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Mission and Introduction to The Association for Christians in Student Development:

The Association for Christians in Student Development (ACSD) is comprised of professionals who seek to bring their commitment to Jesus Christ together with their work in college student development. Through the exchange of ideas, encouragement of networking, regional and annual conferences, and application of scriptural principles to developmental theory, ACSD seeks to enable its members to be more effective in ministering to students.

The roots of ACSD go back to the 1950s with the formation of the Christian Association of Deans of Women and the Association of Christian Deans and Advisors of Men. The two groups merged in 1980, reflecting a commitment to work together with mutual respect. ACSD has grown and currently represents more than 1,100 individuals from more than 250 institutions. While membership originally centered in Bible institutes, Bible colleges, and Christian liberal arts colleges, the Association has committed itself to linking up with colleagues in all institutions of higher education, both public and private. In support of this emphasis, the Association has sponsored prayer breakfasts and workshops in conjunction with annual conferences presented by major student affairs associated organizations.

Membership in ACSD is open to all persons who have or are preparing for responsibilities in student development areas in higher education and who are in agreement with ACSD’s doctrinal statement, constitution, and bylaws. Members receive the Association’s newsletter, free access to placement services, reduced rates at annual conferences, and copies of Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development.

In keeping with the mission and goals of the Association, the purposes of Growth: The Journal of The Association for Christians in Student Development are:

- To provide a forum for members to publish original research.
- To encourage the membership to be active in scholarship.
- To provide members with access to beneficial resource material intended to inform good practice.
- To stimulate research in Christian student affairs.
- To promote the ideals of ACSD and Christian student affairs
Dear Readers:

We are pleased to share with you this the eighteenth edition of Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development. For eighteen years Growth has strived to provide readers with relevant original research and pertinent professional development to aid in our work with college students. We trust that you have found this information useful to your work and that you will find the articles and book reviews in this current issue to be helpful in informing your work as educators.

This year, you will discover seven feature articles including original research focusing on spiritual formation and student experiences. These articles are followed by a collection of book reviews that are intended to introduce us to new publications that will guide and shape our efforts as student development practitioners.

We are grateful to those who work to make Growth possible, including Dr. Jason Morris, Associate Professor of Higher Education at Abilene Christian University who serves in the role of Book Review Editor, as well as the Associate Editor in Chief, Austin Smith, and the Associate Editors, Eli Casteel and Paige Grubb, who have provided guidance to the review of materials and publication processes of the journal. They, along with our peer review team, have put forth great effort to produce an edition that represents strong scholarship and is diverse in its coverage of topics.

We particularly want to encourage you, the reader, to consider submitting manuscripts for consideration for future issues of Growth; the next edition will be published in the spring of 2020. Publication guidelines are included in this issue on the inside of the back cover and are also available via the Association for Christians in Student Development web site: www.acsd.org/participate/write-for-growth-journal/. We are especially interested in manuscripts presenting original or basic research and encourage anyone who has recently completed a graduate thesis or dissertation to submit an article.

The publication team would like to thank you for your support of Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development. We hope your reading of it will be both engaging and challenging.

Sincerely,

Dr. Skip Trudeau, Co-Editor
Dr. Tim Herrmann, Co-Editor
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A Praxis Briefing
Mental Health on the Campus: Defining Challenges and Opportunities

Stephen Beers, EdD
John Brown University

Connie Horton, PhD
Pepperdine University

Brad A. Lau, EdD
George Fox University

Nathan Geer, MA
Corban University

C. Skip Trudeau, EdD
Taylor University

Kim Stave, ABD
Multnomah University

Brenda Roth, EdD
Corban University

Student Affairs professionals will attest that the college years are packed with wonderful life-shaping experiences. Brochures capture images of students in dialogue with wise college mentors discussing life’s big questions. Here they find purpose on their way to autonomy. The implied culmination is that students will enter their profession mature, well-trained, and surrounded by lifelong relationships that will serve them well into adulthood. However, today something seems to be quite different on our
campuses. The normal, developmental stress that accompanies this life transition has escalated into significant mental health crises for increasing numbers of students.

University leaders are urgently attempting to manage what the New York Times national correspondent for higher education summarized as a “national epidemic of students dealing with depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts” (Hartcollis, 2018). A quick review of the literature provides more disturbing details. In the 2004 text College of the Overwhelmed, Kadison, Chief of Harvard’s mental health services, described the “extraordinary increase in serious mental illness on college campuses” detailing alarming rates of increased concerns regarding depression and suicide on college campuses. Over a decade later, the situation has clearly not improved. UCLA's Higher Educational Research Institute found that recent entering college students self-report higher rates of mental health concerns, more depression, and weaker social skills (HERI, 2015).

Studies of University Counseling Centers confirm they are clearly experiencing more demand for services. Over a five-year period ending in 2015, the number of students seeking counseling appointments grew by an average of 30 percent, five times the average rate of enrollment growth. Anxiety and depression are the top reasons students seek care, and increasingly, students come reporting a history of “threat-to-self” characteristics (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2017). Studies of the broader student body also show cause for concern. In one large online survey, researchers found that a quarter of the student respondents indicated they were diagnosed with a mental health (MH) condition within the previous year and twenty percent considered taking their lives. Almost one in ten reported attempting suicide and close to one in five had committed self-harm of some form during their lifetime (Younghans, 2018). The American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II survey reveals similar, escalating results. Forty percent of undergraduate students report that sometime during the previous year they felt “so depressed it was difficult to function;” 62% felt “overwhelming anxiety;” 53% felt hopeless; and 64% reported feeling “very lonely.” This distress is clearly impacting academics as well. Students note that anxiety (26% of students) and depression (17% of students) interfered with their academic performance (NCHA, 2017). Further, it has been demonstrated that two thirds of students who drop out do so for mental health reasons (Field, 2018).
This heightened reality of student stress has affected the college campus in many ways. On highly residential campuses, descript of most small Christian colleges, this increased level of depression and anxiety, along with increased suicidal ideation, impacts not only the student dealing with depression but also the roommates, floor-mates, teammates and classmates. This increased student MH “epidemic” permeates faculty and staff meetings, public safety concerns, retention efforts, resource conversations and even rises into the university boardroom. On residential campuses that celebrate the interconnectedness of the “community,” the impact permeates virtually everything.

This praxis briefing (PB) is designed for decision makers who are developing and implementing institutional policies, procedures, and programs in the midst of rapidly escalating cultural influences. The intent of this document is not to provide the definitive word regarding mental health challenges on college and university campuses, but instead to offer relevant information that will influence the development of best practices. This document is grounded in research and is influenced by relevant practitioner insight and input. The process of gathering information for this PB began with a literature search that informed a phone survey of 6, long-standing student development policy makers stretching from the east to west coast. This led to a three-day task force summit in the fall semester, 2018. The meeting consisted of seven chief student affairs leaders from across the US representing a cross section of Christian colleges and universities. The summit participants dialogued with over 30 Christian college counseling directors during their annual 5C Forum meeting gaining necessary insight that influenced the direction of this document. This particular PB, written by those at the summit, will provide an informed list of viable reasons for the current MH challenge and offer a coordinated list of potential institutional responses related to counseling center directives, campus wide programming, and specific ways the institution can support front line staff.

Understanding the Mental Health Challenge:
How did we get here?

As we consider potential campus solutions, it would be prudent to explore causes of these escalating mental health trends. Clearly, there is not one single variable that is causing the concerns; the answer is complex and multi-faceted. The etiology of mental health concerns in individual cases will certainly vary. However, there are some significant factors that
are apparently influencing the trends.

Before addressing specific cultural and institutional challenges, it should be noted that some of the reasons for the increase in counseling center use are actually signs of progress. For example, there have been significant advances in the development of psychotropic medications. In the past, young people with severe, biologically-based mental illnesses would have been unable to attend college. Now, with proper medication and support, they are able to do so (Collins & Mowbray, 2008). Additionally, mental health stigma has decreased as society has become more educated (Lipson, Lattie, & Eisenberg, 2019). Thus, more students feel comfortable seeking counseling services, many having experienced the benefits of counseling in high school and feeling it is natural to continue as they enter college. Furthermore, our colleges and universities have responded to the demand by providing more services and providing training to faculty, staff, and students to encourage identification of struggling students and referral to supportive services.

Some key problematic causes and interacting themes are illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 1). These themes include the following: Increased Sense of Threat, Over-pressuring and Over-protecting Parenting, Excessive Technology, Underdeveloped Coping Skills, and Decreased Social Skills and Social Support.

Increased sense of threat

The world feels dangerous to this cohort. Some students have experienced major traumas prior to college. This includes those who have histories of child abuse or other significant adverse childhood experiences (Sacks & Murray, 2019) and the increasing numbers of combat veterans who are attending college (Currier, McDermott, & McCormick, 2017). These students are understandably impacted by their traumatic histories and may be “triggered” at times when on campus. But even those who have not experienced these individual major traumas are fearful. Today’s students grew up in a landscape saturated by stressors. They have lived through periods of economic uncertainty, including the great recession (some have parents who lost their jobs), and have trained for school shootings throughout elementary and high school, so they are understandably fearful. The American Psychological Association’s latest Annual Stress in America Reports noted that Gen Z has been found to be more stressed than other generations about issues in the national news, including mass shootings, global warming, the rise in suicide rates, and widespread reports of sexual harassment and assault (APA, 2018). Their
focus on the danger in this world understandably leads to an increased risk for anxiety and other mental health concerns.

**Excessive use of technology**

One might argue that every generation has had its “threats,” but this generation of students is the first to grow up with the news and images of economic woes, diseases, war, natural disasters, violence, and other dangers “in their face.” They are constantly exposed to bad news flashing regularly not only on TVs, but on laptops and smartphones. Clearly this has increased their sense of danger in the world. Twenge, in her 2018 book, *iGen*, notes a number of other ways that this generation’s excessive use of technology impacts their mental health. Social “threats” have also escalated as cyber-bullying, social comparison, and an emerging “fear of missing out” (FOMO) have permeated their world.

This hyper-connectedness has an additional challenge as it enables the student to compare themselves constantly with others. One simple, but frequent aspect of this reality is that today’s students experience intense competition as they view “the ideal life” of peers on social media. From selfie retakes to frequently monitoring “likes,” our students fastidiously study the online images of others and their own virtual popularity ratings. The result of this posture of consistent comparison seems to be adding to student anxiety and dissatisfaction. In an unpublished research project which collected data on 583 students at a small faith-based mid-southern university, the research team found that the increase in anxiety levels “may best be explained by high levels of difficulty focusing, low levels of self-efficacy, and frequent comparison to others” (Sweatman, 2018). Excessive technology use has also led to less face-to-face social time and more sleep deprivation, both of which negatively impact mental health (Twenge, 2018).

**Lack of social support and social skills**

Social support has been well-documented to increase individual resilience. However, among this generation of college students, friendships have thinned as students are often too busy or preoccupied to engage at a deep relational level. As noted above, while there is often the myth of a strong personal connection through social media, the reality is that this tool can often facilitate a profound sense of loneliness and isolation. Further, an over-reliance on technology from a young age may have prevented the opportunity to develop social skills, including basic relationship skills such as conversational turn-taking, assertiveness, and empathy.
For some, a culture of narcissism and entitlement has led to either arrogance and self-absorption or disillusionment and disappointment. An unhealthy focus on oneself fails to realize the joy of giving to others and creates an unrealistic expectation of constant comfort and support. As such, life experiences become a “crisis” when someone else is not focused on what “I think” is important and relevant. Interestingly, institutional messaging is often part of the problem. For example, the messages of “you can be anything you want” and “you can change the world” are meant to be a positive word of encouragement, but they are critically inaccurate. The statement can create unrealistic and unnecessary expectation and pressure. Statements like this can also reinforce the narcissism and entitlement of our age.

Parenting styles may also have a role in increasing mental health concerns on campus. Many parents are understandably anxious as they too have been impacted by the increased sense of threats and the ever-available information about dangers in their children’s lives. They read news stories on topics such as school bullying, drug use, and the competitive college admission process. Some parents worried so much about their children’s safety and future, they become overinvolved, “helicopter” and “bulldozer” parents. Although well-intended, this over-involvement can contribute to mental health challenge in their students (Schiffrin, et al., 2014). Parents may have either over-pressured (e.g., expected all A’s in numerous AP classes) and/or over-protected (worked to influence coaches or teachers to be prevent their child’s disappointment) as the children were growing up which can leave students coming to college with a great internalized sense of pressure and inexperience dealing with disappointment.

Life has its inevitable challenges. Coping is essential to mental health and today students increasingly lack coping skills for traditional stressors such as grades, relationship issues, moving from home, living with others, and finances. They emerged from high school under constant parental involvement and oversight described above (or, in some cases, a startling lack of involvement). Unfortunately, this often delays the maturation process and requires more institutional services and support to navigate the most basic of challenges. Further, students often have an incredible fear of failure that suppresses their ability to live, learn, and thrive through challenging circumstances. As a result, the inevitable
failure of navigating normal life brings incredible pain, giving rise to the danger of “pathologizing” what is perfectly normal. Ultimately, without appropriate interventions and coaching, a lack of coping skills leads to a “fixed” rather than a “growth” mindset (Dweck, 2006) diluting the opportunities of a vibrant educational experience.

Ideally, students should have had experience using various coping strategies including dimensions that are physical (such as exercise), social (such as speaking with a friend), and spiritual (such as prayer). Students who have not been given opportunities to deal with disappointment have not had the opportunity to practice any coping strategies.

Finally, even at Christian colleges and universities, there is a lack of faith integration in coping strategies. Although we would hope our students would rely on their faith and relationship with God in troubled times, many are unable to do so. There is a lack of Biblical literacy that inhibits some students from being able to recognize the One who reveals Himself as Creator, Redeemer, and Friend. Hope is a central and compelling vision for the Christian faith that emerges even in the midst of suffering. Tragically, our modern age has virtually no understanding of, or appreciation for, a theology of suffering. The loss of such a metanarrative leads to an existential crisis for many of our students. We must restore a theological vision for hope that recognizes God is in control and actively engaged in our lives, even in the midst of suffering. Some of our students have fallen prey to what Christian Smith identifies as “moralistic, therapeutic deism” (Smith 2005), a framework that hollows an accurate understanding of God and His work and places the individual’s success and happiness as the chief end of our lives.

Figure 1: Contributors to Increased Mental Health Challenges and Decreased Resilience
Addressing the Mental Health Challenge: A way forward?

Counseling Centers

As University leaders seek to address the rapidly escalating mental health needs of college students, examining the resources and practices of university counseling centers (UCCs) is clearly an important component. College and university counseling centers were previously thought of as resources to help homesick freshmen adjust to a new community and for seniors to manage career angst. Although most centers still do some of this developmental work as needs have increased, university counseling centers have become much busier places and increasingly similar to community mental health centers. University clinicians regularly treat students with significant mood disorders such as anxiety (often including panic attacks) and depression (sometimes including suicidality); substance abuse and eating disorders; and other major mental illnesses. There are frequent crises, some of them life-threatening. This reality impacts work done during office hours as already busy schedules are adjusted to accommodate immediate needs. Additionally, after-hours schedules have also changed as many centers have expectations for clinicians to be involved in an on-call rotation to address evening, late-night, and weekend crises. As one UCC concluded after an empirical investigation of counseling center usage trends, there is an increase in frequency (more students coming for counseling), severity (more significant clinical presentations), and complexity (having problems that are often multi-faceted) (Benton et al, 2003). Although completed over a decade ago, this research finding remains even more true for the counseling centers of today.

An examination of UCCs role and response to the escalating demands could include a consideration of staffing levels, caseloads, treatment model and triage practices. Additionally, the role of these mental health professionals in equipping the broader campus community should be evaluated.

Staffing levels. Although it has been said that universities cannot “staff their way out” of the mental health crisis (Krasnow, 2019), it is still reasonable to consider appropriate staffing levels at the counseling center. Given the trends, a university counseling center may be seeing double to triple the number of students for counseling than they did just a decade ago. Clearly, the same staff size cannot be expected to meet the needs. At the same time, university resources are not unlimited. Thus, the question emerges: What are reasonable staffing levels?
A very minimum place to start is guidelines of the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS), the accreditation body for university and counseling centers (UCCs), which recommends a minimum of one counselor to every 1,000 to 1,500 students enrolled. It should be noted that these guidelines have not been adjusted in recent years as demand has increased significantly. Thus, those with a counselor:student ratio less than IACS minimum demand will certainly not be able to meet the demand, but it is quite likely that a much higher ratio may be needed. Schools should look at data from the Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors Survey and consider questions such as the following:

- **What is the size of your school?** Small universities typically have higher usage rates and thus need higher staffing ratios. The 2016-2017 year AUCCCD survey data shows that for very small colleges (under 1,500) staffing ratios were an average of 1:682. For small schools (1,501 – 2,500) the average ratio of staff to student was 1:757.

- **What percentage of the students are residential?** Residential students are more likely to seek help at a university counseling center. Additionally, the university administration may be especially interested in having those who potentially disrupt the residential environment (due to self-injury, panic attacks, previous suicide attempts, etc.) monitored by university clinicians.

- **Are there other easily accessible services in town?** If a university is surrounded by a walking distance neighborhood that includes a number of well-respected counselors who are affordable and take the university student health insurance, these providers may significantly lessen the demand on the university’s center. Some Christian universities are fortunate to have a number of alumni who practice in the area. This is especially helpful as the center can refer, knowing they share the faith perspective and understand the college experience. If, on the other hand, the campus is rural and students must drive a great distance to seek alternative care, the university’s center will be more heavily used.

By answering questions such as these, any particular university can see how their reasonable ratio expectations should be adjusted. There are no firm guidelines, but clearly, a small, residential, rural campus will need a significantly higher ratio than a large, commuter, urban campus.
Graduate student clinicians can certainly assist in meeting the demands; however, it should be noted that laws, ethics, and IACS guidelines require that trainees are closely supervised. Professional clinicians should not be asked to supervise too many trainees as the professional is ultimately responsible for the care of their trainees’ cases. The number and type of cases assigned to trainees should depend on their level of training. For example, a first-year masters degree student clinician would need more supervision and should not be assigned the same challenging caseload that a post-doc, who has completed four years of coursework, numerous practica, and a pre-doctoral internship could handle. Guidelines published by the IACS further indicate that trainees should treat no more than 40% of the UCC’s clients and are not counted in the staff: student ratios. Thus, for a variety of reasons, universities should not be overly reliant on trainees to “stretch the budget.”

In some UCCs, a legitimate way to stretch their budget is the use of part-time temporary counselors. Rather than hire additional full-time regular staff counselors, which would be expensive and may not be needed during much of the year, directors can bring in additional clinicians temporarily during peak periods. Local clinicians in private practice are sometimes available for such a post over years.

Case load/Counseling hours per week. An important related question is how many hours of counseling a clinician can be expected to provide in one week. On first glance, it may seem that a full-time counselor should be able to provide 40 hours of counseling per week; however, that is unrealistic for a number of reasons. Counseling centers typically have and need to have regular staff meetings. Counselors also may be expected to attend Student Affairs meetings and be needed on Care Teams, Behavioral Intervention Teams, or Threat Assessment Teams. Many counselors are also involved in some type of prevention or outreach efforts to student groups and training of faculty and staff regarding their response to students. Even thinking specifically about the care of counseling clients, the typical 50-minute session with a counseling client is only a portion of the time spent on the care of that student. Mental health laws and professional ethics require treatment plans and case notes to be written on all clients. Moreover, with more severe and complex cases there may be needed phone calls or meetings with other providers (e.g., their counselor from home, their prescribing psychiatrist, the social worker from the psychiatric hospital that just discharged them). In emergencies or with appropriate releases, there may be discussions with parents, residence life staff, disability services, coaches, or faculty. All of this
takes time. According to IACS guidelines, direct service hours should not exceed 65% of a counselor’s workload. Thus, a full-time counselor should not spend more than 26 hours in counseling. There are other ways of “stretching” the time of counselors. During peak periods, some UCCs ask counselors to consider shorter sessions or stretching out the frequency of sessions (e.g., to every other week—perhaps with reading, journaling, online, or appropriate assignments in between). There are limits to the use of those strategies as the stress and emotional toll can be too much for the clinician if overdone.

Treatment Model. Universities should consider the treatment model being used at their Counseling Center. Although long-term counseling may be of interest to some students, and certainly may be an asset to their personal growth, most counseling centers are not equipped to provide that type of care for the majority of their student clients. Instead, brief treatment approaches are more the norm. Centers can consider various strategies to encourage staff members to stay “on track” with using those brief approaches. One such example would be reviewing cases in staff meetings that have gone over a certain number of individual sessions (e.g., 10), with the treating counselor discussing with other clinicians the rationale for an exception if they feel the need to continue treatment. There are certainly situations that require special consideration, especially if off-campus referral options are not readily available. The Threat Assessment Team, for example, may want “university eyes” on a student who has come to their attention throughout a semester. Students with major mental illnesses (e.g., Schizophrenia) or are on the Autism Spectrum may also require longer treatment as an accommodation.

Exactly how the brief therapy model is communicated varies by centers. Some have a “firm limit” (e.g., Students are allowed 10 sessions per year) and that is readily stated on their website and in the consent for treatment signed by the student. Others communicate a “soft limit” (e.g., It is expected that most students will experience significant relief in around six sessions). Interestingly, session limits have been shown to not impact the average length of treatment of a UCC (Locke, 2017). Group therapy should be encouraged and not “counted against” any session limits as they are an effective and efficient way to deliver care. Some centers are offering groups or workshops (e.g., about stress and coping) as an alternative to or prerequisite for beginning individual counseling.

Triage practices. Many UCCs find it challenging to keep up with the demand but have found it helpful to develop some triage practices. Schedule, walk-in (Shaffer, Love, Chapman, Horn, Haak, & Shen 2017)
and phone (Rockland-Miller & Eels, 2006) triage systems have been developed and described. Centers have developed variations but the basic idea is that by gathering key information, a clinician can rather quickly determine which students need emergency care, which students need to be seen relatively soon, and who would be safe to wait for care.

