in a service project. Although spirituality was weakly associated with beliefs about service engagement and not associated with the intention to serve, this surprising finding actually indicates that lower spirituality might not be an obstacle to service participation. In fact, this research suggests that the benefits of service engagement on spiritual development may be available to spiritually diverse students. As a result, universities should focus more on decreasing practical barriers to participation, such as conflicts with school schedules, rather than being concerned about appealing to the spirituality of the potential participants. It is the author's hope, given the substantial benefits of service engagement for students, faculty, the university, and the community, that this research encourages ongoing attempts to include service within the university, either as a part of the curriculum (i.e., service-learning) or as a mandate for graduation (i.e., service requirement).



## About the Author

*Curtis Lehmann is associate professor at Azusa Pacific University and is a licensed psychologist in California. His primary research interests include spirituality and mental health, including suicide, posttraumatic stress, and stigma toward mental illness and addiction. He obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.*

## References

- Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). How service learning affects students. *Higher Education, Paper 144*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered/144>
- Augustine, R. (2009). *Values and affect in the planned behavior model: The actor–observer bias in social context* (Doctoral dissertation; Order No. 3385592). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (No. 305064198)
- Bekkers, R., & Wiepking, P. (2011). Who gives? A literature review of predictors of charitable giving part one: religion, education, age and socialisation. *Voluntary Sector Review, 2*(3), 337–365.
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1996). Implementing service learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education, 67*(2), 221–239.
- Brown, D. M. (2001). *Pulling it together: A method for developing service–learning and community partnerships based in critical pedagogy* (Technical Report, NTIS Issue Number 200202). Retrieved from National Technical Reports Library website: <https://ntrl.ntis.gov/>
- Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service–learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education, 34*(2), 164–181. doi:10.1177/105382591103400205
- Ciarrocchi, J. W., Piedmont, R. L., & Williams, J. E. (2003). Love thy neighbor: Spirituality and personality as predictors of prosocial behavior in men and women. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 14*, 61–76.
- Conway, J. M., Amel, E. L., & Gerwien, D. P. (2009). Teaching and learning in the social context: A meta-analysis of service learning's effects on academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology, 36*(4), 233–245. doi:10.1080/00986280903172969
- Cuban, S., & Anderson, J. B. (2007). Where's the justice in service–learning? Institutionalizing service–learning from a social justice perspective at a Jesuit university. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 40*(2), 144–155.
- Dalton, J. C. (2006). Community service and spirituality: Integrating faith, service, and social justice at Depaul University. *Journal of College and Character, 8*(1), 37–41. doi:10.2202/1940–1639.1152
- Ender, G. (2016, February 17). L.A. 101 program emphasizes service. *Zu News*. Retrieved from <https://zunews.com/2016/02/l-a-101-program-emphasizes-service/>
- Eyler, J., Giles, D. E., Jr., Stenson, C. M., & Gray, C. J. (2001). At a glance: What we know about the effects of service–learning on college students, faculty, institutions and communities, 1993–2000. *Higher Education, 139*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered/139>
- Fiala, W. E., Bjorck, J. P., & Gorsuch, R. (2002). The religious support scale: Construction, validation, and cross-validation. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(6), 761–786. doi:10.1023/A:1020264718397
- Fishbach, A., Friedman, R. S., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2003). Leading us not into temptation: Momentary allurements elicit overriding goal activation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(2), 296–309.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2010). *Predicting and Changing Behavior: The Reasoned Action Approach*. Psychology Press.
- Gervais, W. M. (2014). Good for God? Religious motivation reduces perceived responsibility for and morality of good deeds. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143*(4), 1616–1626.
- Gorsuch, R. L., & McPherson, S. E. (1989). Intrinsic/extrinsic measurement: I/E–revised and single–item scales. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 28*(3), 348–354.
- Gorsuch, R. L., & Venable, G. D. (1983). Development of an “age universal” IE scale. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 22*(2), 181–187.

