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# Experience, Perception, and Purpose for the Chapel Program at Taylor University

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Abstract

Research concerning student experience and perception of chapel programs at Christian

colleges is severely lacking (Morrison, 2014).  However, relevant literature on

secularization and the rising impact of spirituality on today's students reveals chapel

programs to be a critical intersection for the spiritual life of a Christian institution and its

students.  This study sought to explore and describe student perceptions and experience

of the chapel program at Taylor University for the 2016-2017 academic year.  The study

implemented an embedded mixed methods design consisting of two surveys administered

to the entire campus community; one survey administered at regular intervals to a group

of students; and three focus groups.  The results tell of the impact specific elements such

as worship, speakers, and scripture have on students and an overall positive perception of

the program.  Chapel administrators at Taylor can utilize this study as they consider

implementing changes in both the practice and vision of the chapel program.  In addition,

the information regarding student perceptions and experience in this study can serve

chapel administrators around the country as they seek to improve and enhance the

spiritual lives of their students.

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**Introduction**

**Historical Setting**

Chapel programs were considered a central part of the college campus since the birth of higher education in America in 1636 (Marsden, 1994; Morrison, 2014). However, well-documented forces of secularization altered the once prominent role chapel played on college campuses (Grubiak, 2014). The rapid decline of chapel was due in large part to nineteenth-century factors such as German higher criticism (Marsden, 1994; Ringenberg, 2006), scientific naturalism (Berger, 1967; Bouman, 2000), and the secularization of conscience (Berger, 1967), but these effects delayed impact on chapel programs until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapel programs declined sharply in the 1920s as many wealthy and influential private schools ceased requiring attendance under the pressure of student protests (Marsden, 1994). By 1940, just under half of all accredited institutions in America required chapel attendance, while 32% had no chapel programs (Morrison, 2014).

While some debate exists about whether the trends of secularization ceased to affect chapel programs (Marsden, 1994; Ringenberg, 2006), recent studies demonstrated a rise in the importance of religion and spirituality among today's college students (Astin et al., 2005; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Lee, 2002; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Institutions are shifting to a much more holistic

educational approach, recognizing education which does not attend to the spiritual development of students is seen as incomplete (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2005). This relatively new development led college administrators and faculty to take a renewed interest in the role religion played on their campuses (Mayrl & Oeur, 2009).

**Modern Student Spirituality**

The modern college student has much to say about spirituality and religious services. According to a 2003 survey administered to 112,232 incoming freshmen representing a diverse array of 236 schools, 79% of students believe in God, 69% pray, and 81% attend religious services (at least occasionally) (Astin et al., 2005). While some studies have found participation in religious practices such as church attendance and religious groups to decline among students during college (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Uecker et al., 2007), college students' overall spirituality was found to be increasing (Hartley, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schwadel, 2011). As students arrive on campuses, they are met with an abundant supply of religious and para-church organizations to meet their spiritual needs (Cherry et al., 2001).

With thousands of studies conducted on student spiritual development in college (Pascarella, 2006), a convincing body of research indicates, at least, that spirituality is still important to today's students and that education (including public education) that does not attend to a student's spirituality is incomplete (Chickering et al., 2005). This study therefore, sought to contribute to such a body of research, but more specifically, it addressed the manner and method of a particular religious program at a Christian college or university. Chapel programs around the country have drifted from the once dominant positions they held in both stature and programming (Grubiak, 2014; Marsden, 1994).

Today, chapel programs are only relevant at a small, select percentage of faith-based institutions that either require chapel attendance or happen to attract a high number of voluntary attendees (Morrison, 2014). This shift highlights a contrast between the empty architectural wonders that chapel buildings have become (Butler, 2010; Grubiak, 2014), and the heart of Christian campuses still significantly driven by faith (Burtchaell, 1998).

Administrators at Christian colleges face the task of discipling their students in ways that both meet the perceived spiritual needs of their students while also speaking directly to who they are as human beings. To accomplish such a task, administrators must stay engaged and aware of their students' desires and needs. In addition, today's Christian college and university administrators must address the specific purpose of the chapel program at their school. Often, this debate centers on whether the space should exist for spiritual rejuvenation and fellowship or as an educational platform

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explored the student perceptions and experiences of the chapel program at Taylor University. The study was designed to understand broadly the needs and desires of its participants for the purpose of informing the decision-making of chapel administrators at Taylor.

**Research Question**

With the goal of exploring the spiritual needs and desires of the modern college student, this study addressed the following research question: What is the student experience and perception of the chapel program at Taylor University?

**Chapter 2**

**Literature Review**

The literature concerning chapel programs at Christian schools is underwhelming and scarce. Relatively little literature even mentions chapel programs, while even fewer works focus on the role of a chapel program (Thompson, 2013) or the student experience of a chapel program. This fact is somewhat surprising considering how important chapels programs are to the soul of a university, about which much has been written concerning secularization (Benne, 2001; Marsden, 1994; Reuben, 1996). This section presents the known history of various chapel programs and the challenges they faced and highlights the importance of the chapel program's influence on its college or university.

**A Brief History of Chapel Programs and Secularization in America**

In the early days of American higher education, chapel held a significant place and role in campus life. Old-time colleges were eager to construct large magnificent chapels in prominent areas of the university to display their commitment to the spiritual development of their students (Wright & Arthur, 2016). For most colleges, the chapel program consisted of a mandatory daily service including worship, public prayer, and a sermon from the college president.

This format allowed certain schools' chapel programs to thrive if they had an eloquent president such Timothy Dwight at Yale (1795–1817), Francis Wayland at Brown (1827-1855), Charles G. Finney (1852–1875) at Oberlin, or John McLean at

Princeton (1854-1888) (Benne, 2001; Stratton, 2017). However, for other, less fortunate schools, a president with average or worse oratory skills created unrest and stagnancy in the spiritual atmosphere of the school's chapel program. In 1881, Harvard addressed this issue by instituting a rotation of speakers from five local churches (Reuben, 1996). This model of visiting scholars paved the way for chapel reforms across the country by changing both the rules and the attitude behind chapel.

Not all reforms, however, were welcomed. The patterns and trends of secularization are well documented and broad enough in scope that they cannot be covered in this study except with respect to the role chapel programs played and how secularization affected them. Nevertheless, a brief description of secularization will clarify and define the context in which lies the history of chapel on many college and university campuses.

The term *secularization* "was originally employed . . . to denote the removal of territory or property from the control of ecclesiastical authorities" (Berger, 1967, p. 106). As its meaning evolved over time, it became more clearly understood as the "declining importance of religion in social life, diminished strength for religious organizations, and waning religious commitment among individuals" (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999, p. 364). While different entities may influence the shape and scope of secularization, declining religious importance is an appropriate understanding for this study.

As forces of secularization grew and the popularity of religion declined in nearly every university, many schools succumbed to this pressure by instituting voluntary chapel attendance. Some schools saw great success for a time as popularity soared when on-campus revivals were popular (Stratton, 2017). In the case of the University of Chicago,

After five years the officials at Chicago decided that voluntary chapel did not

work. "We have tried every legitimate means of making the service attractive,"

wrote Charles Henderson. "So far as I can learn there is not an institution in the

country which enjoys a large attendance of students without requiring it." Despite

his original belief that "compulsory attendance would produce hypocrisy and

create a prejudice against religion," Henderson recommended that Harper institute

compulsory chapel services for undergraduates. In 1897 the University of

Chicago devised a system of rotating chapel services that required all

undergraduates to attend one service a week.  (Reuben, 1996, p. 127)

The University of Chicago quickly discovered what many other schools knew to be true:

compulsory chapel may secure high attendance, but it does not necessarily benefit the

spiritual state of a university's students, especially as students with lower affinities for

religion began arriving to campus.

