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The Conceptualization of Faith-Learning Integration in Student Affairs

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THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FAITH-LEARNING INTEGRATION

IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Andrew R. Lehr

May 2012

Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Thesis of

Andrew R. Lehr

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The Conceptualization of Faith-Learning Integration in Student Affairs

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

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Abstract

This study, part of a larger, multi-institutional investigation, examines how student affairs educators both conceptualize and practice faith-learning integration in their work in faith-based higher education. Based on the influence of authors such as Holmes (1987), Garber (1997), Hughes (2005), Hauerwas (2007), and Smith (2009), integrating faith into students' educational journeys encourages whole-person development throughout the university environment. This study examines the practices of exemplary student affairs professionals to reveal how these educators conceptualize and implement faith-learning integration outside of traditional classrooms. Findings resulted in a rich understanding of the concepts and practices of integration. Concepts included student affairs translations of Faith Leaning Integration, contributors to growth, and identity congruence. Themes of practice included proximity and presence, individualized education, and relational posture. Concepts and practices varied according to institutional identity; however, concepts and practices were consistent with many academic affairs conceptions of faith-learning integration.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of the university has always been to develop students holistically through multifaceted approaches to student learning both in curricular and co-curricular environments (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Boyer, 1987). Students are challenged in the classroom with academically rigorous material and outside of it as they learn how to live together in the university community and independently. Through the practices of educators, both inside and outside of the formal classroom, universities, both non-faith-based and faith-based, work to produce "whole students" whose education will enable them to live successfully and positively impact their communities. Holistic education has focused on intellectual growth, the development of social skills, emotional intelligence, identity development, and more. However, for many years, the realm of faith development was given relatively little attention (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, Dalton, & Auerbach, 2006). Many argue that greater emphasis has been placed on academic performance and the development of marketable competencies at the cost of the development of the inner life (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006). As a result, higher education at large has been critiqued as offering a fragmented educational experience (Astin et al., 2011). This fragmentation serves students poorly, a critique that cannot be pushed aside easily (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999).

In recent years, many in the academy have recognized this deficit and the accompanying need to give greater attention to the spiritual growth of students. Many students desire to engage in the development of their spiritual lives and resent the compartmentalization of this part of who they are. At the same time, many academic and student affairs educators are seeking ways to support and even enhance the spiritual engagement of these students (Astin et al., 2011; Boyer, 1987). Students on both non-faith-based and faith-based campuses are in the process of "meaning-making," and so higher education must see the facilitation of college student spirituality as both a responsibility and an opportunity (Astin et al., 2011). Clearly spiritual formation is a legitimate objective for both non-faith-based and faith-based institutions.

There are many understandings of the term "spirituality." The lack of a singular definition must be accounted for in this research and when considering this trend. So as not to limit the amount of research considered or the thoughts involved in this idea, its definition for this study remains broad in order to include multiple ideas. According to Love (1999), spiritual development can be defined as the process of developing meaning in the world and is not limited to a single religion or faith (Gehrke, 2008; Love, 1999). Understood in these terms, spirituality is a quality universal to all. Thus, developing this realm should be a concern of all educators (Gehrke, 2008). The benefit of such a focus is that it promotes an understanding of the interconnectedness of ideas and helps students to weave together action and belief (Garber, 1996; Love, 2001).

Spiritual development must be recognized as a legitimate focus of a university's academic and student development curricula (Astin, 2004). According to Astin (2004), spirituality concerns whole-person development as it encompasses the person's whole

being. In this way, each individual is a spiritual being. Research in this area is critical to assist faculty and student affairs educators to aid in students' spiritual formation and to create a campus climate which is conducive to spiritual growth. Since spirituality is such a core element of a student's development, it requires careful attention from those working with them.

Though preliminary research yielded beneficial information, there continues to be a great need for additional insight. Though this issue has relevance to all within higher education, it is especially important to institutions for which spirituality and faith-development are central concerns. More specifically, Christian higher education is especially concerned with better understanding and facilitating spiritual development. The study of spiritual development in these institutions is absolutely critical to their educational agenda in providing a distinctly faith-based education.

Faith-learning integration (FLI) is an interest common to most faith-based institutions. This concept provides the framework for connecting spirituality to all areas of a student's development. This process helps students to develop a faith-based lens through which they view the world (Holmes, 1987). This lens, or "worldview," develops in the crucible of the college years and continues to develop post-graduation (Holmes, 1987; Opitz & Melleby, 2007). Thus, FLI is best understood as the practice of consistently connecting one's spirituality with one's understanding of the world (Holmes, 1987; Marsden, 1997). It provides a unique way for students to identify the natural and supernatural, recognizing appropriate intersections of knowledge and faith (Opitz & Melleby, 2007). The integration of faith and learning is a critical component of equipping

Christian college students to become scholars with a meaningful understanding of the vital connection between faith and all areas of learning.

As one's inner spiritual life frames one's education, it is crucial that academic and student affairs professionals consider how to foster spiritual growth in students. Interactions with faculty members can have profound impacts upon college students and foster several aspects of a student's development, including students' faith development, leadership skills, psychological health, and more (Sax, 2008). Universities must recognize and educationally utilize these relationships. At a time when students are struggling to understand themselves as spiritual beings, faculty can have a powerful influence.

By integrating attention to spirituality into their curriculum, faculty members can heighten the impact that they have on their students; however, it must also be understood that spiritual formation does not end in the classroom. Because education extends beyond the classroom, student affairs programs and personnel have tremendous potential for impact in this realm as well (ACPA, 1996; Boyer, 1986). Student development practitioners have the unique opportunity to educate outside of the classroom and promote a seamless student learning environment (ACPA, 1996). When this occurs, education and, more specifically, spiritual formation, extends further into the campus climate and deeper into students' lives (Astin et al., 2011; Boyer, 1987).

The development of faith-learning integration traditionally focused on the academic realm. However, as faith-based institutions seek to develop students holistically, they must consider how they foster this process outside of the classroom. Astin (1984) suggests that learning is primarily a result of what students do and how they

invest their time and energy. Thus, learning is not limited to classroom activities, but extends into the greater campus climate (Boyer, 1987). Biggs and Tang (2007) propose that "it is not what *we* [educators] do but what *students* do that's the important thing" (p. 19). Creating both curricular and co-curricular experiences in which students can engage in a formative manner increases student learning. According to the American College Personnel Association (1996), institutions must create environments in which students can be motivated to gain an even richer educational experience both in and out of the classroom. Boyer (1987) recognized that the campus climate has a powerful formative influence upon students' education. Student affairs practitioners, then, have a powerful role in shaping the educational environment of the university alongside the faculty, including shaping a culture in which faith-learning integration regularly takes place.

Despite the obvious importance of the work of student development professionals, there is very little research regarding FLI in the student affairs domain. This study considered the manner in which student development educators practice and promote faith-learning integration in their work with students. It is hoped that the knowledge gained will provide the framework for the development of a model to guide student affairs educators as they seek to foster faith-learning integration.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this qualitative investigation are:

1. How do exemplary student affairs educators conceptualize the integration of faith and learning?

2. How do exemplary student affairs educators practice the integration of faith and learning?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

While college student spiritual development is not new to higher education, its best practices both in and out of the classroom are relatively underdeveloped. However, students are increasingly interested in spiritual issues (Astin et al., 2011). In the crucial time of development that occurs in the college years, universities must better comprehend college student faith development and provide opportunities for student spiritual growth (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1981). By doing so, educators will walk alongside their students in their faith development (Astin et al.). Faith-based institutions, particularly Christian universities, understand their students' spiritual lives as a part of their holistic development. Historically, an important vehicle for this development has been understood to be the process of faith-learning integration (FLI) which occurs in the classroom (Holmes, 1987). However, Christian higher education must also consider how it can capture what occurs beyond the classroom to nurture the spiritual development of students and help them to creatively integrate faith and learning into personal practices (Chickering et al., 2006; Smith, 2009).

