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A Culture that Aspires, A Culture that Inspires: A Case Study Analysis of the Calvin College Philosophy Department

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A CULTURE THAT ASPIRES, A CULTURE THAT INSPIRES: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE CALVIN COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

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Abstract

This study explored both the history and current practices of the Calvin College philosophy department with the intention of forming an assessment of a successful, reputable academic department. The purpose of the study was to determine what characteristics of this department's culture could be adapted and implemented to enrich other academic departments across varying disciplines and institutional types. To capture the essence of this productive departmental culture, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 participants connected to the department; these participants included current students, past and present faculty, program assistants, a former provost, and a local educational historian. Results indicated strong influences from the departmental mission, the Christian Reformed faith tradition, and faculty loyalty to the institution and department; the equal pursuit of teaching and scholarship; the value of the weekly peer-review tradition called Colloquium; the critical role of rapport among faculty, students, and department chair; and the impact of diversity in faculty scholarship on the department learning community. Despite the limits of studying one department within a single institution, other academic departments may significantly benefit from thoughtful consideration, adaptation, and implementation of the results.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching" (Boyer, 1990, p. 24).

The Academic Department Culture

"Good practice in undergraduate education encourages student-faculty contact…cooperation among students…[and] active learning, gives prompt feedback, emphasizes time on task, communicates high expectations, [and] respects diverse talents and ways of learning" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 2). Consistently proving to be accurate and effective, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles and subsequent adaptations were originally designed with faculty and administrators in mind. However, successful application of these principles by individual faculty within single classrooms as well as by entire institutions on larger scales also proved to be possible. Furthermore, these principles formed the basis for many additional studies, including different disciplines' applications of the seven principles (Braxton, Olsen, & Simmons, 1998) and more focused research on faculty-student relations (Kuh & Vesper, 1997; Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997).

Indeed, throughout the large body of higher education research—not the least of which are such monumental works by Chickering and Gamson (1987) and others—faculty and institutions are reportedly the most apt to achieve the above-described

pinnacles of quality postsecondary academia. On the contrary, a smaller number of studies focus on administrators and the influence of their leadership. Gmelch (2000) even asserts that these positions may be the least researched and most misunderstood leadership roles on the national scale.

Even less research focuses on the role the academic department plays in fostering an excellent education at the postsecondary level. From the department chair and administrative staff to the part-time and full-time faculty to the students themselves, the department represents a microcosm of the higher education world. Many facets within this entity were explored through individual research studies: the scholar-teaching nexus of faculty (Boyd et al., 2010; Fairweather, 2005; Hattie & Marsh, 1996), student-faculty relations (Helterbran, 2008; Martinez-Alemàn, 2007; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010), student evaluations (Beyers, 2008; Corts, 2000; Landrum & Braitman, 2008), the role of the department chair, and others. Still, as mentioned, little study focuses on the entire academic department as a unique, actively contributing force within higher education.

Thus, building on these individual studies, a case study of a prominent academic department offers a more unified perspective of the structure and culture necessary for such an organizational unit. This type of study can assess elements of a specific department through the lenses of previous smaller studies and thereby determine certain practices by which other departments can enrich the quality of the education they offer.

The Calvin College Philosophy Department

The philosophy department at Calvin College—a small, private, faith-based institution in Grand Rapids, Michigan—is regarded as a high quality department in undergraduate education. Its reputation is due mostly to the scholastic and professorial

caliber of the department's past and current faculty. A quick search on Google Scholar of key faculty names showed simply by citation rates of various publications the academic impact of these philosophers: Alvin Plantinga (1610 citations, *The Nature of Necessity,* 1978), Nicholas Wolterstorff (369 citations, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 1980), James K. A. Smith (164 citations, *Desiring the Kingdom,* 2009), and Ruth E. Groenhout (58 citations, *Connected Lives: Human Nature and an Ethic of Care*, 2004).

The influence of departmental productivity reaches even beyond the focused academic realm. In a review of *Glittering Vices* (2009) by Rebecca DeYoung, Jason Baehr from the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* described the work as "an excellent and important contribution," applicable to audiences from small group retreats to adult Christian education courses (Baker Publishing Group, n.d.). Similarly, Lee Hardy's *The Fabric of This World* addressed the concept of work in ways applicable to those within the work force, those entering it, work leaders, and the necessarily unemployed (Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2015). Thus, the presence of this particular department is profoundly felt both within and beyond academe.

With eight full professors, four associate and assistant professors, and a scholar emeritus (Calvin College, 2014), the current faculty members are known for as much for their teaching as for their research, showing clear departmental support for the balance of the two practices. In addition to recruiting and retaining top-notch faculty, the Calvin College philosophy department equips students with an education that helps them transition well to careers and graduate programs of excellent standing (Calvin College, 2014). The program offers majors, double majors, and minors in the discipline, as well as opportunities to participate in research projects, extensive lectures, and honors

programming (Calvin College, 2014). The quality of the department's students and its faculty suggest equally strong leadership by department chairs past and present, as well as significant support from the institution.

The Present Study

Evidenced by the gap in the literature regarding the organizational management and relational structure that make up quality academic departments, a need exists for further research. In light of its reputed strengths, the Calvin College philosophy department provides an excellent model by which to investigate what elements contribute to such a department.

Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to explore both the history and current practices of the Calvin philosophy department as a whole. The study combined research into the administration, faculty, and students and wove these smaller studies together with the intention of forming an assessment of a successful, reputable academic department. The study was grounded and driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a high performing departmental culture (in terms of teaching, service, and research) at a higher education institution?
2. What components of the department's culture attract, develop, and retain faculty who strive for excellence and lifelong learning?
3. What roles do students, faculty, staff, and the department chair play in shaping the departmental culture?
4. What elements—if any—of a strong academic department can be adapted by other departments in different disciplines and different institutional types?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Sessa and Taylor (2000) stated that a good deal—if not most—of what occurs in higher education institutions is handled at the level of academic departments. While case studies of whole departments are few and far between, recent literature regarding the various elements of departmental organization proved abundant. In order to more fully understand and appreciate the inner workings of an entire department, this literature review explored research regarding departments and academic leadership in general terms; faculty development, scholarship, and relations with students; student evaluations and satisfaction; and case studies highlighting the benefits of this type of research. Once an overview of departmental elements is established, the review concludes by focusing on Calvin College's history and its Philosophy department.

Academic Leadership and Academic Departments

Those few studies assessing departments in holistic terms tend to focus on organizational culture and strategic management, especially with the end goal of departmental change and quality improvement. For instance, Eckel (1998) explored the similarities between academic departments and team frameworks, specifically self-managing and presidential. Significant points of parallel were found in the roles and functions of department members and chairs and the decision-making powers and

processes (individual and group) within the department (Eckel, 1998). This article and others emphasized the crucial role of consistent and strategic communication within departments (Eckel, 1998; Forward, Czech, & Allen, 2007; Spencer-Matthews, 2001). Some studies proved communication styles can significantly influence job satisfaction and the effectiveness of transformational leadership within times of cultural change within departments (Forward et al., 2007). Spencer-Matthews (2001) described a department that attempted to move toward self-assessment, improved quality, and productivity; however, poor communication from departmental leaders resulted in offense to and resistance from the faculty, halting the progressive vision.

