

Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience Among Niagara University Students: Snapshots in 2019 And 2025

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Executive Summary

This report provides snapshots of religious affiliation, religious practice, and religious salience among students at Niagara University in spring 2019 and spring 2025. The findings are based on responses to identical survey items included in two university-wide survey research projects. Although the primary focus of the surveys differed, both collected measures of students' religious affiliation, frequency of religious service attendance, frequency of scripture reading, and the importance of religion or spirituality in students' lives. These data provide glimpses of student religiousness and allow for comparisons over time as well as across racial and ethnic groups.

Changes Over Time (2019–2025)

The distribution of religious affiliation shifted between 2019 and 2025. While Roman Catholicism remained the largest single affiliation at both times, the proportion of students identifying as Roman Catholic declined significantly, from approximately 45% in 2019 to 34% in 2025. Total Christian affiliation (Roman Catholic and Protestant combined) also declined, while the proportion of students reporting no religious affiliation increased from 24% to just over 29%. These changes were statistically significant and similar to broader national trends among young adults, although levels of religious unaffiliation at Niagara remained lower than national estimates.

Religious service attendance showed increasing polarization, with a higher percentage of students in 2025 reporting either no attendance or very frequent attendance, and fewer reporting occasional participation. Substantial change was observed for scripture reading, where the percentage of students reporting never reading scripture showed a notable decline, and the proportion reading scripture at least weekly nearly doubled between 2019 and 2025.

In contrast to practice, religious salience declined over time. In 2019, nearly 78% of respondents reported that religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important in their lives, compared to approximately 62% in 2025. Similarly, the proportion reporting religion or spirituality as very or extremely important declined from nearly one-third to just over one-quarter. Thus, while religious practice increased somewhat, students in 2025 reported lower religious salience overall.

Differences by Race and Ethnicity

Combining the 2019 and 2025 samples, religious affiliation, religious practice, and religious salience differed significantly by race and ethnicity. African-American students consistently reported the highest levels of religious practice and salience. They were substantially more likely than other groups to attend religious services frequently, to read scripture regularly, and to report religion or spirituality as very or extremely important in their lives. There were also more likely to identify as Protestant.

Importantly, multivariate analyses indicated that African-American students scored significantly higher on an overall measure of religiousness even after controlling for religious affiliation. This suggests that higher levels of religiousness among African-American students, which is reflective of prior research, cannot be explained solely by differences in religious affiliation.

Overall Conclusions

Overall, the results indicate that between 2019 and 2025 Niagara University students became less likely to identify as Roman Catholic and less likely to report high religious salience, although religious practice increased modestly. While levels of religious practice remain relatively low, the trends at Niagara are more promising than those observed among young adults nationally. While the study is subject to limitations related to nonrandom sampling and the scope of the religion questions, it provides a valuable picture of the changing religious landscape of Niagara University students. These findings have implications for campus ministry, student development efforts, and future research on religion and spirituality among college students.

Five Key Takeaways

1. ***Religious affiliation shifted between 2019 and 2025***, with a decline in Roman Catholic affiliation and an increase in students reporting no religious affiliation, although unaffiliation remains lower than among young adults nationally.
 2. ***Religious salience declined over time***, as fewer students reported that religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important in how they live their lives and make decisions. However, a clear majority still regarded religion or spirituality as having at least some importance.
 3. ***Religious practice showed some growth***, particularly in scripture reading, suggesting increased religious involvement among students despite declining salience overall.
 4. ***Clear racial and ethnic differences emerged***, with African-American students reporting substantially higher levels of religious practice and salience than other groups, even after accounting for religious affiliation.
 5. ***Overall patterns at Niagara University appear more promising than national trends***, with small but noticeable increases in religious participation.
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Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience Among Niagara University Students: Snapshots at Two Points in Time

Section I: Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a glimpse at two points in time, or two “snapshots,” of the religious faith and practice of Niagara University students. The data presented here are part of two larger survey research projects conducted with Niagara students during the spring 2019 and spring 2025 semesters. The 2019 project focused on students’ knowledge of and views about the sex abuse crisis and the Catholic Church’s response, and the 2025 project examined students’ views on capital punishment and their religiousness. As part of both projects, students were asked questions about their religious affiliation, the extent of their involvement in various religious practices, and the importance of religion in their life, also known as religious salience. The answers to those questions provide the basis for this report. The wording of the religion questions was identical for both cohorts, enabling comparisons over time.

