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## The Effect of an Illinois Wesleyan Education on Political Ideology

### Abstract

Political commentators often label American students not as liberals or conservatives, but simply as apathetic citizens unconcerned with political issues. The number of students venturing to the polls continues to be depressing to any advocate of a democratic form of government. Outside of political science classrooms, few students seem to be knowledgeable of simple political events and personalities.

# The Effect of an Illinois Wesleyan Education on Political Ideology

**Jordan Ault**

Political commentators often label American students not as liberals or conservatives, but simply as apathetic citizens unconcerned with political issues. The number of students venturing to the polls continues to be depressing to any advocate of a democratic form of government. Outside of political science classrooms, few students seem to be knowledgeable of simple political events and personalities.

Has this apathy always plagued universities in the United States? There existed in the 1960s a movement in American students that awakened a generation of political activists. The rise of the student movement in opposition to the Vietnam War gained national attention as teach-ins and other forms of protest became a daily occurrence on campuses. The beginning of the student-based civil rights movement only fueled this activism. As the media looked on, the students of America gained a reputation as a radical, left-wing population.

The nation has seen a rebirth of many of the Vietnam-era values in today's students. Protests, mostly in opposition to the war in Iraq, have become frequent events on college campuses. Student organizations advocating equal rights for women, racial minorities and the gay community have made their voice heard in state and federal legislatures. Perhaps there is some truth to the view that college students are a very liberal group that tends to become more liberal as they approach graduation.

Many scholars feel that the university environment nurtures this liberalization in the student body. There seems to be a general acceptance of social and economic liberal ideas both in and out of the classroom. Some feel that professors have a large effect on students' political development. Others speculate that the material studied by students awakens new views that tend to push them to the left. Still others believe that it is the effect of peers and the general college environment that has the biggest impact. Whatever the source, it seems as if college students tend to cross the graduation platform more liberal than they arrive. This research will look at the political views of students at Illinois Wesleyan University to see if a liberalizing trend exists within the campus. The source of this liberalization (or lack thereof) will be construed from data provided by several hundred students at the institution.

## Literature Review

Between the fall of 1935 and the spring of 1939, Theodore M. Newcomb (1943) completed what has been called the benchmark in the study of political socialization in college. The Bennington Study, published in 1943, made use of questionnaires, written reports and personal interviews with the students of Bennington College, a small women's college located in Vermont. The main finding of the study was that "Bennington students show a significant change in social attitudes... between freshman and senior years in college" and that "the change may be described as being from more to less conservatism" (146). In addition, Newcomb discovered that this attitude change is only slightly related to courses of study pursued in college. Newcomb did, however, find that the attitudes of seniors often persist after graduation, publishing continuing results of the political attitudes of the Bennington women twenty-five and fifty years after their graduation (1991).

There are many reasons why this liberalizing effect is so strong during the college years. Philip Altbach (1967) contends that "the student days are one of the few times in the life of an individual when he is not burdened by financial or social responsibilities or subject to outside control" (76). These years of undergraduate education serve as a transitional period between youth and adulthood when a student is exposed to politics and how

political issues might affect his or her life. This phenomenon naturally fosters increased awareness of political issues and, occasionally, a drastic shift in a student's views and beliefs. In addition, students are dealing with ideas and intellectual concepts in their studies, making them "better able to understand abstract ideology systems than are persons who regularly work in concrete 'non-intellectual' situations" (77).

One of the leading criticisms of Newcomb's findings came in a study conducted by Philip E. Jacob (1957). Jacob considers the results of an extensive survey conducted at several institutions to determine whether general education in the social sciences brought about changes in students' beliefs and values. Jacob concludes that college liberalism is a myth, stating that "the value changes which seem to occur in college and set the college alumnus apart from others are not very great... and do not support the widely held assumption that a college education has an important, general, almost certain 'liberalizing' effect" (50). Jacob claims that the results of Newcomb's study were partly due to the drastic reorientation of public beliefs occurring during the 1930s and were not influenced by exposure to academics.

