Koinonia

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Spring 2005

Koinonia

Spirituality, Religion, and the Undergraduate College Student: Examining Beliefs and Behaviors

ACSD 2005 Artist Spotlight: Shaun Groves

Thinking Theologically: The Moral of a Good Story

Changing Our Name and Identity: Rethinking “Career” Services

Information on the New Professionals Retreat

ACSD Association for Christians in Student Development
Twenty-Five Years and Counting

As I write this, my last opportunity to submit a "President’s Corner" for the Koinonia, I wanted to start by expressing my extreme gratitude to the membership for allowing me this incredible opportunity to serve on the Executive Committee for the past four years. Truly, I have been blessed by this experience, and I consider it to have been an honor to serve. I also want to thank those who have served with me on the Executive Committee during this time. Working with you also has been a pleasure, and I will cherish the times we have had, where we have challenged, encouraged, and supported each other in our tasks.

We are on the eve of the 25th consecutive Annual Conference of ACSD to be held at George Fox University (GFU) in June. As we prepare to enter into this Silver Anniversary, I thought it would be appropriate to take a brief look back from where we have come over this 25 years, as well as scan the horizon a little to catch a glimpse of what the future may hold for us.

ACSD began its journey of faith on June 5, 1980 at the inaugural conference held at Taylor University. ACSD was formed by the merger of two existing organizations, the National Association for Deans of Women and the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Men. The organization had foundational goals of fellowship and renewal, professional development, and the integration of faith and practice within the field of student development. These founding goals of fellowship and renewal, professional development, and the integration of faith and practice have remained a central focus of ACSD for the past two-and-a-half decades and are signature elements of the organization’s unique niche in the broader field of student development. ACSD was formed at a time in the history of student affairs when national student personnel organizations were advocating that human development theories, developed by Chickering, Kohlberg, Perry, and others, be placed at the center of the profession’s ideology and practice. We faithfully have sought to integrate scripture and a Christian worldview into this practice.

Membership at the time of the merger was approximately 300. From these humble beginnings, ACSD has experienced dramatic growth over the past 25 years with our annual membership being near 1,300. Attendance at our annual conferences has risen, also. Early meetings attracted 200-250 participants. In recent years these numbers have swelled over the 500 mark, and several recent conferences have eclipsed 600 and 700 conference. In addition to membership growth, the overall scope of our operation has expanded significantly as well. In the beginning, membership services basically consisted of the annual conferences, mimeographed Koinonias, and limited placement services. Today we have the greatly expanded conferences, regional meetings, continuous online placement services, an online discussion board, a dynamic web page, the significantly improved and professional Koinonia distributed three times annually, the Growth journal, the New Professionals Retreat, and the Mid-Level Professionals Retreat. God has been good in our past.

God will continue to be good in our future. I am more convinced than ever that our niche is a critical one in the broader fields of student affairs and higher education. We live in times where the cause of Christ is challenged on almost every front. In our own culture driven by postmodernity and pop culture and in a world marked by war, poverty, and mistrust, our mission of preparing men and women to expand the influence of the gospel is a shining light against a dismal backdrop. I am convinced that ACSD is positioned uniquely to equip and support our membership as we, as the body of Christ, build His kingdom. The challenges to this enterprise are numerous and significant, but our God is infinitely bigger than anything we will face. I am eagerly anticipating the next 25 years.

I am anticipating this 25th Annual Conference of ACSD at GFU eagerly. The theme “Beyond the Edges” is appropriate, because that is exactly where I feel we are being called to serve. The program will be an excellent one, and I am confident that we will be challenged, encouraged, and renewed as we stay faithful to our calling. Please join me in prayer for the GFU planning staff as they put the finishing touches on this experience.

God Bless You,

Skip Trudeau
ACSD President
Dean of Students
Taylor University,
Upland, IN

Skip Trudeau
“It is finished. Yet it is not over.”

During this most recent season of Lent and Easter, I have had the opportunity to read The Cross-Shattered Christ, a book on Christ’s seven cries from the cross, by Stanley Hauerwas (2004). This short yet powerful work has helped me reflect on Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and what his sacrifice means for us today.

For some reason, there is one cry from the cross that has captured my attention at this stage of my life. As we read in John 19:30, Jesus uttered one of his final expressions in his last moments on the cross. He mustered the strength to put the exclamation point of victory at the end of his sacrifice: “It is finished.”

What is finished? Obviously, Christ himself is not finished. Instead, his self-sacrifice as the spotless lamb was finished. The ultimate sacrifice was accomplished once and for all; it never has to be done again. No more animals have to be killed to cover sin.

When we look at this cry from the cross in the original language, we see that it had some interesting uses that may help us to understand some different nuances of meaning. A servant would have used the expression to let his or her master know that the required work was completed. A priest may have used it after examining an animal for sacrifice and finding it faultless. An artist may have uttered it to indicate that the work was complete. It was used often by merchants to let others know that the debt was paid in full.

But Hauerwas extends the discussion beyond the idea that Christ paid our debt in full. He quotes Richard Neuhaus (2001) when discussing this cry from the cross: “‘It is finished.’ Yet it is not over” (p. 190). What does he mean? First, God is still making us like Christ. Our transformation is not complete yet. Second, Christ came to establish the kingdom of God, but it is not fully established yet. We serve as God’s ambassadors in our world to put flesh to the kingdom. Hauerwas (2004) ends his thoughts on this word from the cross poignantly.

