

Beliefs, Attitudes and Norms of Students on Nazarene College and University Campuses: Then and Now

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Introduction

The Church of the Nazarene is, by all accounts, at a critical juncture in its history. The energy, security and simplicity associated with our sectarian history seem to have somewhat faded leaving the door open to a more tenuous future. Questions of identity and commitment have become increasingly prominent. If sectness tends to be associated with zeal and discipline, is post-sectness necessarily associated with the loss of spiritual vitality and the unraveling of shared norms and values? Is the sociological notion of secularization to be understood more in terms of slippage or maturity? Are we in the process of becoming or of declining? How will we know? Where are we to look?

Our Nazarene college and university campuses may be an especially interesting and potentially important part of the church to watch in a study of changing attitudes and behaviors in the church. Where else could we have such great ring-side seats to observe current societal, family, local church and youth culture norms and values being annually paraded before our eyes as they are in the lives of incoming Freshmen in any of our Nazarene schools? And where else could we be able to so clearly observe the continuing process of value formation in? To the degree that the values that students on Nazarene campuses embrace now are ones that will stay with them into the future, and to the degree that students on Nazarene campuses will become leaders in the Church of the Nazarene, is it possible that an examination of those values may even give us a glimpse into the future life of the Church? But that may be just the point for us here. Are the values and norms of students on our campuses changing, not just within individuals in their respective college careers, but over time, in the larger Nazarene student population? If changes are truly taking place in our "beloved Zion", should we not to some degree be able to observe those changes in the passing parade of students coming through our college campuses?

In this paper, we offer a comparative study of attitudes, norms and beliefs among collegians on Nazarene campuses. We will examine the differences between Nazarene and non-Nazarene students, differences between schools, and differences across time.

Methodology

Data from four separate studies were drawn upon for the purposes of this project. One source of data was the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP), a research effort conducted in conjunction with the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities. The CIRP data is collected annually (since 1992) from incoming Freshmen and graduating seniors for each of the participating institutions and measures a wide variety of issues including basic demographic information, a variety of norms, and moral, social and political perspectives.

The second data source was the Nazarene student survey. In 1982 a study was conducted in which a questionnaire of religious norms, beliefs and attitudes was administered to all

students in attendance in chapel on a given day in 8 of the 9 colleges in the U.S. and Canada (N=5384). This is the base comparison data for the MANC and PLNC studies.

Third, in 1993, MidAmerica Nazarene College undertook a project (under the direction of Dr. Ken Crow) replicating the 1982 Nazarene student survey. A sample of 259 students was surveyed in a chapel setting in order to compare current norms, beliefs and attitudes with those measured 11 years before.

Finally, with the data from the 1982 and MANC studies available for comparison, we revised and updated the original Nazarene student survey and mailed it to a random sample of 938 (960 less 22 that were returned "unsendable" by the post office) full time undergraduate students at PLNC. Time constraints prohibited us from using methods to enhance our rate of return (e.g. sending follow-up reminder notices). One hundred thirty-nine responses were received for a response rate of 14.8%.

With the low return rate in the PLNC sample, there is, of course, the possibility of biases in the sample. In fact, a comparison of descriptive characteristics of the sample with institutional data describing the PLNC student population as a whole does reveal some variance. For example, 73.4% of the responses we received were from female students in comparison to school data indicating that 60% of the full time undergraduates enrolled are female. Thirty-seven per cent of our sample indicated their denominational preference to be "Nazarene" compared to 31% of the total population as per school records. Whereas 28.6% of the actual population are freshmen and 24.9% juniors, our sample registered 16.5% freshmen and 28.8% juniors. The combination of a more educated (year in school), more female, more "Nazarene" sample compared to the actual population could bias the sample presumably toward conservatism on the one hand (female, Nazarene) but liberalism on the other (year in school).

The CIRP Data

The CIRP data indicate that the makeup of the PLNC student population is undergoing some rather major changes. For example, the percentage of incoming students who have a "Nazarene" denominational preference appears to be declining. It should be noted, however, that the number of Nazarene students on the PLNC campus is at an all time high.