There are many other scholars that tend to support Jacob's views over Newcomb's. Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton and Linz (1954) explained the development of political orientations through a succession of clearly identifiable life stages. They concluded that the family had a great influence on the political development of children and adolescents and that these attitudes tend to persist into adulthood. Many other scholars have suggested this strong familial influence. Hyman (1959) concluded that "the individual's political orientation is a product of socialization essentially within the family" (85). Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes speak of this in The American Voter (1960). They find a strong resemblance between the party identification of respondents and the party identification that respondents report for their parents, suggesting that "party identification has its origin in the early family years" (48).

Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton and Linz state, however, that these political orientations could be "upset by fundamentally different sets of experiences and social relations" (1144). If it is true that family is the greatest influence in the development of political orientation in children, it is possible that the fundamentally different experiences and social relations existing within the college environment might be enough to change these orientations. The work of Robert Weissberg (1974) supports this conclusion. Weissberg states that although political loyalties originated within the family are strong, many political attitudes and behaviors are not totally determined by the family, so adolescents are "available for persuasion toward new positions and actions in a number of areas" (172). Manipulation of the socialization process can occur in schools as the political and social environments at many universities seem to spark political attitude change.

Although Newcomb found that course of study was only slightly related to political change in college, many scholars have speculated that there exists a dramatic difference in a student's ideology based on his or her major course of study. Lipset and Altbach (1967) note that "students in humanistic and social science courses are exposed to more liberalizing and politically activating experiences than those in other fields" (221). Their research from the 1960s included data reporting that 70 to 90 per cent of students in business, engineering or the sciences were in favor of the Vietnam conflict, as opposed to only 47 per cent of students studying education and the social sciences (222).

### Hypotheses

The previous literature on the topic of political socialization in the college setting is mixed. This research seeks to determine whether there is a significant change in the political ideologies of Illinois Wesleyan students as Newcomb suggests or whether Jacob is correct and the student body will experience no major change in political values. When informal discussions with students and personal experiences are considered, it seems as if the

findings of the Bennington Study conducted by Newcomb hold true to this day. In short, it seems as if IWU students are influenced by the college environment as they shift their political views to the left during their four years of undergraduate education.

***Hypothesis 1:** Obtaining an undergraduate education from Illinois Wesleyan University will have a liberalizing effect on students, shifting the political ideology of the student body to a more liberal view.*

The findings of Lipset and Altbach regarding the correlation between a student's major and his or her political ideology will also be tested. The data presented in previous literature seems to support a conclusion that can be drawn from personal experience. There is a difference, however, between the major that a student selects based on his or her ideology and the effect that pursuing that major may have on the student's political views. Even though a student may choose a major based on his or her placement on the liberal-conservative scale, it seems that studies within the humanities and social sciences will push the student to become more liberal.

***Hypothesis 2:** Students pursuing a major in the social sciences or humanities will undergo a stronger liberal shift than students in other departments.*

### **Data Measurement**

The data for this study was drawn from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) prepared by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. The CIRP, which was established in 1966, is the nation's largest and oldest empirical study of higher education, involving data on some 1,800 institutions and over 11 million students. Two surveys conducted by the CIRP were used in this study: the CIRP Freshman Survey and the College Student Survey (CSS).

The Freshman Survey is administered to freshman students and provides participating institutions with a detailed profile of the entering freshman class, including the students' expectations of the college experience, demographic information, degree and career plans, attitudes, values and life goals. At IWU, the survey is mandatory for all freshman students during the university's fall orientation week. Around ninety percent of freshman students complete the CIRP Freshman Survey each year.

The College Student Survey is very similar to the freshman survey and is used to measure a broad range of student outcomes, including satisfaction with the college experience, student involvement, cognitive development, and student values and attitudes. The CSS was initiated in 1993 to allow institutions to conduct follow-up studies of their student body. Since 1999, IWU seniors have received a copy of the CSS through the mail during their final semester before graduation. Completion of the survey is encouraged but not mandatory and about 145 seniors complete the survey each year.

