



# Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose

Higher Education Research Institute  
University of California, Los Angeles

Funded By  
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# Research Questions

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- What role does spirituality play in the lives of today's college students?
- What is the connection between spirituality and religion?
- How many students are actively engaged in a spiritual quest?
- What are institutions doing that aids or inhibits students in this quest?



# What is Spirituality?

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- Points to our interiors
- Is qualitative and affective
- Involves our values, beliefs, meaning, and purpose
- Has to do with our connectedness to others and the world around us
- Refers to those elements of our lives that are difficult to define or put into words (i.e., intuition, creativity, inspiration, and the sacred)



# Design of the Study

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- Spring 2003 pilot: 3,700 students
- Fall 2004: survey 112,000 freshmen
- Spring 2007: follow up 15,000 juniors
- Survey of Faculty in 2004-2005



# Indicators of Spirituality

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- Have an interest in spirituality 81%
- Believe in the sacredness of life 84%
- My spirituality is a source of joy 64%
- Seeking opportunities to grow spiritually 47%
  
- Searching for meaning/purpose in life 76%
- Discuss meaning of life with friends 74%
- Spiritual experience: witnessing nature 62%
- Spiritual experience: listening to music 58%



# Indicators of Religiousness

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- Attended Religious Services 81%
- Discussed religion/spirituality 80%
- Believe in God 79%
- Religious beliefs: strength, support, guidance 68%
- Follow religious teaching in everyday life 40%
- Pray 69%



# Religious Tolerance

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- “Non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers” 84%
- “Most people can grow spiritually without being religious” 63%
- “People who don’t believe in God will be punished” 35%



# Expectations for College

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- Encourage personal expression of spirituality 48%
- Enhance self-understanding 69%
- Prepare for responsible citizenship 67%
- Develop personal values 67%
- Provide for emotional development 63%