It is not over because God made us, the church, the “not over.” We are made witnesses so the world—a world with no time for a crucified God—may know we have all the time of God’s kingdom to live in peace with one another. (p. 90)

How can we as Christians in student development respond to this? The call is clear. We must assist students in their transformation processes and help make the principles of the kingdom real on our campuses. Moreover, we must help our students understand their role as witnesses to the world. Lofty? Yes. Optional? No.

For many of us, these ideas are not new, but they can serve as compelling reminders. If it is finished but not over, how am I as a professional modeling this for my students? How am I helping them to be “finished?” How am I working to make the kingdom real on my campus? How is my institution doing in preparing our students to be Christ’s ambassadors in our world?

References


Spirituality, Religion, and the Undergraduate College Student: Examining Beliefs and Behaviors

Jennifer A. Lindholm

For traditionally-aged college students, the undergraduate years are an intensive period of cognitive, social, and affective development. As they refine their identities, formulate adult life goals and career paths, test their emerging sense of self-authority and interdependence, and make decisions that will significantly impact their own and others’ lives, young adults often grapple with issues of meaning, purpose, authenticity, and spirituality. That students’ religiosity generally tends to decline during the undergraduate years has been well documented empirically (see e.g., Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, some researchers have found that commitment to spiritual growth among traditionally-aged students may actually increase during college (see e.g., Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Lee, Matzkin, & Arthur, 2002). While existing research sheds important light on the spiritual/religious dimension of college students’ lives, there remains much to learn about this realm of undergraduate development.

Defining Spirituality
Religion is characterized by “group activity that involves specific behavioral, social, doctrinal, and denominational characteristics” (Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group, 2003, p.2). Spirituality, however, points more generally to our subjective life and involves the internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one’s locus of centricity; exhibiting openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power that transcends human existence and human knowing; and valuing the sacred (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000; Love & Talbot, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Essentially, spirituality has more to do with our qualitative or affective experiences than it does with reasoning or logic and relates to the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us (Astin, 2002).

Traditionally, the construct of spirituality has been closely aligned with religious beliefs and convictions. Current conceptions, however, are becoming much broader. While, for many, spirituality remains closely linked with religion, we are seeing today a growing number of individuals who identify their spirituality as either loosely, or not at all, associated with an established religious tradition. Irrespective of the presence or absence of clearly defined linkages between spirituality and religion, to ignore the role of spirituality in personal development and professional behavior is to overlook a potentially powerful avenue through which people construct meaning and knowledge (Tisdell, 2001). Indeed, it is the spiritual component of human beings that gives rise to questions about why we do what we do, pushes us to seek fundamentally better ways of doing it, and propels us to make a difference in the world (Zohar & Marshall, 2004).

Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose

Within American society, the spiritual dimension of our lives has traditionally been regarded as intensely personal, an innermost component of who we are that lies outside the realm of appropriate discussion or concern within business and nonsectarian academic contexts. However, in an era that some social and political scientists have characterized by its spiritual “poverty,” we have seen a growing societal quest for ways of fostering spirituality and an associated hunger for spiritual growth (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). In recent years, there also has been increasingly widespread recognition of what seems to be an inherent disconnect between the dominant values of contemporary American society and the perspectives and

*The findings presented here are part of collaborative work that was conducted by the author in association with Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, Alyssa N. Bryant, and Katalin Szelenyi. John A. Astin assisted with focus group interviews.*
practices that will enable us to respond effectively not only to our individual needs but also to local, national, international, and global challenges.

While many of the core literary and philosophical traditions that comprise the liberal education curriculum are grounded in the maxim, "know thyself," there is generally little attention paid in today's secular colleges and universities to facilitating student development in the inner realm of self-understanding (Astin, 2004). Given the broad formative roles that colleges and universities play in our society, higher education represents a critical focal point for responding to the question of how we can balance the "exterior" and "interior" aspects of our lives more effectively.

Toward enhancing our existing understanding of the often overlooked "interior" aspect of undergraduate students' lives, a team of researchers at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) is currently exploring the trends, patterns, and principles of spirituality and religiousness among college students and how the college experience influences—and is influenced by—spiritual development. The study is funded by the John Templeton Foundation and directed by Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm. More information about the guiding questions and various dimensions of this multifaceted, longitudinal work is available on the project's website: www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

The findings highlighted here are based on pilot survey research that our team conducted in Spring 2003. The four-page, 234-item CSBV Survey was designed as a longitudinal follow-up of a selected sample of 12,000 third-year undergraduates who completed the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey when they first entered college in Fall 2000. The pilot survey was ultimately completed by 3,680 third-year students attending 46 diverse four-year colleges and universities.

In association with the 2003 CSBV Survey, we also conducted ten focus group interviews at six institutions around the country to examine in greater depth how students conceive of spirituality, what role (if any) spirituality plays in their lives, how they perceive their campus environments and current life circumstances as facilitating or hindering their spiritual development, and what (if any) aspirations they have with respect to spiritual growth. The students we interviewed—all of whom had completed at least one year of college—attended a diverse group of institutions with respect to geographical location, size, type (universities, liberal arts colleges, religiously-affiliated institutions), selectivity (based on the average composite SAT score of the entering class), and control (public versus private).

