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Motivational Factors that Influence Non-Mandatory Chapel Attendance at a Small, Faith-Based Institution in the Midwest

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MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE NON-MANDATORY
CHAPEL ATTENDANCE AT A SMALL, FAITH-BASED
INSTITUTION IN THE MIDWEST

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business
Department of Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Aaron Morrison

May 2014

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

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Aaron Morrison

entitled

Motivational Factors That Influence Non-Mandatory
Chapel Attendance at a Small, Faith-Based
Institution in the Midwest

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

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Abstract

Since the beginning, American colleges and universities featured mandatory chapel exercises. Secularization reduced the influence and occurrence of these exercises. Despite this, member institutions within the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities retained the mandatory nature as a necessary bulwark against secularization. However, one such institution in the Midwest witnessed high student chapel attendance rates while holding a non-mandatory policy. Utilizing focus groups from each floor of every first-year student living area, five distinctive themes emerged to provide context for this phenomena: desire for spiritual growth, desire for community solidarity, perception of chapel speaker quality, desire for choice or self-actualization, and competing personal needs. Recommendations for practice centered on how housing administrators structure the sense of belonging and connection among residential students in order to influence chapel attendance.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historical Context

The college chapel service has maintained a presence on American college campuses since the beginning of American higher education (Marsden, 1994). The first academic institutions of higher learning in America such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton required mandatory chapel attendance. The practice of mandatory chapel, considered as a proper exercise for students, reflected the Christian religious culture of the time in the Northern English colonies in America (Ringenberg, 2006). As time wore on, the specter of secularism came upon American higher education, and this movement changed the priorities of college administrators and faculty away from worshiping God and more towards the hallmarks of modernism—scientism, positivism, and the theory of evolution (Ringenberg, 2006). The college chapel service became less of an emphasis on campus.

University of Notre Dame historian George Marsden noted this change in his 1994 book *The Soul of the American University*, an account of the religious history of American higher education. He described how required chapel services came under attack as a representation of faith—faith that seemed incompatible with reason (Marsden, 1994). Students began to complain about the requirement, but a number of administrators and faculty still respected as a symbol of an institution's valued heritage at the turn of the 20th century. In fact, by the 1940s, of the schools accredited by the Association of

American Universities, 48 percent still had compulsory chapel, 20 percent had voluntary chapel, and only 32 percent had none. Even with state schools where secularism dominated, 27 percent of them still had chapel, usually voluntary. Small colleges seemed especially more likely to have chapel.

A rapid decline in the number of chapel programs in American higher education occurred during the 1920s at the wealthiest and most influential private schools (Marsden, 1994). These schools yielded to student protests and made chapel voluntary. The climate of Christianity at these schools became largely reduced to formal functions. Bible study and individual piety declined, and the enthusiasm of pre-World War I students for sacrificial public service waned. Religion in American higher education became a collection of vague platitudes, a mere formality honoring heritage instead of a relevant force pursuing truth.

Despite the decline in college chapel service significance nationally, a number of schools with an emphasis on strong, ecclesial identity within their academic community held on to their traditional chapel services as a key aspect of their campus (Ringenberg, 2006). The preservation of revered practices like college chapel services on these campuses became viewed as paramount to the vitality of the school, not only for symbolic reasons but also for the ability of the school to profoundly shape other people's lives with the transformative power of the gospel message.

Chapel in Today's Colleges

With American higher education separating into a secular majority and a religious minority, the college chapel service has become a symbol of the role faith has to play on a college campus (Burtchaell, 1998). At many schools, the once hallowed grounds of the

chapel building now serve as little more than showpieces of the campus architecture (Butler, 2010). In contrast, for member institutions of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), the chapel service remains regarded as a key part of campus life. However, some threat to the practice of chapel may remain—the ideological forces driving division between secular and faith-based institutions appear still at work in American higher education (Marsden, 1994), although in more recent literature, scholars have challenged the continued work of secularization in the present time (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

In particular, the role of chapel continues as a discussion among college administrators and faculty at CCCU schools as to whether a mandatory exercise should exist. Some (Burtchaell, 1998; Ringenberg, 2006) advocate for the mandatory measure, fearing the specter of secularism on their college campus, too. Others argue for the value of freely choosing to worship as a means of spiritual formation (Marsden, 1994) and for avoiding the potential consequences of coerciveness (AT News Team, 2012).

Traditionally faith-based institutions such as Baylor (Baptist) and Notre Dame (Catholic) stand out as examples at which non-mandatory chapel does not automatically mean that the loss of the school's religiosity (Benne, 2001).

Purpose of Study

Another example of student participation in non-mandatory chapel appears in a faith-based liberal arts school in the Midwest. Since at least three decades ago, non-mandatory chapel marked the university policy, yet the chapel service maintains a high attendance rate. The present study examined the motivational factors for why this high attendance rate occurred possibly in an effort to gain more understanding of how the

chapel influences culture on campus. The study also sought to reflect the much broader discussion of the role faith has to play in the academe, as well as how much emphasis corporate worship practices should feature in the vision of a school.

Research Questions

Based on the need for the study as described above, the current study addressed the following research question: What are the motivational factors which influence chapel attendance at a small, faith-based university in the Midwest?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

History of Mandatory Chapel

In *The Idea of a College*, Trueblood (1959) observed the following about mandatory chapel:

The American college was, from the first, markedly different from anything in Europe. The college usually owed its origin to a strong Christian motive, the president was deeply devout and the village pattern of life, with the meeting house facing the green, was taken over almost entirely. The centrality of the chapel was meant to express, not the importance of a mere building, but rather the conviction that we must go beyond learning to wisdom. “Neither the mere acquisition of information nor the development of special skills . . . can give the broad basis of understanding which is essential if our civilization is to be preserved” (according to Harvard’s Present Conant). The centrality of the chapel for so many generations was a vivid way of saying that Americans believed this to be true. (p. 118)

Brubacher (1968) also spoke of the role of chapel in the early American college. He observed that compulsory chapel served as a primary tool for moral overseeing and religious education, typically taking the posture of prayers said twice during the day in addition to compulsory services on the Sabbath.

Fox (1945), president of Union College, described in detail the nature of mandatory chapel at the turn of the 19th century in 1802 by recalling the ringing of the chapel bells driving “sleepy boys” to an orderly manner “without running as they made their way down the stairs” (p. 44). Fox mentioned the college butler on the cold, winter morning standing at his post in the chapel to prevent any unruliness among the crowd, holding his candle aloft so that the college president could read the scripture lesson from “the sacred desk” (p. 44). The president would “petition the Almighty” (p. 44) on behalf of the young scholars and soon after delivered a warning of a four-cent fine to students who did not pay attention during chapel. This same process occurred in evening prayers every day during the school year.

From the beginning, these requirements existed as subjects of controversy. Wordsworth told in poetic form of his dislike of forced church attendance during his days at Cambridge University in England, a model many early American colleges followed:

Was ever known the witless Shepherd who persists to drive, a flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked? A weight must surely hand on days begun and ended with such mockery. Be wise, ye Presidents and Deans, and till the Spirit of ancient time revive, and youth be trained at home in pious service, to your bells give seasonable rest, for ‘tis a sound hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air, and your officious doings bring disgrace on the plain steeples of our English Church.

(Patton & Field, 1927, p. 91)

Hopkins (1929), younger brother of railroad magnate Mark Hopkins, remarked about the subject of chapel at Williams College in July 1825, in a letter to his other brother, Harry. He described the difficulty of rising from bed at sunrise in the cold and

making it to chapel for prayers every morning. The zero-tolerance policy had taken its toll on his pocketbook with every fine he received for non-attendance.

