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Vocational Formation in College: A Look at the Intersection of Vocational Formation and Identity and Faith Development

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VOCATIONAL FORMATION IN COLLEGE: A LOOK AT THE INTERSECTION OF VOCATIONAL FORMATION AND IDENTITY AND FAITH DEVELOPMENT

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of vocational formation between freshmen and senior year at a small, faith-based institution in the Midwest. The study considered the concurrent influences on students during emerging adulthood as they experience growth in identity and faith development, while grounding a theory for the vocational formation happening within the season. In this qualitative study, the researcher collected essays and focus groups from both a freshmen and senior population simultaneously for analysis and comparison. The following research question guided the study: How do students' understanding of their vocation change over the course of their college experience, while experiencing growth in identity and faith development at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution? The study exposed the increased autonomy and changing possibilities and perspectives present in the responses of seniors in greater depth than that of the freshmen responses.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"At every stage his calling is not something that will wait until he graduates, or even until he gets that big promotion. Vocation is in the here and now."

(Veith, 2002, p. 49)

Vocation is not a singular or flat concept in the lives of college students today. Cunningham (2016) posited that "the most appropriate time for undertaking this kind of discernment would be the years immediately beyond secondary education, when many young people move out of the family home and start to develop at least some degree of independence" (p. 4). The essence of college is fertile ground for vocational exploration because of the unfettered time, open space, and limits that colleges provide their students. But college is also a place of experiencing confusion, challenging preconceived notions, and seeking what comes after graduation. So what happens in the time in between entering college and graduating? How do college students understand their vocation when "vocation is in the here and now" (Veith, 2002, p. 49)?

Development in College

If vocation is a part of students' lives in the here and now, then what better time for vocational exploration than college? Assumedly, students entering college as freshmen are not the same students that graduate college four to six years later. Numerous researchers have found that identity and faith development continue to occur

during college, and students transition between stages, statuses, and phases as they develop a new sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1984, 2000; Marcia, 1980; Parks, 1986). College is a dynamic and developmental time in which students grow in their understanding of self and who they feel called to be (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Additionally, throughout college, students grow in awareness of the paths they choose for themselves based on their own goals and desires (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1984; Marcia, 1980). This study explored vocational formation in the midst of the identity and faith development experienced over the course of college.

Emerging Adulthood

College students find themselves in a season of life between adolescence and adulthood that is often misunderstood and full of unanswered questions. Arnett (2004) coined the term *emerging adulthood* to describe this time of exploration and the freedom and options it provides. Emerging adults are often forced into thinking about their futures while navigating the uncertain waters of the present. Students are challenged by both "what sort of persons they are and who they will become" (Cunningham, 2016, p. 3). These questions and uncertainty leave students with a mix of emotions ranging from excitement to uncertainty (Arnett, 2004).

Vocation

The confusion of emerging adulthood is met with the big idea and question of "What is vocation?" Clydesdale (2015) believed vocational exploration for college students, particularly at faith-based institutions, is necessary. For the purpose of this research, vocation is understood as an all-encompassing word for someone's life: who he or she is both now and in the future. For Christians, vocation is the faithful pursuit of

flourishing in each area of one's own life (Moser & Fankhauser, 2015). Vocation is not simply someone's job, family, or faith, but rather it is faithful living in all areas of life (Garber, 2014).

Purpose

The research presented in the following chapter exposes a gap in understanding of the vocational formation that occurs during emerging adulthood, especially at a faith-based institution. The primary purpose of this research study was to explore the vocational formation in this season of identity and faith development. The following main research question guided this study: How do students' understanding of their vocation change over the course of their college experience, while experiencing growth in identity and faith development at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution? The secondary research focuses for this study were divided into four parts. The first was to explore how students understand their vocation. The second was to unpack what has influenced their vocation. The third was to see whether their identity and faith development intersect with their vocational formation. Lastly, the fourth was to see how freshmen anticipate changes in their view of vocation and how seniors describe how their view of vocation compares to when they entered college.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Identity and Faith Development Framework

Numerous developmental theories have attempted to explain or provide a framework for what occurs in the lives of 18 to 25 year olds. College is a unique season in which, according to several theorists (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Riesser, 1993; Fowler, 1984; Marcia, 1980; Parks, 1986), students experience changes in their identity and faith development. This variety of theoretical perspectives implies a movement toward autonomy and a growing sense of self with a more established belief system.

Baxter Magolda's self-authorship. In *Making Their Own Way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-development*, Baxter Magolda (2001) developed a theory focused on self-authorship and how students shift from an external to internal self-definition over time. Baxter's theory has four phases of development, including "following external formulas," "the crossroads," "becoming the author of one's life," and ending with "the internal foundation" (p. xxiii). Depending on the conditions and ways development is promoted for the student, the trajectory of his or her development is impacted along this path. It is not uncommon for students in late adolescence to find themselves following external formulas and using these external sources in order to succeed. They often take prescribed plans and predetermined scripts

from others in their lives to know how to act. Once the external formulas prove not as effective as hoped, the formulas are viewed as insufficient, and an awareness of internal beliefs becomes essential.

Once an awareness of the need for internal beliefs develops, students begin the journey of self-authorship. When the internal voices begin to outweigh the external voices' influence on students' lives, they start to shift toward becoming the authors of their own lives. A new sense of self begins to emerge, with new ways of knowing, viewing oneself, and viewing others. In regards to students' vocations, they are often able to allow their own internal voices to hold more weight than their external influences. However, the external influences remain present in the background. Reshaping occurs as they stretch their personal beliefs and change the way they view themselves and others (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Marcia's identity development in young adults. Marcia (1980) developed a theory of identity development through categorizing young adults into four identity statuses. This theory was based on the presence of crisis, or decision making, and commitment in occupation and ideology in a person's life. It is not uncommon for new students to enter college in the foreclosure status, having made a commitment for their future—including their beliefs and vocational goals—but having yet to experience a crisis or opportunity for significant decision making. While these students might be committed to an occupational path, these commitments are often more parentally chosen than self-chosen. Once a decision-making period or crisis occurs in students' lives, they have the opportunity to create a more self-chosen set of goals for themselves. During late adolescence, Marcia claimed,

> the decisions may seem trivial at the time . . . Each of these decisions has identity-forming implications. The decisions and the bases on which one decides begin to form themselves into a more or less consistent core or structure. Of course, there are ways in which one can circumvent the decision-making process: one can let previously incorporated, parentally based values determine one's actions; one can permit oneself to be pushed one way or the other by external pressures; or one can become mired in indecision. (p. 181)

When both crisis and commitment are present, this is known as the achievement status. The primary goal is for students to move into the achievement status and become aware of the path they have chosen for themselves.

