

# Spirituality: Relationship between grit, equanimity, spiritual qualities and first-generation college students

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April 2018

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# Problem Statement

Spirituality and its influence on college students, prior to the last decade, has lacked sufficient research and interest. In general, university personnel do not comprehend spiritual development or the possible guidance it can have on college student's lives (Lindholm, 2013).

Currently, a research gap exists between college student and spiritual development within higher education and a greater paucity exists in understanding first- generation college students, who are enrolling and dropping out of universities, located in the United states, at astronomical rates (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004).

# Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the relationship between first-generation college students' spiritual qualities, which encompass Ethic of Caring, Charitable Involvement, Equanimity, Spiritual Quest, and Ecumenical Worldview as defined by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011c), grit and equanimity in order to understand if the spiritual experiences of first-generation college students' influence their ability to navigate the college environment as well as contribute to limited, but growing scholarship on spirituality and first-generation college students.

# Terms

- ❖ *Spirituality* is a multifaceted quality which encompasses **five Spiritual Qualities**: Ethic of Caring, Charitable Involvement, Spiritual Quest, Equanimity and Ecumenical Worldview in college students attending universities in the United States (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b).
- ❖ Spirituality entails an active role to find answers to questions such as: What is my purpose in life? What brings me joy? (Parks, 2000)
- ❖ *Equanimity* as defined by Astin et. al (2011a) is the ability to find peace and remain positive during hardship.
- ❖ *Grit* as defined by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) is perseverance and passion for long term goals. A non-cognitive skill that contributes to human's success.

# Literature Review- FIRST GENERATION (Undergraduate & Graduate)

“Status where neither parent/guardian of the student possesses a four-year college degree”  
(Ward, Davenport, & Siegel, 2012, p. 29).

“Evidence is reasonably clear that first-generation students as a group have a more difficult transition from secondary school to college than their peers” (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Ternzini, 2004, p. 249).

“43% of first-generation students who entered postsecondary education left without a degree...”  
(Chen & Carroll, 2005, p. 3).

# Literature Review- SPIRITUALITY

Religiosity, Spirituality and Personal Distress Among College Students (Schafer, 1997)

Missing Consideration (Love & Talbot, 1999)

Big Questions, Worthy Dreams (Parks, 2000)

Relationship of Ethnic Identity and Spiritual Development (Chae, Kelly, Brown, & Bolden, 2004)

Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b)

Making Meaning (Small, 2015)

# Significance

“Nonetheless, the way resources are organized and allocated for the benefit of first-generation students must change as student demographics shift, student needs become more acute and evolving research illustrates the ineffectiveness of past and current practices”

(Ward, Davenport, & Siegel, 2012, p. 116).

How will universities create spaces where first-generation college students thrive? Enrollment predictors tell us that by 2030 first-generation college students will be the majority student population in our colleges (Hertel, 2010; Knight et al., 2004)

# Data Collection

Participants received a Survey Monkey link, and were asked to confirm they were first-generation college students as defined by Ward, Davenport, and Siegel (2012).

First-generation college students were asked to complete a 92 item survey including the Meaning in Life questionnaire, College Students Beliefs and Value Survey, and the Grit scale.

A short demographic questionnaire followed.

