
Echoes & Reflections

U.S. College Survey

**What is the purpose of Holocaust education in today’s high schools?
Can it help prepare students to challenge hate and prejudice when
they see it?**

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, there has been a significant increase in efforts at the state and federal levels to ensure that the history of the Holocaust is taught in our nation’s schools. Greater attention has been given to the importance of teaching this history than ever before—fueled by a dramatic rise in antisemitic violence around the country and indeed, worldwide. Unfortunately, recent evidence suggests that today’s younger generation lack historical knowledge about the Holocaust (Claims Conference, 2018), and the inevitable diminishing ability of Holocaust survivors to bear witness over time is quickly becoming a reality.

This context raises the question: What is the purpose of Holocaust education? Clearly, knowledge of the Holocaust is important on its own merit as a preeminent event of 20th century history. Similarly, this historical knowledge can promote students’

understanding of the enormous consequences of the Holocaust for its victims and the world in general, as well as understanding how such atrocities are allowed to happen in modern, democratic societies. But what else is gained? Can Holocaust education make a difference in young people’s attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors as they move into adulthood?

Echoes & Reflections, a partnership program of ADL, USC Shoah Foundation, and Yad Vashem, has been providing professional development and resources to US secondary school educators to teach about the Holocaust since 2005. They have long been eager to understand the downstream effects of exposure to Holocaust education on students. As such, they commissioned Lucid Collaborative LLC, with oversight by evaluation experts from USC Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California, to administer a survey to a nationally representative sample of US



The results are encouraging. They indicate that positive outcomes of Holocaust education not only reflect gains in historical knowledge but also manifest in cultivating more empathetic, tolerant, and engaged students more generally.

undergraduate students. The survey sought to explore the relationship between exposure to Holocaust education in high school (in all forms, not exclusively

Echoes & Reflections resources) and subsequent student attitudes and behaviors on US college campuses.¹

The results are encouraging. They indicate that positive outcomes of Holocaust education not only reflect gains in historical knowledge but also manifest in cultivating more empathetic, tolerant, and engaged students more generally. Interestingly, the results also indicate that exposure to Holocaust survivor testimony as an element of respondents' Holocaust education is strongly associated with numerous positive outcomes in early adulthood.

Findings: **Students with Holocaust Education...**

...report having **greater knowledge about the Holocaust** than their peers and understand its value.

...have more pluralistic attitudes and **are more open to differing viewpoints.**

...report a greater **willingness to challenge intolerant behavior** in others.

...show **higher critical thinking skills and greater sense of social responsibility and civic efficacy if they watched survivor testimony as part of their experience.**

The Survey

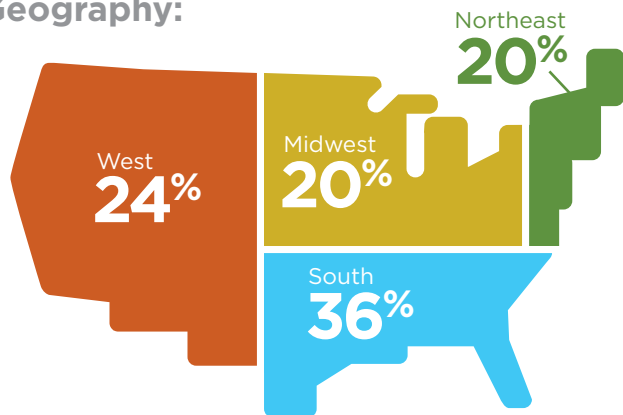
DATA WERE OBTAINED FROM 1,500 post-secondary students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities in the United States. Lucid Collaborative designed the survey and worked with the national polling company YouGov to recruit a nationally representative sample of US college students aged 18-24. The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 3%.

The survey measured attributes related to: Holocaust knowledge and understanding; critical thinking skills; tolerance, empathy and respect for different viewpoints and experiences; and willingness and motivation to be an upstander. The survey also collected data on students' perceptions of, and experiences on, their college campuses. Extensive demographic data were also collected.