Learning more detail about where students are in terms of religious faith is certainly important from a pastoral perspective, as this is an issue many young adults grapple with, and it is an impactful dimension of an individual’s holistic development (e.g., Pargament et al., 2005; Smith, 2003). From an even more “practical” perspective, religiousness, which is a combination of faith and practice, has been found to be associated with positive outcomes such as stronger attachment to parents, improved academic performance, and increased involvement in volunteer service, to name a few (e.g., Kim, 2015; Li and Murphy, 2018; Mooney, 2010; Smith and Snell, 2009). Research has also reported that religiousness serves as a protective factor against a variety of negative outcomes such as drug and alcohol abuse, crime, risky sexual behavior, and depression (e.g., Adamczyk et al., 2017; Brechting and Carlson, 2015; Ellison et al, 2008; Hoffmann, 2014; Rivera and Lauger, 2022; Smith and Snell, 2009).

Further, research has indicated that U.S. adults in general, and especially young adults, are becoming less religious over time (Pew Research Center, 2015b; Smith and Snell, 2009). However, a recent study by the Pew Research Center indicates that this trend seems to be slowing, and may even have leveled off (Smith, 2025). Comparing the results at Niagara from 2019 and 2025 will help to cast further light on these trends. Related to this, recent research has reported that although the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions starting in 2020 affected *how* people participate in religious services, overall *levels* of participation remained relatively steady throughout the pandemic (Pew Research Center, 2023). Thus, any changes at Niagara between 2019 and 2025 are not likely to be explained by the pandemic, but instead may reflect larger socio-cultural trends.

A more detailed description of the methodology, including the samples and the relevant survey questions, will be presented in this section. Section 2 will present the data on students’ religious affiliation, extent of involvement in various religious practices, and religious salience. Section 3 will examine the associations between race/ethnicity and religious affiliation, practice, and

salience.¹ A discussion of the results, including limitations of the study, will be presented in Section 4.

Methodology

Sample

As mentioned above, the data for this report are part of two larger survey research projects conducted with Niagara University students during the spring 2019 and spring 2025 semesters. A survey focusing on students' knowledge and views of the sex abuse crisis and the Church's response, but also containing questions on personal religious affiliation, practice, and salience, was emailed to all undergraduate and graduate students in February of 2019. In February of 2025, all undergraduate and graduate students were emailed a survey on their views on capital punishment and their religious affiliation, practice, and salience (see Appendix A for a copy of the religion items contained in each survey). For both surveys, students were informed in the emails about the purpose of the survey and that it was voluntary and anonymous. Also, as an incentive to participate, they were told they could enter a drawing to win one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards if they entered their email address after completing the survey. They were assured their email address would be stored in a separate data file and could in no way be associated with their responses to the survey questions.

A total of 898 students responded to the 2019 survey, 145 of whom chose not to complete the questions about personal religious affiliation, practice, and salience. The 2019 sample for this report thus consists of the 753 respondents who answered these questions. Of these respondents, 74% were female. In terms of race and ethnicity, 85% of the respondents identified as White, 5% as African American, 3% as Hispanic, 4% as Asian, and 3% as Other.

A total of 490 students responded to the 2025 survey, 171 of whom chose not to complete the religion questions. The 2025 sample for this report thus consists of the 319 respondents who answered these questions. Of these respondents, 79% were female. In terms of race and ethnicity, 79% of the respondents identified as White, just under 7% as African American, 5% as Hispanic, 5% as Asian, and 5% as Other.

Survey Items

Identical questions were used in both surveys to measure students' personal religious affiliation, involvement in religious practices, and religious salience. These questions, described below and included in Appendix A, are based on standard items used in the sociology of religion literature (e.g., Smith and Snell, 2009). Although these items do not provide an exhaustive inventory of an individual's religious faith and practice, they are among the most used in the literature.

To begin, students were asked about their personal *religious affiliation* with the options being "Catholic – Roman Catholic;" "Christian – non-Roman Catholic;" "Jewish;" "Muslim;" "Other;" and "None." Respondents could specify further if they chose "Other," and a full list of these other religions listed by respondents is contained in Appendix B. Due to a low number of responses, the categories of Jewish and Muslim were combined with the Other category for the current analyses. Also, although technically not all respondents in the Christian – non-Roman Catholic category are

¹ None of the affiliation, practice, and salience items differed significantly by gender.

Protestant, since for example a small portion could be Eastern Orthodox, for the sake of convenience the group will be referred to as Protestant in this report.