Spirituality in the Academy

Since its inception, American higher education has sought to develop more than just students' minds. Rather than solely developing students intellectually, higher

education focuses on the "development of the student as a person" (American Council for Education, 1937, Philosophy section, para. 2; ACPA, 1996; Boyer, 1987). Spiritual development is a key component of this holistic model as universities communicate specific values, based on philosophical and theoretical frameworks, to students (Chickering et al., 2006; Smith, 2009). In this way, higher education is not value-free, but relies heavily upon institutional values that give purpose to their pedagogy (Smith, 2009). These underlying values concerning human nature and development extend beyond the material world and translate into the intangible spiritual realm, reemphasizing the importance of holistic development in the university and the connectedness of spirituality in the academy (Astin, 2004; Boyer, 1987; Smith, 2009; Willimon, 1997).

Over time, the spiritual focus of the academy diminished as the higher education landscape diversified (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006). In recent years, however, the interest in spiritual formation of college students has reentered the university, in both secular and religious institutions (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006). Although public institutions are increasing their focus on spiritual development (Astin et al., 2011; Boyer, 1987; Chickering et al., 2006; Stokes & Regnerus, 2010), in Christian universities, spiritual formation has remained at the core of education for years. Nevertheless, these institutions also are reconsidering how best to encourage spiritual growth through pedagogical techniques both in and out of the classroom (Ringenberg, 2006; Smith, 2009; Stokes & Regnerus, 2010).

History of Christian higher education. Christian higher education maintains its distinct nature through its roots in the Christian faith. Specifically, Christian higher education develops students holistically and understands spiritual formation to be at the

core. When the first American colleges were created, they were founded with Christian charters dedicated to the formation of Christian scholars (Ringenberg, 2006). Spiritual formation in the university has been shaped considerably by the example set by these early institutions (Holmes, 1987; Ringenberg, 2006; Rudolph, 1990). More specifically, Christian higher education has the unique opportunity to espouse distinctly Christian beliefs and encourage spiritual disciplines (Hughes, 2005). In this way, Christian higher education hopes to produce students who have the capabilities to benefit their communities by the employment of Christian virtues. Because of this unique position, the character of Christian higher education cannot be completely detached from that of the church, a connection that distinctly marks students with a holistic purpose and a meaningful philosophy of life (Buddle & Wright, 2004; Hauerwas, 2007).

Christian higher education, therefore, exists to develop its students holistically through the core of Christian theology (Holmes, 1987; Hughes, 2005; Litfin, 2004). The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an association dedicated to enriching Christian institutions, portrays this dedication by helping their members "transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth" ("CCCU Mission" section, 2011). In 2010, the CCCU published a compilation of their findings on the impact of Christian higher education upon the spiritual formation of their students. In terms of faith and spiritual development, the report provided little insight into how spirituality is developed at Christian universities (Stokes & Regnerus, 2010). While students are, in fact, growing in their faith, it is unclear what practices impact the spiritual development of students at CCCU schools. This lack of knowledge is troublesome because it makes it impossible to create systematically and confidently optimal

conditions for growth (Stokes & Regnerus, 2010). This provides but one illustration of the importance of conducting research to help educators better understand how to form students' spiritual lives.

Student Spiritual Formation

Spirituality defined. In recent years, interest in spiritual formation and faith development has risen significantly within both non-faith-based and faith-based institutions (Astin et al., 2011; Boyer, 1987; Chickering et al., 2006; Love, 2001; Stokes & Regnerus, 2010). The term "spirituality" is broad and covers a wide spectrum of traditions, meanings, and backgrounds and is therefore difficult to define in absolute terms (Astin, 2004; Love, 1999). Generally, spirituality refers to students' intangible inner lives including their values, sense of purpose, beliefs about identity, and overall connectedness to the surrounding world (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006). Spirituality is a universal human quality which is both personal and social, requiring broader elements including a community, language, rituals, and nurturing (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Parker and Zajonc (2010) offer that spirituality is "the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than one's own ego" (p. 48). Those who are highly spiritual demonstrate qualities such as love, compassion, and equanimity (Astin et al., 2011). Spirituality is distinct from religiousness as it is free from prescribed doctrine and dogma (Astin et al., 2011; Love, 1999). Faith development, then, is the process of meaning-making and transcendence of the material world that is unconnected to a specific religion or belief system (Gehrke, 2008; Love, 2005). In essence, spirituality can be assumed to be the intangible inner life that gives purpose and meaning to human beings.

Christian spiritual development, in relation to the broader context of spirituality, is faith developed within an orthodox Christian framework. Christianity, as a prominent religion, adheres to specific defining creeds through which individuals can develop their spiritual lives. To be more specific, Christian spirituality refers to a "maturity of faith – the degree to which persons exhibit a vibrant, life-transforming faith marked by both a deep, personal relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others" (Benson & Eklin, 1990, p. 9). Beers (2004) describes Christian faith as a religious distinctive separate from secular definitions of faith development. Garber (1996) goes on to describe the Christian faith as an interconnectedness of thinking, weaving together action and belief to reflect orthodox Christian tenets. Christian spirituality is therefore marked by not only Christian creeds, but also by Christian behavior and a focus on God as the central organizing principle of life (Smith, 2009).

Spiritual development. Spirituality can be cultivated and facilitated within students' lives (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006; Garber, 1995). James Fowler (1981) and Sharon D. Parks (2000) argue that faith develops in a series of progressive stages which have their context in a faith-community. These seven distinct stages, as coined by Fowler, begin with "Infant and Undifferentiated Faith" and culminate with "Universalizing Faith." Individuals progress through stages when confronted with times of stress or chaos. Typically, young adults and traditional college-age students are understood to be in the "Individuative-Reflective" stage. Marked by distance from dependence on sources of authority, this stage is characterized by greater independence from previous sources of authority. During this stage, individuals take ownership over their faith. The community facilitates the questioning previous conceptions of faith and

beliefs, a process that helps the individual form a more personalized, deeper faith (Fowler, 1981).

Spiritual struggle has been presented as a significant contributor to students' spiritual development (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Fowler, 1981; Stokes & Regnerus, 2010). Spiritual struggle refers to "intrapsychic concerns about matters of faith, purpose, and meaning in life" (Bryant & Astin, 2008). This struggle exists in many college students, especially those enrolled in Christian universities (Stokes & Regnerus, 2010). Challenging students to interact with the paradoxical truths of Christianity, using liberal arts as the backdrop, encourages spiritual formation as students begin to reconcile their faith with the world around them (Palmer, 2008). By guiding students to interact with the difficult philosophical issues of life, universities can create an environment which is very conducive to student spiritual growth and faith development (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006; Palmer, 2008). Historically, this has been accomplished through the practice of faith-learning integration, often understood as the process of connecting one's faith to all that one learns.