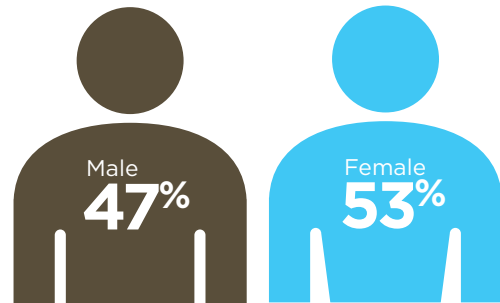
¹As a correlational study, this research sought to identify whether relationships exist, but they do not imply cause-and-effect relationships.

Respondent Demographics

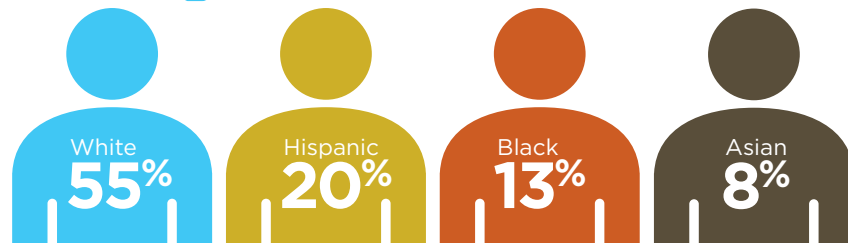
Geography:



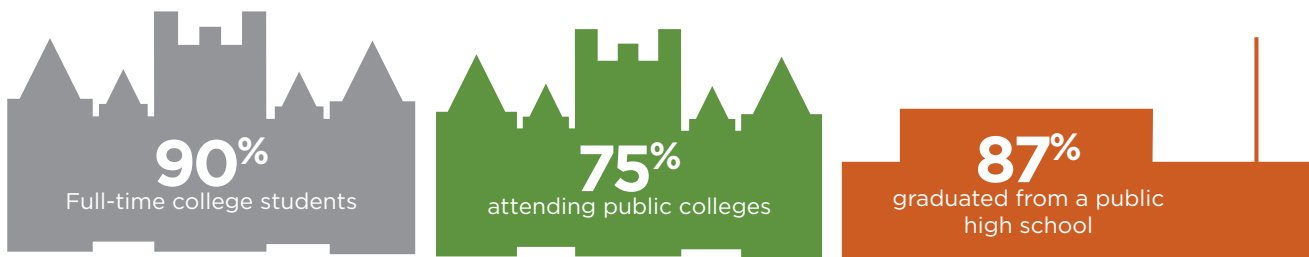
Gender:



Race:



Education Status:



Lucid Collaborative analyzed the survey data using cross-tabulation analysis and multiple linear regression. The large sample size (n=1,500) permitted robust statistical analysis, and the sampling methods used by YouGov ensured that our results are representative of the target population—US college students.

Two facets of the survey distinguish it from other efforts looking at the impact of Holocaust knowledge and education. Firstly, this survey was able to look at the differences between two distinct groups—those who received Holocaust education in high school and those who did not. Other studies have looked at effects of Holocaust education among only those exposed to it in one form or another, ignoring those who did not receive any Holocaust education (Barr, 2015; Cowan and Maitles, 2004; Bowan and Kisida, 2019). Secondly, we surveyed only students aged 18-24, while other

surveys studied a much wider age span (such as 18-90) (Jedwab, 2010; Starratt et al., 2017).

Why is this important? By constructing our sample in this way, we were able to search for significant differences that could more likely be attributed to Holocaust education (or not). Also, by restricting the age range, our results are less likely to be compromised by different age-related factors, such as memory loss, or changes in educational instruction over time. In short, we present confident results. That is, our sampling methods and statistical tests help us to ensure that the findings show real results, rather than something caused by chance.

Key Findings

ENCOURAGINGLY, WE FOUND THAT eight out of ten college students surveyed reported having received at least some Holocaust education during high school. The majority received one month or less of Holocaust education. Ninety percent of these students reported learning about the Holocaust in social studies or history classes, followed by English or language arts classes. The most common activities associated with Holocaust education were reading textbooks, watching documentaries, and reading novels and short stories. Over 55% reported watching videos of survivor testimonies.

Finding #1:

Students with Holocaust education report having greater knowledge about the Holocaust than their peers and understand its value.

