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ACSD Association for Christians in Student Development

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

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ACSD Association for Christians in Student Development

Dear Readers:

We are pleased to share with you the twenty-second edition of *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. For twenty-two 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 encounter five feature articles including original research focusing on political views and experiences of students at an evangelical college, empowering faculty to support student mental health, the religious experiences of Black students, relational coordination between academic and student affairs, and cultivating the self-awareness of global students. 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 Julia VanderMolen, Director of Calvin Cohorts at Calvin University, who serves in the role of Book Review Editor and the Associate Editor, Eli Casteel, who has provided guidance to the review of materials and publication processes of the journal. Additionally, we would like to thank Lucy Man, the Communications and Marketing Manager for Housing and Residence Life at Pepperdine University, who provided our graphic design and layout this year. 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 2024. 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. 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

Austin Smith, Co-Editor

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Under God: Political Views and Experiences Among Young Adults Attending an Evangelical College

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Abstract

While polarization has increased the saliency of political values, political meaning-making has been scarcely addressed in higher education literature and training. Additionally, even though the political orientation of evangelicals has been back in the spotlight since the 2016 presidential campaign, little research has been done to explore the interplay of faith commitments and political values among students at an evangelical college. This study examined religiosity, ideology, political attitudes, the salience of political identity, and experience with political differences among students at an evangelical Christian liberal arts institution (n = 223). Descriptive data confirmed the salience of religious belief and practice among the surveyed students and revealed that they endorsed the views that cross partisan boundaries, suggesting that they were more complicated politically than their ideology, party affiliation, or voting decisions would convey. While political identity was not an important part of personhood for most students, ideology predicted conflict, open-mindedness, and self-censorship.

Introduction

Political division has become a defining characteristic of the United States (Dimock & Wike, 2020), the nation with a convicting motto, "Out of many, one." The past two presidential elections further uncovered the profound differences around core values and beliefs among Americans. In one multinational study, the researchers found that our nation has experienced the highest rise in affective polarization (Boxell et al., 2021), with ordinary citizens affiliated with one political party increasingly disliking and distrusting those affiliated with the other party (Iyengar et al., 2019). Amplified by the echo chambers of social media, political noise drowns out any attempt at a dialogue. We cannot hear each other, and what is more despairing, we do not want to.

The University of California in Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute's annual freshman survey revealed that today's first-year college students are more politically polarized than they have been in the last 50 years (Stolzenberg et al., 2018). Over 60% of young Americans are "worried America will not be able to overcome its current divisions" (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2021, p. 11). While growing polarization has increased the saliency of political identity (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), the subject has been scarcely explored in higher education and student affairs training and literature (Morgan, 2021).

This study investigated the religious beliefs and practices, political views, and impact of political divisions in the lives of college students attending an evangelical Christian college. This research contributes to the higher education and student development field, as student affairs professionals have an opportunity to facilitate respectful and productive dialogue in safe settings to reconcile some of these divides. In the absence of literature addressing the role of political meaning-making in student development, this study also contributes to understanding the political identity development of college students on a Christian college campus by presenting a more nuanced narrative of students' political attitudes and experiences.

Literature Review

The scarcity of higher education research on political identity could be related to a generally low political engagement among college students during the 1980s and 1990s when many student development theories emerged. Following the Vietnam War era, students often saw politics

as "individualistic, divisive, negative, and often counterproductive to acting on the ills of society" (Longo & Meyer, 2006, p. 2).

Political identity and ideology are related concepts (sometimes used interchangeably) that have been challenging to operationalize (Theodoridis, 2013). In political science, ideology is measured using respondent self-reports of their ideological views. While often perceived as something negative by the general public, in political science, ideology is a neutral term that refers to an interrelated set of political beliefs (Freeden, 1996) forming the shared cognitive basis for a group or social identity (van Dijk, 2006). Partisanship is a more tangible concept and, thus, easier to measure and research. Within the sphere of American political science, party identification has been the primary variable included in the analysis to explain voting decisions and political meaning-making (Huddy & Bankert, 2017).