Relatedly, as increasing numbers of students come into UCCs asking to be seen immediately, forms have been developed to help front desk Administrative Assistants and students identify if the situation is urgent or could wait. The forms educate the student about the difference between an emergency and a concern that could wait for a regularly scheduled appointment. If students believe their situation is urgent, they are asked to identify the nature of their concern by checking options (e.g., thoughts of suicide or self-harm, thoughts of harming another, recent sexual assault, just received devastating news) or clarifying that they need to be seen immediately for some other reason. Otherwise, they acknowledge that they can wait for a regularly scheduled appointment and those arrangements can be made.

Equipping the community. As mental health needs continue to escalate, one of the most important roles for mental health professionals is to equip and support the broader campus community in identifying and responding to students with concerns. This can include multiple components.

General mental health training. Counselors should be included in the training of Resident Assistants and other student leaders. Providing workshops for faculty and staff is also critical. The campus community must be the “eyes and ears” and know how to identify students who are struggling with mental health, abusing substances, or in a violent relationship (Mitchell, 2019). Knowing when and how to refer to the counseling center is essential. Understanding the importance of providing ongoing support and mentoring with appropriate boundaries also makes a difference. Counselors can also remind them of healthy coping skills in their own lives and the importance of being a role model in this regard.

Suicide Prevention. The high rate of suicide among college students, approximately 1,100 students die by suicide and 13% of undergraduates seriously consider suicide each year (NCHA, 2018), makes prevention efforts literally a matter of life and death. Faculty, staff, and student leaders should specifically be trained in suicide prevention. Programs such Question Persuade Refer (QPR) or Campus Connect may be taught by counselors or a similar program could be created by counseling staff.
Bystander Intervention. Training the wider campus community, including the general student body, to take individual responsibility in their roles as observers is another component. Similar to the “If you see something, say something” encouragement by airport security, everyone should be encouraged to take the initiative if they see a person who may be suicidal, psychotic, addicted, etc. Available programs such as Step Up can be easily adapted to a particular campus environment. Using a theological framework such as the Good Samaritan can even allow counselors to teach these concepts as a part of a chapel program.

Multi-disciplinary teams. Counselors have critical roles on university administrative multidisciplinary teams that meet to gather information and determine a way forward with students of concern. Counselors may disclose invaluable counseling center client information with appropriate releases, but even without that, clinicians have critical expertise to share. Partnering with other professionals (e.g., Residence Life, Public Safety), counselors help Student Care Teams, Behavioral Intervention Teams, or Threat Assessment Teams in providing students with the care they need and helping the campus community remain safe.

Campus Programming

Let us now turn our attention to the student programming that we hope will change the current course. These programs increase opportunities for students to reduce stress and anxiety. This section will cover thematic program ideas that specifically address the current proposed MH themes.

Transforming the mind. There is much in counseling literature about restructuring how we think regarding a particular issue. Cognitive restructuring builds appropriate thinking and can release individuals from mired thoughts. Specifically, as people of faith, building an appropriate theology around difficult times provides an opportunity to reframe the current situation. This reframing is not dismissive of the problem, but instead provides an appropriate assessment of the problem and an attempt at finding a suitable solution including accepting that some things might not change. Major themes that have emerged as potential emphases are hope, others-centered, gratefulness, finding purpose, and the development of a theology of suffering. The goal in these programs is to provide students a transformed framework of re-orientated thinking regarding their current situation and to provide tangible applications that will eventually shift the student’s outlook on the issue. This new perspective will allow them to either find alternative solutions or learn how to manage the current condition in a healthy manner.
Building resilience. Much has been speculated about the lack of resilience, or minimally stated the lack of a student’s understanding of his or her resilience. Remedial work in this area is a priority. The challenge is how to implement “resilience building” opportunities without creating more problems. A place to start is developing opportunities for learning appropriate coping skillsets. Counseling center staff collaborating with the residential life programming can be of help. Programs that address traditional stressors like grades and relationship challenges have obvious opportunities to make a significant impact. Furthermore, leaning into teaching a theology of suffering along with helping students see failure as an opportunity and not solely as derailing their dreams will be of help in moving students from a fixed to a growth mindset.

There is much work to be done assisting students in developing healthy relationships. Today’s technology may be suppressing opportunities for real relational development. These newly formed relationships will provide support and buoyancy to those traversing difficult experiences. There is also needed dialogue on finding a balance in parental involvement. We must be mindful that parents can and do play a significant role in their student’s resiliency but their continued significant involvement may be a barrier to the student’s full development.

Physical exercise also plays a positive role in building resiliency. Intramurals, sport team involvement, wilderness experiences, and club participation provide many opportunities for individuals and groups to work on resiliency. The natural hurdles that emerge in these spaces provide graduated challenges that give teachable moments related to an array of resiliency related topics like understanding success and failure along with learning how to push past personal boundaries. Setting up opportunities for students to experience safe, yet challenging, experiences, coupled with mentors and coaches taking advantage of the teachable moments, can do much for teaching resiliency during the college years.

Breaking addictions. Technological devices, like any tool, are utilized for good or ill. The current generation has, for all practical purposes, always had smart phone technology. The personal and corporate management of these devices might be one of the more pressing responsibilities for all of us. Developing boundaries and disciplines in managing their “appropriate use” should be a priority of our campus cultural leaders. A simple illustration of using a spiritual discipline for this task is the application of a “fast.” Much like fasting for one meal or a day gives time and focus, turning off our devices for a particular period may deliver similar op-
opportunities. In addition, fasting or disciplined management of our use of technology can work to break addictive behaviors, returning control back to the individual. To be sure, the details of what a disciplined management or a technology fast will look like for any particular community is still emerging but taking control of this technology is critical.

A reimagined application of a fast in the 21st century provides a glimpse into how we might rethink and apply the spiritual disciplines as practical tools for this generation. These practices can be of great assistance in helping individuals within the communities of faith in dealing with anxiety and depression. These ancient, yet relevant, practices provide necessary space for the hard work of establishing healthy habits and spiritual connections. Some of the more notable disciplines include meditation, confession, worship, fellowship, Sabbath keeping, celebration, Lecto Divina, prayer, service, generosity, fasting and chastity.

Destigmatizing counseling. As was covered in an earlier portion of this document, the utilization and maximization of the counseling center is a critical path towards helping this generation of students. There remains institutional work to be done in helping students find the right assistance in managing their mental health. With strategic thinking, the right assistance will include a vast array of institutional offices. Specifically, higher education can do a better job destigmatizing the work of the counseling centers. What would it take to shift the counseling center into a program where students see it similarly as working within the campus ministry area or even their use of the health center? What would it look like to have programming and support provided by the counseling center in collaboration with a wellness model or spiritual formation? Reducing barriers to the appropriate support will go a long way in assisting students toward healthy development during these critical years. With good planning and collaboration, these changes may not actually increase the workloads of the counseling center staff.

Tactical ways to initiate positive change. The previous list of program ideas is organized thematically to encourage specific programs related to the authors' proposed reasons for the MH crisis. These next ideas will focus on leveraging current institutional resources in order to holistically influence students. Virtually all student development departments provide ongoing programming to its students. If institutional leaders facilitate cross departmental collaboration, the whole campus can be leveraged to impact this national concern. Below is a non-exhaustive list of programming teams available to most institutional leaders.
Student Development has the ability to take a significant lead in campus wide programming. Most departments include or have direct access to Chapel, Residence life, Intramurals, Campus Activities, Outdoor/experiential Programs, Orientation, First Year Experience, Retention, Campus Ministries, and Health Services. What would it look like to organize collaboration around this topic? Off campus partnerships with local churches, regional ministries and wellness programming provide additional opportunities for assistance. Frequently, these services are underutilized. In addition to providing increased or expanded services, these partnerships can often embolden a student to find the needed help due to feeling less conspicuous than utilizing on-campus services.

Career Development has a unique role to play. Programming from the career area can focus on personality assessments (i.e. MBTI, StrengthsQuest, Enneagram, etc.) that encourage a personal understanding of the uniqueness of each individual and can assist with significant conversations around the students calling and purpose. In addition, the Center can provide alternative employment pathways once certain doors close.

Academic partnerships can provide additional help. Departments related to health education professions, psychology/sociology classes, wellness courses, freshman and capstone courses along with graduate program courses all may have a role to play. They can provide appropriate programming that meets their curricular goals as they assist in educating undergraduate students in ways that enrich their mental health.

An institutional policy review may be in order to look at ways institutional systems may unintentionally be adding to student anxieties. For example, an institution may wish to review GPA levels for retaining academic scholarships, the deeper dive into the reasons for and frequency of applying registration holds, or the nature of sanctions applied for various conduct infractions. These and other institutional policies may benefit from review to ascertain if they are being applied in ways that produce unintended consequences.

Conclusion: Looking ahead.

Highlighted Resources

A few documents were especially helpful in gaining a perspective on the problem and potential solutions. Two documents in particular were helpful and are listed below. The first is a publication from The Chronical of Higher Education, Idea Lab Colleges Solving Problems: Student Mental Health printed the summer of 2018. This document is a
compilation of articles published in the CHE over the past few years and focused on student mental health. Most helpful was the initial article titled Stretched to Capacity: What campus counseling centers are doing to meet rising demands, written by Kelly Field.

Gaining a broad-based understanding of what is happening on our campuses is critical in gaining an appropriate perspective of the problem for practitioners. It is also critical to provide research data points for institutional leaders to assist in gaining needed resources. Perhaps the most helpful resource for these purposes was the Center for Collegiate Mental Health. 2017 Annual Report published by Penn State University.

Final Thoughts

The authors fully understand that these emerging MH issues are complex, time-consuming and emotionally intense for everyone involved. The situation is currently shrouded but clarity will come. The reasons we find ourselves here are many, but we propose the most prominent are: Increased Sense of Threat, Over-pressuring and Over-protecting Parenting, Excessive Technology, Underdeveloped Coping Skills, Decreased Social Skills and Social Support. Front line staff working on this issue must be reorganized, resourced, and supported to meet the new demands. What this looks like must be specific to each institution, as resources are as diverse as the institutions themselves. New campus-wide programming is essential to begin to stem the tide. Those programs should include ways to help students reframe their situation, break addictions, build resilience, along with removing unnecessary institutional policies that create anxiety.

In closing, one only has to discuss this MH concern with leaders in our nation’s K-12 educational system to get a glimpse that this issue will most likely be with us for a while. Finding a workable “way forward” will give us the courage and resolve to make a difference. Student development professionals have always been “called” into difficult situations for a grand purpose - to assist those in need and to guide the development of the student in our charge. The depth and breadth of this MH challenge seems new but our calling is not. As people of faith, we understand that our savior modeled stepping into the fray and suffering for the sake of others. It is our sincere hope that this praxis briefing will be a helpful guide for decision makers in moving forward for the sake of our students and their flourishing.
References


Twenge, J. (2018). iGen: Why today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood—and what that means for the rest of us. New York: Atria.

The Spiritual Formation of Recent College Graduates and Residence Life Influences Attributed to that Spiritual Formation

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Abstract

This study investigated the spiritual formation experience of alumni from a Midwest Christian college six months to five years after graduation and the spiritual formation factors they attribute to their Residence Life experience. The data revealed that alumni persist in their Christian faith, and seek growth in Christian beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Findings regarding Residence Life were consistent with the literature, revealing that the most significant source of spiritual formation for alumni are peer relationships, interactions, and conversations. Programming was not a significant factor in a student’s spiritual formation. This study led to several recommendations for application including a re-orienting of Residence Life’s mindset regarding spiritual formation. This mindset would conclude that the most spiritually significant role is that of community facilitation and development, the context for most spiritual formation. Recommendations for further study include studying specific aspects of peer relationships, interactions, and conversations that may be spiritually influential.
Introduction

Emerging adults are experiencing the world in dramatically different ways than previous generations, and many of these changes usher in new challenges for these adults to face and navigate. The steady drift of emerging adults away from their Christian faith after graduating high schools is only one example (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 9–19). This reality has been attributed to many things, and although one may anticipate college to be the trigger for faith abandonment, it is often not the reason for these emerging adults. This pseudo-trigger provides higher education professionals the context and opportunity to use the college experience to impact an emerging adult’s spiritual formation and development.

The experiential impact on emerging adult spiritual formation could happen through multiple avenues on campus, but one common experience for college students is that of Residence Life (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 59). Most Christian colleges not only offer residential housing, but often require students to live on campus for some duration of their time at the school. This requirement could be a natural vehicle for spiritual formation. Intentionally including elements of spiritual formation in the Residence Life experience could ensure that students grow into thriving Christians and Kingdom contributors. In order to do this effectively and efficiently, it is important for Residence Life staff to know how to maximize spiritual formation within the department and through the programs offered.

In order to understand more about the influence Residence Life has on a student’s spiritual formation, it is important that a student’s current context, understanding of spiritual formation, and college experience are taken into consideration. Christian Smith conducted substantial research on the emerging adult experience in multiple aspects of life, as well as the various challenges they face that are unique to their demographic (Smith & Snell, 2009). There is also significant literature on spiritual formation, which can be defined in multiple ways and with many metaphors (Nouwen, Christiansen, & Laird, 2010, p. vii) (Fowler, 1995, p. 3) (Greenman & Kalantzis, 2010, p. 24) (Hagberg & Guelich, 2011). Spiritual formation is fluid and complex, which means understanding the nuances and diverse perspectives on spiritual formation is vital if Residence Life professionals are to understand how to facilitate it. Finally, a student’s college experience is the context in which his or her
spiritual formation will occur. It is important for Residence Life professionals to understand their own context in order to know what resources are available and what practices could facilitate the most significant spiritual formation. It is vital that Residence Life professionals are intentional and strategic in the four short years they influence these emerging adults’ spiritual formation (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 91).

Purpose Statement

This study intended to begin to understand the influence of Residence Life on a student’s spiritual formation and the factors students attribute to that formation at a specific Christian liberal arts college in the Midwest. The study analyzed students’ attitudes, practices, and beliefs regarding their Christian faith as well as their Residence Life experience and was guided by the following research questions:

- How would [small Christian liberal arts college] graduates describe their current spiritual formation six months to five years after graduation as defined by reported attitudes, practices, and commitments?
- What specific aspects of Residence Life played a role in [small Christian liberal arts college] graduates’ spiritual formation as perceived six months to five years after graduation? Why?

Literature Review

Emerging Adults

Most church leaders as well as trusted researchers readily agree that adolescents often become less religious after leaving home (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 91). These adolescents move into a time of life recently labeled as “emerging adulthood,” a new life phase in the American script coined by Jeffery Arnett in 2000 (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p. 3). This life phase is defined by identity exploration, instability, feeling in-between, self-focused development, and an optimism about life’s possibilities (Arnett, 2006, 3-19). In 2009, Christian Smith, well-known researcher of emerging adults, published findings from a longitudinal study called the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). In this study, he and a team of researchers conducted hundreds of interviews and surveyed thousands of adolescents and young adults over several years, tracking their spirituality and the factors influencing their religious lives (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 3-4).

Emerging adults are not hostile to religion or spirituality; however, they have increasing apathy toward it as well as increasing self-awareness and
open-mindedness to societal ideas (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p. 15–16). This apathy leads to religion and spirituality often being forced out of their daily lives and replaced with other, more important, opportunities and responsibilities. Many who grow up in Christian environments find themselves wandering away from the religion of their youth, often in effort to “limit the felt discontinuities between faith and lifestyle” (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p. 18). David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, categorized Christian emerging adults into three categories: nomads, prodigals, and exiles. Over a four-year study, the Barna Group found that these adults would walk away from the organized church but still consider themselves Christians (nomads), lose their faith and deny being Christians (prodigals), or continue investing in their faith but feel stuck between the church and their culture (exiles) (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 9–19).

The reasons for faith wandering are endless and represented only by each emerging adult’s unique story, yet the Barna Group research revealed several common themes among those who wander from their faith. Emerging adults often see the Christian church as overprotective (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 95-98). The church’s creation of a Christian sub-culture communicates to these adults that the church is afraid of the world and must protect them from things that are harmful or evil such as media, other religions, culture, or societal norms. They also find Christianity and the church shallow. Some of these adults have shallow faith that cannot stand the test of trial or challenge, and some of these adults have only been given Christian information rather than Christian discipleship (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 113-15). Another theme the Barna Group found was the feeling that the church is repressive or exclusive. Emerging adults “feel torn between the false purity of traditionalism and the empty permissiveness of their peers” (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 150). They do not embrace a rule-oriented faith in the same way as older generations. Only 33% think that spiritual maturity means trying to follow the rules in the Bible as opposed to 66% of their elders (66+ years old) (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 165).

In light of the research showing many emerging adults leaving the traditional Christian church and faith, it is important to note that college is not as detrimental to their spirituality as one may assume. The large majority of college students report that their faith was strengthened during their college years (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p 21). In fact, those who attend college are less likely to stop church attendance or renounce growth.
their faith (Setran & Kiesling, 2013, p 21) than those who do not attend. The most popular forms of spiritual searching among emerging adults are social in nature, meaning most spiritual activities revolve around groups designed to facilitate spiritual discovery within a social context (Morris, Barnard, Morris, & Williamson, 2010, p. 34).

Spiritual Formation on a College Campus

Spiritual formation is often fostered in the Christian college classroom, but spiritual formation must go beyond college programming such as chapel and ministry options (Bender & Self, 2014, p. 42-45). According to Balzer and Reed (2012), a holistic approach to creating an institutional context for spiritual formation must be tied to the hiring and development of faculty as well as the development of specific resources to aid faculty in guiding students in spiritual development. Spiritual development can happen after an institution has “developed relational approaches to education and have hired faculty and staff who are committed to influencing the whole person of the student for the sake of the world” (Bender & Self, 2014, p. 42-45). This philosophy has morphed over the years and now is expressed in Christian colleges through the college community.

Communities are carefully calculated to teach students to relate everything to their Christian faith (Holmes, 1991, p. 93). According to a study done by Dr. Todd Hall surveying students from seventeen colleges belonging to the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), conversations and relationships with faculty, staff, and peers make the biggest impact on students and their spiritual formation (Hall, 2006). These relationships can transform campus culture into one that fosters spiritual formation.

Another study done by Stella Ma from Biola University looked at factors that impact spiritual formation in college students (Ma, 2003, p. 321-339). The study found that residential students experienced greater spiritual formation than commuter students. Working through crises and practicing spiritual disciplines were two of the most significant factors in a student’s spiritual formation. Ma (2003) suggested that college staff invest in campus resources that help students in crisis as well as work toward ways spiritual disciplines can be encouraged whether directly or indirectly. Overall, nonacademic factors were overwhelmingly more significant to a student’s spiritual formation than academic factors.
Residence Life has slowly become a focus to researchers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The need to provide evidence for learning in residence halls propels this research and comes from increased fiscal tension and academic standards within institutions. Overall, students who live in residence halls are more likely to remain in college and graduate than those who do not live in residence halls, but according to Blimling and Schuh (2015) the research that proves this kind of success is indirect, meaning that the residence hall is often the link to relationships, resources, and activities that make a student successful (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 59).

Residence halls create environments where student learning happens. Since most influence happens indirectly, some researchers would say that the “nature of residence hall programming is less important than the fact that it occurs at all and that it initiates and sustains students’ intellectual and interpersonal involvement” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 653). The frequency and nature of interactions and common attitudes, beliefs, and interests may be more influential in development than the content of subject matter.

Social groups formed within residence halls also deeply impact student learning. In particular, a roommate can greatly affect a student’s learning. Research has found that one’s happiness is not influenced by his or her roommate and together they have small influence on the other’s mental health, but a roommate can increase a student’s feeling of acceptance and impact his or her academic performance (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 78–79). Value-based decisions (drugs, gambling, smoking, sexual activity, etc.) are also not significantly influenced by roommates. Instead, the social force of a group is the most powerful influencer in student behavior and learning.

Another influencer is a Residence Life professional’s feedback. Since these staff members see students at their best and worst, they have opportunities to encourage growth and development in areas that would otherwise go unnoticed (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 82–84). Research widely agrees that feedback is a necessary learning strategy and can sometimes double the rate of learning in the classroom (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 82–84). The feedback Residence Life staff gives students is both formal and informal, and an integral part to the learning process.

One particular Residence Life model, the Learning Model, embodies the philosophy of most Christian colleges by creating an environment where students can not only contemplate what they are learning in the
classroom but also explore diverse beliefs and ideas of peers, faculty, and staff in order to establish meaning and a mature self. A residence hall director and faculty-in-residence have the opportunity to mentor students in their domain, making these relationships feel natural and comfortable (Sriram & McLevain, 2016, p. 75). This means that in these relationships, especially with faculty and staff, learning happens from and with one another, which is an essential part of a student’s personal and professional development. It makes space for students to have constructive conversations about their meaning-making identity, which establishes a platform for their beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Small, 2014, p. 12).

Methodology
This study took place at a small Christian liberal arts college in the Midwest. This institution was chosen for its highly developed and nationally respected Residence Life program. The sample was focused upon May 2013–2017 graduates who lived in campus housing for at least two semesters. Respondents who met the criteria may be located all over the United States or the world and were contacted over the Internet. This quantitative research study utilized a survey questionnaire to collect data about spirituality, faith, and perceived influences on the respondent’s spiritual formation and concluded with basic demographic questions. The survey was sent out in partnership with the campus Alumni Office via email with the intent to receive responses from recent graduates with varying demographics.

The survey consisted of three sections: Christian Spiritual Formation, Residence Life Impact, and basic demographics. The Christian Spiritual Formation section was a grouping of questions that correlated to the first research question. These questions inquired about a respondent’s spiritual attitudes, practices, and commitments. The Residence Life Impact section was a grouping of questions correlated to the second research question. The questions in this section asked about a respondent’s Residence Life experience and the spiritual formation he or she did or did not perceive to experience.

Discussion
Analysis of the data revealed that the majority of respondents strongly believe in God, that they are a Christian, and that their Christian faith is important to them. They also are strongly committed to their Christian faith and relationship with God, which influences their daily
life, relationships, and decisions. The responses seem to suggest that their Christian faith and spiritual formation are foundational to the entirety of their lives. Overall, respondents feel strongly about their basic spiritual beliefs and commitments. They are generally not in seasons of questioning their basic spiritual beliefs, and their commitments translate to high participation in spiritual disciplines, specifically prayer, worship, Bible reading, service, and financial giving as seen in Table 1.1. These high percentages of participation are evidences of their strong beliefs and commitments and are consistent with Stella Ma’s research that spiritual practices and disciplines are major factors of spiritual formation (Ma, 2003, p. 321-339).