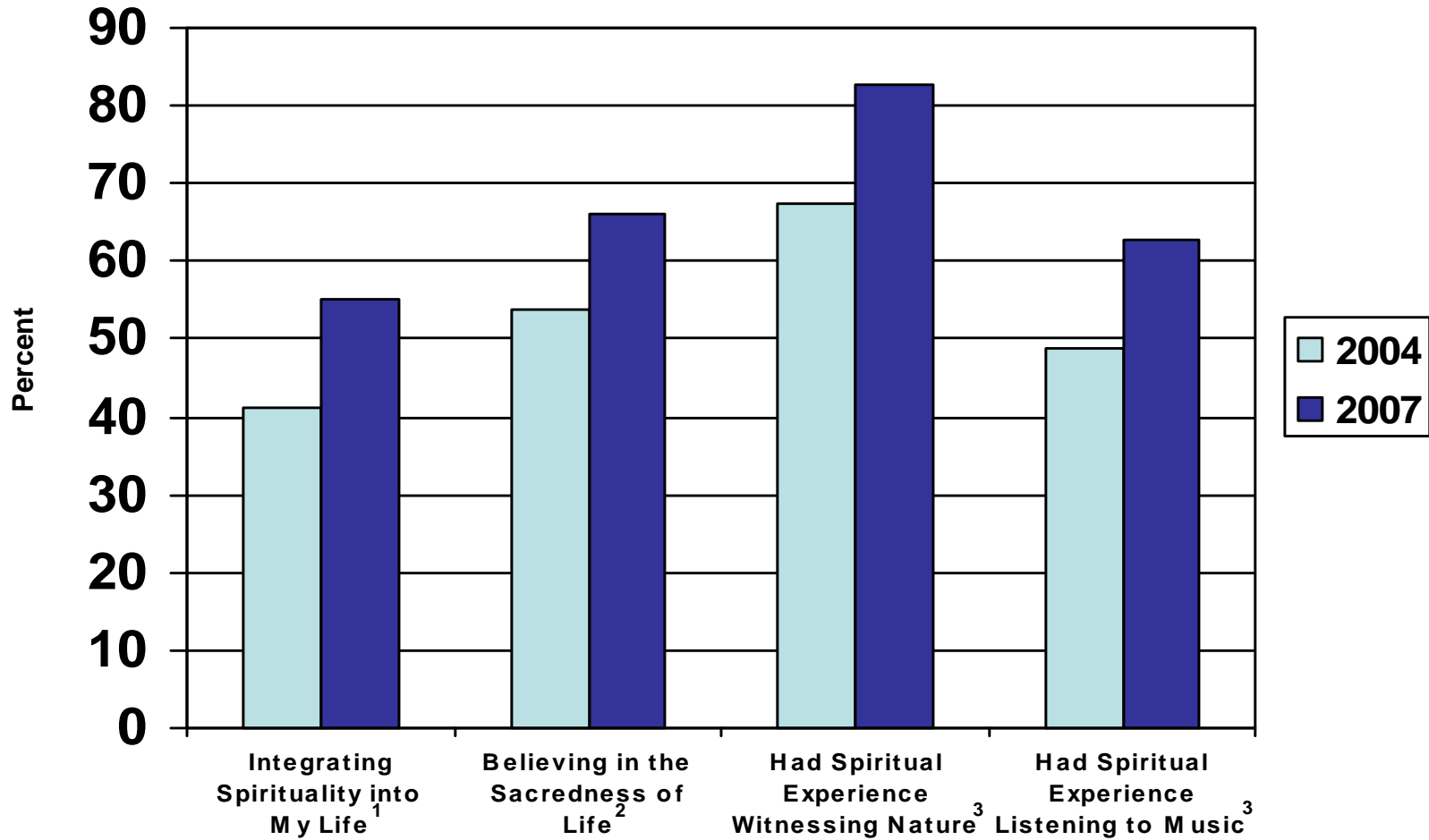


# Spiritual Qualities Showing Increases During College

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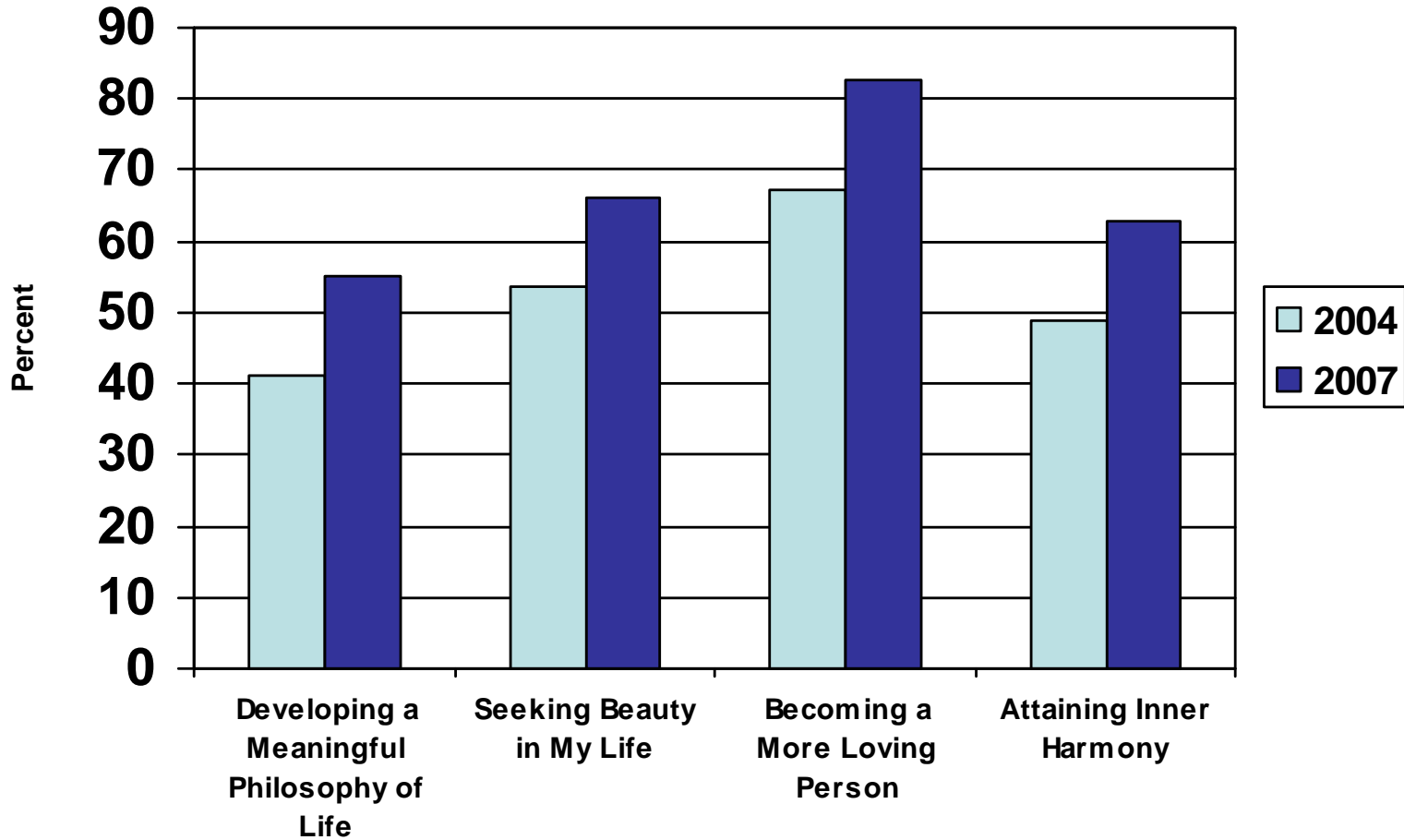
- **Spirituality**
- **Spiritual Quest**
  
