

Student Religious Affiliation United Methodist-Related Higher Education Institutions Years 2004 - 2008

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Introduction

Until the early 1990s, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry collected data from United Methodist-related post-secondary educational institutions using the MINDS¹ data collection system. Data were used to present statistical summaries about the institutions' admissions, enrollment, and fiscal health. In 1993, in response to a mandate to collect standardized data from all institutions receiving student financial aid, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) began to collect data through the Integrated post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The IPEDS data collection system made the MINDS system redundant and unnecessary. For that reason, the MINDS program at GBHEM was discontinued.

The IPEDS system available through NCES provides a plethora of data for use by researchers and institutions. One piece of information not collected by this federal government system, however, is student religious affiliation. In recent years, examination of the religious affiliation of students has become increasingly important to The United Methodist Church. Anecdotal evidence has been used to support the argument that the United Methodist-related institutions educate few United Methodist students. To test this argument, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry collected religious affiliation data for 2004-2008. We find that the majority of students at these institutions are Protestant and the single most common denomination is United Methodist or Methodist.

Methodology

The primary research questions addressed are (1) How many United Methodists are enrolled students at the United Methodist-related institutions? (2) How does the percentage of United Methodist students compare to students of another religious affiliation? (3) Do United Methodist students differ from students of other religious affiliations in characteristics of age, race and sex?

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry requested aggregate student religious affiliation data for the years 2004 through 2008 from all 98² United Methodist-related post-secondary educational institutions. The request was sent via e-mail to the president or CEO of the institution inviting the president/CEO to forward the request to the appropriate person. Attached to the e-mail message was an Excel workbook containing four worksheets on enrolled student religious affiliation by sex, by age, by race, and by in-state/out-of-state attendance. The institutions were requested to complete one workbook for each of the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008.

The data request was large and complex. Some institutions were able to supply all information, others could only respond partially (unable to complete one or more of the worksheets, or one or more years of data) and some were simply unable to respond (data were not extractable, were not available, were not electronic, and

¹ MINDS is the Methodist Interactive Database System developed by the GBHEM.

² The 10 United Methodist-related pre-collegiate schools, one professional school, and the 13 seminaries and theological schools are not included.

inadequate staffing were some of the reasons given)³. Institutions are not required to gather religious affiliation from students and among those who attempt to gather, students are not required to report. Finally, a variety of data collection and recording methods are used at the higher education institutions meaning that there is little consistency across the institutions. Some institutions gathered religious affiliation and coded the data. At other institutions, religious affiliation is a text field. Collapsing the text data into pre-defined denominational family categories was difficult if not impossible for some.

Data collection began June 2009 and ended October 2009. A total of 55 of the 98 institutions provided at least some of the relevant data requested, but complete information (all 4 worksheets were completed for each of five years) was provided by 41 institutions (See Appendix A for a list of responding institutions). This response rate of 56 percent is good considering the complexity of the data request and the diversity of data collection and reporting methods.

Measures

Institutions were asked to provide aggregate information about religious affiliation of their student population. A variety of sources were consulted to develop the list of religious affiliations; primary among them was the Association of Theological Schools denominational affiliation report form and the *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. Rather than listing the innumerable denominations, the GBHEM reporting form listed the major denominational families as well as religious affiliations: Adventist, Baptist, Brethren, Catholic, Church of God, Episcopal, Friends Religious Society (Quaker), Latter Day Saint/Mormon, Lutheran, Mennonite, Muslim, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Reformed, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ, United Methodist/Methodist, Other Religious Affiliation, No Religious Affiliation, and Religious Affiliation Unknown. Institutions were to identify the total number of enrolled by religious affiliation.

Institutions used the other category for any religious affiliations that were not listed on the GBHEM form. This means that the other category includes both Protestant/Christian religious affiliations as well as other religious affiliations. There was also inconsistency across institutions; one institution included African Methodist Episcopal (AME) under United Methodist/Methodist, but another institution included AME under Other. Appendix B lists the religious affiliations included in other.