Since the senior survey has only been distributed at IWU since 1999, complete information is only available for the classes of 1999 through 2002. Both freshman and senior survey information is available for each of these classes. The total number of students in these four classes that completed both surveys exceeded 600, however many students failed to respond with their political orientation, particularly during their freshman year. After eliminating students that failed to respond to this crucial question, there remained a data pool of 450 respondents.

The data collected from these surveys involved the students' political views and came from two specific questions. On each survey, students are asked to characterize their political orientation as far left, liberal, middle-of-the-road, conservative or far right. The question has remained the same on both the freshman and senior surveys since IWU began distributing the survey instruments in 1991.

The second question used in this study involves several questions measuring the

political views of the student. Respondents are given a variety of questions regarding pertinent social issues. For each statement, the student is asked whether they agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly. There were eight identical questions that were asked on both the freshman and senior surveys of all 450 respondents. One of the questions dealing with the individual's ability to bring about changes in our society was omitted as it did not seem to fall upon the traditional liberal-conservative scale. The remaining seven questions, shown in Figure 1, dealt with abortion, the death penalty, attitudes on sex, marijuana, homosexual relationships, racial discrimination and taxes.

**Figure 1**

### **Political Views Questions and Liberal Responses**

1. Abortion should be legal. **(agree)**
2. The death penalty should be abolished. **(agree)**
3. If two people really like each other, it's all right for them to have sex even if they've known each other for only a very short time. **(agree)**
4. Marijuana should be legalized. **(agree)**
5. It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships. **(disagree)**
6. Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America. **(disagree)**
7. Wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now. **(agree)**

It is important for reasons of external validity to clarify that the students at Illinois Wesleyan University are quite similar to those in other private four year colleges. There are a few differences that should be mentioned. First of all, the grade point average of IWU students tends to be higher than the national average, although the difference is not substantial. Second, IWU has many more business and natural sciences majors than most other four year colleges. Finally, the political views of IWU students tend to be more liberal than the national average. According to the 2002 College Student Survey, 36.4% of IWU students characterize themselves as liberal or far left as opposed to the national average of 26.9%.

### **Data Analysis**

The results of the CIRP surveys clearly support Hypothesis 1. A simple glance at the students' responses to the self-identification question will suggest that a clear liberalizing trend is occurring at IWU. The results of the surveys are found in Table 1. The students identifying themselves as liberal or far left increase from 24% as freshmen to 39.4% as seniors. Likewise, the number of students claiming to be conservative or far right drops from 22.7% to 17.1% and the number of students identifying themselves as "middle of the road" drops by over 10%. These numbers clearly show a much more liberal student body at graduation than during freshman orientation, supporting the idea of the university as a liberalizing agent.

These results are shown more clearly in Table 2. Political change was measured by subtracting the political ideology as freshmen from the ideology as seniors. If the result was zero, there was no change in ideology. If the result was positive, there was a liberal shift. A change of one degree (such as middle of the road to liberal) was classified as a liberal shift. Changes of two and three degrees were classified as strong liberal shifts and extreme liberal shifts, respectively. A negative result signified a conservative shift.

**Table 1**

Political Orientation by Class Year										
	Class of 1999		Class of 2000		Class of 2001		Class of 2002		Fresh.	Senior
	Fresh.	Sen.	Fresh.	Sen.	Fresh.	Sen.	Fresh.	Sen.	Total	Total
Far Right	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	4	1
	1.4%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.0%	0.9%	0.2%
Conservative	17	9	28	18	25	26	28	25	98	76
	24.6%	13.0%	23.0%	14.8%	20.0%	20.8%	20.9%	17.2%	21.8%	16.9%
Middle of the Road	30	35	63	59	72	43	75	59	240	196
	43.5%	50.7%	51.6%	48.4%	57.6%	34.4%	56.0%	44.0%	53.3%	43.6%
Liberal	21	23	28	43	25	51	29	48	103	165
	30.4%	33.3%	23.0%	35.2%	20.0%	40.8%	21.6%	35.8%	22.9%	36.7%
Far Left	0	2	2	2	2	4	1	4	5	12
	0.0%	2.9%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	3.2%	0.7%	3.0%	1.1%	2.7%
Total	69		122		125		134			450