In terms of religious practice, *religious service attendance* was measured with the question, “Other than for special occasions and ceremonies (e.g., weddings and funerals), how often do you attend religious services?” with response categories ranging from “Never” to “More than once a week.” *Frequency of scripture reading* was measured with the question, “Other than during religious services, how often do you read the scriptures of your religious tradition?” with response categories ranging from “Never” to “Once a day or more.” Students were also asked about *religious salience* with the question, “How important is religious faith or spirituality for how you live your life and make decisions?” with response categories ranging from “Not at all important” to “Extremely important.”

Section 2: Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience

Section 2 presents the data on the religious affiliation, frequency of service attendance and scripture reading, and salience of religion for the survey respondents in 2019 and 2025, and tests for statistically significant differences between the two cohorts.

Religious Affiliation

Table 1 contains the details of the religious affiliation of the respondents. In 2019, nearly 45% reported being Roman Catholic and approximately 27% reported being Protestant (Christian – non-Roman Catholic), for a total of nearly 72% who reported a Christian religious affiliation. This is compared to approximately 34% who reported being Catholic and 26% Protestant, for a total of 60% who reported a Christian religious affiliation, in 2025. The percentage of respondents reporting no religious affiliation increased from 24% to slightly more than 29%. The overall change from 2019 to 2025 was statistically significant ($\chi^2=27.615$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

Table 1. Religious Affiliation

	2019 % of Respondents	2025 % of Respondents
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	44.8%	33.5%
<i>Protestant</i>	27.1%	26.0%
<i>Other</i>	4.1%	11.3%
<i>None</i>	24.0%	29.2%
	100%	100%

$\chi^2=27.615$, $df=3$, $p<.001$

Table 2 contains the details of how often the respondents attend religious services. The percentage who reported never attending increased from 29.1% to 33.2% from 2019 to 2025, while the percentage attending once a week or more also increased from 12.3% to 13.5%. Basically, in the more recent sample, students were less likely to report occasional attendance (e.g., once a month) and were more likely to report either no attendance or frequent attendance. The overall change from 2019 to 2025 was statistically significant ($\chi^2=11.591$, $df=5$, $p<.05$).

Religious Service Attendance

Table 2. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance

	2019 % of Respondents	2025 % of Respondents
<i>Never</i>	29.1%	33.2%
<i>A few times a year</i>	42.4%	43.3%
<i>Once a month</i>	6.8%	5.3%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	9.4%	4.7%
<i>Once a week</i>	10.2%	9.4%
<i>More than once a week</i>	2.1%	4.1%
	100%	100%

$$\chi^2=11.591, df=5, p=.04$$

Scripture Reading

Table 3 contains results for the frequency of scripture reading. It is important to note that this question asked students how often they read the scriptures of their religious tradition *other than during religious services*.

Table 3. Frequency of Scripture Reading

	2019 % of Respondents	2025 % of Respondents
<i>Never</i>	64.5%	52.7%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	21.2%	21.3%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	4.3%	6.3%
<i>About once a week</i>	4.3%	4.7%
<i>A few times a week</i>	2.6%	7.2%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	3.1%	7.8%
	100%	100%

$$\chi^2=30.118, df=5, p<.001$$

The percentage reporting never reading scripture dropped from 64.5% in 2019 to 52.7% in 2025. At the other end of the spectrum, in 2019 a total of 10% of students reported reading scripture either once a week (4.3%), a few times a week (2.6%), or once a day or more (3.1%). In 2025 these numbers nearly doubled to a total of 19.7% who reported reading scripture either once a week (4.7%), a few times a week (7.2%), or once a day or more (7.8%). The overall change from 2019 to 2025 was statistically significant ($\chi^2=30.118, df=5, p<.001$).

Religious Salience

Table 4 presents the results for the religious salience item measuring the importance of religion or spirituality for how the respondent lives his or her life and makes decisions. In 2019, just under 78% of all respondents considered religion or spirituality at least somewhat important in their life, and nearly one-third considered it either very or extremely important (31.6%). By 2025 religious salience had dipped, with approximately 62% considering religion or spirituality at least somewhat

important, and about one-quarter (26.3%) considering it very or extremely important. The overall change from 2019 to 2025 was statistically significant ($\chi^2=29.807$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

Table 4. Religious Salience

	2019 % of Respondents	2025 % of Respondents
<i>Not at all important</i>	22.1%	37.9%
<i>Somewhat important</i>	46.3%	35.7%
<i>Very important</i>	18.9%	13.8%
<i>Extremely important</i>	12.7%	12.5%
	100%	100%

$\chi^2=29.807$, $df=3$, $p<.001$

Section 3: Race/Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience

This section will examine differences across racial and ethnic categories in terms of religious affiliation, practice, and salience. The analyses reported here are based on a combined sample of the 2019 and 2025 cohorts ($n=1,072$) to increase statistical power and the robustness of the results. Preliminary analyses revealed that the nature of the association between race/ethnicity and the religion variables did not change between the 2019 and 2025 cohorts. Statistically speaking, there was no interaction between cohort year and the effect of race/ethnicity; thus, combining cohorts for these analyses is statistically appropriate.