Table 1.1 Religious or Spiritual Disciplines and Practices Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious or Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Percentage of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Giving</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Study</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence/Solitude</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=247

When it comes to respondents’ experiences, although their perceptions are still positive, they are not as consistent as they are about their beliefs and commitments. Their responses vary more regarding their experience with God, prayer, joy, contentment, and peace, which suggests that they do not experience their spirituality to the same degree they are committed to their spirituality. This could be for a variety of reasons such as a respondent’s theology about how God speaks and manifests himself in his or her life, or that respondents struggle to live and experience God as much as he or she believes in him, although the data do not inform the specific reasons for these patterns.

Analysis of the data regarding Residence Life showed that 76.9% of respondents agreed to varying degrees that Residence Life positively impacted their spiritual formation, which could potentially confirm
Stella Ma’s research that says that resident students experience significant spiritual formation during their college experience. The data clearly showed that the impact of Residence Life is complex and that relationships—not programs, structures, or campus resources—were the most impactful. This finding aligns with the literature that influence happens indirectly, and the “nature of residence hall programming is less important than the fact that it occurs at all and that it initiates and sustains students’ intellectual and interpersonal involvement” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 653).

The data indicated that the closer and more personal a relationship was to a student, the more influential it was on his or her spiritual formation as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Spiritually Influential Relationships within the Resident’s Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>M/SD</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Slightly Agree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (5)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (6)</th>
<th>Does Not Apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (roommates, suite-mates, friends) on my floor or in my building positively influenced my spiritual formation.</td>
<td>M=5.31 SD=1.01</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Resident Assistant(s) (RA) positively influenced my spiritual formation.</td>
<td>M=4.03 SD=1.56</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Resident Director(s) (RD) positively influenced my spiritual formation.</td>
<td>M=3.21 SD=1.60</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=247
For example, 84.3% of respondents agreed that relationships with people they directly lived with influenced their spiritual formation, while only 40.1% of respondents agreed that the RA relationship was influential. Those numbers dropped dramatically when asked about relationships with professional staff such as a Resident Director. Roommates/suite-mates, floor/building friendships, and conversations with peers were the top three important factors to a student’s spiritual formation, a finding that is congruent with Dr. Todd Hall’s research (2006), which states that conversations and relationships with faculty, staff, and peers make the biggest impact on students and their spiritual formation. These relationships, conversations, and interactions are the key to a student’s spiritual formation. It could be concluded that the environment that the RA creates on his or her floor can help or hinder the relationships that residents make, although the data do not directly show this conclusion.

Although Residence Life programs or resources were not as influential or important to respondents as relationships, there were still interesting and significant findings about these aspects of the student experience. The most influential Residence Life factor is the support and resources provided to students who are struggling. Almost 70% of respondents indicated that they had a difficult time during their time in college that necessitated care or support from Residence Life, and of those students, 77% of them agreed that the experience resulted in a positive and spiritually significant experience. Similarly, almost 80% of respondents indicated that campus resources (Counseling Center, Academic Support, Student Health Services, and Chaplain’s Office) affected their college experience, and of those respondents 60% of them agreed that their experience with these resources positively impacted their spiritual formation.

These findings support Stella Ma’s research and recommendations about student crisis (Ma, 2003, p. 321-339). Ma found that crisis was one of the top factors for spiritual formation in a college student and, as a result, recommended that colleges invest in resources and support for these students in order to support their spiritual formation. The findings of this study suggest that many of these alumni experienced a crisis during college in which they received care and were spiritually impacted as a result.

Those who ranked “Being a Residence Life student leader” as most important (among several Residence Life factors on the survey) agreed more than other respondents that they had a spiritually significant relationship with a Residence Life staff member and that their Graduate...
Resident Advisor and Resident Director positively influenced their spiritual formation. Although it is not surprising that staff relationships were positive influences since student leaders work closely with Residence Life staff, the influence is significantly different from those who were not Residence Life student leaders and provides proof that those relationships do contribute to facilitating spiritual formation in a student leader.

**Recommendations**

Residence Life staff needs to consider creating a healthy environment and facilitating community formation as key foundations for encouraging spiritual formation. In light of this study, there are several recommendations for Student Development professionals.

First, build a campus culture of spiritual formation. Many of the following recommendations could be attempted through programming, but in light of the data, it seems like these recommendations need to be integrated into a campus culture instead of being addressed strictly through programming. Programming should be seen as supplemental and reinforcing of an existing campus culture of spiritual formation. Second, focus on strategies and methods that intentionally facilitate healthy relationships among residents in campus housing. Since friendships among roommates, suite-mates, and hall-mates are the most spiritually influential factor of the Residence Life experience, Residence Life staff should focus their energy on creating environments for these relationships to form and flourish in healthy ways. Third, invest in the flow of discipleship from professional staff to student leaders so the student leader is equipped to form a community that is conducive to deep, meaningful friendships and may result in spiritual formation. Residence Life roles support and facilitate healthy community, which breeds friendships that facilitate spiritual formation. Finally, consider strategic ways to increasingly integrate positive role models among students and staff/faculty into the living environment. This could be done through a variety of facilitated relationships such as faculty partners or integrated housing (freshman through seniors living in the same hall or living area).

The findings of this study also prompt recommendations for further study. Studying specific aspects of peer relationships, interactions, and conversations that are found to be spiritually influential would bring further insight to this important factor of Residence Life. A longitudinal study focusing on the specific links between a student’s current spiritual formation and his or her spiritual formation while in college would also
provide key links between Residence Life spiritual formation and the lasting impacts of a student’s college experience.

Limitations

This study contained a few limitations that are noteworthy. Respondents were intentionally tasked with defining spiritual formation for themselves since the survey did not define it for them. Although this was done intentionally in order to give respondents the freedom to assess their experience for what they understood it to be, it also creates potential confusion about what the results of the study mean. “Positive spiritual formation” could mean different things to each respondent, and respondents could strongly agree with one meaning and strongly disagree with another meaning. The varying perceptions of what this term means could have created discrepancies that are not easily articulated or discovered in the data. Additionally, a respondent’s spiritual formation would have been impacted by a variety of factors during their time at college. Asking respondents to attribute their spiritual formation to certain factors could be difficult for some, or those attributions could be influenced by factors outside of Residence Life. For example, a student could have had a positive experience on his or her floor and experienced significant spiritual growth, but also had a negative experience in a class or with a professor that impacted his or her experience. Since experience is complex and comprehensive, it could be difficult for respondents to make distinctions, and those distinctions would be impossible for the researcher to notice through this particular study.

Another significant limitation is in the number of respondents. The survey was distributed to 2,735 alumni, but only 9% completed the survey. Although this response rate matched the expectation of the Alumni Office, a higher number of respondents would increase the accuracy of the data reflecting the experiences of a group this large. Those who completed the survey could have had motivation to click on the link and complete it that stemmed from overwhelmingly positive or negative experiences in Residence Life. Gathering a larger number of respondents could better reflect the overall experience of alumni.

Conclusion

An emerging adult’s spiritual formation is deeply impacted during the college years. The impact on a his or her spiritual formation can come from many avenues, but is deeply impacted by the daily interactions and conversations with peers and friends. On residential college campuses,
these interactions and conversations take place largely in the residence halls, which means that Residence Life has an opportunity to impact student spiritual formation. Student crises and their subsequent need for care is often an opportunity for spiritual formation that results in positive growth. Residence Life student leaders experience the most spiritual formation from mentoring relationships with professional Residence Life staff and also continue to pursue mentoring relationships after graduation. Overall, alumni from this Midwest college continue in their Christian spiritual formation after they graduate. They persist in spiritual beliefs, attitudes, and practices learned during their college experience even after they graduate. They sometimes struggle in those beliefs, but overall press through the challenges even when their experience does not match their beliefs.

The literature revealed that friendships, conversation, and social pressure often impact a student significantly more than structured programming, faculty or staff relationships, or academics (Blimling & Schuh, 2015, p. 78–79). The findings of this study support the literature, confirming past research studies in this area, as well as confirming Stella Ma’s (2003) recommendations regarding the importance of student crisis situations. Many of the resources and responses at this Midwest college align with her recommendations and the findings of this study are evidence that the recommendations can be fruitful and effective.

Not only do students find their peer relationships to be spiritually influential, but they also look on them with fondness. Student development professionals need to re-define spiritual formation success as community development and facilitation of healthy relationships. Creating healthy and safe communities in which strong friendships can form among students is doing a substantial portion of the work toward encouraging emerging adult spiritual formation.

References


Impact of a Student Leadership Experience on the Development of Creativity in Undergraduate Students

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a leadership experience on the development of creativity in undergraduate students in order to help student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators better understand how they can develop creativity in their students. A phenomenological study was conducted on students who held a leadership position as a Resident Assistant or cabinet member of a student organization on the campus of a small institution in the Midwestern United States. The study consisted of an open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews. Key findings from this study include insight into various aspects of students’ experiences in leadership including event planning, supervisors, collaboration, impact on communication, looking past failure, incorporation of interests into their roles, redefining creativity through their roles, and the students’ creative self-efficacy. These findings additionally provide support for the idea that a leadership experience is an effective method for teaching creativity to undergraduate students.
Introduction

Society often views creativity as some abstract, ethereal mantel which graces certain individuals, bestowing upon them the ability to be artistically inclined (McNiff, 1998). Current research, however, suggests otherwise. Within the past thirty years, scholars across the fields of social sciences and education have become increasingly intrigued with the subject of creativity, examining what traits or dispositions are present in creative individuals, the factors contributing to creativity, and methodologies for its development. Considering the complexity of challenges faced by society, it is important for institutions of higher education to develop individuals who are able to find creative solutions from multidisciplinary perspectives (Berrett, 2013).

Fortunately, the tools utilized by creative individuals are often ideal developmental outcomes for those who are involved in student leadership. Despite these potential connections between student leadership and creativity, little to no research exists on the topic. This study sought to examine these potential connections to help student development professionals understand how to develop creativity in their student leaders.

Working Definitions and Purpose Statement

Because of the variety in approaches to creativity, this study utilized the following working definition: creativity is the ability to make connections within a single field or across multiple fields of knowledge to create a novel concept or product. Student leadership is also a broad topic within the realm of higher education, so this study used the following working definition: student leadership refers to any position in which a student is developed in order to cultivate characteristics indicative of effective leaders. Although Astin and Astin (1996) argued leadership is a process rather than a position, this study discussed leadership in this study as a role since the students examined were in designated leadership positions.

The purpose of this study was to examine if a student leadership experience fosters traits associated with creative individuals and if so, the extent and manner in which those traits are being developed. Two research questions guided the study:

1. Is creativity a developmental outcome of a student leadership experience?
2. What traits indicative of creative individuals are being developed in student leaders and how are these traits being developed?
Literature Review

Creativity

The Nature of Creativity. The subject of creativity is difficult to define concretely. Kandiko (2012) affirmed this idea, stating, “creativity research is so broad and contested in part because it is conceptualised from several disciplinary angles” (p. 192). Despite the broad nature of the subject, research on creativity provides an image of not artistic ability, but the creation of new or novel thinking (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hulme, Thomas, & DeLaRosby, 2014; Runco, 2003; Treffinger, Young, Selby, & Shepadson, 2002).

In the literature, creativity is often described utilizing lists of characteristics indicative of creative individuals. Some of these characteristics include curiosity (Hulme et al., 2014; Runco, 2007), engagement with a broad range of fields (Lucas, Claxton, & Spencer, 2014; Runco, 2007), comfort with entering into ambiguous or uncertain situations (Lucas et al., 2014; Runco 2007), collaboration (Lucas et al. 2014), and creative self-efficacy—the idea that an individual is creative (Hulme et al., 2014; Runco 2007). In addition, Hulme et al. (2014) described creativity as a process to be undertaken and proposed a framework for creative ideation (pp. 17-20). The emphasis in this method was on the final step in which ideas are prototyped, refined, and implemented in order to put the creative output to use. Between the traits described above and the process described by Hulme et al. (2014), the literature on creativity rejects the notion that creative ability is reserved for the artistically gifted.

The Development of Creativity. After determining the nature of creativity comes the challenge of developing it in university students. Fortunately for colleges, “the fact that Creativity is largely intentional supports the notion that ‘we can do something about creativity.’ It is not fixed at birth, nor necessarily lost in midlife or late adulthood” (Runco, 2007, p. 411). This concept that creativity is about developing traits or methods is particularly good news in light of the TED talk by Robinson (2006), arguing the modern school system is “educating people out of their creative capacities.”

Hulme et al. (2014) proposed the importance of creativity ecosystems as a method for developing creative characteristics and supporting creative methodology. They proposed generating such environments through reengineering campus organizational structures and organizing learning experiences to develop creative characteristics (Hulme et al.,
Additionally, the literature often identifies supervisors and educators as critical components to providing a space in which students can develop in their creative potential (Alencar, Fleith, & Pereira, 2017; Baillie, 2006; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006).

Leadership Development in College Students

One of the fundamental theories in understanding how leadership and other qualities are developed in students is Astin’s involvement theory (1984), suggesting students who are involved on campus have greater developmental and learning outcomes. Utilizing Astin (1984), Patterson (2012) concluded involvement in organizations and clubs was an influential factor in developing leadership, particularly in interdisciplinary organizations (p. 7). Additionally, Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) found those who participated in leadership activities experienced greater developmental outcomes than non-participants and experiences in leadership education and training were significant contributing factors to such development.

In 1996, Astin and Astin published their social change model of leadership development, arguing leadership was primarily concerned with societal change and is a process, collaborative, and value-based (p. 10). Astin and Astin (1996) categorized the values at the level of the individual, group, or community. At the individual level were consciousness of self, congruence of behavior, and commitment. Group values were collaboration, common purpose, and the ability to engage in controversy with civility. Finally, the community and societal value was citizenship. These values were all centered around the idea of change, the central hub of the model (Astin & Astin, 1996, p. 21).

Intersections between Creativity and Student Leadership

Many points of similarity exist between creativity and student leadership in the university. The first such area where a similarity exists is in collaboration, which Astin and Astin (1996) described as one of the seven values of their social change model of student leadership. Similarly, Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer (2014) included a collaborative disposition as one of the five dimensions in their model of creativity. A second aspect of convergence between creativity and student leadership is in engagement within a broad range of fields. Patterson (2012) observed students were more developed in their leadership capacities when involved in interdisciplinary organizations while Lucas et al. (2014) described the ability to make connections as an aspect of an imaginative disposition. Additionally, Runco (2007) included the presence of a wide
range of interests as an indicative characteristic of a creative individual. The third area of commonality in leadership and creativity is the ability to enter into uncertain or complex situations. Cress et al. (2001) used the ability to deal with complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity and willingness to take risks as categories for measuring students’ leadership ability. Runco (2007) also included each of these factors in his traits of creative individuals.

Ultimately, a myriad of characteristics overlap between leadership development in students and creative individuals. Ideally, if students are given the opportunity to be creative, they should be developing and learning more due to their involvement in creative practice, per Astin (1984). Unfortunately, little to no research exists examining if students involved in leadership are developing other creative capabilities in addition to the traits mentioned above.

Method

Little research has been conducted on this topic, so a qualitative study was deemed most appropriate to explore this subject. Since this study examined students’ experiences and how creativity is being developed through such occurrences, a phenomenological was the most fitting design-type (Creswell, 2013) Additionally, this study was highly exploratory, so bracketing out the researcher’s thoughts and experiences with the phenomenon would have inhibited drawing comprehensive conclusions, therefore a hermeneutical approach was utilized (van Manen, 1990).

Participants and Procedures

Participants for this study were students who held a position as Resident Assistant (RA) or as a member of a cabinet under the student organizations office at a private, faith-based, liberal-arts university in the Midwest. These groups were purposefully selected, as they would be the most likely to develop the traits of interest due to the time and energy commitments inherent in their roles. After obtaining a list of the names of student leaders and asking the directors of residence life and student programs to encourage their students to participate, the researcher sent out an online survey. The survey inquired how or to what extent traits associated with creativity were being developed through their leadership experiences (ie. collaboration, broad interests, affinity toward complexity, and risk tolerance). In order to increase the response rate, the
researcher offered a drawing for a $10 gift card to the campus coffee shop as incentive.

Next, the researcher analyzed the surveys and eight students who included responses indicating a unique perspective on one or more of the traits were contacted, provided they indicated interest in being interviewed. The interview protocol sought to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how students developed the indicated traits through their leadership experiences. Additionally, the interview protocol inquired how participants defined creativity and if their leadership experience had any impact on their thinking concerning creativity as a whole. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed so the researcher could analyze the data.

Analysis and Validity

After collecting the data, the researcher read through the data and coded it according to common key words and phrases. After the coding process, the researcher grouped codes into themes, and interpretation began (Creswell, 2013). To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher utilized triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). These strategies prevented one individual account from providing the sole basis of a reported finding and allowed participants to make corrections to misunderstood responses.

Results

Survey Results

The researcher sent out the survey to 169 students, of which 32 responded. Overall, most responses affirmed leadership positions had given participants opportunities to engage with traits indicative of creative individuals. The largest number of negative responses were to the questions inquiring if the leadership role allowed the participants to develop a broader range of interests and if the role allowed them to test and refine their ideas, with four negative responses per question.

When asked whether their experience helped them to better make connections across multiple fields, participants on average interpreted the question as referring to networking connections rather than connections in information. Thus, the researcher discarded responses demonstrating an obvious misunderstanding of the question. To rectify this error, the researcher asked a similar question with clarified wording in the individual interviews.
Interview Results

Incorporation of Interests into Role. In the interviews, all eight participants discussed incorporating their interests into their leadership positions. One student organization member referred back to her previous experience as an RA and recalled teaching her residents how to knit, while a member of a student organization described showing her cabinets films and attending academic talks to prompt discussion.

Sub-themes: Connection to major and incorporation of class material into role. Throughout the interviews, seven of the eight participants made a connection to their major, six of whom discussed their major in relation to their leadership position. Additionally, four participants mentioned incorporating class information into their roles. One RA described how both her major and specific course information impacted her experience as a leader:

I was having super hard conversations, um, on my wing and I didn’t know how to approach them, or I, like, didn’t understand why they wouldn’t—why they reacted in this way or what they wouldn’t open up about this. And I would go to class and literally be, like, “and here’s Johari’s window, and here’s closed information, and here’s open information,” and I was, like, “oh my gosh, this is, like, what I’ve—this is why I can’t communicate with these people,” or “this is why this person is upset about this because I responded in this way.”

Sub-theme: New interests due to role. In addition to existing interests, six participants spoke about how their roles fostered new interests. One RA discussed her new interests in other cultures stemming from the relationships she built with Korean and Bahamian residents. Through their experiences, participants indicated they were able to find ways to incorporate interests into their roles and discover new passions as a result of their experiences in leadership.

Event Planning. The second major theme was event planning. All eight participants discussed their role in planning or executing events in their interviews. One male RA stated:

I got to put together an escape room. That was a lot of fun and it was kind of ambiguous because I didn’t know how to throw one together and—but I felt like the—taking risks is an idea that has been grown, uh, and fostered in the student development program, um,
and this idea if you have a creative idea that you’re not sure if it might go over well, like, take that risk, see how it develops.

Participants discussed how their planning of events also fostered new interests, allowed for collaboration, or allowed them to see themselves as creative individuals.

Impact on Communication. Seven of the eight participants mentioned their experiences impacted how they communicated in some manner. One RA spoke about learning the importance of communication from his predecessors:

…some things were implemented really well, um, like, for instance, like, planning–like, floor emails, like, I didn’t know at the time how vital that–that was–how effective that was. But, you know, I just carried on that kind of tradition and it was effective, so I learned from that.

Sub-theme: Creativity in conversation. In the discussion on communication, half of the participants mentioned being creative in conversations. One RA reflected:

I’ve definitely learned in this role, like, how do you creatively start a conversation with someone that you’ve only known–with a freshman that you’ve only known for five hours of, like, “the only thing that I can see that we have in common is you have jeans on, and I do too.” And, like, how do you start a conversation with this person, uh, like, off of jeans?

Of the four who discussed creativity in conversation, three described it from the perspective of an RA while one recounted the topic from her experience facilitating large-scale conversations on campus in a student organization.

Supervisors. Six of the eight participants also mentioned their supervisor at some point in the interview. Participants spoke about their supervisors’ influence on their thinking or how their supervisors allowed for a significant experience. One participant reflected on how her supervisor pushed her and her cabinet to take risks and to innovate with a growth mindset. Others additionally described their supervisors’ roles in developing new interests and helping to teach them how to effectively program.

Collaboration. Another common theme in the interviews was an amount
of collaboration in their roles, with six of the eight participants mentioning the idea. Participants mentioned collaborating with other organizations and individuals, building relationships across campus. Some also discussed how collaboration within their organization showed them the value of seeing and utilizing the strengths inherent in their group.

Sub-theme: Going to team for input or support. Among the discussion of collaboration in their leadership positions, four participants mentioned a team of people with whom they could consult for input or support. One RA recounted:

When people say, “hey I want to go out and play volleyball” or “I want to go do more, like, athletic kind of events,” like, I can’t relate on that. And so I had to, like, go to [my co-RAs] and say, “hey, uh, how would you do this? How would you think about implementing this kind of activity?”

Looking Past Failure. The sixth major theme was looking past failure, either real or perceived. One of the six participants who mentioned this theme discussed how he was able to develop a growth mindset from his major and from his time in student programs. This participant further related how he views failure as an “iterative process,” a term derived from his major referring to a cycle of testing an idea or program, failing, and fixing it before trying again.

Redefining Creativity through Role. In their discussion of creativity, all eight participants mentioned some way in which their experiences in leadership influenced their views or definition of creativity. All had different ways of defining creativity but described how their definition, thoughts, or views on creativity changed through an experience or training within their leadership program. These descriptions of creativity often had similar components such as describing creativity as art or music (although not exclusively), creativity involving something new or original, and creativity as uniqueness.

Sub-theme: Creativity as art or music. Of the eight participants, seven mentioned creativity as including art and music. The one participant excluded from this number still mentioned art but discussed how it does not fit within his “paradigm” of creativity. Others mentioned art as being a more traditional idea of what defines creativity or how they at some point used art as a measurement of their own creativity (or lack thereof).

