# Commonality & Diversity

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## ABSTRACT

As students are increasingly influenced by postmodern thought, which promotes ideas of community without a common center and emphasizes difference, so students may have fresh conceptualizations of what community is and how it functions. This study explored students' conceptions, experiences, and ideals of community.

The tension between commonality and diversity within community has caused much debate in the social sciences. Interviewees, who were students at member institutions of the CCCU, recognize the same tension and often struggle to navigate their relationships within a collegiate environment that promotes both.

Thirty undergraduate senior students at two Christian colleges were interviewed in February 2000. A semi-structured interview protocol was used. The interview yielded tape-recordings, then transcribed raw data. Verbal analysis provided several recurrent themes. Students' conception on the two most prevalent themes, commonality and diversity, are discussed in this paper. Finally, implications are drawn for the Christian college campus.

## Community:
## Student Voices on the Tension Between Commonality and Diversity

With radical force, postmodern thought has wrecked havoc on a fairly common understanding of what previously constituted a community. The idea that community consists of a group of similar people who are held together by commonalities is challenged by the postmodern emphasis on difference. What has been termed the "sameness assumption" (Furman, 1998), that is, the modern tendency to assume that ideal communities are homogeneous, has been replaced by the idea of diversity at the center of community.

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A continuing battle rages between libertarian and communitarian thinkers around the issue of shared substantive values at the societal level. University professor and founder of The Communitarian Network, Amitai Etzioni, is a leading communitarian. His research of American and foreign history has led him to conclude that the proper view of American society is a mosaic held within a frame. His article "The Community of Communities" speaks of American society as a conglomeration of diverse parts that share a commitment to shared framework. Unlike most countries of the world, the United States is characterized by increasing heterogeneity. Etzioni suggests reinforcing the bonds that unite Americans and cautions against emphasizing difference. "By relentlessly classifying and distinguishing between Americans -- by stressing diversity but not the elements that bind us -- we further diminish our already weak and weakening commonalities: We face the danger of coming apart at the seams" (Etzioni, 1996, p. 128).

Etzioni is not advocating the blending of culture and difference, but appreciation coinciding with shared bonds. He argues that libertarians proclaim that any determined commonality threatens individual rights and thus form a "thin society". In contrast, the "thick society" framework incorporates shared core values to sustain and maintain "a reasonable measure of unity" (Etzioni, 1996, p. 130). However, the core values need not be rigid and untouchable, "to maintain its own continuity, the framework must continuously adapt to changing balances within society and to geopolitical changes" (Etzioni 1996, p. 130). He heralds "layered loyalty", diversity within unity, bonded pluralism, and communities within community. That is, to "a view of society in which persons respect differences while maintaining unity" (Etzioni 1996, p. 137).

Communitarian ideals pushed to the extreme cause libertarians to fear what they call "the dark side of community." While community is generally considered a social good, Noddings cautions educators to intelligently consider that "Community is not an unalloyed good; it has a dark side" (Noddings 1996, p. 245). Community ideology can result in domination, distrust of outsiders, alienation, assimilation, conformity, coercion, parochialism, exclusivity, marginalization, balkanization and totalitarianism (Noddings, 1996; Furman, 1998; Shields and Seltzer, 1997; Giroux, 1992; McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Noddings suggests a built-in ethical system of collective goods, which is free from the dark side. Rorty's (1989) answer is community with liberalism as its center. Noddings seeks to answer whether collective orientation and individual liberty can coexist. If a unifying center at the societal level is inconsistent with liberalism, perhaps the local level is the place for communitarianism (Noddings, 1996). The public-private split laid out by Rorty gives credence to this resolution in which community at the public level exists only for utilitarian purposes, such as voting, with no genuine allegiance. Etzioni sees danger in this solution.

> *Without a firm sense of one supra community, there is considerable danger that the constituent communities will turn on one another. Indeed the more one favors strengthening communities, which is the core of the Communitarian agenda, the more one must concern oneself with ensuring that they see themselves as parts of a more encompassing whole, rather than fully independent and antagonistic. (Etzioni, 1993, p. 155)*

Magolda and Abowitz point to the writing of John Stuart Mill and John Locke as the foundation for liberal political philosophy, emphasizing liberty, the autonomous self, and persons as rational machines, devoid of cultural and relational influence. The liberal views persons as able to maintain "a critical distance" (Magolda and Abowitz, 1997, p. 272) on societal influences and able to freely choose their identities and commitments. Communitarians consider this view of human beings "naïve," as it presupposes a "divided self" or an "unencumbered self" (Galston, 1989, p. 722), thus ignoring the shaping of social groups on an individual. Rather, communitarians see people as interdependent and making meaning from social contexts.

