

Secularist campus groups doubled in past two years: According to the Secular Student Alliance

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The number of atheist or agnostic student groups on U.S. campuses has more than doubled in the past two years—from 80 to 162—according to the Secular Student Alliance (SSA), the national organization for the secular student movement.

PZ Myers, an outspoken atheist and associate professor of biology at the University of Minnesota–Morris, suggested that the growth could be related to authors saying that it is OK to be “godless.”

Myers, who last year angered Catholics when he publicly tried to desecrate consecrated communion wafers, has a blog and often speaks at SSA-affiliate group meetings, where he urges students to go public about their unbelief and to foster a positive image.

Although SSA has four high school affiliates, most of the groups are on college campuses. Lyz Liddell, the alliance’s senior campus organizer, noted that college is a time when many people question their beliefs and break away from their religious background.

Facebook groups are used by SSA affiliates to organize events, host discussions and provide an “anonymous way to test the waters” for students who may be starting to change their beliefs, Liddell said. “Community is the biggest thing that is provided for these students,” he added.

Most of the affiliate groups meet regularly to have discussions, get involved with politics and do service projects. One group, Students for Freethought at Ohio State University, teamed up with the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO), to do service work in New Orleans in March 2009.

“We have similar worldviews” about service opportunities, said Jonathan Weyer, a CCO staff member who has been working with Students for Freethought on service projects. The two groups are planning a return trip in March 2010 with 15 students from each group. —*Religion News Service*