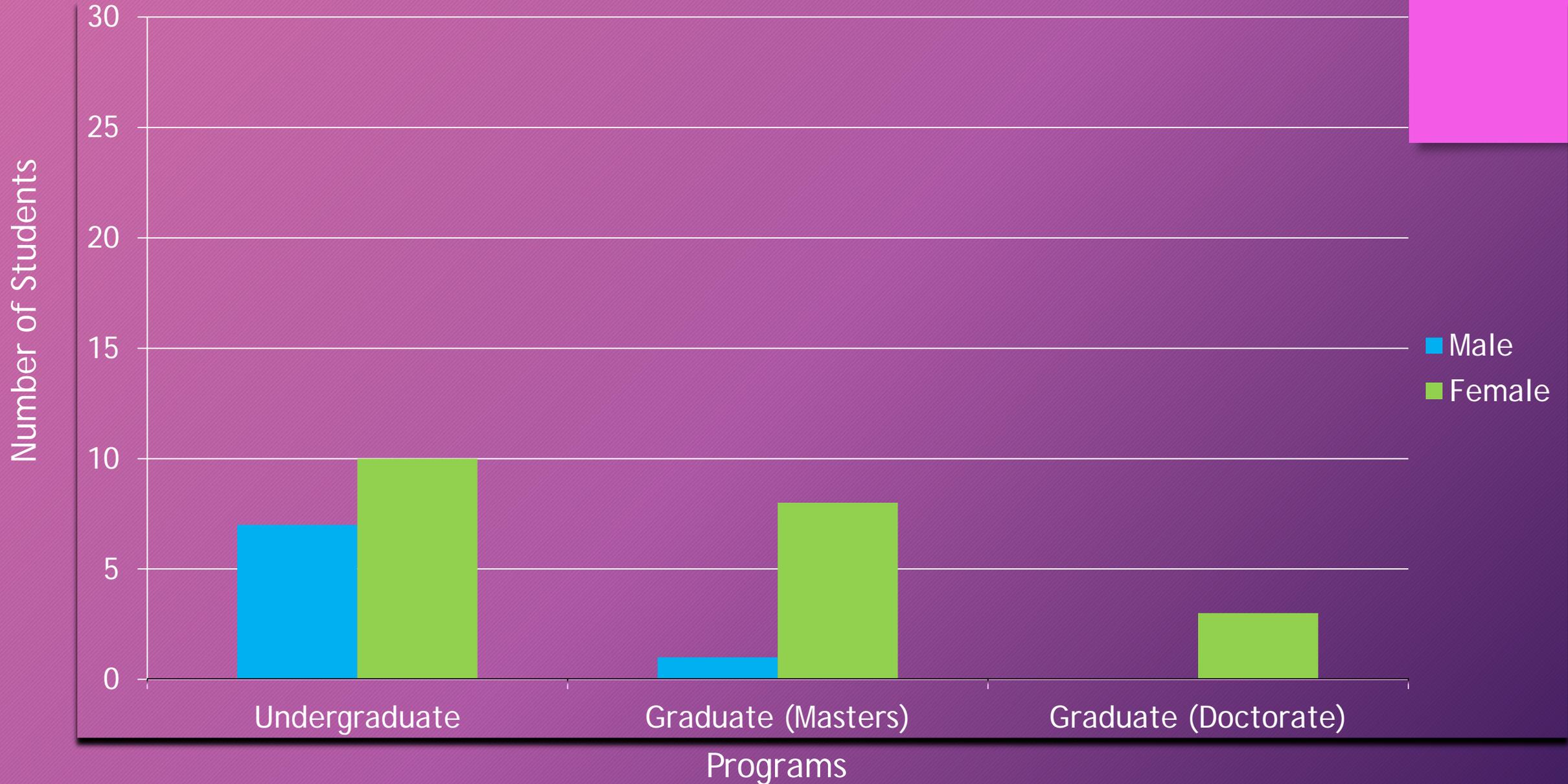
# Data Collection

Students were then asked to respond to two open-ended questions:

1. Describe any spiritual experience you participated in or encountered this year while at college?
2. Please share how participating in or encountering the spiritual experience you mentioned in the previous question affected you (i.e. did it change your mind, alter your mood, provide you support).

“To what extent do you believe your spirituality affected your ability to navigate the challenges you experienced at the university?” Responses ranged from (Not at all) to (A Great Extent).

# Bar Graph Showing the Number of Students in Programs



1. What relationship, if any, exists between first-generation college students' understanding their **meaning in life** and their ability to overcome **setbacks** they experience while attending their university?

# Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

Helps track and identify individual's perceptions on their lives (Steger, 2012)

10-item Likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from (Absolutely Untrue), to (Absolutely True).

- “I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful”
- “I am always looking to find my life's purpose”
- “My life has a clear sense of purpose”

# The Grit Scale (Grit)

Also known as perseverance, a non-cognitive skill that contributes to a human's success (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009)

12-item Likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from (Very Much Like Me), to (Not Like Me at All).