Chickering's identity development. In *Education and Identity*, Arthur Chickering created an identity development theory comprised of seven vectors, in which progression was not always linear. His model illustrated a picture of college students' psychosocial development over time. In the third vector, "Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence," students gain a sense of self-sufficiency and begin "to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47). Students go from heavily needing parents and others to feeling competent and moving into a stage of gaining some emotional independence. They then progress into the fourth through sixth vectors: "Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships," "Establishing Identity," and "Developing Purpose." Students move toward the seventh and final vector, "Developing Integrity," at different rates based on life experiences and processing, but, in this phase, students gain a sense of ownership over their lives and begin to "humanize and personalize values" (p. 264).

Fowler's faith development. In Fowler's (1984) theory on faith development, he recognized a correlation between destiny and vocation because of one's link between his or her image of self and of God. Fowler divided his faith development theory into stages people progress through. Many adolescents find themselves in the synthetic-conventional stage marked by a synthesis of ideas, beliefs, and values. During this stage, the beliefs and ideas impact young people's outlook on life, but they cannot yet critically reflect on their beliefs. The transition of faith and identity into the individuative-reflective stage may come in early adulthood or beyond, thus making the college years a prime time to navigate and move into this stage (Fowler, 2000).

Individuative-reflective faith is comprised of two fundamental movements. First, people shift their sense of self in grounding and orientation. Their actions are more self-authorized, expressing a truer version of themselves. Second, a shift occurs toward the objectification and critical reflection of their beliefs and commitments. At this point, young adults often can make actual commitments to their chosen beliefs with more confidence (Fowler, 1984).

Parks' faith development. Parks (1986) claimed young adults in higher education are in a distinctive time developmentally with their faith. She noted the interesting placement of these young adults between having full access to adulthood while lacking the full responsibilities of work. Parks observed, "The young adult is still in formation, still engaged in the activity of composing a self, world, and 'God' adequate to ground the responsibilities and commitments of full adulthood. The young adult is searching for a worthy faith" (p. 133). Parks drew a great deal on other faith development theorists and highlighted the transitional moment between Fowler's third

and fourth stage. According to Parks, this ambivalent post-adolescent time is distinct enough to be considered a stage itself. She described this time as probing commitment, an exploration of truth as it fits into "one's experience of self and world" (p. 82).

Emerging Adulthood

Keniston (1971) witnessed "the emergence on a mass scale of a previously unrecognized stage of life, a stage that intervenes between adolescence and adulthood" (p. 7). In American culture in 1971, he coined the term *youth* to describe this misunderstood stage of transition. Arnett (2004) also noticed a gap in understanding between adolescence and adulthood; he began researching this time of transition and established the term *emerging adulthood* to describe this misunderstood, new stage of life. Emerging adulthood refers to the age group of 18 to 25 and sometimes beyond that is marked with exploration of oneself and one's vocation, as well as "unprecedented freedom" (p. 7).

When Arnett (2004) asked young people about the most important criteria for adulthood, they responded with "accepting responsibility for one's actions, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent" (p. vi). Before young people can confidently claim those criteria as true in their own lives, they usually face a time of exploration and instability. Emerging adulthood is time for young people to explore love and work, focus on themselves, embrace the transitional nature of this season, and experience both hope and anxiety regarding all their possibilities. According to Cunningham (2016), emerging adulthood "seems to be lasting longer and requiring more dependence on others" as young people navigate these uncertain waters (pp. 4–5). This time of uncertainty often takes place in the midst of a traditional college experience.

Vocation

A significant part of experiencing those unsure waters and exploring the numerous possibilities afforded to people in emerging adulthood is the search to understand one's vocation. Cunningham (2016) claimed emerging adulthood as a great opportunity to explore one's vocation and discern what might be next. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocare*, "to call" (p. 7). For the sake of this research, the words *vocation* and *calling* are used synonymously and primarily termed *vocation*, based on their etymological similarity.

Terminology. According to Garber (2014), "All of us is complex, because we are complex. And our vocations are complex, because we are complex. Vocation has to be a big word, able to handle the whole of life" (p. 198). The definitions, meanings, and connotations regarding the words *vocation* and *calling* are complex, vast, and varied. Historically, calling was viewed solely as a religious concept when someone felt led to enter a monastic order (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009). However, this definition disregarded other callings on people's lives beyond the ministry, leaving people, particularly Christians, with the idea that only the chosen received a calling.

However, Martin Luther and John Calvin redefined calling and vocation as the usage of time and talents in one's specific role to the glory of God and His purposes. According to the ideas of Luther, God has placed stations and duties around the world based on the needs that He sees necessitate action (Hardy, 1990). Buechner (1973) defined vocation as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (p. 95). Hardy (1990) claimed, "By working we actually participate in God's ongoing providence for the human race" (p. 47).

Martin Luther helped to extend vocation to encompass all roles being used for the glory of God. Veith (2002) noted that Luther's approach focuses less on what people should or must do and more on what God does in and through His people. Vocation is "a realm in which we can experience God's love and grace" (p. 24). Veith encouraged students to live out of their callings in the moment, rather than wait until they graduate from college. He stressed, "Vocation is in the here and the now," and it is significant in every role (p. 49). Garber (2014) defined vocation in a way that encompasses the fullness of each person within every stage of life and every role as well. He states:

> The word vocation is a rich one, having to address the wholeness of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighbors, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this and more is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being, living my life before the face of God. (p. 11)

Working definition. All of these definitions point to the universal allocation of vocation and calling among people. However, individual perceptions of the terms are not universally accepted or understood. Determining a working definition for calling and vocation is relevant because it provides a framework for current and future research to take place, within the same constructs. The consistency provided through a framework aids an understanding that leads to well-informed practice. For the sake of this research study, the working definition for vocation being used is, as defined by Moser and Fankhauser (2015), "a life lived faithfully with God, where we embody and pursue faithful trajectories of flourishing in the elements that make up a good life" (n.p.).

Influences on career vocation. Dik and Duffy (2009b) considered vocation and calling as "valuable, inclusive, and cross-culturally relevant constructs," with the goal of targeting "individuals' experience of work as meaningful" (p. 425). Both internal and external influences impact career decision making, as well as help individuals find meaning in their work. Notably, there are often multiple influences acting on the decision-making process and often simultaneously. Individual influences are within the person and are, therefore, motivated by internal factors. External influences come from someone or something outside the person and are motivated by external sources, like societal needs, systemic racism, or sexism (Dik & Duffy, 2009a).

Individuals more easily identify internal influences on vocation because they can often recognize them in their everyday life. Examples of internal influences include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, needs, and pursuit of satisfaction (Dik & Duffy, 2009a). The wrestling with passions and skill sets can fall under the category of internal influences. When internal influences are the primary influencers in people's lives, they are often motivated by the personal satisfaction people gain from their work.