For example, "In 1901 Yale officials recognized that there was not enough

student interest to support a voluntary daily religious service. When Yale dropped

compulsory attendance twenty-five years later, it abandoned daily chapel services as

well" (Reuben, 1996, p. 128).  During the 1896-97 academic year, attendance at

voluntary chapels and morning prayers dropped to a low of 14 students at Johns Hopkins

and 30 students at Columbia (Reuben, 1996).

**Mandatory vs. Voluntary**

As schools saw their chapel program's popularity among students decline, many

more schools chose to experiment with voluntary chapel.  The 1960s witnessed a

challenge to the notion of *in loco parentis*.  Many remaining Christian schools switched

to voluntary chapel as they relaxed rules and restrictions on students across the board

(Hughes & Adrian, 1997).  According to Stratton (2017):

> Some scholars emphasize the demise of compulsory college chapel programs as a
> *unique* development in the transition from Revival College to Modern University.
> [xv] They point to the elimination of compulsory chapel at Harvard (1886) and
> Yale (1926) as key marking points in the forty-year secularization of the
> American academy… They see growing pressure against chapel programs in
> contemporary Christian colleges as part of an *ongoing* pattern in the history of
> Christian higher education.  (para. 5)

Stratton (2017) continued to describe how many schools enjoy a period of about a decade

of success after switching to voluntary attendance before realizing the "disaster" of a

voluntary chapel as attendance dwindles.

Many schools such as Calvin College, Notre Dame, and Valparaiso University

also found this challenge of attendance to be true.  Benne (2001) characterized these

schools as the "third" college chapel model, which describes chapels marked by very low

attendance and an unprotected slot in the academic schedule.  Thus, voluntary chapel

brought many schools' (some of whom have secularized to a great degree) chapel

programs to a position of only marginal influence on a small number of students.

Wright and Arthur (2016) further espoused upon this point by explaining the

commonly accepted fact that chapel services only attract a small number of students at

most colleges and universities.  Ringenberg (1996) echoed these ideas:

> The decline of required chapel frequently is one of the more visible symptoms of
> decay in the Christian orientation of a school. . . . A college may say it has

eliminated chapel because "we don't want to force religion on anyone," as though a chapel requirement is more akin to the medieval state-church system than to the college's other requirements for graduation. What such a college is really saying, however, is, "We don't think Christian worship is very important anymore—certainly not as important as other requirements in, say, English composition or physical education." (p. 321)

Ringenberg posited that declining chapel programs are often found to lack meaning by students as programming puts less emphasis on the Christian religion and a growing relativistic mindset. Finally, Ringenberg highlighted the importance of a chapel message being essential and authoritative to incentivize attendance: "College chapel is the recurring event the greatest number of students are required to attend . . . the college must make certain that the quality of chapel is exceeded by no other campus activity" (p. 322).

Many schools then were unwilling to make the change from mandatory to voluntary chapel services. They saw their chapel program as too important to the educational atmosphere of the university to make it optional and risk a decline in student attendance and, with that, influence. In his work *Sustaining Faith-Informed Mission at Religiously-Affiliated Colleges and Universities*, Witek (2009) offered that schools such as Anderson University (IN) and Nyack College were unwilling to make chapel voluntary because they saw it as a "required piece of every student's education because of the value we place on coming together as a community to worship" (p. 121). A university administrator at Anderson went so far as to argue,

We could have voluntary Chapel, and we would have a group of students that

would still come . . . [but] the unengaged, they wouldn't come through the door.

And I think it's important for them to still be exposed to the good measure of the

Lord Jesus Christ. (Witek, 2009, pp. 209–210).

While conversations about the merits of both voluntary and mandatory chapel programs

persist, there is far too little evidence to draw a conclusion with any certainty. The great

variety and differentiation of chapel programs and schools across the country necessitates

a much larger body of research to affirm one option over the other.

**The Modern Chapel Program**

As secularization progressed, many schools chose either to cancel their chapel

program altogether or continue it as a service to a small minority of students. Both

approaches were of only peripheral interest in relation to the scope of this project. This

particular project dealt more specifically with chapel programs at institutions actively

promoting campus-wide Christian spiritual development. As a result, these institutions

offer a chapel program that attracts a substantial percentage of students.

A brief discussion of the history of chapel programs in this country, however,

must first address the purpose of chapel. Stratton (2017) offered a broad starting point

for discussion about the purpose of chapel:

While modern Christian colleges have yet to develop a widespread theology

capable of managing these tensions at the level of the Puritan model, [xxx] both

sides in the debate agree that chapel programs should be a time when at very least

a sizable majority of the college community gathers together to celebrate their

common faith in meaningful expressions of corporate worship, learn the central

tenants of the Christian faith, and consider together how to live out their faith throughout their campus community, scholarship, personal lives, and future calling. (para. 11)

Perhaps the most murky and influential element in that description is the "sizeable majority." College administrators were forced to contend with the pressure to remain relevant in the lives of young college students, a pressure that must not be overlooked.

Reuben (1996) reported, "University officials at some institutions experimented with their chapel services to make them genuinely nondenominational and attractive to students" (p. 122). However, Reuben further explained,

In their effort to avoid theological doctrines, university officials fixe upon ethics as the common core of religion suitable for discussion in modern chapel services. . . . Religious discourse "thus moves into the field of general ethics." Educators thought that moral lessons, unlike theological doctrine, could receive the common assent of openminded, modern people. (pp. 124–125)

Thus, what some might call a watering-down of theology in an attempt to avoid offending and to achieve a sense of unity among the student body is evident. While this description applies to several schools that have since secularized to the point that their chapel program no longer holds importance or influence on campus, it also describes the current state of several schools approaching a critical point in their faith history.

The central question of purpose continues to be at the forefront of present-day chapel programs. An attempt to characterize broadly the purpose statements of the many Christian college chapel programs proves difficult due to their breadth in terms of both structure and goals. While most college Christian college chapel mission statements

speak of practices such as spiritual formation in students, coming together, and at least some musical worship combined with a message, speaking of their differences often proves easier.

Some institutions, such as Bethel College (IN), approach chapel with pastoral care for the students as the primary goal, while others such as Calvin College seek to emphasize student belonging. Some schools follow a particular Biblical book or theme for a semester or year, while others have certain days each week that are uniquely formatted. Anderson University (IN), for example, provides a church-like service with worship and a sermon every Tuesday while presenting a more culturally-driven topic every Thursday. Calvin College meets for just thirty minutes every day of the week and has different themes for each specific day of the week.

In addition, one of the more interesting factors in comparison is also percentage of student body that attends amid voluntary requirements. Calvin's and Anderson's chapels attract a very small percentage of the student body, while Taylor University, for example, still hosts a majority of campus in services held every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Thus, the present day chapel programs have a great variety of style and presentation.

**Taylor University**

Taylor University's chapel program is an anomaly according to literature on voluntary and mandatory chapel programs (Morrison, 2014; Reuben, 1996). In order to understand the complexities of Taylor's chapel program, some contextual details concerning the university must first be established.