Faith-Learning Integration

The concept of faith-learning integration has been developed prominently in the field of Christian higher education and remains the traditional cornerstone of such an education (Holmes, 1987; Hughes, 2005; Litfin, 2004; Mannoia, 2000; Noll, 1995; Smith, 2009). As Holmes (1987) says, "integration is ultimately concerned to see things whole from a Christian perspective, to penetrate thought with that perspective, to think Christianly" (p. 60). It refers to the intersections and connections of an individual's academic knowledge and their belief system (Opitz & Melleby, 2007). Alternately, faith-

learning integration connects "the positive contributions of human learning to an understanding of the faith and to the development of a Christian worldview, and with the positive contribution of the Christian faith to all the arts and sciences" (Holmes, 1987, p. 46). Mannoia (2000) emphasized this by adding, "to separate our values from our learning is to become intellectually schizophrenic" (p. 115). Integration is a necessity in education as it shapes one's entire learning experience. To this point, Holmes (1987) argues that, "faith affects learning far more deeply than learning affects faith" (p. 46). FLI exists when the natural and supernatural connect and thus broaden a person's understanding of the world beyond the material to the transcendent.

Traditionally, FLI is exemplified within the academic classroom through faculty members who connect orthodox Christian understandings with their pedagogical philosophies, strategies and overall lifestyle. Through FLI practices, academic studies are viewed through a Christian lens. In their book, *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education,* Dockery and Thornbury (2002) illustrate several prominent ways in which faith can be integrated into the academic curriculum, providing specific chapters devoted to idiosyncrasies of certain content areas. Implementation of FLI practices varies from discipline to discipline, illustrating the broad philosophy of this idea and the need to adjust conceptions within each knowledge domain.

Though previously, FLI was understood primarily as a cognitive process with behavioral and practical ramifications, there is currently a competing framework which sees FLI as primarily a formative process with cognitive ramifications. These two competing, but not necessarily adversarial, approaches can be labeled respectively

Worldview and Formational Integration. While both are connected at the core, each branch of FLI focuses on differing aspects of spirituality, learning, and identity development.

  Worldview FLI. In perhaps the best known treatise on the Worldview conception of FLI, *The Idea of a Christian College*, Arthur Holmes (1987) discusses the distinctiveness of Christian institutions as places in which students are shaped holistically through FLI. Holmes emphasizes the importance of reason and the merging of our spiritual and rational cognitive processes as the crux of FLI. He points to FLI as the mutual exchange of positive contributions to both human learning and the Christian faith (p. 46). Worldview FLI is developed through cognitive processes that help students to connect the truth of the Christian scriptures to the way in which they view and operate within the world. Worldviews are particular blueprints of both reason and action that are gathered through the structure and culture of a particular faith (Opitz & Melleby, 2007). Building upon this concept, Holmes (1987) argues, "the Christian college has a constructive task, far more than a defensive one" (p. 7), articulating that FLI is far less about indoctrination and more about the development and acknowledgement of a cultural lens through which the world is viewed and interpreted.

  Holmes' thoughts have permeated Christian higher education over the years and many other scholars have expounded upon his ideas (Hughes, 2005; Litfin, 2004; Mannoia, 2000; Noll, 1995). Hughes (2005) points out that integration naturally occurs within Christian scholars as the scholarship produced flows forth from the individual's Christian character. In this way, Christian scholarship is not limited to the scholarship produced, but is influenced by the person's character (Hughes, 2005). Christian scholars

practice integration as a natural byproduct of their Christian commitment (Litfin, 2004). Litfin (2004) highlights the idea that, in theory, the formalized term, Faith-Learning Integration, should not exist as Christians ought to be performing integration automatically. Others argue that Christians must constantly strive to integrate their faith with their educational praxis and must renew that commitment regularly (Hughes, 2005).

Worldview FLI is strongly connected to the production of Christian scholarship (Marsden, 1997; Noll, 1994). Marsden (1997), in his book *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, points out that the Christian faith bears weight on the individual's thoughts, but also in the "tone of one's scholarship" (p. 55). Thus, the Christian worldview informs and guides a person's scholarship simultaneously. The Christian worldview provides a broad context that permeates all aspects of learning (Marsden, 1997; Noll, 1994). Both Marsden (1997) and Noll (1994) argue that Christian scholarship is relevant to contemporary settings, giving insight into the transcendent nature of knowledge. Mannoia (2000) argues further that through integrating faith and learning, students better understand personal development and the mission of the church and in doing so make an impact on the world. Christian scholarship is made more relevant and more impactful when it is developed through the lens of a Christian worldview (Marsden, 1997).

In the recently released book *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, Smith and Smith (2011) asked several university professors to describe integrative practices they utilize in their specific classrooms. The authors challenged educators, specifically academic faculty, to shift the focus of FLI to pedagogy rather than

explicit learning (p. 5). In doing so, Smith and Smith recognize the importance of pedagogical techniques that reinforce students' learning and faith development.

Formational FLI. While FLI is assuredly a thoughtful, rational process, it extends beyond a simple intellectual conception into communal and individual behaviors. James K. A. Smith, in his book *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009), pointed out the influence of the learning community and its surroundings on students' spiritual lives. He argued that spirituality is formed in the context of daily habits and rituals, or "liturgies," which act as agents of formation whether or not they are overtly pursued or sought after by the individual. Furthermore, Smith offered that these behaviors shape students equally as much as the development of a worldview, though their impact is often subtle and relates to the formation of "habits." Formational FLI asks students to look beyond beliefs and seriously acknowledge, discern, and critique the centrality of formational practices (Smith, 2009). Smith (2009) went on to say that Christian learning is nourished by a Christian worldview, which is practiced daily both in and out of the classroom. In this way, liturgies integrate faith and learning as they focus on the behavioral aspects of a students' life.

FLI, then, is not exclusively in the domain of academia, but extends far beyond the classroom into cultural and communal practices (Opitz & Melleby, 2007; Smith, 2009). Hauerwas (2007) called educators to shape their students not only to understand the world through a Christian lens, but to love the world deeply as well. Accordingly, he argued that knowledge is limited if not understood in the context of the gospel. Furthermore, he suggested that learning holds little meaning without practice. To illustrate, Hauerwas used the example of caring for the impoverished. There is a distinct

difference between understanding the poor and loving the poor; thus, love becomes the final step in the integrative process in which students move beyond mere conceptual knowledge and toward a holistic understanding that exudes Christ's love (Hauerwas, 2007).

FLI also exists in the co-curriculum alongside the traditional academic curriculum (Rogers & Love, 2007). In Rogers and Love's (2007) study, they discovered that faculty viewed spiritual development in the classroom as a kind of modeling. Faculty that were interviewed expressed a desire to teach and model spiritual growth through their pedagogy. Themes of creating safe space, accompanying students on personal and professional journeys, and allowing students to witness personal struggles resulted from the study, reinforcing the idea that faculty influence students in the integrative process through more than just lecturing.

While there has been a great deal of philosophical study of FLI, little research has been conducted regarding how it is exemplified in the classroom through routine practices. This presents a great need for faculty and staff to better understand how to practice FLI both in and out of the classroom.

Student Affairs Practitioners as Educators

As the realm of student affairs has become increasingly professionalized and scholarly, its guiding educational philosophy also has become more sophisticated. In 1937, the Student Personnel Point of View called for the expansion of the borders of education, challenging universities to educate not simply the mind, but the entire person. Later, the Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996) asserted that student development professionals needed to affirm "student learning and personal development as the two

goals of the undergraduate experience." In the same year, NASPA and ACPA (1996)

compiled a list of best practices in Student Affairs. Among these were practices that

included: engaging students in active learning, helping students develop values, and

forming educational partnerships that promote student learning. The increased

understanding of student affairs professionals as educators over the years has enhanced

both the opportunity and the responsibility to educate students through co-curricular

practices (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999). The campus itself has become a

classroom for student affairs practitioners as they partner with traditional faculty in the

education of students. While there are few schools that grant faculty status to their

student development professionals, these individuals often have the greatest personal

contact with students and therefore possess some of the greatest potential to impact

students' learning.