**Table 2**

<b>Political Change by Class Year</b>					
	1999	2000	2001	2002	<b>Total</b>
Strong Conservative Shift	0	1	1	2	4
	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	1.5%	0.9%
Conservative Shift	12	14	16	9	51
	17.4%	11.5%	12.8%	6.7%	11.3%
No Change	33	70	68	84	255
	47.8%	57.4%	54.4%	62.7%	56.7%
Liberal Shift	21	31	34	34	120
	30.4%	25.4%	27.2%	25.4%	26.7%
Strong Liberal Shift	2	6	5	4	17
	2.9%	4.9%	4.0%	3.0%	3.8%
Extreme Liberal Shift	1	0	1	1	3
	1.4%	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	69	122	125	134	450

Again, a change of one degree was classified as a conservative shift and a change of two degrees was classified as a strong conservative shift. Out of 450 students included in this study, 140 became more liberal (31.2%), 255 remained constant (56.7%) and 55 became more conservative (12.2%). Although the number of students changing their political ideology is slightly less than a majority, it is still a very large percent of students. Of the 195 students that experienced a change in ideology, 71.8% became more liberal. There was also a much greater tendency for students to undergo a strong or extreme liberal shift than a strong conservative shift.

The results of the political views questions for freshmen and seniors can be found in Table 3. The liberalism scale is measured from zero to seven, with one point being added for each question that was answered with the liberal response. As a whole, the responses to the political view questions on the senior survey gained a higher score than those on the freshman survey. For example, 215 seniors (48.8%) answered four or more questions with the traditionally liberal answer, compared to only 137 freshmen (31.9%). The change that

students display over four years is also shown in Table 3. A majority of students responded to more questions with the liberal answer on the senior survey, as compared to 19.1% that responded to more questions with the conservative answer.

Table 3

Freshman Liberalism Scale			Senior Liberalism Scale			Change in Liberalism Scale		
Scale	Frequency	Percent	Scale	Frequency	Percent	Scale	Frequency	Percent
0	15	3.3%	0	1	0.2%	-4	1	0.2%
1	45	10.0%	1	28	6.2%	-3	2	0.4%
2	103	22.9%	2	86	19.1%	-2	17	3.8%
3	129	28.7%	3	111	24.7%	-1	61	13.6%
4	94	20.9%	4	107	23.8%	0	126	28.0%
5	33	7.3%	5	81	18.0%	1	116	25.8%
6	10	2.2%	6	26	5.8%	2	68	15.1%
7	0	0.0%	7	1	0.2%	3	29	6.4%
						4	1	0.2%
						5	2	0.4%

It is interesting to note that five of the seven political views questions gained more liberal answers on the senior survey than they did on the freshman survey. All five of these questions had to do with social issues: abortion, the death penalty, sex, marijuana and homosexuality. The question on whether discrimination is still a major problem in America showed little change but did display a 9.6% conservative shift in answers (43 students) as compared to a 4.9% liberal shift (22 students). The question for which the highest amount of students changed their answers stated that wealthy people should pay a larger share of taxes than they do now. One-third of students changed their answer on this question between the two surveys with 80 students (17.8%) shifting to the conservative answer and 60 students (13.3%) shifting to the liberal alternative.