Noddings (1996) refers to the feminist ethic of care and primacy of relation. She champions women in history who demonstrated compassion and service to others in spite of differing intellectual viewpoints. Noddings offers care as the center for community, as she defines it:

> *The felt obligation (prior to agency) to respond helpfully when needs present themselves; a sense of universality based on needs and feelings rather than beliefs, principles, affiliations or highly contested versions of humans as imago dei; and a recognition of the contingent nature of even the closest and most loving communities. (Noddings, 1996, p. 266)*

Noddings desires that a center is maintained within community, but one which can be embraced by diverse people because it is free from ideological content. She warns against declaring the majority, traditional, Eurocentric, white values as the shared societal values. Communitarians retort by stating that as the community evolves, so must the core ideals. Theirs is not a call to preserving or maintaining antiquated, and therefore inadequate, societal values. Rather, re-evaluating values as the population changes.

Christians who seek a proper understanding of Christian community also feel this tension between commonality and diversity. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12, Gordon Fee (1987) argues that there can be no unity without diversity. In responding to problems within the church at Corinth, Paul establishes his plea for diversity within unity by highlighting that God himself (the Three in One) displays diversity within unity. Within the church, "their common experience of the Spirit in conversion is the key to unity (vs.13)" (Fee, 1987, p. 583). He continues, the need for diversity exists "if there is to be a true body and not simply a monstrosity" by which he means a healthy church as opposed to a homogeneous one (Fee, 1987, p. 583). The postmodern emphasis on diversity is a reminder to Christians that the Christian community is diverse in its makeup of race, age, gender, gifts, nationality, personality, handicap and social status. However, the one around whom the Christian community rallies, that is, the triune God, is the one who manifests variety throughout his creation. Diversity is a valued reality within the community, but the common center is essential for the community to exist at all.

First Corinthians 12:4-11 stresses the diverse gifts God manifests to different people for the common good of the community which are a result of their faith in the same Spirit and same Lord. The great diversity builds up the community, not the individual. Discussing verses 12-14, Fee emphasizes that Paul suggests that even though the body is one, it does not consist of one member but of many. Thus, it requires diversity since

it is, in fact, already one body. However, the unity that exists is not uniformity (this is the correction Paul is offering the Corinthians), and Fee strongly states, "there is no such thing as true unity without diversity" (Fee, 1987, p. 602). Paul strengthens his statement by obliterating the significance of distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free. While the distinctions remain, their significance pales in comparison with the new unity and common life that exists in the Spirit.

In this passage, Paul is not requiring a multicultural "look" for the church at Corinth, but rather addressing the problem that arose over gifts. Specifically Paul deals with the gift of tongues and the believers' tendency to find distinctions and value according to gifted-ness. Paul is also not hinting at pluralism or relativism within the church. Each of verses 4-9, and 11 mention the "same Spirit," "the same Lord," "same God," or "one Spirit" after each mention of the type of diverse gift. The diversity he promotes is variety, which is initiated and bestowed by God himself upon a person who has submitted to him in faith.

## THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore the way college students who attend Christian colleges and universities conceptualize community. The tension between commonalities and diversity within community arose consistently throughout the interviews. Students' responses to interview questions reveal that this tension between commonality and difference continues to frustrate and intrigue them.

The research project was undertaken to answer the question: In what ways, and to what extent, are the community experiences of college students who attend two Christian liberal arts institutions similar and dissimilar to their ideals about community? Thirty senior students from two Christian liberal arts institutions, who met a demographic profile[1] based on the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' "Report on the 1996 CCCU First-Year Entering Students," participated in a sixty-minute pre-determined open-ended interview that was tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

### Major Findings

Students' conceptions of community emerged as the interviews were analyzed. Several specific themes[2] came into view from the data; this paper will consider two, Commonality and Diversity.

### Commonality

When speaking about Christian community, students were unwavering on the importance of commonality, or having things in common with others in the community. After identifying places where they had experienced community, students were asked to describe the nature of their community experiences since coming to college. Repeatedly, they could not do so without commenting on the commonalities among those in the community. In all of the examples, the community members were Christians, thereby sharing their faith in common.