These negative feelings toward mandatory chapel did not remain private, however. Students' descriptions during the early first half-century of American independence (1780-1865) reflected the diminishing respect for authority or tradition when discontent proved high. During times of extreme displeasure from the student body, chapel exercises fell victim to demonstrations of rebellion. The diary entry of Princeton's President Green on January 19, 1817, described one such uprising:

A very serious riot commenced, with the manifest intention of preventing the usual religious exercises of that sacred day. . . A great deal of glass was broken; an attempt was made to burn out the buildings, and the bell was rung incessantly. (Brubacher, 1968, p. 55)

One of the earliest known cases of a crack in the practice of mandatory chapel happened at the University of Virginia. On October 4, 1824, the school adopted a regulation allowing students to attend the church of their own choosing rather than the college chapel; however, they still had to attend the establishment they choose, and then from there they must come back to attend their classes for the day (Deutsch, 1931).

Despite this early change, the tradition of compulsory chapel needed some time to lessen in American higher education. Compulsory chapel services occurred so frequently in places such as Williams College that Cowley, Eddy, and Sheedy (1960) observed, during the presidency of Mark Hopkins (1836 to 1872), that students attended more mandatory chapel exercises every week (22 in all) than class sessions. He described how, at one point in the year for about three weeks, the school subjected students to "extensive

evangelical revivals” (p. 47) during which classes all but ceased. Because of this interest in student growth, President Hopkins became hailed as a great president, even though he had little concern for students’ intellectual development.

The practice of daily worship in colleges so pervaded the American college landscape in the early 19th century that, as late as 1857, F.D. Huntington, on the topic of “Public Prayers in Colleges,” remarked that in all “the principal seats of learning in the United States there is a daily social service of devotion for students” (p. 23), and he did not know of a single exception.

After the American Civil War, the tradition of mandatory chapel became seriously challenged for the first time. With many cultural and sociological forces at play, the two major factors influencing the change in this requirement included the German tradition of higher education and the implementation of the first of the Morrill Acts.

Trueblood (1943) stated between the Civil War until World War I, society assumed promising scholars should go to Germany to finish their academic studies. Unlike the English tradition, the German concept of higher education had a less formal emphasis on religion. In German universities, the theologians on faculty had their own chapel that welcomed all people to attend—but the emphasis remained departmental and fragmented. The English-American pattern considered chapel integral to the institution. The American educational leaders’ admiration for the German model during the post-Civil War era played a role in the educational changes that took place.

In addition to the attractiveness of the German model, Brubacher (1968) argued that the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 served unequivocally as the most significant acts by the federal government in the 19th century in regards to education. Despite the fact

that the 1862 act did not meet expectations of its influence and that state support did not have a role in secularization until the second act in 1890, the demand to move higher education towards secular specialization and away from the religious, liberal arts core curriculum took hold. This ideological shift faced the embedded chapel tradition quickly.

This shift did not happen without consternation. The process of removing mandatory chapel proved just as painful for those convinced of its uselessness as for those deeply convicted that it needed to stay (Patton & Field, 1927). Even as state institutions started to emerge on the higher education landscape, the practice of mandatory chapel remained almost universally modeled.

For example, the University of Wisconsin typifies both the beginning and the end of this practice. Founded in 1848, the early university regulations required the daily attendance of all students and faculty at chapel (Curti & Carstensen, 1949). This rule remained enforced until the 1868-69 school year, when the university catalog announced, “No student is required to attend any religious exercise of any kind” (p. 409).

Through this rule change, the University of Wisconsin served as a pioneer in leading the state institutions into an age of “voluntary” chapels. Although nationwide, this transition took time. Ten years after Wisconsin’s change, normal schools still required attendance, as did many other state institutions. At the University of Minnesota, mandatory chapel attendance continued as late as 1887, and the University of Missouri did not change its chapel requirement until 1896 (Curti & Carstensen, 1949).

The Ohio State University mirrored the ideological conflicts of the times. Founded in 1870 as a struggling land-grant college, the school took some time to become established. In the spring of 1878, President Orton came into leadership, and he did not

personally sympathize with daily chapel exercises. Therefore, he did not implement them (Pollard, 1952). Public outcry ensued, with a vocal segment claiming, “The institution has already got as far as possible away from God and Agriculture”—which became a widely quoted reference to President Orton’s administration (p. 108). In 1881, the Board of Trustees decided to terminate Orton and hired Reverend Walter Scott in his place, believing an ordained minister would rectify the situation back to a favorable role for religion. However, when the faculty and President Scott also did not institute daily chapel, the Board laid off the latter as well in 1883 (Pollard, 1952). Consequently, the next presiding administration instituted the required chapel program. This practice continued until 1889 when students, expelled for refusing to attend chapel, brought the issue before the state courts and won (Curti & Carstensen, 1949).

As the University of Wisconsin had led in changing “required” chapel to “voluntary,” the same institution also led in the pattern of abolishing chapel completely as a university function. By 1885, voluntary attendance at chapel had become so sparse that President Bascom “took the course indicated and chapel exercises came to an unheralded and unrecorded end” (Pike, 1935, p. 80).

Perhaps the high water mark of mandatory chapel as a common university function in America took place where it had begun decades ago—Harvard University. As Harvard had initiated the pattern for chapel, many in academia felt the trauma of its demise in the 1880s. In speaking of other New England colleges at the time, Patton and Field (1927) recalled chapel at Harvard, “more than any other spot, *was* the college” (emphasis added) (p. 201). Tradition mattered at Harvard.

Against these giant walls of tradition, with foundations hewn from the earliest days of the American colonies, Hawkins illustrated the vexing picture of conflict at Harvard (Hawkins, 1964). He mentioned how President Charles Elliott seemed hesitant to end mandatory chapel, even though he felt displeased with the perception of Harvard as sectarian and backward with the popular ideals of student liberty at the time. Harvard had practiced mandatory chapel for nearly a quarter of a millennium at the time (Hawkins, 1964). Elliott and the Board of Trustees faced immense pressure in relation to their decisions. The pressure lifted during the 1872-1873 term when the Appleton Chapel closed for repairs. During this time, President Elliott observed no “ill effects whatever on college order or discipline” (Hawkins, 1964, p. 206) Encouraged by these events, President Elliott sided with the popular sentiment among the faculty and students and lifted the requirement for mandatory chapel at Harvard.

Thus, the trend became formally established in the consciousness of higher education in America. With the arrival of the 20th century, state institutions that started with mandatory chapel had dropped the requirement, with many private institutions moving more slowly but yet surely toward the same end (Hofstadter & Metzger, 1955). Those institutions that retained elements of compulsory chapel in the face of changing trends still made compromises. These compromises could take the form of changing meeting times from early morning to mid-morning or reducing the number of days in the week for meeting (Sperry, 1935). The last holdout of official national recognition of compulsory chapel ended with the court decision of *Anderson v. Laird*. This case made the chapel requirement of the nation’s military academies unconstitutional. A national, state-funded institution could not compel cadets to attend chapel (Kelly, 1970). The only

places requiring chapel remained smaller, church-related colleges in America, where forces of fundamentalism and conservative elements in the evangelical church kept the practice valued and considered relevant to the mission of the institution. Compulsory chapel, as a universally accepted practice in higher education, no longer existed.

History of Mandatory Chapel at CCCU Institutions

In contrast to other colleges and universities, most institutions within the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) retained their mandatory chapel practices. According to a 1974 study of the Christian College Consortium (CCC, a parent organization pre-dating the CCCU), member institutions featured their chapel exercises distinctively. All ten CCC members expected students to attend at the exercises, although only nine required it (Berk, 1974). Seven of the colleges checked attendance, while three allowed voluntary checking from students (Berk, 1974). These chapel activities included worship services and convocations, campus-wide announcements, guest lecturers, student government assemblies, and president forums in moral philosophy.