Sub-theme: Creativity as new or original. In their descriptions of creativity, five participants described creativity as being new or original in some
way. One participant stated it as, “making something original, fresh, or new, even just if to yourself, um, and it can be within a specific framework or making a new framework for things to be designed under.” Another said she defined creativity as, “doing something new, um, maybe pushing yourself, um, in an area—something that you haven’t done before or that maybe somebody hasn’t laid out for you to do or you haven’t seen done perhaps.”

Sub-theme: Creativity as unique. Although similar to an idea of something being new or original, four participants discussed creativity as putting a unique, individualized spin on an idea. One participant stated, “it’s not even necessarily creating something, I think it’s engaging with concepts, with ideas, with physical materials in… not necessarily new but in very unique and personal-to-you ways.” Another described creativity as “an individual’s, like, unique way of experiencing,” occurring in a variety of outlets.

Creative Self-Efficacy. The final major theme participants discussed was creative self-efficacy or the idea that one is creative. All eight of the participants stated they thought of themselves as creative. One RA described her view of herself in the following manner:

I like to do things differently. I like to break molds. I am a little bit of a challenger in that way, if somebody tells me to do something or says I should do something, I’m gonna find the, like, freshest way to do that.

Participants also discussed their views of themselves as creative in relation to unique skillsets, imagination, working within various frameworks, or being creative within their major.

Sub-theme: Role impacting view of self as creative. Seven of the eight participants affirmed their leadership experience had an impact on their creative self-efficacy. Participants often discussed how their views of themselves as creative individuals were impacted as their roles allowed them to see ways that they were creative. Additionally, some mentioned their training specifically discussed creativity, thus broadening their perspectives on what creativity entails. Amongst the participants, one indicated she did not feel like her experience in leadership contributed to her creative self-efficacy as she had always viewed herself as a creative person.
Discussion

The results of this study provide insight into how creativity can be developed through a student leadership position. This study indicated leadership positions put students in spaces where they are able to develop creative skills and then utilize them. Leadership experiences also provided students the opportunities to redefine creativity and see the ways in which they were creative themselves.

Key Findings

Event Planning. Based on participants’ responses, event planning was a common way for students to develop their creativity, as it required them to gain comfort in working with ambiguity and complexity, traits mentioned in leadership and creativity literature (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Hulme, Thomas, & DeLaRosby, 2014; Lucas, Claxton, & Spencer, 2014; Runco, 2007). Event planning also provided students the opportunities to incorporate interests into their roles and collaborate with others, in line with Lucas et al. (2014) and Hulme et al. (2014). Through events participants gained beneficial practice in collaboration, engaging with ambiguous circumstances, and the process of prototyping and refining ideas.

Participants also mentioned event planning as a way in which they were able to see themselves as creative. This theme of self-efficacy points back to Runco (2007) and Hume et al. (2014) who included self-efficacy as a trait of creative individuals. Ultimately, event planning provided an opportunity for students to gain experience with creativity and allowed student leaders to see the ways in which they were creative. This experience even caused some participants to develop a newfound creative self-efficacy as they redefined creativity and saw how their skills fit into their new paradigm.

Supervisors. In addition to event planning, the results point to supervisors as an important factor in helping student leaders develop new interests, aiding in the redefinition of creativity, and creating an environment for student leaders to prototype and refine ideas. The participants’ frequent mention of supervisors in their responses affirmed the importance of creative mentors as a component of developing creativity in college students, proposed by Hulme et al. (2014) and Alencar, Fleith, and Pereira (2017). Additionally supervisors contributed to creating an environment conducive to creativity, in line with Baillie (2006), Jackson and Sinclair (2006), and Cole, Sugioka, and Yamagata-Lynch (1999), by
providing spaces in which student leaders were able to work together, experiment with new ideas, and see themselves as creative.

**Implications for practitioners**

The results of this study indicate a leadership experience can provide an effective conduit for the development of creativity in undergraduate students. This finding carries a variety of implications for practices to more effectively foster creativity through leadership positions. Since supervisors were a reoccurring theme, student affairs professionals should be cognizant of how they structure students’ leadership experiences to maximize the impact it will have on the development of creativity in their students. Practitioners should also encourage students to incorporate information and skills from their majors and classes into their roles, promote a culture allowing students to prototype and refine ideas, provide spaces for student leaders to operate in complexity and ambiguity, and endorse creative self-efficacy.

Allowing student leaders to have heavy involvement in creative practice considers the observation by Astin (1984) that investment in curriculum produces learning and developmental outcomes. Thus it follows that in order to develop creative characteristics in student leaders, they must be involved in a manner that requires them to be utilizing the desired skills. However, practitioners should carefully and purposefully structure the environment and learning activities in order to healthfully promote the skills and traits that will allow for development of creativity.

**Limitations**

While this study provides many beneficial suggestions, some limitations potentially affect the overall applicability of the data. Largely, there was limited diversity in the respondents (the majority of participants were female and white), meaning the results may not be entirely representative across the variables of gender and ethnicity. However, since all interview participants discussed a majority of the themes, it is unlikely a larger sample size would have contributed significantly different results. Timing also contributed to the problem of the sample size as the survey went out around the students’ spring break, and the interviews occurred around final exams. As mentioned above, some participants misunderstood one of the questions, requiring the researcher to collect this data from fewer participants in the interviews. Finally, some responded to the survey using leadership positions outside the scope of this study, so their responses were excluded. Although these factors provided challenges in the process, none hindered the study enough to invalidate the findings.
Implications for future research

During the course of this study, multiple topics emerged as potential areas for future research. Primarily, it would be beneficial to see if a study on a larger variety of leadership positions, different demographics of student leaders, or different styles of institutions would provide results significantly different than those of this study. Additionally, a final area of research would be to find a reliable tool for measuring creativity and to perform a test before and after a student’s experience in a leadership role. Such a tool would help provide quantitative data to describe the magnitude of leadership experience’s impact on development of creativity. A study of this nature could also help to better assess the overall effectiveness of leadership experiences as a method of teaching creativity to undergraduate students.

Conclusion

Society today faces a variety of problems requiring comprehensive, interdisciplinary approaches. As there is higher demand for creative and innovative graduates, colleges and universities must determine how best to develop creativity in their students. Since many traits and skills associated with creative individuals overlap with developmental goals for a leadership experience, this study sought to examine the impact of a leadership experience on the development of creativity in undergraduate students. In order to assess this impact, the study addressed two research questions: Is creativity a developmental outcome of a student leadership experience? And what traits indicative of creative individuals are being developed in student leaders and how are these traits being developed? Students indicated development in an increased risk-taking tolerance, comfort with complexity and ambiguity, diversity in interests, an ability to prototype and refine ideas, an ability to make connections across disciplines, and creative self-efficacy. Factors in participants’ experiences such as event planning, supervisors, and an environment that valued creativity played roles in allowing students to develop creative skills and traits while also helping student leaders redefine creativity and gain creative self-efficacy, if it was not present before. The participants of this study both demonstrated development of creative traits and attributed this development to their leadership experience. As such, it would seem a leadership experience, if thoughtfully and purposefully structured, can be an effective medium through which one can teach creativity.
References


A Pivotal Point in Identity Development: The Impact of the Resident Assistant Experience

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Abstract

Does serving as a Resident Assistant (RA) in college impact students’ identity and long-term leadership skills? This article details a grounded theory qualitative research study where alumni are interviewed about their RA experience five to ten years post-graduation. The study revealed that a profound change (labelled a pivotal point) occurred in participants’ lives while they were serving as RAs. These former student leaders unanimously identified the role as important to their overall identity development and leadership skills. Even though the RA experience often caused a significant disruption in self-perception, it was also a catalyst for significant change in areas such as self-awareness, empathy, communication, community development, and stewardship. Being a former RA holistically contributed to participants’ current identity as professionals, friends and family members, and community liaisons.
Introduction

Colleges and universities within the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) recognize the importance of leadership development among students. Often, these campuses have invested in student leadership development by offering co-curricular programs with the goal of lifelong change (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2012a). Some of the primary ways in which leadership development occurs include positions in student government, intercollegiate athletics, and student peer support services. Of the latter, the role of Resident Assistant (RA) is among the most prevalent on residential college campuses.

The primary duty of RAs is to foster an atmosphere for academic, social, cultural, and emotional growth in residence halls (Burchard, 2001). These student leaders staff residence halls at most residential institutions. The RA role has been recognized extensively in the literature (Beers & Trudeau, 2015; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Boyer, 1987; Brown & Parrish, 2011; Murray, Snider, & Midkiff, 1999), and its importance is widely acknowledged by higher education administrators. RAs often interact with more students on a daily basis than do other professional student development educators. For generations, these student leaders have provided counsel, peer-to-peer influence, and served as a “front-lines” representative of the university (Deluga & Winters, 1990).

The RA position often requires involvement with student behaviors that range from inspiring (such as academic success, acts of service, and spiritual growth) to dangerous (including impulsivity, drug use, and interpersonal conflict). Typically, RAs are required to spend many hours per week assisting their peers within the residence hall, although most go beyond these requirements to invest relationally within their living area (Kolek, 1996). The RA plays a critical role for colleges and universities, particularly in the daily development of students in holistic ways (Onofrietti, 2000). In essence, RAs serve as paraprofessional counselors and crisis intervention specialists (Blimling, 2003).

Although RAs must perform these important relational and administrative functions to fulfill institutional needs, their development as leaders is also typically an institutional priority. To recognize and highlight the importance of leadership development, many studies have been conducted with RAs while they were attending college. These studies have indicated positive outcomes associated with being an RA while in
college (Athas, Oaks, & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Murray et al., 1999) as well as the positive outcomes of college involvement, including a sense of belonging and personal growth (Branf, 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Other studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between holding a student leadership position and academic performance (Cooper et al., 1994; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998), the counseling interventions of RAs (Owens, 2011; Schuh, Shipton, & Edmund, 1986), the influences RAs have on their peers (Ender, McCaffrey, & Miller, 1979; Vacc, 1974), and on RA stress and burnout (Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Hetherington, 1989; Hornak, 1982; Nowack, Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005).

However, minimal research has addressed the ways in which the RA experience impacts student lives post-graduation. According to Chambers (1992), the study of student development programs should be both short-term and long-term. Therefore, when exploring the impact of leadership programs, it is important to measure the impact over time. A post-graduation study expands awareness of the lasting effects of the RA experience. Research on this population will benefit both the institutions that invest substantial resources into the RA development and the students who experience this unique co-curricular, leadership development experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore alumni perceptions of their RA experience on a CCCU campus and describe its influence on their leadership skills five to 10 years post-graduation. Through a series of interviews, the specific aim was to uncover the meaning these individuals made from their RA experience and how it relates to their current practice of leadership. Using a grounded theory methodological approach, this study attempted to ascertain a theory or identifiable construct of experience related to a particular context grounded in the experience and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The intent was to create or discover a theory of leadership development related to having been an RA at a CCCU institution.

Literature Review

Over the past few decades, numerous studies have demonstrated the college experience is a critical time for the vocational and academic growth of students (Astin, 1985, 1993; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001).
According to Astin (1984), student involvement is the investment of time and energy into the collegiate experience and is one of the major components to personal, social, and emotional development in students. Astin’s research (1977; 1984) indicated the expanse of student learning is directly related to the quality and quantity of student involvement. One important form of student involvement is leadership participation in roles such as the RA position, athletics, or student government. Therefore, students who hold leadership positions tend to score higher academically and demonstrate greater levels of personal change than those who do not participate in leadership (Astin, 1993; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001).

In a similar study, Cousineau and Landon (1989) concurred academic proficiency and satisfaction are positively affected by leadership participation. Additionally, being an RA in college has been associated with higher levels of educational involvement (Cooper et al., 1994; Hernandez et al., 1999; Kuh, 1995). Decades of research have concluded involvement in leadership roles has a positive influence on students’ academic progress such as a higher GPA and more faculty relationships (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to this research, RAs likely have a higher level of academic success than the average college student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Interpersonal Growth in College

In addition to positive academic outcomes, a variety of interpersonal benefits are associated with being an RA. Astin (1993) explored leadership participation and found the greatest gains were associated with high degrees of peer interaction. Astin described a student’s peer group as the “single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (1993, p. 398). The nature of the RA role requires consistent peer-to-peer interaction. This prolonged, interpersonal engagement can help create a sense of belonging and a number of other positive outcomes. According to Brazzell (2001), “Students yearn for a sense of belonging [in their community] and the lack of it may prompt some to abandon either their institutions—or worse—their education” (p. 31).

Burchard (2001) noted the role of an RA is to foster an atmosphere of interpersonal growth in their residence halls. He also discovered being an RA naturally creates opportunities to form relationships and connect socially with other students. Additionally, working as an RA is positively correlated with interpersonal competence (Hernandez et al., 1999; Kuh,
Although a sense of belonging can be an “enduring, yet elusive goal” (Cheng, 2004, p. 216), it appears interpersonal growth materializes when students become RAs and experience heightened social interaction with both the students for whom they are responsible and their peer leaders.

**Psychological Well-Being**

Beyond academic and interpersonal growth, psychological well-being is enhanced as a result of being an RA (Diener et al., 1999). Studies have demonstrated student leadership positions are platforms for the personal development of students (Astin, 1985, 1993). Kezar and Moriarty (2000) reported students who participated in co-curricular experiences such as leadership training or internships designed to promote leadership development among students, were more likely to have confidence in their leadership abilities and a higher self-perception. They also discovered student leaders who put effort toward developing their leadership skills also improved their ability to set goals and make educated decisions. In short, students who became RAs are more likely to experience higher levels of self-satisfaction in college (Moriarty, 2000).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), leadership roles also help students gain confidence in their abilities and personal attributes which aids in character development long after college is completed. Some of these characteristics cultivated by RAs include dependability, cooperativeness, determination, maturity, self-control, and independence (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Students who become RAs develop traits that encourage personal growth. Positive psychological well-being has been established as an important indicator of the quality of life and persistence (Diener et al., 1999; Eid & Diener, 2004; Pavot & Diener, 2004). Additional studies claimed students who participate in leadership opportunities are more likely to graduate than students who do not assume leadership roles (Cress et al., 2001).

Utterback, Barbieri, Fox, and Solinger (1990) asked the question, “How and to what extent are college students affected by the experience of being an RA?” (p. 45). Their study used the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (Winston, Miller & Prince, 1979) based on Chickering’s (1969) vectors of identity formation. The inventory was given to first-time RA applicants as well as returning RAs. Seemingly contrary to previous studies, their research indicated new RAs were no less developed than veteran RAs. The researchers’ surprising findings caused them to postulate either the Student Developmental Task and
Lifestyle Inventory may not be suitable for measuring the distinctive aspects of RA development or “the developmental effects of the challenges of being an RA are longitudinal and may not become evident for several years” (p. 53). Outcomes assessment for RA alumni is necessary for greater understanding of this population of student leaders (Pace, 1979). Allowing an extended amount of time to pass post-graduation may allow former RAs to better reflect upon and thus develop greater understanding and meaning regarding their RA experience.

Impact of Leadership Programs on Alumni

Chambers (1992) recognized one of the keys to measuring the effectiveness of leadership development programs involves the assessment of changes in participants over time. He insisted, “assessment of leadership programs be both short-term and long-term” (Chambers, 1992, p. 347). Despite this recommendation, considerably less material is available that focuses on the long-term outcomes associated with alumni leadership development. Although there are numerous reasons to seek a greater understanding of the outcomes resulting from college attendance, the motivation for this study was to understand how serving as an RA impacts a person’s long-term leadership development.

From the existing literature, it has been shown being an RA in college is connected to academic (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and interpersonal growth (Athas, Oaks, & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; Burchard, 2001; Hernandez et al., 1999) as well as positive psychological well-being (Brandfon, 2018; Eid & Diener, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Each of these characteristics is likely to continue post-college due to the nature of development it embodies. Therefore, it can be presumed because students are developing through the RA position during college, their life trajectory will be altered; and they will likely leverage the acknowledged personal and interpersonal skills and leadership traits after graduation into their lives post-college.

However, these conclusions are currently based only on assumption. Multiple studies suggest additional research on the impact of student leadership positions is necessary to test the veracity of these assumptions (Cooper et al., 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student leadership has been studied in a variety of ways, including extracurricular activities, residence life, and athletics (Martin, 2000). The study of co-curricular leadership elaborates on the relationship between student involvement and student development. However, it does not specify the level or type of students’ involvement (Hernandez et al., 1999; Kuh, 2003; Terenzini et
al., 1996) or the type of leadership model utilized. It also does not focus specifically on student leaders who have already graduated. Although these studies were valuable, additional research must now address specific levels of involvement, specific leadership theories, and the impact they may have post-college (Gellin, 2003). Thus, the current study provides a first step in helping to fill this gap in the literature by examining the impact of the RA experience (at a CCCU institution) on the future leadership and character development of RA alumni.

Qualitative Methodology

This qualitative research study utilized the theoretical framework of grounded theory (Creswell, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Eight participants from a small, CCCU institution were recruited for a semi-structured interview which explored the ways in which the RA experience in college impacted their current leadership. Participants were selected using the criterion-sampling method (Patton, 2002). The main criterion included those who graduated between five and 10 years prior to the onset of the study. The criteria were established so graduates could gain a more mature perspective on the development that had occurred as a result of being an RA and would be able to reflect on the impact the experience has on their current leadership perspectives, abilities, and activities (Pace, 1979).

Participants were identified by utilizing student affairs professionals of the university selected for the study; using the selected criterion, they helped identify those RA alumni who fit the criterion. Email addresses were obtained through the alumni office on campus. Recruitment of participants involved emailed letters of invitation by a well-known university employee. Once reply emails were received from willing participants, the author sent a confirmation email explaining the data collection needs and the participants’ involvement. The eight participants were selected based on accessibility, willingness to participate, and geographical proximity. Each alumnus who fit the criterion, communicated a desire to be involved, and was selected to be a part of the study was given a preliminary individual interview appointment.

Questions utilized during the interviews were composed by the researcher to reflect the nature of their RA experience. Because participants were asked to recall information from five to 10 years earlier, it was necessary to allow adequate time for participants to remember the experience and offer detailed descriptions. The intent was to
focus on gathering data that could lead to both a textual and a structural definition of their experience as an RA as it relates to leadership development. Once these descriptions were obtained, understandings, connections, and present-day impact could be extrapolated from the participants’ experiences.

Research Process and Data Analysis

Participant interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. After the transcripts were reviewed, the data were entered into the QSR NVivo software program to facilitate qualitative data analysis. The use of this software supported and expedited the research process by categorizing topics and groupings for analysis (Wholey et al., 2004). During the initial coding process, 540 phrases were identified through an open coding process to initially identify each unique idea mentioned. In the preliminary open coding phase, 42 initial categories or nodes were identified and reviewed for subject matter and continuity (Creswell, 1998). A subsequent axial coding process analyzed the list of nodes for commonalities, grouping similar themes together. Last, selective coding was conducted by examining the axial codes. Utilizing the constant comparative method of sorting and resorting, these categories were reduced and combined to identify key themes (Creswell, 1998). Ultimately, these groups were refined to 28 premises and further divided into five categories. The five categories that emerged were self-awareness, empathy, communication, community development, and stewardship. These categories coalesced around three main themes of identity development: personal, relational, and leadership.

To provide triangulation and ensure trustworthiness, the emerging themes were reviewed at each stage with an outside auditor for interrater reliability. All participants were then invited for a follow-up interview to confirm or dispute initial findings and to elicit greater depth to the study. Prior to the second interview, each participant was provided a diagram of the collective findings from the first round interviews to review and comment on during the second interview to clarify or correct any of the information gathered. The second interview phase involved asking participants a series of follow-up questions, developed by the researcher, designed to explore and confirm emerging themes. This process of member checking provided additional trustworthiness viewed as essential for the credibility of qualitative data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).
Results and Discussion

Overall, participants described the RA experience as having an impact in the development of their understanding of self and others. Additionally, the participants reported a reconceptualization of essential aspects of leadership which had a long-term effect on their attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, lasting connections emerged between participants’ recall of their RA experience and perceptions regarding their personal, relational, and leadership identities. When considering their past involvement as an RA, participants commonly referred to an enduring change in their self-understanding, relationships with others, and leadership capabilities and philosophies.

Central Theme: Pivotal Experience

The participants perceived the lessons learned from the RA experience to be profound, a pivotal event in their identity development. The experience was a turning point that contributed to the individual understanding of personal, relational, and leadership identity. The theme of personal identity included the category of self-awareness, the theme of relational identity included the categories of empathy and listening, and the theme of leadership identity included the categories of community development and stewardship.

The term pivotal point can be closely associated with the term turning point from the research and theoretical literature in the field of psychology. The phrase turning point is defined as a perceived, long-lasting redirection in the path of a person’s life (Clausen, 1995; Settersten, 1999). Clausen defined a psychological turning point more thoroughly as an instance when a person undergoes a major transformation regarding views on identity or the meaning of life.

In the interviews with former RAs, “pivotal point” was employed to describe the occurrence that altered the participants’ developmental process and perception of leadership. As one participant stated, “[The RA experience] was pretty important and pretty pivotal for where I am now. It’s changed me.” Rather than an undeviating process of growth throughout college, participants reported retrospectively that they experienced the RA role to be an interrupting event that became a pivotal point in their growth and development.

As confirmed by participants through follow-up interviews and member checking, the RA experience was a central event that contributed to the personal change and understanding of their personal,
relational, and leadership identity experienced five to ten years later. Within these themes, five distinct categories of impact emerged: growth in self-awareness, empathy, communication, community development, and stewardship. Participants viewed the RA experience as a foundational element to their identity as professionals, friends, family members, and community liaisons.

These results support Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) theory that college leadership roles help students gain confidence in their leadership abilities and personal attributes. This finding also adds to the evidence that students who participate in co-curricular experiences, like the RA position, are more likely to have confidence in their leadership abilities and have a higher level of self-understanding (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

Within the theme of personal identity, the RA experience served as a pivotal point in the development of the awareness, discovery, and understanding of self. The personal identity development that occurred as a result of this experience led to a major transformation in self-understanding and enhanced leadership capabilities. The detection of personal strengths and increased self-awareness led to the ability to articulate and implement those strengths with confidence post-college.