Ernest Boyer (1987), the former president of the Carnegie Foundation and U. S.

Commissioner of Education, provides excellent insight into higher education pedagogy in

curricular and co-curricular settings. Boyer brought to light the importance of the

learning environment permeating all divisions of the university, including student

development. Boyer (1987) observed a large gap in higher education between academics

and student affairs and sought to promote the concept of student affairs professionals as

educators. Boyer (1990) strongly believed that student development professionals should

be viewed as educators and ought to join with academic faculty in shaping the

university's learning environment. Unfortunately, a divide often remains between

academic faculty and student affairs educators in universities today. While there are

many possible explanations for this divide, two notable factors are the lack of mutual

understanding of the nature of the work performed in each domain and a lack of vision regarding the incredible educational potential of seamless collaboration (Boyer, 1987; Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005). These factors tend to mediate against the understanding of the integration of faith and learning that occurs in co-curricular environments. Proponents of this collaborative model assert that what is accomplished outside of academic classrooms contributes significantly to the outcomes of higher education and, therefore, cannot be ignored (Boyer, 1987; Kuh, 1996; Guthrie, 1997).

As higher education aims to develop the whole person, the university must account for and acknowledge learning that exists outside of academic courses (Boyer, 1987; Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005; Mannoia, 2000; Rentz & Associates, 1996). Boyer (1990) argued that community first begins in the classroom and extends further to incorporate the entire campus. Palmer (2002), commenting on Boyer's ideas, stated that students learn "from the way individual and collective life is lived on a campus," emphasizing the impact of the campus climate on students (McDonald & Associates, 2002). In this way, the entire campus acts as a classroom, encouraging a "common intellectual quest" (Boyer, 1990, p. 9). By encouraging this quest, universities encourage bonds between academic instructors and student affairs professionals and promote the formation of a common set of educational values (Boyer, 1987). Collaboration extends FLI far beyond academic boundaries and acknowledges the reality that faith and spirituality are all-encompassing and must be understood as whole-life endeavors (Holmes, 1987; Smith, 2009).

According to Blimling, Whitt, & Associates (1999), good practice in student affairs is rooted in the traditional holistic development approach, now more commonly

referred to as the "student learning approach" (p. 14). These practices include engaging students in active learning, helping students to develop coherent values and ethical standards, forging educational partnerships, and building supportive and inclusive communities (p. 15-18).

      Seamless learning. If FLI is to be understood as a "whole-life" process, there is a great need for student development educators to incorporate faith development into their practices and programs (Chickering et al., 2006). The cooperative approach uniting academic and student affairs provides a "seamless opportunity" for students to develop as whole persons (Boyer, 1987; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999; Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005; Kuh, 1996). In order for holistic education to occur, universities should seek to intentionally integrate spirituality into both the student and academic affairs efforts (Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005; Chickering et al., 2006). The learning environment must not end in the classroom, but also extend to the institution's greater culture through events and collaborative efforts (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999). This integrative environment "empowers educated people to act on behalf of wholeness rather than fragmentation" (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). The development of this seamless environment requires the creation of a shared vision which fosters collaboration and cross-functional dialogue, requiring both academic and student affairs practitioners to come alongside one another to develop an enriched campus climate (Kuh, 1996).

      Currently, spirituality remains only an aspect of development, not a foundational centerpiece to student development (Chickering et al., 2006). In faith-based institutions such as Christian universities, spirituality is incorporated but not necessarily integrated into student affairs practices. To date, there are relatively few examples of best practices

literature (Chickering et al., 2006) or a fully developed philosophy of FLI in the student development literature. If Christian higher education is to remain distinct in light of the growing secularization of the academy, then the integration of faith and learning must stand as the foundational element of the Christian university, thereby affecting all divisions of its campus and being woven into the lives of all of its students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Conclusion

Although the integration of faith and learning has been evident in Christian institutions for years, it is clear that many institutions have yet to fully actualize this transformational element of higher education. In the scholarly works produced by those such as Holmes (1987), Hughes (2005), Hauerwas (2007), Smith (2009), and others, the call to strengthen FLI in the traditional classroom is strong; however, few voices are calling for such a formalized approach in student affairs. The need for faith development outside of the classroom can be evidenced through the work of authors such as Capeheart-Meninghall (2005), Chickering (2006), Parks (2000), and Astin (2011), who are all looking for universities to begin the process of formalizing holistic education within student development. Through the examination of exemplary student affairs professionals who currently integrate faith and learning, a better understanding of FLI will emerge. By better understanding how these individuals conceptualize and practice FLI, the broader community of student affairs educators will be enhanced in their ability to serve their constituents, their institutions, and higher education more completely. The ultimate purpose of this study is to deepen this understanding in a manner that will further the integration of faith and learning in American higher education.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Grounded Theory

This study utilized grounded theory methods to investigate how student affairs educators at faith-based institutions conceptualize and practice faith-learning integration. Grounded theory methodology is practical, sensitive to individuals involved, and attempts to address the construct's complexities, in this case, faith-learning integration (FLI) (Creswell, 2008). Grounded theory methodology is used to study complex constructs, themes, and phenomena to create a theory when existing theories do not appropriately address the construct studied (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell). Theories are formed when emerging themes have saturated to form one overarching concept (Corbin & Strauss). Grounded theory methodology forms "building blocks" for future studies which will further generate the theme being studied (Brown et al., 2002).

This particular investigation is the third study in a comprehensive research project examining college student spiritual development and efforts to nurture it in faith-based institutions. The team leading the Study of Faith-Integration Development (SFID) is conducting a parallel study examining student spiritual growth. Further studies within the research project will be compiled to identify a philosophical and practical model of faith-learning integration. By building upon the pilot (Jacob, 2011), data collected in this study

will be broad enough to reach saturation among participant responses to formulate a theory for FLI in student affairs. This study's methodology will attempt to replicate and build upon Jacob's earlier study in order to further the project and to maintain continuity.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of student affairs professionals from two faith-based, liberal arts institutions in the Midwest. To identify participants, an anonymous online survey was administered to student affairs educators at the studied institutions. The survey asked each individual to rank the top ten student affairs educators within the institution who best exemplified the practice of FLI in their work with students. Results were collected and compiled by the researcher. The five highest ranking individuals from each institution were asked to participate in the qualitative interview process.

Diversity in participants is crucial to the study of college student affairs (Brown et al., 2008). Diversity was ensured through institutional and career variances of the participants. Participants whose primary responsibilities were closely associated with traditional student ministries were eliminated in order to develop a more comprehensive model of integration in student affairs. Thus, the researcher excluded participants whose roles include campus pastor or other primarily religiously-affiliated positions.

Procedure

Selected individuals were contacted through either email or phone communication, and the researchers scheduled individual interviews with confirmed participants. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to each

interview (see Appendix B). To protect participants' identities, any data collected was kept confidential and no identifiable information was presented.

Raw data was kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office on an external hard drive. The research team had sole access to the raw data and identifying information. Because this is an ongoing investigation, upon completion of the study, audio records will be maintained in a secure location to allow for future analysis and comparison.