Taylor University was founded in 1846 as Fort Wayne Female College by the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Ringenberg, 1996). After

just four years, the school began enrolling men and renamed itself Fort Wayne College. For the next thirty years especially, but also for most of its history, Fort Wayne College and Taylor University experienced great financial struggles. Partially due to these struggles, the college moved to Upland, Indiana, in 1893 because of the recent natural gas discovery in the area (Ringenberg, 1996). Some might have even expected a great metropolis to arise in the surrounding area, but Upland saw no such growth, as it is currently home to only 3,845 citizens (Suburban Stats, 2017).

In the late 1880s, the North Indiana Conference transferred control of the school to the Local Preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1892, Fort Wayne College acquired a vacated property from the Fort Wayne School of Medicine. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Taylor was considered an "intensely religious institution" (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 115). In a poll in the 1930-31 academic year, three times more students "reported that they came because of the 'Christian spirit'" rather than an academic program (Ringenberg, 1996, p. 115). It follows, then, that a study of Taylor graduates in the early 1950s found that almost 48% of all Taylor alumni went into full-time ministry or missions after graduation (Ringenberg, 1996).

With such a specific focus on ministry training and religious atmosphere, participation in religious activities was historically widespread at Taylor. Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of this participation differentiating Taylor from several similar schools is that almost no religious activities were required throughout its history, yet attendance remained steady. According to Ringenberg (1996),

Many students attended the daily chapel service, the Sunday-afternoon campus meeting, the worship services in local churches on Sunday morning and evening,

and the once or twice weekly Prayer Band. . . . Professors frequently (although

not by rule) began their classes with prayer or singing or both.  (p. 127).

Taylor continued this "common man" identity until after World War II when it "began to

attract an increasing number of students from a wider variety of religious traditions" (p.

218).  Ringenberg later asserted that, since 1970, Taylor has departed further from its

Methodist origins and is now most comparable to the likes of other non-denominational

schools such as Wheaton and Westmont.

While Taylor now seeks to serve students from a variety of evangelical

denominations, it continues to attract large numbers of Baptist, Methodist, and

Independent students (Ringenberg, 1996).  Taylor's chapel program must be somewhat

flexible theologically to accommodate for the diverse backgrounds of its students.

However, this flexibility, as played out in speakers and specific elements of the chapel

program, must find that breadth of appeal while remaining centered on what unites its

variety of students.

**A Comparison of Chapel Programs**

While the literature concerning chapel programs in the past is scarce and often

only relevant in small portions, literature concerning the specific elements of chapel

listed above is practically non-existent.  As already stated, mission statements of various

institutions reference certain elements such as worship (defined in the current study as

worship through music) or theology, but little to no actual research exists on these topics.

As a result, this study drew upon personal communication with an assessment

team that worked with Taylor University's chapel program in the fall of 2017.  This team

contacted Calvin College, Bethel University, Messiah College, Whitworth University,

Gordon College, John Brown University, Wheaton College, and Westmont College. Only Calvin College, Bethel University, and Messiah College responded. All three schools mentioned worship through music was an integral part of their chapel programs, but they did offer further details. Perhaps the most interesting detail that communication with these three schools revealed came from Messiah College. According to their response, Messiah College ceased gathering feedback after consistently receiving negative feedback about the required nature of their chapel program. Unfortunately, very few details were received from other schools regarding worship, speakers, and use of Scripture in their chapel programs.

The history of secularization and the declining importance of chapel programs around the country demonstrate the relevance and importance of this study. Taylor University's 172-year history provides a glimpse of the program that is still the central cultural influence on campus. The remaining chapters of the present study discuss the methodology and findings as they pertain to the purpose of Taylor's chapel program and the specific elements that comprise it.

**Chapter 3**

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first purpose was similar to Walvoord's and Banta's (2010) question for any type of assessment: "Are students learning what we want them to?" (p. 5). In particular, Taylor University's chapel program recently (2015) refocused itself on seven guiding principles to inform and influence decision-making within the program. Thus, the first purpose of this study was broad and exploratory and relates to what students, faculty, staff, and administration are experiencing and how they interact with Taylor University's chapel program. The second purpose of this study was to determine how well the chapel program is achieving its goals and adhering to its guiding principles. In essence, this study sought to find the participants' beliefs, values, and motivations regarding the purpose and execution of a chapel program (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009).

With these two purposes in mind, a relatively new embedded mixed methods design was chosen (Creswell, 2012; Curry et al., 2009). The design includes three distinct parts. First, two campus-wide cross-sectional surveys were administered to the entire student body as well as to faculty, staff, and administration. The design of the survey itself was mixed in that both quantitative (11) and qualitative (4) questions were present in the survey (Creswell, 2012). Second, after gathering these results and coding

the data for patterns of responses, three focus groups were conducted to allow for further detail from students and to clarify some responses in the survey that have contextual meaning.  Finally, in addition to the two campus-wide surveys and the three focus groups, 60 students ere selected via semi-convenience sampling to respond to weekly surveys more specifically tailored to individual chapel sessions.  These weekly surveys were not intended to provide any sort of longitudinal data but, rather, to build the specificity of the data by adding cross-sectional surveys specific to each week of chapel programming (Creswell, 2012).

According to Creswell (2012), cross-sectional surveys are useful for "program evaluation" and assessing "community needs" and participants' "attitudes and actions" (p. 378).  The research was organized so that the three focus groups were chronologically conducted in between the administration of the two surveys and alongside the weekly surveys.  Thus, while a survey was administered at the end of the fall 2016 semester and at the conclusion of the spring 2017 semester, the focus groups and weekly surveys took place throughout the spring 2017 semester.

Not only did this embedded element ensure clarification of the first survey's results, but it also informed a few minor edits in the administration of the second survey (Creswell, 2012).  More specifically, Sofaer (1999) affirmed the interwoven nature of this design and its value:

> These methods are typically used to explore highly specific issues. Nevertheless, they retain the quality that all information-gathering efforts should have: leaving lots of room for investigators to be surprised. The focus group involves bringing together a group of individuals chosen to meet a specific profile of characteristics.

Typically, groups are intentionally homogenous along some dimensions and heterogeneous along other dimensions. A structured but still informal setting is used to explore a limited number of "focus questions." Focus groups are best used instead of individual interviews when it is clear that the interactions among group members will be as illuminating as the statements of any individual. As with other qualitative methods, focus groups are often combined with more quantitative approaches such as surveys. (p. 1111)

According to Sofaer's recommendations, focus group participants were conveniently selected from among the homogenous group of current Taylor students; from that group of willing participants, students were selected in an attempt to create a diversity of residence hall and ethnic background among participants.

Sofaer (1999) also mentioned the advantage of qualitative research when studying a topic that may provide "unforeseen" results (p. 1114). Because Taylor University's chapel program previously received no measurable feedback, a qualitative approach was appropriate to find the broad perceptions and experiences of Taylor's community members.

The survey was more heavily considered and weighted as the primary database in this study. As Creswell (2012) observed, "One challenge in using this design is to be clear about the intent of the secondary database" (p. 545). In other words, the mixed methods design was chosen because of its flexibility in utilizing the primary form of research in the two surveys while still taking advantage of the nuances and descriptiveness of qualitative data gathered through focus groups.

**Participants**

The merits of this research were perhaps underestimated in the beginning, and unfortunately no demographical data was collected about the percentages of students, faculty, staff, and administrators at Taylor University who took the survey. What is known is that, of those four groups of people, 477 responded to the first survey at the end of the fall 2016 semester, and 320 responded to the spring 2017 survey. These numbers comprise approximately 20% and 13% of possible respondents respectively. The three focus groups, however, consisted entirely of Taylor University students and included 9, 6, and 5 students, respectively, who were chosen via convenient sampling.