- Graham, J., & Haidt, J. (2010). Beyond beliefs: Religions bind individuals into moral communities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 140–150.
- Grusky, S. (2000). International service learning: A critical guide from an impassioned advocate. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 858–867.
- Helm-Stevens, R., Rawlings, M. A., Hutchinson, J., Tsai, A., Duke, R., & McPhee, C. W. (2015). Examining faculty motivations for engagement in service-learning at a faith-based institution: A comparison of service-learning faculty versus non-service-learning faculty. *International Education Research*, 3(3), 1–15. doi:10.12735/ier.v3i3p01
- Hesser, G. (2003). Faith-based service-learning: Back to the future [Review of *Commitment and connection: Service-learning and Christian higher education*, edited by Gail Gunst Heffner and Claudia DeVries Beversluis]. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 10(1), 59–69.
- Hill, P., & Pargament, K. (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research. *American Psychologist*, 58(1), 64–74. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.58.1.64
- Hood Jr, R. W., Hill, P. C., & Spilka, B. (2009). *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. Guilford Publications.
- Hunsberger, B., & Platonow, E. (1986). Religion and helping charitable causes. *The Journal of Psychology*, 120(6), 517–528. doi:10.1080/00223980.1986.9915483
- Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2004). Enduring influences of service-learning on college students' identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 149–166. doi:10.1353/csd.2004.0023
- Jongbloed, B., Enders, J., & Salerno, C. (2008). Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda. *Higher Education*, 56(3), 303–324. doi:10.1007/s10734-008-9128-2
- Koth, K. (2003). Spiritual reflection in service-learning. *About Campus*, 7(6), 2–7.
- Lehmann, C. S. (2009). *A multivariate model of adolescent spiritual well-being, God concept, religious motivation, and religious coping* (Unpublished master's thesis). Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.
- Lehmann, C. S., & Gorsuch, R. L. (2017). The relevance of religiousness and reasoned action for adolescent moral and immoral behavioral intentions. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 9(Suppl. 1), S49–S59.
- Lin, P. K., Tong, E. M., Lee, L. N., Low, A. H., & Gomes, D. (2016). The prosocial impact of God concept priming on God believers. *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 3(1), 93–103.
- Louie-Badua, L. J., & Wolf, M. (2008). The spiritual nature of service-learning. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 118, 91–95.
- McKay, R., & Whitehouse, H. (2015). Religion and morality. *Psychological bulletin*, 141, 447–473.
- Mitchell, T. D. (2015). Using a critical service-learning approach to facilitate civic identity development. *Theory Into Practice*, 54(1), 20–28. doi:10.1080/00405841.2015.977657
- Ortberg, J. C., Gorsuch, R. L., & Kim, G. J. (2001). Changing attitude and moral obligation: Their independent effects on behavior. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40(3), 489–496.
- Parboteeah, K. P., Hoegl, M., & Cullen, J. B. (2008). Ethics and religion: An empirical test of a multidimensional model. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(2), 387–398.
- Park, D., Helm, R., Kiple, D., & Hancock, D. (2009). Connecting faith & personal values with the service learning experience to create more effective service learning. *Business Renaissance Quarterly*, 4(3), 61–76.
- Phillips, S. L. (2011). Path models of vocational calling in Christian college students. *Christian Higher Education*, 10(3–4), 296–323. doi:10.1080/15363759.2011.576220
- Pichon, I., Boccato, G., & Saroglou, V. (2007). Nonconscious influences of religion on prosociality: A priming study. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 37(5), 1032–1045.

- Praetorius, R. T., & Machtmes, K. (2005). Volunteer crisis hotline counselors: An expression of spirituality. *Social Work & Christianity*, 32(2), 116–132.
- Preston, J. L., Ritter, R. S., & Hernandez, J. I. (2010). Principles of religious prosociality: A review and reformulation. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(8), 574–590.
- Radecke, M. W. (2007). Service-learning and faith formation. *Journal of College and Character*, 8(5), 1–28.
- Randolph-Seng, B., & Nielsen, M. E. (2007). Honesty: One effect of primed religious representations. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 17(4), 303–315.
- Rosing, H., Reed, S., Ferrari, J. R., & Bothne, N. J. (2010). Understanding student complaints in the service learning pedagogy. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(3–4), 472–481.
- Ruiter, S., & De Graaf, N. D. (2006). National context, religiosity, and volunteering: Results from 53 countries. *American Sociological Review*, 71(2), 191–210.
- Saraglou, V. (2013). Religion, spirituality, and altruism. *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion and Spirituality*, 1, 439–457.
- Schaffer, R. H. (2004). Service-learning in Christian higher education: Bringing our mission to life. *Christian Higher Education*, 3(2), 127–145. doi:10.1080/15363750490429417
- Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game. *Psychological Science*, 18(9), 803–809.
- Sheeran, P. (2002). Intention-behavior relations: A conceptual and empirical review. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 12(1), 1–36.
- Szekely, R. D., Opre, A., & Miu, A. C. (2015). Religiosity enhances emotion and deontological choice in moral dilemmas. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 79, 104–109.
- Webb, T. L., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Does changing behavioral intentions engender behavior change? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(2), 249–268.
- Welch, M., & Koth, K. (2013). A metatheory of spiritual formation through service-learning in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(6), 612–627. doi:10.1353/csd.2013.0089
- Wong-McDonald, A., & Gorsuch, R. L. (2004). A multivariate theory of God concept, religious motivation, locus of control, coping, and spiritual well-being. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 32(4), 318–334.
- Yorio, P. L., & Ye, F. (2012). A meta-analysis on the effects of service-learning on the social, personal, and cognitive outcomes of learning. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 11(1), 9–27. doi:10.5465/amle.2010.0072
- Zlotkowski, E. (1998). *Successful service-learning programs: New models of excellence in higher education*. Bolton, MA: Anker