A comparison of the responses to political views questions with self-reported political change can be seen in Table 4. The students reporting a liberal shift seem to undergo a fairly obvious liberal change in political views. Students reporting no political change do, in fact, change their political views, although 45.3% become more liberal in their views as compared to only 21.8% that become more conservative. The students that claim to be

Table 4

[illegible]



more conservative as seniors present an interesting case. Only 25% of those students reporting a conservative shift in their ideology actually give more conservative answers to the political views questions as seniors, compared to 47.9% that give more liberal answers. What seems to be happening is that all students, regardless of their self-reported political change, are becoming more liberal in their political views. Those reporting a liberal change are having the stronger liberal shift in the views, but even those reportedly becoming more conservative are actually becoming more liberal on the political views questions.

The political views questions that were included in the survey may provide the answer for this puzzling phenomenon. Of the seven political views questions included in the surveys, only one question had anything to do with fiscal as opposed to social ideology. It is also interesting that more students shifted to the liberal answer on five of the six questions concerning social issues but the single question on economic issues resulted in more students shifting to the conservative response. This brings us to an interesting dilemma. A majority of students consider themselves as becoming more liberal. This trend seems to be supported in the political views of students on social issues. However, this is not supported on the single fiscal issue that the survey measures. The self-identification question simply asks students to characterize their general political views without asking for specifically social or fiscal views. It seems that students may be becoming more conservative on fiscal issues, but equate the term "political ideology" with social issues.

\* \* \*

It is clear at this point that the first hypothesis is supported by the data regarding students' self-declared political ideology and their responses to political views questions. We now turn to different data from the surveys to discover what factors are causing this change to take place.

The gender of the student respondents was first tested to see if it accounted for any variation in the political change of the student body. The results, shown in Table 5,

**Table 5**

<b>Political Change by Students' Gender</b>			
	Male	Female	Total
Strong conservative shift	1 0.9%	3 0.9%	4 0.9%
Conservative shift	18 16.5%	33 9.7%	51 11.3%
No change	54 49.5%	201 58.9%	255 56.7%
Liberal shift	30 27.5%	90 26.4%	120 26.7%
Strong liberal shift	4 3.7%	13 3.8%	17 3.8%
Extreme liberal shift	2 1.8%	1 0.3%	3 0.7%
<b>Total</b>	109	341	450

do not seem to account for a majority of the change. Slightly more males than females tend to become more liberal over the four years of their undergraduate education (33% of males and 30.5% of females), however males also tend to become more conservative

(17.4% of males and 10.6% of females). It seems that males are more likely to undergo some form of political change, although they tend to move in either direction.

The cumulative grade point averages of the students after seven semesters were then tested. The results of the comparison are shown in Table 6. Interestingly, 36.8% of students with an A average became more liberal while only 6.6% of these students became more conservative. This trend of liberalization is similar for students with an A-minus or B-plus average with 30.9% shifting to the left and 10.2% shifting to the right. In total, 75% of students that became more liberal during their undergraduate study earned a B-plus average or above. Only a slight majority of students shifting to the right earned a B-plus or higher. Surprisingly, it seems that a correlation might exist between a student's grade point average and his or her political change.

Table 6

Political Change by Students' GPA							
	Cumulative GPA						Total
	C- or less	C	B-/C+	B	A-/B+	A	
Strong conservative shift	0	0	1 6.3%	0	3 1.4%	0	4 0.9%
Conservative shift	0	1 100.0%	1 6.3%	24 21.6%	18 8.4%	7 6.6%	51 11.4%
No change	1 100.0%	0	10 62.5%	56 50.5%	127 59.3%	60 56.6%	254 56.6%
Liberal shift	0	0	4 25.0%	26 23.4%	53 24.8%	37 34.9%	120 26.7%
Strong liberal shift	0	0	0	5 4.5%	10 4.7%	2 1.9%	17 3.8%
Extreme liberal shift	0 1.4%	0	0 0.7%	0	3	0	3
Total	1	1	16	111	214	106	449