For the other worksheets, institutions were to provide total numbers of enrolled students by religious affiliation and characteristics (total number United Methodist for each age group, race, and sex). Problems with the data collection instrument, the aggregate nature of the data the varied methods of data collection at the institutions, as well as other reporting errors made the data in the worksheets on age, race, and sex by religious affiliation of insufficient quality for analysis. Therefore, analysis is based on enrollment and religious affiliation only.

Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis is conducted using existing data provided by the post-secondary educational institutions related to The United Methodist Church. Data analysis for 2008 is based on 53 institutions and analysis for historical trend data (2004-2008) is based on 44 institutions. Data were entered into an Excel workbook by the institution. These institutional worksheets were then collapsed for analysis into four

³ Findings from this first request will be used to modify GBHEM's request for data in subsequent years.

workbooks: sex, age, race, and state with worksheets for each year and then uploaded to SPSS⁴. During preliminary analysis (frequencies and crosstabs) it was discovered that the reporting categories on some worksheets resulted in a large percentage of missing data as well as inconsistency in reporting religious affiliation by age, race, and sex. One flaw in the instrument design is that worksheets did not include fields for unknown age, non-resident alien, and international students. Conclusions based on those worksheets must be approached with caution. One potential solution to the myriad data problems is to obtain individual level de-identified enrollment data from the institutions. This would insure that all data coding and analysis is consistent across institutions and allow for deeper analysis rather than simply reporting totals.

For analysis, Catholic and Roman Catholic were collapsed into religious affiliation-Catholic. All denominations are grouped into religious affiliation-Protestant, so that religious affiliation could be discussed separate from religious denomination.

FINDINGS

Year 2008

In 2008, the 53 institutions reported total enrollment of 109,314 students. The size of the institutions varies greatly, ranging from a low of 116 students enrolled, and a high of 12,755 students enrolled at another institution. For nearly one-third (32%, 35,324) of the enrolled students, religious affiliation is missing or unknown. In other words, no information is available about whether or not the student claims a religious affiliation.

Among the 73,990 students whose religious affiliation is identified in 2008 the greatest percentage of students are Protestant. Shown in table 1, 37 percent of the students are Protestant followed by 22 percent who are Catholic. A small percentage of students are Jewish, but few students at these 53 institutions are Muslim. The religious composition among students at these institutions is similar to the composition among the US population where approximately ⁵18% are mainline Protestant (51% evangelical, mainline, and historically black Protestant), 24% are Catholic, 2% are Jewish, 1% are Muslim⁶.

Table 1. Religious Affiliation

Religion	N Students	Valid %
Protestant	27,475	37%
Catholic	16,140	22%
Jewish	3,219	4%
Muslim	757	1%
Other ⁷	14,504	20%
None	11,895	16%
Total	73,990	100%
<i>Missing/Unknown</i>	35,324	
TOTAL Enrollment	109,314	

Among the Protestant denominations in 2008, the greatest percentage of students is United Methodist at 35 percent of the Protestant students (United Methodist represents 9% of the total student enrollment)⁸.

⁴ Statistical Software Package for the Social Sciences

⁵ Percentages rounded to nearest whole.

⁶ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life/U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008

⁷ Other includes some Protestant denominations as well as other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, etc.).

Following closely behind the United Methodist students are Baptist students representing 31 percent of the Protestant students (table 2).