...some researchers have found that commitment to spiritual growth among traditionally-aged students may actually increase during college

Despite declines over time in the religious/spiritual inclinations of the country's entering college freshmen (see Astin, Oseguera, Sax, & Korn, 2003; Sax, Astin, Lindholm, & Korn, 2003), our findings show that the majority of 2003 CSBV Survey respondents indicate an awareness of, and connection with, the spiritual dimension of their lives. For example, 77 percent agree that "we are all spiritual beings;" 71 percent "gain spiritual strength by trusting in a higher power;" and 58 percent indicate that "integrating spirituality into their lives" is "very important" or "essential." Moreover, substantial numbers of students (upwards of 84 percent) report that they have had what they consider to be a spiritual experience (e.g., while witnessing the beauty and harmony of nature, listening to beautiful music, etc.). While students' survey responses indicate that spirituality likely plays an important role in their lives, the question of what, precisely, they mean by "spirituality" remains.

Defining Spirituality

The students we interviewed commonly conceived of spirituality in terms of people's "ultimate beliefs," "morals," or "philosophy of life"...a core "part of who you are" and the "values that you live by." Inherent in most students' constructions was a largely self-focused element...a sense that spirituality is an "individual thing" with strong components of "self-reflection" and "internal conversation." Others conceptualized spirituality in terms of "what you're experiencing from the world and how you process that and send that back out into the world."

While an individualistic theme was prominent, there was also a strong, commonly expressed sentiment that one's individual connection with his or her spirituality has important implications for connecting with others. Equally prevalent was the notion that spirituality is heavily process-oriented and involves "asking questions about who you are and what you believe." For many students, the time and energy expended on getting to know oneself better is linked inextricably with one's ultimate capacity to better understand others.

How did students perceive the relationship between spirituality and religion? For a few of those we interviewed, the two constructs were largely inseparable. However, the vast majority perceived there to be distinct differences between spirituality and religion and viewed the relationship between the two as highly variable. Regardless of their religious faith, or lack thereof, students tended to view spirituality as an integral, "every day" part of one's life that encompasses "emotional feelings" and an "individual connection" to "an intangible something larger than yourself," a "power beyond man." Religion, on the other hand, was commonly perceived as focusing more on "group concerns" and "doctrinal points" and conjured up for many students the image of a place where people may go to worship on a regular, or occasional, basis. Nearly all participants across institu-

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*The CIRP was created by Alexander W. Astin in 1966 and is now completed annually by over 400,000 students at more than 700 institutions nationwide. CIRP Freshman Survey findings are used widely to document an array of demographic, attitudinal, and social changes involving the nation's entering college students.*
ional types agreed with the sentiment that people can be spiritual without considering themselves religious.

To be sure, today's college students tend to conceive of religion and spirituality in varied ways. Generally speaking, however, they also tend to be fairly tolerant of divergent perspectives. For example, 88 percent of 2003 CSBV Survey respondents agree that "non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers," and 70 percent agree that "most people can grow spiritually without being religious." In fact, some students openly questioned why people really attend religious services and doubt whether spiritual growth necessarily occurs as a result of that attendance. Interestingly, nearly without exception, participants reported having experienced a change in their perspectives on the association between religiosity and spirituality since entering college.

Spiritual/Religious Engagement and Struggle

In conducting the 2003 CSBV Survey and talking with undergraduate students, we also wanted to learn more about their levels of religious engagement. Although just 29 percent of respondents had attended religious services "frequently" during the past year, 78 percent said they discuss religion and spirituality with their friends, and 77 percent indicated that they pray. Regarding discussing issues related to religion and spirituality with friends, those we interviewed overwhelmingly concurred that although they do reflect privately on this dimension of their lives—in some cases very often—actual conversations with others tend to take place only when "upsetting" things happen.

Indeed, although not a casually or routinely discussed aspect of many students' lives, their religious beliefs and spiritual considerations are often very important. For example, roughly three-quarters of CSBV Survey respondents (74 percent) indicated that their spiritual and religious beliefs provide them with strength, support, and guidance. A similar percent felt that their spiritual and religious beliefs have helped them develop their identity (73 percent), while two-thirds said that their beliefs give meaning and purpose to their lives (67 percent). Among those we interviewed, there was also a recurrent theme of wanting to "figure out" personal perspectives in relative independence of any proscribed set of beliefs.

While many undergraduate students forego regular engagement in structured religious activities, findings from the 2003 CSBV Survey revealed that a notable proportion of third-year college students are nonetheless actively struggling with spiritual issues. For example, two-thirds (65 percent) of those surveyed reported that they question their religious/spiritual beliefs at least occasionally (18 percent frequently), while 68 percent indicated that, at least "to some extent," they are "feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters." Moreover, 76 percent say they have "struggled to understand evil, suffering, and death" at least occasionally, and 46 percent have, at least occasionally, "felt angry with God." One-third (38 percent) reported feeling "disillusioned with my religious upbringing" at least "to some extent."

Some of the students we interviewed also were struggling with reconciling the teachings of their religion with their own evolution of beliefs, particularly because, "once you're exposed to [other beliefs], you can't really ignore them." Indeed, for many students, exposure to "the other," and resulting realizations that what they once believed to be the absolute, unquestionable "truth" about some aspect of their own or others' lives may not necessarily be the only "right" way, prompts much questioning and self-reflection.