Students said that in order to be a member of the community, they all must be "believers," or have put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. In addition, they must share specific common beliefs, or the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Some students delineated the specific beliefs necessary for Christian community. Peter, an athlete and literature major, said

> Christian community is a group of people where the people are joined by a common set of beliefs. They all accept basic points of Christian orthodoxy; Jesus was the Son of God, conception of the truth of the Word. They are in community because this is their focus ... a core set of beliefs, it doesn't have to be my personal theological points, but a core set that is basic Christian orthodoxy.

Secondarily, Peter wanted the community to share a commitment to justice and a commitment to taking care of other people.

Nate said, "Christian community is a certain bond or connectedness amongst Christians that is based on shared values and goals and beliefs. The shared values and beliefs unite them and create some of the connectedness and unity and love."

Students assert that these commonly held beliefs are necessary in order for Christian community to exist. Membership within the community is contingent upon faith in Jesus Christ. More than just adherence to external lifestyle habits, students speak of a spiritual unity through Jesus Christ and a mystical union because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Further, they maintain that a shared belief system determines the kind of community that unfolds--one that is guided by a common purpose, the topic of the following section.

In addition to common faith, several other commonalities were mentioned: common goal of wanting to serve God, to educate the college campus about missions and provide opportunities for missions, glorifying and loving God, united in zeal for missions, common team goal to win championships, enjoy God together and a common focus or purpose.

When asked to define Christian community, a recurring answer was that Christian community consists of Christians serving the same purpose. Students spoke of a bond or connectedness based on shared purpose and goals that grow out of their shared values and beliefs. The community is thus able to "experience Christianity together." The goal, as they share their life, is "to glorify God" and to "bring each other closer to the Lord."

In similar fashion to student's answers regarding a definition of community, their answers regarding their ideals of community consistently demonstrated the importance of commonality. Their answers are three-fold and can be divided into three categories that are represented by heart, mind and strength. Inwardly, students speak about the common indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a common commitment to Jesus Christ in one's heart. Intellectually, they speak of assenting to a common goal, agreeing on a common vision, or submitting to a common purpose. Brooke said this assent to common ideology is "foundational to building a community." However, the goal or purpose is flexible and may change depending on circumstances. The common purpose gives birth to common activity as ideology works itself into community life in tangible ways: sharing the gospel, learning, ministry, working and service surfaced as potential common ways for the community to minister.

When students were asked to mention elements that are essential for the existence of Christian community, the majority of students responded that commonality was non-negotiable. Repeatedly commonality was identified as a common goal, focus or purpose. The object of the goal was God himself, the desire to be Christ-like, like-mindedness, the desire for God, the desire that others grow closer to God, and serving the Lord. Kari succinctly stated, "a true Christian community needs to have a definite desire for pursuing God." All of these can be summed up in the purpose to glorify God and Sam represented the thinking of many when he said "God is glorified in a special way when there's a large group of people."

It is interesting to note that when students were asked to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian community, their ideas about non-Christian community were pessimistic and dismissive. Because there could be no common ideology to provide the glue necessary, a community would be based on one's residence or job and this is neither permanent nor deep enough to warrant lasting bonds.

To summarize, students' experiences and ideals of commonality within community were consistent. In both cases the spiritual, rational and physical aspects were employed and vital. Commonality in all three aspects gave birth to the community and allowed it to be enjoyable, functional, educational and soil for growth.

### Diversity

A second strong theme that emerged from the data was diversity, or difference between people. Students recognize that community requires a common center, such as belief in Jesus. They think diversity is often considered a threat to community although theoretically, that should not be the case. As mentioned in the previous section, commonality within the community is non-negotiable. Diversity within the community can co-exist with commonality because the nature of the diversity is external or in the non-essentials of the faith. While commonality is necessarily at the center, diversity is on the periphery. The two do not oppose one another; they are different aspects of the same entity, like different organs of the same organism. The diverse attributes of an individual are peripheral in comparison to the innermost things held in common. Jason appealed to the body of Christ and insisted, "diversity is essential to community ... Unity comes in Christ and wanting to live as Christ lived, but diversity comes on a variety of levels, gender, etc."