According to the study, the reasons supporting chapel services included concepts such as “community, “common experience,” and “essential” (Berk, 1974, p. 134). One respondent from a CCC school said chapel exists as “a normal expectation, desire, and motivation” (p. 135). Berk (1974) noted this “naturalness” characterized several other respondents who saw chapel as “absolutely vital in a Christian school,” “an essential ingredient in building a Christian academic community” (p. 135). From out of the chapel service, one stream of the consciousness contained “whole person education . . . the spiritual dimension” would flow (p. 135).

According to Berk (1974), multiple colleges reported a reduction in the number of chapels per week. While some still scheduled the chapel hour every day, the format changed from the “strictly religious theme” to one including “public affairs and various items of students and local interest . . . as for instance during the time of the election” (p. 135). Gordon College reported the lowest frequency of chapels with twice weekly.

Philosophy of Individual Sovereignty—Who Has the Final Say?

Behind the demise of mandatory chapel in American higher education, philosophical forces influenced the gradual change, as highlighted in the historical record. These forces shaped the behavior of both students and administrators as they struggled with old and new notions of freedom, particularly the tension between public and private conceptions of freedom, as the rise of the sovereignty of the individual to freely choose brought down corporate institutions and practices like mandatory chapel.

Patterson (1992) considered how freedom—personal, civic and political—became such a powerful value in the Western world. According to the study, the relationship among masters, slaves, serfs, and native non-slaves during ancient times helped birth the concept of freedom and a commitment to it. Patterson stated male, small-time farmers, by virtue of their relations with large-scale, slaveholding counterparts, gave rise to civic freedom as a value. In addition, he argued women invented the ideal of personal freedom, closely linked to justice, and the concept of remaining true to oneself and to others’ relationships. Patterson believed the ideal of freedom became valued as a public good, even as far back as the medieval period, before it rocketed towards the forefront of public consciousness as a dominant public desire.

With this rise in the value of freedom through the centuries, the concept of sovereignty in society changed in parallel. Elshtain (2008) focused on the question of the sovereignty of the human agent in politics, especially in light of religion. She outlined three different concepts of sovereignty. In the past, western society considered God or religion to have the final say on matters of politics. The pope of the Catholic Church held immense power over matters of state, for instance. As the Enlightenment and Secularization came about, God's Word became associated with an age of dogma and superstition incompatible with our conception of freedom. As power shifted to the state, Elshtain believed too many abuses of political authority made western society cynical about the idea of trusting political leaders. Now, she claimed today's world locates sovereignty in the self, the individual. With this freedom and autonomy, achieved over the past thousand years, Elshtain posited the difficulty of imagining our current cultural norm of individual sovereignty ever going back to a more authoritarian model, or even authoritative times.

However, Elshtain (2008) warned this present value of individual sovereignty carries danger, as society has learned to question all public authority, including liberal-democratic states. Elshtain feared this development represents a step away from a just world because the absoluteness of individual sovereignty believes the individual can control nature, rather than acknowledging that nature controls the individual. The individual substitutes itself for God without becoming God. Its inherent selfish nature, seeking self-mastery, has little patience for those who lack the capacity to direct themselves, which Elshtain believed could lead to a society in which the individually strong dominate the weak.

The concept of absolute individual sovereignty has deep implications for the future of power structures and practices in the world. Naím (2013) considered the tension between the previously dominant institutions and these new micro powers composed of small groups of individuals challenging them in all capacities of human endeavor. Naím argued the anti-establishment drive of micro powers can topple larger power structures and open new possibilities, but they can also lead to chaos in society. Technology and the spread of information have made it possible for individuals and small teams to disrupt and dismantle traditional corporate entities. Though the people in power may create barriers to manage them, today's insurgent forces seem more capable than ever to take large organizations and institutions down.

While these studies appear largely political in nature, they bear relevance in explaining the trends behind the demise of mandatory chapel and how it continues to shape the reasoning of students attending chapel today. As Western culture has come to value freedom as both a public and private good, the sovereignty of individuals to decide their behavior and their fate has risen. This change brought down authoritarian structures, such as a mandatory chapel program, and if the 2013 prognosis of Naím proves true, it may mean the final holdouts of the practice—small, faith-based institutions—face a difficult future keeping that practice.

Earlier Studies of Mandatory Chapel and Mandatory School Policies

A small number of mandatory chapel studies exist with regard to school policies. Claus (1913) conducted a four-question survey of sixty representative American colleges, thirty-two of which required chapel attendance of their students. The study found that more than half of the colleges with required chapel attendance operate in New England.

Eighteen of the colleges had voluntary chapel, but only a small portion of the student body attended. Where chapel remained mandatory, the gathering did not seem regarded as religious so much as a daily “get-together” of students and as a disciplinary measure.

Fitzgerald and Ludeman (1930) organized “A Study of Chapel and Class Attendance in Colleges” in 1930. Utilizing a survey instrument with five questions sent to seventy-five colleges and receiving forty responses, they found the frequency of chapel exercises averaged twice a week, with 67% of the colleges reporting their chapels as mandatory. Policies regarding enforcement varied widely.

Conclusion

American higher education once universally mandated, conducted, and valued chapel practices. However, with the development of competing philosophies, particularly in relation to secularization and the sovereignty of the individual, the practice declined. However, one faith-based institution has a voluntary chapel exercise with high, regular attendance. The current unique case has provided new insights into the future of chapel exercises at colleges and universities as they move ever further into post-modern and religious pluralist thought.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

For the current study, the researcher chose a case-study methodology, as the method gives the best explanation of the motivational factors examined through discussions of social constructs and experiences. According to Yin (2003), researchers should use a case study design when:

- a) The study focuses on answering “how” and “why” questions;
- b) One cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study;
- c) One wants to cover contextual conditions seen as relevant to the phenomenon under study; or
- d) The boundaries seem unclear between the phenomenon and context.

Through this method, one discovers the essence of an experience. Instead of imposing concrete criteria upon a subjective construct, a case-study method looks at the depth of an experience, making it the most suitable to identifying motivational factors.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), the case-study approach produces context-dependent knowledge and, in the study of human affairs, also rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction. He also identified how the closeness of case-study approach to real-life situations can provide a wealth of details helpful to understanding

information, particularly in developing a nuanced view of reality, built on the assumption that one cannot understand human behavior as simply rules always true and never broken.

Case studies also prove effective for testing for “falsification,” as defined by Popper 1959. Falsification aids in knowing to the truth of something by stating that, if just one observation does not fit the proposition, this result threatens validity, and one must either revise or reject the concept. Popper used the now famous example of all swans being white; he proposed that just one observation of a black swan would render this proposition null and call for further investigations and theory-building. The case study seems well suited for identifying “black swans” because of its in-depth, detailed approach, making what appears “white” often turn out “black” on closer examination.

Sample and Methods

The present study uses case-study research methods to examine the experiences of students participating or not participating in voluntary, non-mandatory chapel exercises at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution. The chapel exercises at this institution take place during the 10:00 a.m. hour on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week. These exercises take place almost exclusively in a 700-seat auditorium located near the geographic center of campus (Institution, 2013).

During the 10:00 a.m. hour, all campus offices close, including classrooms, food courts, and the library. Most students proceed through the front auditorium doors and sit almost exclusively in the ground-level seating galleries (Institution, 2013). The institution does not take attendance, and students can leave the exercise whenever they choose.