The findings of Lipset and Altbach regarding the difference in a student's ideology based on his or her major course of study were tested from the data set of IWU students. The 34 majors reported by students were grouped into eight categories: fine arts, humanities, social sciences, nursing, education, business, natural sciences and mathematics. The self-reported political change within each major can be seen in Table 7. It is interesting to note that the humanities and social sciences show two of the largest liberal shifts with 37.8% and 37.6% of the students within those areas of study becoming more liberal, respectively. The weakest liberal shift and, likewise, one of the strongest conservative shifts occurred in business students with only 21.1% of students becoming more liberal. The overall results of the table, however, do not show any great difference between the areas of study. The results support Lipset and Altbach's findings; however,

Table 7

Political Change by Students' Major Course of Study										
	Category of Student's Major									
	Fine Arts	Human	Social Sciences	Nursing	Education	Business	Natural Sciences	Math.	Other	Total
Strong cons. shift	0 7.1%	1 2.2%	0	0	0	0	1 1.6%	0	1 33.0%	3 0.8%
Conservative shift	2 7.1%	4 8.9%	8 10.0%	2 8.3%	2 5.6%	16 17.8%	8 12.9%	5 25.0%	0	47 12.1%
No change	18 64.3%	23 51.1%	42 52.5%	16 66.7%	22 61.1%	55 61.1%	28 45.2%	10 50.0%	2 66.7%	216 55.7%
Liberal shift	6 21.4%	16 35.6%	23 28.8%	6 25.0%	9 25.0%	18 20.0%	21 33.9%	5 25.0%	0	104 26.8%
Strong liberal shift	1 3.6%	1 2.2%	6 7.5%	0	3 8.3%	1 1.1%	3 4.8%	0	0	15 3.9%
Extreme liberal shift	1 3.6%	0	1 1.3%	0	0	0	1 1.6%	0	0	3 0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>388</b>

five of the eight majors had liberal shifts ranging from 33% and 40%, suggesting that most majors do tend to push students in a liberal direction. It is also surprising that the category of majors with the highest liberal shift was actually the natural sciences, with over 40% of students becoming more liberal in their political ideology.

The students' gender, college grade point average, major course of study and graduation year were then tested for correlations with both the self-described change in ideology of the students and the change in the responses given to the political views questions. The results are displayed in a correlation matrix in Table 8. We can see that there is a significant correlation between the political change of the students and the change in the liberalism scale based on the political views questions. This should not come as a surprise. However, the relationship between political change and both the grade point average and major of the students are also significant at the .05 level. The students' grades and majors are not significantly correlated, so there seems to be a strong

Table 8

## Correlations

		Political Change	Change in liberalism scale (no ind.)	Data year	STUDENT'S GENDER	AVERAGE COLLEGE GRADE	Category of student's major
Political Change	Pearson Correlation	1	.195**	.006	.008	.119*	-.106*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.900	.863	.012	.037
	N	450	423	450	450	449	388
Change in liberalism scale (no ind.)	Pearson Correlation	.195**	1	.107*	-.004	-.039	-.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.028	.934	.420	.923
	N	423	423	423	423	423	368
Data year	Pearson Correlation	.006	.107*	1	-.032	-.034	.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.900	.028		.496	.469	.528
	N	450	423	450	450	449	388
STUDENT'S GENDER	Pearson Correlation	.008	-.004	-.032	1	.154**	.163**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.863	.934	.496		.001	.001
	N	450	423	450	450	449	388
AVERAGE COLLEGE GRADE	Pearson Correlation	.119*	-.039	-.034	.154**	1	-.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.420	.469	.001		.787
	N	449	423	449	449	449	387
Category of student's major	Pearson Correlation	-.106*	-.005	.032	-.163**	-.014	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.923	.528	.001	.787	
	N	388	368	388	388	387	388

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

relationship between political change and both of these variables individually. It is interesting to note that there does not seem to be a correlation between the gender of the students and political change, although gender is significantly correlated to both students' grades and major.