- “Setbacks don’t discourage me”
- “My interests change from year to year”
- “I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge”

## Data used

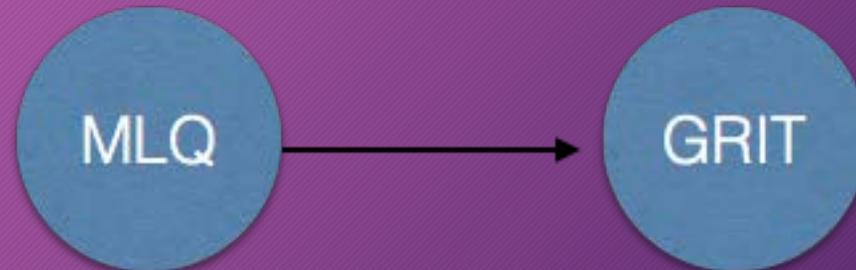
Composite score from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger, 2012) and The Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

## Analyses

Assessed the reliability of each scale running a Cronbach's Alpha.

Computed composite score for each scale.

Ran a Pearson Correlation to examine the relationship between students responses on the MLQ and Grit Scales.



# Meaning in Life and Grit

MLQ score ( $\alpha = .74$ ,  $M=50.14$ ,  $SD=9.15$ )

GRIT score ( $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M=44.29$ ,  $SD=7.32$ )

$r(27) = -.07$ ,  $p=.72$

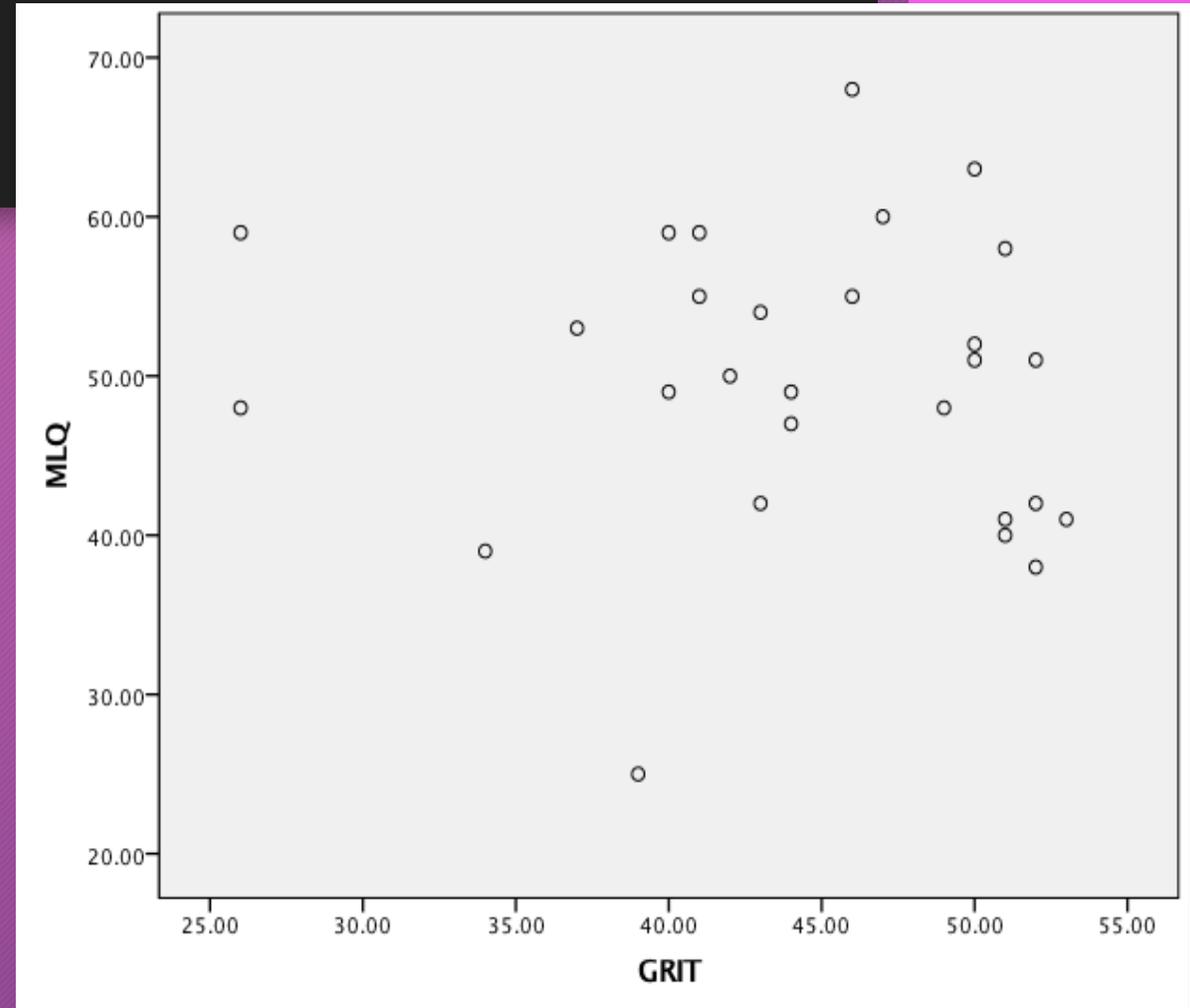


Figure 1. Scatterplot depicting relationship between grit and MQL.