Generally, a worship team plays several songs at the beginning of the chapel exercise, consisting of typically Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) with the

occasional hymn. Most students stand during this time, with the freedom to sit down as well. After the music concludes, a speaker or a group of speakers delivers the sermon, with the occasional crowd-participation activity. This part of the exercise generally runs about 30-45 minutes. At the end of the hour, someone delivers a short, perhaps a minute-long benediction and dismisses the crowd (Institution, 2013).

Population and Procedures

The population of the current study consists of undergraduate students from the selected small, faith-based, liberal-arts institution in the Midwest. The study involved only students who live on-campus because they make up the majority of the student population and could present a better picture of the campus community dynamics.

The study selected students by asking the Personnel Assistant (known as a “PA”) on duty during the evening for help in recruiting students. The researcher asked for one willing student participant from each floor/wing within the residence hall to represent his or her floor in a planned, small focus group interview. In this manner, the researcher gathered data from a randomized sample of students representing different floors within a hall. These focus group interviews identified how the social structure on particular floors or wings may or may not influence individual student motivations in attending chapel.

According to their definition, case studies seek holistic description (Creswell, 2007). The researcher desired to represent the majority of residential students by randomized sample size in order to achieve holistic description. By majority, the researcher meant to represent students from the majority (over half) of the residence halls on campus. In particular, the researcher wanted to prioritize the gaining of samples from the mixed-gender halls. The researcher randomized his sample’s stratification among the

entire population, regardless of GPA, class rank, gender, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status. In this manner, the researcher gained a nearly complete picture of the institution's student body.

Before conducting the interviews at a pre-arranged meeting time, the researcher informed the participants of the study's nature and the option to not participate or leave the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable with the questions. All participants signed a consent form agreeing to interviews. In this manner, the researcher achieved individual consent for the study. The researcher estimated interviews to average about 45 minutes, taking place at various times of the evening.

Data Analysis

The researcher recorded interviews digitally and transcribed them. After transcription, the researcher analyzed each focus group interview independently for significant statements (Creswell, 2007). After the researcher identified the significant statements in each group interview, he compared interviews to discern major theme clusters across interviews. Similar themes, brought together and condensed, revealed all of the major themes; the researcher then described the themes in the most concise, yet broadly recognized form. With regard to Wolcott's model (1994), the researcher placed the themes within the literature, compared and contrasted to previous studies. The researcher recorded the primary results and used a member-checking process. He sent participants copies of their group interviews prior to coding so as to confirm their statements, and he changed all names of participants to ensure confidentiality.

Chapter 4

Results

The findings from the current study include descriptions of various motivations for students attending non-mandatory chapel exercises. Participants engaged in conversations within focus groups of their peers, adding complexity to the following findings and discussion.

Altogether, the researcher transcribed eight focus group interviews that lasted an average of 25-30 minutes. Participants represented eight residence halls, excluding upperclassmen housing. Each residence hall contained a focus group of four or five students with at least one representing each floor within the residence hall. The researcher interviewed a total of twenty-five individuals, including 14 women and 11 men. A small amount of the students interviewed participated in leadership groups. The population sample involved a random mix of freshmen through seniors. When asked the question, “How often do you go to chapel on average [per week]?” all participants except one said they attended 2-3 times.

Themes

Five themes emerged from the respondents’ answers explaining their reasoning for attending or not attending non-mandatory chapel: (a) desire for personal spiritual growth; (b) perception of chapel speaker quality; (c) desire for solidarity or sense of

belonging to a floor or small group; (d) desire for free choice/self-actualization; and (e) perception of competing personal needs.

Personal Spiritual Growth

Eight of twenty-five respondents cited the desire for “personal spiritual growth” as a contributing factor in choosing to attend chapel exercises. These students described choosing to attend chapel for the purpose of increasing their awareness of spirituality and deepening their understanding of how to apply their faith to their lives. Two sub-themes then also emerged within chapel attendance based on a desire for personal spiritual growth: attendance for cultivating spiritual discipline and attendance for realizing a sense of purpose or focus for their lives.

Chapel attendance as spiritual discipline.

For an example of chapel attendance as cultivating a spiritual discipline, a respondent connected chapel attendance to one’s development as an adult:

My biggest reason is that I think it helps to develop more of an individual commitment, so when you get out of school, that same kind of commitment you've developed by kind of pushing yourself to go to chapel even though you have a lot of work is still there, so it kind of helps to develop us for when we leave school. And chapel and worship is more of an individual spiritual discipline, so that's one of the biggest reasons I go.

Another respondent also touched on developing a habit of going to chapel for her spiritual growth during the entirety of her life and not just on Sunday church attendance. A self-admitted frequent chapel attender, she described making chapel “actively a part of

my social schedule” in a positive sense. She wanted chapel to be “inside of my life” instead of “outside on the weekends.”

Another female respondent echoed other sentiments about integrating chapel into her life as a necessary spiritual practice, especially in light of a demanding schedule. The respondent expressed her attempts to “attend chapel as often as possible” because it represents a “good opportunity” to “get time to worship.” She mentioned the difficulty of “[making] time” for spiritual growth during her week, even implying chapel exercises could become substitute time for worship especially since she does not “always have the time to go to church every Sunday.”

In addition to making chapel attendance a habit, other respondents talked about choosing to attend the institution because of how much the community values chapel exercises in terms of individual spiritual growth. A respondent described coming to the school because “I want to grow closer to Christ and it's easier to do that in an environment where virtually everyone is trying to get closer to Christ.” Interestingly, she said she did not see chapel attendance as “essential to [spiritual growth],” but “it certainly helps, so I try to go when I can.”

Chapel attendance as realization of purpose/focus.

Several respondents also talked about chapel attendance for personal spiritual growth in terms of a realization of purpose or focus for their lives. For example, a student replied he attended chapel to feel “a part of something bigger and to take advantage of the opportunity to grow my faith.” Another respondent alleged a similar notion, saying he “usually [attends] in the hope, of course, of spiritual growth.” However, he also found chapel exercises a “good time during the week to... refocus and keep a sort of big picture

purpose in mind.” Finally, for a different respondent, chapel offered time not just to increase his own personal growth. More specifically, it represented a “key thing” or “opportunity” to reflect on meaningful life elements—“to think well and take things in.”

Desire for Community/Floor Solidarity

Of the twenty-five individuals interviewed, seventeen cited choosing to attend non-mandatory chapel services to mark a sense of belonging or solidarity with their floors. Desire for community or floor solidarity emerged as the most popular theme from the interviews. Students described this desire for solidarity in terms of attending chapel with meaningful people in their lives who lived near them in their residence hall. This desire for solidarity took the form of several sub-themes: (a) solidarity as obligation/accountability; (b) solidarity with non-obligation/accountability connotation; and (c) solidarity and desire for consistency.

Solidarity as obligation/accountability.

Several students explained this desire for solidarity as a sense of obligation or accountability from the people who lived on their floor or wing in the residence hall. Because of the significant relationships they cultivated on their floor, these students took the encouragement to attend chapel exercises seriously. A female respondent stated,

The girls on my wing expect you to go, because that's our time as a wing to be together. We can't all do events because of time commitments, and it's just like our wing time, and if you aren't there they bring it up, not, ”Why weren't you there?” but just, “Hey, we missed you in chapel,” and it kind of makes me, not feel guilty, but sad that I'm missing out on that wing time.

A male student shared a similar story of his floor keeping him accountable for his chapel attendance. Without his floor keeping him accountable, he said he would feel “lazy and start skipping.” Even when his semester became “really stressful” because of homework, his floor-mates “called [him] out on it.” They asked him, “Why aren’t you going?” and “It’d be better if you were here.” The student said it made him realize, “not everything revolves around school. There’s a reason I’m here, and you should remember that.” This respondent’s answer seemed to indicate meaningful relationships with people on his floor. Because of the meaningful relationships, choosing to attend chapel or not appeared to reflect on how much those local relationships meant to the respondents.