External influences act alongside internal influences but can sometimes go unnoticed without proper acknowledgment or can cause internal confusion. Dik and Duffy (2009a) divided external influences into four categories: "family expectations and needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, and social services motivation" (p. 32). These influences are studied with less frequency but are responsible for a great deal of confusion for individuals seeking help in navigating careers and vocation. When external and internal influences conflict, counseling can be sought for clarity in the midst of felt tensions.

Family expectations and needs can surface in an individual's life in a number of ways. Family voices are critical when making initial decisions, which could have been hypothesized based on students' developmental state. Students feel significant stress when their internal aspirations do not meet the expectations of parents and family (Dik & Duffy, 2009a). In a study by Kniveton (2004), "Parents are shown to have a greater influence than teachers [on the student's selection of career]" (p. 51). The same study also showed that the same-sex parent was the most influential person in the student's life in regards to his or her vocation. Siblings also influence career decisions, according to Schultheiss, Palma, Predragovich, and Glasscock (2002). Siblings can be a source of career information, as well as mentors or role models vocationally.

Life circumstances, whether foreseen or not, are uncontrollable and directly impact career decision making. When an unforeseen event occurs in life, the goals and work of the individual are usually altered to meet the more pressing and immediate need. Examples of these events are loss of a job, natural disaster, and medical issues for a family member (Dik & Duffy, 2009a). According to Dik and Duffy, spirituality and religion impact decision making, as dosocial services that motivate and pull individuals into bettering the external world. This category includes social justice or volunteer opportunities.

One's vocation is widely impacted by both internal and external influences. Students may place internal pressure on themselves to meet their own expectations or be satisfied in the work they do. Other people and life circumstances also impact the freedom students may or may not feel when trying to make decisions about their future (Dik & Duffy, 2009a). None of these influences happen in a vacuum; rather, they happen

in conjunction with one another. For students, the overwhelming influences and confusion they have can cause lack of vocational decidedness, which is related to anxiety (Arnett, 2004; Bradley, Hawkins, & White, 1977).

Cultural considerations. Certain influencers impact vocation differently based on their cultural context. When conducting career counseling, the counselor would do a disservice to a client if the counselor does not account for the cultural lens through which the client's identity operates (Dik & Duffy, 2009b). Cultural variations and expectations are placed on students that must be considered on an individual basis.

One of the major cultural considerations necessary to understand what influences a student's vocation is whether his or her culture is collectivistic or individualistic. As influencers, religion and spirituality fall into the same category but place different types of expectation on students. Different religions function with similar practices and beliefs, and, therefore, a religion's pressure around vocation is likely unified in its approach for all followers. However, spirituality by nature is viewed as more individualistic, personal, and inclusive of differing approaches or lifestyles (Dalton, 2001). Individuals from collectivistic cultures are usually more attuned to the community needs and pro-social elements. By contrast, students from individualistic cultures can be more inclined to feel called to a certain area based on the meaningfulness of work rather than the social contribution (Dik & Duffey, 2009b).

According to Clydesdale (2015), approximately two out of three Americans identify as Christian, and it is not uncommon for religious students to feel pressure to consider the spiritual component of their vocation. Because of the number of students identifying as religious, Clydesdale presented vocational exploration of the theology of

vocation as vital and valuable. He believed "purpose and vocation represent reasonable departure points for exploratory conversation, especially when the colleges or universities hosting these conversations go out of their way to affirm the religious and spiritual heterogeneity of their campus populations" (p. 22). At a faith-based institution, conversations of purpose and vocation are needed because they are thoughts and pressures students are facing. Creating space within this culture to address this conversation helps students explore.

Summary

The culture of college needs also to be taken into consideration when analyzing vocation exploration in emerging adulthood. It is imperative to consider what pursuing clarity in one's vocation looks like at a faith-based institution. Cunningham (2016) claimed an undergraduate college education provides students with unrestrained time to make decisions, as well as both a free and ordered space to explore with limits. The forward-moving and ever-changing nature of college lets students experience change and motion in their academics, relationships, and personal development. With all the influences students experience in college, the very nature of emerging adulthood, the developmental changes occurring during this season of life, and students' attempt to understand their vocation, there is a need to explore how all of these elements interact during a student's college education.

Chapter 3

Methodology

College students find themselves in a season of life defined as emerging adulthood. Based on the literature, college has proven to be a time of both identity and faith development, as well as vocational formation. Identity and faith development have been heavily researched in college students, and vocation is a widely discussed topic in the literature. However, a gap exists in exploring the intersections of vocation formation, faith development, and identity development among college students.

Methodology

This study examined the experiences of college students at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest to explore vocational formation that occurs over the course of college. This study employed a grounded theory methodology for the purpose of "exploring common experiences of individuals to develop a theory" (Creswell, 2014, p. 20). A grounded theory approach allows for qualitative data based on a central phenomenon to be gathered and turned into a broad theory explaining the process, action, or interaction. For the sake of this study, the researcher followed the systematic approach of grounded theory to study the process of what influences vocational formation in college students (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). As a result of this research's primary methodological need to explore the process of vocation formation during college,

grounded theory surfaced as the most appropriate and helpful methodology in guiding this type of research.

Before the implementation of Corbin and Strauss's (2014) full systematic approach, Charmaz (2006) suggested an initial coding process. This action entails comparing data with data rather than assigning preconceived concepts to it. The process begins with looking at a portion of data to see what trends or codes emerge, allowing the data to speak for itself. Once codes start surfacing, a few are named, and, as more data is read, more codes emerge and are then set. Throughout this portion of the analysis, questions are asked of the data to see what is actually being answered rather than trying to fit the data into a desired outcome. When approaching the online essays and focus group interviews, no predetermined code set were used; instead, a new set of codes emerged from each of the four data sets.

Corbin and Strauss (2014) developed the systematic approach to allow a theory to be derived from the data collected during research as opposed to being selected prior to research. After using Charmaz's (2006) initial coding, the researcher took three steps in the systematic approach: open, axial, and selective coding. This study employed open coding to conceptualize and categorize the data collected through online essays and follow-up focus group interviews. This coding invovlved drawing comparisons and asking questions (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). In grounded theory, interviews are used for the purpose "of exploring students' experiences and placing them in context" (p. 175). After initial coding, the codes that surfaced began the open coding process. In axial coding, primary categories were identified and placed at the center of the process in order to create a model (Creswell, 2014). In the final step, selective coding,

the researcher used the model created to hypothesize a theory that described the connected relationships between categories (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

The participants for this study were selected from two groups (A and B) to allow for comparison. Participants were male and female undergraduate students from a small, residential, faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest, enrolling approximately 2,000 students. Group A was comprised of 163 incoming freshmen enrolled in a college entrance course in the fall of 2016. The average age of the freshmen was 18.41 years old, with participants ranging in age from 18 to 23. Group B was comprised of 162 seniors enrolled in an exit course in the spring of 2016. The average age of seniors was 21.58 years old, with participants ranging in age from 19 to 24. As a requirement of the freshmen entrance course and senior exit course, participants were asked to complete essays through the Vocation in College Project (Moser & Fankhauser, 2015). From both large groups of participants, two to three small focus groups were selected based on convenience sampling. Due to the timing of the follow-up focus groups, the students who were willing and able were chosen to participate in further research, with a total of 14 willing freshmen and 6 willing seniors. Additionally, three more seniors were willing to participate, but due to the researcher's personal relationship with them, they only participated in the pilot study and provided feedback.