To clarify communication within a department that focuses on growth, studies show departmental rewarding of faculty for their focus on and achievement of the desired goals (such as rewarding teamwork through grants, etc.) is often a clear and effective means of communicating said goals (Heaton, 2005; Ringwood, 2005; Wolverton, Gmelch, & Sorenson, 1998). Some programs focused on even distribution of workload (coupled with a type of "reward system") in order to achieve faculty satisfaction and thereby ease the pursuit of the department's chosen strategic direction (Ringwood, 2005). For instance, all departmental activities—teaching, research, and administrative—were weighted with fixed number values according to their relevance to the overall departmental vision and strategic trajectory (Ringwood, 2005). Heaton (2005) then also emphasized the value of creativity—individual and collaborative—as academic departments develop and pursue strategic direction, student and faculty recruitment, and quality improvement.

Departments striving for growth may encounter an interesting tension not only among their faculty but also between institutional influences and the academic pressures of their respective institutions (Lee, 2007; Wolverton et al., 1998). While the institution contributes significantly to departments' prestige orientation and commitment to scholarly recognition, the discipline often influences the department's instrumental and multicultural orientations (Lee, 2007). For departmental change that meets these two seemingly opposing forces, studies suggest the following steps: an environment that encourages teamwork; a focus on teaching; regular and intentional self-assessment; and purposeful leadership from the department chair (Wolverton et al., 1998). To bring these change elements together harmoniously, Wolverton et al. (1998) suggested forming department portfolios (much like those done for teaching) so as to establish tangible benchmarks by which to assess improvement as a whole department.

As departments self-evaluate and seek improved quality, direction, and productivity, much research details how best to measure their desired growth. For example, Taur, Fried, and Fry (2007) documented their analysis of the efficient departmental workings within a single university. Utilizing the DEA (Data Envelopment Analysis) as the basis for their methodology, their research team defined the department's efficiencies by a ratio of its inputs (e.g., hours spent teaching or conducting research, internal and external funds) and outputs (e.g., teaching, research projects, grant applications, publications), using linear programming and thereby offering a more concrete means of measuring departmental productivity, efficiency, and growth.

Department Chairs

As far as personnel are concerned, a typical academic department is comprised of a group of faculty and administrative assistants under the leadership of the department chair, usually a faculty member who has agreed to take on the responsibility of overseeing the department as a whole (Carrol & Wolverton, 2004; Czech & Forward, 2010; DiLorenzo & Heppner, 1994; Thomas & Schuh, 2004). Leaming (1998) stated, "The department chair is the glue [of the institution], serving as the link between faculty and administration, between the discipline and the institution, and occasionally between faculty and parents" (p. ix). According to Bowman (2002), department chairs serve as managers—handling paperwork, processes, and policies—and as leaders—championing the department's engagement, vision, mission, and adaptability (Buffone, 2009; Hicks & Sperry, 1986; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005; Wolverton et al., 1998). Bowman highlighted that "[t]he real work of academic chairs is rooted in establishing 'common purpose' that cuts across the organization…they manage conversational inquiry that engages others in creating possibilities, breakthroughs, and a sustainable future for their common enterprise" (2002, p. 159, 161). Amid the myriad of interlocking duties, a department chair casts a vision as a leader and provides concrete, achievable steps as a manager.

While the complexity of the position offers significant challenges in and of itself, the need to balance administrative duties with the constant institutional expectation of scholarship (specifically, research and publication) provides additional stress and difficulty for department chairs in all disciplines (Carrol & Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch, 2004; Seedorf, 1993; Wolverton et al., 2005; Wolverton et al., 1998). Other commonly

professed hesitations to taking on the chair position are the "limelight" that accompanies administrative positions, the heightened accountability to and control by the institutional administration, and the time taken away from family and personal life (Gmelch, 2004; Thomas & Schuh, 2004).

Such a demanding position, therefore, would understandably require training and support from the institutions for which the department chairs work. Unfortunately, the literature recurrently notes that intentional training and professional development for the role of department chair has proven sadly lacking for decades (Aziz et al., 2005; Buffone, 2009; Gmelch, 2004; Hecht, 2004; Staniforth & Harland, 2006; Wolverton et al., 2005). In fact, Gmelch (2000) reported that between the years of 1990 and 2000, only 3 percent of all academic leaders (including department heads) who responded to national surveys reported having official training for their position.

One alleged reason for a lack of training is the focus that disciplines, departments, and much of higher education places on faculty becoming specialized in their field of study, while simultaneously sounding the call for more "generalized experts" to step forward as department chairs (Aziz et al., 2005; Gmelch, 2004). At other times, institutional administration may draw from a current faculty pool because such a candidate would understand the department's unique idiosyncrasies, or they may select an outside party in hopes of bringing strategic or cultural change to the department (Wolverton et al., 2005). Hecht (2004) reported training came "on the job" for most department chairs (p. 20).

Often through this "self-taught" process, department chairs form distinct methods of leadership and communication styles. Studies regarding department chair leadership

focus on the effectiveness of different leadership styles in achieving culture change and strategic direction within the department, especially in light of pressures for change from the institution and from administration "higher up" (Czech & Forward, 2010; Forward et al., 2007; Hicks & Sperry, 1986). Leadership styles can include broad categories, like authoritarian and democratic (Hicks & Sperry, 1986) or more specific, such as Machiavellian, Bureaucratic, and Transformational (Czech & Forward, 2010; Forward et al., 2007).

> Moye, Henkin, and Floyd (2006) stated that
>
> [d]epartment-chair-faculty relationships…define, in part, the extent to which the work of departments may be considered successful, especially where institutional success depends on the collective capacity of a department to act in response to continual demands for change and transformation. (p. 266)

Organizational (or, in this case, departmental) success results in large part from the building of interpersonal trust, which is effectively built through movements by the department chair to empower the faculty in their work and in their contributions to the department and the higher education community (Angelo, 1999; Moye et al., 2006). The importance of trust is especially true for relations between department chairs and new faculty, who must be oriented to the workings and visionary directions of both the department and the institution as a whole (Czech & Forward, 2010; Staniforth & Harland, 2006). However, tension can easily develop between faculty and chair, especially on the sensitive subjects of promotion and tenure (Buffone, 2009; Staniforth & Harland, 2006).

Faculty Development

Thomas and Schuh (2004) stated that department chairs report faculty development as "the most interesting and rewarding" element of their job (p. 12). While this responsibility is often a major part of the department chair role, often the institutional administration takes the lead. In many ways, faculty development in higher education is a means to individual growth and group alignment with institutional vision. Often, faculty development refers simply to the improvement of either professorship (teaching) or scholarship (research), and, on most occasions, individuals from outside of the department or even outside of the institution lead these development efforts (DiLorenzo & Heppner, 1994). Believing departmental administration should take responsibility for equipping its faculty, DiLorenzo and Heppner (1994) defined faculty development from a departmental perspective: "a process of enhancing and promoting any form of academic scholarship in individual faculty members…by promoting the individual growth of faculty members in conjunction with the mission of the institution and the needs and values of the department" (p. 485). Similarly, according to Angelo (1999), faculty development should result in "more effective teaching, produce more and better learning, foster more meaningful scholarship, and operate in a more collaborative fashion" (p. 1).

However, if measured specifically by improved student learning, little to no progress was made over the last 40 years of studies and movement regarding faculty development in the U.S. (Angelo, 1999; Finkelstein & Cummins, 2012). As mentioned above, DiLorenzo and Heppner (1994) believed, in large part, the common practice of defining faculty development as "improving teaching and research," as well as having outside parties conduct the development, limited the potential scope and effectiveness of

the developmental programs. In addition to their possible explanation, Angelo (1999) suggested various reasons for the slow and rather fruitless faculty development efforts. First, the programs operated without a sufficient understanding of true "collegiate learning" and how to promote it (Angelo, 1999, p. 1). Also, efforts were scattered and scarce inside institutions and across higher education, and the focus had been on professors and not on student learning; however, current efforts have not taken much into account regarding faculty reasons for resisting change (Angelo, 1999). Lastly, current efforts have been tangential to institutional missions and visions and thereby lack sufficient administrative support (Angelo, 1999).