A second female respondent stated something similar in solidarity as near obligation, agreeing with other respondents in terms of the sense of accountability: “I would say there’s definitely accountability as far as your wing goes [in going to chapel].” She spoke generally of floor culture at the school, alleging, “Your wing and your wing mates will know if you’re not there and they’ll ask why you didn’t come.” She also spoke of a “guilt trip” that came with not attending chapel but noted, “It’s like a healthy accountability.” The respondent’s floor-mates believed in the importance of her chapel attendance to the point of asking her about it. This exchange could not occur without meaningful interactions within the local floor community.

Another female respondent described her own feelings of obligation to attend chapel due to her leadership position, especially in the sense of promoting community and spirituality on her floor. She said she attends “on days when I don’t want to go because I’m [on floor leadership].” Her supervisor provided particular directive for her to go: “I am highly, highly encouraged by my hall director to go as an influence on the

wing, so that would be another reason that I go sometimes.” However, she did not view his external exhortation in a negative sense: “But I also enjoy corporate worship and being able to worship with the women on my wing, as well as the student body as a whole.” She even talked about attending chapel as a “good start to her day.”

A different respondent shared a similar story involving the role of student leadership in galvanizing chapel attendance for the floor. The respondent said his/her first-year student leader on the floor “really forced, enforced us going to chapel, . . . like, yelling down the hall.” Their student leader would shout, “Okay, we’re going to chapel—anyone want to come with? We’ll walk all together.” The respondent viewed this action as accountability for the floor to attend chapel but only observed this behavior during freshman year. As an upperclassman, the accountability seemed reduced to “more of a do your own thing.” According to the respondent, the impetus to develop a habit of attending chapel appeared stronger during freshman year but later appeared less necessary—perhaps due to the underlying assumption that an upperclassmen student could more capably self-direct towards floor solidarity.

Students also described social solidarity as an obligation in terms of meeting with someone individually from the floor instead of only attending because of a group of peers exhort them to go. One student in a mixed-gender residence hall stated he would “meet with a friend for breakfast at 9, and then we usually walk over to chapel.” He described this regular practice as “a little bit of individual accountability” but “not like pressure.” He said the practice “kind of helps” motivate him to attend chapel because he does not want to “bail on him.” To the respondent, “bailing on him” felt like not expressing care for his friendship, potentially suggesting a strong, meaningful connection.

Sometimes the solidarity as social obligation manifested itself in how a group expressed their opinion of a chapel speaker. The student who skipped chapel felt like they “missed out” on a common experience with people on their floor. A respondent related she “[felt] bad afterwards talking to [floor-mates] because they’re like ‘Oh, this [chapel service] was so good today! The speaker said this.’” The student said she expressed remorse over skipping chapel but noted that her floor “won’t judge me for not going.”

A respondent related perhaps one of the most curiously memorable narratives in all of the interviews when he talked about a “walk of shame” for students who choose not to attend chapel. This respondent believed “social pressure” existed in relation to chapel attendance. He added, “I don’t think we want to talk about how many times we go to chapel with other people.” The respondent explained further:

If there's times where I'm at class before chapel and I need to go back to my dorm and finish homework, I don't want to be seen walking across campus as you're going against the flow, so it's this, like, silent sort of shame.

However, he noted this shame might serve as a “good incentive” to attend chapel, “kind of a double-edged sword.”

Solidarity with non-obligation/accountability connotation.

While some students mentioned the external pressure to attend chapel for social solidarity, others described the motivation for social solidarity in non-obligatory terms, speaking of chapel as a “unifying event” and an opportunity “to see my floor.” One female respondent offered: “I . . . enjoy the community aspect of it, that we all do it as a campus and campus kind of shuts down is nice and I sit with my wing.”

Another female student talked about the “togetherness” of attending chapel in

light of differing congregational preferences on Sundays. “It's a community thing,” she said, “We get to all be together and serve and worship together. “ She pointed out that all students do not go to the same churches in the area, meaning chapel exercises represent the “one time we can all gather together and just praise God,” which she specifically cited as “part of the reason why most of us are here, because we're Christians.”

In addition, respondents who did not attend church on Sundays characterized their social solidarity in chapel attendance as a place for “community connection,” in contrast to church congregations, therein implying a lack of connection. Attending chapel for them became part of engaging with “a group of people . . . I'm invested in and a group . . . I care about and all of us gathering together for it.”

One respondent also touched specifically on the psychological impact of social solidarity in chapel. The respondent detailed how “great [it is] to come together and worship God in a big setting to where you can see everyone.” It made the respondent “feel good to know that everyone's putting in effort and praising God all together.”

The mention of a signed “community covenant” by students before they entered the school featured prominently in a respondent’s answer to why she attends chapel. She felt that administrators of institutions with mandatory chapel overlook the signing of the community covenant as a reason why students attend mandatory chapel: “We all sign the [community covenant] which says... we are going to go to chapel... and we're supposed to as a community keep each other accountable.” According to the respondent, the small, individual things students do to keep other people accountable in their chapel make a difference in supporting the contract they sign,. Students may ask others, “Why are you not going to chapel?” or “What’s going on?” She added that even inviting other students

to come makes a difference—even if they have homework or class, they will say, “I’ll save you a seat.” She cited such conversations as a significant behavior in making people feel included and encouraged to attend chapel.

Solidarity and desire for consistency.

Another group of students talked about the corporate solidarity in terms of consistency or habits they enjoyed. A student said she “love[d] worshipping every Monday, Wednesday, Friday” because it’s “a constant . . . I can look forward to.” She added, “I can always look forward to going and just being with my wing and just having that community.” The student even remarked on enjoying chapel with other people even if the chapel service seemed “just okay.” The constancy of worshipping with other people provided greater motivation than the individually perceived quality of chapel services.

One respondent who declared her membership on an athletic team recounted her motivation for attending chapel as something like the “community feel” in the midst of a “hectic” team schedule. She felt chapel exercises helped her “to focus on why I’m here” and on “what my purpose is in life.” Another student (not on an athletic team) also connected social solidarity with his own personal spiritual experience of chapel. He talked about chapel as “one hour out of your day, . . . in the presence of the Lord, and . . . really engaging in fellowship with others, . . . singing and worshipping and listening.” Chapel provided a time when “you’re not thinking about anything else, your mind is just distracted by the Lord.”

Perception of Chapel Speaker Quality

Eleven of twenty-five respondents mentioned their perception of chapel speaker quality as a factor in deciding to go to chapel or not. Respondents actualized this

perception when, for instance, they talked about “checking the chapel schedule.” They also would describe gauging the quality of a chapel speaker based on what their peers said about him or her. One male respondent stated he found himself “[looking] at the chapel schedule, because I know I like some speakers better than others.” He added, “Depending on the speaker, . . . that’ll make my decision stronger or not to go.”

Another male respondent echoed the same sentiment, admitting he would “[look] at who’s speaking that day online, because you can check that.” He mentioned, “That will often determine the decision.” However, he also spoke of times he went to chapel even when the “speaker didn’t look appealing” at first, yet ended up enjoying the chapel speaker anyway. Yet another shared similar thoughts, explaining, “There are certain chapel days . . . I don’t go because I don’t find any real benefit to them.” He cited “things like the sing and pray chapel or when [the institution is] marketing its various outreach programs” as examples of when the respondent perceived chapel as less than beneficial.

A different male respondent described the experience of checking the chapel schedule online with peers on his floor. Checking the schedule influenced their decision to attend or note: “We look at the schedule and certain speakers definitely are more known and draw better around campus.” He particularly noted the discussion a chapel speaker generates: “There’s certain speakers . . . people will actually be excited about coming.” His floor-mates would talk about a peer saying, “Hey, guess who’s in chapel?”