Percentage of Incoming PLNC Freshmen Who Are Nazarene	
1993	39%
1994	41.40%
1995	31.90%
1996	36.70%
1997	25.70%

The data also indicate that parental income was much greater for incoming freshmen in 1997 compared to freshmen in 1992. There was also an increase in parental income levels for incoming freshmen at other comparable institutions around the country, but the increases at PLNC were much greater. A noteworthy increase between '92 and '97 in GPA's for the

incoming Frosh accompanied the increase in SES with the percentage of incoming students having an A minus or better GPA increasing from 33.8% to 46.3%. Here again, other comparable colleges and universities also showed increased, but those at PLNC were notably greater. Ethnic diversity of incoming freshmen remained fairly stable over the five year period with a high of 12.5% "other than white" students in the incoming class of 1994 slightly declining to 10.2% of 1997's class.

Estimated Parental Income of Incoming Freshmen		
	1992	1997
under \$15,000	6.6%	5.7%
\$15,000-\$29,999	13.9%	9.6%
\$30,000-\$49,999	27.2%	23.6%
\$50,000-\$74,999	27.2%	26.6%
\$75,000-\$99,999	10.3%	10.9%
\$100,000-\$149,999	7.4%	12.1%
\$150,000-\$199,999	3.7%	5.5%
over \$200,000	3.7%	5.8%
Total	N=148	N=372

Any self-respecting sociologist would anticipate such shifts in socio-economic status to have some influence on political and social world views. Even though there are certainly other social/contextual factors at work, there was, in fact, a noted increase in conservatism on social and political perspectives of incoming freshmen over the five year period that can be attributed, at least in part, to the changing SES of incoming students.

Percentage of Freshmen Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat (Selected Items)		
	Fresh	Seniors
raise taxes to reduce deficit	19.6%	36.3%
too much concern for criminals	72.4%	70.2%
abolish death penalty	18.9%	23.0%
married women best at home	31.9%	17.8%
prohibit homosexual relationships	65.3%	40.4%
abortion should be legal	28.7%	36.8%
	N=148	N=290

In sum, from the CIRP data there is evidence that incoming Freshmen at PLNC over the past five years are increasingly coming from wealthier homes. Concomitantly, there is an increase in GPA's and in social and political conservatism. There are some questions that arise

associated with the increased SES. Certainly there are pluses in these trends such as better students make for better education and happier faculty, increase in SES should contribute to support from home and retention, increased stature of the institution in the community, etc. But, is the Socio-cultural level of the school out-distancing (leaving behind) that of the larger church? Are minorities and the poor being left behind? Is the school increasingly becoming a white, upper middle class enclave with a matching politically conservative world view (even with the liberalizing effect of education)? How does this fit in with the mission of the institution?

The Nazarene Student Surveys

The Nazarene student surveys offer a seemingly unlimited number of opportunities for analysis. The MANC and PLNC replications give us an opportunity to examine current norms, attitudes and beliefs on Nazarene campuses including comparison of the perspectives of Nazarene and non-Nazarene students. The replications also offer a long-range perspective that was obviously missing in the original study. The two replications increase our level of confidence in analysis as we compare the trends over time in two different regions.

There has been a long standing discussion on Nazarene campuses regarding the percentages of Nazarene students and the presence of students listing other denominational preferences. If sacrificial investments of time, money and energy have gone into the creation and sustaining of our colleges, to what degree should the denomination expect to reap the rewards? If the expenses of the schools continue to be supplemented by denominational support, to what degree should those outside the tradition of the Church of the Nazarene benefit from that support? Could the colleges (universities) even survive without students from non-Nazarene backgrounds? If we are successful in creating a quality Christian education that attracts large numbers of students from outside our tradition, what effect does this large non-Nazarene presence have on the culture of the student body and the institution as a whole? Is there a certain critical mass of administration, faculty, staff and students that is necessary to maintain a Nazarene identity, culture and mission? Can real education take place in a sectarian venue in which mostly Nazarene professors teach mostly Nazarene students in a mostly Nazarene college located in a mostly Nazarene town?

Though it would be presumptuous to suppose we could solve the riddles above, the research before us may be helpful in comparing Nazarene and "other than Nazarene" student responses on various norms and values.

In both the MANC and PLNC studies, Nazarene/non-Nazarene data were available for independent measures of consumption of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. In each of these cases, a smaller percentage of Nazarene students reported consumption of the various substances in the past year.

