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A COLLEGE FAVORITE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TRADITIONS
AND CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Danielle M. Spoutz

May 2018

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

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Danielle M. Spoutz

entitled

A College Favorite: Students' Perceptions of Traditions
and Culture in Higher Education

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

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of a college tradition on a university's culture. Through a hermeneutical phenomenological design, this study explored two college traditions at two separate campuses: Taylor University's Airband and Westmont College's Spring Sing. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of the impact a college tradition has on a university culture?
2. Is there mutual shaping—does a tradition shape institutional culture as much as institutional culture shapes a tradition?

Three findings emerged from this study. The first finding demonstrated the importance of traditions in building community, as it was the largest impact of both traditions. Second, both traditions had similar characteristics, but each revealed the respective institution's cultural values. Third, the traditions shared similar environmental characteristics that led to their level of importance amid the community.

Recommendations for practice include strategically thinking about how traditions are developing university communities and cultures; recognizing college traditions as a method for conveying, changing, and influencing an institution's culture; and campus traditions necessarily reflecting their respective environments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Generation after generation knows this is the place to be present. Through the late nights and long hours of preparation, the moment has finally arrived. Students have been loyal and faithful in their provision, while creative and innovative in their implementation. The college tradition lives on. Nerves, sweat, excitement, tears, and a sense of unity fill the backstage atmosphere. Crowds—mobs—of people rush in to fill the amphitheater. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and community members have all arrived to witness this event. The lights go dim. Murmuring gives way to silence. It is time for Airband and Spring Sing to begin again.

Experiences like the one described above are best known as college traditions. Each institution has their own unique traditions, while all of them individually contribute to the overall college experience. Tradition also plays a key role in one's daily life but often goes unrecognized. As Bronner (2011) wrote,

In theory, everyone has traditions, and folk used as a modifier signals expressive forms such as stories, games, rituals, houses, and crafts that are learned and transmitted in the unofficial social settings of family, play, work, and community. Calling these things folk means that they are traditional, but it also has a special naturalistic association with groupness, ordinariness, and often disempowerment, besides the idea of continuity with the past embedded in tradition. (p. 20)

Folk signifies the traditional culture of a community, being passed down from one generation to the next. These customs or traditions are all around, contributing to culture and heritage. What about tradition makes it so fundamental to an institutions' nature? How does a tradition become a significant piece of our campus communities? How does this act of participating in tradition contribute to how students feel about their institutions? This study attempted to answer such questions.

Culture

Culture provides a landscape or framework for students to make meaning of their experience (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Bringing together the symbols, values, and beliefs of a community, culture encompasses what people groups view to be true. The group's truth is best represented through symbols throughout their community, specifically through cultural pieces such as mission statements and leadership figures (Tierney, 1988).

Every university has a different culture because of the unique values and beliefs each community embodies. The more distinct or ingrained the culture is at an institution, the more "rich" it is. George Kuh (1990) discovered the importance of culture as it relates to students' identity development, learning, and experience. Specifically in his study on campus environments, Kuh found, "Older institutions tend to have stronger cultures..." (p. 15). These older universities have an established values structure. In addition, they have established traditions contributing to the overall culture the community operates around.

Traditions

Traditions have been a college favorite for many years and are arguably an essential piece of the college experience. As an element of culture-richness (Kuh, 1990;

Kuh & Whitt, 1988), traditions create a practice that embodies the values of the community. Traditions connect individuals to those who have gone before them and to those who will come after them. The most recognizable characteristic of any tradition is continuity, which can be defined as the practice of handing down history from one generation to the next (Bronner, 1992, 1998; Bruns, 1991; Pelikan, 1984; Shils, 1981). Traditions also provide context for a community by demonstrating what has been done in the past to influence the present.

There is a lack of urgency to study traditions due to the societal value of forward thinking. However, most collegiate experiences are built on traditions. The college experience itself is a tradition in American society. These practices are vital to communities, and folklorists have explained a tradition's importance to the larger society (Bronner, 1998, 2012; Pelikan, 1984; Pieper, 2008; Shils, 1981). Traditions are valued in the field of higher education but have yet to be determined why they hold value.

Airband. Airband, a beloved tradition at Taylor University, has taken place for over 30 years. Airband is a lip sync competition in which students create acts to tell a story. Students gather into groups, typically by residence hall or floor (better known as a “wing” at the institution). Airband is held in Taylor's Rediger Auditorium. Students perform for two shows—the first typically consists of more families, while the second show is all students. Both performances conclude with a winner; however, students from the second show are the ultimate champions of Airband.

Spring Sing. Spring Sing, Westmont College's longest running tradition, is a Broadway-style competition between students from each residence hall. Through song and dance, students tell a story that relates to the theme from that year. Students

sometimes recruit faculty and staff to participate in their skits as well. Spring Sing is held in Santa Barbara's largest venue, the Santa Barbara Bowl. Attendees range from faculty, staff, and administration from the college to alumni, community members, and students' families.

Purpose of Study

Both traditions and culture are valuable pieces of an institution and have been said to play a large role in the development of students. Yet, tradition is not a well-researched area in higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between traditions and culture in higher education. In particular, this study explored Taylor University's Airband and Westmont College's Spring Sing—two very significant traditions at each respective institution. The study examined students' perceptions of the impact traditions have their individual campuses. The results were then compared to determine if there was an overarching theme of college traditions and their impact on institutional cultures within higher education. The questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What are students' perceptions of the impact a college tradition has on a university culture?
2. Is there mutual shaping—does a tradition shape institutional culture as much as institutional culture shapes a tradition?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Culture and tradition are both well-researched areas, but within higher education, research on tradition is lacking. Folklorists and historians have researched the concept of tradition, while only two texts address traditions in higher education; one folklorist researched tradition within the context of higher education (Bronner, 2012) and one report regarding tradition (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Due to the lack of research about tradition within higher education, this study utilized many folklorists' definitions of tradition. The review of literature combines the works on culture and tradition to examine the relationship of the two phenomena.

Culture

Culture is an elusive term encompassing everything people groups know, making it hard to define. However, it has been described in multiple areas of study bringing it to light:

A pragmatic view sees culture as what one must know and do to function in a given society. A learning perspective defines culture as norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors that are socially transmitted. Finally, culture can be defined in statistical terms as norms, values, beliefs and behaviors that are common in a population. (Hruschka & Hadley, 2008, p. 947)

In a more overarching description of culture, Geertz (1973) and Tierney (1988) described it as an interconnected web, discovering the meaning behind each action taken by an organization. Geertz (1973) further explained culture as contextual, “something within which [symbols] can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described” (p. 14). Higher education scholars Kuh and Whitt (1988) stated, “Culture is viewed as an interpretive framework for understanding and appreciating events and actions in colleges and universities . . .” (p. 20). One all-encompassing description is defined best from Becher (1984): “But although ‘culture’ has uncomfortably many denotations, it is the only term that seems satisfactorily to combine the notions...of a shared way of thinking and a collective way of behaving” (p. 166). Each of these descriptions identifies culture as a collective web of contextual interpretation for people groups, the leading definition used in this study.

Characteristics/Central concepts. Tierney (1988) outlined the essential components of culture to include environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership—each semi-independent while still contributing to an overall culture (Goodenough, 1956; Tierney, 1988). These cultural pieces are “shaped by history, tradition, religious convictions of founders, and the attitudes of faculty, students, administrators, alumni, and others” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 89). Because of these unique cultural pieces, universities have their own cultures. “Likewise, institutions with very similar missions and curricula can perform quite differently because of the way their identities are communicated to internal and external constituents and because of the varying perceptions these groups may hold” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3). All of these factors

contribute to the universities' overall philosophy and identity, providing context for how their institution is viewed and how members of their community interact.

Culture is displayed through embodying the essential elements Tierney (1988) outlined within the community. Higher education scholars have found culture to assist campuses through the following purposes:

(1) it conveys a sense of identity; (2) it facilitates commitment to an entity, such as the college or peer group, other than self; (3) it enhances the stability of a group's social system; and (4) it is a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior. (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 26)

These four features of culture shape students' college experiences and the institutional culture. In a university context, campus environments are essential in shaping a student's perceptions and attitudes (Hoffman, 2006). Students also have a part in shaping campus environments by contributing to the culture of their institution (Kuh, 1990). In this way, culture is seen as "both a process and a product" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 6). The process is an ongoing shaping done by the individuals that influence the culture; the products are outcomes such as the four features found above and the manner in which community members interact (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Culture is transmitted generation to generation through a learned behavior (Goodenough, 1956). "A central element in most definitions of culture is that it is learned and that population change arises through the transmission of novel ways of thinking and acting" (Hruschka & Hadley, 2008, p. 948). The transmission is essential to the continuation of culture but often goes unnoticed because the concept is so natural (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Interconnected web. Due to its contextual nature, cultural components will overlap in an interconnected web (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988). Geertz (1973) spoke of this web design as a standpoint from which he analyzes culture:

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

All observable products of a culture—such as events, behaviors, and norms—are all material displays of what the community values. These shared principles ground the community and allow the contextual basis to operate (Tierney, 1988). Scholars emphasize formal and informal behavioral patterns’ importance “. . . in transmitting the values and beliefs through which experience is made meaningful” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 55). Without the context of a community’s values, individuals do not know how to make sense of their experiences. With the cultural context, they are able to relate to and make meaning of their experiences (Goodenough, 1956).

Tradition

Traditions encompass many aspects reaching deep into an individual’s heritage, giving them a sense of who they are. These aspects include continuity, social connection, and identity development. Often, traditions are overlooked because they are “. . . basic to the ways that societies function.” (Bronner, 1998, p. 43). This basic functioning can be demonstrated by anything from the judicial system to classroom procedures. The ways in which society functions are based upon how it has been done in the past. In a society that “has—if I may say so, traditionally—been more hungry for its future than addicted to its

past” (Pelikan, 1984, p. 20), tradition is not in the forefront of thought (Pelikan, 1984). Rather, it lies in the background, playing a crucial role in how we identify with our communities, selves, and world around us.

Higher education literature. Literature is sparse when addressing tradition in higher education, most of which can be found in studies looking at campus culture and community. Kuh (1990) used prominent traditions as an indicator for strong institutional culture. A few scholars have learned how rituals and traditions play an important role in developing campus community (Cheng, 2004; Elkins, Forrester, & Noel-Elkings, 2011). Elkins et al. (2011) discovered student participation to be a large factor in students’ sense of campus community. The researchers recognized, “It is reasonable to assume that the knowledge of campus history and traditions gained from high levels of involvement in student activities may contribute to a greater sense of campus community” (p. 13). Kuh (1990) also thought student effort may lead to a greater connection to the university.