Within the theme of relational identity, participants confirmed with confidence their experience positively contributed to the way they presently build relationships and interpersonally engage. More specifically, the findings indicated significant changes on empathy development and communication style/practice. Participants reported a pivotal point of positive impact on their empathy levels by way of the RA role, modifying the way empathy is both practiced and understood. Additionally, participants’ communication skills were expanded by the RA experience by becoming better listeners and viewing conflict more optimistically. These findings support the evidence that it is possible to improve one’s empathetic ability (Kunyk & Olson, 2001) while viewing conflict as an opportunity for growth (Lillis & Schuh, 1982). Empathic leaders are more likely to have an appropriate degree of openness about diversity and the differences between cultures (Atwater & Waldman, 2008; Choi, 2006). These results support the previous evidence that college involvement improves interpersonal communication (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), increases social development (Stuart et al., 2011), and expands social awareness (Whitt, 1994).

In addition to a greater awareness of self, an increase in empathy, and redefined communication skills, participants described and confirmed
how their leadership identity also significantly changed throughout their RA experience. The role generated a desire to lead confidently and well, while also instilling the essential and foundational components to do so. Whether through leadership roles at work, within their families, or in their local communities, participants experienced a leadership identity shift post-college. This aligns with previous research on extracurricular involvement in college (Hernandez et al., 1999; Kuh, 1995; Lillis & Schuh, 1982) as well as research on long-term leadership impact (Downey et al., 1984; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Sommers, 1991), and also adds to the body of research by providing a focus on RAs post-graduation.

Within the theme of leadership identity, another significant area of impact, participants expressed commitment to community development, including stewardship. Participants explained and confirmed how their views on and practice of stewardship were considerably developed through the RA role -- a change that now included high levels of emphasis toward serving the needs of others. Three distinct aspects were located within the category of stewardship: active service to others, sacrifice of self, and leadership theory development. The RA role instilled an others-focused mindset of leadership that encouraged new approaches to acts of service. As a result, participants cultivated a regular practice of offering time and energy to make a difference for someone else.

Stewardship has been defined as “contributing to society” (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 308). According to the literature on leadership, servant leaders function out of core values and an ethical framework oriented to the service of others (Behr, 1998; Chewning, 2000; Greenleaf, 1991), making service the essential core (Farling et al., 1999; Greenleaf, 1991; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone; Spears, 2010). As such, the findings in this study add to the evidence that a servant leader assists the needs of others prior to serving their own needs (Greenleaf, 1991; Patterson, 2003; Senjaya et al., 2008). This study further supported the idea that effective leadership places the good of the followers over the self-interests of the leader (Laub, 1999). Servant leaders are perceptive to a larger community beyond themselves (Liden et al., 2008). For the participants, this understanding translated into the way they lead others post-college in their current professions and lives.

As a result, this study offers additional support for research on the positive outcomes of college and leadership involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996; Whitt, 1994). Participants reported confidently on the long-term effects the RA leadership role had on
their leadership practice post-graduation. More specifically, the results of this study indicated three identity shifts as a result of the RA experience, as displayed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Process of identity development through RA position**

Conclusions and Future Study

This study contributes to the research by providing a focus on the RA experience at a CCCU institution, five to 10 years post-graduation. Participants made positive correlations between their experience and a changed personal, relational, and leadership identity. The experience caused a significant disruption in self-perception, interpersonal communication, and personal leadership theory. The five categories of self-awareness, empathy, communication, community development, and stewardship comprised the themes by adding depth and understanding to the participants’ experience. The RA role was a pivotal point to the development of these individuals into caring and committed professionals, friends and family members, and community liaisons. Participants unanimously confirmed the experience as one of the most distinctly significant and pivotal experiences of their identity development. The grounded theory that surfaced from interviewing these former RAs contributed to a deeper understanding of the ways in which the RA
experience has impacted the perspective on and practice of their leadership post-graduation.

This study included a comprehensive analysis regarding the positive outcomes associated with being an RA while in college (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Murray et al., 1999) as well as the positive outcomes of college involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Terenzini et al., 1996; Whitt, 1994). The central theme of pivotal point provides the appropriate description for the change that occurred in the lives of the former RAs. The participants unanimously recognized the RA role as an interrupting event amidst the challenges of conflict, difference, and expectations that became a pivotal point in their growth and identity development. Findings suggest the RA experience caused a significant disruption in their self-perception, interpersonal communication style, and approach to leadership. Over time, the experience led to the emergence of a more refined and understood personal, relational, and leadership identity.

Previous leadership studies have examined various facets of student leadership, including extracurricular activities, residence life, and athletics (Martin, 2000). This research elaborates on the relationship between student involvement and student development. However, it neither specified the level or type of students’ involvement (Hernandez et al., 1999; Kuh, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996) nor the type of leadership model implemented. It also did not focus specifically on student leaders who have already graduated. Although these studies were valuable, further research must address specific levels of involvement, specific types of leadership theories, and the impact they may have post-college (Gellin, 2003). The findings from this study demonstrate the variety of benefits associated with the RA leadership experience over time. However, future studies could identify and isolate other student leadership roles in various college settings to ascertain long-term effects. Further effort is necessary on the study of leadership alumni to identify dimensions of growth and development as well as possible instruments for measuring these scopes. Suggestions for future research might expand the construct of student satisfaction, retention, and student development among future generations of student leaders.
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The Missing Image-Bearers at College: The Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities On the Christian University Campus

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Abstract
Since the passage of the Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008, higher education has expanded and improved access for individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, Christian colleges and universities have fallen behind in terms of creating innovative and spiritually formative programs for people with intellectual disabilities. Through the exploration of a literature review, a theological framework, and the description of three Christian programs that currently exist, this paper argues for the good of the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities on the Christian college campus as fellow image-bearers. Additionally it contends that the Christian university has a unique position of to provide these opportunities as a blessing to the community and sign to all.
Introduction

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, public sentiment, activism, and faith-animated engagement have fueled movements to increase access to higher education in America. Higher education leaders have worked to dismantle racist, xenophobic, and sexist structures; and many have strived to provide financial means to people of all socioeconomic backgrounds (Thelin, 2004). When viewed through the theological frame, this movement is exciting and encouraging, as the college community has grown to more fully reflect the kingdom of God. Higher education has, in a sense, acknowledged the image of God in all students by inviting them to bear that identity within the university community (Ostrander, 2009). However, one population is strikingly missing from this growth in access.

Rarely on a college campus does one find an individual with an intellectual disability. Access has surely increased for individuals with other kinds of disabilities, but the prospect of individuals with intellectual disabilities attending college still seems foreign to many college students (Griffin et al., 2012). Though this population represents about 15% of the population of the country, very few people with intellectual disabilities attend college (American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disorders, 2018).

Christians have led the charge in higher education since its inception (Glanzer, Alleman, & Ream, 2017), and the venture of Christian higher education has the chance to show the radical inclusion of the ministry of Christ by inviting this population to enrich Christian campuses, too. Ostrander (2009) lays out the significance of the Christian university simply, “Why does college matter to God? Because it prepares us to be image-bearers of God and effective agents of redemption in every corner of creation” (p.33).

The distinctive and theologically significant benefit Christian colleges can offer is more than simply instruction. They can provide faith-animated learning and human development, especially in the manner of spiritual development. This study provided a review of current realities for people with intellectual disabilities in college communities today followed by a theological framework to evaluate the ways Christian colleges are welcoming students with intellectual disabilities. Ultimately, this research demonstrated the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities provides not only great blessings to these students, their families,
and the other members of campus community, but also demonstrates that Christian higher education cares about more than academic and instructional performance.

Literature Review

Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in the United States

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines intellectual disability as one that causes “significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior” (2018, para. 1). Examples of intellectual disabilities include, but are not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorders, disabilities caused by traumatic brain injury, and Down Syndrome (Special Olympics, 2018).

Intellectual functioning involves cognitive abilities such as learning and reasoning. It is traditionally measured with an IQ test, and people with intellectual disabilities tend to score lower than 70-75 (AAIDD, 2018). Adaptive behaviors include social, conceptual, and practical skills required for daily, independent living (AAIDD, 2018). The onset of an intellectual disability normally occurs before the age of eighteen (AAIDD, 2018).

Around four million Americans have intellectual disabilities (Cusack, 2017). This population often struggles to find meaningful employment, as only 15% of people with intellectual disabilities have jobs (Cusack 2017). Though public school education provides opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to attend until they are 21, opportunities dissipate in higher education; only 8% of this population attended postsecondary education as of 2001 (Getzel & Wehman, 2005).

Additionally, parenting a child with intellectual disabilities can be a great stressor. Studies have shown parents of children with intellectual disabilities are more likely to develop “clinically significant levels of stress, anxiety, and depression” (McConnell & Savage, 2015, p. 100). McConnell & Savage (2015) argue equivalent attention must be paid to the societal constraints and “contemporary social arrangements” that do not adequately support the realities of families with children with intellectual disabilities (p. 106).

The above data provides a clear picture that this population has needs exacerbated by environments unsuited to their realities (Reid, 2015). However, people with intellectual disabilities often have unique strengths that are developed and magnified through the presence of appropriate and consistent support (AAIDD, 2018). Though intellectual and
adaptive functioning is important to the traditional college student, current higher education initiatives have shown college can provide a supportive community and valuable experience to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities at College

Some people with intellectual disabilities choose to attend college without the support of a specialized program. These students can encounter distressing struggles ranging from social confusion to structural inadequacies of the campus (Reid, 2015). Reid (2015) notes that one of the most distressing struggles can be social stress, as exemplified by a case study focused on a student with an Autism Spectrum disorder.

However, more attention has been given to creating supportive college environments for students with intellectual disabilities following the passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008 (Lee, 2009). Aspects of the legislation were aimed at increasing access for students with intellectual disabilities, such as restructuring the way these students can access financial aid (Lee, 2009). Now, 266 postsecondary education programs aimed at serving individuals with intellectual disabilities exist in the United States (Think College, 2018). These programs are archived on the website of Think College (Think College, 2018).

Think College. Think College is an organization committed to “developing, expanding, and improving inclusive higher education options for people with intellectual disabilities” (Think College, 2018, para. 1). The organization established standards and quality indicators to which programs for students with intellectual disabilities can gauge their effectiveness. Many of the programs listed focus on the development of students’ learning abilities, social skills, and independent living skills (Think College, 2018).

Along with providing education and training for professionals in this area of higher education, the website also provides links to all 266 programs available to students with intellectual disabilities. Only 48 of these programs are offered at private institutions, and only eleven of these programs are housed at Christian institutions (Think College, 2018). Appendix 1 lists the colleges that offer these programs with their national association affiliation and whether their website explicitly uses Christian language and lists explicitly Christian practices as a part of the program.

Benefits for Students without Intellectual Disabilities

Up to this point, this review has listed facts pertinent to individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, programs serving college
students with intellectual disabilities can provide developmental benefits to students without intellectual disabilities as well. In fact, students who interact more with people with intellectual disabilities “hold more positive attitudes toward them” (Griffin et al., 2012, p. 237). Developmental theories show college students who have an increased awareness of a certain population experience development in their appreciation and valuing of people from that population (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003).

Therefore, the presence of students with intellectual disabilities fosters the development of other students’ appreciation of this population of people. The unique gifts of people with intellectual disabilities will additionally provide a benefit to the college population. The next section will address the ways that the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities on college campuses will allow the college community to more fully reflect the image of God.

Theological Framework

Created in the Image of God

Christian college leaders have the responsibility to view students in light of the Christian narrative. One of the most important aspects of this narrative is that all people are created by God and in God’s image (Ostrander, 2009). Being an image-bearer points to the intrinsic value of the person and the way the person reflects aspects of God to the world. Colleges can educate and help develop students in light of this identity.

A Good Human Being

Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream (2017) note that a university needs to “possess some understanding of a core human identity and moral ideal about what makes a better human being” in order for the university to embrace the “soul of their mission” (p. 2). In light of this, one can see that a college risks over-intellectualizing the view of a good human being if it continues to exclude individuals with intellectual disabilities. The current admission policies and programmatic offerings of Christian colleges without specialized programs exclude these individuals from the campus community and thus the campus’s ability to reflect the fullness of God’s image.

If a whole population of image-bearing people is excluded from the college campus, the whole campus community suffers a loss. However, the Christian college, unique in its ability to cling to a shared view of what makes a good human being, has the opportunity to include
individuals with intellectual disabilities on the college campus as image-bearers of God alongside other students. Further, the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities coheres with the qualities that distinguish a Christian college according to Ream and Glanzer (2013).

Distinctiveness of a Christian College Community According to Ream and Glanzer

Christian universities can define their venture with “broader terms” than both Bible schools and secular universities (Ream & Glanzer, 2013, p. 7). The unique standing of a Christian university allows the institution to pursue not only the instruction of students in disciplines as animated by faith but also the formation of students and the ordering of their loves (Ream & Glanzer, 2013). This focus frees a Christian university to be an ideal home for programs serving students with intellectual disabilities. The following three distinctives set Christian universities apart from other higher education institutions, and each quality can be seen as a motivating force for including individuals with intellectual disabilities in the campus community.

Holistic development. Christian universities are different than Bible schools in that they educate students not only in church ministry preparation but also in other disciplines. Similarly, the Christian university is poised to educate individuals and shape them into the various identities they will hold throughout their lives including the identities of citizen, child, parent, man, or woman (Ream & Glanzer, 2013).

The inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities can be an exemplar of holistic development, as the programs are designed to prepare students for a more independent life. Because of the nature of intellectual disabilities, their education necessitates a holistic approach, as their need for learning social and other adaptive skills presents much of their areas for growth (AAIDD, 2018).

The presence of students with intellectual disabilities also allows for the education of the rest of campus. Staff and faculty require growth in order to provide specifically supportive environments for these students, and students without intellectual disabilities who are unfamiliar with this population would be challenged to grow in their awareness of, and sensitivity toward, this group (Griffin et al., 2012). Christian universities including students with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to foster the development of members of the campus community holistically into better and more loving neighbors.

Transmission and discovery. Ream and Glanzer claim, “Christian
universities join in this search for knowledge with their own set of unique practices, virtues, and ends” (2013, p. 8). The inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in the context of the history of the university is a new venture. Christian universities, therefore, can be a part of the discovery of how to do these programs well. Because of the mission fit, Christian universities are poised to do so in a distinctively Christian way, again leading the charge in increasing access to education.

Centrality of worship and theology. Finally, the Christian university is distinctive because of the central role it allows for the worship and study of God. Meaningful faith communities place every student within the story of God and God’s world, allowing each person to stand out as an image-bearer. The centrality of the worship of the Gospel of Christ, who called all lost sheep into his fold “so there will be one flock, one shepherd,” poises Christian colleges to be leaders in the best practices for including individuals with intellectual disabilities in the campus community (John 10:16, English Standard Version).

Additionally, Christian universities risk over-intellectualizing the Christian faith because the community is filtered according to intellectual or academic performance. This phenomenon could have negative impacts on the Christian faith and for all Christians, but especially certain communities within the faith, such as people with intellectual disabilities (Whitt, 2012). The inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, therefore, allows the gift of their faith to imbue into the campus’s faith culture and provide an alternative to an over-intellectualized faith.

An Example of Inclusion: L’Arche Communities

Jean Vanier, who was a Catholic priest and leading writer in inclusive communities, founded L’Arche Communities in 1970. L’Arche provides meaningful community in the form of dedicated homes of people with intellectual disabilities and people without intellectual disabilities doing life together (L’Arche USA, 2018). The innovative organization includes communities across the world, and the insights from L’Arche provide Christian universities valuable wisdom in the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

One of L’Arche’s aims is especially relevant to colleges and universities: L’Arche communities pursue being a sign to the rest of the world. The website proclaims:

In a divided world, L’Arche wants to be a sign of hope. Its communities, founded on covenant relationships between people
of differing intellectual capacity, social origin, religion and culture, seek to be signs of unity, faithfulness and reconciliation (L’Arche USA, 2018).

Christian colleges should pursue being a sign to the rest of society that their educational venture is unashamedly about more than instruction, career placement, or profit. Inspired by the same motivating faith as Vanier and L’Arche, Christian universities can provide a sign to the rest of the world that all people are valuable as image-bearers of God and that education goes beyond instruction to formation.

Collegiate Examples

Three variants of the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities are provided. They are analyzed according to the way they pursue the three Christian distinctives as well as being a sign to the rest of the world.

Friendship Houses

Friendship Houses are an example of a way of including people with intellectual disabilities in the campus community not as students but as neighbors and roommates with seminary and graduate students. Graduate students are given the option to join the Friendship House for the duration of their study to live alongside other graduate students as well as people with intellectual disabilities. The first Friendship House began at Western Theological Seminary in 2009, and Duke Divinity School established its Friendship House in 2010 (Little, Raye Rice, & Conner, 2015).

The core values of Friendship House Partners USA include a desire to “produce something reflective of God’s love for all humanity” (Little et al., 2015, p. 5). Friend residents, residents with intellectual disabilities, are able to grow in living skills and find meaningful involvement in the surrounding campus and city communities. Student residents and resident advisors provide intentional support and experiences for the friend residents and commit to living life together with the Friendship House group (Little et al., 2015).

“Theological formation” is an important aspect of life within the Friendship House, and the groups are committed to spending time focusing on faith development through significant experiences and consistent prayer meetings and discussions with both friend residents and student residents (Little et al., 2015, p. 23). The theological formation provides a centering paradigm for the communities, as “several important aspects of the common life at Friendship House
converge in the varied spaces of theological reflection” (Little et al., 2015, p. 23).

Friendship House provides an opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities to develop and grow as a part of the campus community, though not as students. Still, Friendship Houses allow for the holistic development of friend residents in the provision of life skills and social development alongside the work of spiritual formation. Additionally, Friendship Houses have contributed to the discovery and transmission of knowledge in their field by developing and spreading to five communities across the country. Finally, the centering aspect of theological formation distinctly identifies the communities.

Friendship Houses act as a sign. Friendship Houses act as a sign to the rest of the campus community by exhibiting Christian community through meaningful and committed life together. Also, they are a blessing to the parents of people with intellectual disabilities and a sign that the Christian mission motivates a care and appreciation for their children. Finally, the venture grows and prepares seminary and graduate students to be prepared as Christian leaders in their future and provides a caring home for these student residents, as well.

Saint Vincent College’s Bearcat B.E.S.T Program

Similar to Friendship Houses, Saint Vincent College’s Bearcat B.E.S.T. program was “born of the need expressed by parents of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities” (Saint Vincent College, 2018). The program’s goals are summarized in four pillars: growing the level of independence in students with intellectual disabilities, preparing students for employment, empowering students, and benefitting students in creating a caring community (Saint Vincent College, 2018). Saint Vincent College partners with students’ school districts to continue their schooling after the completion of high school until the students are 21 years-old. In doing this, the cost to families is greatly reduced (Saint Vincent College, 2018).

The three-year Bearcat B.E.S.T program utilizes evidence-based educational strategies in supporting and teaching the students with intellectual disabilities, instilling academic, independent living, social, and vocational skills (Saint Vincent College, 2018). Externships provide students opportunities to develop their employability. Furthermore, students are able to eat together with other Saint Vincent College students, participate in clubs, and attend various activities. These students are also
held to Saint Vincent College’s conduct expectations (Saint Vincent College, 2018).

Ream and Glanzer’s distinctives. Saint Vincent College’s program is innovative in many ways. It focuses on the holistic development of students as independent people and aims at their thriving in many aspects of life. Similarly, Saint Vincent College stands out in terms of the discovery and transmission of knowledge in providing the innovative partnership with school districts and utilizing evidence-based educational strategies. Though the Bearcat B.E.S.T allows for integration in the larger Catholic campus community, the centrality of theology and worship of God is not as clearly described on the program website. The Bearcat B.E.S.T program could continue to distinguish itself as unique with greater attention given to the centrality of Christian theology and practice.

Bearcat B.E.S.T program as a sign. Bearcat B.E.S.T. has an opportunity to be a sign not only to the campus community and the families that it serves but also the public school system in the surrounding community. The partnership allows the Catholic educational enterprise to bless the school system as motivated by its Christian mission. The continued development of the centrality of theology and worship of God as expressed by the Bearcat B.E.S.T. program could continue to magnify the program’s role as a sign.

Judson University’s RISE Program

Judson University’s RISE is an acronym for “Road to Independent Living, Spiritual Formation, and Employment” (Judson University, 2018). The program was created in 2016, and its mission is to “provide [students] with intellectual disabilities the college life experience, in a Christian community, to prepare for independent living and customized employment” (Judson University, 2018).

Judson accepts cohorts of twelve students with intellectual disabilities into the two-year program in which graduates receive a Certificate of Completion in Liberal Arts (Judson University, 2018). Students take classes with their cohort focused in the following areas: “independent living, current events, math & money management, fitness & wellness, person-centered planning, professional skills, and daily living through Christian values” (Judson University, 2018 p. 2). Students also have the opportunity to take classes with traditional college students in which faculty can allow the students to audit or pursue an adapted syllabus. In their second year, students choose a concentration ranging from business to creative arts to Christian ministries (Judson University, 2018).
RISE students live on campus with other RISE students and a housing mentor living nearby. They eat with traditional students and have access to the same resources traditional students have (Judson University, 2018). Faith development is also an integrated aspect of RISE, as “RISE students participate in all campus life activities, including chapel three times each week and small groups” (Judson University, 2018).

Ream & Glanzer’s distinctives. Not only is Judson’s RISE program the most integrated into the campus community, it also shows the highest level of Christian integration. The program clearly meets each of Ream and Glanzer’s distinctives with excellence. RISE focuses on holistic development by providing students classes and experiences to develop living skills. Additionally, students are able to choose their own concentration, allowing them to focus on a field in which they can work for the rest of their lives. Similarly, Judson can be a great contributor to the discovery and transmission of knowledge in the field of higher education for people with intellectual disabilities in the Christian framework, as it was the most explicitly Christian-focused program listed on Think College’s page. This puts Judson in a special position to lead this venture.

Finally, the centrality of theology, worship, and spiritual formation sets Judson’s RISE program apart from others. Students are consistently taking classes in spiritual life as well as practicing their faith through practices and discussions. The centrality of formation even shapes the name of the program, emblematic of the faith integration of all of RISE.