Substance Use of Students by Denominational Identity			
		MANC (1993)	PLNC (1998)

		Nazarene	Non-Nazarene	Nazarene	Non-Nazarene
Have you had any alcoholic beverages in the last 12 months?	Yes	24.7%	51.9%	43.1%	59.0%
	No	75.3%	48.1%	56.9%	39.8%
Have you used any illegal drugs (such as cocaine or marijuana) in the last 12 months?	Yes	1.2%	8.0%		
	No	98.8%	92.0%		
Have you ever experimented with any drugs such as cocaine or marijuana?	Yes	11.5%	25.0%		
	No	88.5%	75.0%		
Have you used any tobacco in any form in the last year?	Yes	9.3%	22.0%	17.3%	26.2%
	No	90.7%	78.0%	82.7%	72.6%

In the PLNC study, we examined several other items of interest by denominational preference. We found that compared to non-Nazarene students, Nazarene students tended to be: more conservative on moral issues

- (abortion, gay rights, death penalty);
- more conservative on social issues (welfare, affirmative action, feminism); more observant of religious norms
- (church attendance and tithing); higher in the likelihood of religious experience
- (saved, sanctified); in greater conformity with Nazarene doctrine
- (inspiration of Scripture and entire sanctification); and more observant of Christian lifestyle norms
- (type of movies watched, frequency of sexual intercourse). (See Crosstabs in the Appendix for a breakdown of the data).

As to change over time, there is little that concerns us Nazarenes more than the possibility that slowly and surely we are somehow losing our calling, our identity and ultimately our reason for being. As much as we resist, change seems to continue to occur. Movies are in and bobbed hair appears to be gone forever. But are these changes critical to the core of what it means to be holiness folk? Or are they the welcome shedding of legalism that hindered and encumbered for far too long? And what of our youth? If some of the norms we struggled with as teenagers have been cast aside, does that leave other, "more precious" norms and values left exposed for today's youth to test? Further, is there such a thing as a value complex at work here such that our various norms and values are somehow linked together? If one goes, does it have the effect of "pulling" others along with it? And where is all this heading for us anyway?

We may not have much hope of controlling these presumed changes in our midst, but we can at least chart them! The comparisons of the Nazarene student survey with the MANC and PLNC replications offer a candid glimpse at the progress we have made over the years (or is it the slippage along the fault line?). Given the results reported above, it should be noted here that the following is a comparison of all students on Nazarene campuses, not of Nazarene students.

(Note: The percentage of students indicating that at least one of their parents was a member of the Church of the Nazarene in the 1982 MANC study was 71.7% compared to 68.4% in 1993. The percentage of PLNC students indicating "Nazarene" as their denominational preference in the 1982 study was 43.7% compared to 37.4% in our 1998 sample)

"About how often do you attend church here at school?"*				
	MANC		PLNC	
	1982	1993	1982	1998
not at all**	—	—	21.9%	7.2%
less than once a month	4.6%	10.9%	4.2%	5.8%
one to three times/mo.	3.2%	10.5%	15.0%	18.8%
once a week	9.3%	26.4%	30.3%	40.6%
twice a week	19.3%	51.6%	16.6%	18.8%
three or more times/wk.	63.5%	0.8%	12.1%	8.7%
Total	N=803	N=258	N=936	N=138

* PLNC survey adds, "(other than chapel)".

** MANC data is collapsed into "less than once a month".

The data appear to be mixed with church attendance decreasing in the MANC student population but increasing in the PLNC study (and this with a lower percentage of Nazarene students who, as we have already seen, tend to have greater conformity to norms). One wonders why the major shift away from three or more times per week in the MANC data. Perhaps there were specific opportunities available to the 1982 group that were not available to the 1993 sample.

The PLNC data also had a question on tithing available that indicated a decline in the practice. In 1982, 51.1% replied "usually" and another 24.4% said "sometimes" when asked if they tithed. By contrast, in the 1998 sample, given only "Yes" and "No" response options, only 40.6% replied "Yes".

Bottom line, some changes, but not a lot of slippage here.

Observance of religious norms is one thing, but spiritual experience is something else altogether. Do these students today report having a relationship with God? Are they "saved" and "sanctified" and "on their way to heaven"? The 1982 MANC data were not available for

analysis on these questions, but in the 1993 group, over 95% reported being "saved" and 68% said they were "sanctified". This compares favorably with 87% "saved" and 61% "sanctified" in the total 1982 study (including all 8 schools). In the PLNC study, those reporting being "saved" slightly increased from 85% in 1982 to 88% in 1998 and those reporting being "sanctified" increased from 58% to 69% (note: in the 1998 question, words of explanation were added further defining sanctification as "completely committed to God and living a Christian lifestyle").