Interviews were approximately an hour in length and were audio-recorded. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix A). This protocol was an altered form of the pilot study's student affairs protocol as the initial study revealed some limitations in the questions.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were completed, the audio files were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher analyzed each transcription. Initially using open coding, preliminary categories were developed by segmenting information and "making comparisons and asking questions of the data" (Brown et al., 2008, p. 4; Creswell, 2008). Categories formed through open coding were represented visually using axial coding, in which categories are identified through conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences (Brown et al.; Creswell). Finally, themes were identified through selective coding, in which categories were condensed into central ideas (Brown et al.). Emerging themes were tested against current FLI literature and formed into a model for Faith-Learning Integration in student affairs.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study's purpose was to understand better faith-learning integration within student affairs. The research questions guiding this study were: "How do exemplary student affairs educators conceptualize the integration of faith and learning?" and "How do exemplary student affairs educators practice the integration of faith and learning?" The following themes emerged along with their respective sub-themes. The two major themes resulting from the study consisted of concepts and practices found beneficial to the understanding and implementation of faith-learning integration within student affairs. Additionally, institutional contrasts also emerged through the analysis of participant interviews from the different universities.

Concepts

As can be seen from the research questions above, participants were asked about their conceptualizations and practices of FLI. Themes were divided into the two categories of concepts and practices in line with the research questions. Concepts emerged as a theme relating to professionals' understanding of FLI. Major contributors to this understanding are split into sub-themes, which synthesize the most prominent ideas that emerged in this study.

Student affairs conceptions of FLI.

Seamless environment. Nearly all participants articulated the understanding that student affairs functions as a non-traditional classroom environment. More specifically, it was acknowledged that student affairs was part of the university learning environment, providing a holistic influence on both the in and out of the classroom environments. One participant noted that, "a seamless curriculum…flows naturally outside of the classroom in our area of student development, and back into the classroom. They bolster each other in a kind of cyclical, seamless way." Student affairs also acts to assure that student identity formation occurs across institutional boundaries. A comment from another participant illustrates the connected nature of this process, "I think [faith and learning] mutually inform each other as well. You are learning to inform your faith and your faith should inform your learning." Many participants also indicated that, similar to an academic faculty member's disciplinary preparation, student affairs professionals should be well-educated in student development theories and concepts. One participant characterized it this way, "[a] student development practitioner should be proficient in relevant theory and practice and best practices."

Inseparability of faith and learning. Several participants articulated that because of their reciprocal influence, it was impossible to separate faith and learning either conceptually or practically. One participant stated:

> To me, I can't separate those two things. It is who I am. Hopefully that is what is coming out in what I'm doing…I think it just is like putting water and flour together. No longer is it a solid or liquid, it becomes kind of together. They are

mixed together so I see that as being how I kind of see the integration of faith and learning.

Participants used highly personalized terms to express how the concepts of FLI played out in their own lives. One illustrated this by saying, "the more learning we do [the more it becomes] becomes part of this whole person we already are -- which involves our faith and beliefs and relationship with the Lord."

Formation in understanding FLI. Each participant reported growing in their understanding of FLI during their careers in higher education. The three major contributors to such growth can be characterized as transformational relationships, reading, and engaging other disciplines.

Transformational relationships. The influence of mentors, peers, and respected teachers proved to be beneficial to participants' conceptualization of FLI. Professors who intentionally modeled FLI in their classrooms provided participants with a schema from which they now draw their own practices. One participant said this of a significant professor, "You could tell that he understood being a professor was a craft in and of itself. For me, he came to the classroom as a Christian and embodied what it means to be a scholar." Additional relationships included meaningful interactions with mentors and peers. One participant said this about a former mentor: "He just mentored me. He opened his life to me." Other participants mentioned respected professors or student affairs professionals with whom they had little direct contact, but from whom they learned a great deal. A seasoned participant recounted, "One of my key influencers was Art Holmes and not so much because I had a lot of direct contact with him, but because his

philosophy and approach permeated the culture." Whether observed or taught, these influencers shaped participants' understanding of integration.

   Reading. Participants mentioned three separate forms of literature that shaped their understanding of FLI. The most often mentioned literature was FLI-specific. One participant articulated:

   The Idea of a Christian College and *The Fabric of Faithfulness* are two books that

   I read and continue to re-read over and over again because they mean a lot to me

   in putting ideas into words and word that I can highlight and write in the margins

   that then give shape to some thoughts that were probably wayward.

   The second most often mentioned book type was non-fiction literature. Books that did not focus on FLI specifically influenced some participants' concepts more directly than works written specifically on FLI. A participant involved in athletic programs talked about how he incorporated books related to his sport into his practices as a student development educator. Other individuals spoke about how institutional documents shaped their understanding of faith and learning. One participant mentioned, "Almost everything [college name] is in our Covenant somewhere and we use it as we integrate our faith. We try to use the Covenant for an honest appraisal of a culture that we want to have and kind of a guide instead of a hatchet or hammer kind of thing."

   Engaging other disciplines. Some participants also mentioned that they had developed a deeper understanding of FLI by engaging other disciplines or areas of learning. Many participants indicated that their undergraduate experience engaged them in wide-ranging learning experiences. One participant described how business and computer science courses converged to interact with her faith. Another participant said

that his understanding grew by "involvement on…faculty committees where a portion of my responsibility is to hear how other faculty from a variety of different disciplines are challenged with that faith and learning integration piece." Other participants indicated the role of understanding other domains of knowledge in helping them to conceptualize FLI. Participants noted areas such as art, business, literature, and computer science as having contributed to their deepening understanding.

Identity congruence. It was clear that individual identity was an important ingredient in participant's understanding and practice of FLI. Three particular elements of identity that emerged as subthemes were personal theology, the embrace of an ethic of care, and a deep sense of responsibility.

Personal theology. Individual identity was heavily emphasized when participants spoke about their experiences and understanding of faith and learning. Some participants described FLI as a highly personal endeavor, involving participants' personalized faith as the primary platform from which to understand integration. It was clear that participants understood that their identity and theology are intricately linked. One individual said, "It seems to me that the only place to start if we're going to do our work in Christ-centered ways is to start with scripture and sound theology." Other participants went further to say that an understanding of humanity and sinfulness was necessary to properly integrate faith and learning. One person said:

> I'm smart enough to realize that the best way for me to have anything to teach
> students is to embrace being confessional and in one sense that means going back
> to my foundation of theology which is embraced remembering that I am a sinner.

Participants' theology also informed their Christian practices, which served to build their concepts of FLI. Several participants mentioned the importance of liturgical practices and prayer as two key practices by which they were able to formulate their personal faith and provide a foundation for FLI. One participant summarized this theme simply by saying, "It emerges out of who we are."

Ethic of care. Demonstrating an ethic of care and love was a strong motivational factor for student affairs professionals to practice FLI. Participants mentioned the desire to connect with students as a demonstration of love and care. Most saw this as necessary to the understanding and practice of FLI. One participant shared about how he strives to care for students:

My duty to care does not come from my title or my professional responsibility. It comes from something that is more core, more genuine than that. And hopefully from that, I wouldn't have to convince a student that, or wouldn't even have to use words to describe this is my care. They would be able to see faith being evidenced by the way they are being cared about and not necessarily needing to be reminded with words afterwards.

One of the most powerful examples of this perspective came from one of the participants as they described their approach to helping students.

I work with a lot of students who don't really have a lot of hope. They are discouraged, depressed, or anxious; they have had a bad experience, or many bad experiences, or they are just not doing well and they are in a cycle where it is spinning out so I try to feed them hope. Or they don't have a sense of belonging; they are struggling to have friends – lonely. They are trying to find a place to fit in

either in their family or here or maybe both. So I try to feed them love and help

them through those things.

Perhaps the most visible and powerful indicator of the seriousness of one

participant's commitment to care came when the question: "What are your primary

motivations for integrating faith and learning in your work with students?" brought him

to tears.