Procedures

This study was conducted in two phases and with two distinct groups in conjunction with the Vocation in College Project (Moser & Fankhauser, 2015). In the first phase, online essays were collected from both the incoming freshmen and graduating

seniors. In the second phase, students were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate, and they were placed into focus groups of approximately three to six students. There were three freshmen focus groups and two senior focus groups, all taking place later in the semester during which the surveys were administered. Following IRB approval, phase one and phase two took place as described below.

Phase one: Online essays. In Spring 2016, seniors in the exit course were asked to complete an online qualitative survey as part of the research conducted by the Vocation in College Project (Moser & Fankhauser, 2015). The link led students to a survey with two short answer/essay questions: "How do you define/understand the word vocation?" and "What has shaped/influenced this understanding of vocation?" (n.p.).

Phase two: Focus groups. After the online surveys were collected, each student had the opportunity to provide their email address or respond to an email indicating their willingness to participate in an interview for further research. The researcher then contacted all of the willing students to ask for volunteers to form focus groups of three to six students from both student groups. They were provided with possible meeting times and asked to respond with their availability. This convenience sampling was used to select the first 16 or fewer students—after eliminating those with a conflict of interest—who responded to the email and could meet during the focus group times provided.

Before conducting focus group interview with participants, a pilot interview was conducted with three senior students. With both the freshman and senior students, the researcher conducted semi-structured, focus group interviews, with the shortest lasting 22 minutes and 48 seconds and the longest lasting 39 minutes and 28 seconds. At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher reminded participants of the survey

questions and asked them to reflect on their personal answers to the questions. After a few minutes of silent reflection, the researcher began by asking participants a series of semi-structured questions (see Appendix B) regarding their vocation and how they came to understand it. Senior data was gathered in the spring of 2016. In the fall of 2016, the data collection was replicated with the new incoming freshmen.

Analysis. In a systematic approach, research is analyzed through the process of constant comparisons, in which "data are broken down into manageable pieces with each piece compared for similarities and differences" (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 7). Before open coding, the researcher read 20 to 40 essays for the purpose of comparing data to data to see the different questions students' responses addressed and the variety of possible codes (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding took place for group A's and group B's essays and focus groups separately. For the essays in phase one, the data was coded twice for accuracy and to ensure the proper upcoding occurred in the analysis phase. Then the process of open coding started, and categories began surfacing from the essays and interviews separately. Within the separate age groups, similarities were grouped under conceptual headings based on common properties. These smaller codes were combined to form thought units, and major themes emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). For example, the influence of faith included Scripture, church, and one's personal relationship with the Lord. Triangulation—making use of multiple sources of information to validate findings—confirmed the themes concluded from the essays and focus groups (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation was implemented as the codes and themes from the freshmen essays and focus groups were used to reinforce and add depth to one another. The same was done with both senior data sets. After separately coding and

theming the freshmen and senior individual online essays and group interview responses, the researcher compared the categories and conclusions drawn from both data sets. Through the coded and themed results, "the process emerges from the problem and the need to explore the central phenomenon, and the categories develop from data collection" (Creswell, 2014, p. 455). From this comparison, the researcher grounded a theoretical hypothesis reflective of the process that emerged.

Research questions. This research study sought to gain an understanding of the vocational formation occurring during college. The primary research question was "How does students' understanding of their vocation change over the course of their college experience, while experiencing growth in identity and faith development at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution?" Within the overarching focus of vocational formation, the researcher explored how students understand their vocation, what has influenced their understanding, how their identity and faith development in college has impacted that understanding, and what anticipated or experienced changes occur in college. In phase one, the researcher established a framework for freshmen's and seniors' definitions of vocation and what has influenced that understanding. The goal of the focus group interviews was to explore the answers to the secondary research questions and seek validation of the findings in phase one. Through a series of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B), this study explored the following inquiries: What has the process of understanding their vocation looked like in college? How have the different influences impacted their understanding of their vocation? How have those different influences or voices intersected with one another? What anticipated or experienced changes occur regarding their view of vocation during college?

Summary

This study explored the vocational formation that occurs in college and how that intersects with the identity and faith development taking place in college. Conclusions were drawn about the common process occurring during college based on the comparison of categories and responses between the freshmen and seniors. This was not a longitudinal study, and the conclusions drawn represent their represented age-group, rather than particular students' personal vocational formation. The initial hope of this study was to illustrate the shift in vocational formation occurring over the course college in this particular subset of college students.

Chapter 4

Results

The results below come from the themes that emerged from the four sets of data collected among freshmen and seniors. All participants were asked the questions, "How do you define/understand the word vocation?" and "What has shaped/influenced this understanding of vocation?" After each set of surveys were administered, students were invited to participate in smaller, focus group interviews. Separately, 163 freshmen essays and 162 senior essays were coded and themed. Three freshmen focus groups with a total of 14 students and 2 seniors focus groups with a total of 6 students were interviewed to provide additional depth on the process of vocational formation in their own lives. During all five focus groups, participants were asked to describe the process through which they came to understand their vocation and how the different influences mentioned impacted their understanding of their vocation. Separate additional questions were asked to the freshmen and senior groups.

Freshmen's Current Understanding

For many freshmen, the idea of vocation was not a fully formed idea or word for many. Eighteen students claimed this was a new word or idea for them, and some leaving the questions blank, potentially due to a lack of understanding. In the definitions they provided, 21 claimed sourcing the dictionary or googling the term. Many more

students reflected the dictionary definition or meaning. Of the definitions provided, two major meanings emerged: calling or job.

Job or life's work. Nearly half (78) of the freshmen surveyed listed at least one of their definitions for vocation as a job or occupation. Some of this interpretation came from their upbringing or high school experiences when they were exposed to the word *vocation* or the term *vocational school* or *training*. One freshmen stated,

> I remember seeing a brochure for vocational therapy or consultation, something along those lines where I am guessing people go to figure out what they want to do with their lives. A high school near my hometown started a vocational trade type program where students not only learned basic subjects but also a trade they would pursue after graduation if high education was not suitable.

Only 26 students explicitly described vocation as more than a job or something beyond the work a person does each day.

Calling. Of the 163 freshmen survey, 97 referred to vocation as some version of a calling, whether to do something or from God to be something. Seven participants referred to this call as their general vocation or call to love God and others and to share the Gospel message with the world. Almost half of those who claimed it as a call viewed it as a specific call from God to do something based on their passions and strengths. One student wrote, "It is what God has called you to do, and for what He has given you the skill set."