A related struggle for many students is reconciling a perceived conflict between personal needs and faith expectations. Should issues of faith and doctrine always come first, or does dealing effectively with the demands of everyday life need to take precedence? Not surprisingly, the most prevalent struggles voiced by participants relate to deciding what they want to do with their lives after graduating, considering what kind of people they hope to become, and determining how they should best go about creating a life that is personally meaningful, professionally rewarding, and that ultimately, contributes back to society. For many, thinking about these issues perpetuates constant questioning and related self-doubt. Others talked more explicitly about specific issues they are wrestling with and expressed frustration that their soul searching has not yet led them to find definitive answers. Some students struggling with self-described "big" questions also found them-
VARIATIONS BASED ON ACADEMIC MAJOR

With respect to differences between students majoring in various fields, we see that students in the fine arts and humanities are about three times as likely as physical science and computer science majors to report high levels of spirituality. Interestingly, fine arts and humanities majors are also more likely than other majors to be highly engaged in a Spiritual Quest (43 percent and 42 percent respectively) and to express high levels of Spiritual Distress—questioning one's religious/spiritual beliefs; feeling disillusioned with one's religious upbringing; struggling to understand evil, suffering, and death; etc.—(27 percent and 31 percent). By contrast, students in the physical sciences (19 percent), computer science (23 percent), engineering (23 percent), and business (24 percent) are the least likely to show high levels of engagement in a Spiritual Quest, while especially low percentages of computer science (10 percent), engineering (11 percent), business (15 percent), and education (17 percent) majors report high levels of Spiritual Distress.

Close to half of education students report high levels of religious/spiritual growth during their first three years of college. This contrasts sharply with just one in five among physical and computer science majors and one in four among history and political science majors. Students majoring in journalism, health professions, engineering and psychology fall between, with about one in three reporting a high level of religious/spiritual growth during college.

We also find that the highest levels of Religious Commitment occur among students in education (53 percent) and the fine arts (48 percent). The lowest levels of religious commitment, on the other hand, are found among students in biological science (32 percent), history or political science (31 percent), computer science (30 percent), sociology (30 percent), and physical science (30 percent).

MEANING, PURPOSE, SPIRITUALITY, AND THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Given the questions, struggles, and contradictions college students deal with, it is critical to understand how the college experience adds to or detracts from students' spiritual development. What are the opportunities in college for students to pursue their spiritual quest? To search for answers to their spiritual questions? To grow spiritually? Do students discuss the spiritual issues and questions they have with others on campus? Do they talk about spirituality in any of their classes? Would they welcome more opportunities for such discussions?

Indeed, we find that considerable numbers of students are "searching for meaning and purpose in life" (75 percent), discussing spirituality with friends (78 percent), and discussing the meaning of life with friends (69 percent). However, more than half (56 percent) say that their professors never provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) say that their professors never encourage discussions of spiritual or religious matters. Moreover, while 39 percent say their religious or spiritual beliefs have been strengthened by "new ideas encountered in class," 55 percent report that their classroom experiences have had no impact on this dimension of their lives. Overall, just 55 percent are satisfied with how their college experience has provided "opportunities for religious/spiritual reflection."

Echoing the sentiments of CSBV respondents, the students we interviewed had mixed experiences dealing with spiritual/religious topics on campus. The majority at one religiously affiliated institution, for example, felt that their spirituality has been strengthened because of the culture and practices of the institution. However, there were also some students within the same institution who felt that being in an environment where everyone is of the same

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1Religious Commitment is one of 19 scales created by the UCLA project team that combines questionnaire items with similar content. These scales were derived through factor analysis, a procedure that examines the correlations among a set of variables (in this case, questionnaire items) with the aim of reducing the variables to a smaller set of more general "factors." A complete list of the items comprising each factor is available at: www.spirituality.ucla.edu.
faith has its limitations, in that there are essentially no challenges to their existing beliefs and, thus, no growth. As we heard from many students across different types of institutions, it is the diversity of faith and beliefs within the campus environment that they feel most contributes to their spiritual growth.

While many students were inclined to have discussions about religious/spiritual issues with their peers, we heard from them recurrently that they are “cautious” about how they approach these conversations and with whom they engage in such dialogue. In part, these apprehensions stem from a feeling that the spiritual dimension of one’s life is inherently personal. Understandably, students often do not feel comfortable “exposing” such aspects of their experience within environments where they are not entirely certain that their perspectives will be validated and that their sentiments will be respected.

Students also held diverse perspectives about whether the spiritual realm of personal development could be addressed effectively in classroom settings. Overall, with respect to their experiences discussing religion and spirituality within the classroom, while some students recalled classes that challenged them to “think outside the box” and “evaluate my own values, morals, and beliefs,” most students concurred with the notion that professors largely avoid discussing controversial topics.

While students were often aware of topically relevant courses they could take on their campuses, such as those offering perspectives on various religious faiths, the general consensus was that, in the words of one woman, “there’s no class that talks about spirituality as a whole with an unbiased point of view.” One student noted her perception—particularly in her biology classes—that spirituality is “kind of in the air” in certain class discussions but that professors tend to steer the conversation away from topics that are controversial. Some students at nonsectarian institutions felt that discussions about religion, whether in class or not, are generally frowned upon and that people are “afraid” to broach associated topics. However, for the most part, students were open to the idea of engaging in conversations about the spiritual aspect of their lives within campus settings in which they felt comfortable. Nonetheless, there was a widespread agreement that the process of opening communication lines for such exchanges could be challenging. This was particularly true given what students perceived to be the “prevailing assumptions” within academia.