2. What relationship, if any, exists between first-generation college students' level of **grit** and **equanimity** while attending their university?

## Data used

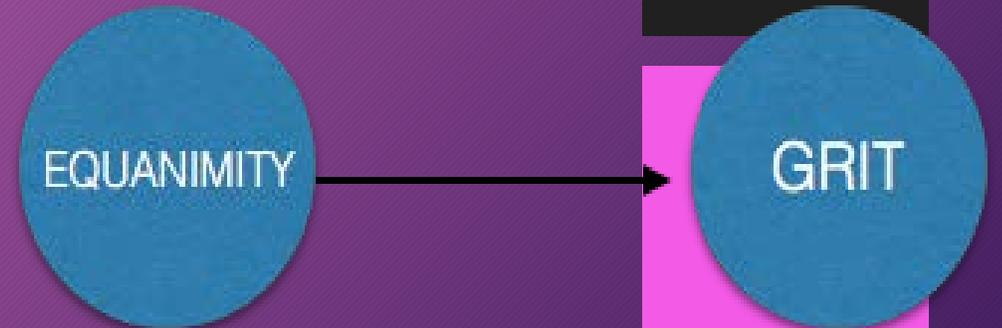
The Grit scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and the Equanimity subscale score of the College Students Values and Beliefs survey (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b).

## Analyses

Assessed the reliability of each scale running a Cronbach's Alpha

Computed composite scores for the Equanimity and Grit scales

Ran a Pearson Correlation to examine the relationship in student responses between scales.



# Grit and Equanimity

GRIT score

( $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M=44.29$ ,  $SD=7.32$ )

Equanimity score

( $\alpha=.71$ ,  $M= 12.45$ ,  $SD= 1.90$ )