In one of the essays, a student wrote quite distinctly about his or her differentiation between vocation and occupation. The following statement shows the broader nature of this student's understanding of the vocation:

> My vocation was defined as what I am called to do, and my occupation is what occupies my time and makes me money. I believe my vocation is not necessarily a career, but something I have to strive to accomplish. My vocation is to show God's grace to people who are incarcerated figuratively and literally. My occupation, then, is the position as a defense attorney that I am striving for.

Influences of introduction and input. The primary influencers on freshmen's vocation were (in order of frequency) family (72), faith (63), skills and passions (53), upbringing/culture and community (37), personal experiences or observations (29), and high school (26). Many of these influences have come in the form of exposure to the concept of vocation or the receiving of signs from the Lord, advice, pressures, and expectations.

As stated earlier, sometimes, the only previous encounter incoming freshmen claimed to have was vocational programs in high school or the term *vocational trade*. Some provided no explanation because this study was their first and only exposure to the word. Almost half of the respondents claimed that a family member's definition or understanding of the word influenced their thoughts regarding their own vocation. From the focus group interviews, 11 of the 14 participants claimed at least one parent was supportive or encouraging of what they felt called to do or become. However, four different students felt at least one parent was more restrictive in their influence on their vocation. These parents often were more logical and focused on their children choosing a major with financial assurance.

Students' faith was described as a source of direction to where or what God might be calling them. A relationship with God was indicated as an influence by 39 freshmen,

and at least 12 students reported using Scripture in seeking direction. According to one student, "My relationship with God has informed where I think I need to be and what I think I have been called to do." Faith as a source of calling was mentioned time and time again, and some of the fear expressed by a few students was linked to the potential of not hearing God's call correctly and pursuing the wrong career.

Upbringing, personal experiences or observations of experiences, and previous schooling often informed freshmen's thoughts around vocation. At least 27 students mentioned high school as an influence, especially in helping them explore what career they might be good at in the future. A majority of the 29 students who listed personal experiences or observations described past events rather generally. A few discussed helping with elementary school classes or watching a parent or another adult either enjoy or dislike their line of work. Within students' upbringings, they experienced numerous outside voices affirming talents and skills to point them toward a particular major in college. Growing up was regularly referred to as the reason students viewed vocation in a certain way. One student said, "Vocation has been shaped by how I see other adults around me use their job. I think once you take your job and use it for a purpose beyond its original intent, you make it a vocation." Many freshmen's opinions of vocation and calling are rooted in the influences listed.

Freshmen's Anticipated Changes

At the institution where the research was conducted, all incoming students are required to take a freshmen foundations course. In this course, students are introduced to the concept of vocation. The freshmen participants in this study were surveyed within the first month of school and, by that point, had received little introduction to the idea or

word vocation. Later in the course, they read books and heard from the institution's career development office to introduce them to the idea of vocation exploration. At the time of focus groups—over a month after the initial essays were collected—the students who voluntarily participated in the focus groups had more exposure to the topic than when the surveys were administered. Their responses reflected this added familiarity.

Hopeful for growth. Since high school, when freshmen were preparing to come to college, they had been wired to answer what they wanted to do or be, but many of them were aware their idea of vocation would change in college. When asked whether they anticipate their understanding of vocation changing while in college, 7 of the 14 hoped their ideas would change, develop, or mature. Participant 5 stated, "I hope that because of [college], my vocation will mature and my ideas will mature because that's why I'm here, I guess." This student's own perception of why she came to college was postured toward a desire to let herself grow and change. Due to a lack of exposure to this idea prior to college, Participant 2 was hopeful: "When now we're kind of confronted with it, I hope my response to it and my willingness um to be open grows and changes too, as…as we sort grow as people." At the time of the interviews, which took place about halfway through their first semester on campus, two students claimed they were already experiencing the change in their ideas of vocation, and two of them referenced changing their majors already.

Fearful entry. Upon entering college, nine incoming freshmen in the focus groups experienced fear or pressure regarding their vocation. Two students mentioned a fear of disappointing others if they selected a major or took a path not in alignment with others' advice or encouragement. Others feared God might call them to something they

did not want or feared choosing the wrong thing. Major choice and the pressure to make large life decisions made was expressed and affirmed among focus group participants.

Seniors' Current Understanding

Calling versus job. Three fourths (124) of the surveyed seniors defined vocation as a calling. Some explained the variety of definitions used to define this word, and many saw it as a call from God. Thirty-six students believed in the general vocation of being called to love God and others and to spread the Gospel, and another 39 believed in the specific vocation of each human from God to use his or her passions and gifts to benefit the world. Nearly 50 students claimed it as the call to do something or a call of how you spend your days. Only 57 of the seniors considered vocation a job or occupation, with 56 seniors claiming it is more than a person's job.

Comprehensive or all-encompassing. A description that emerged from the senior essays—but very little from the freshmen essays—was a comprehensive view of vocation. In total, 10 freshmen stated there are multiple aspects to vocation, but only 4 freshmen defined vocation as all-encompassing or the whole of one's life. However, 31 seniors claimed vocation as encompassing all of who one is at any given moment. Vocation is not simply one's job or marital status, but rather it accounts for all aspects of a human and is a calling toward faithfulness in all areas of life. Seniors who viewed vocation as all-encompassing could potentially be relieved of some pressure to choose exactly the right major or job after graduation. The comprehensive nature places significance on multiple aspects of a person, including all roles and not just a job title.

Influences of exploration and observation. The influences with the highest frequencies among senior participants were as follows: college/college experiences (92),

faith (67), family (58), passions or strengths or skills (47), personal experiences (41), media (42), and observations (29). Attributes that emerged more specific to seniors were college experiences, the particular role of parental voices in their lives, personal experiences, media, and observations.

The most frequently listed influence on seniors' view of vocation was something during college. Seven students attributed their study abroad experience as influential. The senior capstone course was influential in 12 students' experience, but a total of 48 students claimed a class or many classes influenced their idea of vocation. The opportunity to explore and think about their future and present life through course work, chapel messages, professors (21), and campus events was impactful to 92 individuals.

Of the 58 participants who stated their family influenced them in some way, 45 participants directly mentioned their parents as having influenced their vocation. Many of these participants simply mentioned parents or talked about how their parents lived life and the value or posture toward work their parents exhibited. Four of the six focus group participants listed their parents as an affirming influence on their vocation, but this affirmation came more through modeling rather than advising or pressuring. Only one student reported receiving conflicting or negative messages from one or more parents.

Something unique in the variety of answers seniors supplied fell into the theme of personal experiences, which included past jobs, internships, high school experiences, and upbringing. Eight students credited past jobs as informing their view of vocation, and five students claimed internships during college helped guide their vocational aspirations. These experiences gave students an ability to gauge their own interests and passions regarding work, as well as the role they want work to play in the whole of their lives.