Future Directions

Spiritual growth has been described both as “complex and multifaceted” and as “contingent and universal” (Wink & Dillon, 2002). Moreover, different trajectories have been evidenced for men and women, and our preliminary work suggests that meaningful dimensions of difference in process, practice, and perspective may exist among students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and faith traditions, also. One’s spiritual development path is also known to be influenced, at least in part, by socio-historical context and related life experiences. For example, as Stokes (1990) has elaborated, changes in how people make meaning of their lives tend to occur more intensively during times of crisis and transition than during periods of calm and stability. Variations in an individual’s openness to spiritual/religious matters are influenced by life stage, experience, and context, also. Preliminary findings from the “Spirituality in Higher Education” study support these assertions and raise new questions that we plan to explore in our future research.

Recently, we completed the first phase of data collection for a larger longitudinal study of college students’ spiritual development that we believe will provide more comprehensive insight into the spiritual development of undergraduate students. Based on findings from the 2003 CSBV Pilot Survey and related interview research, some of which have been highlighted in this article, we developed a revised two-page, 128-item version of the CSBV Survey questionnaire that was administered in Summer and Fall 2004 to a diverse sub-sample of 2004 CSBV Freshman Survey participants. The sub-sample is comprised of approximately 112,000 entering freshmen at 299 colleges and universities. These students completed a special six-page Freshman Survey, which is intended to serve as a “pretest” for a longitudinal follow-up survey to be conducted in Spring 2007 that will make it possible for the UCLA research team to track changes in students’ spiritual development during their undergraduate years.

Using data collected as part of the 2004-2005 HERI Faculty Survey, a related component of this 2004-2007 longitudinal student study is aimed at discerning how college and university faculty view the intersections between spirituality and higher education; examining how faculty beliefs and behavior may influence students’ spiritual development; and exploring how faculty view their own spiritual expression within the context of their academic careers and institutionally-based work. Data analysis related to that aspect of our work will commence in late Spring 2005.

One of the most critical questions posed by the “Spirituality in Higher Education” project is how spirituality affects other aspects of college students’ development including their academic performance, psychological and physical health, sense of personal empowerment, civic responsibility, empathy, racial/ethnic awareness and tolerance, religiousness, and satisfaction with college. While definitive answers to these questions must await the longitudinal study that is currently underway that will conclude in Spring 2007, data collected thus far have enabled us to gain some preliminary insight about college students’ spirituality. Ultimately, the aim of this work is to promote public awareness of and attention on the spiritual development of American college students. Moreover, we hope that the insights, understanding, and dialogue generated through this research and related efforts will provide a broad foundation for associated student, faculty, and institutional development initiatives which are aimed at facilitating this important and too often overlooked aspect of college student development.

Jennifer A. Lindholm is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Organizational Change and Associate Director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Dr. Lindholm also directs HERI’s Triennial National Faculty Survey and the Institute’s newest program of research on spirituality in higher education.

References


Continued on page 10
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Aston those of us who serve as students affairs professionals, perhaps no one would refute the claim that our campuses have sunk into moral disrepair. Formal studies, documentaries, and even recent novels assert that the acceptance, albeit reluctant, of the notion is slowly gaining traction. At times, they also are told what to do in a situation. However, students are left to fend for themselves if for no other reason than little agreement exists concerning which stories we should share with our students. If students are left to fend for themselves in the tournament of stories that defines the American college or university.

If students are left to fend for themselves in the tournament of stories, then what pragmatic end do documents such as student handbooks serve? Student affairs professionals are left wondering why the present generation struggles more with ethical concerns than their predecessors while the policies and procedures sections in student handbooks only continues to grow. These concerns will only persist unless we are willing to contend with the question concerning the moral of a good story. Contending
with this question is undoubtedly difficult for campuses which resonate more with the impulse of the secular than the sacred. In such places, confusion often abounds concerning whose story and what virtues are to be taught. However, perhaps even more problematic is the lack of any common means of arbitration between such differences. For those of us on campuses defining themselves as Christian, the common means of arbitrating between these questions is our common faith. Our faith in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the narratives we need. By reading the Word and practicing the sacraments in the Church we encounter these stories. We escape the tournament of narratives that plagues so many campuses and thus learn what stories we are to share with our students.

An example of such an understanding is found within the Anabaptist tradition. In light of Christ's example, Anabaptists tell the stories of their forefathers and foremothers who attempted to live up to the moral of Christ's story—even unto death. The Martyrs Mirror is a record of such stories. It tells the stories of martyrs, beginning with the time of Christ and ending in the 1660s. The moral of these stories is that Christ's sacrifice was intended to bring reconciliation between God and humanity. By telling these stories as secondary yet significant extensions of the practices of Word and table, Anabaptists invite the next generation to live up to Christ's example regardless of the cost. As a result, Anabaptist colleges and universities seek ways to reproduce these stories. Christ's example and stories concerning those who sought to live up to his example are applied to both curricular and co-curricular offerings. Students are challenged to think through what reconciliation would look like in both local and global contexts. The power of the stories that inform these practices is brought to life by the fact that such efforts may come at a great price.