**Instruments**

Because of the centrality of the Taylor University chapel program in university life and this type of study, the survey and focus group protocol were created for this specific study (Appendix A). The survey consisted of 11 Likert scale questions that ranged on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each question was based directly in measuring how Taylor's chapel program was adhering to its seven guiding principles:

1. Corporate Worship

2. Scripture Engagement

3. Intellectual Challenge

4. Whole-Person Focus

5. Diversity

6. Lifelong Practice

7. Collaboration

Each of the 11 questions was based directly in measuring one or more of these seven principles.  The four following questions were open-ended, with three of them allowing for respondents to clarify their previous answers from the Likert scale questions; the remaining question simply measured which speakers were most memorable in the minds of the respondents.

The secondary instrument in this study was the focus groups (Appendix B).  As recommended by best practices, brainstorming, phrasing of items, and sequencing were used to create the protocol (Schuh, 2009).  The finalized protocol was conversational, short, open-ended, and one-dimensional (Schuh, 2009, p. 130).  This design sought "to make sense of [the] experience and transform [the] experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

The mixed method design was selected with the study's exploratory end in mind (Banta & Palomba, 2015).  The embedded surveys and focus groups were flexible enough to achieve the open-ended element an exploratory study requires, while also appropriately measuring student perceptions and experience (Creswell, 2012).  The data gathered from this design has been organized and described in the following chapter.

**Chapter 4**

**Results**

The findings from this study speak directly to the experiences of Taylor University community participants and the chapel program's adherence to its seven guiding principles. Results were compiled from two campus-wide surveys, three focus groups, and twelve surveys administered weekly to a specific group of an average of 27 students per survey. The surveys alone combined for 1,126 individual responses, representing 16,890 individual questions answered. Each of these responses was processed before three focus groups were utilized to further pursue questions of meaning. The findings drew upon data from all three methods of the embedded design in an attempt to give a full, rich, and accurate description of the data collected.

**Themes**

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, themes were widely coded across all answers regardless of question, while answers to specific questions were also examined and explored. The respective themes in order of frequency are as follows: worship, speakers, Scripture, positive view, and diversity.

**Likert Scale Questions**

The answer options ranged on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with neutral lying in the middle. Perhaps the strongest finding from the Likert-scale responses was respondents' overall positive view of the chapel program. Seventy-

five percent of respondents selected either "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" for nine of the ten Likert-scale questions (excluding question 11 about personally interacting with chapel speakers). This statistic was true of both surveys, though, notably, the second survey had four questions that fell between 75-83% agreement. This means almost one in four respondents either felt neutral or chose to disagree with the statement.

The four statements with lowest agreement were, "The chapel program engages the Scriptures in a careful and meaningful way," "The chapel program actively influences conversations and spiritual growth on campus," "The chapel program integrates people and programs from other areas of the University," and "This semester's chapels assist me in integrating my faith with my academic discipline." The statement with below 75% affirmation is analyzed first, followed by an examination of the four statements.

Of the statements in the instrument, the one with the least agreement was, "This semester's chapels used varying kinds of worship styles and practices" (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Survey Question with Least Agreement*

| Answer Choices | Response Number | Response Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 162 | 33.96% |
| Somewhat Agree | 184 | 38.57% |
| Undecided | 33 | 6.92% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 73 | 15.30% |
| Strongly Disagree | 25 | 5.24% |
| TOTAL | 477 | |

The responses in agreement with this statement on the two surveys were 72% and 68%, respectively. While about 30% of respondents disliking or feeling neutral about the variety of practices and styles of worship may not seem alarming, the number was certainly significant enough to warrant closer examination.

The four statements mentioned above ("The chapel program engages the Scriptures in a careful and meaningful way;" "The chapel program actively influences conversations and spiritual growth on campus;" "The chapel program integrates people and programs from other areas of the University;" and "This semester's chapels assist me in integrating my faith with my academic discipline") reported relatively lower agreement (between 75-83%) and are therefore important to recognize moving forward. While not particularly helpful on their own, they serve as indicators of what might be important to respondents when thinking about potential changes and improvements for the future.

The five statements not mentioned yet received very positive marks. Respondents seemed pleased with the following five elements of chapel: meaningful worship, Biblical application and proclamation, challenge of preconceived ideas, diversity of evangelical thought among speakers, and diverse backgrounds of speakers. These responses show an overall positive and popular image of chapel with respect to these five areas. While meaningful worship and Biblical application scored highly in the Likert scale questions, they scored lower in other sections.

**Written-Response Questions**

As noted above, the two surveys concluded with three open-ended questions that allowed for a variety of written responses. The three questions were as follows:

1. What was the most meaningful part of chapel this semester?

2.  What would have improved this semester's chapels?

3.  Comments or thoughts?

**Worship**

Respondents drew the most meaning out of the time set aside for worship in chapel. While worship was not defined for participants at any point, respondents likely considered worship as primarily referring to the act of singing and playing music. Just over fifty-nine percent of all responses to these three questions mentioned or commented about worship (Note: Comments could be applied to more than one theme, allowing for more than 100% when taking the sum of the five themes).

**Meaningful.** The majority of comments about worship (47%) pointed toward the corporate and communal aspects of worship as the most meaningful part of chapel for the respondent. The largest subset of these responses addressed the question of meaningfulness. Participants described worship as "refreshing," "applicable," and "moving" as they enter chapel in the midst of a hectic class schedule in a busy week. Others referenced the power of corporate worship with a large body of believers, but a great number of these comments simply stated that "worship" is the most meaningful part of chapel. In the words of a participant from the second focus group, "I think arguably this (worship) is the most important part of chapel."

**Lacking variety.** The second largest section of this worship theme came in the form of suggestions or requests for a greater variety of song styles and choices (19%). This data is of even greater significance when one considers the fact that none of that 19% came in response to the question of meaningfulness. Therefore, requests for more variety and diversity actually gathered 58% of all the possible comments received.

Clearly, respondents had something to say about how they worship. Worship then received both the most positive comments and, at the same time, the most suggestions for improvement.

The following example demonstrates the controversial nature of feedback commonly found in this study. What may be incredibly meaningful for one respondent might be draining for another:

> At Urban Light I always feel included. . . . Urban Light's worship is a wider variety of song style, so some Sundays we sing Hillsong, sometimes we go straight up gospel and in chapel we only hit the same Hillsong, Bethel rotation.

Another student added to the discussion, comparing the typical chapel worship song to a richer, more meaningful hymn that allows for "meditation . . . instead of just repeating the same lyric over and over and over again." A few students from this same focus group articulated that part of the problematic lack of variety stems from a lack of time allotted for worship:

> With the one song kind of thing, that's actually been the number one complaint that I've heard personally from the vast majority of people. . . . And I personally, as someone who goes to chapel mainly for the corporate worship I guess, that is disappointing to me but at the same time I kind of understand.

**Speakers**

In a program that dedicates about 15 minutes to musical worship and 30 minutes to a message from a speaker, not surprisingly the theme of "speakers" received the second highest remarks after worship. Either the word *speaker* or *pastor*, a specific speaker name, or a type of speaker were mentioned in 32.6% of all possible comments

across the two campus-wide surveys. Unlike the previous theme, slightly more comments about speakers also noted point for possible improvements. However, it is extremely difficult to categorize these responses, as respondents have their own ideas of the type of speaker they would like to hear and what they think others need to hear.