Two pieces of literature address tradition specifically in higher education. These two texts give a base for tradition in higher education but do not give an in-depth understanding of why traditions matter. Both texts demonstrate how college traditions exhibit the characteristics of continuity, social connection, and identity development. *Campus Life: In Search of Community* (The Carnegie Foundation, 1990) speaks briefly on how traditions encourage the development of community on college campuses and give a glimpse into its importance:

The challenge is to instill all rituals and ceremonies with real significance—and fun as well. Such activities—and almost all colleges have their own unique traditions—show how memories can be kept alive and a sense of community can

be sustained from year to year. Community must not only be created but recreated continually in institutions of higher education, and ritual has a vital role to play. These celebrations are critical, because from a quarter to a half of the undergraduates are new to a college each fall, and without traditions, continuity is lost. (p. 66)

Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University (Bronner, 2012) seeks to make sense of “bizarre campus traditions” (p. xvii) through understanding the cultural framework of American colleges: “In other words, the lore expressed within the [cultural] frame leads to commentary embedded in actions on the use of traditions in college” (Bronner, 2012, p. xv). As a folklorist, Bronner (2012) compiled traditions into themes such as college spirit, campus events, and Greek life to tell of the lore, or shared knowledge, of college campuses.

Continuity. Traditions are not coincidental but intentional pieces of history given from generation to generation (Bronner, 1998; Shils, 1981). These customs represent peoples from multiple generations as they bring communities together (Pelikan, 1984). To be considered a true tradition, the event, activity, or object needs to be handed down for at least three generations (Shils, 1981). With this classification, college traditions need to withstand twelve years for the transmission of the tradition to take hold as a symbol of the community. Other scholars discuss tradition as needing to withstand the test of time. However, Shils’ classification is valid because of the high level of importance in the transmission or inheritance within tradition (Bronner, 1992). “A sense of filiation or continuity is a sense of being ‘connected’ with an unbroken chain of generations which have some significant quality in common” (Shils, 1981, p. 14). This

connection provides a deeper significance of their existence as an expression that brings value and meaning. In essence, a tradition's continuity is a vital component to how the tradition represents the community. Through participating in a tradition, individuals leave their mark while being shaped by the tradition.

Tradition is inserting oneself into the conversation of history, contributing to the overall story. Bruns (1991) drew this illustration through relating writing and quoting:

One does not insert quotations into one's own text; rather, quotation is the mode of inserting one's own text into the discourse of the other, that is, into that distant and alien text which no longer makes sense to us, which is inscribed in a language we no longer understand, which belongs to a world from which we are in endless exile, and which everyone around us regards as a world well lost. (p. 5)

In essence, tradition builds upon the individuals that contribute to it. Providing context for communities and an understanding of where they came from, tradition also gives a sense of power. Pelikan (1984) wrote, "What is so impressive about Augustine . . . is that, as he drew from tradition and not only from Plato and Paul and other giants, so he also became part of the tradition . . ." (p. 18). Through becoming part of the Christian tradition, Augustine left his mark by engaging those who had gone before him while contributing to the tradition of Christianity as well.

Bronner (2012) spoke of continuity in higher education contributing to the loyalty of the institution through experiencing the college spirit: "[College spirit] is wrapped up with a sense of the institution's tradition or legacy and the concept of students taking part in an unbroken chain from the past to the future" (p. 163). Referencing the college spirit as inspiration from the past and a significant development for institutional affiliation for

first-year students, Bronner saw tradition playing a large role in students' loyalty to their institution.

Social connection. Tradition is fundamental to social life (Bronner, 1998; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Traditions have deep roots in social connection, joining the present generation to past generations. In various societies, “. . . the role of tradition [is] the social glue that brings cohesiveness to a clan or tribe” (Pelikan, 1984, p. 6). Kuh and Whitt (1988) identified tradition as having an influence in uniting a community: “Such [traditions], however, also can be viewed as important, unifying rituals through which successive generations of students are socialized and bonded.” (p. 5). Through experiencing a tradition, individuals develop a connection to the institution. Bronner (2012) also described this loyalty within the college spirit: “Spirit is often code for a heightened sense of tradition on campus that is rooted in an altruistic bonding of students, faculty, and administrators” (p. 164). The bonding of institutional community is a result of taking part in a campus tradition.

Traditions evolve but still maintain a set of core elements to allow past generations to recognize the tradition as they experienced it (Shils, 1981). “They change in the process of transmission as interpretations are made of the tradition presented; they change all while they are in the possession of their recipients” (Shils 1981, p. 13). These changes are typically neither positive nor negative but allow each generation's identity to influence how they practice the tradition. However, gathering a community for tradition's sake does not always have a positive effect. Pelikan (1984) and Bronner (1998) encouraged communities to think critically about their traditions. Similarly, according to Pelikan (1984),

For even if—or especially if—the tradition of our past is a burden that the next generation must finally drop, it will not be able to drop it, or to understand why it must drop it, unless it has some sense of what its content is and of how and why it has persisted for so long. The tradition does not have to be understood to be dominant; as Czeslaw Milosz has observed, ‘Certainly, the illiterates of past centuries, then an enormous majority of mankind, know little of the history of their respective countries and of their civilization,’ and yet their lives were decisively shaped by that history. (p. 19)

There is an urgency to know the meaning of tradition as it pertains to the current and previous generations. An “unknown pressure” seems to be apparent to keep tradition going due to the legacy of the practice (Bronner, 1992).

To deal with this unknown pressure, individuals carry out the tradition but place their uniqueness into the tradition. It is through the practice of innovation and refinement that traditions carry on: “In any case, innovation is based on an understanding of traditional precedents. Creativity and tradition are intertwined, and represent the complex processes of humans expressing themselves to others in ways that carry value and meaning” (Bronner, 1992, p. 3). Traditions from one generation lay the foundations for the next generation to begin. This allows the next generation to use creativity to shape the tradition to what they need it to be. Shils (1981) noted, “It is the past in the present but it is as much part of the present as any very recent innovation” (p. 13). Creativity and innovation allow each generation to make the tradition their own, ultimately leaving their mark on it. The Carnegie Foundation called (1990) for universities to be celebratory communities, which requires innovation and creativity in their approach to traditions:

The celebrative community uses ceremony and ritual to recall the past, to affirm tradition and build larger loyalties on campus. But as colleges and universities become more richly inclusive, as the student body becomes more and more diverse, campuses should find ways to celebrate, not just tradition, but change and innovation as well. (p. 71)

In both folklore and higher education, the use of creativity and innovation are vital for tradition to continue.

Identity development. Bronner (1998) suggested individuals, willingly or unwillingly, define their identity through the participation in tradition. They find identity through the sense of belonging from a “social chain reaching well back in time” (p. 10). Shils (1981) spoke of a similar social chain that contributes to the identity of the generation and individuals participating: “A sense of identity is experienced by members of the chain embraces ‘all’ of the putatively successive members who might also be viewed as possessors of the tradition in times leading up to the present” (p. 14). This is an identifier of a strong tradition, the sense of belonging one gets from contributing to a tradition.

While each generation has their own identities, traditions are measured by maintaining their same core elements throughout time. “It is a question of preserving through all change the identity of something presupposed and preexisting, against the passage of time and in spite of it” (Pieper, 2008, pp. 2–3). Traditions have their own identities and values behind each of them. These identities and values mix with each generation’s identity, producing a newly refined version of the tradition.

Intersection of Tradition and Culture

Culture and tradition are relatable in many ways. Both describe and display the values of a community, transmit cultural values from generation to generation, and are shaped by each individual who takes part. Tradition has been considered a symbol of culture: “. . . all these patterns and many more seem to one people or another to sum up most powerfully what it knows about living” (Geertz, 1973. p. 132). Because the two phenomena are so relatable, they have often been mistaken for the other. Bronner (1998) differentiated the two: “Most persistently, tradition, especially when referred to in the plural, has carried the connotation of practices of a society, while culture has been considered an encompassing idea of the society” (p. 11). In this light, tradition is seen as a cultural element through displaying the values of the community in which it exists.

In his study of college environments and student learning, Kuh (1990) used tradition as a measurement of a strong institutional culture. When an organization obtains strong traditions, the culture was found to be richer (Kuh, 1990). Communities with strong traditions having spanned multiple years refine their traditions to represent the core values of their culture. With Shils’ (1981) three-generation classification, strong traditions can be developed through the act of passing them down multiple times. Through the refinement, individuals take ownership of the tradition.

The use of tradition in ‘traditional values’ connotes what I call *culturalism*, a belief that social stability is gained by a process of sifting out undesirable trends as a result of values being handed down from one generation to another. This kind of tradition provides a sense of belonging to a shared experience judged to be preferable to others. (Bronner, 2011, p. 17)

An individual's sense of belonging is important in building a greater community moral and, overall, in retaining its members. Because of this importance, traditions "have a pervasive, far-reaching influence on institutional life" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 5). The historical context allows individuals to have a starting point in developing the culture they have inherited (Bronner, 2011).

One example of tradition used as a measurement for strong cultural values is a study conducted by Billings and Terkla (2010) on the campus of Tufts University. This study assessed the level of civic engagement within the campus culture. The researchers measured the impact of the civic engagement tradition through the assessment of how well their students live out the mission statement of the institution as active citizens. Their results showed

. . . a supportive campus culture for civic engagement and provides strong empirical evidence that Tufts' institutional mission of service is successful and verifiable. In addition, the model explains how the campus culture can affect students' civic values and beliefs which can in turn affect their level of civic engagement activities. (p. 19)

A direct correlation was found between the campus culture, values, and beliefs with an indirect correlation between campus culture and level of engagement (Billings & Terkla, 2010). This study displays the tradition of civic engagement having a strong impact on Tufts' campus culture, especially through changing students' values and beliefs, both core elements of an individual's identity.

The culture of a university is essential. Traditions have proven a measurement and observable by-product of culture, displaying tradition's importance in the colligate

setting. “The management of academic culture therefore involves both the management of meaning and the management of social integration” (Dill, 1982, p. 317). Traditions exhibit this well through providing a sense of belonging, social connection, and context to university values.