Still, DiLorenzo and Heppner (1994), Angelo (1999), and others suggest certain elements crucial to effective faculty development programs and resultant student learning. In DiLorenzo's and Heppner's (1994) programs, they proposed three "core features" to successful development. The first was "the basic goal of enhancing the growth and development of each faculty member by promoting any and all forms of scholarship throughout each individual's career" (p. 486). The second core feature was a focus on leadership as opposed to management by the departmental chair (DiLorenzo & Heppner, 1994). The third core feature broadened the developmental emphasis from individual faculty to the department as a whole, "developing an environment that is safe, fair, friendly, and productive for all…" (p. 486). Heaton (2005) would add creativity as an equally necessary focus to creating this effective learning community, viewing creativity as the core to both departmental innovation and organizational change.

Faculty Scholarship

As seen above, DiLorenzo and Heppner (1994) asserted the end goal of faculty development as the furthering of individual scholarship, but often professorial scholarship—and in particular, how it relates to teaching demands—proves to be a nebulous matter in higher education (Boyd et al., 2010; Milem, Berger, & Dey, 2000). According to Kennedy, Gubbins, Luer, Reddy, and Light (2003),

> Scholarship is defined as the creation, discovery, advancement, or transformation of knowledge. The fruits of such efforts are evidenced only when that knowledge is assessed for quality by peer review or made public. Thus, the defining elements of scholarship are originality, creativity, peer review, and communication. (p. 2)

Boyer (1990) famously proposed four "realms" of scholarship that greatly impacted subsequent research and practice on the topic: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching (Boyd et al., 2010; Freedenthal, Potter, and Grinstein-Weiss, 2008; Hurtado & Sharkness, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2003). In relation to college and university faculty, Kennedy et al. (2003) described scholarship of discovery as the creation or reorganization of knowledge on a specific topic, requiring creativity, originality, and peer-reviewed communication. Scholarship of integration refers to the ability to take basic comprehension of a subject and, through the study of relation and comparison to other elements, discover more broadly integrated results (Kennedy et al., 2003). The scholarship of application focuses on utilizing knowledge with the end goal of improving productivity in their chosen field of study (Kennedy et al., 2003). Lastly, the scholarship of teaching refers to teaching (or, more specifically, developing curriculum, analyzing, or measuring outcomes) that

demonstrates effective communication and undergoes peer review from external parties (Kennedy et al., 2003).

Boyd et al. (2010) and others conducted extensive research regarding the "teaching-research nexus" (TRN), or how professors, students, departments, and institutions of higher education approached and responded to the dual demand faced by college faculty. Krause et al. (2007, as cited in Boyd et al., 2010) listed five benefits to the direct integration of the TRN in collegiate classrooms: the TRN "epitomize[s] teaching and learning in higher education… engages and motivates students…develops important graduate attributes…prepares students for future employment…[and] offers professional benefits for academic staff" (p. 14-15).

In a miniature review of literature regarding the relationship between research and teaching, Hattie and Marsh (1996) presented eight different models connecting these two elements of faculty life. The scarcity model, the differential personality model, and the divergent rewards model all suggested why a negative relationship should exist between research and teaching (Hattie & Marsh, 1996). The conventional wisdom model and the "g" model proposed a positive relationship, and the different enterprises model, the unrelated personality model, and the bureaucratic funding model demonstrated a zero relationship (Hattie & Marsh, 1996). Hattie and Marsh's (1996) subsequent meta-analysis of these models—adding two models that account for certain variables in the scholarship-teaching relationship—found little significant influence between teaching and research, either positive or negative.

Institutional support for faculty scholarship comes in many forms—determined institution by institution according to mission and capability—but the most common

broad categories are time-related supports, funding-related supports, and technical support, which includes expertise, mentoring, and training (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Kennedy et al., 2003). However, perhaps the biggest indicator of institutions supporting their faculty members' scholastic endeavors is through the tenure review and promotion evaluation processes and how heavily faculty scholarship is weighed as merit toward these honors (Fairweather, 2005; Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Hearn & Anderson, 2002; Heaton, 2005; Hurtado & Sharkness, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2003).

Faculty – Student Relations

As with professorial research and scholarship, teaching and time spent with students play understandably significant roles in student learning. In addition, outside-of-class interactions specifically are viewed by many as a primary responsibility of faculty members (Bok, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Volkwein & Carbone, 1994). Indeed, many studies show students highly value professors who interact outside of class and who are genuinely empathetic and concerned about their well-being (Epting, Zinn, Buskist, & Buskist, 2007; Helterbran, 2008; Hill & Christian, 2012; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Sprinkle, 2008). Some studies referred to this quality as "rapport," saying that students reported "greater enjoyment of the material covered in the course and of the instructor…[and were] more likely to attend class, study, contact their professor, and engage in other academically beneficial behaviors" (Wilson et al., 2010, p. 246).

Regrettably, a study by Milem et al. (2000) indicated a universal decrease in faculty time spent outside of the classroom in comparison to the time spent in research. These statistics of decreased interactive time with students were most significant in comprehensive universities, research institutions, and, surprisingly, even liberal arts

colleges. Even such interactive elements as faculty office hours reveal a disconnect between what students and institutions expect and what faculty either can or are willing to provide. For example, according to a study by Pfund, Rogan, Burnham, and Norcross (2013), observed faculty fulfilled about 75% of scheduled office hour times—a realistic achievement by faculty evaluation, while deplorable by "student-consumer" standards.

Coupled with this focus on informal student-professor interactions is a growing realization in higher education of the disparate expectations of faculty and students on faculty availability and contributions to student experiences (Helterbran, 2008; Hill & Christian, 2012; Pfund et al., 2013). According to Hill and Christian (2012), some students prefer instructor competence over the abovementioned desire for extracurricular interactions. Pepe and Wang (2012) suggested that students most value "communication of ideas and information" (p. 610) and facilitation of learning (p. 611). Helterbran (2008) reported still more student expectations, purporting that "students view professors who make things easier for them as a quality of good teaching," while "instructors consider their ability to encourage students to work more independently as a mark of good teaching" (p. 127).

Student-professor relations are perhaps most explicitly recorded through student evaluations, the subject of much scholarly research and a point of much disagreement among higher education professionals. Some contest that student evaluations prove most often to be invalidated by unrelated student biases, such as the professors' physical appearances or opinions on outside subjects. The other side of the argument suggests that students, as the primary consumers of professorial productivity, stand in an excellent

position to provide accurate, reliable feedback on the desired outcome: student learning (Beyers, 2008; Helterbran, 2008; Landrum & Braitman, 2008; Pepe & Wang, 2012; Remedios & Lieberman, 2008). In light of the controversy, many recent studies focused on narrowing evaluation options to achieve more specific and helpful feedback for faculty (Landrum & Braitman, 2008) or using a student-professor rapport scale to predict valuable student outcomes and thereby channel professor efforts to more effectively achieve those desired learning results (Wilson et al., 2010).

Calvin College

Institutional history. In 1876, approximately twenty years after forming the Christian Reformed Church, Dutch immigrants founded Calvin College and Seminary in the western region of Michigan. Both the faith and the institution fundamentally focus on the sovereignty of God in all things—personal, professional, and academic. Originally designed as a training center for ministers or an academy for non-theological students, the school expanded its curriculum at the turn of the century as the size and interests of its student body increased and diversified. Awarding its first Bachelor of Arts degrees in 1921, Calvin College has continued to grow in attendance and reputation. Today, the institution is widely recognized for the excellent scholastic experience it provides to over 4,300 currently enrolled students.