Evangelicals and Politics

Evangelicalism is both a global religious movement and a system of beliefs within Protestantism, defined by Bebbington (1989), based on four central commitments: (1) biblicism (high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority); (2) conversionism (the necessity of the new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit); (3) crucicentrsim (a core emphasis on Christ's sacrifice on the cross); and (4) activism (or evangelism—the need to share the Gospel, locally and globally). However, as astutely noted by Van der Borght (2018), religious movements cannot define themselves exclusively "in terms of their confessional identities . . . all religions are co-identified by a sociocultural identity" (p. 162). Historical realities have shaped the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of White American evangelicals—not shared by evangelicals of non-White backgrounds or in other parts of the world—and directed their political affections (Smidt, 2013). Likewise, non-White evangelicals' racialized experience in the United States has affected their political commitments (Calhoun-Brown, 1998). However, as research shows, across racial and ethnic groups and across political parties, evangelicals' political meaning-making is usually more nuanced and complex than the political opposites would make it sound.

Evangelical Students and Politics

Although evangelicals are the largest religious group among young adults, little is known about how their faith shapes political outlook and civic engagement (Stackaruk & Singer, 2022). In a nationally representative survey of 1,989 young adults aged 18 to 25, evangelical young adults

were the only group to select religious texts as the primary source of influence (along with friends) on political issues and community engagement (Stackaruk & Singer, 2022). They were also more likely to view civic engagement as important and more engaged than their religious and non-religious peers.

Bryant (2005) offered a composite portrait of an evangelical subculture based on an in-depth qualitative study of an evangelical student presence on a public campus. In terms of the students' political beliefs, she concluded that evangelical student organizations are intentionally silent to avoid polarization. Many participants deliberately avoided identifying as Republicans or Democrats and often revealed holding "both liberal and conservative attitudes simultaneously" (p. 11). These attitudes included the support for welfare programs, environmental stewardship, and gun control (commonly perceived as liberal commitments), as well the conservative stance on abortion rights. The author found the students' view of LGBTQ+ matters ambivalent, expressing "significant conflict between their interpretation of biblical scriptures and their warm connections to gay or lesbian friends" (p. 12).

Politics, Stress, and Close Relationships

Over the past seven years (since the 2016 presidential election), researchers have focused on the impact of the tumultuous political environment on mental health. Following the 2016 presidential election, there were reports of significant stress, notably among Democrats, women, young adults, and college students unaffiliated with the Christian faith (Hagan et al., 2018; Hoyt et al., 2018).

Several studies examined how political engagement (Ballard et al., 2020) and sociopolitical stress (Ballard et al., 2022; Hagan et al., 2018) affect students' well-being. Ballard et al. (2022) defined sociopolitical stress "as the intense feelings and experiences people have that stem from an awareness of, exposure to, and/or involvement in, political events and phenomena" (p. 2). In a study of 769 students attending a large public university, one out of four met the criteria for clinically significant symptoms of stress related to the 2016 election (Hagan et al., 2018).

In another study, 76% of college students agreed that the 2020 election "was stressing them out" (Ballard et al., 2022, p. 4). However, students self-identifying as Republicans, ideologically conservative, and Christian reported the lowest stress levels, even though Trump, the candidate they most likely supported, lost the election.

A recent study with a representative sample of 850 college students nationwide found that a person's vote for a presidential candidate influenced one's openness to build friendships with, date, and work for someone with an opposing choice (Generation Lab, 2021). The effect was stronger for Democrats, with 71% responding that they would "definitely not" or "probably not" go out on a date with someone who voted for the opposing presidential candidate (compared with 31% of respondents who identified as Republicans). These findings demonstrate the impact of political polarization on relationships and suggest that partisanship influences social interactions.

Political Discourse in the College Setting

The college setting is a natural space for political development (Finlay et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), where exposure to new ideas helps students clarify their values and influences the formation of their identity. However, opportunities for intentional political discourse have been limited to specific majors or small groups of students with specific (and similar) interests (Thomas & Brower, 2017).