- **Equanimity**
- **Ethic of Caring**
- **Ecumenical Worldview**

# Spirituality



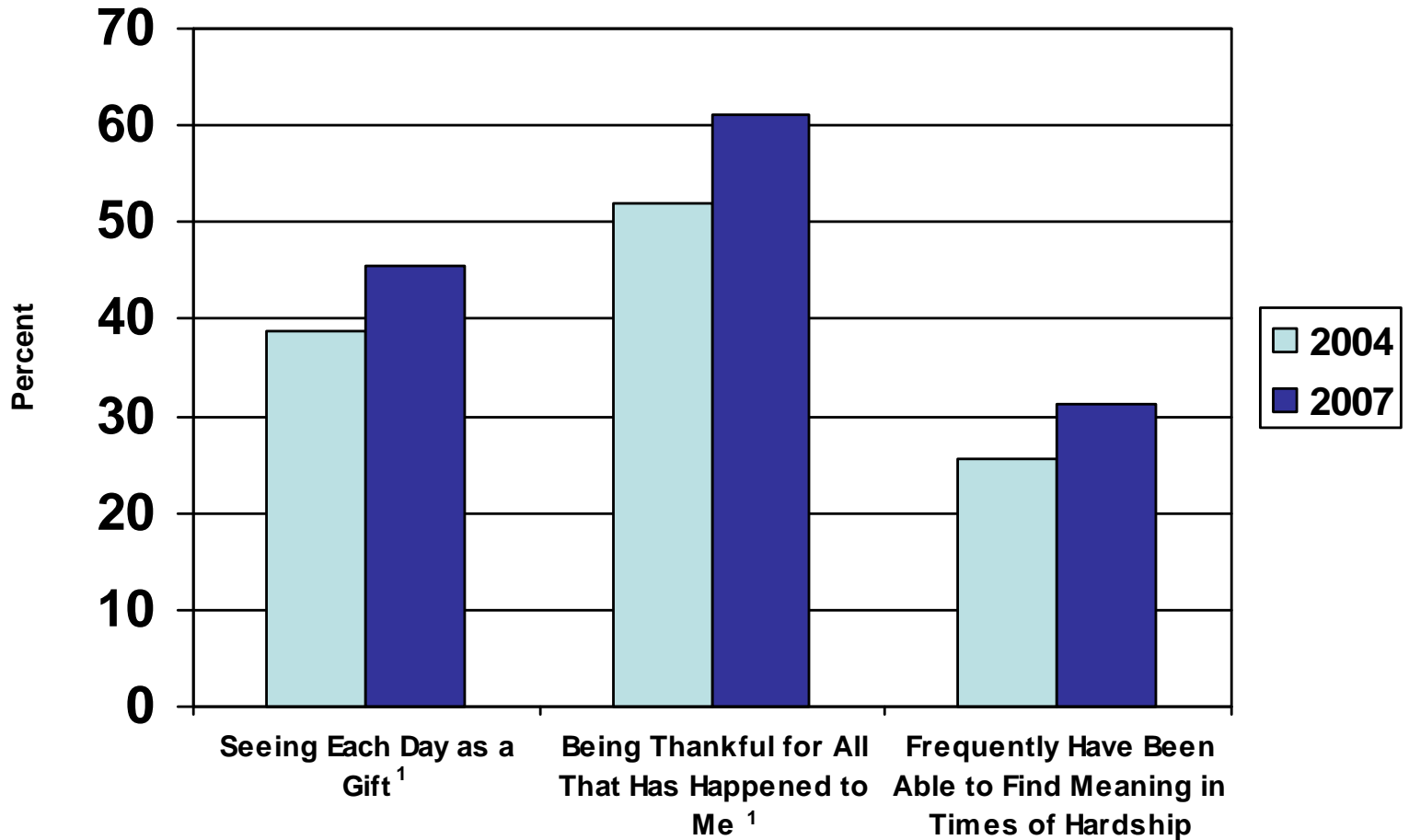
- Notes: 1. Students identified objective as "very important" or "essential" to them.  
2. Students indicated that these descriptions characterize them to "a great extent."  
3. Students indicated that they "frequently" or "occasionally" have had such spiritual experiences.