$r(27) = .48$ ,  $p=.02$

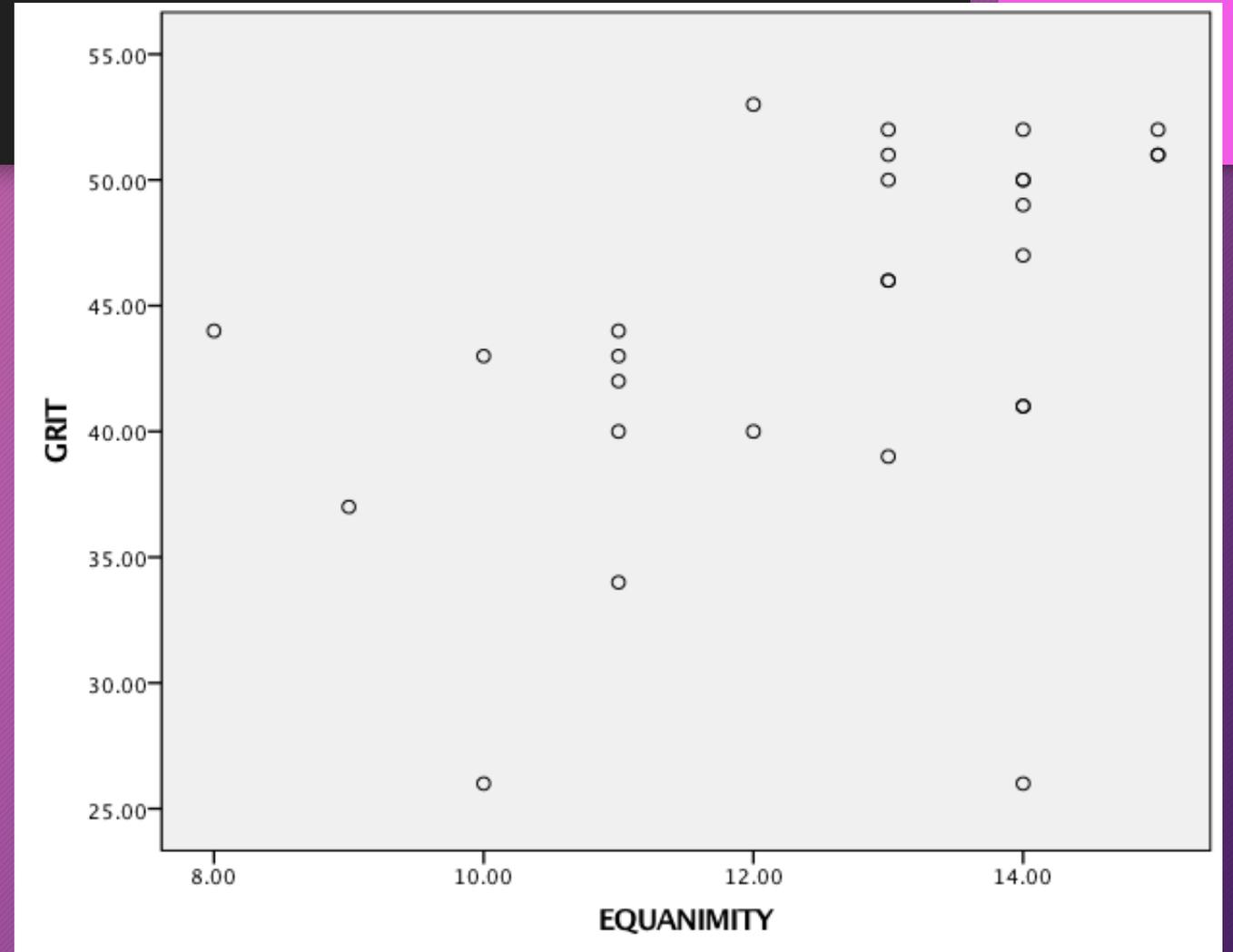
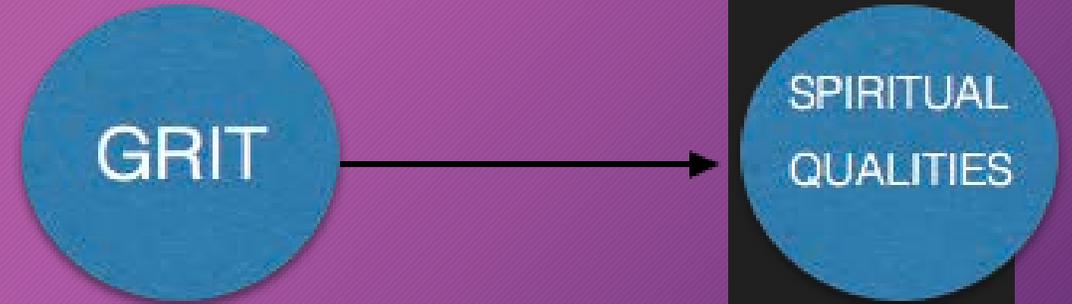


Figure 2. Scatterplot depicting relationship between equanimity and grit.

3. What relationship, if any, exists between the **spiritual qualities** of first-generation college students and their ability to overcome **setbacks** while attending their university?

## Data used

The Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and Spiritual Qualities Subscale of the College Students Values and Beliefs survey (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b).



## Analyses

Assessed the reliability of each scale running a Cronbach's Alpha

Computed Spiritual Qualities composite score

Ran a Pearson Correlation between Grit and Spiritual Qualities

# Grit and Spiritual Qualities

GRIT score

( $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M=44.29$ ,  $SD=7.32$ )

Spiritual Qualities score

( $\alpha=.69$ ,  $M=84.96$ ,  $SD=10.35$ )