In her book *Angry Politics*, Stacy Ulbig (2020) argued that civil debate around potentially polarizing issues is a skill that needs to be taught in college. Yet, even before the cancel culture reached its momentum, a survey of 19,969 undergraduate students from 55 colleges and universities found that "a majority of students feel they can't express their opinions on campus, especially when they are in the ideological minority and even if they believe their college fosters a climate that supports free speech" (Anderson, 2020, para. 1). Understanding student perceptions of the impact of political disagreements on their close relationships and their meaning-making around political identity can help faculty and staff offer more informed, intentional support for their development inside and outside the classroom.

Research Questions

We sought to address the gap in the literature regarding Christian students' political views and engagement, aiming to answer the following research questions:

1. How central are religious beliefs and practices to college students at an evangelical Christian liberal arts institution?
2. What are the patterns of students' political self-identification?
3. What attitudes on diverse contemporary political issues are endorsed by the participants?

4. Have students experienced significant polarization and interpersonal conflict related to the 2020 presidential election?
5. Is there a relationship between the study's main variables (i.e., religiosity, ideology, political identity, and political conflict)?

Method

This survey-based study sought to explore the patterns of political ideology, attitudes, and identity, as well as the experience with political conflict in American students attending a private liberal arts institution identifying with evangelical Protestant tradition in the Midwest.

Participants and Procedures

The study's sample was drawn at a private Christian college in the Midwest where the student population reflects the qualities we intended to explore (i.e., a primarily evangelical student body). Upon receiving the institutional review board approval, we visited classes, sent an email, and posted flyers encouraging students to participate in the study. Data were collected in May and September 2022 through an electronic survey.

Out of 292 responses, 69 were excluded for missing data or not meeting the inclusion criteria (undergraduate status, 18 to 29 years old age group, and American citizenship). Men comprised 51.0% of the sample, and women 46.5% (2.5% selected Other or Prefer not to say). The participants came from 35 states and, racially, were 75% White, 13% Asian, 2% African American, and .5% Native American, with 9.5% selecting "other" or "prefer not to say." Of those who chose White, 6.5% identified as Latino/a or Hispanic. The racial/ethnic composition of the sample was representative of the student population at the institution as a whole. The age ranged from 18 to 24, with 23.76% being first-year students, 19.80% sophomores, 27.71% juniors, and 28.71% seniors. As expected for this demographic group, 96% were never married.

Measures

The survey consisted of questions to assess one's religiosity and view of the Bible, ideological self-identification, party affiliation, voting history and decision (for presidential election only), political attitudes, the salience of political identity, and the impact of political discord on significant relationships.

Measures of Religiosity

We were particularly interested in this sample because of the expected high levels of religiosity. The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) assesses the salience of religious thought, expression, and experience (Huber

& Huber, 2012). We used the five-item version of the scale, measuring religious thought ("How often do you think about religious issues?"), belief ("To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?"), public practice ("How often do you take part in religious services?"), private practice ("How often do you pray?"), and experience ("How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?"). Respondents answered each item using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all/never*) to 5 (*very much so/very often*); higher scores represented a more evident centrality of religiosity. The measure of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of the five-item scale was .85 (Huber & Huber, 2012;), .93 in our previous study (Bayne et al., 2021), and .75 in the current study, demonstrating adequate reliability.

Additionally, the survey included the question from the American National Election Study (ANES) survey, a national survey of voters in the United States conducted before and after every presidential election. This question attempts to gauge the participants' view of the Bible by asking which of the given statements reflects their feeling about the Bible:

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.
3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God. (American National Election Survey, 2021, p. 185)

As it was done elsewhere in the literature (see Yancey & Quosigk, 2021), we included these questions to explore the participants' theological orientation (progressive or conservative) based on their belief about the Scriptures.

Measures of Political Identification

Ideological self-identification was assessed through a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 corresponding with extremely liberal to 7 corresponding with extremely conservative (Bayne et al., 2021). Respondents also answered whether they were registered with a specific party; whether they thought of themselves as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else; whether they thought of themselves to be closer to the Republican or Democratic Party; and the degree of identification (*Strong* or *Not very strong*). Finally, they were asked for whom they voted in the 2020 presidential election (Trump, Biden, Other, or Decline to answer).