RISE as a sign. Because RISE is so integrated into the campus community, the program is poised to be a wonderful sign to the students, staff, and faculty at Judson. Faculty must adjust their teaching style to reach a non-homogenous group of students. Similarly, traditional students must learn to be caring and committed neighbors, as RISE students will be living next to them on campus. Finally, the unique ways people with intellectual disabilities approach the faith and worship (Whitt, 2012), as well as their gifts, will serve to transform the worship environments of Judson in chapel sessions and small groups.

Conclusion

Jean Vanier, founder of L’Arche communities, said in an interview in 2006:

I’m not really sure that we can really understand the message of Jesus if we haven’t listened to the weak… we can love people
who have been pushed aside, humiliated, seen as having no value. And then we see that they are redeemed. And at the same time, we discover that we too are broken, that we have our handicaps. And our handicaps are about elitism, about power, around feeling that value is to just have power (Vanier, 2006).

Inspired in this way to know the message of Jesus more fully and to see the redemption of all image-bearers, Christian colleges and universities can be motivated to hospitably include individuals with intellectual disabilities into their campus communities. This inclusion serves the population of people with intellectual disabilities, a community open and ready for education and formation, and their families. It enriches the campus with the unique strengths and image-bearing capacities of individuals with intellectual disabilities that are currently missing from the college campus. Finally, this inclusion can provide a sign to the campus and to the world of the mutual brokenness of all people along with the mutual image-bearing beauty of all people worthy of community. The Christian university is especially poised to take on leadership in this venture in higher education.

References


## Appendix 1: Think College Programs at Christian Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>ACCU or CCCU</th>
<th>Explicitly Christian language on website</th>
<th>Explicitly Christian practice on website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethel University (BUILD Program)</td>
<td>CCCU</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia University of Wisconsin (Bethesda College)</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgewood College (Cutting Edge Program)</td>
<td>ACCU</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmhurst College (Elmhurst Learning and Success Academy)</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntington University (Able Program)</td>
<td>CCCU</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judson University (RISE Program)</td>
<td>CCCU</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipscomb University (Ideal Program)</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercyhurst College (Oasis Program)</td>
<td>ACCU</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts Wesleyan College (BELL Program)</td>
<td>CCCU</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Vincent College (Bearcat B.E.S.T Program)</td>
<td>ACCU</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union University (EDGE Program)</td>
<td>CCCU</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abstract

For professors of higher education/student affairs, the primary object of inquiry is the university. Yet lore of the divide among faculty and administration looms large over the academy, ranging from perceived dissonance to overt hostility (Bess and Dee, 2014; McMillian and Berberet, 2002; Rice, 1996). With the multitude of issues emerging in the present landscape of higher education, it is worth exploring the real extent of this divide. This article explores the question: Do scholars of higher education/student affairs have or take the opportunity to translate their technical, disciplinary skill into practical assistance to the benefit of their respective institutions? This article provides the preliminary results of an exploratory study of professors of higher education/student affairs and the extent to which they engage in the scholarship of practice (Braxton, 2005) on their own campuses.
Introduction

For professors of higher education/student affairs, the primary object of inquiry is the university. These scholars devote their careers to the exploration of the many dynamics that comprise this complex system. Yet lore of the divide among faculty and administration looms large over the academy, ranging from perceived dissonance to overt hostility (Bess & Dee, 2014; McMillian & Berberet, 2002; Rice, 1996).

With the multitude of issues emerging in the present landscape of higher education, it is worth exploring the real extent of this divide. Issues ranging from higher education finance, the rise of non-tenure track faculty, controversial presidential leadership, diversity on campus, and the role of intercollegiate athletics often pit faculty at odds with institutional leaders. Applied specifically to the field of higher education/student affairs, this raises an important question: Do scholars of higher education/student affairs have or take the opportunity to translate their technical, disciplinary skills into practical assistance to the benefit of their respective institutions? Or, to what extent do professors of higher education/student affairs engage in the scholarship of practice (Braxton, 2005) on their campuses?

The scholarship of practice is inspired by Ernest Boyer’s framework of scholarship (Boyer, Moser, Ream, & Braxton, 2015), and is defined as that which focuses on “the development and refinement of applicative knowledge, as the applicative knowledge entails the translation of technical knowledge into action” (Braxton, 2005, p. 288). More specifically, Braxton states two primary goals of the scholarship of practice: the improvement of administrative practice and the development of a knowledge base worthy of professional status for administrative work. Such goals include the employment of empirical research to develop institutional policy and practice. The pages that follow will report findings of a preliminary, exploratory online survey administered to professors in graduate programs of higher education/student affairs across the United States. A list of over 700 professors was compiled and the survey was distributed via email in March 2015. The survey and sought to explore questions such as:

- Do university leaders seek out scholars of higher education for insight on pressing issues facing their own institution?
- Do scholars of higher education seek to employ the scholarship of practice at their own institution? If so, what compels them to do so? If not, what barriers hinder such efforts?
Are scholars of higher education rewarded for their efforts in the scholarship of practice at their own institution? If so, what are those rewards?

Methodology

An online survey was developed to gather insights from faculty of higher education and student affairs and their scholarship of practice. This survey was piloted at the researchers’ own institution for quality control. An email list of professors of higher education/student affairs was developed from relevant listservs and institutional websites. An email was sent to the distribution list with a link to participate. Results were analyzed utilizing primarily descriptive analysis, as this is a preliminary, exploratory study. The 34-question survey contained three main components. The first component sought to gather demographic information of both the faculty member’s institution and higher education experience. Following the demographics, faculty were inquired through a four point Likert-scale of frequency to what extent university leaders sought their insight on twelve areas pertinent to higher education. In order to explore those who proactively offered their insight to university leaders to those who did not, a third component included a question that branched the participants into different sets of questions to explore motivations and perceived impact. Several open-ended questions were included throughout to seek further clarification.

Analytical Procedures

An initial 136 respondents’ data were collected. After cleansing the data for incomplete survey completion, 128 responses were analyzed utilizing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). As the study sought to be exploratory, basic descriptive analysis was employed seeking frequencies, averages, and cross-tab comparisons.

Findings

The results of this study are compelling, symbolized by the comments of one participant: “This study is of significant interest to me as I have observed a lack of collaboration between Higher Education faculty and our campus’ willingness to engage them in problems solving with regard to student success . . .” Another scholar remarked, “This prophet is disparaged in his home town . . .” Yet another scholar provides a more hopeful perspective, responding, “We are a teaching oriented institution and the scholarship of practice is valued.” What leads to such disparate
experiences among our guild? This article will report preliminary findings of this survey, highlight points of discussion, and offer conclusions that either promote best practices or provide informed suggestions for bridging any gaps among higher education/student affairs faculty and university administrators.

Of the 700 professors that received the survey, 128 participated, resulting in an 18% response rate. An initial email was sent, followed by two reminder emails. As this was a preliminary study, more research and analysis is required to determine sample representativeness. Demographic information of the participants provides insight into the results.

Participants were asked to provide institutional type (see below), of with the majority of faculty taught at midsize or large public institutions (nearly 70% in total).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution (coded)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Private</td>
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<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Private</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Public</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsize Public</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty were also asked to provide the degrees granted in their program of appointment. The majority (65.6%) taught at institutions that provides master’s and doctoral academic programs. The remaining (34.4%) were master’s only program.

Participants were also asked to provide their current rank (see below) and whether or not their appointment is full-time (85%) or part-time (15%). Most participants were tenured (41%) or tenure track (40%), leaving only 19% as non-tenure track. Just over 1/3 of participants maintain another position at the university (34%), the majority of which are their program’s chairs/coordinators. A small number (6) of faculty were also senior administrators.
Participants were also asked to provide their years of teaching at their current institution and in higher education overall. The average years taught by participants at their current institution was 7.82 years, while the career average is 11.12 years. Faculty members were also given a list of research areas and were asked to “check all that apply” to them. Most prevalent areas of research were “student affairs” (53.1% of respondents), “diversity/equity” (41.3%), “identity development/moral development/spirituality” (37%), and assessment (24.2%). Participants were asked, “To what extent do university leaders seek out scholars of higher education/student affairs for insight on issues facing policy and planning at their own institution?” A list of areas was provided, drawn primarily from the most commonly listed expertise areas of the faculty who were sent the survey. Participants were asked to select one response according to their frequency (ranging from frequently, occasionally, once, and never). These areas included:

- Higher Education Landscape
- Organizational Leadership
- Academic and Educational Strategy
- My Institution’s Strategic Plan
- Comprehensive Review of Educational Programs
- Faculty Development and Governance
- Retention Strategy
- Issues of Diversity
- Institutional Advancement
- Athletics
- Accreditation
- Online/Distance Learning
- Other (please type)

Of the areas inquired, the results overwhelmingly demonstrated a lack of inquiry from the university to HESA faculty members. The only exception was the area of “higher education landscape” in which a majority of respondents were frequently or occasionally (54% in total) sought for their expertise. The three least inquired areas, in which faculty selected “never” were athletics (84%), online/distance learning (70%) and faculty development/governance (68%).

Those faculty that were sought by their institutions were asked their method of being inquired. The majority reported that a university leader asked for their input through an “informal appointment/conversation” (72%). A much smaller percentage (39%) were asked to participate in a scheduled appointment in the leader’s office. Twenty respondents were contacted via email.

Inquiries from university leaders is but one avenue in which to provide expertise. Researchers also sought to explore the extent to which professors of higher education/student affairs attempted to employ the scholarship of practice at their own institution, regardless of being asked. Nearly two thirds (65.3%) indicated offering unsolicited insight to university leadership. The majority of this group (77%) choose informal conversation or email (63%) to lend their expertise.

Those faculty that did provide their expertise were asked to provide their motivations for doing so. The most frequent response was “responsibility” (76%) followed by “institutional loyalty” (44%). When asked whether or not engaging in the scholarship of practice at their own institution had a positive influence on their institution, 61% agreed or strongly agreed that it did.

For the 34% of faculty respondents that did not initiate offering their insight to institutional leaders, they reported a number of reasons. The most frequent response was “university leadership would not welcome unsolicited insight” (37.2%). Another common response was that such efforts “do not count towards promotion or tenure” (30%). In addition, 30% cited a “lack of time.”

For those that did engage in the scholarship of practice at their respective institution, they were asked to report their rewards for such efforts. The most common response (41%) was “none.” However, 32%
did receive some form of credit towards promotion or tenure, and 10% received some form of institutional recognition.

For those faculty that did not initiate the scholarship of practice at their institution, the majority agreed (55%) or strongly agreed (18%) with the statement “I would engage in the scholarship of practice if I was officially recognized or rewarded for such work.” The majority agreed (48%) or strongly agreed (24%) that they would increase such efforts if they were recognized or rewarded.

Profile of a Highly Inquired HESA Faculty Member

Through descriptive analysis, the researchers compiled a profile of a Highly Inquired HESA Faculty Member in order to better understand how certain participants were sought after by their institutional leaders. Participants responded to questions regarding their own sense of frequency of inquiry from their respective institutions and selected from a range including “1” for frequently inquired to “4” for never inquired. Of the 128 surveyed, ten faculty members were considered “highly inquired.” “Highly inquired” means the faculty members received a score of 12-24. Such a score could have been reached by a number of different combinations—for example, through several “frequently” answered (1 point) or several “occasionally” (3 points each). Whether by occasionally being asked on an array of subject or frequently on a few, these ten faculty members were more sought out by university leaders for their expertise than their peers.

These 10 highly inquired HESA faculty members predominantly taught at small or midsize institutions. Half of the highly inquired HESA served at “midsize public institutions” (50%, 5 faculty). Three served at “small private institutions” (30%, 3 faculty), one at a “large public institution” (10%, 1 faculty), and one at a “large private institution” (10%, 1 faculty). Six of the faculty worked at institutions that provided masters and doctorate programs, while four worked at masters only institutions. There was diversity within rank, with lecturer (1), assistant professor (2), associate professor (4), and full professor (3) all represented within this “highly inquired” pool. The majority (7) were tenured, with one on the tenure track and two on a non-tenure track. Half of the group taught full-time, while the other half taught part-time in their respective academic programs, while holding other positions outside of their programs.

One respondent reported a teaching tenure at their institution of 40 years. Since this was such an outlier to the participant pool, these years were excluded from calculating teaching year averages. The average
number of years this highly inquired group had taught at their current institution was 10.11 years, with a total of 11.67 average years of teaching in higher education.

In terms of research areas university leaders sought insight for from highly inquired faculty, the three most common areas were “assessment” (50%), Student Learning (50%), and Student Affairs (50%). University leaders sought these professors' insights in the following ways: an informal appointment/conversation (90%), a university leader scheduled an official appointment through the leader’s office (80%), a phone call initiative by the university leader (70%). It is also important to note that, in addition to being asked, all ten in this “highly inquired” group indicated that they offered insight on an area of their expertise to university leaders regarding an institutional issue. They offered this unsolicited insight through similar means: an informal appointment/conversation (100%), sending Email (90%), initiating a phone call (70%), scheduling an official appointment through leader’s office (70%).

All highly inquired faculty members were motivated by a sense of “responsibility” (100%) to offer their insight. The majority also indicated “institutional loyalty” (90%) as a primary motivating factor. Eight of the ten indicated that they received “credit in promotion or tenure file” for their Scholarship of Practice. Four faculty members noted they received “institutional recognition (an official award).” Three faculty members indicated they received “financial compensation” and three faculty members noted receiving “course reduction.” Only one faculty member noted having receive no incentive for their scholarship of practice. Nine out of ten believed that “engaging in the scholarship of practice has had a positive influence on my institution.” Nine out of ten believed “being officially recognized or rewarded for scholarship of practice would increase my engagement even more in the scholarship of practice in the future.”

Faculty members considered “never inquired” are those respondents who received a score of 48 (answering “never,” 4pts, to each question). Since two of the faculty members did list two areas in “other” where they were contacted, they were disregarded for this profile. Fourteen of the other faculty members remained. Similarly, researchers explored those participants who were “never inquired” from institutional leaders. Of the 128 surveyed, sixteen faculty members were considered “never inquired” through the inquiry scale in which we categorized faculty members into levels.
Over a third of the never inquired faculty came from “midsize public institution” (35.7%, 5 faculty members) or a “large public institution” (35.7%, 5 faculty members). Two taught at “small private institutions” and one worked at a “large private institution” (one chose to not identify institution type). The majority of the HESA programs were masters and doctorate (78.6%, 11 faculty) and only 21.4% (3 faculty) from a masters only HESA program. With regards to rank, 6 professors in the “never inquired group” identified as assistant professor, five as associate professor, one as adjunct, and one as visiting professor. The majority (11) were tenure track, five were tenured and three were not on the tenure track. The majority (11) taught full time, while 3 taught part time.

The majority of this never inquired group (78.6%, 11 faculty) did not hold a position other than teaching in a HESA program. Those (3) that did report an additional position held the following positions: Associate Director of Residence Life, Executive Director of a Scholarly Society, and a faculty appointment in another department. This never inquired group was a less experienced group than their “highly inquired” counterparts, averaging six years of teaching at their current institution and eight years teaching per professor overall.

Half of the “never inquired” group offered unsolicited insight to institutional leaders, while the other did not. Of the half that did offer insight, 71% did so through informal appointments or conversations. Of those “never inquired” that “did not offer insight”, there was no common motivation by the majority. The most shared motivations were “no interest” (42.9%) and “distracts from research agenda” (48.9%). It is worth noting that only one faculty member indicated “university leaders would not welcome unsolicited insight” as their motivation for not sharing. The following comments were shared for motivations not to share:

I’m not certain if it would be viewed as unsolicited. I suppose there doesn’t seem to be any precedent for doing that. If I knew they would welcome it, I might do it. There is also the fear factor—stepping out too much while not yet tenured.

There is a power differential, and while feedback might be welcome, it may not be. As a relatively new faculty member to the institution, that is risky. In addition, other (more senior faculty) may not support the move (again, making it risky).
Of the seven that did not offer unsolicited insight, two “strongly agreed” and three “agreed” that they “would engage in the scholarship of practice if I was officially recognized or rewarded for my work.” One was “neutral” and one “disagreed.” Of the seven, three “strongly agreed” and three “agreed” that they “would engage in the scholarship of practice if I knew such work would make a positive impact on my institution.” One faculty member responded as “neutral” to the statement.

Key Differences between Highly Inquired (HI) and Never Inquired (NI)

Of the highly “inquired faculty,” all reported self-initiated insight of some sort. In contrast, half of the “never inquired faculty” never initiated offering insight. The “highly inquired” group employing solicited and unsolicited insight may imply some mutuality and trust between university leaders and these faculty members? Of the highly inquired group, 6 of 10 held other positions other than teaching full-time in HESA program. Of sixteen “never inquired” faculty members, 11 did not maintain another position. This raises a question: Do faculty members who hold other positions on campus have increased opportunities to lend their expertise?

It’s also interesting to note that “highly inquired” faculty reported higher reward for their insight (see below). Eight of the ten indicated that they received “credit in promotion or tenure file” for their use of the scholarship of practice. Four faculty members noted they received “institutional recognition (an official award).” Three faculty members indicated they received “financial compensation” and three faculty members noted receiving “course reduction.” Only one faculty member noted having received no incentive for their scholarship of practice. Institutional incentives seem to foster the Scholarship of Practice.

The “highly inquired” faculty also indicated stronger institutional loyalty than their “never inquired” counterparts. All highly faculty members indicated being motivated to offer insight due to “responsibility” (100%). A majority also reported “institutional loyalty” (90%) as a primary motivating factor. The majority of those “never inquired” faculty top two responses regarding motivations were “no interest” (42.9%) and “distract from agenda” (48.9%). Interestingly, only one faculty member indicated “university leaders would not welcome unsolicited insight” as their motivation for not sharing.

Finally rank and status seems to play a role. The “highly inquired” faculty had higher rank overall, with more associate professors (40%) and full professors (30%) then their “never inquired” colleagues (0 full
professors, and 43% assistant professors). Additionally, the majority of “highly inquired” faculty were already tenured (7), while the majority of “never inquired” were on the tenure track (11).

Implications for practice

Such preliminary results are not enough to draw generalization, but they do raise important questions for professors of student affairs/higher education. First, what can professors do to cultivate opportunities to lend their expertise at their own institution? For those who have been at their respective institutions for a number of years, it appears their chances may increase with time. Patience and strategy could prove fruitful. Consider the comment by one participant:

My answers would have been different if I was speaking about my former institution, where I was consulted and also offered my expertise. A move to a new institution caused me to step back to get settled and revamp my teaching and research before engaging with such opportunities.

The importance of developing rapport and relationship with administration cannot be understated. As most insight was sought through information, conversations, or appointments, professors would be well served to find natural ways to ‘rub shoulders’ with administrators. With relationship comes opportunity and trust.

In addition, professors and HESA departments may benefit from intentional marketing of their expertise to their own campuses. Many participants remarked at how institutional leaders would hire external consultants to come to campus and address issues that they themselves well-versed in. Such efforts could include graduate students, exposing them to the essential socialization required to succeed in an academic career (Austin, 2002). Consider the comments by another participant:

Most academic leaders aren’t formally schooled in CSA, HIED admin, leadership etc. . . . they often lack some (or all) of the background that many of us gain from our graduate programs. Why not tap into the richness of these resources? Why not seek consultations from time to time? I’ve been at my institution for about 20 years now and while I’m quite loyal, I also find myself asking why we don’t work smarter, more efficiently and use the resources we have right here . . . We have experts right on our
campus. But we'd rather pay someone $X thousands of dollars to come here and conduct an unremarkable program.

Yet another participant remarked:

It is appalling to me how little our faculty is sought for our insights about higher education and this institution. Instead of turning in-house, they readily pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to consulting firms who do not know the culture or history of this institution and do not care and which spew the same copy-and-paste strategies to every institution they consult with. It is demoralizing and disgusting.

Clearly the onus for developing a generative relationship among faculty and administration does not rest solely on the faculty. Institutional leaders can do much to encourage experts in their midst. What can institutions do to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge right on their own campuses? First, faculty are motivated to employ the findings of their scholarship to inform their scholarship of practice at their own institutions through a myriad of ways. Developing clear and compelling incentives to do so would go a long way, beginning with allowing such efforts to count towards promotion and tenure. Second, leaders should develop a habit of looking around campus for help with difficult issues before turning to external consultants. This would likely foster increased loyalty and ownership from faculty, and would save significant financial resources. Third, many participants reported or remarked fear that institutional leaders would not appreciate their insight, as it may be critical of leadership. Leaders can reduce stigma by truly inviting critique and engaging in dialogue with experts on their campus. Consider the experience of one participant:

My efforts to engage in the scholarship of practice at my institution have been constructively critical, and this is viewed negatively by academic leaders. As a result, I have gained the reputation of being ‘anti--administration’ when advocating for faculty autonomy in academic decision-making. This has negatively affected my career, and I have been repeatedly passed over for internal promotions for which I am most qualified because I am not a ‘yes person.’
Limitations

As the study was preliminary and exploratory there must be caution when utilizing results as generalizations. What has been reported should be seen as initial, descriptive, and fodder for additional inquiry. Additionally, only 128 participants out of a potential 700 responded to the online survey, yielding an 18% response rate. Thus, it is difficult to ensure that this is an accurate representation of higher education/student affairs professors. Also, the list of topics of inquiry presented to survey participants may not be exhaustive.

Areas for Future Research

As this was a preliminary, exploratory study, there is much room for continued research in exploring professors of higher education/student affairs and the scholarship of practice. Deeper qualitative exploration of “highly inquired” faculty would likely yield much insight. In addition, the role of university leadership in leveraging the scholarship of practice from their own faculty has not been studied. Subsequent studies could also provide case studies of exemplary HESA departments who cultivate a culture of employing the scholarship of practice at their own institution. Finally, a more refined examination of the impact of reward structures and the scholarship of practice could prove helpful.