Religious Affiliation and Race/Ethnicity

As Table 5 reveals, religious affiliation did differ significantly by race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 193.463$; $df = 12$; $p < .001$). African-American students were more than twice as likely as any other race or ethnicity to identify as Protestant, with more than 71% selecting this as their religious affiliation. African-American students were also the least likely to have no religious affiliation, with only 12.5% reporting no affiliation.

Table 5. Religious Affiliation by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	45.5%	7.1%	46.2%	19.5%	26.3%
<i>Protestant</i>	24.3%	71.4%	25.6%	19.5%	28.9%
<i>Other</i>	3.7%	8.9%	2.6%	43.9%	18.4%
<i>None</i>	26.5%	12.5%	25.6%	17.1%	26.3%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 193.463$; $df = 12$; $p < .001$

Hispanic students were the most likely to identify as Roman Catholic at 46.2%, followed closely by White students, 45.5% of whom identified as Roman Catholic. Asian students were equally split between Roman Catholic and Protestant (19.5% each), and were most likely to select a religious affiliation of Other (43.9%). For students who selected “Other” for race and ethnicity, slightly more than half identified as either Roman Catholic or Protestant (26.3% and 28.9%,

respectively). White students were the most likely to report no religious affiliation at 26.5%, followed closely by students who reported a race of Other (26.3%) and Hispanic students (25.6%).

Frequency of Religious Service Attendance and Race/Ethnicity

Frequency of religious service attendance also differed significantly across race and ethnicity, as shown in Table 6 ($\chi^2 = 55.085$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$). The clearest pattern in the data is that African-American students reported attending services more frequently than any other race or ethnicity, with a total of 33.9% reporting attending a few times a month or more (i.e., either 2-3 times a month, once a week, or more than once a week). Further, nearly 11% of African American students reported attending services more than once a week, which is more than four times as high as the next highest groups, Hispanic and Other, both at 2.6%.

Table 6. Frequency of Religious Service Attendance by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Never</i>	32.3%	14.3%	33.3%	4.9%	34.2%
<i>A few times a year</i>	42.0%	46.4%	48.7%	56.1%	31.6%
<i>Once a month</i>	6.3%	5.4%	0%	12.2%	7.9%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	7.9%	7.1%	7.7%	17.1%	0%
<i>Once a week</i>	9.4%	16.1%	7.7%	7.3%	23.7%
<i>More than once a week</i>	2.2%	10.7%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$\chi^2 = 55.085$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$

Students who selected Other for race/ethnicity were most likely to report never attending services, at 34.2% (but also attended weekly at 23.7%), followed closely by Hispanic (33.3%) and White (32.3%) students. Asian students were the least likely to report never attending, at 4.9%, although those who did attend were most likely to attend only a few times a year (56.1%).

Frequency of Scripture Reading and Race/Ethnicity

As revealed in Table 7, students' frequency of scripture reading also differed significantly across race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 86.392$; $df = 20$; $p < .001$). There was a clear trend in the data of African-American students reading scripture more frequently than other students. Nearly 43% of African-American students reported reading scripture once a week or more (i.e., about once a week, a few times a week, or once a day or more), a percentage that is nearly double the percentage for the next highest group, which was Hispanics at 23.1%. 21.1% of students who selected a race or ethnicity of Other reported reading scripture once a week or more, followed by White students at 10.3% and Asian students at 9.7%.