Key philosophy faculty members. Among other characteristics and elements of the college, the Calvin philosophy department holds a national and international reputation, not only for the quality of education it offers students but more specifically for the scholastic caliber of the faculty it attracts and maintains. The faculty (current and past) involved in the current study are Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Dr. Alvin Plantinga, Dr.

Rebecca DeYoung, Dr. Ruth Groenhout, Dr. James K. A. Smith, Dr. Lee Hardy, Dr. Christina Van Dyke, Dr. Kevin Corcoran, Dr. David Billings, Dr. David Hoekema, Dr. Gregory Mellema, Dr. Matt Halteman, Dr. Del Ratzch, and Dr. Dan Herrick.

The credentials of each of the Calvin philosophy faculty members—as well as their dedication to teaching amid robust research and publication—testify to their faith convictions and their quality as scholar-practitioners. In turn, these faculty members stand as prime examples of the department's and institution's faithful culture and pursuit of rigorous scholarship.

Conclusion

The review of the literature above highlighted various elements of the workings of academic departments. From chair leadership to faculty scholarship to student evaluations, the "shared governance" of a department provides a checks-and-balances system that, ideally, leads to continual quality improvements in education and research. Building on the foundations laid by the literature, the current study focuses on the Calvin philosophy department to determine what organizational methods and perspectives contribute to the considerable reputation of the department's members and product.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose and Design

The purpose of the present study was therefore to explore both the history and current practices of the Calvin College philosophy department as a whole. In particular, it explored the administrative, faculty, and student cultures and wove these smaller studies together into an assessment of what defines a successful, reputable academic department. The case study design was selected in light of the investigative purpose and the desired outcomes of the study. According to Baker (1999), "Case studies may be largely exploratory, or…descriptive. But often the reason to study a particular case is to try to figure out why a certain situation prevails or how an organization or group has succeeded" (p. 321). Merriam et al. (2002) highlighted that case studies "provide researchers with an understanding of complex social phenomena while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday events" (p. 205). Thus, with the end goal of attaining a holistic, in-depth understanding of the Calvin philosophy department's organizational culture and success, the case study design proved the best research approach.

Similarly, a qualitative form of exploration was chosen for the case study considering the desired end results. Data collected from observing an organizational culture often is analyzed most effectively in a qualitative manner because the method

leads to a more detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative methodology focuses on exploration, often done through interviews with participants in the selected culture or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Thus, in the current study, data was collected through interviews with different members of the Calvin philosophy department and was qualitatively coded for themes that provided a more detailed understanding of that particular organizational culture.

Participants

As the present study was a qualitative case of the Calvin philosophy department, the primary participants consisted of seven of the department's full-time professors, two associate professors, two assistant professors, one professor emeritus, and two past professors. In addition to faculty, the study included the unique insights of the department chair (also a full-time professor), three administrative assistants, seven current students, a local historian, and a former provost.

As both researchers and teachers, faculty members (as a whole and as individuals) hold a unique perspective on departmental culture, often providing different insight based on their duration with the department. Those who have worked longer often describe evolutions of the culture and ascribe causes to such changes, whereas newer faculty describe first impressions and initial draws to the department and its culture (Hearn & Anderson, 2002). Additionally, faculty play instrumental roles in creating and shaping that particular culture, depending on the level and type of authority faculty are permitted to wield. It is not uncommon in academic departments that the power granted to faculty differs from the power they choose to exert (Moye et al., 2006). Lastly, whether faculty

members are more focused on the department itself or on the discipline at large also significantly affects the organizational ethos of the department (Lee, 2007).

Members of the small group of major students in the present study represented all four undergraduate academic levels (freshman through senior) as well as both genders. Student participants were key to the study as they are the product of the department. Also, as with the faculty who have taught at Calvin for varying lengths of time, representatives of all class levels (underclassmen and upperclassmen) provided a more holistic view of the student experience, from entering the department to graduation. The study also explored the degree of involvement students had in department workings and to what extent their input was sought, considered, and implemented.

Administrative or program assistants were involved in the study because of the integral role they play in the academic department. From facilitating communication among faculty, the department chair, and students to organizing meetings to keeping the department as a whole connected to the institution. The program assistants therefore were often primary witnesses of the causes and effects of fluctuations in organizational culture from within the department. The study also involved an interview with two of the department's most influential and prestigious past faculty and two local institutional historians. While some of these figures were pivotal and intimately involved in shaping the department at one time, they all now offered a holistic perspective from "the outside," making their voices and thoughts invaluable to the study.

Participation in the study was purely voluntary, and individuals involved were offered no monetary compensation for their participation. If desired, participants' names were changed to pseudonyms in the final report for the sake of confidentiality through

anonymity. However, if the participants permitted their names to be used, explicit references were made between responses and specific participants. For instance, if a participant was directly quoted in the reports from the study, he or she was referenced by name and title, if the person gave permission.

Procedures

The researcher collected the data for the study through a series of interviews with the previously mentioned participants. The researcher first approached the chair of the Calvin philosophy department with the initial inquiry as to the department's overall interest and availability of participants for the study. Once the department as a whole had agreed to participate, and once the IRB had approved the study project, the researcher scheduled and conducted a series of both group and individual interviews with the Calvin philosophy faculty and staff. The researcher determined which participants to interview individually or in a group based on each participant's responsibility in the department, as well as each participant's availability.

As many interviews as possible were conducted in person and recorded for later transcription. The two interviews that could not be conducted face-to-face were conducted via email. All oral communications (in person, Skype, phone) were ideally kept to between 30-45 minutes and were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Written communication (email) was kept in its original form and used for data coding. (See Appendix A for a list of framework interview questions). Interview questions were tailored to fit the departmental role of each individual participant or focus group and draw the most insight possible from their respective perspectives. In general, however, non-demographic questions focused on the following topics: departmental mission and

leadership, professorial teaching and scholarship, student involvement, and relations among the department chair, faculty, and students.

Data Analysis

Having completed all necessary transcription, the researcher coded all interview data. The researcher then synthesized the coded results to formulate a collection of tentative themes representing the organizational culture of the department in the study. From the data, the researcher also highlighted organizational elements and themes that potentially contribute to the department's national reputation and clear academic success. Combining the themes and noted contributing factors, the researcher formulated implications for other academic departments and institutions to consider for possible use as they develop their own organizational cultures.

Validity. The researcher's analysis of the data was verified through a member checking approach. The purpose of the validity checking procedure was, as described by Creswell (2008), to assure "whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative" (p. 267). All 26 participants were given the opportunity to proofread the analyzed data and provide feedback regarding the accuracy and validity of the study's observations, themes, and asserted implications.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and evidenced by the literature in Chapter 2, the primary anticipated benefit of the current study was to fill the gap in the literature regarding organizational culture in academic departments. While the present research did not provide a model by which departments can structure or shape their culture, the

study's results and the implications drawn potentially provide questions of self-assessment as well as organizational suggestions applicable to all types of academic departments.

Similarly, the study was anticipated to benefit the Calvin philosophy department in several ways. First, the study could be seen as an informal assessment of department culture, communication, and expectations, reflecting on strengths and weaknesses alike. Also, in the anticipated publication of the study, the "spotlight" focus on the Calvin philosophy faculty and program would further increase awareness of the department's significant contributions to higher education and the discipline of philosophy. The department would therefore benefit from increased interest from incoming students, faculty, and other higher education practitioners who wished to learn more or perhaps participate in the program's well-respected work.