Table 2. Protestant Denominations

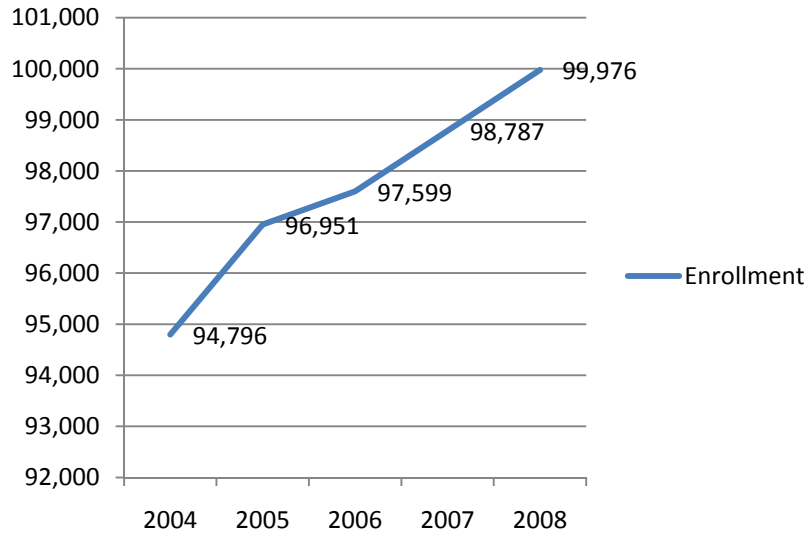
Denomination	N	Percent
United Methodist/Methodist	9,637	35%
Baptist	8,491	31%
Lutheran	3,238	12%
Presbyterian	2,351	9%
Episcopal	1,445	5%
United Church of Christ	754	3%
Pentecostal	501	2%
Orthodox	390	1%
Church of God	230	1%
Reformed	113	<1%
Latter Day Saints (Mormon)	92	<1%
Adventist	76	<1%
Brethren	56	<1%
Friend, Religious Society	54	<1%
Mennonite	47	<1%
TOTAL	27, 475	100%

Trends 2004- 2008

Enrollment

Forty-four institutions provided enrollment data for all five years (2004-2008). Among those institutions, enrollment has steadily increased from 94,796 students in 2004 to 99,976 students in 2008, a 5.5 percent increase of 5,180 students (figure 1). While enrollment overall has steadily increased over the five years, all 44 institutions are not experiencing increased enrollment. In fact, enrollment actually decreased at some individual institutions, but enrollment increased much more at other institutions. Fifteen institutions had a decrease in enrollment and twenty-nine had an increase in enrollment between 2004 and 2008.

⁸ In 2008, student religious affiliation of United Methodist/Methodist (9,637 students) is 9 percent of the total student enrollment (109,314)

Figure 1. Enrollment at 44 United Methodist-Related Institutions

Religious Affiliation

Annually, the religious affiliation is missing or unknown for nearly one-third of the students enrolled at these 44 institutions and there is little change across years. Where religious affiliation is identified, consistently the greatest percentage of students is Protestant. Protestant religious affiliation, however, has consistently declined from a high of 42 percent (26,862) in 2004 to 36 percent (24,649) of the students in 2008. That is an 8 percent difference in the number of students from 2004 to 2008. Similarly, although not as dramatically, the percentage (and number) of Catholic students has decreased from 2004 to 2008. On the other hand, the percentage of Jewish and Muslim students has remained constant through the years at 5 percent and 1 percent respectively. The greatest increase is among those claiming no religious affiliation; moving from 11 percent (7,345) in 2004 to 17 percent (11,528) in 2008, that is a 57 percent change from 2004 to 2008.

Table 3. Religious Affiliation by Year

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Protestant	42% (26,862)	41% (26,765)	40% (26,743)	39% (26,325)	36% (24,649)
Catholic/Roman Catholic	24% (15,356)	23% (15,356)	23% (15,217)	22% (15,005)	22% (14,904)
Jewish	5% (2,998)	5% (3,079)	5% (3,144)	5% (3,190)	5% (3,179)
Muslim	1% (518)	1% (524)	1% (556)	1% (615)	1% (740)
Other	17% (11,029)	18% (11,711)	17% (11,709)	18% (12,098)	19% (12,742)
None	11% (7,345)	13% (8,231)	15% (9,742)	15% (9,749)	17% (11,528)
Total	100% (64,108)	100% (65,666)	100% (67,111)	100% (66,982)	100% (67,742)
<i>Missing/Unknown</i>	32% (30,688)	32% (31,285)	31% (30,488)	32% (31,805)	32% (32,234)
Total Enrollment	94,796	96,951	97,599	98,787	99,976