Responsibility. The final identity factor which emerged was a sense of

responsibility. Participants strongly felt a desire to give back to higher education in order

to help future students grow and learn as much as they themselves had. One participant

said, "I feel that God transformed me as a person in a setting very much like where I am

working and I believe God can do that now." Another participant said very simply,

"Someone did this for me and I want to do it for them." Many saw this work as a means

of acting out their commitment to Christianity. When asked about motivations

surrounding FLI, one participant said, "I think it's just because I love them and because I

love the Lord and so I think there is a really big responsibility of being an educator and

scripture teaches that."

Practices

A second major category that arose from participant interviews was concrete

practices which participants utilized as they sought students to connect their faith with

their learning. These major themes can be described as proximity and presence,

individualized educational practices, and connecting learning domains.

Proximity and presence. Due to their roles as student affairs professionals,

participants identified their close proximity to and presence with students as a key

element of helping students in the integrative process. The three primary contributors within this area were taking a relational posture, demonstrating authenticity, and creating an environment which positively contributes to integration.

Relational posture. Participants mentioned the importance of assuming a relational posture when working with students outside of the classroom. Relationships refer to the reciprocal sharing of life together in a community. Participants mentioned the importance of interacting with students in their everyday environment, enabling practitioners to see students' behaviors in less structured environments rather than just the traditional classroom. One participant said, "…we get to see students in what would be their most natural or uninhibited habitat." Relationships also included purposeful mentoring roles. One participant mentioned, "I try to be in mentoring relationships with students in an ongoing way." In addition to mentoring, participants indicated the importance of modeling appropriate behaviors to students. Modeling refers to integrating faith into personal affairs and priorities. One participant illustrated this through his relationship with his family. He said, "But I feel like if I can love my son genuinely or if I can love my wife in an ongoing way better than I did yesterday. That's actually more important to faith integration than again just being in the heady academic kind of discussions with them."

Authentic lifestyle. One of the most often mentioned elements of this theme of *proximity and presence* was demonstrating authenticity with students. One participant said, "To the degree that I feel I am able, I try to be real with [students]." Participants frequently used words such as "authentic," "real," and "transparent" to describe their relationships with students. The intensity of this theme came through one participant who

said, "I'm just trying every day to not be full of bull[----]." Another participant said, "As

student life educators engage with students around their key developmental tasks, the

central motive operating is authenticity in relationships. So our classroom is relational."

Going further, some participants indicated the importance of allowing students to witness

hardships and mistakes made by the participants themselves. "I think it's also being able

to identify with a student – the mess in my life might be instructive for the mess in

someone else's life," said one participant. The same participant articulated the

importance of demonstrating this authenticity because student affairs professionals ask

students to live authentically with them as well. "A personal challenge is [that] it's

obviously hard to live out some things we're asking students to live out…so approaching

all these things with honesty and integrity becomes of the utmost importance."

    Cultivating a healthy environment. Participants indicated the importance of

creating a safe environment as a key aspect of helping students in the challenging process

of connecting faith and knowledge. One participant said, "What I hope is to foster a safe

place to deal with some of those deeper issues of faith and learning." Other participants

mentioned providing a space that fosters care and support. Another participant said, "I

think [students] feel safe that I am going to oversee and take care of them and I'm going

to try and give them everything I have got, I'm going to give them everything I have."

Other participants used phrases such as "safe space" to identify the environment's

influence. Participants in athletic departments expressed this in terms of creating a

supportive community among teammates, exemplifying this theme on a micro-level in

the university.

Educational practices. Participants viewed the discipline of student affairs as requiring the integration of faith and learning. The following practices provide examples of how participants integrated faith and learning outside of the classroom, which include individualized education, connecting areas of individual, and cooperative learning.

Individualized education. Several participants spoke about how integration can impact students in terms of creating individualized experiences for students. One participant said, "There's something a lot more individual and personal about being in student development." Participants referenced these individualized experiences as formational and educational in nature. This practice involved creating intentionally challenging experiences to promote student growth utilizing tools such as conversations, activities, or other experiences. One participant illustrated this through her department's program, saying, "We intentionally design this experience that's going to challenge them way beyond situations where they can control the environment and that's a powerful opportunity to speak into their lives." Individualized education also includes allowing students to experience tension firsthand. Tensions arise from academic conversations, spiritual questions, and other personal areas that cause students to wrestle with difficult ideas and concepts. A participant said the following about students grappling with the concepts of mercy and justice: "These are tensions of the Christian life that they get to figure out firsthand, which is painful but really powerful for them."

Connecting domains of learning. Creating bridges of learning between academic disciplines emerged as a key educational practice involving FLI in student affairs. Participants spoke on the importance of helping students connect various areas of their

learning outside of the classroom and providing ways for them to create meaning with those experiences. One participant mentioned:

> So we are helping students to not compartmentalize their life so the spirituality stays over on the edge of something – or where we take it along with us and we dip into it when we need to. But we put it in the front and center of who we are…

Developing students holistically involved helping students connect several concepts as they assimilate them into their understanding. Another participant said:

> They aren't making those connections and I think part of what motivates me too is to help bridge that gap between what we have compartmentalized, even if it is just like some overlapping circles, even if we can't get a student all the way there, but to help them see that it does overlap and it does make a difference…

Within this practice, participants also indicated that connecting learning involved framing experiences in light of their Christian faith. A participant involved in athletics described how he frames his practices in light of scripture, saying, "We start practice with [a passage of scripture]. We say it out of Leviticus and it's paraphrased 'Never treat as ordinary what's consecrated to you or it will depart from you.'"

Mutual learning. Participants indicated the importance of learning alongside students. Demonstrating personal learning in the midst of students was articulated as a way to embody personal integration outside of the classroom. One participant said, "In some instances my ignorance is part of my learning as well as the students' learning…so that shared space comes from an honest approach to life within the kingdom..." Participants viewed themselves as lifelong learners in light of their faith calling. Having a curiosity about the world was also expressed by participants. One participant said,

"Whether it is disciplinary or we are getting to know each other or I am in the classroom with them, I just have a curiosity and that fuels questions I have for them about themselves or about the subject."

Institutional Variances

This study focused on two distinct universities, yielding an interesting comparison in how integration was both conceptualized and practiced in student affairs through a diverse lens. Comparisons were presented through the themes reported in earlier results, indicating similar practices that reach beyond particular institutional structures. While themes were compiled as a result of both institutions' similar responses, it is important to acknowledge that there were institutional differences in approaches to integration. The primary practices of one institution's participants focused primarily on themes of authenticity and relationship-oriented approaches, whereas the second institution's participants placed more emphasis on pedagogical philosophies and practices. Another difference arose from the organizational structure of each institution's student affairs department. One institution includes the athletic department as part of student affairs whereas the other does not. This added an important layer of diversity to the results, giving them a broader range of departmental differences when conceptualizing and practicing the integration of faith and learning. In the next chapter, these results and their implications will be discussed in detail. The results will be extended further to draw comparisons and contrasts to existing literature. Professionals will be given ideas for practical implementation.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how exemplary student affairs educators conceptualize and practice faith-learning integration (FLI). This final chapter identifies and analyzes major findings and provides implications for practice within student affairs.

Concepts

Student affairs conceptions of FLI.

Seamless learning. Participants frequently mentioned the necessity of viewing student affairs departments as educational opportunities similar to classroom environments. As student affairs professionals educate students in the manners distinctive to this domain, FLI must be viewed as more than just an intellectual pursuit, but rather as a way of living (Boyer, 1990; Mannoia, 2000; Hughes, 2005). Student affairs professionals provide a vital educational experience which accompanies, complements, and accentuates the classroom experience (Kuh, 1996; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999). Increasing connections between academic affairs and student affairs can provide new directions for universities to promote a "common intellectual quest" (Boyer, 1990, pg. 9).