Conclusion

In the selection of research design, participants, and analysis technique, the goal of the study was to "provide researchers with an understanding" of the organizational and scholastic success of the Calvin philosophy department "while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday events" (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 205). Ideally, the themes drawn from collected data would prove instructional and applicable to academic departments in higher education both nationally and internationally.

Chapter 4

Results

Overview

As previously noted, the purpose of the study was to explore both the history and current practices of the Calvin philosophy department in an attempt to form an assessment of a successful, reputable academic department. The research was grounded and driven by the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a high performing departmental culture (in terms of teaching, service, and research) at a higher education institution?

2. What components of the department's culture attract, develop, and retain faculty who strive for excellence and lifelong learning?

3. What roles do students, faculty, staff, and the department chair play in shaping the departmental culture?

4. What elements—if any—of a strong academic department can be adapted to other departments in different disciplines and different institutional types?

Data was collected through a series of 19 in-person interviews and two email interviews with a total of 25 faculty, staff, students, and administrators with present and historic connections to the Calvin philosophy department. The interviews were transcribed and coded by the researcher. Below are common themes and sub-themes that arose from this process.

Table 1

Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Mission / Faith Tradition	Teaching and Research as Equal Emphases	Colloquium	Rapport	Diversification of Specialization
Sub-themes	**Mission** -To do good philosophy -To do good philosophy Christianly -To do good philosophy Christianly for wider audience **Faith Tradition** -Appreciation for intellectuality and philosophy -Faculty loyalty	**Mission and Reputation** **Expectations** **Student Draw** **Mutual Influence**	**Benefits** -Coming together to do philosophy -Sharpen each other -Learn from each other **Challenges** -Harsh critique -Diversification of focuses -Content and time commitment	**Faculty-student rapport** -Accessibility -Preparation for grad school -Student perception of faculty collegiality and passion -Holistic care **Faculty rapport** -Mostly without tension -Gender -Mentorship **Chair leadership** -Egalitarian -Representative -Administrative	**Offers students broad range** **Brings variety to Colloquium** **Less cohesion around common projects**

Mission and Faith Tradition

Mission. Participants were asked to articulate their understanding of the departmental mission (as opposed to Calvin's mission as a college). For the most part, each response aligned with at least one of the following three descriptions.

To do good philosophy. Nine of the 25 participants reported the department's mission broadly as doing good or impactful philosophy. George Marsden, former history professor at Calvin and friend to several past members of the philosophy department, succinctly stated, "the…goal was simply to be [a] really good philosophy department."

To do good Christian philosophy. Building off of the fundamental commitment to excellence, 18 participants emphasized the influence of the Christian faith on the

department's mission. One participant described the department's position on the forefront of Christian philosophic scholarship, having demonstrated Christians' ability to be intellectually respectable philosophers. Similarly, former Calvin provost Joel Carpenter said of the philosophy faculty, "…every one of them [is] an engaged, active scholar, and they're determined to do that…from a Christian basis."

To do good Christian philosophy for wider audience. In addition to the concepts of doing good philosophy and from a Christian perspective, six participants indicated the popular or public component of the department's mission, which is, extending to recipients beyond the domain of the Christian faith. James K. A. Smith stated,

> …what we've tried to do is foster robust, rigorous…thinking in philosophy, but starting unapologetically from a Christian standpoint. But then not just doing that for Christian audiences…but in a way that is engaged with the wider academy…those who are engaged in the American Philosophical Association….

These elements—excellence, the Christian faith, and a commitment to serving wider audiences—were consistently reported among participants with regard to the Calvin philosophy department's mission.

Faith tradition. In addition to the guiding structure of the mission, participants referenced the influence of, for example, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) on Calvin and thus on the philosophy department culture.

Appreciation for intellectuality and philosophy. First, nine participants referenced the intellectual—and specifically philosophical—appreciation fundamental to the CRC tradition. According to Lee Hardy, "…the Reformed community has had a very high regard for the intellectual life and supporting it…we've received a lot of

support…from the institution and culture…" Nicholas Wolterstorff echoed this sentiment regarding the Reformed tradition: "Its founders were themselves very learned,…establish[ing] universities all over the place…. So one thing that clearly aided philosophy…the tradition never had suspicion such of…any part of learning."

Faculty loyalty. Five of the participants also mentioned the loyalty for which past faculty had for the CRC and specifically for Calvin as an intellectual community within that faith tradition. Such loyalty often brought prominent graduates back to Calvin—a less prestigious institution than other options they had—to work for less pay than was available to them in other positions. In light of faculty working at Calvin for these lower wages, Kevin Corcoran stated, "…with Wolterstorff and Plantinga, there was loyalty to this place…They're so loyal…this is their home. This is their tradition. This is where they were born and bred…" Similarly, Marsden highlighted how faculty ties to Calvin did not diminish the scholars' prestige: "I think it reflects the…loyalty here, that the people who were really good here in this little parochial institution, when they went out to other places, they were, you know, just about as highly regarded…"

Teaching and Research as Equal Emphases

Mission and reputation. Another thematic consideration was the department's equal prioritization of teaching and research among its faculty. Twenty-one participants referenced this mutual emphasis as key to the department's mission or reputation. Wolterstorff stated, "…our being at a Christian liberal arts college meant that we saw ourselves as serving students and not just serving academics off in New Zealand or wherever." Similarly, of his colleagues throughout the department, David Billings said, "…they amaze me in…how engaged they are in teaching and with students, but also in

their academic research…my experience before coming to Calvin is that often those two things are quite separated…" The faculty's mission-based attentiveness to both teaching and research thus stands as a distinctive feature of its departmental reputation.

Expectations. Fourteen participants reported that the balance of excellent teaching and research was expected, in many cases by institutional standards (especially for tenure). Professor emeritus Alvin Plantinga stated, "You're expected to teach well and to spend a lot of time at it, take it really seriously…but at Calvin, you're also expected to come up with serious scholarship." Some of the 14 participants attributed the expectations to the legacy of past colleagues and the work of current colleagues. While acknowledging institutional and reputational expectation, participants reported much drive for scholarship came naturally to the faculty in their individual desires to contribute to the disciplinary conversation, especially to the excellent and prolific levels of their colleagues, past and present.

Student draw. Seventeen participants indicated the department's mutual focus on teaching and research was a point of attraction for students, especially transfers (reported by five participants) and those who take the required "general education" philosophy course (reported by seven participants). One current student reported that dedicated philosophy students are attracted by the department's reputation for students and faculty "doing philosophy," not just teaching or learning the subject in a removed fashion.

Mutual influence. Eleven participants also discussed how the department focuses on both research and teaching because each one inherently influences—or *should* inherently influence—the other. According to Plantinga,

> …a very important part of being an excellent teacher in philosophy is being a very good philosopher. You can…be pedagogically as skilled as you want, but…if you don't really know what you're talking about, it's not going to be [sufficient just]…by way of teaching.

Colloquium

The Calvin College philosophy department has a weekly tradition called Colloquium that entails the faculty convening to discuss each other's written work and provide constructive feedback. Started by Plantinga and Wolterstorff in the 1960s for the purpose of peer reviewing and actively practicing philosophy, the tradition remains to the present day. One participant acknowledged how this practice stands out as something of a trademark in the department, an element known and envied by many Christian college philosophers.

Benefits. Participants reported several particular benefits of this weekly practice.

Coming together to do philosophy. Nine participants specifically highlighted the fact that Colloquium brings the faculty together around their discipline on a regular basis. Smith said, "…it's important…for departmental culture we meet every week to do philosophy…It just creates an ethos in which our business meetings…function subserviently to…our calling as philosophers."