Conclusion

In a recent conversation with a fellow professor of higher education, it was said that “a prophet has no honor in his/her home.” The same sentiment has been said in a different way, “All you need to be an expert in your field is 90 miles and a PowerPoint presentation.” To a certain extent, this appears to be true of professors of higher education/student affairs at their own institutions. According to Eraut (1988), “The knowledge development of potential of practitioners is underexploited” (p. 130). Perhaps professors of higher education/student affairs are uniquely positioned to develop the knowledge of their institutional leaders. From this study, it is clear that it doesn’t simply “happen” by working on the same campus. There is vast untapped potential, yet not without hope as indicated by the ten highly inquired professors of higher education. There are many scholar/practitioners lending their expertise to the benefit of their campuses. Such work is needed, now more than ever.
References


Austin, A. E. (January/February, 2002). Preparing the next generation of faculty: Graduate education as socialization to the academic career. The Journal of Higher Education, 73(2), 94-122.


Abstract

Premarital cohabitation is an increasingly common aspect of relationships today. Despite Christian theology that often frowns on cohabitation, modern students entering institutions of Christian higher education are influenced by this societal trend. For some students, cohabitation does not carry the negative connotation as in previous years. However, how aware are students of the implications of cohabitation on relationship satisfaction? This study examines whether the level of satisfaction within a relationship is affected by having lived in a cohabiting relationship before marriage. Through an analysis of U.S. data from the 2010 Married and Cohabiting Couples survey, levels of relationship satisfaction were assessed in 2,150 participants. Results indicate that the participants who were married and did not cohabit before marriage reported the highest levels of satisfaction within their relationship. Drawing from these findings, implications and best practices for Christian institutions of higher education are discussed.
Introduction

Premarital cohabitation has become increasingly common as a socially acceptable step in leading toward marriage (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Today's couples are finding themselves gravitating toward cohabitation as a way to test compatibility with their partner as a means to “divorce-proof” their marriage (Manning & Cohen, 2012). Research over the last decade has shown that the majority (66%) of married couples live together prior to marriage (Manning, 2015). Conventional wisdom says that if one is able to experience or test something before making a final commitment to it, the level of satisfaction will increase. Hence, the test drive approach to premarital relationships through cohabitation has become a common relational experience for many couples today.

How then, does the cultural trend of cohabitation impact Christian higher education? Many faith-based institutions value a commitment to monogamous marriage and oppose cohabiting unions before marriage. Yet, while faith-based colleges and universities hold to these standards, the current student body has grown up within a larger societal culture in which cohabitation has not only significantly increased over recent years, but is seen as a normal and helpful relational pathway for those considering marriage. The result is that the two cultures are in opposition to one another, placing faith-based institutions in a unique and needed role of educating students about the practice of living out Christian relational values in a society that does not adhere to these beliefs.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study was designed to test whether premarital cohabitation is correlated with levels of satisfaction within a couple’s relationship. The research question guiding this study states: What are the differences in relationship levels of satisfaction among married couples who did not experience premarital cohabitation, married couples who did experience premarital cohabitation, and couples that were cohabiting but not yet married at the time of the survey? Second, drawing from the results of the data analyses, this article also seeks to offer recommendations for Christian colleges and universities as they guide and educate students about the relationship between premarital cohabitation on marital satisfaction.

Literature Review

Premarital cohabitation has become a highly researched subject within the past two decades (Barna 2016; Manning & Cohen, 2012; Regnerus
& Uecker, 2011; Stanley, Rhoades, Amato, Markman, & Johnson, 2010; Teachman 2003), with the emphasis focusing on the correlation between premarital cohabitation and marital disruption. Researchers have seen the divorce rate between married couples rise, as well as the percentage of couples that choose to cohabit before they decide to get married. Of the marriage unions formed in the early 1990s, it was estimated that 60% were preceded with premarital cohabitation (Teachman, 2003). The number of couples who cohabit before marriage has continued to rise with data from the last ten years finding that about 66% of couples cohabit before marriage (Manning, 2015).

The increase in the numbers of people who choose to cohabit has led researchers to question the motives behind cohabitation. One motivating factor of some couples for cohabitating is that such relationships are perceived to be a financial stress reliever. Drawing from a sample of 1097 participants, the Barna Group (2016) found that 5% of participants who favor cohabitation said that finances are a major reason that people cohabitate. Since individuals in serious relationships often spend more time at one partner’s house than the others, they will choose to move in together and combine their resources. Barna (2016) found that 9% of participants who favor cohabitation cite this type of convenience as a reason for cohabitating.

One of the most prominent motivations for cohabitation is to test the compatibility of the relationship. The majority (84%) of those who favor cohabitation say that testing the compatibility of the relationship is the driving motivation to cohabit (Barna, 2016). Testing of compatibility has been documented in other studies (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Smock, 2000) over time as a major reason for couples choosing to cohabit. Cohabiters view their cohabiting as a way to divorce-proof their marriage (Manning & Cohen, 2012).

The likelihood of cohabitation is not the same for all demographic groups. Experiences of cohabitation vary based on race (Manning, 2010; Manning, 2015) and socioeconomic status (Krivickas & Payne, 2010). While an overall increase in cohabitation among all racial groups over the last 20 years has been well-documented (Manning, 2015), there are differences in the likelihood of cohabitation based on race (Manning, 2010). Black women experience cohabitation at higher levels (61%) than non-Hispanic White women (59%) and Hispanic women (56%) (Manning, 2010). While cohabitation occurs across the socioeconomic spectrum in the United States (Manning & Smock, 2002; Reinhold, 2010),
research indicates that cohabiting couples have a lower median household income compared to married couples (Krivickas & Payne, 2010).

Along with the possible motives behind premarital cohabitation, researchers have narrowed the explanations for cohabiting into two main categories: selection or experience. Selectivity is the idea that some people have characteristics such as religiosity, race, and educational background that predispose them to both cohabitation and subsequent marital difficulties (Stanley, Rhoades, Amato, Markman, & Johnson, 2010). Researchers suggest that, because of these variables, they are better able to predict who has an increased likelihood of experiencing cohabitation before marriage (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Based on this research, it is suggested that individuals with these characteristics are at a higher risk of marital breakdown regardless of whether they choose to cohabit prior to marriage (Legkauskas, 2008).

The cohabitation experience explanation argues that there is something about cohabitation itself that increases the risk of marital distress, divorce, or both (Stanley et al., 2006). Those who cohabit before marriage reported lower marital quality among a wide range of variables including communication, confidence, commitment (Stanley et al., 2010), more negative interactions and more physical violence (Legkauskas, 2008). The experience itself is often short-lived due to either marriage or the termination of the relationship. Research by Smock (2000) suggests that 55% of cohabiting couples will marry and 40% will end the relationship within the first five years of the beginning of cohabiting (Smock, 2000). Cohabitation can erode the motivation and commitment toward marriage (Stanley et al., 2006), and can weaken beliefs in the permanence of marriage (Legkauskas, 2008). Research found that the experience of cohabitation actually increased the acceptance of divorce as an alternative to remaining committed to a marriage relationship (Stanley et al., 2006).

Overall, Manning and Cohen (2012) found that the relationship between cohabitation and marriage is not a simple one. Marital commitment prior to cohabitation has been correlated with the likelihood of divorce. Couples who have made a commitment to marriage (e.g., an explicit period of engagement) prior to cohabiting are less likely to divorce than couples who lack that commitment. Research by Jose, O’Leary, and Moyer (2010) also has indicated that premarital cohabitation is generally associated with negative outcomes both in terms of marital quality and
marital stability in the United States, and that level of commitment when entering cohabitation plays an important role in these outcomes.

Methodology

The current study used data from the 2010 Married and Cohabiting Couples survey which was conducted by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research. The Center was cooperatively launched by the US Department of Health and Human Services, making it a first-ever National Center for Family and Marriage Research (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The 2010 Married and Cohabiting Couples survey entails a nationally representative sample of U.S. married and cohabiting adults, and is the most current version to date. Participants were randomly sampled by Knowledge Networks, an online research company, and were asked to participate in the online 2010 Married and Cohabitating Couples survey. According to the criteria established for the administration of individuals completing the Married and Cohabiting Couples survey, respondents are married or cohabiting heterosexual couples’ between the ages of 18-64 years. A total of 2,150 participants were surveyed; 1,075 self-identified as being male and 1,075 self-identified as being female. Data was accessed for 1,504 married individuals, equaling 752 married couples, and 646 cohabiting individuals, equaling 323 couples. Table 1 below provides the descriptives for each variable included in the demographic section of the survey.

Table 1: Frequencies and Univariate Statistics for all Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Control Variables</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction Scale (1-5)</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variable</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with a partner</td>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, did not live together</td>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, lived together before</td>
<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$50,000 to $59,999</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Control Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variables</th>
<th>$60,000 to $74,999</th>
<th>13.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working - as a paid employee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working - self-employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Not working - temporary layoff</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race or Ethnicity</td>
<td>Biological Children Under 18 at Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-hispanic</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-hispanic</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, non-hispanic</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ Races, non-hispanic</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working - as a paid employee</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working - self-employed</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working - temporary layoff</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working - looking for work</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working - other</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Educational Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Race or Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race or Ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White, non-hispanic</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-hispanic</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, non-hispanic</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ Races, non-hispanic</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Independent Variable

The primary independent variable that was examined via the Married and Cohabiting Couples survey is the marital status of the participant. The researchers created a variable to identify respondents who were living together but not married, those who were married but did not live together prior to marriage, and those who were married and did live together prior to marriage. As seen in Table 1, the respondents were near evenly divided between those who were living with a partner (29.9%), those who were married and did not live together before getting married (35.3%), and those who were married and did live together before marriage (34.8%).

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SPRING 2019
Dependent Variable

A key goal of this research project was to examine the differences in relationship levels of satisfaction among married couples who did not experience premarital cohabitation, married couples who did experience premarital cohabitation, and couples that were cohabiting but not yet married at the time of the survey. In order to address this research question, we used six items that measured the participants’ level of satisfaction with various aspects of their relationship. The six items have a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.877, indicating a strong scale that is measuring a single construct. The items included were: (1) How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse/partner?; (2) How satisfied are you with how well your spouse/partner listens to you?; (3) My spouse/partner shows love and affection toward me; (4) My spouse/partner encourages me to do things that are important to me; (5) My spouse/partner will not cheat on me; (6) My spouse/partner listens when I need someone to talk to. The responses to each of these questions were answered using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses to all six questions were averaged together to create a total scale that ranged from 1 to 5. The mean level of satisfaction for the scale was 4.4 with a median of 4.5. Thus, overall, the 2,150 respondents to the survey (whether cohabiting or married) were very satisfied with their relationship.

Control Variables

Several demographic variables were included as controls based on the review of literature. Age, education, race/ethnicity, gender, household income, employment status, and whether or not the couple has biological children living with them were all included as control variables. Table 1 provides the breakdown and distribution of each of the control variables.

Results

The researchers ran a one-way analysis of variance to test for differences between the three groups. Table 2 provides the means for each group and documents that the differences between groups is statistically significant.
Table 2: One-Way Analysis of Variance for Level of Satisfaction by Relationship Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Mean Level of Satisfaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living with Partner</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, did Live Together</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, did not Live Together</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>2065</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* F = 11.730, 2 degrees of freedom

Relationship is significant at the .000 level

The participants who were married but did not experience premarital cohabitation were the group who reported the highest average level of satisfaction (4.44 on a 1-5 scale); in contrast, couples who were living together but not married reported having the lowest average level of satisfaction of 4.26. Although this difference may seem fairly minimal, it is statistically significant and should be interpreted in relationship to the overall average, meaning that rather than focusing on how high the average is for all groups we should compare each group with the overall average to see if there are statistically significant differences. To restate the key findings: (1) Those respondents who did not live with their spouse prior to marriage self-reported satisfaction levels that were above the total average; (2) Those who were living together without being married self-reported satisfaction levels that were below average; and (3) Those who were married and had lived together reported average marital satisfaction. There was a significant effect of relationship status on the level of satisfaction at the p <.05 level for the three conditions [F (2, 2133) = 35.451, p = .000]. Scheffe post hoc comparisons indicated that the participants who were married and had not cohabitated before marriage had a significant mean difference (M = .067) than the participants who cohabitated before they were married. Specifically, the married with cohabiting participants had a significant mean difference (M = .145) than the strictly cohabiting participants. Also, the strictly cohabiting participants had a significantly different mean (M = -.212) than the participants who had not cohabitated before marriage.

In order to include the control variables and test the predictive value of relationship status, we ran an ordinary least squares (OLS) linear
regression. While the data are not normally distributed, the total sample size is quite high and OLS is sufficient. Table 3 includes six regression models.

Table 3: Multivariate Ordinary Linear Regression Unstandardized Coefficients for Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Model 1.1</th>
<th>Model 2.2</th>
<th>Model 3.3</th>
<th>Model 4.4</th>
<th>Model 5.5</th>
<th>Model 6.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>-0.130***</td>
<td>-0.180***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.062***</td>
<td>0.071***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.004**</td>
<td>-0.006***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.019*</td>
<td>0.019*</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = Female)</td>
<td>-0.152***</td>
<td>-0.153***</td>
<td>-0.154***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Race (1 = White)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.013**</td>
<td>0.017***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Children</td>
<td>-0.183***</td>
<td>-0.130***</td>
<td>-0.154***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.119)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.109)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>16.401***</td>
<td>14.365***</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>11.141***</td>
<td>16.520***</td>
<td>13.636***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-Square</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Standard Errors in Parentheses

Models:
1 Living together
2 Living together + Controls
3 Married, did cohabit
4 Married, did cohabit + controls
5 Married, did not cohabit
6 Married, did not cohabit + controls
Model 1 included just the variable for living together, thereby comparing those respondents who were living together but are not married to all those who were married. Overall, the model is not very strong, although the findings were statistically significant. With a B value of -0.130, it appears that respondents who were living with a partner but not married were less satisfied than those who were married. In Model 2, the researchers included the various control variables, even controlling for other factors, and the relationship between living together and satisfaction is still negative and statistically significant. In fact, the relationship is slightly stronger at -0.180, indicating that when all other factors are taken into consideration couples who are cohabitating are less satisfied than married couples. Other variables that seemed to have an effect on relationship satisfaction were age, education, gender, income, and whether or not the couple had biological children. It appears that younger respondents were very slightly more satisfied with their relationship, more highly educated respondents were slightly more satisfied, men were more satisfied than women, higher income households were more satisfied, and couples with no biological children were more satisfied.

In Model 3, the researchers tested the relationship between being married and having lived together before marriage and relationship satisfaction. The researchers found no statistically significant relationship between the two. In Model 4, the researchers added in the control variables, the same controls that were used in both Models 2 and 3. The researchers found that the same variables that were significantly related to relationship satisfaction in Models 2 and 3 remained significant in Model 4. Model 5, tested the relationship between being married but not having cohabitated and relationship satisfaction, identifying a slight positive effect of 0.062 that was statistically significant. When adding the control variables in for Model 6, the researchers identified a slight increase in the effect of not cohabiting before marriage (i.e., an increase to 0.071). In Model 6 the same control variables (i.e., age, gender, income, and having children at home) were statistically significant which indicate that regardless of relationship status, age, gender, income, and having children at home are all significantly related to relationship satisfaction. Notably, however, the respondent’s level of education was not found to be statistically significant in this model.

In all six models there were significant relationships found, however, the adjusted r-square was very low in all models. The low adjusted
r-square is a reminder of the complexity of relationship satisfaction and that while we found several key components to satisfaction there are more factors that we were not able to take into consideration.

Discussion of Findings

Results from this study demonstrate a relationship between premarital cohabitation and overall relationship satisfaction. The findings also reveal those who are married and did not experience premarital cohabitation are more likely to be very satisfied with their current relationship. These results helped answer the original question: What are the differences in relationship levels of satisfaction among married couples who did not experience premarital cohabitation, married couples who did experience premarital cohabitation, and couples that were cohabiting but not yet married at the time of the survey? This study also supports prior research findings that had identified a relationship between premarital cohabitation and marital relationship satisfaction. The results were consistent in demonstrating that individuals who do not cohabit before marriage reported the highest levels of relationship satisfaction.

Among the various statistical analyses that were run, the satisfaction level was highest among the married participants, whether or not cohabitation had occurred prior to marriage. It was interesting, however, to see that strictly cohabiting couples (i.e., those in a cohabiting relationship but not married) had the lowest levels of relationship satisfaction. While White participants (80.5% of total participants) were over-represented in this study, it is interesting that they self-reported being more satisfied with their relationship compared to the other participants. The fact that White individuals were more likely to transition to the marriage union from cohabitation than are African-American or Hispanic individuals (Lichter & Zhenchao, 2008), may, at least in part, explain this finding/observation.

Limitations

This study utilized data from a nationally representative survey and focused on married couples who did and did not cohabit before marriage and those who were not married but were cohabiting. One limitation of the data from which these findings were drawn relates to the uneven distribution of race; White respondents were overrepresented in the sample, making up 80.5% of respondents (See Table 1). Another limitation is in the distribution of relationship satisfaction, given that the respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied in their relationships, as...
indicated by an average of 4.4. With so little variation in the dependent variable it is difficult to see the true relationship between cohabitation and relationship satisfaction.

The impact of religion was not explored within this study, thus creating a limitation with the results. Exploring several facets of religion and its' impact on cohabitation could involve an examination of how specific religious beliefs influence a couple's decision to engage in cohabitation. Also, it would be beneficial to determine premarital cohabitation rates among the different religions.

Implications for Practice

The findings that emerged from this study serve to address the original research question: What are the differences in levels of relationship satisfaction among married couples who did not experience premarital cohabitation, married couples who did experience premarital cohabitation, and couples that were cohabiting but not yet married at the time of the survey? The analysis of data from this study, as well as others (e.g., Manning & Cohen, 2012; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Smock, 2000), demonstrates there is a relationship between premarital cohabitation and relationship satisfaction. In addition, those who are married and did not cohabit prior to marriage report the highest levels of relationship satisfaction.

Given the growing trend of cohabitation, despite research not supporting the test drive approach with cohabitation (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Jose, O’leary & Moyer, 2010; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Smock, 2000), Christian institutions have an opportunity to take a leading role in helping students see the value in not cohabitating. To begin with, it is beneficial for Christian institutions to reiterate traditional Christian theology on marriage. In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God reveals the foundation of Christian marriage by two coming together to become one. From the Genesis account, traditional Christian theology of marriage is born. Wright (2015) depicts how the Genesis account of marriage is reiterated in the New Testament, revealing a cohesive and intended design by God, not just a one-time account in creation. In fact, as Wright (2015) states, “...[W]e discover again and again that it [marriage] isn’t just an odd rule, a rule which we might in our day object to on the basis that we have new and different scientific knowledge about how human beings actually are. It is always a statement of faith about the meaning of God’s creation and about God’s ultimate purposes for that creation” (para. 16).
Building on the traditional Christian theology of marriage, it is recommended that educational leaders at Christian institutions ensure that the wording used in the student code of conduct is clear and aligned with university values. Using language such as “sexual stewardship” within the code of conduct offers institutions a framework to address sexual issues including, but not limited to, cohabitation. Thus, sexual stewardship brings all areas of sexual behavior within a larger framework of honoring God in relationship to others.

When the wording of values is assessed within policy, Christian educators can tie policy into meaningful practice that helps students to see how institutional policy against cohabitation is more than just a rule, but it is a sacred call to live a life that is spiritually and personally beneficial. Educating students in sexual stewardship can involve a myriad of curricular and co-curricular activities. From the curricular perspective, the general education curriculum could include a course or unit on healthy relationships. One such model was launched at Seattle Pacific University in 1992 and was taught for several years by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, relationship experts with a Christian perspective. Similar courses can be added within the general electives or social science credits.

Student Life divisions at schools can also play a part in creating a culture of sexual stewardship by developing programs like Healthy Relationship Week that engage students with intentional messages about cultivating healthy, Godly relationships. Part of the content can specifically address cohabitation. Student Life can also direct resources to social clubs, small groups on campus, and invite speakers. Such efforts can be used to educate students about the value of sexual fidelity and the research-related concerns related to cohabitation.

Helpful mentoring connections that include discussions about sexual stewardship can also open opportunities for conversation, encouragement, and role-modeling. One example is to create faculty/staff and student small mentoring groups that can be connected to chapel and spiritual life activities. For institutions that require students to complete a number of chapel or spiritual formation credits, these group/mentoring programs can be ways for students to earn these credits. One example is Relationship IQ. Through outreach at Pepperdine’s Boone Center for the Family, Relationship IQ began in 2005 as a student outreach ministry that integrates theology and social science research to help students cultivate healthy relationships with God and others (Pepperdine Boone Boone Center for the Family).
Center for the Family, 2018). Relationship IQ training is now offered to other colleges and universities.

Conclusion

The analysis of data as reported in this study corroborates earlier research findings (Manning & Cohen, 2012; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Smock, 2000) that married couples that did not cohabit before marriage report higher levels of satisfaction. Given the increased commonality of cohabiting in the current U.S. cultural context, combined with mounting peer pressure on today’s students, it is recommended that Christian institutions integrate Christian theology with the research on self-reported relationship satisfaction levels between those who cohabit and those who do not cohabit. As shown in this study, relationship satisfaction reports are higher for those choosing not to cohabit. Utilizing a sexual stewardship framework to guide the education and mentoring of students allows Christian institutions to create student conduct policy and practices that help encourage students to seek Godly standards that are rewarding in their relational lives.
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Generation Z Goes To College (2016) by Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace is a thorough and fascinating exploration of the characteristics and needs of the most recent generation to reach college age. Generation Z is comprised of those born from approximately 1995 to 2010, making the oldest of this group about twenty-one years old at the time this book was written. This means that this book, and the large study of the same name which it describes, is one of the first to look at Generation Z and address what the needs of this group may look like in the context of higher education. Seemiller and Grace are both practitioners in the field of higher education who, after noting a lack of research in this area, chose to start the conversation through some initial research. While no perfect answer is presented to the complex question of defining the generation and its needs, the book concludes that Generation Z as a whole is very different from previous generations, with different needs and interests that student affairs professionals should take note of and adjust their practices accordingly. The book also provides some excellent strategies for working with these students, and gives specific suggestions for approaches and programming that may be meaningful to this unique group.
Overall, the book is organized simply and well. The preface describes not only the authors’ rationale for the need for the study and subsequent book, but also the perspectives of each author on Generation Z from the point of view of their respective generations. Seemiller, of Generation X, explains both the great and challenging things about working with this group. Grace is a Millenial who describes the striking similarities and differences she finds between herself and the students she serves, who are relatively close to her in age. The Introduction then provides an overview of the Generation Z Goes to College study, a multi-institution effort led by Seemiller and Grace in 2014 to survey over 1100 Generation Z students on a variety of topics. This study formed the basis for this book, but the authors also supplemented the study with outside research to provide a more rounded-out picture of this generation. The description of the study is thorough and lays a strong foundation for the book’s remaining chapters, which describe the findings of the study and make suggestions about their applicability.