# Spiritual Quest



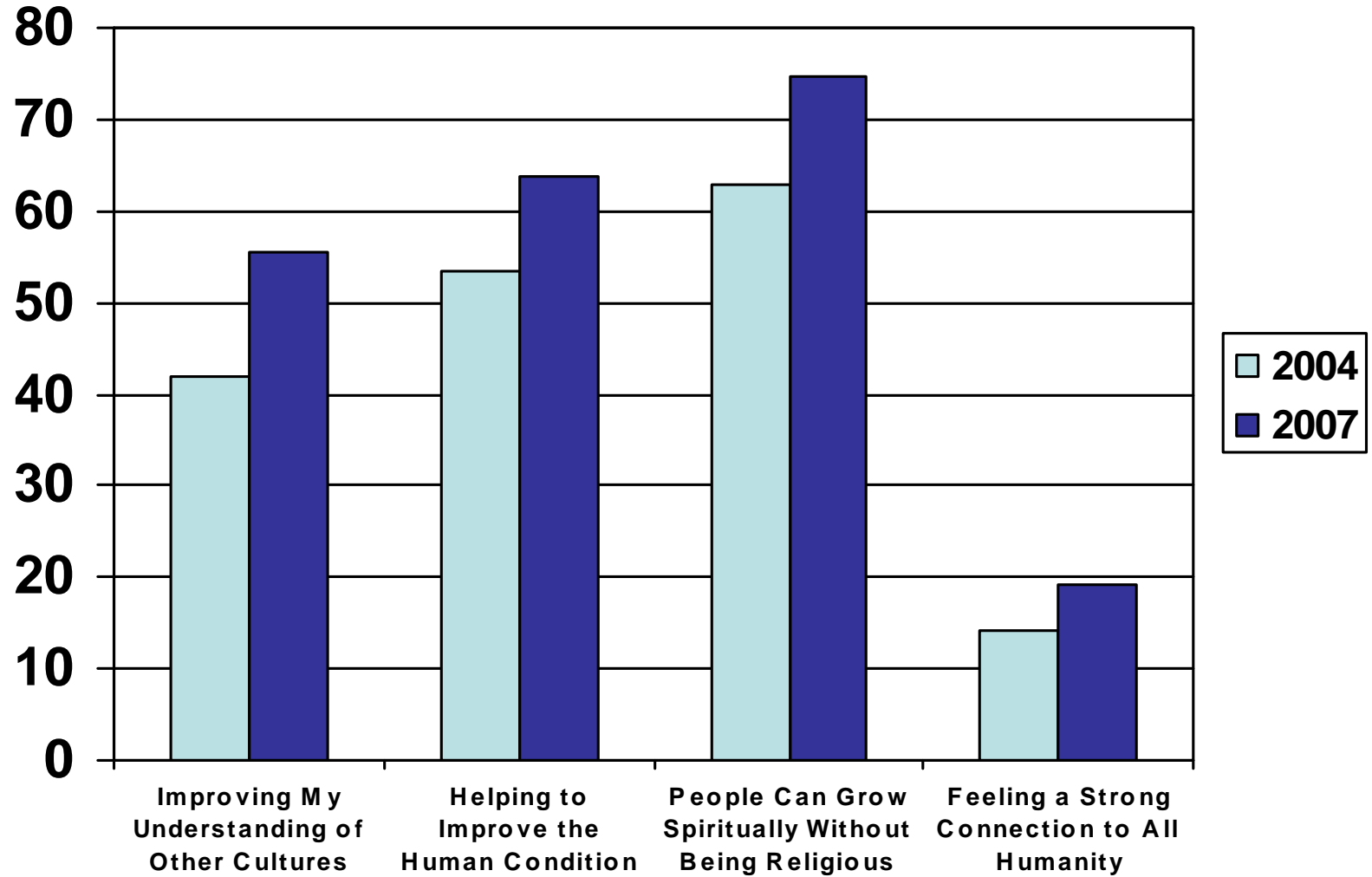
Note: For all items students identified objective as "very important" or "essential" to them.