One student wrote, “My different jobs have given me a better idea of what my calling in life is and have shown me what I am passionate about.” Of the six focus group participants, five discussed past experiences—including jobs, summer and study abroad trips, and experiences with tests—that helped them refine their own vocation. Participant 15 talked about what he considered failures and how they shaped his view of vocation:

> I think for me, my failures or like um taking the MCAT the first time and not doing as well as I would have hoped, sort of slap you in the face with realism and make you have to think about something like vocation to a much deeper level.

Other students had experiences that verified what they hoped to pursue.

Due to the classes and the personal exploration during college, books and videos played a significant role in seniors’ perspectives. Through senior capstone and exit courses, students were exposed to the views of Kate Harris and Steven Garber. In the elementary education capstone course, one student discovered a definition for vocation that resonated with them through a video and assigned books. In a video shown in class, Kate Harris explained vocation as “one's entire life living in response to God's voice or call.” Multiple students quoted these media sources, as well as chapel addresses and other books they encountered in college.

Lastly, 29 participants noted that the observations of others—whether family members, professors, peers, high school teachers, or people in different fields—have impacted seniors’ view of vocation. Sometimes, college provides space away from past experiences to look at the lives of others and see what one might like and dislike about their lifestyles. Observing is a powerful tool in helping students gauge their interest and desires internally. One student talked about the opportunities to “observe others in their

vocations and hear stories. [They] have found that vocation for many individuals looks different than what would be expected."

Seniors' Recollection of Changes

Conflicting messages and emerging autonomy. By the time students complete college, they have had many voices speaking into their lives and what their futures should look like. However, at times these voices can send conflicting messages. Participant 20 discussed how different voices understand vocation differently in her life. For example, when she goes home to "talk about this with [her] family and there's still, it's work oriented, um but then [she] can go to some of [her] classes and be like no it's not work-oriented, it's everything." Three different students expressed some of the conflicting messages they have received, which have resulted in them coming to their own conclusions about what they feel called to.

Growth. The seniors in the focus group were asked to think back to how they viewed vocation as incoming freshmen, and then they were asked to describe the changes in their thinking now. Participants 15 and 17 both experienced their view of vocation becoming more uncertain or vague, as their ideas have changed about what they thought their future would look like. Participant 16 felt a sense of growing clarity in direction with each year over the past four years. Participant 18 started to think more about vocation beyond simply getting a job and began thinking about work for the purpose of expanding the kingdom and serving others. Participant 20 discussed expanding her view of vocation, while also growing in vagueness as she moved toward uncertainty in the future. Her perspective changed the most from exposure to a vocation-related class at her college, which introduced the idea that vocation goes beyond a person's job. In the

surveys, four students referenced vocation related-courses as impacting their changed view of vocation. Additionally, having a vocation-centered class during their senior exit or capstone courses was impactful to 12 seniors, according to their surveys.

Conclusion

Due to the nature of the research study and timing, it was not possible to conduct a longitudinal study on the same students. Therefore, a large sample size of freshmen and seniors were researched through their written essays. The purpose was to draw general themes from freshmen and seniors and compare the two groups to see where growth and development of thought regarding vocation may have occurred over the course of college. Follow-up focus group interviews were then conducted based on volunteer participation. The focus group interviews sought to provide depth to the essays, as well as better identify the changes anticipated and occurring during college.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

Average-aged college students find themselves right in the heart of emerging adulthood during their collegiate career (Arnett, 2004). This period of time is marked by faith and identity development (Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 2000; Marcia, 1980; Parks, 1983). The purpose of this study was to explore what vocational formation looks like for college students in the midst of other important developmental processes. Based on the literature and the results of this study, the increased autonomy in college and the changing possibilities students face due to increased observations, experiences, and influences result in vocational formation.

Increased Autonomy

According to Baxter Magolda (2001), it is common for those in late adolescence to follow external formulas. When freshmen enter college, they are used to having an answer for the questions asked by adults, church members, and scholarship applications. They have been asked to be certain about what they want their future to look like by the time they enter college. However, this push can cause them to make a fearful entry, and, at times, the external formulas are less effective upon entry into college, which eventually causes a new sense of self to emerge. Marcia (1980) would hope the crisis sometimes present when one enters college and realizes he or she does not have everything figured

out would send students into achievement status. Post-crisis students would ideally function out of self-chosen goals rather than choices they feel others have made for them.

Based on a comparison of the senior and freshman data, the students in this study exhibited increased autonomy from external pressures. The four categories of external influences Dik and Duffy (2009a) noted as present in one's life are "family expectations and needs, life circumstances, spiritual and religious factors, and social service motivation" (p. 32). Through the essays and focus groups, these influences exposed themselves in the lives of both freshmen and seniors. In the focus groups, 7 of the 14 freshmen talked about a social service motivation to help others, and 3 of the 6 seniors also alluded to the desire and pressure to use their vocation to help a world in need. The desire to help a world in need and fulfill one's calling for the glory of God was a similarity evident in both groups' responses. However, the way many influences were described exhibited some sort of shift in significance—albeit slight—from the freshmen group to the senior group.

One notable difference between freshmen and seniors is the distance seniors have gained from the external influences of family expectations and needs. A great deal of the parental voices discussed within the senior focus groups came in the form of affirmation rather than advice or pressure. Many of the surveyed seniors gave credit to the influence of family for the model of vocation provided to them instead of the pressure to fit into a certain vocation. This finding contrasted with the fear of disappointing or choosing the wrong career or future, as expressed by multiple freshmen. By the time many students reached their senior year, they seemed to be less fearful about landing on the wrong vocation and less pressured to decide what career they wanted for the rest of their lives.

This distinction could stem from the separation they experience from high school and parents or from the opportunity college provides them to explore their options.

More than being told what they should do based on skills or passions, seniors leaned heavily on their own personal experiences and the observations of how others lived. Participant 16 discussed having the opportunity to see researchers on a field trip, and he realized he could really enjoy the work they do. On a summer trip experience to Kazakhstan, the same participant was able to consider what it would look like for him to be a missionary physicist. Freshmen were quicker to talk about the pressures they felt to do or be something, but seniors experienced less fear or pressure. The potential reason for seniors experiencing less fear or paralysis could be the increased opportunities they had to observe vocation lived out in so many different ways and the greater number of varying influences and experiences informing their thoughts.

Changing Possibilities

Emerging adulthood is a season marked by transition and exploration, as well as what Arnett (2004) called "unprecedented freedom" (p. 7). When the freshmen were interviewed, half of them appeared hopeful for changes to occur in their understanding of their own vocation. This transition is somewhat anticipated and welcomed. The senior focus groups described the freedom they felt to explore, regardless of whether it led to greater uncertainty or clarity. Even when they experienced conflicting messages from their past and current lives, they had confidence in the midst of it. Their personal experiences and observations of the world granted them the assurance needed to explore their own future with both hope and anxiety. Seniors exhibited informed decision

making in light of all they had learned before and during college, making them more equipped to change their mind about previous ideas or opinions.