Other respondents described how he/she valued chapel speakers in connection with the institution’s Christian identity. According to one respondent, “The reason I go to chapel is just that there are so many different speakers that attribute to what we’re trying to learn here at [the institution] as being a Christian school.”

Still more respondents described valuing chapel speakers in terms of intellectual stimulation, such as one respondent who remarked on the “great chapel speakers, a lot of brilliant minds” and how he appreciated “[listening] to what they have to say for a good hour, which I really enjoy.” Another added he went to chapel to “gain insider perspectives on things” and revealed he saw chapel as “like another class period throughout the day” in which he could “learn more and just kind of explore different ideas.” He finished his thought by pointing out “the more I go to chapel, the more eager I am to . . . learn more and come back . . . and it’s always different but always exciting.”

Desire for Choice/Self-Actualization

Seven of twenty-five respondents cited the freedom to choose to attend chapel exercises as motivation in deciding to ultimately attend. In comparison to other themes addressed in interviews, students gave some of the most lengthy, passionate diatribes in relation to the subject of choice. Some students made statements of how choosing to attend or not made them feel mature or even connecting mandatory chapel with a legalistic approach to the Christian lifestyle.

For example, a female respondent stated that “making [chapel mandatory] would . . . push people away from God, because . . . forcing people to go . . . makes it . . . a chore.” If the school forced students to do it, she believed “it makes their heart towards God seem . . . a mandatory thing where you have to love God.” She contended that non-mandatory chapel remains a superior school policy, explaining, “God gives free will, and He doesn’t force us to love Him.” The same respondent further added that a policy of mandatory chapel “would completely change the community.” In her opinion, making chapel mandatory might appear like “it’s mandatory to be a Christian to come here.”

In her final statement, she argued students “as adults coming away from home” and finding their faith ought to feel trusted enough to make decisions for themselves, going to chapel when “they want to and getting quiet time when they want to.” The school’s policy of non-mandatory chapel signaled to her that the school trusted her “enough in [her] own faith . . .” to make the decision to attend chapel or not.

A second student connected the ability to choose to attend chapel with emerging notions of adulthood among students. She argued that people felt opposed to attending mandatory chapel because students are “just [now] turning into adults.” To her, the idea of mandatory chapel meant less freedom for students: “They’re just coming from being seventeen where they’re completely controlled by their parents.” She believed mandatory chapel made the chapel experience “feel like high school with . . . just more rules.” While alleging she understood why mandatory chapel existed at other schools, “because some people really just don’t go to chapel,” she rejected the policy of mandatory chapel as a means of sustainable spiritual growth: “Because you can’t get into heaven on your parents’ faith, you need to make your faith your own.” She explained institutions might “be helping” develop students by mandating their chapel attendance, but the policy would prove of limited use, as students “can still choose not to pay attention. . . . [Students] have to decide for themselves if they want to put in the effort [to pay attention].”

Another female student shared similar concerns over the utility of mandatory chapel. She deplored the idea of mandatory chapel, comparing it to “a chore” like “washing the dishes.” She feared mandatory chapel might provoke more insincere motivations for worship. While she admitted benefit to “structure and rules,” she held all students at the school as “adults” who can freely choose how to spend their time.

After holding a conversation with his roommate about it, a male respondent said both he and his roommate agreed the non-mandatory chapel policy played a “big role” in motivating students to attend. Because students did not feel forced to go, it created a “community, an atmosphere of wanting to be there.”

More students shared their appreciation for non-mandatory chapel, especially in comparison to other schools. A respondent stated that he loved “the fact that it’s not mandatory chapel, because I know a lot of schools will do card swipes or a head count.” Attending by his decision with his wing made attending chapel a positive instead of an “enforced, punishable thing.”

Another student described how non-mandatory chapel provided an incentive to go in comparison to other schools. She said, “Because I don’t have to do this, I kind of want to do this.” In reference to other faith-based schools, she believed the mandatory nature made chapel exercises seem “forced upon them.” However, with this school, “it’s optional. . . People who want to go make it a commitment to go and enjoy it because it’s their choice.” A different respondent held that required chapel would become “monotonous, and I would feel like I would have to go all the time.” Under the current non-mandatory system, she “generally [loves] going, just because I know the people who go want to go.” She claimed this commitment affects her “decision-making process” whether to attend chapel.

A transfer student even weighed in on the non-mandatory status of chapel. He said he used to attend a college with mandatory chapel services, and the policy made him resent chapel “because I felt like it was something I was being forced to do.” In light of his previous experience, he “[tries] to go every single time chapel’s offered.” He does so

not just because he “[enjoys] the speakers [it] has but because I want to honor the fact that they make it something they leave up to us as a decision.”

Competing Personal Needs—Sleep and Homework Load

Nine of twenty-five respondents attributed competing personal needs, such as perceived need for sleep and perceived need to complete homework, as a motivating factor in choosing whether to attend chapel exercises. Students described how decisions regarding competing personal needs occurred at the margin--whether marginal benefit exceeded marginal cost in attending chapel exercises.

Two sub-themes emerged within the main theme of competing personal needs: perceived need for sleep and perceived need to complete homework. Both of these sub-themes often appeared together in the same statement. A respondent described how she thought about her daily schedule in prioritizing what actions to take. For her, she had morning classes just before chapel exercises at 10 a.m. By the end of her morning classes, she asked herself if she had “finished all [her] homework or if [she was] going to get some sleep.” She said the main reason for skipping chapel exercises came down to unfinished homework due during the day. The female respondent quickly pointed out that her decision to skip chapel due to homework “doesn’t happen a lot.”

A second female respondent made nearly the same statement. She also had morning classes and thought about whether she had gotten enough sleep. “I do think about things . . . Am I going to benefit more from chapel right now or from more sleep so that I’m able to do the rest of the things I need to do for the day,” she said. However, she also said that if she’s “really tired,” she figures she would not “get anything out of chapel anyway.” She asks herself, “Am I just going to go there and just sit and zone out

anyway?” If she answers in the affirmative, she decides to “skip chapel and sleep.”

A different student described how her perceived introversion impacted her chapel attendance. If she had an “emotionally trying week, then I’ll be less likely to go.” As an introvert, she said she needed “time by herself to rest.” However, she did say she “[liked] going to chapel.”

Another student posited his chapel attendance based on “convenience.” He said he did not “go to church on Sundays” because he’s “up late on Saturday night.” Chapel exercises become his version of church. Additionally, he cited his work schedule as a factor in attending chapel: “I can’t work from 10-11 because of chapel, . . . so there’s really no excuse to not go. I mean, they free up time for you.”

Conclusion

A variety of reasons exist for why these students chose to attend chapel exercises in a non-mandatory context. For some students, attending chapel meant improving their spiritual lives by making chapel attendance akin to a spiritual discipline or perhaps as a time for reflection upon their life’s calling and purpose. In addition, for many students, their chapel attendance relied on a desire for solidarity with their floor or local residence hall community, which manifested itself as obligation/non-obligation from their peers or as a desire for consistent community time. Even more students thought of their chapel attendance as an opportunity for self-actualization as adults or as a prerogative for free choice. Finally, how students perceived and weighed their competing personal needs maintained relevant decision-making space in their minds in ultimately deciding to attend chapel exercises or not.