The moral of a good story resides in its ability to form the sense of virtue of those who hear it. Whether implicit or explicit, we must think through the power of the stories we seek to share with our students. Violence unto oneself or unto another will no longer work as a moral common denominator. Even if we focus our attention on choices of action or intended outcomes, virtues are always part of the conversation. For those of us who serve as student affairs professionals on Christian college or university campuses, we need to think through the moral of the story we encounter in Word and sacrament. Christian traditions such as the Anabaptist one may interpret such a story in light of the power of Christ's reconciliation. Others such as the Wesleyan tradition may emphasize the power of Christ's holiness or sanctification. Regardless, the moral of this good story, the greatest story ever told, lives on in how we dare to retell it to our students.

Todd C. Ream, Ph.D., is the Director of the Center for Student Support Services at Indiana Wesleyan University. Prior to coming to Indiana Wesleyan, he served as a research fellow, a chief student affairs officer, and a residence director. In addition to the “Thinking Theologically” column in the Koinonia, he is also the author of articles in journals such as Christian Scholar’s Review, Educational Philosophy and Theory, the Journal of General Education, and New Blackfriars. He invites your remarks and suggestions concerning this particular contribution or concerning topics for further exploration. You can reach him at todd.ream@indwes.edu.

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Outside the darkness is slowly easing away as morning makes its mark on the night sky. Light filters across the horizon, and the dawning day washes over everything in its path, gradually dissolving the blackness in its wake.

It is twilight. No longer night, but not yet morning.

"The sun and moon together in the gray"... a strong metaphor for the abundant themes that make themselves known on six-time Dove Award nominee Shaun Groves' sophomore effort, *Twilight*.

"In Romans 7 Paul says that there's a civil war happening in his soul," says Groves. "That what he wants to do and what he does are not the same thing. He's torn. That's an idea we can all relate to. The person I was before I met Christ is night and day different from the person I will be when I see God face to face in heaven.

"In this time in between, I'm torn between God's way and my way. I am between the midnight and dawn of my soul. I'm in twilight. The darkness is not completely covering my heart, but the sun hasn't come up yet. Hope comes from knowing that the God who began this good work is going to complete it. Over time the sun is coming up."

It's not a shallow topic, and Shaun Groves is not a shallow artist. In fact, the depth of *Twilight* is only fitting for an artist and writer of Groves' caliber. After the 2001 release of his debut album, *Invitation to Eavesdrop*, the 29-year-old Texas native was nominated for six Dove Awards, including New Artist, Song ("Welcome Home"), and Songwriter of the Year. Groves was also the only new artist with a No. 1 AC radio hit in 2001 or 2002 ("Welcome Home"). But *Invitation to Eavesdrop* delivered more than hit radio songs and peer awards—critics everywhere lauded the album with words like “inventive,” “unique,” “irresistible” and “insightful.” Tours with Bebo Norman, Jars of Clay, Jennifer Knapp, and Avalon cemented this artist’s favor with Christian music fans across the country, and a summer 2003 international tour with Michael W. Smith introduced Groves to thousands in Europe.

With so much success, it'd be easy to succumb to the dreaded sophomore slump. Instead, Groves rose to the challenge, delivering 10 songs of stunning honesty and ebullient adoration. From the rockin' opening strains of guitar-driven first single "See You" to the gently-picked closing notes of "God of Us," *Twilight* depicts an author living out the theme of being caught between two worlds, two ways of life.

Groves says, "That theme of choosing midnight or dawn runs throughout this record. I do have a choice which desire I will feed—the desire to please me or the desire..."
to please God. For instance, 'I Love You' is a song about choosing to love and continue to befriend someone close to me who has made a mistake. Another song, 'Jesus,' talks about how when we love the least—those difficult for us to love—we love Jesus. It's easy to choose to love a wife or a child or even a difficult co-worker, but it's hard to love a prostitute or a foreign soldier. Our desire to love those people is not as great as our desire to stay comfortable and clean."

One track that's appealed to fans since Groves first wrote it in the summer of 2001, "Without You," depicts Shaun’s commitment to his wife Becky and their two small children, Gabriella and Gresham. "It's about being torn between home and the road. There's a constant balance of working to keep in touch with my callings as a husband and father as well as a traveling musician."

Musically, Twilight doesn't stray far from its lyrical theme. Heavy guitar tracks are balanced by an equal number of pianodriven ballads, all revealing the dichotomy that is Shaun Groves: a performer who loves to rock out and have fun as much as he enjoys playing simple, contemplative melodies that haunt the memory as they prick the soul.

"This record is more basic in some ways than Invitation to Eavesdrop," says Groves. "It's free of vocal tuning, it's free of computers. There are no drum loops or anything synthetic. It's me at an upright piano or on an acoustic guitar with other guys in a circle in one big room with the tape rolling making music. This is what I sound like with a band."

From performing nearly 200 concerts since his debut released, Shaun has certainly gotten comfortable on stage. But he'll be the first to say that as much as he loves playing for an audience, he feels most equipped to teach, to hide truth in the midst of pop songs.

"I started out as a teacher," says Groves. "I like the dialogue that happens when I sit in a circle with a small group of students and we discuss scripture. I like creating a safe place where we can bring our questions, share our answers, admit our defeats, celebrate our successes, and be a family."