Table 7. Frequency of Scripture Reading by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Never</i>	64.2%	32.1%	43.6%	56.1%	57.9%
<i>Once a month or less</i>	21.1%	16.1%	28.2%	26.8%	13.2%
<i>2-3 times a month</i>	4.5%	8.9%	5.1%	7.3%	7.9%
<i>About once a week</i>	4.1%	10.7%	0%	2.4%	7.9%
<i>A few times a week</i>	3.2%	10.7%	12.8%	2.4%	5.3%
<i>Once a day or more</i>	3.0%	21.4%	10.3%	4.9%	7.9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 86.392; df = 20; p < .001$$

Religious Salience and Race/Ethnicity

Although most students, regardless of race and ethnicity, reported that religion or spirituality were at least somewhat important in their life, Table 8 reveals that religious salience differed significantly across race and ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 42.739; df = 12; p < .001$). African-American students reported the highest religious salience compared to other students, as 57.1% indicated religion or spirituality were either very or extremely important. The next highest group is students who selected a race or ethnicity of Other, with 39.5% answering either very or extremely important, followed by Hispanic students at 30.8%, Asian students at 29.3%, and White students at 27.8%.

Table 8. Religious Salience by Race and Ethnicity

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Not at all important</i>	29.0%	12.5%	28.2%	12.2%	21.1%
<i>Somewhat important</i>	43.2%	30.4%	41.0%	58.5%	39.5%
<i>Very important</i>	17.2%	23.2%	15.4%	19.5%	15.8%
<i>Extremely important</i>	10.6%	33.9%	15.4%	9.8%	23.7%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$$\chi^2 = 42.739; df = 12; p < .001$$

Section 4: Discussion and Conclusions

As part of two larger survey research projects conducted with Niagara University students in the spring of 2019 (n=753) and the spring of 2025 (n=319), data were collected on undergraduate and graduate students' religious affiliation, involvement in religious practices, and religious salience. Basic demographic information such as gender and race/ethnicity were also collected. Analysis of these data provides a glimpse at two points in time, or two "snapshots," into the religious faith and practice of Niagara students. It also allows us to examine whether there were any differences in the religiousness of students who attended Niagara in 2019 and those who attended in 2025, and whether there were any differences across race and ethnicity.

The distribution of religious affiliation did change over time. Although Roman Catholic was the largest group at both time points, which is expected given that Niagara is a Catholic university, the percentage of students who are Catholic dropped from approximately 45% to under 34%. This

difference between 2019 and 2025 could at least partly be explained by the broader topics of the surveys. The topic of the 2019 survey was the sex abuse crisis in the Church, which might have been disproportionately of interest to Catholic students thus leading to a higher proportion of Catholic respondents. The 2025 survey, on the other hand, focused on capital punishment, which would be less likely to draw interest from one religious group more than others.

Also of note is that the percentage of students who reported no affiliation increased from 24% to 29%, a pattern of increase that is in line with national estimates, although the absolute levels of no affiliation are lower at Niagara compared to nationally. For example, in its 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, the Pew Research Center estimated that 36% of young adults were religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center, 2015a), and that number rose to 43% of this age group in the 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Study (Smith et al., 2025).

Niagara students in both cohorts generally regarded religion or spirituality as at least somewhat important in their lives, although religious salience was lower for the 2025 cohort. In 2019, over 77% reported religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important, and nearly one-third (31.6%) reported it was very or extremely important. In 2025, these numbers had decreased to 62% reporting religion or spirituality was at least somewhat important, and 26.3% reporting it was very or extremely important. In either cohort, this importance did not necessarily translate into frequent involvement in religious practices. 10% of students reported reading scripture at least once a week in 2019, compared to 19.7% in 2025, and just over 12% reported attending services at least once a week in 2019, compared to 13.5% in 2025.

It is noteworthy that although the estimates of participation are slightly lower at Niagara compared to national samples of young adults, the trend between 2019 and 2025 at Niagara is more promising than the national trend. Specifically, the pattern at Niagara is one of slightly increasing scripture reading and service attendance, while the national pattern for young adults is going in the opposite direction. For example, a comparison of results from the 2014 and the 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Studies reveal that the percentage of young adults who reported reading scripture at least weekly decreased from 27% to 15%, and the percentage who reported at least weekly service attendance also decreased from 27% to 18% (Pew Research Center 2015a; Smith et al., 2025).

The somewhat low levels of religious participation among Niagara students are similar to those seen in young adults nationwide, and likely at least partly reflect the increasingly busy schedules of college students and their first “taste of freedom” from required religious participation with their parents. These levels could also speak to a potential disconnect between religious salience and practice, whereby although religion or spirituality is important in students’ lives, they are not necessarily connecting with traditional practices such as service attendance and scripture reading. However, at Niagara the two are trending towards each other, as salience decreased between 2019 and 2025 while participation increased.