Through the course of this study, it became clear that there were few major differences between student and academic affairs educators' philosophical

understandings of faith-learning integration. These differences were, however, more practical than philosophical. One participant articulated this idea well by saying:

> I wonder if sometimes we walk around and think it's so unique that we forget that maybe it's not as unique. Or maybe by carving out our differences or laying stake to [those differences] in our way from academic affairs that we're limiting the imagination of what can happen through academics and we're limiting our own imagination in terms of how we can really grow in that area too.

Although this theme was left unmentioned by other participants, their individual answers made it apparent that the differences were almost exclusively practical as opposed to philosophical. Although a weakness of FLI literature is that it has little to say about the integrative processes that occur outside of the traditional classroom, this philosophical congruence is quite consistent with the broader literature concerning the purpose of higher education and the desirability of facilitating seamless learning environments (Boyer, 1990; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999). Encouraging and recognizing this lack of philosophical distinction between student and academic affairs promotes holistic student learning throughout the entire university environment.

Engaging other disciplines. Participants who sought opportunities to engage in faculty committees, teach a class, or learn on their own recognized the importance of those activities and found them beneficial. This scholarship, as noted by authors such as Marsden (1997) and Noll (1994), shapes one's personal theology as well as one's character. The importance of engaging critically in other realms of academia results in a broadened perspective and an appreciation for truth in all areas of learning (Holmes, 1987; Marsden, 1997). By mutually valuing, observing, and learning about one another's

domains, student affairs and academic affairs educators can enrich their own practice of FLI while at the same time nurturing a more connected learning environment (Dockery & Thornbury, 2002).

Formation in understanding Faith-Learning Integration.

Transformational relationships. Participants spoke warmly and often of influential mentors and models in their lives that influenced their ability to integrate faith and learning. Some relationships with these mentors and models, despite the many years of separation, continued to be powerful and highly memorable influences on their efforts to help students integrate faith and learning. These relationships play a prominent role in practitioners' development of integration capabilities as well as in the development of their personal character (Garber, 1996; Parks, 2000). Mentors provide direct contact and influence through intentional personal relationships (Garber; Parks). Models influence others through their lifestyle, thoughts, and behaviors through indirect relationships witnessed by others (Palmer, 1993). Both kinds of relationships should be sought out by student affairs professionals as they seek to better develop their own ideas of FLI. In turn, student affairs professionals can act as mentors and models for students, creating a progressive cycle of learning beneficial to each individual's personal growth and their ability to integrate faith and learning.

Identity congruence.

Personal theology. Integrity to one's Christian identity was essential to most student affairs educators. Participants indicated that FLI cannot be understood outside of one's personal identity and theology. Palmer, in his book *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (1998), maintains that true education

flows out of the educator's true self and requires the individual to remain true to that

identity. Palmer says:

> If identity and integrity are more fundamental to good teaching than
>
> technique…we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each
>
> other about our inner lives – risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and
>
> seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract. (p. 12)

Christian higher education, then, contains a distinctive in FLI as it requires

educators to resist the temptation of isolation and distance and to move towards personal

connections with both peers and students. Student affairs educators have an immense

opportunity to impact students as they demonstrate their vulnerability and humanity in

unique learning contexts outside of the classroom (Capeheart-Meninghall, 2005; Kuh,

1996; Palmer, 1998; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

Participants mentioned the theme of personal identity frequently throughout the

interviews. Integration flows out of a person's true self and particularly out of one's faith

commitment. This concept ties directly to Holmes' (1987) worldview concept, that in

order to practice integration one must first understand themselves in light of the gospel.

Even broader ideas of spirituality outside of Christian higher education recognize the

importance of developing one's inner spiritual life as a crucial element of pedagogical

practice (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Love, 2005).

Responsibility. Many participants mentioned the idea of giving back to the

institutions from which they came to better understand their own identities. This degree

of responsibility was strongly felt by participants, indicating a deep feeling of

responsibility to their undergraduate institutions. When asked to consider their roles as

educators, participants felt a deep responsibility to their Christian commitments which aligns with current integration literature. Hughes (2005) asserts that Christian educators naturally practice FLI out of their religious commitment. Litfin (2004) acknowledges that Christians ought to practice integration naturally as a result of their Christianity. Student affairs educators can embrace the personal aspect of FLI and utilize their individual faith journeys as avenues to practice FLI in their work with students (Hughes, 2005; Litfin, 2004).

Practices

Proximity and presence.

Authenticity. Participants identified an authentic lifestyle as one of the primary dispositions through which student affairs educators exhibit FLI. Authenticity by way of displaying genuine thought, emotion, and care all resonated as strong pedagogical techniques in student affairs. Reminiscent of Palmer's *To Know as We Are Known* (1993), it became apparent that educators who allowed students to see their true identities and lives as part of a confessional and vulnerable lifestyle were more likely to impact their students in a holistic manner. Living a simple, authentic life can influence students powerfully by demonstrating connections with humanity and with the Christian faith. Interestingly, there is a small gap in current literature recognizing the importance of this authenticity. Since this language is typically commonplace within Christian higher education, authenticity could easily be ignored despite its strong relevance to educating within student affairs.

Cultivating a healthy environment. It is clear that, in a manner similar to what would be observed in a traditional classroom, creating safe, welcoming learning

environments was an important way in which student affairs educators facilitated student learning. Spiritual development literature emphasizes the importance of safe environments as key to students' faith progression (Astin et al., 2011; Rogers & Love, 2007), and it was clear that this was as important to learning outside of the traditional classroom as we know it to be inside. Further research regarding the elements necessary for creating healthy learning environments in which students are nurtured in a manner that promotes integration would benefit educators both inside and outside of the classroom.

Educational practices.

Collaborative learning. The idea that, in reality, both teacher and student are learners can be a meaningful pedagogical orientation that creates a partnership in which novice students bring value as co-laborers in a shared effort with an experienced educator. Participants indicated the need to practice lifelong learning as they encouraged students to do the same. This theme is an acknowledgement that educators learn from their students and an important reminder that educators must maintain a humble attitude towards teaching and their students (Palmer, 1998). Educators who recognize the importance of lifelong learning maintain humility in their pedagogy, thus attracting students to learning more than to themselves (Palmer, 1998). This theme is also consistent with the "student-learning paradigm," which emphasizes active learning and the creation of educational partnerships (Blimling, Whitt & Associaties, 1999).

Connected learning. Building bridges of learning allows for students to see the world through a more holistic lens and promotes identity congruence in their lives (Palmer, 1998). Palmer (1998) avers that, "Good teachers possess a capacity for

connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves" (p. 11). Student affairs educators can target particular tensions with which students wrestle and walk alongside them as the students attempt to understand and even accept apparent paradoxes (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Fowler, 1981; Palmer, 2008). Hauerwas' (2007) reminds us that educators must help students take steps towards love through faith-learning integration by helping them connect knowledge with the love of God. Student affairs educators require creative and imaginative means in order to best aid students in building these bridges of learning in their lives. Those participants whose primary assignments were in sports realms provided a helpful understanding of this idea when they explained that the connections between their faith and their individual sports were a result of the fact that their focus was not on the sport, but on life.