Summary

The literature review presents this study’s definitions for both culture and tradition. Culture is a collective web of contextual interpretation for people groups, and tradition is a social event passed down from generation to generation. Tradition is a representation of cultural values and can be used to determine richness when analyzing a culture. Kuh (1990) used tradition as a measure for the strength of institutional culture, while other scholars have discussed tradition’s role in culture. There is a significant gap in the literature pertaining to how tradition impacts an institution’s culture. What are the effects of a tradition? How does it promote university values? This study aimed to answer these questions and demonstrate how traditions influence a college’s culture.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study was conducted in correlation with the Traditions Research (TR) project. The TR project sought to gather research on the importance of tradition in higher education by starting with traditions' impact on student identity development, then continuing on to traditions' importance in college as a whole. The researcher is a member of the TR team. The methodology selected is exploratory in nature and utilized a qualitative design, due to a lack of existing research on the topic of traditions within the field of higher education. This design identifies variables that cannot easily be measured and provides a richer description of the findings (Creswell, 2013). The level of detail for the description only came through conversations with participants.

Design

The purpose of this research was to determine what the impact of a tradition has on a college culture, specifically through discovering the experience of the tradition and what it means to a university's culture (van Manen, 1990). The researcher chose a hermeneutic phenomenological design in order to interpret the shared experiences of participants, providing an essence of the impact of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). van Manen (1990) described this design as combining phenomenology—the study of a lived experience—and hermeneutics—one's interpretation of texts. Essentially, this method is “an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation . . . of

the meaning of the lived experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). This design is essential in describing the lived experience of the tradition participants, how it impacts the culture of an institution, and what the experience means to the institution. “Cultural analysis is . . . guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape” (Geertz, 1973, p. 20). Multiple layers of analysis are needed to determine the universal properties of higher education traditions (Geertz 1973; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In addition, the phenomena studied at one institution cannot be generalized due to the uniqueness of the campus cultures and traditions (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Thus, a thick description of the phenomena needs to be constructed to maintain the uniqueness, while interpreting for the universal principles of cultural traditions in higher education (Geertz, 1973). The hermeneutic phenomenological design utilizes interpretation and a thick description, both necessary when studying the tradition and culture.

The phenomena studied were two traditions on two different college campuses: Taylor University’s Airband and Westmont College’s Spring Sing. The experiences of the participants were compiled to determine meaning from these traditions’ impacts on their individual campuses (van Manen, 1990). The researcher analyzed findings from both campuses to determine if any commonality between the two traditions and their campuses exists, providing more certainty in the results.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted at two similar undergraduate institutions: Taylor University and Westmont College. Taylor University is a faith-based, residential, liberal arts institution in rural Indiana. This coeducational university has 1,890 undergraduate

students. Westmont College is also a faith-based, residential, liberal arts institution located in the foothills of Santa Barbara, California. Westmont has about 1,304 undergraduate students. Both institutions were administered the same protocol to focus groups with the exception of the tradition discussed.

Random purposeful sampling was utilized in selecting participants. This strategy was employed because the undergraduate population, as a whole, was too information-rich and too large to select from; thus, random purposeful sampling was chosen (Sandelowski, 2000). The TR group drew from a smaller population within the larger university. The subset population was student leaders from the offices of Residence Life, Student Programming, Civic Engagement, Intercultural Programs, and Orientation. The selection of student leaders was purposeful because they are a larger subset population within the university. Within this smaller group, students were asked to participate in the study through volunteering. The volunteering component allows for randomization within the subset population. The TR team provided incentives to participants.

Once volunteers were identified, TR members provided times for focus groups. After the focus groups filled up, the data collection began. Interviews were comprised of one to five individuals of similar class years. The variety in participant numbers is discussed below. Separation of the classes allowed each group to have a voice and share their traditions openly, and it eliminated upperclassmen influence on underclassmen. Between the ten focus groups, the overall study included interviewing 25 participants.

Procedures

Data collection was conducted through the use of focus groups. Focus groups were the chosen method of obtaining research because “[f]ocus groups can be used to

collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). This method of data collection allowed participants to collaborate in their responses and provide individual perspectives.

At Taylor University, data collection began by contacting faculty members from the offices of Residence Life, Student Programming, Civic Engagement, Intercultural Programs, and Orientation. Members of the TR team attended the meetings of each office in order to speak with the student leaders about participation in this study. The TR members gathered interested student leaders’ names and contact information. The TR team scheduled four times for focus groups, and those who were interested were contacted and asked if they were available to be interviewed. At Westmont College, the researcher partnered with a campus contact to recruit participants for the study. The campus contact then reached out to student leaders on behalf of the TR research team. E-mails were sent to student leaders from similar offices visited at Taylor University, and sign-up lists were distributed for four focus group times.

At both institutions, two TR members led each focus group and used a prepared script to begin the focus group interviews. The protocol consisted of 10 questions for the TR study and 5 questions for this research project (see Appendices A and B). Because both studies were exploratory, all questions were semi-structured and open-ended to allow participants to expand on their responses. This design eliminates researcher bias and allows the researcher to gather participants’ knowledge on the topic rather than asking specific leading questions. Each group interview was recorded and transcribed using Rev software.

Protocol

As stated above, each focus group received the protocol. The first 10 questions were for the TR study; the remaining 5 questions focused on the traditions studied in this research. The last 5 questions asked about the impact of the specific tradition—Airband or Spring Sing—on students’ experiences and how the tradition connects with the campus culture. The protocol was assessed through a pilot focus group, a convenient sample of non-student leaders at Taylor University. Four men and one woman attended the pilot, with the four men living on the same floor. This connection seemed to produce some group-think and focus on this floor’s specific traditions.

Data Analysis

In *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (1990) suggested that hermeneutic phenomenology does not have a fixed set of procedures; rather, it allows the research questions and subject matter of each study to create their own paths in discovering the essence. In light of this, the researcher utilized methods Creswell (2013) suggested for data analysis in a phenomenological study. However, the structural description was not developed because all participants experienced the traditions in similar ways. Therefore, it was not necessary in this study.

For both institutions, the data was analyzed by “identifying significant statements, creating meaning units, [and] clustering themes . . .” (Creswell, 2013, p. 226). Within this, the researcher coded the transcriptions and produced themes from these codes. From the themes, the researcher developed a description for each tradition that captured the experiences of the participants. From this description, an essence for both universities was created. Through comparing the two institutions’ themes, the researcher

sought to discover if the traditions share common ideas or if they have completely different purposes. If common traits were discovered, the researcher would create a description based on those common qualities, then develop an essence for tradition's impact on a college culture as a whole. This finding would reveal universal traits for similar institutions. If there were no commonalities, the researcher would attempt to determine why there is no commonality. This finding would show how each tradition impacts their individual cultures but indicate no universal principle across institutions.

To maintain validity, the researcher clarified researcher bias in the introduction. The researcher also developed rich, thick descriptions of the findings for both traditions and any unifying essence. These descriptions allow readers to discern if the results apply to other college traditions and cultures. Due to the lack of research, the researcher could not use triangulation, a typical method for corroborating results (Creswell, 2013).

Due to the variability in participant numbers, the researcher developed a frequency weighting system. This extra measure was implemented to maintain validity and reliability of the data and stay true to the focus group model. This system strives to maintain the collective voice of participants while still including the voices of those in an individual interview. The scale ranged from the values of 1 to 3. Interviews of one participant were given the value of 1; interviews with two participants were given the value of 2; focus groups with three or more participants have the value of 3. Throughout the coding process, the researcher weighed excerpts based on the number of participants in the interview. Through data analysis, the researcher calculated the sum of the weights for each theme, providing a level of significance to the findings. In Chapter 5, frequency weights are indicated in parentheses after the themes, subthemes, and elements.

Chapter 4

Results

The aim of this study was to explore the impact of traditions on an institution's culture and any universal characteristics of traditions in Christian higher education institutions. As a reminder, the frequency weights are indicated in parentheses following each theme, subtheme, and element. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the findings.

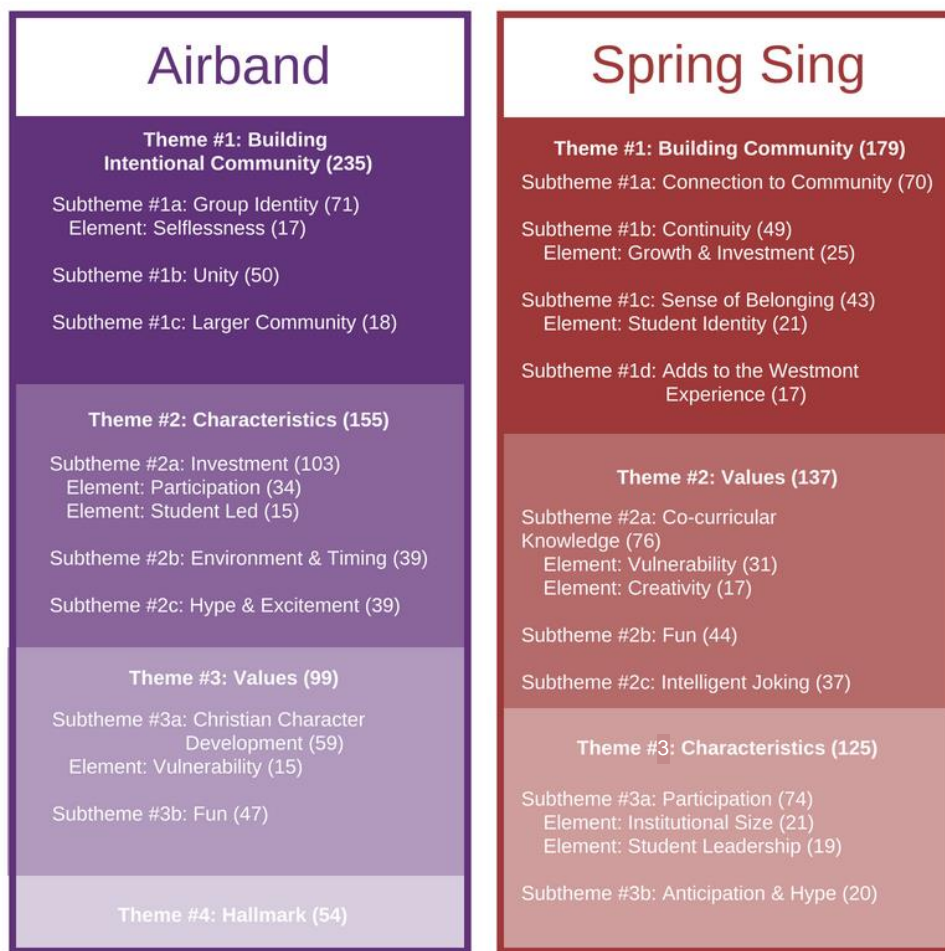


Figure 1: Theme outlines for Airband and Spring Sing.