Students with Holocaust education reported greater knowledge about the Holocaust than their peers who did not receive Holocaust education in high school. In fact, 78% of students with Holocaust education reported “knowing a lot or a moderate amount about the Holocaust” compared to 58% of students with no Holocaust education.

These students were also more likely to agree on the value and importance of Holocaust education for today’s youth. For example, those with Holocaust education are significantly more likely to agree that people should learn about the Holocaust in order to:

- **recognize the dangers of antisemitism (27% more likely),**
- **stand up for those who are being discriminated against (20% more likely), and**
- **stop something similar from happening again (21% more likely).**

The findings suggest that by helping students to develop a greater understanding of the Holocaust and its impact, they can also better recognize the dangers of antisemitism and discrimination and the importance of standing up for others and for stopping something similar from happening again.

Finding #2:

Students with Holocaust education have more pluralistic attitudes and are more open to differing viewpoints.

Additionally, we found that students with Holocaust education in high school were significantly more likely to be tolerant of others with different beliefs, to be open to having their own views challenged, and to be able to discuss and negotiate controversial issues. This is in addition to being more comfortable with people of a different race or sexual orientation more generally.

Not only are students with Holocaust education more likely to report having more tolerant and pluralistic attitudes, they are also significantly more likely to report willingness to:

- **challenge incorrect or biased information (28% more likely),**
- **challenge intolerant behavior in others (12% more likely), and**
- **stand up to negative stereotyping (20% more likely).**

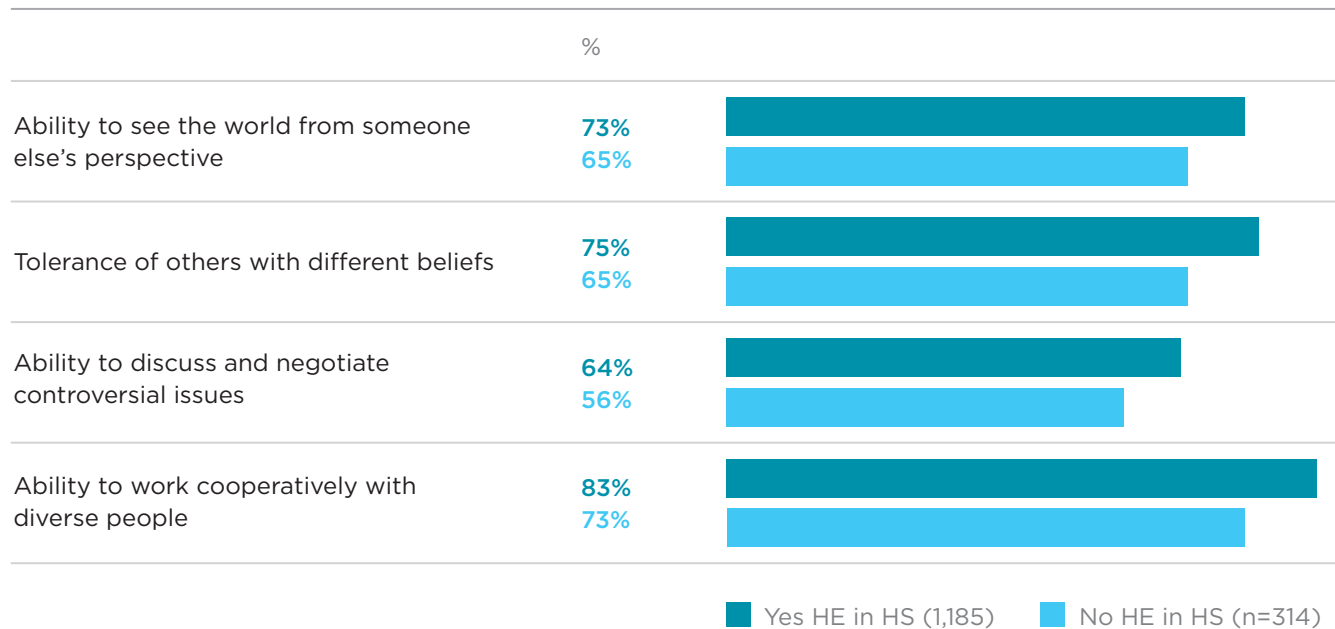
Students with Holocaust education also scored slightly higher than students without Holocaust education on critical thinking measures, although no significant difference was found between these two groups. It is important to note here that when measuring overall civic engagement, students with Holocaust education were less likely to be active; however, when

explored further, other factors such as political interest, student status (full vs. part-time), and age were better predictors of civic engagement.