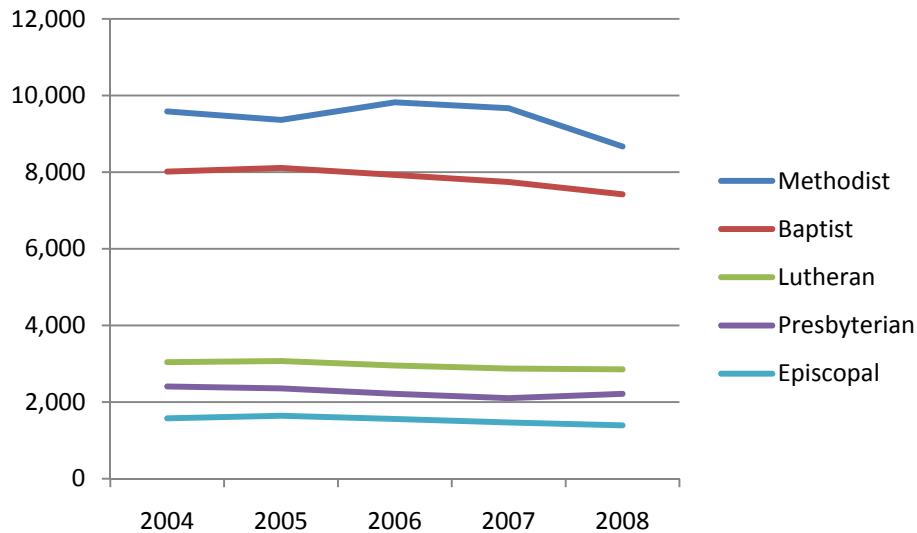
The most common Protestant denomination identified is United Methodist. Annually, more than one-third of the Protestant students are United Methodist/Methodist (35-37%) followed closely by Baptist (30%). These two denominations represent the majority of the Protestant religious affiliation. The third most common denomination is Lutheran, at 11 percent of the enrolled, significantly fewer than United Methodist/Methodist or Baptist.

Table 4. Protestant Denomination

Denomination	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Adventist	<1% (105)	<1% (95)	<1% (75)	<1% (76)	<1% (72)
Baptist	30% (8,014)	30% (8,111)	30% (7,928)	29% (7,743)	30% (7,420)
Brethren	<1% (47)	<1% (53)	<1% (56)	<1% (100)	<1% (52)
Church of God	1% (221)	1% (187)	1% (194)	1% (249)	1% (203)
Episcopal	6% (1,576)	6% (1,642)	6% (1,557)	6% (1,466)	6% (1,392)
Friend, Religious Society	<1% (63)	<1% (79)	<1% (62)	<1% (72)	<1% (47)
Latter Day Saints (Mormon)	<1% (109)	<1% (110)	<1% (103)	<1% (103)	<1% (77)
Lutheran	11% (3,041)	11% (3,069)	11% (2,953)	11% (2,874)	12% (2,852)
Mennonite	<1% (58)	<1% (48)	<1% (40)	<1% (80)	<1% (43)
Orthodox	1% (315)	1% (340)	1% (334)	1% (316)	2% (374)
Pentecostal	2% (560)	2% (554)	2% (547)	2% (566)	2% (459)
Presbyterian	9% (2,406)	9% (2,355)	8% (2,214)	8% (2,102)	9% (2,213)
Reformed	<1% (58)	<1% (51)	<1% (54)	<1% (152)	<1% (94)
United Church of Christ	3% (703)	3% (706)	3% (802)	3% (759)	3% (682)
United Methodist/Methodist	36% (9,586)	35% (9,365)	37% (9,824)	37% (9,667)	35% (8,669)
TOTAL Protestant	100% (26,862)	100% (26,765)	100% (26,743)	100% (26,325)	100% (24,649)

For the most part, the percentage of students affiliated with each denomination has been consistent from 2004-2008 although there has been some fluctuation for The United Methodist/Methodist (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Top 5 Protestant Denominations
44 UM-related institutions



Future Research

This research provokes a variety of questions for future research. Religious affiliation is self-identified by the student and no additional information is available about whether the student is currently practicing or participating in a religious community or about the frequency of attendance at worship services. Further, unclear is whether students are simply reporting the religious affiliation in which they were raised whether or not they truly identify with that religious affiliation. How active are the students in their religious community? How important is the religious affiliation of the institution to the students' selection of college or university?

Another area for future research is among those students reporting no religious affiliation. What does it mean that students without a religious affiliation would chose to enroll at a United Methodist-related institution? Does this signify a decreasing amount of religiousness at the institution, making the institution more palatable to those without religious affiliation? Are the religiously unaffiliated the religious seekers? Are they looking for a religiously affiliated higher education institution as part of their religious seeking? What is it about these institutions that would draw the religiously unaffiliated as well as the religiously affiliated?