Airband Results

The following results focus on how the tradition of Airband impacts the culture of Taylor University. Four themes emerged with seven subthemes. Within the subthemes, several elements revealed themselves. The four themes are (1) building intentional community, (2) characteristics, (3) values, and (4) hallmark. Building intentional community contains subthemes of (1a) unity, (1b) larger community, and (1c) group identity. Group identity includes an element of selflessness. The theme of characteristics has three subthemes: (2a) hype and excitement, (2b) environment and timing, and (2c) investment. The elements of investment include participation and student leadership. Values' subthemes include (3a) Christian character development and (3b) fun. The Christian character development subtheme includes an element of vulnerability. The remaining theme, hallmark, does not include any subthemes. The following sections provide further depth of the results.

Theme 1: Building intentional community (235). Participants described this theme as creating close relationships across campus and within their “wings”—defined as communities within a residence hall. Participants shared that intentional community is a “cliché” phrase at Taylor but is genuinely displayed through traditions like Airband. This tradition has allowed students to meet others they never would have, build relationships, and feel more a part of the Taylor community.

Students who had performed in Airband tended to speak of how the experience itself provides space for community bonding. Groups made up of “brother and sister wings”—defined as men and women residential wings that partner together for activities throughout the year—shared how the Airband experience helped deepen those

relationships and the bonds between the two wings. Other groups made up of just the wing or another affinity group talked about how the experience helped deepen those members' relationships. As the students became comfortable with each other in Airband, doors were opened for deeper relationships to grow outside the activity. In addition, students who waited in the long line to get into Airband shared how that experience helped them connect with their wing mates better as well. Students' connections made while waiting in line or performing has contributed to community building on campus. Participants communicated group identity, unity, and larger community—the subthemes—as important aspects of intentional community.

Subtheme 1a: Group identity (71). Students expressed that participating in Airband was a way to develop pride and allegiance to the institution and/or wings by creating a space for them to feel known. Many students discussed Airband as both a campus-wide tradition and individual wings' tradition. "I think it has kind of aspects of both, because it definitely builds Taylor pride, but at the same time, a lot of wings and floors do things together on their own . . ." (Student K). When discussed as a campus-wide tradition, students spoke of Taylor pride stemming from Airband:

So as much as people who take residence halls as an identity, I think we realize... there's that Taylor pride. . . . I feel that at Air Band because I'm like "Wow, what other school would do this." You know, what other school would spend so many hours preparing an act that's lip-syncing and dancing just because. It's like Taylor pride . . . (Student D)

This feeling of campus and residence hall "pride" is generated from students' unique experiences with Airband and demonstrates care for the communities they are a part of.

After participating in Airband, students expressed feeling more connected to their wing and like they were part of something. Even students who had negative experiences with Airband expressed how it bonded their group closer because of their shared situation. Certain wings on Taylor's campus view Airband as "their tradition," meaning they always participate by having an act in the show. One wing has a history of winning Airband and has developed a reputation that plays into their wing identity. With this reputation, there can be pressure on students to represent their wing well.

Students acknowledged Airband as an opportunity to develop their individual identities, learn more about themselves, and how they feel known on campus. Participants discussed these spaces contributing to where their identities derive from at Taylor. These spaces of feeling known encourage students to continue building the community into which they were welcomed. Other participants confirmed how much they value their identity in their student leadership positions and having a piece in facilitating traditions. Through their positions, they feel known by their community. Participants spoke more in depth about how Airband helped them experience selflessness, an element of group identity.

Element: Selflessness (17). Described by participants as "contributing to something larger than myself," Airband allows students to practice humility through participating in long-standing tradition. Especially as student leaders who facilitate the tradition, participants expressed mindfulness of other community members before, around, and behind them. "It's just the feeling of being part of something bigger that makes you want to do that. . . . It just instills that commitment to something that . . . It's not necessarily for your benefit" (Student C). This selflessness draws students to think

back to their community and how the tradition impacts them. Participants' ability to do this demonstrated their mindfulness of the tradition's impact overall.

Subtheme 1b: Unity (50). Participants viewed Airband as a way to bring together groups from across the Taylor community, creating camaraderie through the unique experience. Students felt unified through their relationships in the residence halls and across campus, but a few shared how it impacted their own families as well. Legacy students—individuals whose parents or family members have also attended the institution—expressed how fun it was to share this experience with their family members. One legacy student expressed unattainable expectations for Airband set by a family member that she did not experience, which created a disappointment. However, she and other participants expressed how the tradition is infamous because of how much it is discussed amongst students:

I feel like if I didn't go to Airband it would detract from my experience because, here's an example I can think of that's like, I went on a Pick-a-Date a day after Airband and the guy I went on Pick-a-Date with didn't go to Airband and I was like what can we talk about? All I wanted to talk about was Airband. (Student E)

Overall, students spoke of unity as a way for different residence halls to bond over the shared experience and viewed Airband as a method to bridge gaps across campus.

Participants discussed a spirit of celebration—through supporting and cheering for one another—emerging from the camaraderie experienced in Airband. Celebration was a surprise to some students, as Airband is a competition. However, students saw celebration as a way to care for one another despite their differences:

And I think that's a really good image of Taylor's culture and how even though we are very different depending on your wing or your floor or what dorm you live in or what sports team you're on or if you're international, when it comes down to it, we all are in support of one another, and we are willing to kind of transcend those differences in order to help one another. (Student D)

Participants recognized this spirit of celebrating unity as stemming from the Taylor culture and how Airband provided a space for them to practice that value.

Subtheme 1c: Larger community (18). Participants viewed Airband as a unique opportunity to build connections with the larger Taylor community: the Upland community, faculty, staff, families, alumni, and administration. By including the Upland community, students thought this tradition helps build relationship between the university and the town. Through the first show, which has typically been viewed as family-oriented, students believed community members feel welcomed to campus. Participants saw this inclusion of other individuals as the tradition's impact reaching beyond the immediate Taylor community.

Theme 2: Characteristics (155). This theme consists of the surrounding components relating to Airband's impact. Almost all of the participants described these characteristics as an important factor to Airband. These components include the investment of students, environment, timing, hype, and excitement—all of which are subthemes. The elements within the subtheme of investment include participation and student leadership.

Subtheme 2a: Investment (103). Participants were in awe at the commitment, dedication, care, time, and resources students put into Airband. Students discussed

participation and student leadership—both elements of this subtheme—as deeper aspects of investment. In essence, participants said that “people are willing to do crazy things to keep the Taylor traditions alive” (Student L). Participants shared that their level of investment stems from wanting to represent their groups well:

. . . when I went to Airband for the first time, it blew me away. First, how much hype there was to it and how excited people were and how serious they were about it. And how, you know, people practiced for weeks and hours and people invest their money and time and grades. . . . People put a lot, people care about it a lot. And I think that really surprised me and I love it. I loved it. Because it is what makes it what is it is. (Student J)

The commitment and dedication displayed by students in the show encouraged them to get involved as well: “. . . it's a tradition, it's something that you want to be a part of because your university does it and because you want to be part of those traditions” (Student C). Through investing in Airband, students demonstrate their care for the Taylor University community. While this tradition does require a lot of effort, many students recognized the value in their investment.

Participants recognized a growth in the quality of Airband through word of mouth and by watching old YouTube videos. Students recognized this growth stemming from their peers’ level of involvement and a change in culture. Through the student body seeking to continually improve the quality of Airband, they demonstrate a high level of commitment and dedication to the tradition and Taylor University.

Element: Participation (34). Students spoke about a large number of people willing to engage in Airband in a variety of ways, whether participating in an act,

attending the event, and helping execute the event. “Yeah, like the mass participation. Whatever quantity of people that means. Like the participation and the fact that everyone is doing it” (Student L). Students expressed how the uniqueness of having a majority of the student body in one place at one time displays community to them. The level of involvement is important to the tradition’s level of importance to the community, according to participants.

However, participants noted how some student groups from different halls or interests do not care for traditions such as Airband and choose not to participate. Students also suggested a skew in the acts that participate in Airband, as the majority of acts come from two of the largest residence halls. They noted how a few students choose not to participate in Airband at all.

Element: Student-led (15). Participants conveyed the importance of having student-led traditions, such as Airband. Taylor Student Organization (TSO) is credited with leading many of these campus-wide traditions and fostering community for the rest of campus. Participants expressed how the student leadership in these traditions aligns closely with the mission of the university, which is to develop servant leaders. They perceived their leadership roles as an important part of keeping the traditions going. “We have TSO for students to do events for the campus, its student run, student run, student run. You don't see president/deans up there running a tradition for us. That's not what it's designed for . . . ” (Student M). Students also noted that every act needs leadership as well, providing an opportunity for other students to step forward and assume leadership.

Subtheme 2b: Environment and timing (39). Participants expressed how the institution’s size, location, and policy are factors of the environment surrounding

Airband. These factors are perceived to be conducive to fostering a tightly woven community. Taylor University is a small school of approximately 2,000 students, located in rural Indiana. The institution also has a community statement called the “Life Together Covenant” that all community members sign and are expected to live by. Students acknowledged how these factors dictate their college experience and create a unique environment:

I think it's just a huge part of Taylor's culture. And, I mean honestly, the fact that Taylor is in the middle of nowhere and you can't get off campus without driving for a while, I think, initially, that was a lot of why like the traditions are "let's do this crazy thing on campus because there is nothing else to do, we live in the middle of the corn fields." So I think that's one unique aspect of Taylor. The fact that people are so invested in the traditions and the events that happen on campus.

(Student I)

These factors help to foster an environment that encourages students to stay on campus and participate in traditions—Airband being one of the largest campus-wide traditions. In addition, the institution’s calendar seems to play into effect. Students regarded traditions to have a holiday-like feel to them. “Everyone gets so excited and hyped about Airband. I feel like as soon as spring hits, it's like Airband, let's get ready. . . . It's just a huge event” (Student J). Participants described the day of Airband as a “feeling in the air” that is special, exciting, and something they look forward to every year.

A year before this study took place, Airband was moved from the fall to the spring to switch with another tradition—Taylathon, a bike race. Many participants noted the change and talked about how it impacted both traditions. At first, students were upset

and wondered how they were going to pull their performances together. Participants also expressed Airband was a way for the freshmen to get to know their communities. They shared how the timing of Airband in the fall allowed for wings and halls to get to know each other well at the start of the new academic year. This change was a bigger deal to those who prepared acts than those who attended. While the modification was an adjustment for students at first, most seemed to be fine with the event in the spring with a few students expressing more difficulty in putting together acts.