**Suggested improvements.** The largest subtheme drawn from this theme is that of "diversity." In response to the question of improvement, some respondents expressed a desire to hear "more varied voices," "more women speakers," and even "non-evangelical speakers." Several comments contained elements of political or philosophical frustrations in that respondents almost entirely requested to hear from more conservative speakers. As with many themes in the data, some comments stood in stark contrast to each other. For example, one participant noted, "I would appreciate more conservative speakers, specifically more speakers that share scripture [sic] and then interpret it. I believe that there has been a lack of scripture [sic] in chapel, although I do believe that it has gotten better recently." In contrast, another participant noted, "A greater diversity in representation of evangelical thought and of speakers. Often the speaker is a white male from a conservative evangelical background." Another argued, "It seems like we may be embracing diversity so much that the traditional preacher-type is ignored. I've missed having an 'old white guy' speak, though I have also loved the diverse range of speakers."

The responses possess a great level of variety and complexity. Beyond comments on diversity, respondents articulated a desire for more speakers from within the Taylor University community and for more speakers to speak directly from Scripture. The usage of Scripture, in particular, is then discussed in greater depth in the following section.

**Meaningful aspects of speakers.** In contrast, a nearly equal number of comments affirmed the chapel speakers as the most meaningful part of chapel. Some participants expressed appreciation for the variety of speakers who "think differently about topics," "address present-day issues," and "come from different places in the world and in their lives." Still others appreciated speakers who "speak from Scripture . . . and address specific issues in our culture/university." The responses in this subtheme varied, but the responses shared above evidence some of the most commonly shared elements.

## Scripture

The third most frequently referenced theme, yet the most consistent theme, was Scripture, appearing in 16.1% of all comments. Feedback about Scripture was consistent in that nearly all the comments were of a similar nature and called for a similar response.

**Lack of Scriptural teaching.** More than 6 of every 7 comments that referenced Scripture (or the Bible/God's Word) expressed a desire to hear Scripture play a more prominent role in the chapel program. While a few comments pertained to Scripture readings or Scripture used in worship, the bulk of the data concerned the way in which speakers use Scripture in their messages. One participant wrote:

> I honestly wish that there was more Scripture being taught in chapel. There have been a couple ones like the chapel from Josh Moody, but honestly, it feels like the speaker just brings their message (sometimes highly biased) and throws Scripture in to support their viewpoint.

Another participant expressed, "More Scripture! Social topics are good to talk about and relevant, but they are too often consisting of a speaker's opinion rather than the Bible's perspective."

The homogenous voice that arose from this third theme contrasted starkly to the varying, often conflicting voices of the first two themes. Many comments that deemed Scripture the most "meaningful part" of chapel held undertones of dissatisfaction with the level of scriptural engagement. One respondent wrote, "I enjoy when I leave the chapel learning more about God, but sadly I feel that I learn more about programs than about His Word." On possible improvements for the chapel program, one participant wrote,

> That they bring in some speakers who actually read from the Bible and preach the Word and not try to make us just feel good about ourselves. Some of them don't do that but when some do it's so encouraging and applicable.

Other participants simply posited the proclamation of the Word, Biblical exposition, and teaching as the most personally meaningful parts of chapel without implying a lack of Scripture.

**Positive**

This theme proves deceptively significant considering its status as fourth of five themes. While it only garnered 14.9% of the total comments across both large surveys, positive comments were only measured in response to the open-ended final question, "Comments or thoughts?" This determination was made because nearly all responses to the "meaningful part" question were positive, while nearly all suggested improvements were negative. Therefore, of all responses to a question that offered respondents no guidelines, 46.9% of respondents chose to provide positive feedback.

Some examples of these comments include, "So grateful for all that the chapel program does," "I see improvement in the program and am looking forward to where it is headed," and "The chapels are consistently good, and every now and then one really

stands out to me." Respondents have a positive view of the current state of the chapel program, and 116 other comparable comments reinforce this assertion.

**Diversity**

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the data refers to "diversity." While respondents did not explicitly define this term, the manner in which respondents discussed the topic provided pictures of two different images of diversity. The first form referred to diversity within worship styles and songs. This form of diversity was already addressed under the "worship" theme and does not count toward this theme of "diversity." Therefore, in this context, diversity was understood quite broadly as both diversity of background (e.g., speakers' race, ethnicity, gender, experience) and diversity of thought (e.g., conservative, liberal, denominational).

Of responses to this question of improvement, 11.2% concerned some element of diversity. Unlike the previous two themes that received a highly uniform set of answers and responses, diversity was somewhat controversial. The majority of comments typically requested more diversity of all kinds, but especially greater racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. A large section of these responses recognized an effort to increase this element of chapel over recent years but still encouraged further growth. For example, one participant noted,

> While I think there still is more room to grow in terms of diversity of speakers, this year was by far the most diverse I have experienced in my four years on campus. I really appreciate the willingness to press into hard or uncomfortable issues, and how chapel was a space to bring in people who had studied or lived out those challenges and were appropriate to speak to them.

However, another respondent offered,

> Although the chapel program seems to have made an effort to incorporate "diverse perspectives of evangelical thought" I have found that the proportion devoted to orthodox Biblical Christianity has been smaller than I expect to see from an institution devoted primarily to discipleship (rather than evangelism, for instance) of its students. Too many times the speaker has a great deal to say about their particular experiences or perspectives, but fails to strongly derive their message from scriptural [sic] truth.

Another respondent claimed, "I feel as though many of the chapel speakers have been very liberal and teach things one-sided. It would be nice to have a variety of speakers that more than just one group of people could connect with."

These comments closely represent the larger voices of respondents. The data revealed a relatively even split between respondents who wanted the "increased" diversity of speakers to continue and respondents who felt this "increase" in diversity came at the expense of Biblical exposition and more conservative views. Interestingly, the only respondent who asked for more liberal speakers also asked for more conservative speakers. Otherwise, every comment that explicitly used the words *conservative*, *right*, *liberal*, or *left* indicated that conservative views were not being fairly represented, especially conservative theological views.

When this topic was explored during the focus groups, one participant said, "I feel like I'm getting conservative from somewhere else and I feel like I'm getting more liberal from chapel, I don't really know how to balance that though." At the same time, this participant noted he also benefitted from chapel. The majority of participants seem to

recognize (with varying levels of appreciation) the ways in which the chapel program influences them. One participant in the third focus group articulated that chapel is

> . . . challenging because like they said a lot of different viewpoints, which is a good thing I think but it's also been just very difficult because it feels like every single chapel is that way and it's never refreshing. It's always challenging my viewpoints and never giving me something to go (say), "I know this is true." It's like wrestling.

Another interesting finding from this study comes from a minority student from the Bahamas. This student expressed her concern in the first focus group by stating, "I'm rarely satisfied with the chapels because it lacks diversity. That's my own opinion if that helps clean things up." When asked to clarify what type of "diversity," the student replied: "diversity of everything." Thus, even though almost every category of comments in this study affirmed that diversity is increasing and that some students even seem weary of it, to this student, the chapel program appears to be failing to meet desires in this area.

**Conclusion**

The sheer volume of feedback contained in this study merits a reconsideration of the level of certainty at which claims may emerge. On the one hand, the response rates are high enough to assure saturation across the possible respondents. All three methods of data collection showed similar patterns of thought and feelings among participants. On the other hand, the responses are complex and varied. Thus, no patterns prove universally true among all responses. With such a relatively large number of responses, the data allows for both certainty about the findings, yet also a complex story.