Political Attitudes

Attitudes toward specific political issues were assessed with a 12-item Political Attitudes Questionnaire (PAQ) created by Pyszczynski et al. (2018), with the participants indicating on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 6 = *Strongly Agree*) their agreement with the statements listed in Table 1. In the Pyszxzynski et al. (2018) study, the scale yielded good reliability (α = .83), and it did likewise in our study (α = .81).

Salience of Political Identity and Responses to Political Conflict

The Political Identity and Relational Impact Scale (PIRI) is a new instrument intending to capture personal and relational responses to political conflict (Bayne et al., 2021). It consists of 30 items and a four-factor structure (Conflict, Identity, Open-Mindedness, and Self-Censorship). In its initial validation study (Bayne et al., 2021), it had the following measures of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha): .88 (Conflict), .85 (Identity), .80 (Open-Mindedness), and .76 (Self-Censorship). In the present study, Cronbach's alphas were .87, .87, .73, and .82 for Conflict, Identity, Open-Mindedness, and Self-Censorship, respectively.

Analyses

We answered Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 using descriptive statistics. To answer Research Question 5, we measured the strength of the association between the study variables by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients and performing a multiple regression analysis.

Results

Centrality of Religious Beliefs and Expressions

The responses to the CRS confirmed the salience of religious belief, experience, and practice among the surveyed students. The majority of the respondents thought of religious issues often or very often (85%, n = 170) and experienced situations in which they felt that God intervened in their life (occasionally: 34%, often or very often: 53%, n = 175). Ninety-five percent (n = 190) endorsed a belief that God exists, with 6% believing in God "quite a bit" and 89% selecting "very much so." They reported regularly participating in religious services (once a week or more than once a week: 89%, n = 179) and praying either daily or several times a day (82%, n = 164).

Based on the responses to the ANES survey items on the view of Scripture, 99% believed the Bible to be the word of God, with 24% affirming the statement that "the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken

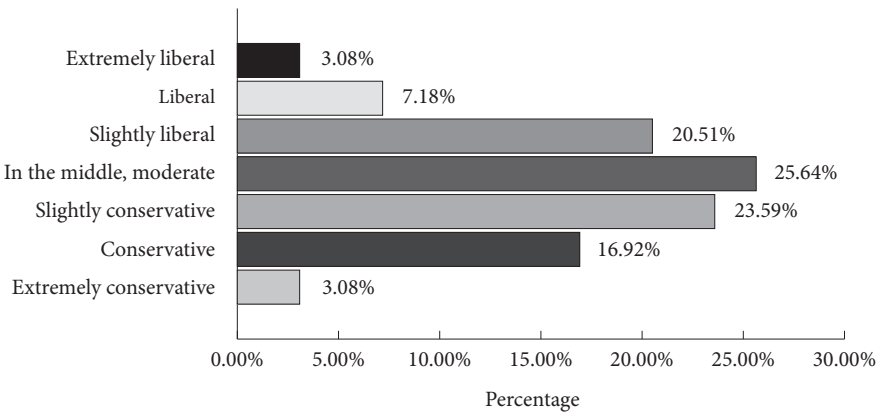
literally, word for word," and 74% agreeing that "the Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word." Out of 203 students, three agreed with the statement that "the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God."

Ideological Self-identification, Partisanship, and Presidential Election

As seen in Figure 1, the sample was reasonably balanced ideologically, slightly leaning to the conservative side (M = 4.22, SD = 1.41), with the individuals most frequently self-identifying as "moderate, in the middle" (25%, n = 50). Overall, 30.77% of respondents described themselves as liberal (across the three liberal categories), and 43.59% described themselves as conservative. Women were more likely to identify as liberal (M = 3.87) than men (M = 4.56), reflecting the trend in the country (Survey Center on American Life, 2022).