Not surprisingly for educators outside of traditional disciplines, most participants focused on students' character development instead of discipline-specific learning. The positions of those involved in this study ranged from residence directors to administrators to coaches and ministry leaders, representing a broad range of individual roles. Despite this reality, participants' thoughts regarding FLI practices rarely targeted departmentally-specific learning outcomes, but rather focused on students' overall holistic growth. While this idea was not mentioned explicitly, the focus was notable and important and very different from what might be anticipated from classroom instructors. FLI outside of the classroom is less focused on explicit learning outcomes or specific content knowledge related to student affairs, but rather is aimed at helping students to take what they are learning—both inside and outside of the formal classroom—and allowing it to impact

their hearts and shape their character (Hauerwas, 2007; Opitz & Melleby, 2007; Smith, 2009). This is perhaps both good and bad news in that, while the end product is highly meaningful, one must at least consider how desired outcomes might be more effectively utilized through a more systematic and focused approach.

Implications for Christian Higher Education

The findings from this study clearly provide ample opportunities for student affairs educators to further develop their understanding and ability to practice integration outside of the classroom. Broadly speaking, student affairs educators ought to pursue opportunities to first increase their own understanding of faith-learning integration. One very practical manner in which to better understand FLI is through formal teaching opportunities in the classroom. Other equally important avenues for increasing FLI understanding are through relationships with mentors, reading current literature on integration and higher education, and continually reflecting upon one's own identity in Christ. Key practices that aid in the performance of integration include an attitude of vulnerability, providing support for students as they connect what they are learning in and out of the classroom, and being transparent with one's students regarding one's own growth and learning. In addition, administrators and student affairs leaders should create opportunities to formally educate their professional staff on integration both in concept and practice. One clear finding of this study was that many educators conceptualized the integration of faith and learning in a very abstract manner and, thus, at times struggled to know how best to operationalize this important process. Therefore, concrete models are critical in helping practitioners to move from abstract theory to hands-on practice. Identifying key individuals who currently practice integration intentionally and

effectively and using them to serve as exemplars will foster useful collaboration as institutions strive to facilitate integration and, particularly, to connect the work of their academic student affairs divisions.

Universities would be well-served to view student affairs as an educational endeavor and as a foundational tool in facilitating students' holistic development. Universities ought to assess their student life divisions and personnel continuously to ensure the quality of integration outside of the classroom. Universities must then be willing adjust student affairs programs and personnel in a manner that allows them to most effectively serve institutional purposes. Perhaps even more importantly, colleges and universities must hire individuals who can best promote and accomplish the institution's vision related to integration. By including faith-learning integration as a core value, and a seamless learning environment as a necessary tool for its realization, institutions will best educate their students as "whole beings" and best contribute to the Kingdom imperatives of Christian higher education.

Limitations

Certain limitations must be noted when considering this study. Participants were selected by a ranking system that each member of the institutions' student affairs staffs completed. Participants with the greatest number of votes were selected to participate in the study. Due to institutional variances, some student affairs practitioners might not fully understand FLI, and this could have influenced their selections. Additionally, students were not consulted in the selection of participants, thus, colleagues may have selected participants who would not have been perceived as positively by students.

Additionally, several administrators were selected to participate in the study. Many of these administrators maintain relatively little contact with students in their respective roles apart from disciplinary situations. It could be argued that FLI is a student-centered concept and requires student contact in order to be appropriately practiced; however, administrators acknowledged this gap and recognized it as a challenge. Instead, administrator's practice of FLI came through disciplinary situations, policy-making, and relationships with their professional staff. Furthermore, all of the interviewed administrators did have some direct student contact, and all had served previously in roles with a high level of student interaction.

Future Research

Further comparisons between academic and student affairs' professionals need to be made in order to gain a more developed understanding of FLI and the differences in perceptions accompanying one's placement in the institution. As universities increase collaboration between academic and student affairs, FLI could provide a common ground for university colleagues to see one another as equals in the education process. Drawing comparisons and contrasts between these two departments would further aid in this collaborative effort and increase the potential for students to be deeply impacted.

The Study for Faith-Integration Development (SFID) research team has recognized the value of the development of quantitative instruments to examine this concept. By creating scales that can accurately measure how effectively an educator or a university performs FLI, leaders would be equipped with a relatively convenient tool for assessing and improving faith-based higher education. Additionally, the SFID team

would benefit from further comparisons of faith-based universities to pinpoint more accurate practices and concepts that comprise FLI outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

The integration of faith and learning within student affairs creates unique educational opportunities distinct from any other area in the university. Through the development of the concepts and practices highlighted in this study, student affairs professionals will be better equipped to practice integration in co-curricular settings. By way of practicing integration outside of the classroom, student affairs educators can impact students by living out the pursuit of learning in their daily lives. The very existence of the realm of student affairs or student life implies the idea that education is not merely an intellectual pursuit, but a holistic one. Faith-learning integration breaks down educational barriers by providing a compelling demonstration that education must exist outside of the classroom and must be appropriately supported if higher education is to form students' lives in a holistic manner. Through creative and imaginative efforts, student affairs educators have the exciting potential to impact students through faith-learning integrative practices that will not only shape students' minds, but their hearts as well.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: Student Affairs Educators

I. Introduction

  a. Welcome/Greeting

  b. Informed consent
1. Nature and purpose of the study
2. Short biography of interviewer
3. Interview procedure (60 minutes)
4. Potential risks and anticipated results
5. Confidentiality (digital recording of the interview)
6. Freedom to withdraw from the interview or decline to answer
7. Questions regarding the study/researcher (signed consent form)

II. Interview

  a. Demographic questions

1. What division of student life are you a part of?
2. What are your educational degrees?
3. How many years have you worked in student development?
4. What roles have you served in?

  b. Open-ended questions

1. What constitutes excellent educational practice in student life within a Christian college or university?
   What do aspire to do as an educator?
2. How do you conceptualize the term "integration of faith and learning"?
   If you had to explain the term to someone who did not know?
3. What facilitated your growth in the area of the integration of faith and learning?

4. How do you practice the integration of faith and learning in your work with students?
    Looking for specifics for 4 and 5.
5. Can you provide and describe an example of how you integrate faith with a specific subject or topic as you interact with students?
6. What are you primary motivations for integrating faith and learning in your work with students?
    Why is it important?
7. How does your faith inform your own scholarship, research and professional development?
8. When you think about the various facets of the university, how is the integration of faith and learning unique within student life?
a. What unique challenges or obstacles do you face in your discipline?
    If struggle with this one, ask about their area in Student Life.
9. Is there anything you would like to add based on your understanding of the integration of faith and learning?

c. Closing

    1. Open request – "Any questions or comments?"
    2. Gratitude

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Study of Faith-Integration
Informed Consent

The purpose of this research is to understand how educators at Christian colleges understand the role of their faith in their work with college students. For this project, you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your own experience with students. Interviews will last approximately sixty minutes, and will be recorded using a digital recorder.

Data will be transcribed and analyzed for major themes. All data will be maintained as confidential; any direct quotes used in the presentation of data will utilize pseudonyms and no discipline-specific information in order to preserve anonymity. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Taylor University Center for Student Development. Aside from the research team, no one will have access to raw data. Only the research team will have access to identifying information. All audio files will be erased upon completion of the study, no later than May 31, 2013.

There are no foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study.

One benefit you may gain from your participation in this study could include the opportunity to share your knowledge and expertise in teaching and working with students with other faculty. Any significant new findings discovered in the course of this project will be shared with participants.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing the Informed Consent form and beginning the study, and at any time during the study. Contact information for the Principal Investigator is provided below and may be contacted with any questions related to participants' rights or this research project.

****

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, "Faith Integration Development." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my

consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator's Signature   Interviewer's Signature

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