**Chapter 5**

**Discussion**

This study sought to explore the student experience of Taylor University's chapel program. In addition, this study utilized the seven guiding principles that inform the planning and implementation of Taylor's chapel program to evaluate the degree to which the principles are being implemented. The data detailed in Chapter 4 is discussed below in further detail with reference to the literature in the hope that it can add to conversation on the purposes and impact of chapel programs at Christian colleges and universities.

The five major themes that emerged from the data in order of frequency are worship, speakers, Scripture, a positive view, and diversity. Frequency did not necessarily correspond to magnitude even though the themes discussed in the previously stated order correspond to their frequency. The findings from this study reveal a complex story of the ways in which respondents experienced the chapel program.

**Worship**

"What if education wasn't first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love?" (Smith, 2009, p. 18). Overwhelmingly, the largest theme participants mentioned—worship—concerns an aspect of chapel that only occupies about a third of the program schedule. Why might that be? Traditionally, religious ceremonies were called "worship services"; thus, one could argue this view of worship was also in mind of at least most respondents. But the type of worship referenced throughout the data almost

exclusively applied to musical worship. Therefore, something about music is found to be more meaningful and impactful in respondents' lives than the typical thirty-minute message given by a speaker. Could the answer be indicated in Smith's (2009) arguments that anthropological assumptions reveal humans as affective beings shaped and formed most acutely by what they love as opposed to by the dissemination of information?

In relation to this theme, respondents described feeling "moved" or "refreshed," and the power of corporate worship was referenced numerous times by respondents. That power was made possible both by a student's desire to worship and by the well-documented power of peer influence, as over 1000 of their fellow students choose to attend chapel nearly every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Regnerus & Uecker, 2006; Schwadel, 2011). Perhaps Taylor University finds itself in the temporary period of popularity that the University of Chicago and many others found themselves after switching to voluntary chapel (Reuben, 1996; Stratton, 2017). But perhaps different forces are at play at Taylor, making chapel something popular among students and perhaps even sustainable. It appears worship through song alongside a group of believers that students know and trust is the most influential aspect that students experience. Thus, the first guiding principle of "corporate worship" appears highly integrated in the chapel program.

The data also revealed a hunger for greater variety in worship songs, styles, and practices. Some of this desire likely stems from a growing diversity of students attending chapel at Taylor, but the volume of data encapsulated in this theme suggests this desire is not limited to a diversity of race, background, and ethnicity. Students seek more meaningful song lyrics, different styles of music, different instruments, varied song

choices, and more ways to express themselves in worship. If worship is the most meaningful part of chapel to students, it follows that the way in which worship is done requires more attention.

**Speakers**

Responses concerning chapel speakers varied greatly and prove difficult to characterize. Within this theme, the largest category of comments referenced diversity in some way. However, respondents split over how this diversity should look. While some respondents sought speakers from diverse backgrounds and experiences (e.g. gender, ethnicity, denomination), others reported a bit of weariness from the constant push for different opinions.

Demonstrating the complexity within comments about speakers is a subsection of this theme that views Taylor's chapel program as "embracing diversity so much that the traditional preacher-type is ignored." Comments of this kind reference an apparent lack of conservative viewpoints being represented among invited speakers. Upon bringing up this dilemma in focus groups, students expressed some difficulty, pointing to specific chapels services that were more liberal than others; however, these respondents seemed unaltered in their perceptions that such chapels were challenges to be addressed.

The more common sentiment expressed under this theme, however, was a positive attitude toward the quality and type of speakers that Taylor hosts. Encouragement to see more diversity is certainly a part of this subsection, but most comments more generically expressed appreciation for "a lot of our speakers and the unique, powerful thoughts that they process through for our community." This theme is certainly important to the

discussion and therefore merits attention. However, speakers make up most of the time spent in chapel and are therefore heavily interwoven into the next three themes.

**Scripture**

Unlike the data concerning speakers, comments about Scripture were almost uniform in their nature. In short, respondents wanted Scripture used in a more meaningful way. Furthermore, many comments specifically mentioned the relationship between the message and the Word of God. Many respondents expressed sentiments similar to the following: "More scripture! Social topics are good to talk about and relevant, but they are too often consisting of a speaker's opinion rather than the Bible's perspective." But many other comments simply state, "Bring in more speakers who will teach from Scripture."

For a university with Taylor's mission, this theme comes as the biggest surprise of the five. It must be understood as the third most frequently mentioned theme, but perhaps some of these comments carry greater weight and merit a greater examination. Respondents were not wholly upset that the Bible was not being used, although that is certainly part of the concern; rather, they were upset because of *how* it was being used. One rather passionate respondent wrote,

> More scripture engagement [sic]. Chapel needs to be scripture [sic] focused...not social justice and world-view focused. WAY too much about personal opinion, world view, emotion, and social issues. Too much focus on what the world says...very little focus on what God's WORD says as actual biblical truth.

More than six of every seven responses about Scripture carried a similar—though less-emphatic—sentiment, making this theme highly consistent.

In light of research regarding secularization, it is appropriate to reiterate Reuben's (1996) account: "Religious discourse 'thus moves into the field of general ethics.' Educators thought that moral lessons, unlike theological doctrine, could receive the common assent of openminded, modern people" (pp. 124–125). The subtle shift from Scriptural authority toward moral authority is potentially cause for concern for today's Christian colleges and universities.

**Positive**

If discovering a perceived lack of Scripture usage by some speakers was the most surprising finding, an overwhelming positive review of a well-attended, non-mandatory chapel program is only slightly less surprising given broad student perceptions communicated in the literature. The data from this study revealed that, when answering the open-ended question "comments or thoughts," almost half of all respondents chose to express something positive about their experience with Taylor's chapel program. While this question provided a chance to reiterate suggested improvements or present new ideas, 47% of respondents expressed gratitude and appreciation for the chapel program in some manner. This finding stands in stark contrast to a sister school which, as previously noted, ceased gathering feedback because of its overwhelming negativity. However, it should be noted that a level of cognitive dissonance and discontentment may possess educational benefits. If each student enjoyed every part of the chapel program, it is highly possible that chapel would lose both spiritual and educational benefits.

Why, then, is perception so positive, and what could potentially threaten this positivity? It seems answers lie in aspects respondents found most meaningful and in most need of improvement. The chapel program must seek a philosophy of continual improvement. For example, a variety of worship styles (Psalm 150), historic orthodoxy, and an extremely meaningful experience should therefore be given great attention by campus leaders.

**Diversity**

"Diversity," the fifth and final theme, aligns closely with that of "speakers." As one of the chapel program's relatively new seven guiding principles, diversity seems to have seen the greatest improvement in student perception. Even though diversity is referenced many times as something to be improved, an understanding also exists that diversity is something worth striving for and worth improving.

Within that understanding, many feel Taylor's program ventured away from certain types of diversity. For example, one respondent noted, "You claim to have a diverse array of speakers because you've had men women and people of several colors speak. Yet, you FAIL to have the MOST IMPORTANT diversity of all - diversity of thought." This respondent further expressed a perceived "left wing" bent of chapel speakers. Any time diversity is sought, there is an implied way of thinking that was previously the normative. In this case, it appears some respondents feel this previously normative way of thinking is no longer properly represented because new diverse views have taken priority. Notably, any decrease could potentially be felt more acutely by individuals who approve of the previously dominant ideology; thus, chapel program administrators must honestly ask if such comments are grounded in fact or perception.

