

Air Force Academy cites progress in tackling religious intolerance

by [Whitney Jones](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) A recent survey on the religious climate of the U.S. Air Force Academy showed that 41 percent of non-Christian cadets face unwanted proselytizing at least once during a year-long period.

The Cadet and Permanent Party Climate Assessment Survey, which was released Friday (Oct. 29), analyzed religious, racial and gender relations within the academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. The survey detected an increasing trend in religious freedom since 1998, but points out persistent problems with proselytizing and religious tolerance.

"I'm encouraged by the mostly positive trends we saw from the survey, but I also know we've got some work to do in regards to the basics of respect and dignity towards each other," said Lt. Gen. Mike Gould, academy superintendent, in a statement.

From 2007 to 2009, the portion of non-Christian cadets who believed there was a low tolerance for non-religious people at the academy increased from 30 percent to 50 percent, the survey found, which was down from approximately 75 percent in 1998.

Although the nine-year trend was positive, additional training on the constitutional right to the free exercise of religion was instituted in the 2010 basic combat training manual to address lingering issues of intolerance.

While the academy has made steps to address problems of religious intolerance, some believe the issues are being downplayed.

Mikey Weinstein, an Air Force veteran who launched the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, said Gould is trying to "spin" the religious oppression as trivial. Weinstein, a longtime critic of the academy, was denied access to the official release of the survey.

"It is, of course, obvious why Gould barred MRFF," Weinstein said in a statement. "He cravenly wanted to silence all opposition and dissent to his farcical briefing."

The findings were based on the answers of 2,170 cadets (a response rate of 47 percent). Of the respondents, 1,337 were Christian, 128 were non-Christian and 252 stated no religious preference.