As seen in the literature, college can be a time of many competing internal and external influences that could lead to anxiety and a lack of vocational decidedness (Arnett, 2004; Bradley et al., 1977). In addition, spirituality and religion impact a student's understanding of vocation because, for the students studied, they were almost all Christians who desired to glorify God through living out their calling. A few freshmen mentioned working through their fear of disappointing God or going against His will. According to Parks (1983) and Fowler (1984), young adulthood is a normal time to be in formation and to move toward making a commitment to beliefs. If one recognizes that college students' relationships with God are being negotiated and understood in new ways, students must be granted the same right to figure out their understanding of vocation in new and expanded ways. Half of the seniors in the focus groups felt an expansion in their understanding of vocation in college.

With college and college experiences as the most stated influence on seniors' understanding of vocation, it seems what happens at their small, faith-based liberal arts institution impacks the lives of students and how they enter the world after college. The combination of all these experiences and this particular context are unique to the collegiate setting and take place in an environment that cannot be perfectly replicated elsewhere. Increased opportunities and personal experiences, especially in a context removed from their parents, community, and upbringing, resulted in a broader view of vocation that invites exploration over fear or anxiety. While a few seniors in the focus group mentioned failures or redirected passions or career goals, they appeared open to the

changing possibilities both now and in the future. While freshmen presented a robust view of vocation, greater depth and autonomy was found in the themes that emerged from the seniors' data.

Implications

For practice. The research showed seniors had increased numbers of experiences and more autonomy in self-chosen goals. It could benefit students to be introduced to the all-encompassing view of vocation earlier in order to ease the expectation that vocation is all or nothing. The more opportunities and permission student development professionals and teaching faculty can give underclassmen to become self-aware and build autonomy from parents, churches, and high school can aid in this process through a supportive environment. Additionally, reinforcing vocational exploration in classes or any other programs instead of simply at the beginning and end of their college career could aid in vocation formation. Facilitating more vocational discussion and creating more space to reflect and explore can aid in the students' growth.

Many freshmen and seniors stated watching a wide variety of people—including parents, teachers, professors, mentors, pastors, and peers—was helpful to their understanding of themselves and the varying definitions for vocation. A suggestion for the future would be to continually look for ways to give students the opportunity to observe and experience different vocations and lifestyles. Clydesdale (2015) stated, "All too often, students approach college as a maze with multiple exits, with their life satisfaction determined by finding the right exit and doing so quickly" (p. 109). Helping relieve the pressure students feel to figure out their life direction quickly or to choose correctly can reduce the fear and stress they experience in vocational exploration.

Another implication for practice is to prepare and equip faculty and staff to aid students in vocational exploration throughout their college career. At least 48 seniors claimed a class was influential in their vocational exploration. Many of the 48 students were referring the entrance, exit, or capstone courses that had a specific vocation component due to the Vocation in College Project happening on the campus. Almost 30% of the seniors were influenced by faculty and staff helping them to think differently about vocation. If faculty and staff can be trained to incorporate vocational exploration into their courses and conversations with students, this number could increase and cause greater opportunity for vocation formation in college.

Lastly, taking this research outside of a faith-based setting could provide similar opportunities for students to have conversations of meaning and purpose in life beyond discovering their calling from God. The theory of increased autonomy and changing possibilities resulting in vocational formation translates to college students everywhere. Recognizing the benefit and value of encouraging increased observation, experiences, and influences in college as students prepare for what is next and release the pressure or fear they may have in approaching the future is significant everywhere.

For further research. Conducting this research on a wider-scale at a non-faith-based institution could better represent the process more accurately and illustrate the formative experiences and influencers on the process of vocation formation. Extending this research to other institutions can improve and help to validate the findings.

Due to the nature of the two-year program within which the research for this study was conducted, a longitudinal study on the same group of students over the course of their undergraduate college careers was not possible. However, there could be great

benefit to the research credibility if the research were conducted on the same students. Seeing growth or change in the same students could prove powerful.

A more robust study of the faith development could be conducted to see how students' view of God impacts how they view their vocation. The researcher of the current study only pursued questioning their faith and its impact if participants prompted the conversation, but it would be worthwhile to see how, if at all, their faith development impacts their vocational formation.

Limitations

Timing. Due to the timing of the study, the researcher conducted the senior focus group during finals week, right before their graduation. This proved a hard time to get them to volunteer for the focus group, and the students could have been more distracted or stressed as a result of the timing of the semester. Additionally, the focus groups were conducted after a considerable amount of time had passed since the administration of the surveys. The freshmen had learned more information about vocation and had experienced more of college. In the focus group interviews, freshmen said how much they had already grown or changed after being at school for two months.

Inconsistent sample size. Due to the timing of the semester, not as many seniors volunteered to be a part of the focus groups. The researcher interviewed 6 seniors in total, 3 in 2 different focus groups, whereas a total of 14 incoming freshmen participated in 3 different focus groups. More freshmen volunteered to be part of the study, which could have been due to the difference in the timing of the semester and perceived busyness amongst freshmen and seniors. However, the researcher analyzed a comparable number of essays for both the freshmen and seniors.

Institution type. The institution at which the study took place was, at the time, undergoing the Vocation in College Project, a grant funded by the Lilly Foundation with the purpose of incorporating vocational exploration programs into institutions. The impact of this project meant many students, if not all, had been introduced to some form of vocation exploration curriculum and were encouraged to think of their vocation at some point in college. The freshmen focus groups were conducted after their foundations course covered the Vocation in College Project lecture, which could have skewed the true incoming freshmen perspective since they had already been prompted to think about this topic in a new way. The seniors had been exposed to this topic through their freshmen foundations course and then their senior seminar and potentially capstone experiences. All students had the opportunity to take part in additional, elective vocation classes, but few students in this study had taken additional courses. Four seniors referenced these additional vocation classes, but the courses did not have a significant impact on the results of this study.

Participant selection. Students were asked to self-report in both the focus group interviews and surveys. Students could have wanted to see development in themselves and answered more idealistically than realistically. Additionally, students willing to be part of the focus groups may not have provided an accurate depiction or sample of the larger group. In the follow-up focus groups, all of the students brought energy to this topic and were willing to discuss vocation. The sentiment found in the focus group interviews was not always echoed in the highly encouraged surveys. Possibly, freshmen and seniors in the focus groups had thought more about their vocation and the

implications of the topic than the average freshmen or senior surveyed. Still, it is helpful to hear about the experiences of willing freshmen and seniors in greater depth.