# Equanimity



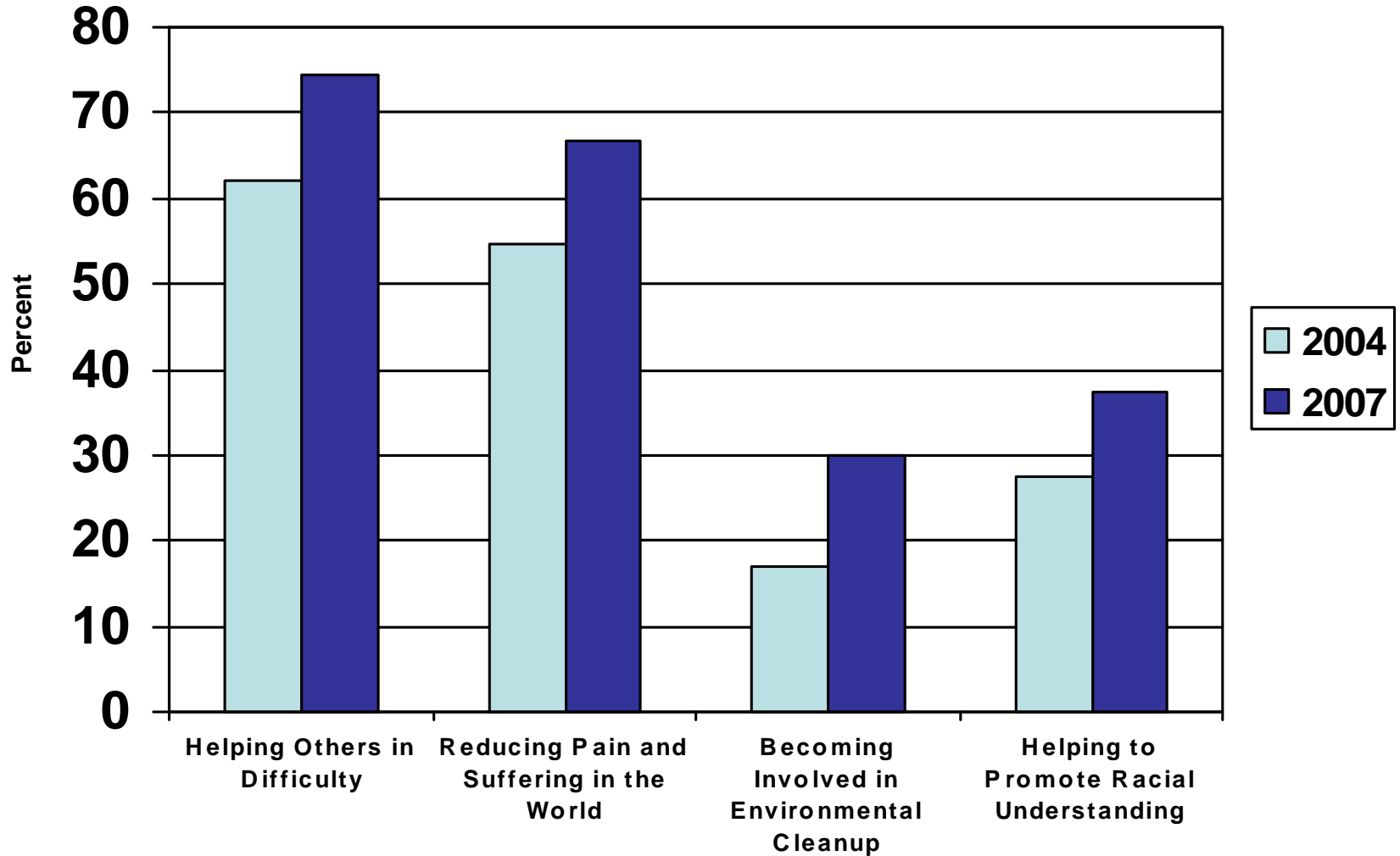
Note: 1. Students indicated that these descriptions characterize them to "a great extent."

# Ecumenical Worldview



Notes: 1. Students identified objective as "very important" or "essential" to them.  
2. Students indicated that they agreed "strongly" or "somewhat" with the statement.

# Ethic of Caring



Note: For all items students identified objective as "very important" or "essential" to them.



# Faculty Effects on Students' Spiritual Development

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- Direct Encouragement
- Reflective writing and journaling
- Collaborative group projects
- Contemplation/meditation



# EFFECTS OF MAJOR

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- **POSITIVE:** fine arts, health professions, biological sciences, social sciences
- **NEGATIVE:** engineering, mathematics, physical science, other technical fields



# Other Positive Influences

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- Service learning
- Interdisciplinary courses
- Study abroad programs
  
- Leadership training
- Intercollegiate athletics
- Student organizations



# Negative Influences on Spiritual Development

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- Watching television
- Playing video games
- Frequent drinking/partying



# Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose

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- Project Website:

**[WWW.SPIRITUALITY.UCLA.EDU](http://WWW.SPIRITUALITY.UCLA.EDU)**