Certainly no slippage here!

I should mention that on measures of belief, the PLNC comparisons showed little difference over time on a question regarding the inspiration of Scripture. The percentage agreeing with the traditional Nazarene position of "...fully inspired, without error in things necessary to salvation", actually increased from 64% to 68%. However, the percentage of those holding to the traditional Nazarene view of sanctification, "...an act of God...in which the believer, following regeneration, is made free from his sinful nature" decreased significantly from 51% to 28%. "Cleansed at regeneration" was close behind with 24% and "I do not understand" received the most responses at 30%. Sixty-seven percent of MANC students still held the traditional Nazarene position on sanctification in 1993.

Perhaps some confusion here regarding entire sanctification...

One more direction to explore, Christian lifestyle norms. For us Nazarenes, this has often been pretty close to the main issue. You may be a regular church attender, have a personal relationship with God, and even know your holiness doctrine, but do you a clean and godly life all through the week? As we have discussed, some lifestyle norms (like the prohibition against going to the movies) have changed with our full knowledge (if not always our full approval). Others, we have begun to wonder about...

"As a single college student, what is the most intimate you have gotten with a person of the opposite sex?"					
	MANC		PLNC		Total
	1982	1993	1982	1998	1982
Intercourse	21.5%	26.0%	21.1%	28.3%*	19.7%

(*Note: The question in the PLNC survey was re-worded to read, "Which of the following comes closest to describing your sexual activity?" 71.7% (80.0% of Nazarenes) answered, "I have never engaged in sexual intercourse". This is probably not a comparable question to the original instrument in that this question would infer a lifetime of sexual activity, whereas the original question would infer sexual activity only after coming to college. Therefore, this figure is probably too high. If we subtract out those who said they had not engaged in sexual intercourse in the last year, the percentage is reduced to 20.8%, a slight reduction from the 1982 figure. The MANC figure apparently shows some increase in sexual activity.)

"Have you ever experimented with any drugs such as marijuana or cocaine?"		
	PLNC	
	1982	1998
yes, regularly	5.4%	2.2%
yes, occasionally	14.3%	8.0%
yes, once	14.9%	5.8%
yes, before I was a Christian	10.1%	3.6%
no, I never have	54.8%	80.4%
Total	N=927	N=138

This is good news to the world! In the MANC study, data were not available for 1993. However, a substitute question asked whether or not students had taken any drugs in the past 12 months. Ninety-seven percent replied, "No". Trends among youth through the 1980's showed a decrease in drug use. However, in the 1990's, the rate has gone way up again. To the degree that these statistics are indicative of the PLNC student population, it is a marked decline of drug use over the 16 years and stands in stark contrast to the current youth culture statistics.

"Have you had any alcoholic beverages in the past 12 months?"				
	MANC		PLNC	
	1982	1993	1982	1998
Yes	24.8%	31.5%	59.3%	52.6%
No	75.2%	68.5%	40.7%	47.4%
Total	N=742	N=214	N=883	N=135

The CIRP data provide an additional measure of this question. Thirty-two percent of graduating PLNC seniors in 1995 stated they "drank beer" during the previous year and 48 percent said they "drank wine or liquor". (N=233) This appears to support the Nazarene student survey data. Dr. Ken Crow points out in his MANC report that most MANC students who reported consuming alcohol started drinking before they came to MANC. Only 14% of MANC students and 23% of PLNC students who reported drinking alcohol in the past year said they drank more at college than they did when they were living at home.

By contrast, in the CIRP data, only 1.9% of graduating PLNC students in 1994 (N=234) and 1.3% in 1995 (N=366) said they had "smoked cigarettes" in the previous year.

Taken as a whole, adherence to Christian lifestyle norms as measured by abstinence from drug, alcohol and tobacco use, has become stronger since 1982.

Conclusion

In all of the discussion of changing norms and values, much of what we care about the most for our church as seen in our youth appears to remain intact. While some measures are mixed and show some declines, there is little evidence overall of movement away from core values, beliefs and practices of the church in the past 10–15 years. In fact, on most measures, there is some indication of an increase in adherence. Possible exceptions that the church may want to take a closer look at include tithing, understanding of the doctrine of entire sanctification, and sexual intimacy.

Bottom line—No slippage! Well, at least not much. Next question... why?