**Implications for Practice**

Based on the findings from this study, some suggestions for practices now surface that can enhance the student experience and fulfill the guiding principles of the Taylor University chapel program. The following section outlines potential actions for implementation.

The most frequent requests from respondents revolved around worship. As beings created to worship the Creator, worship is much more than a formula that provides two six-minute songs before a message. If enough students seek a greater variety of ways to worship their Creator, it seems appropriate for chapel administrators to accommodate these requests in a practical, sustainable manner. That suggestion does not mean every chapel should reflect radically different styles of worship. However, worship bands may be more closely advised on song choice, instrument choice, and style of worship with this feedback in mind.

If students are growing weary of hearing two worship songs of similar style in every chapel (e.g., Hillsong, Elevation, Bethel) performed with similar combinations of instruments (e.g., piano, acoustic guitar, full drum set, electric guitar, bass guitar, electronic keyboard), chapel bands could add greater variety to the combinations of instruments used and the types of songs chosen. Ultimately, the rationale is not because students need to be entertained, but because a crowd of over 1,000 people may have different ways in which they most effectively worship God, and ultimately because God commands us to worship Him with a variety of instruments (Psalm 150).

According to the data, worship was overwhelmingly the most meaningful part of chapel to respondents, but many spoke of feeling dissatisfied or discontent with just two,

and sometimes even one, song.  Restructuring chapel to allot more time for worship may not be practical in light of the resources used in bringing many guest speakers to campus. However, two alternative options for improvement might be possible.  First, avoid singing just one song for worship at any chapel.  Second—and perhaps along with the first—select shorter songs or medleys of two or three songs.  Often, modern worship songs last from five to nine minutes.  Perhaps choosing the shortest version of a song may allow for more songs and for a greater variety of songs to be sung, which will provide a more meaningful worship experience for the greatest number of people.

The next recommendation born out of the data pertains to the relatively unified responses seeking greater usage of Scripture in chapel programming and, more specifically, chapel messages.  Recommendations and discussion around the manner in which the Bible is addressed must be recognized as complex, sensitive, and significant. According to the literature, Christian colleges and universities face a false dichotomy that assumes they either recognize Scripture as the primary authority for their chapel program or pursue an academic convocation that emphasizes intellectual and cultural relevance (Mixon, Lyon, & Beaty, 2004).  However, chapel programs can and must strive for a healthier—and, ironically, more Biblical—balance of the two.

Perhaps Taylor can model this balance after the ministry of Jesus, who often questioned people's conceptual understandings by challenging both their actions and the motivation behind those actions.  In other words, He recognized the inseparability of the heart and mind.  He thus confounded the Pharisees (Mark 12:17), the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21), Nicodemus (John 3), the crowds (John 7:15), the disciples (Matt. 13:10),

and many others not by appealing to their theological knowledge but to their practical application of that knowledge.

Taylor must accomplish this task by developing a robust *Bibliology* and anthropology, which are held both harmoniously and hierarchically with *Bibliology* in the authoritative position. This matter should primarily be addressed through the parameters and criteria Taylor uses to invite speakers onto campus. Intentionally selecting and inviting speakers who agree with 2 Timothy 2:15 and whose messages are informed by the hierarchy between *Bibliology* and anthropology would strengthen and deepen that understanding. This task, however, is extremely nuanced and requires an alteration in the theological vision cast by the institution.

A change of this kind would require effective communication among all stakeholders. Because of the centrality of the chapel program to Taylor's student life, student development personnel, academic faculty, and university administrators are all interested in the educational and spiritual platform chapel provides. Thus, the idea of restricting or controlling the chapel stage with a tighter grip is not in view here—nor should it be. Rather, the task of informing and educating these three groups should be the goal. This education occurs both in communication with colleagues and communication with incoming speakers about the current state of campus and the atmosphere of its students.

The problem students are increasingly voicing about an apparent lack of Scripture must be addressed in the vision found in the chapel's seven guiding principles. Doing so does not mean any of those principles are misguided, wrong, or deserving of elimination.

Instead, in order to establish a hierarchy that sees *Bibliology* as informative of anthropology, the seven guiding principles must be established in a hierarchy.

Based on the findings in this study and the literature regarding this topic, a hierarchy of principles, as suggested below, is recommended for two reasons.

| Tier 1: "What we do" |
| --- |
| Corporate Worship |
| Scripture Engagement |

| Tier 2: "How we do it" |
| --- |
| Diversity |
| Intellectual Challenge |
| Whole-person Focus |
| Collaboration |
| Lifelong Practice |

*Figure 1.* A hierarchy of principles.

First, the hierarchy communicates to all stakeholders that the Taylor chapel program values the Bible as the inspired Word of God and that this God is undeniably worthy of worship in all things. As such, Scripture and a desire to worship and glorify God must first shape every decision made in the chapel program.

Second, the hierarchy allows for more informative guidelines for practice of the five second-tier principles. Once decisions about programming, planning, and inviting speakers submit to the first tier, a healthy balance of second-tier principles will prove

possible. Such a recommendation does not in any way diminish the importance of the second-tier principles, but rather acknowledges the preeminence that the first-tier principles must have in decision-making.

This restructuring of the seven guiding principles would serve as an appropriate and informed response to the feedback found in this study. Without devaluing current important practices and aspects of chapel, this model would demonstrate a priority to both the aspect of chapel that respondents found most meaningful (worship) and the aspect that relevant comments nearly unanimously found lacking (Scripture).

Once these two major categories are addressed, this study makes two more minor recommendations. First, chapel at Taylor is viewed in a positive light, especially when compared to sister institutions. Respondents appreciate chapel and care deeply about its impact on their own spiritual development and the development of the Taylor community. The Taylor chapel program must continue the development of a consistent feedback loop that will measure longitudinal trends and ascertain the source of such a positive view of the program. In addition, continued feedback will allow for more informed rationales behind future decision-making.

The second of these two recommendations centers on the issue of diversity. As the wider culture struggles both to embrace and suppress diversity, Taylor must strive to remain at the forefront of this discussion. Too often in the past, Christian universities have either drawn back from culture or reacted to culture (Marsden, 1994). Taylor should continue to expose its students to a Biblical theology of diversity. This theology must promote a rich value of the many differences God bestowed upon his children, which should naturally precede worship of the God who created such diversity. While

respondents received the recent increase in emphasis from the chapel program on the issue of diversity with mixed feelings, this second-tier principle must remain a high priority moving forward while looking to the first-tier principles for guidance in implementation.

**Limitations**

As with all studies, several limitations are present. First, all survey respondents and focus group participants self-selected to participate. Therefore, participants may have been more inclined to respond because they already had an affinity and appreciation for chapel or, perhaps, because they strongly disliked chapel. Either way, the data has the potential to be skewed.

Second, several elements in this study are subjective and political, which makes the analysis of data subject to researcher bias. The researcher selected this topic in large measure because of its perceived importance. Although the researcher took measures to represent all sides fairly, bias is never completely eliminated.

Finally, the sheer volume of qualitative data involved in this study creates numerous opportunities for misinterpretation both on the part of the respondent—by misunderstanding a question—or the researcher—by misunderstanding a response. This study's 16,890 responses reveal a complex combination of opinions, desires, and feelings. Thus, while many hours were dedicated to the careful reading and processing of responses, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of some are inevitable.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The dearth of literature on chapel programs and student experience creates many opportunities for future research. Perhaps one of the most helpful studies would involve

a nation-wide survey of the current vision and purpose of chapel programs at all Christian

institutions.  If that is too broad of a scope, perhaps a study focused on member schools

of organizations such as the Council for Christian College and Universities, the Lilly

Fellows Program, or the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities would prove

sufficient.  Such studies could inform the decision-making for chapel administrators

around the country.