Regressions were then calculated for a variety of information available from the CSS surveys. The surveys have eight lengthy questions with multiple responses. These question areas cover general college activities, academic activities, student satisfaction, non-academic actions, time management, perceived change in abilities, objectives after

Figure 2

Regression coefficient (r2) values	
• Academics:	0.134
• Change in abilities:	0.104
• Objective:	0.099
• Actions:	0.097
• Activities:	0.077
• Satisfaction:	0.067
• Self-rating:	0.037
• Time spent on activities:	0.034

graduation and self-ratings for various traits. These groups of 11 to 28 questions were each correlated with the change in self-declared political ideology for each student. The regression coefficient (r2) values can be found in Figure 2. These sections range from explaining just 3.4% to 13.4% of the change in political ideology. While the regression coefficients vary, the various questions from the College Student Survey do not seem to account for much of the change in political ideology of students.

A correlation was then calculated using the change in political values questions and the students' gender, grade point average, major and graduation year to determine the effect on political change. The results are shown in Figure 3. The regression coefficient for the model only accounts for 8.4% of the variation in the self-described political change of the students. Both the change in the liberalism scale and the grade point average of the students are significant. The category of the student's major seems to play a much smaller role, weakening the argument of Lipset and Altbach. Overall, these variables account for only a minute portion of the political change.

Figure 3

Correlation between self-perceived political change and change in liberalism scale, graduation year, gender, major and GPA			
	R	R2	Std. Error
Model	0.289	0.084	0.743
	Beta	t	Sig.
Change in liberalism scale	0.215	4.242	<b>0.000</b>
Graduation Year	-0.016	-0.309	0.757
Gender	-0.046	-0.888	0.375
GPA	0.190	3.718	<b>0.000</b>
Major	-0.083	-1.625	0.105

## Conclusions

This research has sought to discover whether students at Illinois Wesleyan University tend to become more liberal in their political views during their years on campus. The research paralleled Newcomb's study conducted at Bennington College in the 1930s which found that students at Bennington showed a significant change in social attitudes from more to less conservative as they progressed towards graduation. While Newcomb did not find a relationship between change in political attitudes and the course of study pursued by a student, many other researchers have found that students studying the humanities or social sciences tend to be especially susceptible to the liberalizing function of a college education (Lipset and Altbach 1967).

Both of the hypotheses in this research were supported to a degree. A simple glance at the data would confirm the general trend that students tend to shift their political ideologies to the left as they progress from freshman to senior year. Although slightly less than a majority of students display a change in ideology, 71.8% of the students that do display a change in their self-reported political views become more liberal in their views. Interestingly, many students that claim to have become more conservative actually answer social political views questions with more liberal responses.

The question remains why this liberalization is occurring. Although a correlation exists between both grades and major course of study with the political change of the student body, these variables explain very little of the self-reported political change of students. These low regression values could possibly be explained in several ways. There seems to be some confusion about the meaning of the terms liberal and conservative. Specifically, liberalism can be divided into both social and fiscal liberalism. The single fiscal political views question displayed the strongest conservative shift of all. It is possible that students may be undergoing a liberal shift with respect to social issues and a conservative shift with economic issues. Unfortunately, the variable for political change used in this research only measured general political ideology.

It is important to note that a majority of students did not undergo a shift in their political ideology. While most students displaying a shift in ideologies moved to the left, these students were usually outnumbered by those students that did not shift at all. Therefore, while there may be a larger tendency for students to shift in the liberal rather than the conservative direction, the results of this research show that it is more likely that a student's ideology will not change.

Finally, there may be problems with the representativeness of the data, specifically with regard to senior students completing the CSS. While the CIRP survey is mandatory for freshman and usually has a very high response rate, just under one-third of seniors complete the College Student Survey. The representativeness of the sample completing the CSS with respect to the rest of the class is unknown.

While there are many possibilities to continue research into the political socialization process that occurs in the university setting, it is clear from this research that students at IWU do tend to undergo a process of liberalization. The college environment tends to nurture and celebrate liberal views, particularly with regard to social issues. Whatever the cause may be, Newcomb was correct in determining that the students of Illinois Wesleyan show a significant change in social attitudes.

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