Subtheme 2c: Hype and excitement (39). Participants described Airband as having an atmosphere of joy, excitement, and anticipation. They specifically talked about the energy level surrounding the event—before, during, and after:

. . . the amount of energy everyone has put into Airband by the teams who are participating and the audience. . . . I think that has a lot to do with the hype and excitement of Airband and the reason why everyone talks about it for weeks before hand. And why everyone buys their tickets and wants to go. (Student F)

This energy level was viewed as a crucial element to the tradition; participants communicated that, without energy and excitement, the tradition can start to die. Students talked about the hype of Airband beginning as soon as they arrive on campus as a prospective student: “. . . so even within the first month of school, I already knew about [Airband], and I already knew the weight that it carried” (Student K). The popularity and energy of this tradition make it something students look forward to, even as a spectator.

Theme 3: Values (99). This theme consists of main values represented by the institution’s culture around the tradition of Airband. Students expressed learning about

these cultural values through their experience with Airband. These values include safe, healthy fun and Christian character development:

The idea of growing closer together as a body of believers, growing closer together as individuals. . . . So the idea of vulnerability, growing individually, the idea of community, growing as a group, and I would assume that the integration of faith and learning can even be tied into an event such as Airband. I mean there are so many things that individuals can learn specifically and definitely a way that faith can play into that of having good clean fun. An event where we are all cheering for each other because we are all sort of on the same team. (Student D)

Participants expressed that Airband was a good culmination of these cultural values and taught students how to make them their own.

Subtheme 3a: Christian character development (59). Participants shared how Airband helps students learn and practice how to be a Christian individual through representing their values well and preparing them for life after Taylor. Some of these values include leadership, teamwork, accountability, inclusivity, and vulnerability. Participants also discussed how Airband provides a space for students to practice living out Taylor's mission statement:

The last line [of the mission statement] is marked with a passion and show Christ's love to a world in need. And, if you take back a little bit, to be able to show love to a world in need, you have to first know how to love or how to show love... And then if you want to display that, you have to be able to relate to people of different backgrounds, different genders, and different interests. And so these

events are very subtly encouraging that by providing at least those opportunities to happen or for you to learn from it. (Student G)

This subtle encouragement helps students learn how to work and love one another well by giving them a space to practice this value well before they leave Taylor.

Students acknowledged that Taylor values holistic development and felt that Airband was one way they were expected to do more than learn in the classroom. They felt Airband plays a role in shaping who they are as college students and helps develop their character in ways they could not inside the classroom. Student E shared, “I think that's important because it really shapes who we are, and shapes how we leave this place . . .” Participants recognized the importance in developing their character now and how it can contribute later on in their lives.

In addition, students saw Airband as an opportunity to practice their Christian values while interacting with culture. Airband provides the space for students to engage with both their faith and culture while learning how to bring the two together. Participants described their Airband experience as an opportunity to learn how to glorify the Lord even through a lip sync competition. Students spoke of Airband being a secular event in which they can practice being in the world but not of it, demonstrating students’ mindfulness in how they approach Airband.

Element: Vulnerability (15). This value was discussed more than the others in the Christian Character Development subtheme. Participants expressed how Airband gave them spaces to become comfortable with one another through doing something uncomfortable or unfamiliar to them. Many of the students who participate in Airband have no previous dance background, making this opportunity uncomfortable for them.

This discomfort made the students feel vulnerable to those with whom they performed. However, the participants expressed that, after pushing through, they were able to grow into deeper relationships with who shared in the experience.

Subtheme 3b: Fun (47). As a prominent value, participants shared how Airband creates an atmosphere of good, safe, goofy enjoyment. “I think Taylor is so unique because it's appropriate family friendly fun. . . . to me it shows a value of Taylor that we have our own definition of fun and it's a good one and we value that” (Student B). Participants described the fun they experience at Taylor as zany, awesome, weird, and safe. In essence, “We know how to have fun in a way that no one does anymore in college, in a way” (Student I). Students also expressed the fun experienced at Taylor teaches them how share in wholesome enjoyment, which builds their Christian character as well. Students shared how this type of fun helps Taylor students stand out. After hearing from alumni friends, participants expressed that Taylor graduates to have a wholesome outlook on how to experience enjoyment, which they claimed to be unique compared to graduates from other institutions.

Theme 4: Hallmark (54). This theme captured the essence of Airband in relation to this study. Ultimately, students described Airband as a tradition that represents the values of Taylor University and is ingrained as a part of the institution’s culture. “It's one of the selling points. It's one of the things that makes Taylor, Taylor, and it's one of the things that makes us a community. I think that's very additive” (Student M). Most students said Airband was not crucial to their experience, but they would be upset if it were to leave:

[Airband] has become a part of what Taylor culture is, you know? If it's so very ingrained in the culture of Taylor, and for that to go away, it kind of takes away from what Taylor represents and the culture of Taylor and why people want to be here. (Student C)

The overall consensus was that Airband made students' college experiences richer but was not the entirety of their college experience. Participants said Airband helped their relationships with others grow and provided wonderful opportunities to meet other students.

Spring Sing Results

The results of this part of the study focus on how the tradition of Spring Sing impacts Westmont College's culture. Based on the analysis of the data, three themes emerged with nine sub-themes. Within these sub-themes, six elements also emerged. The three themes are (1) building community, (2) values, and (3) characteristics. The theme of building community contains subthemes of (1a) connection to community, (1b) sense of belonging, (1c) continuity, and (1d) adding to a student's Westmont experience. The sense of belonging subtheme has an element of student identity; and the subtheme of continuity has an element of growth and investment. The value theme includes subthemes of (2a) co-curricular knowledge, (2b) intelligent joking, and (2c) fun. Vulnerability and creativity are elements of co-curricular knowledge. The subthemes for characteristics are (3a) participation and (3b) anticipation and hype. The subtheme of participation has elements of institutional size and student leadership. From these themes, the essence of Spring Sing was developed: Spring Sing is a communal event led

by students to communicate and develop culture representative of Westmont College.

The following sections provide further depth of the results.

Theme 1: Building community (179). Students expressed community as one of the biggest outcomes of Spring Sing. Ultimately, this tradition brings together individuals to share a common experience and bonds them together to form new relationships. Participants discussed how Spring Sing has impacted how they view their Westmont experience. Spring Sing not only taught the students of community's importance to the Westmont experience but also helped to build their community in the process:

[Spring Sing] allowed me that classic opportunity to get to know people I probably wouldn't have just because we don't run in the same circles but we happened to be involved in the same thing and we both wanted to be. So we did. It's also bonding. It's just a bonding experience. (Student P)

Participants emphasized Spring Sing's role in helping build the Westmont community, which they described as essential to the Westmont experience. Legacy students spoke of how they heard of Spring Sing before attending the college from their parents. This tradition allowed participants to create connections with others, feel known, continue the tradition of their community, and have an added value to their Westmont experience.

Subtheme 1a: Connection to community (70). Participants described Spring Sing as creating a sense of unity among all community members (i.e., students, professors, staff, alumni), which form long-lasting relationships and memories. Students described this emerging mainly through the connection with the college's faculty, staff, and other students. Participants viewed this tradition as providing a space for all

community members to engage one another, allowing a universal connection between different parties. “Not just in the student body, but the fact that alumni come back like parents and grandparents of Westmont students come just to see that event. That's like a three hour event” (Student T). This tradition demonstrates the unity within the Westmont community. Participants communicated how Spring Sing demonstrates this close-knit community through the jokes shared from the stage:

Perks of a small school . . . I think most of the jokes people make in Spring Sing teaches us like how actually connected the student body is because we get jokes like that whereas [they] might not come across as well at a bigger institution.
(Student M)

Students described Spring Sing as providing a layer of depth to their relationships with community members that will last after graduation. They expressed wanting to participate in Spring Sing because they desire these long lasting relationships with others.

Subtheme 1b: Continuity (49). Participants discussed how generation after generation chooses to take on this tradition as a representation of the Westmont community. Students expressed Spring Sing as one of the most stable traditions they have at Westmont, recognized throughout the generations of alumni. The legacy of this tradition provides a connection between students and other community members:

I met an alumna this summer while I was working at summer camp. . . . She was like, “Oh yeah, I went to Westmont. Are they still doing Spring Sing?” Asking about it. I was like, “Yeah, I was in it.” It's just really cool that's a common thing that almost anybody no matter when they graduated or when they went here, you can ask them about their experience with that. (Student R)

Participants viewed their participation in Spring Sing as becoming a part of the tradition and learning more about their community. Spring Sing has become an identifiable representation of the Westmont community due to its longevity and popularity.

Element: Growth and investment (25). Participants expressed the amount of passion and care each generation has contributed to the growth and change in making Spring Sing their own. Students expressed that the reason they do Spring Sing remains year after year; however, the way in which they do Spring Sing evolves. Participants shared the factors contributing to the evolution include keeping up with current culture, recent campus jokes, and safety policies. Students stated their continual investment in Spring Sing stems from their passion for the community:

Community and love of the events. The passion that students put into everything, what they say about the events, how they do the events. The time commitment they will put into Spring Sing... I think all of that keeps it going, because faculty, staff, the people that plan all these things, they see it, and they're like that's something that's gonna last. (Student W)

Students knew the event used to take place on campus but became very popular and was moved to the Santa Barbara Bowl. This growth demonstrates how invested the community is.

Subtheme 1c: Sense of belonging (43). Participants articulated Spring Sing as space where students feel known by community members and are able to identify where they fit into the community. This feeling of being known and knowing others allowed the students to build deeper relationships within their residence halls and the greater Westmont community:

. . . general human sense of belonging. Everyone wants to belong somewhere to something, and a great way to do that is to participate in a tradition that people 50 years before you have done and 50 years after will do and all your friends are doing. It makes you part of a group automatically. (Student P)

Participants described Spring Sing as a catalyst to develop a strong association with their residence halls and the college. They also discussed how being present on campus helps them feel like they belong. When students understand the context of the jokes expressed in Spring Sing, they experience a bond between them and other community members.

Element: Student identity (21). Participants emphasized sense of belonging and identity by feeling known through their participation in Spring Sing. Through this tradition, students identify with different groups on campus such as their residence hall or clubs. “. . . you're watching skits and then associate, oh, that one's the crazy red ant. Oh, I thought he was some random person on the baseball team, but now he's like a weird coffee pot” (Student X). Participants spoke of how their participation speaks into how they view themselves as a part of the Westmont community. Once their identities were established on campus, participants discussed feeling more comfortable within the community in knowing their place and how others see them.

Subtheme 1d: Adds to the Westmont experience (17). Participants spoke of Spring Sing as an added value of the Westmont experience. Many agreed they have enjoyed Spring Sing and it has made their experience richer, but they recognized the event is not the entirety of their Westmont experience. Since Spring Sing is viewed as the “thing to do,” students get whole-heartedly involved. Other participants, who have been more involved, expressed how ingrained the event is in their Westmont experience.