Each of these factors seldom worked alone. The themes universally applied to students at the faith-based school and always operated in tandem with each other. This cooperation occurred even if participants did not consciously mention the individual themes as such in response to the first direct interview question regarding motivations for chapel attendance. As interviews continued, the respondents almost always brought up additional motivations for attending chapel. One cannot reduce the reasons why students attended non-mandatory chapel exercises to a formulaic understanding but instead must understand the reasons as connected and ultimately complex, grounded in a narrative of how students make meaning of their higher education experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results of the current study identified five major themes that marked students' motivations for attending non-mandatory chapel: (a) desire for personal spiritual growth; (b) perception of chapel speaker quality; (c) desire for solidarity or sense of belonging to a floor or small group; (d) desire for free choice/self-actualization; and (e) perception of competing personal needs.

These findings become enhanced when compared to the literature on chapel exercises within the history of American higher education and on evolving notions of sovereignty in the individual's relationship with the institution. In particular, the findings and available literature illustrate the story of what happens in the minds of students as they weigh the value of corporate religious habits and practices within the context of a collegiate community.

Personal Spiritual Growth

Student descriptions of their motivation for chapel attendance based on desire for personal spiritual growth echoed literature on the history of chapel exercises and elements within the intellectual history of sovereignty in human interactions. Since the beginning of American higher education, institutions viewed chapel exercises as means of cultivating spiritual discipline and helping students understand their purpose in life. Ringenberg (2006) wrote how schools viewed chapel exercises as a vital means of

shaping students with the transformative power of the gospel message. At one time, even public institutions such as Ohio State saw making chapel exercises mandatory as critical to upholding the values of a liberal arts education in making virtuous people (Cowley, Eddy, & Sheedy, 1960). As time passed, only faith-based institutions such as the members of the CCCU maintained this value on chapel exercises as an institutional policy (Berk, 1974; Ringenberg, 2006).

The findings from the current study of individual students at a faith-based institution suggested a strong desire for attending chapel still exists in relation to developing spiritual discipline. Mandatory chapel does not exist at this institution, but individual students still see the importance of chapel in forming them spiritually. They personally understand the necessity of it and seek it by their own free will.

The findings also revealed the value students place on chapel exercises in terms of knowing their purpose in life, such as why they attend college or why they pursue their particular course of study. They described this purpose in terms of individual callings, which echoed how Elshtain (2008) believed individual sovereignty has become the dominant function in society.

Desire for Community/Floor Solidarity

A desire for community or floor solidarity emerged as the most widely cited factor in students' decisions whether to attend non-mandatory chapel. This theme corresponded to the literature describing chapel exercises as a unifying function for the community (Claus, 1913), even if not marked as particularly religious services. Berk (1974) also noted the reasons supporting chapel services included notions of its essentiality as a place of community and common experience for the campus. From out

of chapel exercises, students walked united in consciousness, which contained the planted seed of a spiritually-aware, holistic education.

The idea of chapel exercises as a unifying point and a place of solidarity for the community still existed at the faith-based institution studied, but through a more fragmented and peer-driven form of authority. While an institutionally-enforced mandatory chapel policy existed in the past, students expounded upon the means of gaining solidarity through relationships with people on their floor. Sometimes direct accountability between neighbors achieved this solidarity. At other times, students saw chapel attendance as a way to see the people with whom they lived and thus gain feelings of belonging to the community and actualizing their identity within the community.

Remarkably, a noticeable difference existed between male and female students in describing their desire for community/floor solidarity. Female respondents tended to speak more about a sense of individual guilt if they did not attend chapel and also seemed more likely to speak at length about floor solidarity as a motivating factor in attending chapel than males. While the reason for this difference remains uncertain with a small sample size, the responses prompt further reflection into the role of gender identity on attending religious exercises.

Perception of Chapel Speaker Quality

Naím (2013) described how technology and the corresponding spread of information have created possibilities for individuals and small groups in how they relate to institutional goals or desires. When students answered the question of how they decide to attend chapel exercises, a number of them mentioned checking the chapel schedule for who spoke on any particular day. The ability to perceive value from the convenience of a

computer screen and a google search for the respective speaker's biography allowed students to evaluate the net benefit to themselves of listening to a speaker.

Along with checking the chapel schedule online, assumptions about the appeal of chapel speakers influenced students' preferences. Students used phrases such as "I like some speakers better than others" or "[Some speakers have] brilliant minds... which I really enjoy." These statements line up with the 2008 allegation of Elshtain of present-day sovereignty located in the individual's preferences. However, sometimes peer perceptions of chapel speaker quality did factor into an individual's decision to go, especially if the speaker generated excitement within a group. Still, these peer perceptions of chapel speakers often assigned value to chapel services in terms of individual consumer appeal rather than institutional and community good.

Desire for Self-Actualization/Choice

The history of chapel exercises within American higher education has borne witness to the recurring themes of the desire for self-actualization and for the freedom to individually choose how to spend one's time. Frustration, sabotage, and even violent protest often mark the actions of students in response to institutional attempts to coerce them in some manner (AT News Team, 2012; Brubacher, 1968; Fox, 1945; Patton & Field, 1927). As a result, emerging notions of individual freedom (Patterson, 1992) and the value of individual sovereignty (Elshtain, 2008) contributed to this negative perception of coercive, mandatory chapel exercises.

The responses of students displayed desire for self-actualization and freedom of choice. Students in interviews explained how the opportunity to choose made them feel mature or respected as adults. For some students, they believed the institution "ought" to

treat them as adults, and having mandatory chapel would violate this obligation.

Other statements by students drew a negative association between mandatory chapel and a legalistic approach to the Christian lifestyle. They believed mandatory chapel would make chapel exercises like “a chore” and make loving God an obligation rather than a sincere desire. Students also valued free will in their personal relationships with God and viewed mandatory chapel as a threat toward their use of free will.

Competing Personal Needs

While the scholarship on chapel exercises made no direct mention of personal needs such as sleep or homework load factoring into chapel attendance, certain historical events do recall similar threads. In the past, mandatory chapel exercises demanded the presence of students whether they preferred sleep or not, and uniformity and discipline often overruled individual desires (Fox, 1945).

However, with non-mandatory chapel exercises, the option for “sleeping late” or spending more time on schoolwork becomes available. Once again, this sovereignty of the individual by Elshtain (2008) appeared within the findings. Students weighed the decision to attend chapel at the margin—marginal cost versus marginal benefit to themselves. Students thought ahead about their priorities and activities of the day. While they still valued chapel exercises, sometimes their perceived personal needs became a greater priority, and thus they opted to skip chapel exercises for the day.

Limitations

Because the motivation to attend non-mandatory chapel exercises remains a phenomenon with many complex facets at multiple institutions different from the study location, one cannot consider the present case study at this specific study location

exhaustive. As much as possible within the realm of the research question, the researcher sought to account for limitations. However, some recognized limitations to the study's findings and applicability exist.

For instance, selection bias might mark the findings. Because the respondents chose to take part in this study, perhaps on the basis of their desire or belief that their experience might prove relevant to the researcher, the study may reflect only a small segment of the experience students have in the decision-making process of attending non-mandatory chapel.

Another limitation of the study might come from the fact that several participants shared a great deal of their chapel-attending experiences, while others only shared a small amount and tended to support many of the experiences shared by more vocal participants. Also, the size of the sample might not have reached a saturation point, perhaps making some themes not as accurately represented.

The researcher drew the participant population from a small, residential university in the Midwest, thus possibly limiting the applicability of the study to other institutions (Creswell, 2007). Radically different designs compose some of these other institutions, and thus their students may have different experiences than those included in the current study (Wolcott, 1994).

Researcher bias may also potentially contribute a limitation. The case study methodology attempted to maintain objectivity as much as possible, especially in terms of minimizing the researcher's preconceptions and prejudices. Eliminating those preconceptions and prejudices in their entirety proves likely impossible. Despite these potential limitations, however, the study presented relevant information that should aid

higher education professionals' understanding and practice. A researcher cannot separate from the topic or people studied. Rather, the value of the research lies in the interaction between researcher and research. The open-ended nature of the interview questions sought not to steer the participants to a particular response. In this manner, compelling results emerged between two trusting parties.