Groves’ quick wit and dry sarcasm have endeared him to his Bible study members and college students everywhere, while his thought-provoking attitude towards worship music has inspired many to extend their praise beyond singing in their church pews. In fact, the first pressing of the Twilight CD will include an exclusive live recording of four worship songs Groves has written, including new track “Here I Am.” His own thoughts on the subject of worship were borne out of intense study in original biblical languages.

“The words in both Greek and Hebrew that are translated into the English word ‘worship’ most often in our Bible are words that mean most literally ‘work’ and ‘service.’ Worship is my response with all that I am to all that God is. I know now that if I raise my voice and my hands in praise—but I don’t use my voice and stretch my hands out to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and fight for the poor and oppressed—then I have only worshiped a singer or a song, not God. God deserves all. I think, based especially on the writing of the Old Testament prophets, that God would rather have service without singing than singing without service.”

And Groves’ desire for his own music is to inspire Christians to serve by reminding them that God is at work in every moment of their lives.

“After hearing Twilight, I want people to walk away with the comfort that I found in reading Romans 7. The process of refinement is continuing. I hope this thought can inspire us to look at each moment in our lives as an opportunity, an opportunity to love and to learn. Every longing, every loneliness and heartache we have, every need that is not fulfilled is a possibility to be more dependent on God. Every relationship we have is an opportunity to choose that person over the things of this world. I hope Twilight can encourage each person who hears it to look at every facet of their life and choose sunlight over darkness, choose to follow Christ’s way of thinking and not their own."

Shaun Groves will be releasing a new recording, White Flag, on July 12, 2005. In addition, he has made several contributions at CMCentral.com, on which there are several files of music from the new album. This article was retrieved from www.rochetownrecords.net/media/bios/TwilightBio.doc
Tilikum Retreat Center
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The New Professionals Retreat is designed for Student Development/Student Affairs/Campus Ministries professionals with one to four years of experience in the field.

"What I found at NPR were 35 twenty- and thirty-somethings (mostly) like me who actually 'got it.' They 'got' what I do, why I do it, and what my life is like... because their lives are just like mine! This was an unbelievable value to each of us. I made friends and connections with people who understand me and have a heart for college students and for the Lord. I now have a network of friends and colleagues across the country who are praying for me and who are helping me work through the issues and questions that we face in our profession." Mindy Cacopardo
Resident Director & Student Activities Advisor—Gordon College, NPR 2003

It is fair to say that career centers at liberal arts colleges struggle to market their services to students. In my experience, it is no less true for Christian colleges than for our secular counterparts. It is very common to see in career publications various ideas for enticing students into our offices with a variety of bribes and perks. In one professional meeting a colleague stated that “candy outside our office really works.” Although I resist being reduced to snagging students with sweets, I also have been in the position of trying anything that works. It is almost embarrassing to see the lengths to which career centers will go to lure students to their offices and have them pay attention to their programs. If we’re not careful, this can lead to a frustration that works itself out in criticism of our students. The themes that often emerge when college career people get together center on the fact that liberal arts students are not as focused, directed, goal-oriented, and career-directed as we would like. At our worst, we may resort to the word “clueless” to describe them. And that word can cover a multiplicity of issues, including a seeming obliviousness to the future, a lack of planfulness, unclear goals, and what sometimes looks like the “Peter Pan syndrome”—a resistance to growing up. Even if this is in part true, it is not at all helpful to fall into what I would characterize as the “client as enemy” syndrome. When those we serve don’t respond in the way we would like, we can sometimes turn on them and make them the villains of our drama.

Maybe it’s more our problem. Maybe we have stuck with models, language, and approaches that don’t work well and, by doing so, pushed students away rather than inviting them in. More specifically, when I looked at our department at Westmont, I sensed that there was an opportunity to make a change that could significantly alter our vision and how we are seen.

For lack of a better place to start, and because I believe it symbolized what seemed to be an ineffective approach, I looked long and hard at our old name: Career and Life Planning. What stood out most particularly was the word “career.” I decided to start from scratch and completely reappraise our identity. I had been thinking about it for some time, so it didn’t take me long to enumerate the reasons why I found “career” to be problematic.

First, “career” is not a word students at a school like ours tend to relate to or use. In fact, I would go so far as to say that they fear it. It seems big (maybe overwhelming), “adult” (when they cherish the role of “student”), far away (until the second semester of their senior year, and sometimes later than that), and connotes a role and identity that is far from their interest or focus. It has been noted that many women on our campus dislike the word as it implies to them something in opposition to marriage and motherhood. Whatever the reason, I would contend that when most students hear “career,” a barrier goes up which lessens the chances of our seeing them until they are required to access our services at crunch time—when they need a job now. Few students would say they want a career. They may desire direction, a sense of purpose, a greater understanding of how God has gifted them, a better idea of their calling and vocation, etc. “Career” is not usually a part of their language, and I have rarely heard a student express a desire to achieve one. As students think in these more biblical paradigms, we certainly want to partner with them as fully as possible. We want to get out of the situation in which we expend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to convince students that they need to come to “the career center,” and to assure them that we do far more than “career” counseling.