$r(27) = .21$ ,  $p=.29$

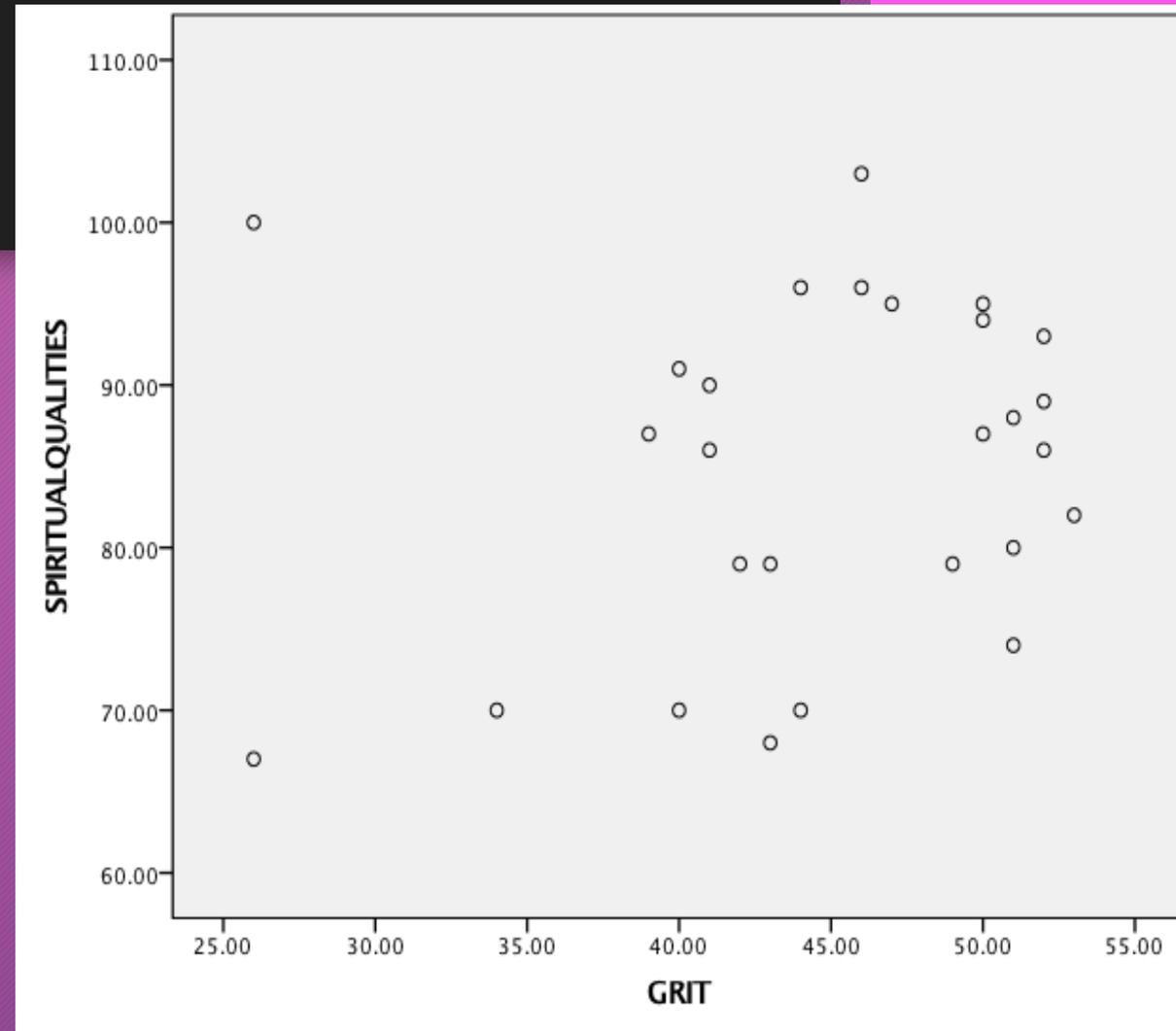
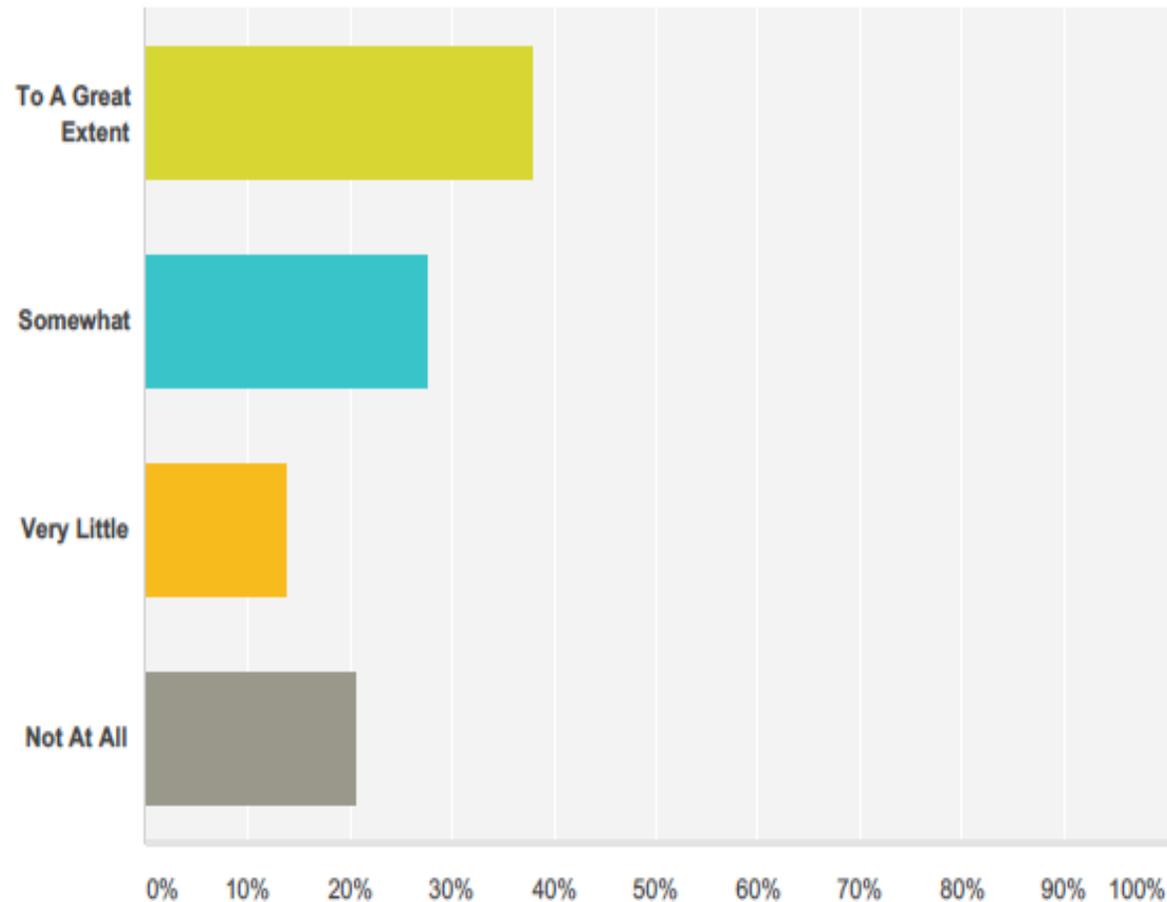