Sharpen each other. Eight participants noted another apparent benefit of Colloquium in the sharpening of each other's work through the group discussion of disciplinary practitioners. According to Hardy, "…supporting and reviewing each other's work…the quality of the work has been greatly elevated by…passing through collegial scrutiny before you go out to the world."

Learn from each other. Seven participants reflected on the role of Colloquium in expanding faculty members' knowledge of the diverse areas of philosophy through exposure to each other's specializations. Billings stated, "…the Colloquium often forces people—forces me—to read outside of the perspective that I'm used to reading…We have to stretch ourselves…to enter into debates that we wouldn't otherwise be familiar with." Hardy echoes this observation by referring to Colloquium as "a kind of place of continuing faculty development" and "continuing education."

Challenges. While Colloquium offered many distinct benefits, participants also noted certain challenges or shortcomings of the practice.

Harsh critique. Eight participants indicated the tone of Colloquium, while often collaborative and congenial, can become harshly critical or "mean-spirited." Participants used a variety of phrases, including "not so supportive" and "brutal," saying that these more negative dimensions can stem from a sense of competition or "one-up-manship."

Diversification of focuses. Another challenge to the Colloquium tradition is the increasing diversification of philosophical sub-disciplines present in the work submitted to Colloquium for review. One participant, while acknowledging that he received some benefit from the practice during his time in the department, also stated that the majority of the department members simply cannot comment very extensively on most submissions considering the wide diversity of scholastic foci.

Content and time commitment. Four participants reported a desire to perhaps include pedagogical discussions within Colloquium, honing one another's teaching as much as each other's scholarship (considering the mutual emphasis by the department on these two topics). Five participants also mentioned time commitment as a significant

downside to Colloquium. Hardy outlined the average time requirements for this weekly event: "…if every week, you're given a paper by a colleague to read very closely, …that's at least…two to four hours worth of work…plus the Colloquium time itself, two hours."

Rapport

Rapport arose as another common theme among participant responses, specifically faculty-student rapport, faculty collegiality, and the rapport generated by the department chair.

Faculty-student rapport.

Accessibility. Sixteen participants reported student accessibility to faculty as a significant strength in shaping the departmental culture. Participants defined accessibility as faculty members' willingness to make time for discussion outside of class, philosophical or otherwise, as well as inviting students into their research. Physics student Richard McWhirter conducted an anthropological class study on the Jellema Room, the common room where students and faculty interact and share in philosophical discussion. Even from his more removed perspective, McWhirter described the environment as a "haven," "welcoming," and "…a place for, especially between faculty and students…[that is] kind of the even playing field."

Preparation for grad school. Fifteen participants mentioned how preparation for graduate school was a key strength in faculty-student interactions and rapport. One graduating student stated that he believed his potential to be accepted into graduate school had been improved by the support of the department, citing the advice he received

from speaking intentionally with the professors or even in passing conversations in the Jellema common room.

However, current department chair Ruth Groenhout noted, "One of the things we're really trying to be intentional about with our students in particular is not pretending that the stars are the ones who go to grad school, and everyone else is second-rate." This mindfulness of student treatment reflects the department's holistic perspective on students (explained below) as opposed to emphasizing intellect over personal calling.

Student perception of faculty passion and collegiality. Twelve participants referenced the developmental importance of how students perceive faculty passion and collegiality. Groenhout highlighted how part of the department's mission of "doing good Christian philosophy" is "doing it in the classroom, getting students really excited about doing it themselves and kind of…mentoring them into a world where…they think and see philosophically." Similarly, in reference to the Colloquium practice, student Kimberly Small said, "…to be able to see these professors…getting together and discussing ideas and presenting and talking about it…it seems like the ideal environment that I would want to be a part of if I were a philosophy professor."

Holistic care. Seventeen participants described a holistic perspective and approach of faculty to student care and development. Corcoran stated, "…we kind of see it…as part of our job to…see that these students flourish as whole human beings and not just sort of brains on sticks."

Faculty collegiality.

Mostly without tension. Fifteen participants highlighted the collegial nature of the department, with some particularly noting how unique this rapport can be among

scholars of high regard and especially between members of philosophical camps (continental and analytic). When asked about the cause for such abnormal collegiality, Gregory Mellema stated, "I think we share a lot of common outlooks…having to do with scholarship and teaching and sort of Christian commitments…I think we share a lot…we talk about those things in meetings and informally."

Gender. Eleven participants referenced the topic of gender equality in relation to departmental culture. Academic philosophy, in general, has proven to be historically dominated by men, and the male/female ratios for both students and faculty in this department reflect the imbalance. Some participants had not experienced gender dynamics influencing collegiality; students Kimberly Small and Rachel McKinley stated that they had never felt their opinions disregarded "just because you're a woman." However, other participants indicated the gender imbalance in the "old boys' club," or the department, as a weakness. When asked to comment on any potential shortcomings observable from outside the department, Marsden referenced the male-heavy gender ratio (as well as ideological homogeneity).

Mentorship. Eleven participants mentioned the departmental practice of assigning pedagogical mentors to newly hired faculty. However, participants also reported the system was loosely structured at best and of benefit only if the personalities of the mentor and mentee proved compatible. With regard to his mentorship experience, Corcoran stated, "…there was constant collaboration…[but] if either of us had a different personality…it wasn't very structured."

Chair leadership. Participants highlighted three key characteristics—egalitarian, representative, and administrative—as defining the department chair's leadership of the department.

Egalitarian. Fourteen participants emphasized the egalitarian tradition of chair leadership within the department, using words such as "non-authoritarian," "consensus," and "fairly democratic." Participants also indicated that this "collaborative" model reflected the institution-wide approach of faculty governance.

Representative. Six participants specifically described the representative nature of the chair's role in creating a healthy departmental culture. Smith described how chairs have "a responsibility but not much authority…they're kind of representing the department." Similarly, according to Billings, "…if there's something rumbling…at the upper echelons of the college…with the core or something, the chair hears about it and tells us. So the chair often, I think has…something of a communicative role rather than just…making decisions."

Administration. Eight participants mentioned that the administrative duties fulfilled by the chair, while perhaps the most undesirable part of the role, kept the department running smoothly. Program assistants Laura McMullen and Corrie Baker described how committees and processes set in place by department chairs thereby allowed the faculty to focus on teaching, scholarship, and other institutional demands.

Diversity of Specialization

Finally, the wide array of philosophical specializations among the faculty and their scholarship arose as a strong theme during the interviews, with most participants labeling diversity as simultaneously a strength and a weakness of the department.

Offers students broad range. Thirteen participants referenced the diversity of specialization among faculty as an admirable departmental feature, particularly for students and their learning experiences. Current student McKinley stated, "…there's just such a wide variety of professors. You can find something that you're interested in, and then there will be a professor that kind of, like, can help you along in that…" Similarly, student Josepth Matheson compared the philosophical variety to the sciences—"…there's just lots of different areas"—and reported that this exposure to the range of philosophical avenues helped him narrow PhD focuses, were he to pursue a doctorate post-graduation.

Brings variety to Colloquium. Eight participants referenced specialization diversity in the context of the department's weekly Colloquium practice. As mentioned previously, some participants find the variety educational, discussing topics about which they know little with expert colleagues. However, one participant noted how the department members' different activities and diverse audiences severely limited the potential for intelligent commentary on nearly 50% of the Colloquium submissions.

Less cohesion around common projects. Four participants highlighted that, while beneficial in many ways, the diversification of the faculty's scholarship might detract from departmental cohesion. Smith stated,

> …there might be less sense now of all of us being invested in a common project….my impression is that thirty years ago…those who were active in scholarship all thought they were sort of rowing the same boat towards a very similar goal. Now I feel like we're a bit more…like most universities to be honest. We are more like independent contractors, and…our projects resonate with one another, but…it's not like we're sitting here strategizing…

Thus, despite its many clear benefits, the diversification of scholarship may work against the unity established through the departmental mission of research (and teaching).