A second interesting area of study would involve data concerning a wider set of

themes than Scripture and positivity.  Certainly, an institution's view of Scripture is

present in the secularization literature, but information about student perception or desire

for Scripture in the present-day Christian college or university could yield great value.

The theme of positivity, however, is intriguing because of its apparent rarity in the

literature.  Taylor University captured a positive perception among its students, and a

study that compares Taylor with a school experiencing negative perceptions of chapel

could reveal possible causes for negative and positive perceptions of chapel programs.

The final suggestion for future research is a continuation of this study in the form

of a longitudinal study.  Over a period of three to five years (or longer), the data gathered

will create trends that chapel administrators monitor and address for the benefit of the

program.  If resources allow, this longitudinal study could provide great merit.

**Conclusion**

The chapel program at Taylor University is an integral part of the institution and

should be treated as such.  This study found chapel to be a deeply meaningful and

impactful program for students who shared a variety of stories and interactions with

chapel.  As the complexity of conflicting responses and an understanding of the historical

context shed light on the current state of Taylor's chapel program, this study serves as a reference for practitioners to rely upon for decision-making.

According to the historical decline in the importance of chapel on American college campuses, Taylor exhibits a rare and valuable positive perception of their chapel program. Students appreciate chapel and value the opportunity to worship God alongside their friends three times a week. This study gathered the perceptions of students who possess specific desires about the way in which they worship. They described a need for a variety of types and styles of worship that might provide more meaningful worship experiences for a greater number of people. In addition, this study uncovered a significant number of students deeply impacted by the ministry of the Word of God. Contrary to the positive perceptions of the larger program, these students tell stories of frustration at the apparent decrease in meaningful usage of Scripture in the chapel program.

Taylor must take great care to navigate the diverse needs of its students alongside its principles to uphold its high call to honor and worship the Creator of the universe. Administrators will never find this task an easy one. However, attending to that task is an imperative component of the process by which not only students but all members of the Taylor community learn to respond to the call to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NRSV).

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**Appendix A**

**Survey**

**1. The chapel program allows me to worship God in a meaningful and personal way.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree


**2. The chapel program accurately applies and proclaims the Word of God.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree


**3. The chapel program challenges how I think about Biblical truth and my preconceived ideas.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree


**4. The chapel program assists me in integrating my faith with my academic discipline.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree


**5. Chapel speakers represent a wide range of evangelical thought.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided

Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**6. The chapel program uses varying kinds of worship styles and practices.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**7. Chapel speakers came from diverse backgrounds and experiences.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**8. The chapel program engages the Scriptures in a careful and meaningful way.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**9. The chapel program actively influences conversations and spiritual growth on campus.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**10. The chapel program integrates people and programs from other areas of the University.**
Strongly Agree
Somewhat Agree
Undecided
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

**11. How many times did you personally Did you personally interact with a chapel speaker outside of chapel this semester?**

0 times
1 time
2-3 times
4 or more times

**12. What was the most meaningful aspect of the chapel this semester?**

**13. What could be done to improve the chapel program?**

**14. What impact (if any) has the chapel program had on your spiritual development?**

**15. Which 3 chapels stand out the most in your memory from the past semester?**

**16. Comments or thoughts?**

**Appendix B**

**Focus Group Protocol**

**Chapel Feedback through Focus Group Assessment**

[Greet students as they arrive. Distribute pens, index cards, consent forms as students enter.]

**Introductions, purpose of the focus group, and thanking participants.**
Welcome!  Thank you for joining our focus group, today.  My name is… and the rest of our team will introduce themselves.

Campus Ministries wants to learn from your experience as a student to help improve chapel--making it a great place to worship and spiritually grow.

**Informed consent.**  [Explain the basic ideas and invite each participant to read and sign.]
- This is part of a larger study (4 focus groups, total).
- Risks are minimal.  Please feel free to pass on any of the questions if you do not feel comfortable responding.
- One benefit to participation is that you will be have time and space to reflect in meaningful ways on your chapel experience.
- Your contributions to this focus group will remain confidential.
- Your participation is voluntary.  You may choose to leave the study at any time.

[Ask students to sign and date consent forms.]

**Ground rules** (feel free to add others…)
- We want to hear from everyone. One person speaks at a time. Minimize side conversations.
- The session will be recorded.
- What is said in the room, stays in the room.  Content is confidential.
- It's ok to disagree or to have an alternate opinion. We want all voices to be heard.
- Other?

[Begin audio recording.]

**Warm-up.**  What three words best describe your chapel experience at Taylor?

[Invite students to write words on index cards, then share with the group. This exercise gives everyone an opportunity to speak.  Try to accomplish this quickly.]

Thanks for jumping in and sharing these words that describe your TU chapel experience.

Many of you have participated in a chapel survey last semester. Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey! We have found the responses to be very interesting and we are seeking your input to discover the "why" behind some of the results. Please feel free to share your honest opinions, thoughts, and ideas for each question. We want to hear as many voices as possible, but you should feel free to "pass" on any of the items if you don't feel comfortable responding.

**Broad exploration.** [This section will seek to get students think about their initial thoughts or generalizations of chapel, then we will get more specific in the following sections in terms of survey findings and explore generalizations deeper. Facilitators provide a calendar of fall and spring chapel speakers and descriptions.] What do you think the purpose of chapel is?
Probes:
- Why do you go to chapel? If not, why do you not go to chapel?
- How satisfied are you with chapel overall?
- What is most beneficial?
- What do you want more in chapel? What do you want less in chapel?
- What topics do you want to be covered more often?

**Corporate worship.** [Survey item: *The chapel program allows me to worship God in a meaningful and personal way*. For facilitators, corporate/communal worship was indicated as the most meaningful part of chapel.]
Corporate worship is considered an important, even most meaningful part of the chapel program. What has been your experience with worshiping God in a meaningful and personal way?
Probes:
- What have been some of the challenges you have encountered?
- What suggestions do you have for improving corporate worship in chapel?
- What would diversity of style and song choice entail?

**Scripture Engagement.** [Survey item: *The chapel program engages the Scriptures in a careful and meaningful way*.]
What has been your experience of scripture engagement in chapel?
Probes:
- What suggestions do you have for improving scripture engagement in chapel?
- Do you experience a lack of Biblical teaching/exegesis among speakers in chapel?
- [Facilitators explain expository preaching as a form of preaching that details the meaning of a text or passage of Scripture.] What chapels most exemplified expository preaching?

**Diversity.** One of the 7 guiding principles of chapel is diversity. The desire is to interact with a spectrum of evangelical thought, practice, worship, and style as well as hear from Christians with diverse backgrounds and experiences.
Probes:

- How diverse do you think chapel is? Can you give examples of what diversity in chapel means to you?
    - In terms of speakers?
    - In terms of topics?
- Do you think chapel is too conservative? Too liberal? Too political? Which chapels can you think of that covered these topics?
- Do we discuss social issues too much? Too little? What are some chapels you can think of that covered these topics?
    - If students do not bring them up, ask specifically about feminism, race, social justice, etc.

Does anyone have additional comments you would like to share as we wrap-up the focus group? Things you thought of after we moved on to the next question?

[Thank students for participating in the focus group.]