“Spring Sing is one you hear constantly. To think to not be a part of that is kind of strange. Imagining that, not being in Spring Sing, or doing something, that would be strange . . .” (Student W). All participants recognized the importance of Spring Sing to the Westmont experience because the majority of the campus is involved with it:

I think most [traditions] are marketed as this is something that if you neglect to take advantage of this experience, then you're going to miss something that's essential for the Westmont experience, and not just a college experience, but particularly Westmont. This is something that we've been doing for so long. You can think this is lame, but being on the other side of it, you're going to realize how amazing this is. (Student R)

In this light, Spring Sing is viewed as an important piece of the Westmont culture.

Theme 2: Values (131). The theme of values describes the qualities that represent the Westmont culture or community. This theme ultimately points to what values students learn from Spring Sing and how it has impacted their Westmont experience. These subthemes include co-curricular knowledge, intelligent joking, and fun. Co-curricular knowledge has two elements—vulnerability and creativity.

Subtheme 2a: Co-curricular knowledge (73). Participants shared beneficial social and practical skills that students learn from their experience in Spring Sing. They identified learning skills such as teamwork, leadership, competition, involvement, public speaking, different cultures and languages, and time management:

It's made me . . . a better student for time management purposes, but it's also made me closer to my community and it's given me so many skills. . . . My second year I was a director [of an act] for my dorm. That is a lot of time commitment but it

also gives you a lot of creativity. You have to come up with this hilarious skit that makes no sense whatsoever. . . . But I think it makes you better in the sense that you understand the tradition, because you're part of it, but you also build the community, and you kind of understand how to work with 60 girls, which is insanely hard because they don't stop talking. (Student Y)

This is just one example of what participants learned from Spring Sing. They viewed these skills as important to their development and knowledge for life after college. Participants spoke about two skills—vulnerability and creativity—in more depth.

Element: Vulnerability (31). Participants viewed this value as a freedom to get out of their comfort zone and try something new. Students thought deeply about this topic, relating their Spring Sing experience with a chapel speaker they had heard earlier. They expressed Spring Sing as a freeing experience when students learn how to place their value in Christ and not care how others view them:

And also once you realize that God loves you, you don't depend on other people for your happiness or your love that you need, and I think when you come to [that] realization . . . you can be as silly as you want on that stage for Spring Sing, and everyone's like you go. . . . That's important though to be able to develop in yourself. (Students Z).

The Spring Sing experience helps students step outside of their comfort zone and be vulnerable with others. Through this step, participants found they were free to be themselves within their community. By trying something new and getting up on stage, participants expressed a growth in their self-confidence. “[Spring Sing] teaches you to have a voice because work, or life after college, you have to stand up for yourself and put

yourself out there” (Student X). This opportunity is a stretching process and something participants do not think they could have learned in the classroom.

Element: Creativity (17). Participants emphasized how Spring Sing encourages individuals to express themselves and see the world differently:

. . . a lot of these events and traditions offer students a wide stage to be creative and express themselves, which kind of plays into Westmont's emphasis on the individual and the imago dei. And just allowing students to be who they were created to be as a student body all together. (Student M)

Students discussed how traditions such as Spring Sing help them channel their creativity in another way. They stated that having another space outside of academia, where they can express passion and creativity, is important to them. Especially within Spring Sing, participants spoke about how creative they get when trying to work within the guidelines. Students expressed creativity within the subtheme of intelligent joking, as students are creative in how they formulate and express their jokes.

Subtheme 2b: Fun (44). Students described this value as important to the Westmont culture. They viewed Spring Sing as a space for good communal fun and enjoyment:

Yeah, and I think too it's an effort to foster a Christian community as well. These traditions, they're fun . . . as an alternative to going to [a place] and partying every night. They want us to have other things, other fun things that we can do that are not . . . we're not breaking any laws or doing anything we shouldn't be doing. We're having fun and building good community together in a healthy way.
(Student Y)

According to participants, Spring Sing is one space on Westmont's campus that promotes good, healthy fun. Students described this type of fun as unique and written into the fabric of what Spring Sing is. They mentioned how enjoyable this event is for them through goofing off with one another. One student said that Spring Sing taught her how to laugh, enjoying the presence of others.

Participants also noted there is an element of stress that comes with doing Spring Sing but described it as a different type of stress: "But Spring Sing stress is like I'm doing this because (A) it's fun. . . . Stress, yes . . . but I'm doing something that's making memories for me for a lifetime, but also building relationships for a lifetime" (Student X). The fun that students experienced through Spring Sing helped them further build their communities and deepen relationships by making memories that will last past their four years at the institution.

Participants stated part of their fun is learning how to laugh at themselves and the uniqueness of the Westmont culture. "It's funny. It's a joke, and that's kind of what Spring Sing cultivates, this sense of you need to laugh at yourself every once in a while" (Student Y). The students recognized the uniqueness of the Westmont culture and how they interact as a community. This encouragement to make fun of it celebrates their unique culture. "I think we definitely like to make fun of ourselves and make fun of the Westmontness of the way we do things" (Student R). Participants expressed Spring Sing as a space where they can celebrate their uniqueness and laugh with one another.

Subtheme 2c: Intelligent joking (37). Participants discussed this value as a method of communication. Participants viewed their Spring Sing acts an unaggressive way to satirically "push" or present their views on relevant events, Westmont-related and

not. This subtheme displays students' wit and creativity in sharing their thoughts about the college's current events.

It aligns with the values of the college on one hand, but it also pushes against those and questions. Like that's why there'll be jokes about chapel in Spring Sing is because the college is saying this and the student body is pushing a little bit against that. That's why there's always a little tension with the editing and the regulations, just because the student body wants to push against those values. Not in like an aggressive, "We don't like this" way, but just like an SNL, like its own mini expose. But it's funny. (Student Z)

They considered this form of joking as a value of the Westmont culture in learning how to express their ideas to others: ". . . you get little inside campus jokes that this school has. That's also what the good traditions help develop" (Students X). Students described Spring Sing as where the "drama" comes out from the year before, such as a mountain lion on campus, a shark in the mailbox, or other situations on campus.

Participants described Spring Sing as a unique platform for students to be in front of the faculty, staff, and administration—in a way, flipping the tables and giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions or concerns. One student provided an example of how students "intelligently joke" at Spring Sing:

I think creativity is at least something that is championed because you want something that's original but also can intelligently make fun of the Westmont way of doing things and intelligently kind of poke it. . . . For example, the Arlington men last year did one about a parody of inception. However, they made a joke about the annual tuition increase and that I can't lose my scholarship. They were

trying to get an A on the test by changing the professor's mind. They were making jokes like, "I can't lose my scholarship because my parents can't afford another 2.8 in tuition increase." Of course we all laugh because we all know it's happening. . . . It doesn't have to be all about Westmont, but people can make intelligent jokes. I think that's a mark of something that's really encouraged, that's told to be risen to the surface. (Student R)

Participants explained that, through Spring Sing, they can express some of those thoughts in a humorous way. "Some satire, pushing. Seeing how far you can push it a little bit, not to be like coerced" (Student M). Students learned they also have to communicate their thoughts so the larger Westmont community understands what they are trying to say, which they found to be challenging.

Theme 3: Characteristics (127). The theme of characteristics describes the surrounding environment of Spring Sing. In the general interview protocol, students were asked questions regarding characteristics of traditions overall. Participants often described Spring Sing's characteristics first. The subthemes include participation, and anticipation and hype. The elements of the participation subtheme include institutional size and student leadership.

Subtheme 3a: Participation (73). Participants viewed Spring Sing as having a high level of participation from the Westmont community (i.e., students, faculty, staff, Santa Barbara community members, families, alumni, and administration). Participants also contributed this participation to their institutional size and student leadership—both elements of this subtheme. Students expressed how Spring Sing's inclusivity helps create

a higher level of participation. Students equated a higher level of participation to greater impact on the community—if people do not participate, then it detracts from the tradition.

There's certain things that we've highlighted to do as a community and that it's a communal event and we celebrate that in all [the traditions] that I can think of, especially since community is such a big part of what this school is. I think it's more that it's not an individualized tradition where every person does this. It's still communal aspect, but it's very specific to the fact that everyone does it as a community. (Student R)

While Spring Sing seems to have high community involvement, participants emphasized the importance of partaking in the experience as a community. This view may explain why some participants who have not been involved with Spring Sing expressed regret in not doing so.

Element: Institutional size (21). Participants shared the college's size as one reason for their ability to have a rich tradition like Spring Sing. The smaller student population allows for greater access, greater connectivity, and more participation:

For instance, Spring Sing is done by where you live. It aligns very much with Westmont's heart to be communal. We're not a big school, one, because we don't have room but two, I think people at the heart of Westmont don't want it to be this massive university. I think they want people to be connected and want people to know each other. We're small. We're a small liberal arts school. The small part is not unintentional. (Student Z)

Participants expressed that the majority of students will participate because it is “the thing to do” (Student X). The size of the institution, while a characteristic, provides a unique environment for a tradition like Spring Sing to emerge.

Element: Student leadership (19). Participants described Spring Sing as a student-owned event. While it is a community event in which all members of the institution participate, the event is initiated, led, directed, produced, and performed by students. Participants spoke of how Spring Sing is a unique outlet for students to have the stage rather than faculty, staff, and administration. They viewed this outlet as a great opportunity for them to express themselves. The student effort put into this tradition is fueled by their passion and care for the events and the college:

It's almost like why are we putting so much effort into something that no one's gonna remember really, and what's the big deal? But the reason is this is the thing to do, and we're all gonna get heavily invested because we care. (Student X)

Students saw their participation in Spring Sing as an opportunity to express their love for the institution. Participants perceived their passion for the tradition to be an indicator of its continuity. Students enjoy Spring Sing because they do not have to be involved, but they want to be involved. They expressed this opportunity rather than requirement allows them to have a more genuine affection for the tradition.

Subtheme 3b: Anticipation and hype (20). Participants saw Spring Sing as something students look forward to when it comes to spring semester. There is a sense of excitement, eagerness, and a contagious anticipation throughout campus as spring approaches. A few participants discussed how quickly new students find out about Spring Sing through the community's excitement.

When you come to school in the spring you know that Spring Sing is eventually going to get talked about. Even if you've never been a part of it, like even coming in as a freshman, if someone talks about it they're excited about it so you kind of get secondhand excitement from it . . . and you want to join. (Student T)

Students discussed Spring Sing as a something everyone is always talking about and a tradition “you have to do” (Student R). Participants also expressed how the anticipation for Spring Sing could be built up to the point of overexcitement, resulting in negative attitudes from their peers.