Conclusion

From the 21 interviews conducted with the 25 participants, the following themes surfaced: the influence of the departmental mission and faith tradition; the equal emphases of teaching and research; the traditional Colloquium practice; rapport among faculty, students, and the department chair; and the diversification of topics and philosophical interests in faculty scholarship. Together, these themes formed a series of characteristics of strong departmental culture, though with awareness of shortcomings that may threaten the unity and productivity of the department. The implications of these findings on other academic departments, as well as the limitation of the present study and suggestions for future research, are discussed in the following section.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Implications

Many findings from the current study offer distinct implications for academic departments. While scholastic discipline and institutional type will impact the nature of some of these implications, academic departments still may wish to consider the following observations.

Scholarship diversity and departmental mission. In their definition of faculty development, DiLorenzo and Heppner (1994) highlight the value of appreciating diversity among faculty scholarship. With its mission's equal emphasis on teaching and research, the diverse forms of scholarship productivity by members of the Calvin philosophy department operates as continued faculty education and offers students a rich educational experience. By participant report, the department makes a concerted effort to value various types of faculty scholarship without compromising its standards for research.

Other academic departments, therefore, may recognize that excellence in scholarship does not inherently preclude diversity of research type or focus. Instead, faculty could collaboratively define excellence in scholarship with regard to disciplinary demands and institutional requirements while also inviting appropriate diversity of research foci. Through such variety, faculty can sharpen one another's disciplinary

knowledge and provide students with a broader and—ideally—deeper educational experience.

However, the present study highlighted the fact that departmental division can also result from scholastic diversity. Understandably, faculty who do not share specializations cannot as easily collaborate, thereby resulting in automatic (albeit slight) division. Moreover, as seen in certain participant testimonies, scholars in some departments assert certain areas or types of scholarship as superior, threatening the learning environment by devaluing the work of their colleagues and dissuading students from other topics due to their own bias.

Specific to philosophy, participants described experiences in departments at other institutions in which faculty from different philosophical camps allowed these divisions to result in personal conflict with students caught in the rifts. Such division not only detracts from the student experience but also distracts from the fundamental mission and productivity of the department. According to study participant Lee Hardy,

> …we have to learn how to honor the differences and, at the same time, challenge each other without alienating each other…philosophy kind of runs off of disagreement and argument, so that's just how we do it. The trick is…how do you pursue that and, at the same time, don't let that degenerate into…destructive conflict…my view is that a shared Christian commitment…that we have in common is deeper than our philosophical disagreements, so we have something that we know…runs deeper, holds us together. In other departments that I've been at as a student or grad student…philosophical differences are ultimate.

Angelo (1999) reinforced this anecdotal evidence by positing trust as the primary step in creating a productive learning community—trust built by lowered interpersonal barriers of fear and competition. As a result, the literature, as well as the study's findings, recommend that academic departments build scholastic trust and respect among faculty in order to create optimal learning communities for faculty and students alike.

Colloquium. Functioning best from this respect and trust, the tradition of weekly Colloquium stands as a practice worth considering. Gathering regularly around their discipline, scholars sharpen one another's scholarly work and pedagogy, foster collegiality, and provide an example for students of collaboration and rigor. Participants referenced how, without the Colloquium, they would likely only gather for administrative or "business meetings" on a monthly basis and would be more ignorant of their colleagues' work. Not sharing in the discipline they all professed would likely increase the potential for a department of isolated "private contractors" with less well-honed scholarship. To this effect, Kennedy et al. (2003) particularly noted the importance of peer review in fruitful scholarship.

However, as referenced above, this collaboration must stem from interpersonal care in order to be productive rather than destructive. If scholarly critique goes unchecked, participants testified competition—the "I have one on you" mentality—could push "peer review" criticism onto personal ground and thus create a caustic rather than collaborative environment.

Simultaneously, Wolverton et al. (1998) emphasized a "willingness to accept criticism" as equally important in a quality department (p. 205). Rejection of all

feedback from colleagues and fellow scholars likely would cripple faculty members' development to some extent and result in less outstanding scholarship. Nicholas Wolterstorff referred to such productive criticism as "tough love." He then mentioned preparing new faculty for the Colloquium experience so they could better embrace the criticism as a tool for scholarly improvement and recognize the underlying supportive collegiality. Therefore, considering its benefits, academic departments may wish to explore the implementation of this practice (or something comparable), while being aware of the caring, respectful, trustworthy qualities it must embody in order to generate the most favorable results.

Dedication to teaching-research balance. While recognizing the time demands on personal schedules, faculty participants demonstrated loyalty to the department's equal mission for research and teaching. Student participants likewise noted and appreciated the balance, a contrast to many academic departments that emphasize one component over the other. Hattie and Marsh (1996) reported that the same qualities supporting good teaching also serve as the foundation for good research, creating an overall richer academic experience for students. When asked what traits of the Calvin philosophy department would ideally be passed on to other departments, student Rachel McKinley noted,

> …I would hope that their professors would be as encouraging to the students and…excited about the material they're teaching…it's catching…when your professor is obviously loving what they're talking about, then you can't help but pick up on that excitement and really get into it, and then that's, I think, very formative…for a person in college to sort of…discover who they are and what makes them tick and what they're actually passionate about…and that's through the good role models in the department.

In the same way, participants such as Alvin Plantinga believed the components reinforce each other: "…a very important part of being an excellent teacher in philosophy is being a very good philosopher."

Research by Volkwein and Carbone (1994) somewhat reinforced Plantinga's observation: "…we find little evidence to support the argument in the literature that research enhances teaching, but we find even less evidence to support the opposite argument that research is harmful to teaching" (p. 162). Instead of automatically assuming research is detrimental to teaching, academic departments within "teaching institutions" can actively seek ways to strike a balance between the two. Such an effort is important if for no other reason than an improved experience for the students.

Chair leadership. As an implication directly for departmental chairs, the current study highlighted equality, representation, and administration—leadership characteristics most influential in creating a productive, supportive environment for both students and faculty. Leaming (1998) noted the representative role of the chair, referring to the position as the "glue [of the institution], serving as the link between faculty and administration" and "between the discipline and the institution" (p. ix). Bowman (2002)

suggested certain critical administrative traits, particularly with regard to processing paperwork, managing committees, and facilitating policy-making.

Participant responses paralleled these studies. Participants also reported that the collaborative or egalitarian tone set by the chair for the department proved invaluable for healthy departmental culture. Effective departmental leadership, therefore, invites faculty voice in decision-making while also creating space and freedom for faculty by handling the bulk of administrative duties. Additionally, department chairs can operate as proverbial "high priests," representing their faculty to the institutions and vice versa so as to foster good communication, hold the departments to high standards, and advocate for the departments' needs.

Student access and holistic treatment. Bok (1994) acknowledged that academic faculty and departments more likely achieve reputation and recognition for research productivity than for student engagement and teaching. However, participants in the current study repeatedly mentioned student access to faculty as a distinct strength. Responses also indicated a dual interpretation of accessibility: time made available and personal willingness to engage. Student respondents stated that faculty members made time for student questions and discussion during class, during office hours, in passing between classes, and outside of the academic context. According to the study's findings, the Jellema Room (the department common room) provided opportunity and an environment in which faculty made time to converse with students.