Researcher bias. The researcher admitted particular passion about this topic and felt invested in the study. As a result of personal interest in the topic, the researcher hoped to see growth in autonomy, identity, and spiritual development when analyzing the data. The researcher anticipated seeing growth amongst senior participants, which could have resulted in looking harder for that growth. The researcher also knew a few of the seniors who were interviewed for the focus groups, which could have impacted the participants' responses. Overall, the researcher double coded the essays in an attempt to let the data speak for itself. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher could admit to discovering what appeared to be less growth than originally anticipated.

Conclusion

Vocation is a widely interpreted word with a great deal of variance in its interpretation. Some of the freshmen and seniors were studied for the purpose of identifying what growth, if any, is present between freshman and senior year in regards to students' vocational understanding. The literature showed college students are in the prime time for significant developmental experiences, including growing in self-authorship, developing an increased autonomy, developing self-chosen goals, becoming aware of self-chosen goals versus others-chosen goals, and navigating faith and potentially new or renewed commitments to one's faith (Arnett, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 2000; Marcia, 1980).

After a thorough analysis of the data, many themes emerged and led to two overarching themes. The freshmen understood vocation as either one's calling or job,

and their views were most heavily influenced by family, faith, skills and passions, upbringing and culture, and personal and high school experiences. Threads of advice and external pressures marked freshmen's surveys and interviews. For many of them, vocation was a fairly new concept for them, and many of their influences provided them with an introduction to living with a calling or purpose in life. Freshmen have experienced the pressure to decide what they want to do with their life, and some have been told directly from parents or others what would suit them best.

Seniors, however, described vocation as either a job, calling, or an all-encompassing word to describe what one is called to do in every area of his or her life, including relational roles, job, and studies. Seniors discussed the influential role of college and college experiences, faith, family, skills and passions, personal experiences, media, and observations of others. Threads between the seniors' responses were of personal exploration and experiences that informed their self-chosen goals. Many still had a variety of external pressures in their lives but were in the midst of internal pressures and opinions as well. Many seniors found freedom in a broadened view of vocation, and some found reduced anxiety from either increased clarity or the knowledge that one does not have to figure all of life out now. The realization that some freshmen and many seniors came to is that vocation is in the here and now, so one can be faithful to God in the here and now as a student, friend, son, or daughter, rather than waiting for a future vocation to arrive.

For some students, college is the first time they may experience a crisis of faith or decision-making in their lives. According to Marcia (1980), due to distance and the experience of crisis and commitment during college when students may have previously

let parental-based values guide their decisions, it is possible for them to follow a self-chosen path for themselves. Freshmen described hope for change, and some were already experiencing it in the first few weeks and months of school. Seniors appeared less shaken by uncertainty and more open to where the Lord might lead them by the end of their college experience. Comparing the freshmen and senior data evidenced an increased autonomy in college and an openness to the changing possibilities of vocation both now and in the future. Due to the increase in opportunities for observation, new experiences, and varying influences, college provides space and a stronger likelihood for substantial vocational formation to occur in the midst of identity and faith development.

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Appendix A

Senior & Freshmen Vocation Essay Assignment Survey Questions

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT: Your responses will be part of institutional research efforts regarding the understanding of vocation among undergraduate students at Taylor University and will inform the future directions of vocation education on campus. Results of the study may also be published and/or presented. However, your responses will be kept confidential and your name will never be reported with the research results. There is no risk to individuals in this assessment and study.
If you feel strongly opposed to your essays being used for research you may select this option at the beginning of the survey. Choosing not to include your essays in research will not affect your course grade in any way. If you have any questions, please contact principal investigator, Drew Moser, Dean of Experiential Learning at drmoser@taylor.edu or 765.998.5382. Or you may contact Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of IRB, Sue Gavin, at ssgavin@tayloru.edu or 765.998.5188.

1. After reading the informed consent above, please indicate below if you wish to participate
    -Yes I agree that I am over 18 and that my essay may be used for researcher purposes
    -I am not yet 18 years of age (your responses will not be used for research purposes)
-No, I do not agree to this informed consent and do not want my responses to be used for research purposes

2. Student ID #

3. Age

4. Please indicate your anticipated graduation date
    -May 2016
    -December 2016
    -January 2017
    -May 2017

5. Check one

-Male
-Female

6. Please list primary major

7. Are you the first person in your immediate family (parents/legal guardians/siblings) to attend college?
-Yes
-No

8. Please indicate the ethnicity you most identify with
-African American/Black
-American Indian/Alaska Native
-Asian American/Asian
-Native Hawaiian/Pacifica Islander
-Mexican American/Chicano
-Puerto Rican
-Other Latino
-White/Caucasian
-Other (please specify)

9. Please indicate the faith background with which you most identify:
-Assembly of God
-Baptist
-Christian & Missionary Alliance
-Christian Church (all groups)
-Church of God
-Episcopal
-Evangelical Free
-Independent/Community
-Lutheran (all groups)
-Methodist (all groups)
-Presbyterian (all groups)
-Roman Catholic
-Other, Christian
-Other, Non-Christian

10. How do you define/understand the word vocation? (Please type 2-3 full paragraphs)

11. What has shaped/influenced this understanding of vocation? (Please type 2-3 full paragraphs)

Appendix B

Interviews of Focus Groups

1. Inform participants to keep everything stated confidential but let them know that we cannot ensure confidentiality due to the nature of a focus group.
2. 5 minutes of silent reflection: Ask participants to silently reflect on the online surveys they filled out at the beginning of the semester. Remind them of the two questions they answered:
    a. How do you define/understand the word vocation?
    b. What has shaped/influenced this understanding of vocation?
3. Semi-Structured Interview Question
    a. How do you understand your vocation?
    b. Describe the process through which you came to understand your vocation.
    c. Tell me what or who has influenced their current understanding of your vocation.
        i. If participants mention certain influences, I will ask follow-up questions based on the mentioned influences. Potential follow-up questions:
            1. Describe parental voices in your life and how they have impacted your understanding of your vocation.
            2. Describe how your faith has impacted your understanding of your vocation.
            3. Describe how mentors have impacted your understanding of your vocation.
            4. Describe how that course/class has impacted your understanding of your vocation.
            5. Describe how that event/experience has impacted your understanding of your vocation.
        ii. At the conclusion of a participant sharing, I will prompt more responses by the saying, “Any others?”
    d. How have those influences or the voices regarding your vocation intersected with one another during college?
    e. Have you experienced any tension because of this? If so, please explain.
4. In the freshmen focus groups, I will add the additional question:
    a. Do you anticipate your understanding of your vocation changing while at Taylor?
        i. If so, how do you anticipate that change looking by the time you graduate?
5. In the senior focus groups, I will add the additional questions:

a. Retrospectively, how did you understand your vocation as an incoming freshman?
b. Have you noticed any changes in your understanding of your vocation since coming to college?
    i. If so, can you describe the shift you have experienced?
c. What experiences or events have significantly impacted your understanding of your vocation while at college?