A consistent trend in the analyses regarding race and ethnicity is that African-American students reported more involvement in religious practices as well as higher religious salience. These findings are in line with prior research (e.g., Markstrom, 1999; Pearce et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2025). This could potentially be explained by the fact that more than 70% of African-American students identified as Protestant, which is more than double the proportion for any of the other groups (see

Table 5), and prior research has shown Protestants to be generally more religious compared to Roman Catholics and adherents of other religions (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2015b; Smith et al., 2025; Smith and Snell, 2009).

Running a multivariate statistical model, using an individual's race and ethnicity to predict religiousness while controlling religious affiliation, would allow an examination of this issue. Such an analysis would separate the effects of race and ethnicity from religious affiliation, and would reveal whether there is an association between race and ethnicity and religiousness above and beyond any effect of religious affiliation. Thus, if African-American students scored higher on religiousness compared to other students in this statistical model, this would indicate that the greater involvement of African-American students in religious practices, and higher religious salience, was not simply because they were more likely to be Protestant.

To that end, and following standard practice in the academic literature, a religiousness scale was constructed for each respondent by combining their responses to the three items measuring involvement in religious practices and religious salience – religious service attendance, scripture reading, and the importance of faith and spirituality. Specifically, each of the three questions was first standardized (i.e., z-transformed) to put them all on the same metric. The mean of these three standardized items was then calculated to arrive at an overall measure of religiousness for each individual.

A multivariate regression model² was then estimated using an individual's race and ethnicity to predict religiousness, controlling for religious affiliation. The results revealed that African-American students scored statistically significantly higher on the overall religiousness scale compared to other students even after accounting for religious affiliation ($b=.514$; $t= 4.39$; $p <.001$). Thus, the findings discussed above that African-American students were more involved in religious practices and reported higher religious salience were not simply because they were more likely to be Protestant. Future studies could include a more in-depth qualitative component along with the standard religious salience and practice questions to shed additional light on such findings.

Limitations

It is important to note a few limitations to the current study which should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, the samples are not random samples of Niagara University students, and are not necessarily representative of the overall student body in either 2019 or 2025. Although the survey was sent to the entire population of undergraduate and graduate students, those who chose to respond are likely not representative of students overall. Especially since the topics of the surveys were the sex abuse crisis and the Catholic Church's response in 2019, and capital punishment in 2025, students who had more knowledge or stronger feelings about these issues were probably more likely to respond, leading to the possibility of selection bias in the sample. Regardless, these samples, with a total of 1,072 respondents, are still a sizeable proportion of Niagara students and do include good cross-sections of religious affiliations, gender, and race/ethnicity.

² Specifically, a Tobit regression model was estimated to address the right-censoring of the distribution of the religiousness scale variable.

One other limitation is that although the survey questions in the current study covered key religious practices as well as religious salience, and can provide important insights into the religious faith of students, they do not provide an exhaustive picture. The number of questions was limited in order to keep the surveys manageable for the students. Future research, focused purely on religious faith and practice, could increase the number of questions asked and include a qualitative component to provide a more comprehensive assessment.

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**Appendix A: Religious Affiliation, Practice, and Salience Items
Included in 2019 and 2025 Surveys**

1. What is your religious affiliation?
 - a. Catholic – Roman Catholic
 - b. Christian – non-Roman Catholic
 - c. Jewish
 - d. Muslim
 - e. Other _____
 - f. None
2. Other than for special occasions and ceremonies (e.g., weddings and funerals), how often do you attend religious services?
 - a. Never
 - b. A few times a year
 - c. Once a month
 - d. 2-3 times a month
 - e. Once a week
 - f. More than once a week
3. Other than during religious services, how often do you read the scriptures of your religious tradition?
 - a. Never
 - b. Once a month or less
 - c. 2-3 times a month
 - d. About once a week
 - e. A few times a week
 - f. Once a day or more
4. How important is religious faith or spirituality for how you live your life and make decisions?
 - a. Not at all important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Very important
 - d. Extremely important

Appendix B: Religions Listed in “Other” Category by Respondents

Religions Listed in Religious Affiliation Category of “Other” in 2019

	# of Respondents
Buddhism	9
Eckankar	1
Hindu	2
Native American	1
Pagan	1
Pastafarian	1
“In Transition”	1
Not sure	2
	18

Religions Listed in Religious Affiliation Category of “Other” in 2025

	# of Respondents
Catholic and Muslim	1
Hindu	3
Longhouse	1
Pagan	2
Pantheism	1
Shinto Buddhist	1
Spiritual	1
Raised Catholic, now unsure	1
Unsure	1
	12