Students also appreciated faculty willingness to spend time with them as opposed to doing so out of institutional obligation. Student participants mentioned with equal frequency how professors engaged them in topics both within and beyond the disciplinary

framework, caring for them holistically and helping them prepare for "life." Rachel McKinley stated, "…you come away from talking with the professors just feeling like a more full…completed human being…with new ideas to talk about later…" This finding paralleled results from a study by Wilson et al. (2010) that clearly indicated intentional faculty accessibility to students as significant to student engagement, learning, and productivity. Academic departments can evaluate the access to faculty members that students currently experience and consider fostering such beneficial but more informal interactions, such as the ones that take place in the Jellema Room.

Limitations of the Study

The very nature of a case study automatically limits research to some degree. While a department of national and international acclaim, the effort focused solely on that single department within one institution. Therefore, the results did not reflect disciplinary diversity beyond philosophy nor variety in institutional type beyond one that was private and faith-based. Also, while the study participants included individuals from the department's "history," the non-longitudinal nature of the research brought additional limits.

With data derived from interviews, self-reporting inherently limited the study further. The researcher observed neither any participant teaching nor the weekly Colloquium practice and therefore relied wholly on participant descriptions for the content, context, and quality of both. Lastly, due to scheduling conflicts with some of the faculty, the researcher did not interview all of the professors currently serving within the department, additionally limiting the scope of the study and the contributing perspectives.

Suggestions for Future Research

In light of the current study's findings as well as its limitations, several opportunities exist for further research on this topic. Future studies could compare this case study of the Calvin College philosophy department to a larger philosophy department or even department of same size but within a different discipline. The manner of comparative study would provide additional insights into the applicability of the current study's implications and ideally reveal additional facets to healthy, productive departmental culture. Similarly, a future study could test the effectiveness of translating the Colloquium practice to another department or institution in order to see what benefits and/or challenges parallel those found in the Calvin philosophy department's Colloquium.

Conclusion

By the very nature of their structure and culture, academic departments—microcosms of the higher education world—hold incredibly powerful potential for shaping college students during their postsecondary educational experience. Creating, modeling, and inviting students into a genuine and vibrant learning community can encourage and equip them to be continuous learners throughout their lives, regardless of vocation. However, in light of this potential, academic departments should deliberately consider those elements that, as a whole, could most impact students' experiences: departmental mission, faculty balance of scholarship and teaching, collegiality among faculty and students, diversity in faculty scholarship, and others.

Now, all departments—Calvin's philosophy department included—do well to recognize their nature as dynamic, constantly in flux between degrees of decline and

progress. While some departments, such as Calvin's, offer various admirable qualities, no one department remains a perfect model in all respects for the entirety of its establishment. Still, while understanding their fluctuating nature as well as the aforementioned organizational facets, academic departments can equip students holistically to become deeper learners and have a more profound impact on the world they enter after graduation.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

General:

- What is your job description within the department?
- How did you come to be a part of the Calvin philosophy department in this capacity?
    - How did you first hear about the department?
- What would you articulate as the department's mission/goals/focus?
- What are some of the most outstanding qualities, in your opinion, about this department?
- What are some of its greatest obstacles and shortcomings?

Leadership:

- Describe the leadership structure of the department.
    - How is the chair selected for the position?
    - What role to faculty play (in choosing the chair, in departmental leadership in general)?
- Describe the leadership style of the department chair.
- How involved are institutional administration in the running of the department?

Hiring/Training:

- When hiring faculty for this department, how often do applicants apply and are thusly selected as opposed to the department recruiting specific candidates?
- Describe, if applicable, the training and mentoring process for new faculty in the department.

Promotion/Tenure:

- Describe the department's tenure process.
- Describe the department's approach to promotion.
- What are some of the most encouraged qualities for tenure and/or promotion within the department?

Research/Teaching:

- How would you describe the department's overall approach to faculty balancing teaching responsibilities with personal scholarship?
    - Give a percentage ratio that you would say describes departmental emphasis of the two.

Student Involvement/Satisfaction:

- Does the department use student-completed course evaluations (either online or paper)?
    - Why or why not?
- How strong a voice would you personally say the students have in department workings?
    - If applicable, give examples of how students participate in the department in more ways than attending class and earning degrees.
- How satisfied to students seem to be throughout their time in the department?
    - How do you assess overall student satisfaction?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Research Participant Consent Form

Researcher Information
Hannah Adderley,
Guest Researcher at Calvin College
236 West Reade Avenue
MAHE Graduate Program, Taylor University
Upland, IN 46989-1001
(503) 758-3462

Faculty Advisor Information
Dr. Todd Ream
765-998-4399

Purpose of research
The purpose of this study is therefore to explore both the history and current practices of the Calvin philosophy department as a whole; it combines research into the administration, faculty, and students and weaves these smaller studies together to form an assessment of a successful, reputable academic department.

Procedures
Those invited to participate will take part in individual, pair, or group interviews (based on availability and responsibility level in the focus department). Interviews will be audio-recorded for future transcription and analysis. Interview questions have been made available in advance of the interviews.

Duration
Each interview will take approximately 25-45 minutes, with approximately 5 minutes before the interview to explain and sign the consent form.

Risk
There are no known nor anticipated risks in this research. Any risks are equivalent to those that participants would expect to encounter in daily life.

Benefits
Direct benefits are unknown, but it is hopeful that the study will be of organizational and assessment benefit to the participating department.

Compensation
Participants will receive no compensation.

Voluntary Participation
Involvement in this research is voluntary. Participant refusal to participate or discontinuation of participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality
All information will be kept confidential to standard guidelines of Taylor University and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP), and all names will be changed to pseudonyms for further confidentiality. All hard copy information will be in a locked drawer in the researcher's desk. All electronic information will be kept on a password protected computer. Data will then be kept in perpetuity for the purpose of a longitudinal study.

Sharing the Results
The findings of this research will be shared at the end of the thesis process. It is likely that this research, including the results, would be shared with practitioners and researchers in the field of education (e.g., presentation at a conference, publication, etc.).

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
Participation is voluntary, and any participant may withdraw at any time.

Who to Contact
If you have any questions at any time concerning this research, contact Hannah Adderley (765) 998-4602 or hannah_adderley@taylor.edu

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Taylor University's IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. Questions regarding institutional research, including this research project, can be directed to Dr. Edwin Welch, Chair IRB, 765-998-4315 or edwelch@taylor.edu.

This proposal has also been reviewed and approved by Calvin College's IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. Questions regarding institutional research, including this research project, can be directed to Herb Fynewever, Associate Professor of Chemical Education, 616-526-7711, or herb.fynewever@calvin.edu

You may ask questions concerning the research before signing the following consent form.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Participant's Name (Print)

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Credit: Purdue University IRB Guidelines http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/forms/Consent_Form_with_instructions_8-07.pdf

Appendix C

Departmental Demographics

Calvin College Philosophy Department *Brief Demographic Overview, 2013-2014*	
Majors and minors	End of Fall 2013: 65 majors 21 minors End of Spring 2014: 48 majors 14 minors
Graduates	Spring 2014: 25
Total number of students enrolled in courses offered through department (*Numbers do not include 10 independent studies courses taught by professors during year)*	Fall 2013: 687 Interim 2014: 128 Spring 2014: 635 Summer 2014: 29
Classes offered	Fall 2013: 26 (16 intro, 10 upper) Interim 2014: 3 (philosophy) 4 (interdisciplinary) Spring 2014: 26 (16 intro, 10 upper) Summer 2014: 2 (intro)
Faculty (by rank)	Full: 8 Associate: 2 Assistant: 2 Emeritus: 1
Faculty (by gender)	Male: 10 Female: 3
Faculty publications	Books: 5 Book chapters: 2 Journal articles: 8