When describing diversity, students offered these realms of difference: different backgrounds, gifts, "places people are at," interests, nationalities, personalities, strengths, ethnicities, majors and worship styles. They did not offer different theological views or religious faiths as acceptable points of diversity within Christian community. It seems, the stuff of their faith is central; the stuff of diversity is peripheral.

When asked if diversity and commonality can coexist, students reported that they could indeed. Apparently, because the two do not claim the same theoretical "place," they can easily coexist. Each serves a different role in the design and functioning of community. Sonja offered her prescription for balancing the two:

> *I guess for it not to be (in) tension what you have in common needs to be more important than what is different ... The center for Christian community needs to be the core beliefs and the dedication to the Christian faith and a desire to enact that.*

Asia, reflecting on her two years in Zimbabwe said,

> *Diversity brings about commonality, understanding the hugeness of the Lord and how he can be worshipped makes you a person who can see commonality more ... it makes commonality so much more precious because it's those things that really, really matter.*

Students also mentioned that diversity improves the community, thereby making it more effective. The same goal can be worked toward with a diversity of gifts or ideas. Shane saw the need for emphasizing commonality when there is diversity.

> *Some people from different races come here (to college) and assume that all white people are bad and you have to acknowledge that whatever our race is we all have Jesus Christ in common, so you have to be intentional about what's in common or else there will be many problems. Diversity is a threat on the surface level issues that can be difficult to get past like language barriers or outer differences, but at a deeper level it shouldn't be a threat in theory.*

Logan adds, "If we focus on the big picture, we can exist with our differences. We shouldn't focus so much on our diversity. Little things aren't detrimental to community unless it's something that we make detrimental." Kate's assessment was, "Diversity is only a threat to community when people are coming at it from a place of pain and people are defensive then you can't get to the real issues because of the symptoms." One student said the center of Christian community is theological: faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone. Human diversity is not in tension with that core.

In their definition of community, a small number of students indirectly touched upon the issue of diversity through the idea of gifts. That is, rather than specifying diversity explicitly, they mentioned that a community is like the body of Christ which is made up of people with different gifts and roles. These differences are necessary to the functioning of the organism. While perhaps not central to what it means to be Christian, diversity is recognized as God-given.

While diversity appeared tangential compared to commonality, students were skeptical of a community when individuality is squelched and people are forced to be alike; they want to maintain what is unique to each. Some see individualism as an extreme emphasis on individuality and a desire to stand alone. Others confuse the meaning of individualism and individuality, stating that individualism and being individualistic is good and should be encouraged.

The theme of comfort and the desire for it was easily discerned when students spoke of diversity. Diversity makes community less comfortable and it can be difficult to feel a sense of belonging. They state it is much easier to be in community with similar people. Therefore, students naturally gravitate toward people who are similar to them. Tori admitted,

> *We like to circle around people most like us who agree with us because they support our way of thinking and encourage and affirm us. We don't naturally go to people who are more diverse and will challenge us by disagreeing with the way we think.*

Others divulge that there is a lot of similarity among their friendship group. Rachel purports, "Commonality is important, because you must connect in order to build a community or friendship ... it (is) easier to be comfortable and build relationships, like with my RA staff, because we had a lot in common." Some are concerned about the loss of comfort when diversity is pronounced. Martha, believing that strongest connections occur among those similar, said, "The point of community is to develop a network of people who are like you ... Community is people who are just like you that you can bond with."

Speaking of interacting with an international student, Nate said hesitatingly, "I learned a lot, I see the world differently, and it adds a lot of richness. But I won't ever be as close to him as I will to other people." Because his experience was less comfortable, Nate would prefer to interact regularly with those who were less different. Wyatt, sharing Nate's concern, poses the question:

> *Using the terms diversity and community in the same sentence is really crossing the streams ... if someone different acts differently than you do, do you need to feel compelled to go and interact with them for the sake of diversity and exposing yourself to something new that's extremely unnatural?*

Later he added,

> *If you pick up too much diversity though two people may not feel comfortable interacting, there may not be enough common ground between them to promote community. Diversity can eliminate common ground if there's too much of it or if you accumulate more diversity.*

These students, having felt pressure to diversify their campuses and lives, question whether the loss of comfort is worth the benefits that diversity affords.