These findings suggest that students with Holocaust education have greater empathy and ability to work cooperatively with people of diverse backgrounds, and

they are more likely to consider multiple perspectives and more open to having their views challenged, which have been identified as necessary skills in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society (Engberg, Meader, and Hurtado, 2003).

Pluralistic Orientation % Of Students With Strong Orientation



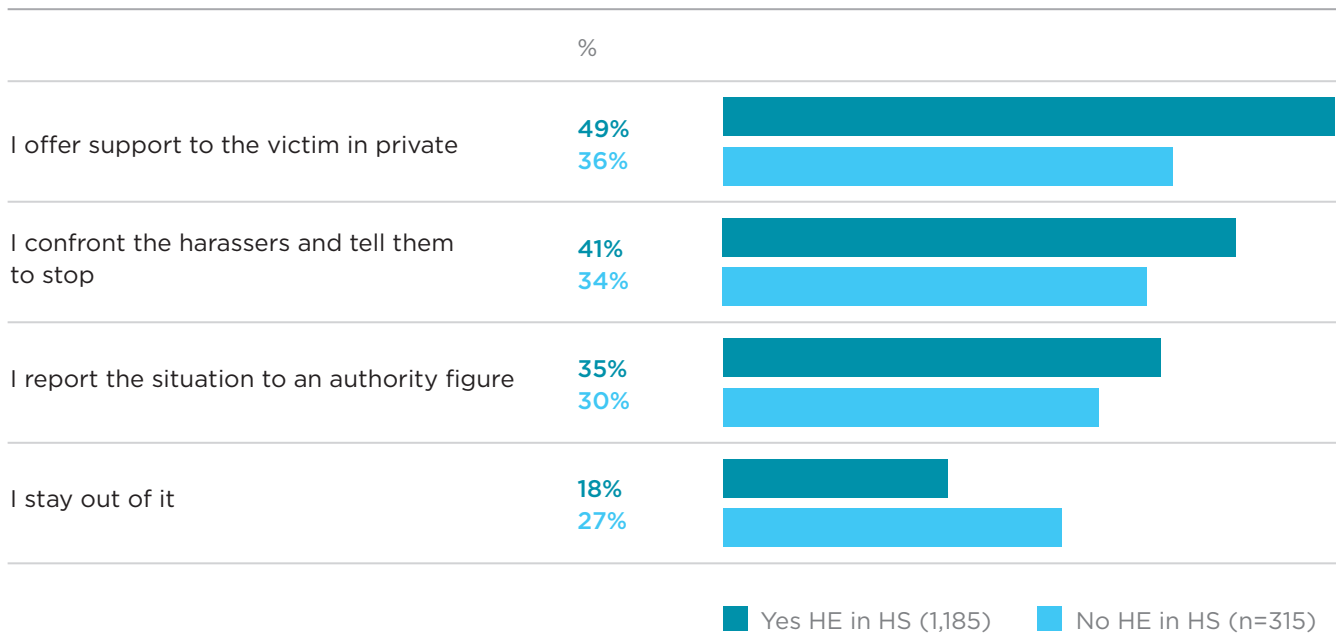
Finding #3:
Students with Holocaust education report a greater willingness to challenge intolerant behavior in others.

When presented with a bullying scenario, students with Holocaust education reported being more likely to offer help and were 50% less likely to do nothing and stay out of it. This indicates a certain willingness to

intervene, although students with Holocaust education were only more significantly likely to provide support to the victim in private (35% more likely). There was no significant difference between students with Holocaust education and those without when it came to reporting willingness to stand up to bullies publicly or to be more proactive generally.

These findings suggest that students with Holocaust education are more likely to see the harm caused by not standing up to acts of hatred and also have a greater sense of agency to support victims who are being bullied.