Chapter 1 provides a general look at Generation Z in terms of their relationship to previous generations and their demographics, key traits, and motivations. Chapter 2 dives into the beliefs and perspectives of these students, particularly as relates to current affairs, religion, and politics. Their preferred forms of technology and communication are explored in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 portrays the way Generation Z students build and maintain relationships, while Chapter 6 breaks down issues which interest or concern them. This connects to Chapter 7, which explains the ways in which these students engage with, and sometimes change, the world around them. Chapter 8 provides interesting insight into how Generation Z defines, perceives, and performs leadership. Chapter 9, a crucial chapter, addresses the way they learn, in terms of learning styles, resources, environments, and discusses how these factors can affect major decisions about college. Finally, Chapter 10, brings together all the findings from the study and other sources to present clear, concrete suggestions for how to work with Generation Z effectively in a college or university setting, including relational, operational, instructional, programmatic, developmental, and technological strategies.

Overall, this book presents a well-developed and supported argument. The timing of the study is excellent; the lack of research about this particular group in relation to higher education certainly needed to be addressed, particularly since the majority of students currently in
colleges and universities belong to this new generation. The developmental theories and measures used to develop the literature review and survey questions of the Generation Z Goes to College study, including Kolb’s experiential learning model, Gardner’s multiple intelligences, and the Life Orientation Test are widely known and respected in the field, and provide a sound basis for the study. From a methodological perspective, the study was well-developed, though not without its limitations. The sample size was respectably large, and the fact that it included students from fifteen institutional partners makes it more easily generalizable than if it only drew from the authors’ institution. However, the actual sample size for individual questions was smaller than the listed 1100 plus, as not all participants addressed each question—no single question received more than 759 responses. Additionally, while the authors mention that “Generation Z is the most racially diverse generation to date” (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. 7), their sample skewed heavily white. This, along with the fact that all the participants were volunteers recruited solely through the authors’ professional connections and that many types of institutions are not represented in the study, could indicate that the sample is not necessarily representative of Generation Z as a whole. However, by pulling in other research from various sources, including studies from other higher education institutions, national polling data, market research, and studies about adolescents, the authors adjust for some of the limitations of the study’s reach. Both quantitative and qualitative questions were assessed, giving the data more depth and allowing for a more broad picture of these students and their perspectives than just quantitative data would have provided. Finally, the authors are careful to address the fact that this study only provides a general snapshot of a large and varied group of students, and that care should be taken not to overgeneralize these results. As mentioned several times through the book, the findings are merely a starting point for practitioners to start to understand and appreciate a new generation. It is still crucial for practitioners to consider each student’s characteristics and needs individually and adjust the strategies they use in working with these students accordingly.

There is not space enough in a brief review to break down all of the interesting insights offered by Generation Z Goes to College. However, a few bear mentioning. First, it is important to consider the double-edged sword of social media. It is a hugely crucial set of tools that educators in this day and age cannot afford to ignore if they wish to stay relevant.
However, the findings in this study suggest that Generation Z views certain platforms, such as Twitter, as safe spaces away from the scrutiny and judgment of authority figures. It is important to use social media mindfully and effectively, while respecting students’ space. Second, students of this generation view higher education as a worthwhile experience, but are also very concerned about the cost of education and whether or not it will adequately prepare them for the work-force. Due to this, they have very high and specific expectations for their college or university experiences, and want more experiential or problem-based learning that yields real-life experience and skills that employers want. Practitioners should consider this when designing curricular and co-curricular programming for Generation Z students, as this type of learning currently exists in the field, but is typically not available to all students. Finally, Generation Z students are passionate, hard-working, and want to change the world by addressing root-causes and not symptoms. They are somewhat unique in that, “instead of working in a job that they see as just a means to make a living and then volunteering on the weekends to give back to their community, Generation Z students will turn their community engagement experiences into paid work” (p. 145). They are also highly entrepreneurial, and if they cannot find the jobs that fit their needs, they may create their own. Understanding these needs and motivations is crucial to understanding this generation and what they are looking for after their college or university experiences.

While the topics in this book do not directly address a Christian worldview, it is important that Christian practitioners stay relevant and up-to-date on best practices in higher education in order to provide ethical and mindful service to their students. Additionally, there are several fascinating insights into this generation’s view of spirituality and religion, as well as the issues they care about, that may prove useful to Christian practitioners in understanding and serving these students. It is a timely book, and certainly a worthwhile read for any student affairs professional.

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Unity is becoming increasingly difficult to find within current culture. Politics, faith, and more seem only to divide people. Colleges and universities are not exempt from this division and in the wake of divisiveness, Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream assert these institutions have lost their soul. In their book, Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age, the term “soul” refers to “a university’s core identity, story, and mission” (p. 13). Although the soul has been lost, the authors also contend the soul of the university can be revived and returned to health. They believe this restoration “must connect to the transcendent story of the universe and its Author—the triune God” (p. 13).

To defend the idea of the university’s lost soul and illustrate the past, present, and future impact of this lost identity, Restoring the Soul begins with an introduction, then is divided into three parts, followed by a conclusion. The Introduction is characterized by the question “Can the Soul of the University Be Saved?” In this introduction, the authors describe the term “soul” with other words like “identity” and “purpose.” Moreover, they assert their thesis and introduce the following parts of the text.

Part One is designated “Building the University.” In this
section, the authors explore the history of the university, and thus the
original soul of higher education. The authors include information from
as early as the twelfth century to provide historical context for colleges
and universities. In this part, the authors remind readers of the connec-
tion between the university’s soul and Christian faith in saying, “theolo-
gy can and must be understood as essential to the soul of the university”
(p. 37). However, throughout history, theology decreases in importance
to most higher education institutions and is replaced by idea such as
“moral philosophy” (p. 54) and “political purpose” (p. 65).

As the world entered into the post-Christian era, the vision of higher
education continued to change and broaden, causing fragmentation.
Thus, Part Two of this work is entitled “The Fragmentation of the Mul-
tiversity.” This section identifies several elements of higher education
that have lost their soul, therefore causing division in higher education.
These areas include the role of the professor and the curricular/cocur-
ricular divide, among others. When discussing the role of the profes-
sor, the authors highlight Derek Bok’s identification of “publish or per-
ish’ culture” among faculty members (p. 124). The authors share several
concerns about this culture, specifically the attention it takes away from
teaching. Moreover, the shift in attention away from curricular educa-
tors, leaves cocurricular educators “with not only subdivided disciplines
but also now with subdivided students” (p. 153).

In hopes of leaving readers with some encouragement, Part Three is
called “Restoring the Soul of the University.” In the final part of this
work, the authors examine how aspects of the university can be “reimag-
inged” in hopes of restoring its soul. These components include academic
vocation and the cocurricular, among others. In discussing academic
vocation, the authors describe the need to “connect our understanding
of virtues and practices to the triune God and God’s story” by upholding
virtues such as faith, hope, and love in higher education work (p. 253).
Moreover, when the cocurricular is reimagined, educators are not con-
cerned solely with a “narrow range of capacities” but a “wider range of
different student identities” to help students understand “what it means
to be a good student” and “explore what it means to be a good neigh-
bor, friend, man or woman, community member, citizen, and so on” (p.
273). When work done within colleges and universities is reimagined,
readers begin to see pieces of the original soul of higher education from
Part One.
To end, the authors pose the question “Can a University with a Singular Soul Exist?” as their Conclusion. Their answer acknowledges the limitations and falleness of this world stating “A university with soul will never be fully embodied on this earth” (p. 323). However, the authors challenge readers to live “among a redeemed community with a mission to fully image God in communal academic life” (p. 324).

Over the course of the book, the authors essentially create a timeline of the loss the university’s soul, identify the influence this lack of unity currently has on institutions, and provide insights into how higher education professionals can work to rectify this crisis. This text employs hundreds of references from scholarly resources as well as the author’s personal higher education experiences to create a robust history and vision of the soul of the university. Everything within the text points back to the main assertion that the soul of the university has been lost, but can be found again. Because of this framework and thorough research, readers would find it difficult to disagree with the authors’ thesis.

With such a strong, but viable, thesis, reading this book with a Christian worldview causes alarm. And it should! When reading this text, Christians are forced to confront the reality that an integral piece of culture—the higher education system—is flawed, fallen, and in need of repair. The higher education system has lost sight of its beginnings, its purpose, and our God. This text reminds readers of these important origins, unified purpose, and eternal God.

This text is honest, robust, and dense. The authors intended to give a full picture of higher education and its soul, and they have done so well. Including everything from athletics, administrative positions, academic leadership, the role of theology, and more, this text leaves few to no stones unturned when it comes to exploring the purpose, or soul, of higher education. Restoring the Soul is a great resource for higher education professionals and student affairs practitioners who wish to better understand the former, current, and future state of the field.

Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream identify their audiences as “Christians in the multiversity” and “those seeking to nurture or build coherent Christian universities” (p. 12). There is no doubt, this text has already and will continue to benefit both of these groups. This work provides context often forgotten by professionals about the original purpose of higher education. Moreover, it examines the ways in which that first purpose has not been fulfilled. Finally, it provides a glimmer of hope for professionals—hope to keep working, serving, and remembering who God is
as well as the purpose He has called Christians to in higher education. This text emulates a common higher education practice—challenge and support—it supports the meaningful work of higher education professionals and challenges the soul behind it, for the glory of God.

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Well-researched and incisively written, Listening to Sexual Minorities is a “must read” and provides a helpful resource for student affairs professionals seeking to further their understanding of and care for students. As the title suggests, the authors operate from a posture of humility and respect in faithfully relating stories told by sexual-minorities in their own words. The longitudinal research behind this book consisted of gathering information on two occasions, one year apart, from 160 student participants on fourteen different Christian college campuses. Comparisons were also made with earlier 2009 and 2013 studies. The underlying premise of the authors behind the study is that Christian college campuses should be intentional in engaging our students who are navigating their faith and sexuality.

The authors begin by reminding readers about the three “lenses” that people often bring to this conversation (pp. 8-9). The integrity lens is connected to the historic view of the church that human sexuality and expression is grounded in the creation order and God’s design for marriage between one man and one woman. The disability lens emphasizes the fallenness of creation and an understanding of sex and gender that is not as it was originally intended, but calls for compassion and empathy. Finally,
the diversity lens sees gay identity as worthy of being celebrated and affirmed. All of these perspectives point to the very real tension that both institutions and sexual-minorities feel in seeking to navigate student faith formation alongside their sexuality on Christian college campuses.

The authors describe the participants in the study as “relatively young, quite religious, very spiritual, sexual minorities, fairly moderate, doing better than expected, and looking a lot like their fellow students” (pp. 29-48). Their research and findings recognize the complexity of the conversation and the diversity of the student participants. There is not a single student story, but many different backgrounds, experiences, and stories related to faith and sexuality. As the authors state, “The complexities should lead us away from easy answers . . . and toward more nuanced reflection on sexuality, human development, and flourishing” (p. 37). The ultimate goal is always to see our students flourish and develop as whole persons.

Key findings of this longitudinal study are summarized well toward the end of the book (pp. 272-274). The first finding, as has already been mentioned, has to do with the diversity of the student participants. The second key finding is that Christian colleges can be challenging environments for sexual minorities to navigate. Third, “intrinsic religiosity” and faith are important elements for students seeking to fit into our campus environments. Fourth, about 50% were in “low distress” and the other 50% were in moderate to high stress with intrinsic religiosity having a protective effect on the level of psychological distress. Fifth, most of the sexual minorities in the study wanted to hold on to both their Christian faith and their sexuality. Sixth, most of the participants liked being on their Christian campus. And finally, social support and relational connections are critical for sexual minorities on our campuses.

Before concluding with some of the most poignant takeaways and considerations for student development practitioners (and there are many), it is important to point out a few concerns or limitations that are noteworthy. While the research and methodology throughout were excellent, on rare occasions some of the comparisons with older studies seemed a little overstated. Attitudes and perceptions about this topic have changed so dramatically and rapidly in recent years and, while the authors briefly noted this on a couple occasions, this reality probably deserved more emphasis. Another observation is that the authors didn’t fully acknowledge or appreciate the complexities of working within systems with diverse stakeholders including Boards of Trustees and alumni.
who have a level of responsibility for institutional faithfulness and integ-

rity over time. While this particular consideration might be beyond the
scope of the study, it does seem relevant and noteworthy (and, perhaps,
some recommendations in this area might have been helpful). Finally, it
was still somewhat unclear how the “integrity lens” enters into the equa-
tion or, put another way, we are left with the same conundrum of ex-
tending understanding, compassion, empathy, care, and support while
holding to an “orthodox theological position” that matters to many of
our institutions and those who faithfully serve students on Christian
college campuses.

With that said, there are a number of observations and insights
throughout the book that are extremely helpful to student development
practitioners in our work with students. First, faith was extremely im-
portant to the student participants in this study. Generally, this was re-
flected in faithfulness in church attendance as well as attention to private
faith practices (prayer, reading Scripture, etc.). In fact, “Participants in-
dicated it was more important to identify themselves as a Christian than
any of these additional labels. This was truly the most important identity
for this group of students” (p. 93). The researchers also found that faith
commitment was generally very beneficial to overall mental health (p.
162). It is incumbent upon us to take the faith of sexual minorities on
our campuses seriously and to facilitate ways for them to deepen their
walk with Jesus. This is part of the human flourishing that we seek for all
our students.

A second interesting observation had to do with participant’s attitudes
toward celibacy. A significant number of students saw celibacy as an op-
tion, but also noted that the church and the college campus are very un-
prepared about how to talk to students about singleness and/or celibacy
as anything other than a loss. Indeed, “What kind of vision does a faith
community provide to its members who do not see themselves in the
standard path toward heterosexual marriage and family?” (p. 226). If we
are concerned about educating and speaking to the “whole person”, it is
critical that we allow for alternative “scripts” for living a meaningful and
purposeful life.

Yet a third observation that is absolutely critical is the importance of
supportive and empathetic relationships and relational connections on
campus. A few close friends or “micro-affirmations” from faculty or
staff members can go a long way in mitigating the “otherness” that is
felt by students. Participants in the study noted that counseling centers were often the most helpful resource along with empathetic faculty and staff members. In addition, campus ministries offices and residence life were sometimes perceived as helpful. It was somewhat troubling, though perhaps not surprising, that student development was seen as the least preferred resource for sexual minorities on our campuses. While there was not always “evidence” conveyed by students to support these perceptions, they were perceptions nonetheless. As the authors noted, this may have to do with the fact that student development is charged with addressing conduct issues and carrying out institutional policies. Interestingly, the authors observed several times that very few student participants suggested policy change as an end goal. What is clear is that student development offices can and should seek ways to listen carefully to sexual minorities and create environments conducive to flourishing and spiritual growth. Our goal is always to point all of our students to deeper walks with Jesus!

A fourth observation, as noted previously, is that we must seek to address the needs of the whole person. This requires intentional and proactive engagement and that we “show up” for the conversation. As the authors note, “In the eyes of students, the developmental process for sexual identity seemed to be more informally engaged at best, often lacking any formative plan that students could identify” (p. 126). What would it look like for student development offices to both embody institutional values and convictions while courageously stepping into this “awkward” space with our students? As the researchers noted, “The most common classification of the ‘general campus attitude’ among the interview sample was ‘disengaged and resistant,’ meaning that other students [and faculty/staff] were perceived as being avoidant of engaging sexual minority issues (disengaged) and possibly averse to discussing the topic if confronted (resistant)” (p. 110).

In the minds of sexual minorities on campus, not talking about same sex attraction or sexual minority students is not seen as neutral, but as indicative of a lack of support or even resistance. Or, as the authors summarized “Basically, interviewed students seemed to be asking for a quality of institutional attention that did not magnify their own shame and fear” (p. 289). This requires a great deal of cultural humility as we enter into meaningful and nuanced conversations about sexuality and faith recognizing that “Christians who seek to follow Christ and un-
derstand the meaning of their same-sex attractions will need support, compassion, and space from the church community as they navigate this journey” (p. 155).

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Over the past decade, enrollment in online education has grown at an astounding rate as access to distance programs has increased through the rise of the internet and digital medias. Lowe & Lowe provide Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age at an integral time for Christian Higher Education as many institutions have begun to invest in the increased accessibility of learning. The book seeks to provide a ‘how to’ answer for higher education professionals for engaging students spiritually in online education but may leave the reader wondering how to achieve what the authors propose. Lowe & Lowe provide an excellent overview of bioecological systems in nature, social and psychosocial ecological models, and scriptural emphasis of ecological connections in the Christian Faith. Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age could be the beginning of answering greater questions for many student affairs practitioners dealing with developing students in the digital space of Higher Education.

The authors’ thesis is that thinking ecologically about spiritual growth and online student engagement could have “significant implications for and application to our practice of online Christian education” (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). They structure their manuscript into three parts: a biblical theology of ecology, spiri-
tual formation through digital ecologies, and ecological connections to Christ and community. Part one introduces the reader to the idea of ecological motifs found in Scripture; images of Eden, the power of Parables, and how ecology in the Body of Christ functions all weave a beautiful story of an interdependent creation for the reader.

Part two draws on part one to suggest that as the Body of Christ is interconnected – creation was designed ecologically – the reader should consider an ecological framework for online education to be viable. Lowe & Lowe discuss how they have viewed growth in online spaces, how they began to design learning ecologies, and the power of influence in social spaces. To further support their thesis, the authors draw on narratives from students who responded positively of growth and support through their online educational experiences in this section.

Part three seeks to further cement the idea that creation was designed ecologically and support the authors’ thesis by discussing ecological connection to Christ, Christian-to-Christian, in interactions with others, and the idea of ecological sanctification. Lowe & Lowe draw on the idea that all Christians are ecologically connected to Christ and other Christians, and support this with Scripture. They also use a well-developed argument for how Christians interact with each other online and how positive interaction and holiness can lead to further sanctification of other believers.

While the authors utilize much personal insight and experiences they have had through multiple academic placements in Christian Higher Education, they provide fair reasoning using well-known ecological model theories such as Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development. Their thesis is well supported by Scripture and by human development research, showing how environments do shape individuals and that every person can have a large impact on those they connect with.

Professionals in higher education may still be left asking a few questions. While Lowe & Lowe seek to support their thesis with unsolicited, positive experiences from previous students these claims are unreferenced for the reader’s review and there are no assessment tools or outcomes provided to prove the true success of development efforts. This leads to question if the authors can back up their claims using assessment that a student majority found satisfaction and spiritual growth in online education. Part two also discusses a study on the social lives of teenagers by Danah Boyd, in which the authors reflect that Boyd’s find-
ings included a discovery that “teens would much rather gather together with their friends in person than through digital platforms” (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). A second question the reader may have is why focus so much on engaging students in online education when research shows that many would find greater development and satisfaction from in-person experiences?

The discussion on ecologies and the insight the authors provide to spiritual ecologies is valuable in thinking about the interconnectedness in the Body of Christ but falls short in delivering professionals with an actionable plan to engage online students in development. Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age uses strong reasoning to support a powerful focus on developing spiritual formation in online settings but lacks both data-driven results and a plan of action for the reader to utilize. Much of the authors’ advocacy for digital ecologies for faith formation may be challenged with references to research in mental and emotional challenges caused by social networking; many studies have shown that prolonged use of social media can lead to depression (Pantic, 2014). The flow of the manuscript can also sometimes be confusing as the authors seem to jump back and forth between Scripture, theory research, and allusions to an actual plan of action.

In conclusion, Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age provides excellent Scripture support for digital spiritual formation and provides well-researched information on how various types of ecologies work. The lack of data-driven research and a useable plan of action for practitioners may make this text unusable as a source to achieve what the authors purport to have achieved in their professional roles. However, Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age begins raising questions to a conversation that many students affairs professionals must start to have as online enrollment climbs and traditional enrollment becomes a challenge for many: How do we develop students holistically who experience college education entirely online? This is a good question to ask if we are to truly provide comparable services for these students to those provided traditionally.

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References


**Write for Growth**

*Growth* is published during the spring each year and solicits manuscripts and or book reviews that fall within content areas that relate to purposes of the journal. Those content areas include Foundations, Leadership and Professional Development, Student Culture, Student Learning and Assessment, Spiritual Formation, Diversity and Global Engagement, and Book Reviews.

All articles should be consistent with the Doctrinal Statement, Article III of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Association for Christians in Student Development. Material in the following categories will be considered for publication:

- Research articles that have relevance to the field of Christian Student Development.
- Theoretical or applied articles that have relevance to the field of Christian Student Development.
- Research, theoretical or applied articles dealing with the integration of faith and learning within the field of Christian Student Development or within the broader field of Christian Higher Education as a whole.
- Reviews of articles in other journals relevant to Christian Student Development.
- Reviews of books relevant to Christian Student Development practice.
- Reactions to current or past journal articles.

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Authors submitting a manuscript should:

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2. Adhere to the following length parameters:
   a. 10-15 pages for original research articles
   b. 7-10 pages for applied research articles
   c. 3-4 pages for book and article reviews
3. Avoid submitting manuscripts which have been previously published or that are being considered for publication in other journals. If an article has been rejected by another journal it may then be submitted to Growth.
4. Submit completed manuscripts to ACSD-growth-submissions@taylor.edu, as follows:
   a. Send two digital copies in Word format (one with author identification and one without identification for review purposes)
   b. Include an abstract of no more than 150 words in a separate file.
   c. Include, for each author, institutional affiliation and degree(s).
   d. Include, for submitting author, phone number and email address.

All submitted manuscripts will be promptly acknowledged and processed in a timely fashion. The review process generally requires a minimum of three months, after which authors will be informed of the status of their submissions. Please note submissions may be rejected for failing to adhere to the guidelines above, or authors may be asked to revise and resubmit articles.

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Contact the Growth co-editors with any questions about the review process:

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