Figure 3. Scatterplot depicting relationship between grit and spiritual qualities.

**Q77 To what extent do you believe that your spirituality affected your ability to navigate the challenges you experienced at the university?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 11



**11 To A Great Extent**

**8 Somewhat**

**4 Very Little**

**6 Not At All**

# Conclusions

Researching first-generation college students and the influence spirituality can have on their grit and equanimity throughout the academic year is not only insightful and interesting, but also extremely beneficial for all university personnel.

First- generation college students are enrolling and being admitted in mass numbers to our universities and we need to develop new initiatives to retain them.

Researching the influence of spirituality on grit and equanimity could be the next best practice for student affairs professionals.

# Implications

Universities need to revisit their mission statements

“a commitment to values-based outcomes like character, social responsibility, and citizenship” (Astin et al., 2011c, p. 6)

Student affairs professionals need to lean into the scholarship and implement spirituality, religion, and secularism into their area of expertise.

Grit is a character trait that needs to be nurtured.

Resources such as space and personnel need to be created.

# Limitations

Small Sample Size

Lack of generalizability

Variability in what participants defined as spirituality

Correlation

Uncontrolled Environments

# Recommendations for future research

## ❖ Qualitative

- ❖ Expand participant pool to include students who identify as 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> generation college students
- ❖ Expand participant pool to include recent alumni to investigate possible impacts of spirituality on career aspirations and work environments

# Implications

- University Personnel need to consider:
  - Studying and incorporating spirituality into programmatic initiatives including values based work, diversity and leadership trainings as well as in identity development workshops
  - Nurturing grit and finding mentors to nurture this characteristic in first-generation college students
  - Ensuring spirituality is included
  - Creating spaces where students can bring their whole selves
  - Asking first-generation college students about the obstacles they are facing
- More research...

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