In addition to desiring comfort, students cited a positive outcome of their community experiences was learning to appreciate people who are different from them. They recognize that differences help a group function and that dissimilar people can learn from one another. Indeed, learning to appreciate people was the most common answer students offered for positive benefits of their community experiences. They appear to sense that people are valuable and therefore should be appreciated. There is room in their ideal communities for individuality and some want to allow for individualism. Several people would intentionally include diverse people in their ideal community. However, individuals are subordinate to the community.

Kate recognizes both the importance of comfort and challenge. She suggests that being "heard and understood" are nurtured in situations that are not diverse: "It's good when you can relate to people in community and are heard and understood, but I've come to appreciate those who are more diverse from me."

To summarize, students see the potential difficulty of being in community with those who are different, yet they refer to "learning to appreciate them" as one of the greatest outcomes of being in community, suggesting that it is a process. That is, the appreciation is not immediate but learned.

Students were asked to discuss the negative aspects of their community experiences. "Difference" surfaced as a cause for relational struggles. Some students found interaction with different personalities difficult. Jason generalized, "When someone thinks different from you, your immediate response is to become defensive." Anna added, "It can be uncomfortable to be different from others and it's good to learn to deal with that." In her eyes, the benefit of the rough experience outweighs the negative.

To summarize, students had strong consistent ideas of the importance and content of diversity. They had developed ideas of the tension and solution to the tension caused by diversity. When talking about the nature of their community experiences, diversity was not highlighted very often. When a brief reference was offered, such as, "the diversity was immense," it came without describing it or developing the importance of it. When asked directly about diversity students had much to say, but in open-ended question, they did not volunteer much on the topic.

Interestingly, while students see the necessity of commonality, they often describe themselves and their group/team/school in terms of differences. However, the differences mentioned are often parochial, social butterflies verses wall flowers, or west coast verses midwest, football player verses quartet singer. One may question whether these qualify as substantial cultural differences. When considering the breadth of human difference within the world, those who attend an American Christian college may appear homogenous.

In most cases, their experience was one of pleasant homogeneity: similar people sharing a similar Christian worldview out of which grew similar commitments and lifestyle. Most students interviewed have only experienced "Christian community." Most of them have grown up in Christian families and attended evangelical churches. Some attended Christian schools prior to college. Their responses are thusly influenced by their experience.

## Conclusions and Recommendation

Students did not offer their ideas about diversity unless provoked. As they described their community experiences most did not mention diversity. Further, they did not state that diversity was essential to Christian community. When directly asked, they wanted to maintain individuality, but maintain the primacy of the community over individuals. The few students who saw the necessity of diversity were usually those who had substantial experiences in diverse communities. Several had concerns about how comfortable community would be with those very different. One may wonder whether these students may be fearful of the unknown when speaking of diversity. Their community experiences have been mostly homogeneous. Therefore, they clearly point out, this is most comfortable to them. Although they state that sameness is comfortable, they do not stop there with their analysis. Rather, the majority said that difference is essential to good community and that learning to appreciate difference is one of the greatest benefits of community. Apparently, when diversity is already

established within a given community, positive ramifications result, but because the process may be uncomfortable, few would intentionally diversify their community.

Overall, students wanted the emphasis in community to be on commonalities and not on diversity. This may be a reaction to a perceived emphasis on diversity surrounding them in the media or at their institution. They sense that increasing diversity is an institutional initiative and have been exposed to speakers who provoke guilt in them for attending (and being comfortable in) predominately upper/middle class, white institutions. Some are frustrated by this push to diversify, others are relieved that the problem is receiving attention. Regardless of the reasons for their ideas about diversity, one thing is clear; their own comfort is a priority. They seem to be saying, "relationships are hard enough, let's not complicate them more by immense differences!" What they consider a big difference is sometimes as inconsequential as what hobby or sport they enjoy. It is ironic that, although they say they want to emphasize commonality, they highlight parochial differences as challenges. It seems they look for points of distinction and allow those as reasons for division. Perhaps this is part of their quest to establish their own sense of identity. In noticing the differences in others, they are establishing their own uniqueness. At many Christian institutions, the students, faculty, staff and administrators are all Christians. Consequently, it appears that students seek to find significance in other ways. External distinctions are elevated as students formulate their identity. It seems plausible that Christian students who attend secular universities would emphasize their common faith to counteract their feelings of isolation or being misunderstood. In their need for fellowship, these students may minimize distinctions that the students interviewed would find divisive, such as personality, interests and background. In this way, students at secular universities may have a truer concept, or at least experience, of Christian community.