Summary

Through these themes, the essences of both traditions were developed. The essence of Airband is a tradition that represents the values of Taylor University and is ingrained as a part of the institution’s culture. The essence of Spring Sing is a communal event led by students to communicate and develop culture representative of Westmont College. Both Airband and Spring Sing had significant impacts on the participants. From these results, three main findings were produced. Students on both campuses recognized community to be the greatest impact of the traditions. Participants also recognized the values learned through the traditions have a large impact on the communities, as well as maintain the cultural uniqueness of both institutions. In addition, students shared how characteristics surrounding the traditions shaped the tradition’s impact.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research sought to explore students' perspectives of college traditions' impact on campus culture. Several observations can be made from the results. First, building community is the largest impact of both traditions. Community is a strong cultural value at both institutions. While heavily emphasized, students truly experience community through participating in Airband or Spring Sing. Second, both institutions had similar theme breakdowns, but each revealed the respective institution's cultural values. Both Airband and Spring Sing shared similar themes, demonstrating an overarching tendency for college traditions in general. In addition, both institutions' cultural values were prominent through the subthemes and elements. Third, both traditions have similar characteristics impacting the importance of the traditions. Both sets of participants saw the institutional size and environment, hype, student leadership, and level of participation to be factors that makes these traditions what they are.

Implications for Practice

Finding #1: Building community is the largest impact of both traditions. This conclusion reinforces previous findings on tradition's relation with community (Bronner, 2012; The Carnegie Foundation, 1990; Cheng, 2004; Elkins et al., 2011). Each of these scholars talked about tradition and community in different ways. The Carnegie

Foundation (1990) discussed traditions' significance in developing and sustaining community on college campuses, which is also demonstrated through this study.

Both traditions studied produced a deep sense of unity and belonging for participants. However, the two traditions seemed to accomplish this sense of community in slightly different ways: Airband emphasized the group identity, pride, and loyalty as discussed by some of the higher education literature (Bronner, 2012; The Carnegie Foundation, 1990); while Spring Sing highlighted the continuity piece many folklorists discussed as the social chain or glue (Bronner, 1998; Bruns, 1991; Pelikan, 1984; Shils, 1981). Both traditions displayed the growth, innovations, and refinements made from the handing down from generation to generation (Bronner, 1992; The Carnegie Foundation, 1990; Shils, 1981). In addition, both traditions played a role in how students identify with the institution (Bronner, 1998; Shils, 1981) and have maintained core elements of the traditions' identities (Pieper, 2008).

Elkins and colleagues (2011) recognized higher levels of student participation can lead to more knowledge about the institution and traditions, providing those students with a deeper sense of community. The current study's participants were all student leaders, speaking on behalf of students in general, who expressed feeling a deep sense of campus community through Airband and Spring Sing. However, the few student leaders who did not participate in Airband or Spring Sing did not feel a lack of community but did regret not participating. Therefore, students at Westmont College attributed the level of involvement to greater sense of community, while students at Taylor University did not. This could also be attributed to Westmont participants' view of Spring Sing as a communal event—meaning the community participates in the tradition together.

This finding begs the question, “Is community always positive?” From this study’s results, community was communicated as a positive attribute. In this understanding, community is described as inclusive, fun, and connective—where beneficial relationships are built. A couple of participants discussed how these traditions cultivated a negative sense of community, either through a high demand on the individuals’ participation in the tradition or an overexcitement surrounding the tradition. Through this discussion of the negative aspects, participants demonstrated how communities developed in these traditions are not always positive. Still, overall, participants discussed both of the traditions studied as having a positive impact on the institutions’ sense of community. This finding could also be attributed to the emphasis of community as a positive cultural value at both institutions. However, participants viewed sense of community as a beneficial aspect of both traditions studied. While participants may have described these traditions as having a positive impact, this finding cannot and should not be assumed for all college traditions.

This conclusion demonstrates the need for institutions to think strategically through how their traditions are developing their communities and cultures. As displayed through this study, community is one of the biggest cultural values at both institutions and is extremely significant to students. While this is a cultural value at these institutions, this conclusion also demonstrates college traditions’ significant role in developing campus community. Through the tradition, individuals discover more of their identities and experience a sense of belonging. This community also serves to unite the campus with a sense of pride and fellowship. The development of community is significant to the institution’s culture, for, without community, there is little to no culture.

Finding #2: Both institutions had similar theme break downs, but each revealed the respective institution's cultural values. This finding demonstrates an overarching tendency of college traditions' characteristics while also maintaining each tradition's uniqueness. The college tradition characteristics found through this study are building community, providing a sense of unity and belonging, demonstrating and teaching cultural values, institutional size, and environment. The traditions studied prove to be symbols of their institutions' cultures, a characteristic discussed in the literature by Geertz (1973). Airband and Spring Sing also emphasize Becher's (1984) description of culture as "a shared way of thinking and a collective way of behaving" (p. 166).

While these traditions are very similar, they also demonstrate their uniqueness as communicated through how the institutions present themselves (Tierney, 1988). Airband and Spring Sing are both based on the values and beliefs of their respective institutions. Airband shows Taylor's mission of developing servant leaders through the subthemes of Christian character development and investment. Participants also referenced the university's mission when discussing the values Airband displays. Spring Sing exhibits Westmont College's (2017) mission of "cultivating thoughtful scholars, grateful servants, and faithful leaders" through the subthemes of co-curricular knowledge, intelligent joking, and student leadership. These subthemes demonstrate students' development of critical thinking, communication of their thoughts to a larger audience, and stewardship. Participants also discussed the college's five pillars in conjunction with what values Spring Sing displays. Participants on both campuses recognized how the traditions emphasize the value of community and the purpose of cultivating good, healthy fun.

Airband and Spring Sing also displayed Kuh and Whitt's (1988) concept of culture as "both a process and a product" (p. 6). As stated in the literature review, the process is an ongoing shaping done by individuals who influence the culture, in which students play a part (Kuh, 1990). The products are outcomes, such as the manner in which community members interact and the four ways in which culture contributes to campuses:

- (1) it conveys a sense of identity;
- (2) it facilitates commitment to an entity, such as the college or peer group, other than self;
- (3) it enhances the stability of a group's social system; and
- (4) it is a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior. (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 26)

Both Airband and Spring Sing demonstrate each of these purposes, confirming their significance in shaping students' experiences and institutional culture.

This conclusion answers one of the study's original research questions: is there mutual shaping—does a tradition shape institutional culture as much as culture shapes a tradition? Yes, the traditions in this study prove to be part of Kuh and Whitt's (1988) concept of culture as "both a process and a product" (p. 6). As part of the process, students can utilize the tradition to influence institutional culture. As part of the product, tradition reinforces the purposes of culture in higher education institutions. This finding also establishes the overarching tendency of college traditions' characteristics and how campuses can maintain the uniqueness of their traditions. Thus, college traditions need to be recognized as a method for conveying, changing, and influencing an institution's culture. Colleges and universities need to assess what cultural values are communicated through their traditions and whether these values align with their institution.

Finding #3: Both traditions have similar characteristics impacting the importance of the traditions. This final conclusion demonstrates the importance of a campus environment in a tradition's impact. Minimal literature relates to this finding due to traditions being viewed as unique to individual campuses. However, a majority of these characteristics are similar to Tierney's (1988) essential components of culture. Participants identified a few areas as key pieces that shape campus traditions: institutional size, policy, location, timing, student leadership, participation, and hype. These characteristics contributed to how participants saw the tradition's significance.

Both traditions studied take place on small, liberal arts, Christian campuses. These institutions have community life statements that dictate the values, beliefs, and norms of their communities. Both Airband and Spring Sing have guidelines regarding what students can and cannot do for their acts. In addition, Airband and Spring Sing both take place as part of the institutions' spring festivities. Students view their ownership of the traditions as a key component, which proved to be significant in how they view their roles within the traditions. The high levels of participation and hype in both Airband and Spring Sing proved to be an important factor in the level of the tradition's impact. Both sets of participants contributed the higher level of participation in these traditions to their institutional size and value of community. All of these similar institutional characteristics contribute to how participants view the impact of their tradition.

As Hoffman (2006) suggested, campus environments are essential in shaping a student's perceptions and attitudes. Students on both campuses compared their tradition to public institutions' forms of entertainment, noting how the tradition is much more wholesome because of the institution's environment. Students discussed both Airband

and Spring Sing as “the thing to do” on their campuses. Participants at Taylor shared how there is nothing else to do because of the university’s location but emphasized their investment into Airband because of this quality. Another student from Westmont commented how these traditions are “marked” as something that to miss out on is to miss out on part of the Westmont experience. This idea relates closely with how Taylor students view Airband as well. These characteristics frame the tradition to be what it is and to have the impact it has.

This conclusion represents the need for traditions to reflect their campus environments. Airband and Spring Sing are strong cultural artifacts because of their ability to capture the campuses’ cultures well. Certain characteristics—such as institutional size, policy, and location—are not easily changed. Other characteristics—such as timing, student leadership, participation, and hype—are more malleable. Both sets of characteristics contribute to how students view their environment, which shapes their perceptions.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. The first limitation is the timing of when this study was conducted. The two data sets were collected at different times—Airband right after it happened in the spring and Spring Sing in the fall. Because of this, data may be skewed due to Westmont underclassmen being unable to participate in Spring Sing before data collection. Equal participation is the second limitation; due to data collection timing, fewer students participated at Westmont than at Taylor. The third limitation is focus group numbers, as both data sets did not have full focus groups. The frequency weighting system was created to help compensate for the lack of numbers to constitute as

a full focus group. The fourth limitation is that the type of participant recruited—student leaders—may have a better understanding of campus traditions than other students. Some literature points to this limitation, while other scholars disagree. Finally, as a limitation due to the nature of qualitative research, the participants' experiences cannot be measured objectively. The researcher holds a degree of bias from personal life experiences and perceptions of the traditions studied, making it potentially difficult for the researcher to disconnect preconceptions fully from the phenomena explored.

Recommendations for Future Areas of Research

While this study confirmed previous findings and introduced new ideas to the college tradition literature, further research is needed in multiple areas. Scholars have debated whether students' level of involvement, participation, and effort relates with their sense of community; specific research is needed in relation to students' level of involvement with campus traditions and their sense of community. Participant responses in this study suggested a causation; however, more research is needed to provide a better understanding.

In addition, participants briefly discussed the spirit of celebration and how it strengthens unity within traditions. However, it would be interesting to explore the relation between the spiritual discipline of celebration and college traditions on faith-based campuses. As stated earlier, Elkins and colleagues (2011) found a relation between faith-based activities leading to a greater sense of campus community but acknowledged limited research tying the two together.