Figure 1

Self-Reported Ideology



In response to the question about the political party affiliation on voter registration 46.70% of respondents (n = 92) did not have an official party affiliation, followed by 36.04% registered as Republicans, 8.63% as Democrats, and 8.12% as Independents. One person selected "other." However, based on another question ("Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?") a different pattern emerged, with slightly more than half of the students identifying as Republicans (50.25%, n = 100), followed by 26.53% identifying as Independents, 10.05% as Democrats, 7.54% selecting "no preference," and 5.53% "other." Interestingly, of those who identified as Republicans, less than half (48.98%) called themselves "a strong Republican" (as opposed to "not a very strong Republican"). For

those identifying as Democrats, 45% called themselves a strong Democrat (vs. 55% describing themselves as "not a very strong Democrat").

Finally, 73.23% of the participants (n = 145) voted in the 2020 presidential election, with 41.33% voting for Trump, 24.49% for Biden, and 14.29% for another candidate. Almost 20% of the respondents declined to answer.

Political Attitudes

Attitudes toward specific political issues were assessed with a 12-item Political Attitudes Questionnaire (PAQ). Higher scores denoted greater endorsement of the statement. We used these items to explore how our sample rated statements that are often points of division along political lines in order to get a more in-depth perspective of student political ideology.

Table 1

Responses to Political Attitudes Questionnaire

Survey Item	Strongly Dis-agree	Moder. Dis-agree	Some-what Disagree	Some-what Agree	Moder. Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean/ *SD*
The traditional (male/female) two-parent family provides the best environment of stability, discipline, responsibility, and character.	5.8%	4.9%	5.8%	11.2%	11.7%	60.5%	5.0/1.53
America's domestic policy should do more to ensure that living and working conditions are equal for all groups of people.	4.0%	2.7%	9.91%	30.0%	22.0%	31.4%	4.57/1.31
The use of our military strength makes the United States a safer place to live.	1.8%	7.6%	13.9%	22.0%	21.1%	33.6%	4.54/1.37
America would be a better place if people had stronger religious beliefs.	4.9%	5.8%	8.1%	28.3%	29.1%	23.8%	4.42/1.35

The more money a person makes in America, the more taxes he/she should pay.	7.6%	7.2%	9.4%	30.9%	24.2%	20.6%	4.19/1.45
It is the responsibility of political leaders to promote programs that will help close the income gap between the rich and the poor.	8.1%	8.15%	11.7%	28.7%	24.7%	18.4%	4.09/1.47
Taxation should be used to fund social programs.	5.4%	7.2%	15.2%	38.6%	22.9%	10.8%	3.99/1.26
Gay marriage threatens the sanctity of marriage.	13.9%	10.76%	13.45%	20.18%	13.0%	28.7%	3.94/1.76
Flag burning should be illegal.	15.2%	10.8%	19.7%	17.9%	12.6%	23.8%	3.73/1.73
There is no "right way" to live life; instead, everyone must create a way to live which works best for them.	14.8%	20.2%	21.1%	22.9%	15.2%	5.8%	3.21/1.45
Our society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.	14.3%	19.7%	26.0%	23.3%	12.6%	4.0%	3.12/1.36
Spending tax dollars on "abstinence education" rather than "sex education" is more effective in curbing teen pregnancy.	23.8%	25.6%	20.2%	21.1%	6.7%	2.7%	2.70/1.35

Note. $N = 223$. Survey items are listed in descending order of the mean value, ranking the items from the highest to the lowest agreement.

As shown in Table 1, most students (72.2%) strongly or moderately agreed that the traditional male/female two-parent family is the best environment for a stable upbringing aiming to develop character and responsibility. However, there was no strong consensus on whether same-sex marriage threatens the sanctity of marriage, with 41.7% of respondents strongly or moderately agreeing with the statement and almost a quarter of them strongly or moderately disagreeing. Perhaps in the same vein, 43.9% agreed that there is no "right way to live life;

instead, everyone must create a way to live which works best for them." Yet, only 18.8% disagreed the country "would be a better place if people had stronger religious beliefs."