While students have learned from those different from themselves, their comments indicate that comfort is more highly prized in friendships than challenge or sharpening. They state that initial discomfort may give way to comfort in time, but perhaps they do not want to invest the extra time and effort necessary, but rather want immediate comfort in relationships. A community of like individuals is perceived as conducive to immediate comfort. According to interviews, students highly value authenticity and being known. Their reservations with regard to diversity suggest that being known may be compromised as difference pervades. Other's ability to instantly know them well will be challenged by their different personality, background, culture or theological stance. Further, students desire vulnerability within relationships. However, they must be confident that they will not be judged once they reveal who they are. They abhor judgment and see it as detrimental to community. Perhaps they fear that someone very different will misunderstand them, and thereby find it easy to judge them. Consequently, they would not be free to be themselves and not feel known. The end result would be a community that does not provide the feeling of connectedness for which they are primarily searching.

When different portions of students' interviews are brought together, they appear incongruent. Students admit they desire to be comfortable and find difference prohibits that, but also theoretically want commonalities to be more highly valued in community than difference. If the essential commonalities were as strong as students say they should be, the points of difference would not pose a challenge to their comfort level.

Why would peripheral issues challenge relationships? Could it be that they view others "according to the flesh," 2 Corinthians 5:16, rather than according to their essence? Perhaps they know how things should be but have a hard time making it reality.

On one hand students say all believers are one in Christ, and that diversity is important for a community to function. On the other hand, some say they are too uneasy to force relationships with those who are markedly different. The apostle Paul provides them with a challenge -- God broke down the dividing wall and brought peace so that all believers are fellow citizens. Legal, ethnic and national distinctions are obliterated in light of faith in Christ, Galations 3, Ephesians 2. To those students who see dissimilarity as a hurdle, Paul says you are no longer strangers and aliens, but one. Relationships and interactions should be driven by this theological truth, not by fear of the unknown or by a desire for comfort. Students should be challenged to live out this theological reality regardless of opposing feelings.

Racially and ethnically diversifying the campus is difficult but should be a priority of admissions offices. Many Christian colleges recognize this need and are making efforts toward this end. The issue of minority students being drawn to and comfortable in a predominately white institution arises. The burden then falls to human resources to hire faculty and staff who represent other racial and ethnic groups.

Effort should be made toward integration of race, interests, intellect and ethnicity in the living environment. Separate living quarters based on interests or race may be detrimental to the community efforts being made in other realms of campus. Modeling appreciation of difference among faculty can be accomplished by team teaching with someone from a different field or viewpoint to demonstrate respect, openness and collegiality.

Teachers of programs such as "The Freshman Experience" or "The First Year Seminar" have the unique opportunity to interact with first year students coming straight from high school who are eager to learn what college life and learning are all about. Here, at the beginning of their college career, is an opportune time to teach on the necessity of difference for the functioning of relationships, specifically marriage, family, in ministry and the church.

Faculty and staff can communicate a proper concept of community to students simply by the language they choose to use. We must begin to view community as something we *are* rather than something we *create*. We are the body of Christ, a group of diverse people rallying around Christ, who is our center. Commonality and diversity are theological realities within Christian community because of God's intentional design and creativity. Our responsibility is to reflect what is true of us, not seek to create it anew. Our parlance must be consistent with this theological truth. Perhaps then our students will rejoice in both commonality and diversity rather than perceive these two aspects of community in negative tension.

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## FOOTNOTES

[1] In an effort to interview students who were typical of CCCU member schools, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' "Report on the 1996 CCCU First-Year Entering Students" was used to determine a demographic profile. The points of the profile were (1) at least 60% female students; (2) students between eighteen and twenty-two who had entered college the same year they graduated from high school; (3) Caucasians; (4) approximately 60% of students from families with annual income $25,000-$75,000 with a median income of $50,000; (5) students who had parents who were "living with each other;" and (6) United States citizens who spoke English as first language. Seniors were interviewed because they had entered college in 1996 when the CCCU Report was conducted.

[2] Analysis provided several recurrent categories. Within these categories, subcategories could be determined that further defined students' conceptions. The seven most common themes, which became the main categories, were: commonality, diversity, authenticity, living together, leadership, interaction and activities. Two additional categories were probed directly, theology and learning.