Implications for Practice

The present study observed what motivates students to attend non-mandatory chapel. The research found five major qualitative themes with additional sub-themes. For higher education practitioners, this data ought to prove valuable in achieving desired learning outcomes and objectives for students, particularly in the areas of spiritual and virtue formation. In making the following suggestions for practice, the researcher operated under the assumption that higher education practitioners at comparable institutions desire high and consistent student attendance records.

The students featured in the study valued their faith and sought to develop it. Sometimes this motivation created a desire for chapel attendance as an activity of spiritual discipline. At other times, the motivation made chapel a place to understand their purpose or focus for their lives, even for their time in higher education. To encourage this motivation, practitioners might initiate programs geared towards the cultivation of spirituality among their students. For example, making opportunities available for a Bible study within a residence hall floor or unit might aid discussion of the role spirituality has within students' lives. Another example might include programming designed to educate students on the value of spiritual disciplines in their lives—

particularly in the sense of understanding one's calling—and then connecting chapel exercises to the impact of spiritual disciplines.

Additional support from practitioners in communicating the value of common worship might also add to students' desire for spiritual growth. As Elshtain (2008) alluded, secularization continues to shape how humanity understands its relationship to the world, including its understanding of sovereignty. In asking students about which "uni" in a university education they want to pursue, practitioners can prompt opportunities for students to consider what ends of the human experience students view as worth celebrating and respecting through common exercises.

Students described how their perception of a speaker's value weighed into their decision to attend chapel. Group peer evaluation from other students on their floors and the online schedule provided a means by which students could perceive a speaker's value. Because students choose to attend chapel, planning who speaks in chapel becomes more significant for practitioners. One such method in improving chapel attendance might involve seeking student opinion on which chapel speakers to invite. Involving students in the process of brainstorming chapel programming and selecting chapel speakers can make students feel a vested responsibility in chapel exercises and could make them more motivated to attend as well as communicate to other students the value in attending.

The most popular theme of desire for solidarity with a student's floor/local community perhaps presented some of the most fascinating implications for practitioners, especially in terms of building design for residence halls and determining what demographic indwells those residence halls. Participants maintained a strong connection to the floor on which they lived. They identified themselves by their floor and expressed

a strong sense of belonging. The thick, meaningful group identity made attending chapel exercises together an event to practice and realize the group identity for students.

Specifically for administrators working alongside architects, designing living spaces that create environments in which meaningful student interactions consistently occur might help translate to forms of meaningful group identity. Spaces with many doors separating student interaction may increase feelings of privacy but may also unintentionally hurt the development of community within a floor setting. Individual bathrooms may afford comfort but also might negate many opportunities for interactions. Students need face-to-face contact in order to develop meaningful relationships.

For administrators making housing decisions for students, a residence hall with multi-year students might more effectively create a distinct, meaningful group identity than a hall with a single class-year. All of the students interviewed came from multi-class year residence halls containing freshmen through seniors. The upperclassmen could set the tone for group practices and, in turn, habits within the floor. They passed on the tradition of chapel attendance as a floor to the first-year students, who then created a perpetual cycle of modeling this tradition. This finding might not rule out a possibility of successfully passing on chapel attendance habits onto single class floors, but doing so may prove difficult without a modeled narrative from upperclassmen (Ballou, 1986).

For residence hall directors, empowering floor leaders to model and encourage their residents to participate in habits and practices as a group may help reinforce the desire for solidarity. Several respondents prominently mentioned the key role of their floor leader in galvanizing group chapel attendance. A student leader has a greater

likelihood than an administrator of relating to their peers and may have a higher degree of trust, compelling fellow students to participate in group habits and practices.

Students who cited self-actualization and the freedom to choose as a motivation for attending chapel exercises may present a difficult ideological choice for practitioners. As cited in the literature, certain experts in higher education expressed concern for the policy change towards non-mandatory chapel as mark of secularization on a faith-based campus (Ringenberg, 2006; Burtchaell, 1998). The interviewed students expressed appreciation for the institution's non-mandatory chapel policy, and some even noted it as a motivating factor in attending the school. They regarded a policy of mandatory chapel in a negative sense. In light of these findings, practitioners may wish to weigh the values of individual sovereignty (Elshtain, 2008) as opposed to institutional sovereignty in achieving student learning outcomes as a part of a liberal arts education.

The last theme of competing personal needs described how students perceived challenges such as sleep deprivation and completing schoolwork as weighing in their decision to attend chapel exercises. For practitioners, awareness of the amount of programming in which students participate may help them discern whether students might overextend themselves. The plethora of available programming could distract and confuse student priorities and make the chapel experience just one more program in a fragmented narrative of higher education's purpose. Also, practitioners might directly address the topic of time management by providing programs and seminars that help students develop skills to schedule their time and commitments more intentionally.

Suggestions for Further Research

Recognizing the impact chapel exercises upon college students in their holistic development, the opportunity for further research proves sizable. Due to the lack of research, a qualitative case study on student motivations for attending non-mandatory chapel ultimately offered a necessary starting point. The researcher believed a particular richness and breadth of data lay in student descriptions of their experience, potentially aiding practitioners in how to approach the role of chapel exercises.

In the future, other researchers could use the themes observed to perform a quantitative study on the prevalence of these motivations among college students, as well as to define better the experiences of how students decide to attend chapel exercises. Testing for prevalence could also yield a more concise understanding of which motivations correlate to a higher choice of chapel attendance.

Many respondents viewed non-mandatory chapel favorably as opposed to mandatory chapel at other schools. Further research could seek a comparative, qualitative study between institutions with mandatory chapel programs and consider depth of student satisfaction and understanding of the purpose of chapel exercises.

Finally, the prominent mention of a desire for solidarity factoring into student decisions to attend chapel exercises could lead to fascinating studies on floor group dynamics within a multi-class residence hall. The strong sense of floor identity made chapel attendance as a floor a matter of significance. Understanding how to cultivate this floor identity to encourage residents to participate in certain habits and practices could profoundly impact practitioners' understanding of student development.

Conclusion

The current study sought to determine the motivational factors that influenced non-mandatory chapel attendance at a small, faith-based university in the Midwest. Utilizing a case study methodology and interviewing residential students in focus groups, the study explored how students weigh the decision to attend non-mandatory chapel.

While representing one particular context, the study illustrated a point from which the narrative of secularization in higher education might speak differently than in the past. Some prominent scholars marked the policy change of mandatory to non-mandatory chapel as a symbolic shift towards secularization (Burtchaell, 1998; Ringenberg, 2006). However, the current case study offered an opportunity to tell the narrative in a different way. The absence of mandatory chapel did not necessarily mean a reduction in the role of spirituality on the researched campus. Rather, the value of chapel exercises came more from students themselves than from an institutionally-enforced mandatory policy.

While concerns about individual sovereignty remain valid (Elshtain, 2008), practitioners can still acknowledge today's philosophical circumstances and find ways to engender the value of spirituality and religious exercises within students. Even as modernity casts doubt about religion's relevance, the desire for a meaningful life remains strong among students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). If enlightenment has brought about respect and care for the individual, then spirituality must continue as a relevant factor on college campuses. Effective student affairs practitioners ought to intentionally program for it, inviting the entire campus to meditate and reflect on not only the ends of a liberal arts education, but even more on the ends of a truly human experience.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Focus Groups

1. Why do you (or not) attend the chapel service at Taylor University?
2. How often do you attend chapel?
3. Describe the decision-making process you undergo in deciding whether or not to go to chapel.