Consider This Scenario: **Some Of Your Fellow Students Are Harassing An Acquaintance Online. How do you react?**



Finding #4:

Students who learned about the Holocaust through survivor testimony show higher critical thinking skills and greater sense of social responsibility and civic efficacy.

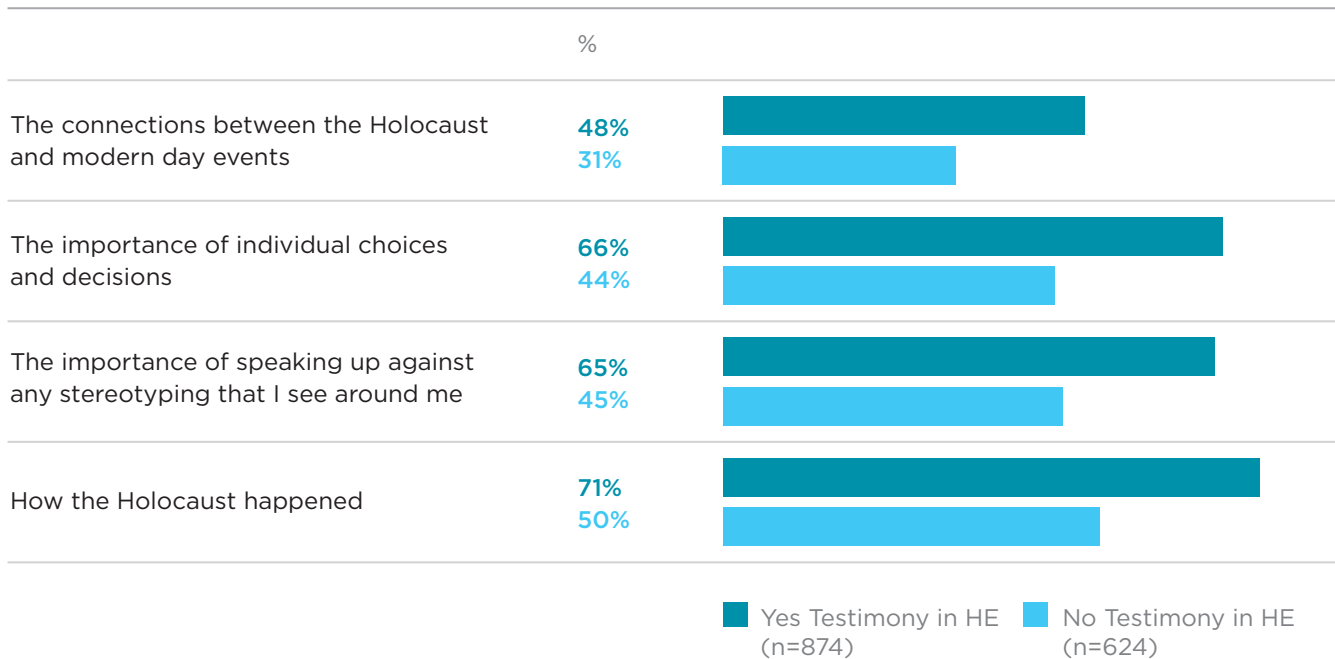
In addition to the positive findings related to Holocaust education generally, one teaching modality—the use of video or in-person testimonies of survivors recounting their lives and accounts of their experiences during the Holocaust—stood out as having the most significant positive impact on students. For example, in comparing

differences between students who were exposed to survivor testimony and those who were not, those who learned through survivor testimony were more likely to report that their education helped their understanding of the Holocaust's importance in significant ways. In fact, the proportion of students reporting at the highest levels of the scale ('extremely' or 'very much') averaged 20% greater for the group exposed to testimony.

In addition to the positive findings related to Holocaust education generally, one teaching modality—the use of video or in-person testimonies of survivors recounting their lives and accounts of their experiences during the Holocaust—stood out as having the most significant positive impact on students.

How much did your Holocaust education help you to understand the following?:

% of students who responded “Very Much” and “Extremely”



Further, on almost every single validated scale² in our survey measuring respondents’ critical thinking, tolerance, social responsibility, social agency, and civic efficacy, students who heard survivor testimony scored significantly higher than those who did not. Statistical tests indicated that these differences between students who received Holocaust education with testimony and

those without testimony were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ for all scales), meaning that they are unlikely to have resulted from random chance and likely reflect true differences between these groups of students (Geher & Hall, 2014).