Other areas of interest emerging from this study include student leaders' perspectives compared to participating students' perspectives of college traditions, legacy

students' perspectives of college traditions, minority student populations' perspectives on college traditions, the influence of gender in college traditions, the impact of college traditions on alumni, the impact of college traditions on a student's choice to attend a specific university, and traditions' influence on student retention. Another approach to this study could explore how residential living units influence college traditions. Many areas of college traditions remain unexplored; the above suggestions are only a few ideas emerging from this study.

Conclusion

College traditions provide a unique space for students to discover identity, belonging, and good old-fashioned fun. Higher education scholars and practitioners need to explore more of these important rituals happening on college campuses and how they affect students. This study sought to explore student perspectives of college traditions' impact on campus culture. Through studying two traditions at two separate institutions, the findings indicate tradition has a significant impact on building community and communicating cultural values. The themes from the data established an overarching tendency of college traditions' characteristics while revealing the individual institution's culture as well. This study also discovered a mutual shaping between tradition and culture, finding students can shape and reinforce cultural values through their participation in traditions.

Three recommendations were made based on each finding. The first recommendation encourages institutions to think strategically through how their traditions are developing their communities and cultures. Because community emerged as the largest outcome of college traditions, administrators of these events need to assess

how these traditions contribute to the campus' sense of community. The second recommendation urges professionals to recognize college traditions as a method for conveying, changing, and influencing an institution's culture. In addition, colleges and universities need to assess thoughtfully what their traditions communicate about the campus's cultural values and if these align with the institution. The third recommendation is for college traditions to reflect their campus environments— institutional size, policy, location, timing, student leadership, participation, and hype. This suggestion also requires thoughtful assessment of college traditions by institutional stewards. Through the proper stewardship of college traditions, individuals can find great value and meaning. This study demonstrates college traditions' importance to higher education and their significant influence on the student experience.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Protocol for Taylor University

Traditions Research Focus Group Protocol Taylor University

Please use the following intro at the beginning of each Focus Group

Thank you for taking part in this research. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact campus traditions have on the college student experience. Your participation is voluntary and you may opt to stop at any point in this process. Your participation will be completely anonymous and at no time will your name or any identifying information about you be reported to anyone outside of the research group.

All interviews are being recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions will be analyzed by the research team and only the team will have access to any of this information. The results of the analysis will be reported in aggregate form and again no individual identifying information will be reported.

There will be two sections for the focus groups, one asking general questions regarding your experience with campus traditions and the second asking specific questions about one campus tradition that takes place on your campus.

If at any time during the interview or focus group discussion you have any questions, please ask.

General Questions:

1. What are some of your campus traditions?
 - a. University sanctioned events?
 - b. Unofficial traditions?
2. What are the characteristics that make them traditions at your institution?
3. Describe your participation in those traditions.
4. What do you know about the origins of these traditions?
 - a. Is it important to know the origins of the traditions? Or just that they are traditions?
5. How many people/groups participate in these traditions?
 - a. In what ways are they gender specific? Gender inclusive?
 - b. In what ways do they have unifying effect across different groups?

6. Have these traditions grown over time?
 - a. How have they evolved? Changed?
7. How have these traditions been passed down to new and incoming groups? How are they kept alive?
8. Why have these traditions continued for so long?
9. What do these traditions teach, implicitly or explicitly, at your campus?
10. In what ways do these traditions add or detract from the mission of your university?
 - a. Do they reinforce the mission? How?
 - b. Do they undermine the mission? How?

Airband:

1. What ways has Airband affected your time at Taylor?
 - a. Could you imagine your Taylor experience without Airband?
2. How has your participation in this event affected your relationship with community members?
3. What did Airband teach you about Taylor's culture?
4. What values does Airband display?
 - a. Do these values align with your institution?
5. How vital is this tradition to your campus?

At the end the Focus Group

Thank you again for your participation in this research. If you have any questions regarding this project, please address them to Dr. Skip Trudeau.

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol for Westmont College

Traditions Research Proposed Focus Group Protocol Westmont College

Please use the following intro at the beginning of each Focus Group

Thank you for taking part in this research. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact campus traditions have on the college student experience. Your participation is voluntary and you may opt to stop at any point in this process. Your participation will be kept confidential and at no time will your name or any identifying information about you be reported to anyone outside of the research group.

All focus groups are being audio recorded and then transcribed. The research team will analyze the transcriptions and only the team will have access to any of this information. The results of the analysis will be reported in aggregate form with the use of unattributed quotations for support (i.e.: Faculty Member A, Staff Member B, Student Personnel C, etc.). Code names will be given to the quotations with no individual identifying information reported.

The use of an audio recording for this study has been chosen in addition to taking typed notes in order to assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to withdraw from this study if you choose to not be audio recorded. In order to ensure confidentiality, the researchers will take the precautions listed in your informed consent form. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others outside of the group.

There will be two sections for the focus groups, one asking general questions regarding your experience with campus traditions and the second asking specific questions about one campus tradition that takes place on your campus.

If at any time during the interview or focus group discussion you have any questions, please ask. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

General Questions:

1. What are some of your campus traditions?
 - a. University sanctioned events?
 - b. Unofficial traditions?
2. What are the characteristics that make them traditions at your institution?
3. Describe your participation in those traditions?
4. What do you know about the origins of these traditions?
 - a. Is it important to know the origins of the traditions? Or just that they are traditions?
5. How many people/groups participate in these tradition?
 - a. In what ways are they gender specific? Gender inclusive?
 - b. In what ways do they have unifying effect across different groups?
6. Have these traditions grown over time?
 - a. How have they evolved? Changed?
7. How have these traditions been passed down to new and incoming groups? How are they kept alive?
8. Why have these traditions continued for so long?
9. What do these traditions teach, implicitly or explicitly, at your campus?
10. In what ways do these traditions add or detract from the mission of your university?
 - a. Do they reinforce the mission? How?
 - b. Do they undermine the mission? How?

Spring Sing:

1. What ways has Spring Sing affected your time at Westmont?
 - a. Could you imagine your Westmont experience without Spring Sing?
2. How has your participation in this event affected your relationship with community members?
3. What has Spring Sing taught you about Westmont's culture?
4. What values does Spring Sing display?
 - a. Do these values align with your institution?
5. How vital is this tradition to your campus?

At the end the Focus Group

Thank you again for your participation in this research. If you have any questions regarding this project, please address them to Dr. Angela D'Amour.

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Taylor University

TAYLOR UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

The College Experience: Explorations of the Link Between Tradition and Student Identity

You are invited to participate in a research study of the role of campus traditions and student identity development. You were selected as a possible subject because you are either a student at a participating university or a faculty/staff member with at least 5 years of service. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Dr. Skip Trudeau, Dr. Drew Moser, Dr. Mike Hammond, Dr. Tom Jones, Ryan Hawkins, Maddy Trudeau, Danielle Spoutz, Paige McCourt. It is funded by the Taylor University Women's Giving Circle.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential connection between campus traditions, the practices they foster, and college student identity development

NUMBER OF PEOPLE TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 8-10 students in a focus group or one or 10 faculty/staff member subjects at your institution who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:
Participate in either a focus group or a one-on-one interview.

RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

While on the study, the risks and/or discomforts are:
The risks of completing the interview or focus group are being uncomfortable answering the questions and possible loss of confidentiality.

To minimize these risks you may tell the researcher you feel uncomfortable or do not care to answer a particular question. To minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, your name will be changed in any results.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

The benefit to participation is the opportunity to reflect on how campus traditions have impacted the identity development of you, a friend, or the students you work with.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

There is no alternative to taking part in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published. Only the researchers will have access to the recordings of the interviews or focus groups and the recordings will be deleted following the completions of the research study.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Taylor University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

COSTS

There is no cost to participate in this study.

PAYMENT

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

In the event of physical injury resulting from your participation in this research, necessary medical treatment will be provided to you and billed as part of your medical expenses. Costs not covered by your health care insurer will be your responsibility. Also, it is your responsibility to determine the extent of your health care coverage. There is no program in place for other monetary compensation for such injuries. If you are participating in research which is not conducted at a medical facility, you will be responsible for seeking medical care and for the expenses associated with any care received.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact the researcher Dr. Skip Trudeau at (765) 998-5368 or sktrudeau@taylor.edu. Inquiries regarding the nature of the research, your rights as a subject, or any other aspect of the research as it relates to your

participation as a subject can be directed to Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of the IRB, Susan Gavin at 756-998-5188 or ssgavin@taylor.edu

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Taylor University or any of the researchers involved in this study

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Subject's Printed Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent for Westmont College

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT – The College Experience: Explorations of the Link Between Tradition and Student Identity

You are invited to participate in a study of The College Experience: Explorations of the Link Between Tradition and Student Identity. The study is being conducted at Westmont College by Danielle Spoutz under the supervision of Dr. Angela D'Amour. This study was approved by the Westmont's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Research on October 12, 2017. The results of the study will be used to learn more about campus traditions in higher education.

The study will take about a year to complete. Participation will involve spending an hour in a focus group with your peers. Your involvement is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to answer a question or withdrawal from participation involves no penalty. Your answers are also kept confidential.

Although this research does not address the following, I am required to inform you that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, Westmont College might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of being involved in this study include the opportunity to reflect on how campus traditions have impacted the identity development of you, a friend, or other students you work with. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, the researcher will be happy to provide one for you. You will receive compensation in form of a meal for participating in this research.

Potential risks of being involved include being uncomfortable when answering the questions and possible loss of confidentiality. To minimize these risks you may tell the researcher you feel uncomfortable or do not care to answer a particular question. To minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, the audio recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer and the hard copies of the

transcriptions will be kept in a locked office or on the person of one of the researchers. In presenting the findings, researchers will use aggregate form with unattributed quotations (Student A, Student B, etc.) to support the themes. The code names will ensure confidentiality to the participants. After the study is completed, files will be deleted and hard copies will be shredded. If either of these potential risks occurs, the researcher will arrange for supportive care from staff at Westmont's health center.

The use of an audio recording for this study has been chosen in addition to taking typed notes in order to assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to withdraw from this study if you choose to not be audio recorded. In order to ensure confidentiality, the researchers will take the precautions listed in the paragraph above. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others outside of the group.

If you have questions about the research or related matters, please contact Dr. Angela D'Amour at adamour@westmont.edu.

Please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or have questions you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The IRB member you may contact about this study is Dr. Carmel Saad at csaad@westmont.edu.

-----once signed, cut here and researcher keeps bottom part-----

Please sign below if you understand and agree to participate.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called The College Experience: Explorations of the Link Between Tradition and Student Identity. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Signature

Date

Focus group interviews will be recorded using audio recording devices. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording, and withdraw from the study if you choose not to be audio recorded. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