Conclusions

United Methodist students are indeed a large percentage of the student population at the 53 United Methodist-related post-secondary institutions examined. It is clear from this research that the United Methodist institutions enjoy wide appeal across faith groups and among the major Protestant denominations which is consistent with United Methodist ethos of education for the common good. These institutions appear to be sufficiently United Methodist to attract students who are United Methodist or Methodist, while at the same time appealing to students with another affiliation and even those with no religious affiliation.

Appendix A. Institution Response

Complete = all years and all worksheets completed

Partial = one or more years of data missing and/or one or more worksheets incomplete

Adrian College	Complete
Alaska Pacific University	None
Albion College	Complete
Albright College	Partial
Allegheny College	Partial
American University	Complete
Andrew College	Complete
Baker University	None
Baldwin-Wallace College	Complete
Bennett College for Women	None
Bethune-Cookman University	None
Birmingham-Southern College	Partial
Boston University	None
Brevard College	Complete
Centenary College of Louisiana	None
Centenary College(NJ)	None
Central Methodist University	Complete
Claflin University	None
Clark Atlanta University	Complete
Columbia College	Complete
Cornell College	None
Dakota Wesleyan University	None
DePauw University	Complete
Dickinson College	None
Dillard University	Partial
Drew University	None
Duke University	None
Emory & Henry College	None
Emory University	Complete
Ferrum College	None
Florida Southern College	Complete
Green Mountain College	Complete
Greensboro College	None
Hamline University	Complete
Hendrix College	Complete
High Point University	None
Hiwassee College	Complete
Huntingdon College	Complete
Huston-Tillotson University	None
Illinois Wesleyan University	None
Iowa Wesleyan College	Complete
Kansas Wesleyan University	None
Kendall College	None
Kentucky Wesleyan College	Complete
LaGrange College	Partial
Lambuth University	None
Lebanon Valley College	None
Lindsey Wilson College	Complete
Lon Morris College	Partial
Louisburg College	None
Lycoming College	Partial

MacMurray College	Partial
Martin Methodist College	Partial
McKendree College	None
McMurry University	Complete
Methodist University	None
Millsaps College	Complete
Morningside College	Complete
Mount Union College	Complete
Nebraska Methodist College	None
Nebraska Wesleyan University	Complete
North Carolina Wesleyan College	Complete
North Central College	Complete
Ohio Northern University	Complete
Ohio Wesleyan University	Partial
Oklahoma City University	Complete
Otterbein College	None
Paine College	None
Pfeiffer University	None
Philander Smith College	None
Randolph College	Partial
Randolph-Macon College	None
Reinhardt College	Complete
Rocky Mountain College	None
Rust College	Partial
Shenandoah University	None
Simpson College	Partial
Southern Methodist University	Complete
Southwestern College	None
Southwestern University	Complete
Spartanburg Methodist College	Complete
Syracuse University	Complete
Tennessee Wesleyan College	None
Texas Wesleyan University	Partial
Union College	Complete
University of Denver	None
University of Evansville	Complete
University of Indianapolis	None
University of Puget Sound	Complete
University of the Pacific	None
Virginia Wesleyan College	None
Wesley College	Complete
Wesleyan College	Complete
West Virginia Wesleyan College	Complete
Wiley College	Complete
Willamette University	None
Wofford College	None
Young Harris College	None

Appendix B. Other Religious Affiliations

African Meth. Episcopal (AME)	Christian
African Meth. Episcopal Zion	Church of Christ
Agnostic	Disciples of Christ/Christian Disciples
Anglican	Hindu
Apostolic	Holiness
Assembly of God	Jehovah's Witness
Atheist	Moravian
Baha'i	Nazarene
Bible Church	Non-Denominational
Buddhist	Other
Christian Meth. Episcopal (CME)	Pagan
Church of God in Christ	Protestant
Congregational	Shinto
Christian Missionary Alliance	Sikh
Charismatic	Tao
Christ	Unitarian/Universalist
Christian Union	Vineyard
Christian Scientist	