Students who heard survivor testimony...

...scored significantly higher than those who did not in scales measuring:



These significant differences suggest that students who learned about the Holocaust through survivor testimonies may have greater comfort with people of different backgrounds, greater openness to viewpoints

different from their own, and a greater sense of responsibility to help others who are less fortunate. To demonstrate the potential impact of incorporating survivor testimony in teaching about the Holocaust,

²A validated scale is one which has been tested to ensure reliability (consistent results) and validity (accurately measuring true results).

we can compare results on a common scale measuring critical thinking. This scale is designed to determine whether respondents check their sources, seek out additional information, including opposing viewpoints; integrate new ideas into their thinking; and engage in reflective thinking about their actions. When we analyzed results between those with Holocaust education in high school and those without, there was no significant difference between the two groups. However, when analyzed according to whether respondents had heard a survivor's testimony, the difference in critical thinking became statistically significant. This provides evidence that Holocaust education with survivor testimony could be more beneficial for critical thinking than Holocaust education alone.

Similarly, those exposed to survivor testimony were significantly more likely to understand why Jews and other marginalized groups were targeted in the Holocaust and to see the connections between the Holocaust and modern-day events. No significant difference was found when simply comparing respondents with Holocaust education to those without on these issues.

Beyond positive attitudes, our results show that students exposed to survivor testimony are significantly more likely to report engaging in upstander behavior, such as challenging derogatory comments, educating oneself about other groups, and seeing the importance of challenging injustice in society. These qualities are important for helping students become more responsible participants in civil society.

Conclusion

THIS STUDY PROVIDES STRONG EVIDENCE of the positive impact of Holocaust education on students' attitudes towards diversity, tolerance, and upstander behavior in the face of hate and intolerance. Importantly, it shows that these outcomes are sustained over time, appearing in students who have left high school and are transitioning into young adulthood. It also provides strong evidence that the

use of survivor testimonies, whether in person or digitally, may be even more effective at developing these positive attributes in students. These findings have important implications for education policy and practice discussions. This is especially true for decisions on how to most efficiently and impactfully deliver Holocaust education to cultivate citizenship values, empathy, respect for differences, and willingness to take action against hate and prejudice in today's challenging political and social environment.

For more information on the study, please contact:

Claudia Ramirez Wiedeman, Ph.D., USC Shoah Foundation (crwiedem@usc.edu)

References

- Barr, D. J., Boulay, B., Selman, R. L., McCormick, R., Lowenstein, E., et. al. (2015). A randomized control trial of professional development for interdisciplinary civic education: Impacts on humanities teachers and their students. *Teachers College Record*, 117 (2), 1 - 52.
- Bowen, D. H., Kisida, B. (2019). Never Again: The Impact of learning about the Holocaust on civic outcomes. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, DOI: 10.1080/19345747.2019.1652712.
- Cowan, P., & Maitles, H. (2005). Values and attitudes -- positive and negative: A study of the impact of teaching the Holocaust on citizenship among Scottish 11-12 year olds. *Education Review*, 37, 104 - 115.
- Claims Conference. (2018). "New survey by Claims Conference finds significant lack of Holocaust knowledge in the United States." Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. <http://www.claimscon.org/study/>.
- Engberg, M. E., Meader, E. W., & Hurtado, S. (2003, April). Developing a pluralistic orientation: A comparison of ethnic minority and White college students. In *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association* (Vol. 1001, pp. 48109-1259).
- Geher, G., & Hall, S. (2014). *Straightforward statistics: Understanding the tools of research*. Oxford University Press.
- Jedwab, J. (2010). Measuring Holocaust knowledge and its impact: A Canadian case study. *Prospects*. 40, 273 - 287.
- Starratt, G. K., Fredotovic, I., Goodletty, S., and Starratt, C. (2017). Holocaust knowledge and Holocaust education experiences predict citizenship values among US adults. *Journal of Moral Education*. 46 (2), 177 - 194.