Second, to the degree that “career” equates to “job,” it is a misleading term that does not really describe what we are about. Most of what we do has an indirect relationship to getting a job. Our primary focus is on self-understanding: clarifying of interests, honing in on skills, gaining a deeper understanding of significant personality characteristics, clarifying life values as they inform decision-making. Another focus is on equipping students to access information they need to make informed decisions. We are a resource for all aspects of graduate school exploration and planning. In other words, our work truly is “career” planning.

Changing Our Name and Identity: Rebranding or Renewal?

By Dana Alexander
Career consultant and author Dr. Howard Figler refers to students’ perception that there is a “magic list” of jobs that career centers possess (perhaps other constituencies such as trustees and parents have this same idea) which may keep them from doing the hard work of effective job-searching and networking. I wonder if the word “career” doesn’t reinforce that notion.

Third, it is a word that has different implications for different constituencies, each of which may have in mind accomplishments and expectations that we cannot meet. When constituents hear the word “career,” it sets in motion a set of perceptions about what we offer and what we can do. I already have described what I think it means to students. It often means something very different to some Board of Trustee members, certain parents, and probably the world-at-large. I would submit that what it tends to translate to is the old concept of “placement center.” That is, we are seen as the department that places students into jobs or finds jobs for them. That is in fact not what we do, nor is it what most career centers across higher education do, which is one of the reasons why the word “placement” has all but disappeared from the names of career centers. In a variety of ways, we equip students to find jobs, but the “placing” becomes more their responsibility as they put to use the resources (e.g., well crafted résumés), techniques (e.g., effective interviewing and networking skills), and experiences (e.g., internships), that we provide for them. Most career centers would see their primary responsibility as “empowering,” not “placing.”

Fourth, even in the larger culture, “career” is an ambiguous, inexact term. Career development books go to great pains to delineate the difference among a job, an occupation, and a career, and even then have to admit that there is confusion and lack of consensus over the definitions. It is hard to think in traditional terms about a career when workers in our day stay so little time in a given job and, even by the strictest definition, may have three or four “careers” in their lifetime. In many ways the word “career” is outdated; we just don’t yet have another word to replace it with.

Fifth, our old name failed to communicate what were trying to accomplish as a Christian institution and inaccurately reflected our identity, values, and ethos. The word “career” is not a biblical one. When we as an institution talk about a Christian liberal arts education, we do not generally describe it in “career” terms. Though we mention the value of transferable skills and competencies to life after Westmont, our focus is not so much on “finding a career,” but on maximizing the gifts students have been given by God to make a difference in the world. Though we rise to the challenge of anyone who would characterize an education here as “impractical,” we spend a relatively small amount of energy and time on convincing prospective students that they will find a good job upon graduating from our college. And even if we could, should we? Should we capitulate to the utilitarian approach that implies “more bang for the buck” at our school? While preparing a student to find employment following college is certainly an aspect of what Career and Life Planning did and while we certainly strove to be a bridge to the world of work and even specific job opportunities, that was only one part of our mandate. And I am convinced that even that part could be better accomplished if we took a different approach to presenting ourselves to students.

There are other ways to characterize our focus that more accurately reflect our Christian perspective. In his book Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life, Douglas Schuurman (2004) says, “Churches and church-related colleges should lead the way in a recovery of life as vocation. Pastoral care, teaching, liturgy, hymnody, preaching, and sacrament must all be reexamined in light of the church’s task to evoke and sustain a sense for all of life as an integrated response to God’s callings. Church-related college curricula and community can become crucial avenues for expanding and deepening a sense of calling in students, faculty, administration, and staff” (p. xiii).

With that in mind, and after a school-wide contest, in January 2005, we officially changed our name to “Office of Life Planning: Resources for Direction, Transition, and Calling.” I was exceedingly gratified that this whole process had approval and support at the highest levels of the college.

Our change is an experiment, and it will take some time to see if we have succeeded in our goals, but these are the benefits we hope to achieve:

1. A greater sense of congruence between our name and our mission. We want to avoid the uphill fight to educate our constituencies (especially students) that we are “more than a career center.”

2. We hope to be more “user friendly” to students. If my analysis is correct (that we place unnecessary impediments to students by our name and identity), then we should see more students, especially earlier in their time at Westmont, and have a greater impact on the campus.

3. This has presented the opportunity to educate all aspects of the Westmont community about our mission. A name and identity change has provided the forum to give a higher profile to our department through the variety of ways we have announced and explained our process.

4. I believe a focus on call and vocation may resonate better with faculty with whom we are trying to develop increasingly strong relationships. My sense is that most faculty have seen us largely in a utilitarian way, necessary for that point where a student needs a résumé and help with finding a job. If we can broaden our vision and mandate in their minds, perhaps true collaboration would increase as well.

5. I want our department to be truly Christian and biblical in its orientation and not mimic the world. This may be one way we can set ourselves apart in a healthy way.

Several months ago I heard the career director at a large secular university talk about the importance of “branding” our departments if we wanted to make an impression. It was a well crafted presentation on logos, advertising, publicity, and the like. While I found her insights and suggestions helpful, I knew that whatever we did it couldn’t simply be a “rebranding.” What we are about is redemptive renewal, and my prayer is that our change represents that goal as we move into a new era.

Dana Alexander is the Director of the Office of Life Planning at Westmont College. Dana can be reached at dalexander@westmont.edu.
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Shaun Groves

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