While ideologically, the sample was leaning slightly toward the conservative orientation, an overwhelming majority of participants agreed (83.4%, across the agreement categories) that "America's domestic policy should do more to ensure that living and working conditions are equal for all groups of people." Similarly, most respondents believed that (1) people with higher earnings should pay higher taxes (75.9%, with varying degrees of agreement), (2) political leaders must promote programs closing the income gap between the rich and the poor (71.8%), and (3) "taxation should be used to fund social programs" (72.3%), although the most common selection on these items was "somewhat agree." Finally, 60% of participants disagreed that "our society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve."

While the desecration of the American flag has not dominated the news headlines in the last thirty years, perhaps with national anthem kneeling protests becoming a much more polarizing issue, 36.4% of respondents expressed their belief that flag burning should be outlawed, 26% agreed that it should be legal, with a significant portion of students remaining ambivalent (37.6% selecting either somewhat agree or somewhat disagree). Lastly, most students (81.2%) agreed, in varying degrees, that "the use of our military strength makes the United States a safer place to live," a belief that might have been reinforced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Salience of Political Identity and Responses to Political Conflict

The salience of political identity, the relational impact of political conflict in significant relationships, and the approaches to political difference and conflict were measured utilizing PIRI. Table 2 summarizes responses to each PIRI question, organized in the ascending order of the mean value, ranking the items from the highest to the lowest agreement.

Table 2

Results for Political Identity and Relational Impact Scale

PIRI Item	Mean	SD	Agree (Composite)	Factor
I maintain respect for people who hold different political values.	1.77	.96	78.6%	Open-Mindedness
I can respect opposing perspectives when I know others are informed about political issues.	1.81	1.01	78.22%	Open-Mindedness
I can understand why someone would vote differently than me.	1.96	1.10	73.76%	Open-Mindedness
My significant relationships stay the same regardless of what is happening in politics.	1.98	1.09	70.29%	Open-Mindedness
I like to keep a sense of humor when talking about politics	2.32	1.23	53.47%	Open-Mindedness
I can discuss politics without feeling the need to change the other person's opinions.	2.40	1.21	58.42%	Open-Mindedness
My political identity is influenced by my personal history and background.	2.42	1.26	58.42%	Identity
I am selective about who I talk to about politics.	2.52	1.49	55.44%	Self-Censorship
I tend to support candidates from the same political party.	2.59	1.43	58.42%	Identity
I tend to only talk about politics with someone who I trust.	2.60	1.51	46.53%	Self-Censorship
I like to joke around with people who have different political values than me.	2.73	1.51	44.55%	Open-Mindedness
I could see myself voting for someone from another political party.	2.83	1.39	39.11%	Open-Mindedness

I try to keep the peace in my relationships, even if that means not sharing my own beliefs.	2.89	1.56	45.55%	Self-Censorship
In the past, I have voted for or supported candidates from different political parties.	2.95	2.07	23.76%	Open-Mindedness
I experience tension when discussing politics within my relationships.	3.20	1.52	32.67%	Conflict
I think it is difficult to have conversations with people who have different political opinions than me.	3.36	1.47	25.25%	Self-Censorship
I try to avoid discussing politics with people who disagree with me.	3.40	1.48	27.72%	Self-Censorship
Politics feel personal to me.	3.54	1.47	19.31%	Identity
Political discussions can hurt my relationships.	3.58	1.57	23.77%	Conflict
I feel personally impacted by political election outcomes.	3.52	1.63	24.26%	Identity
I am more informed about politics than people who support opposing candidates.	3.67	1.68	15.84%	Identity
I feel distressed when my candidate loses an election.	3.69	1.63	13.37%	Identity
This election cycle distanced me from people I care about.	3.70	1.79	20.3%	Conflict
My political identity is important to me.	3.80	1.43	14.85%	Identity
This election cycle created tension in my close relationships.	3.86	1.82	18.32%	Conflict
My political views represent who I am as a person.	3.91	1.71	18.81%	Identity

I think my relationships have been divided by political disagreement.	4.02	1.69	15.85%	Conflict
I avoid contact with significant others who have different political values than I do.	4.16	1.81	12.88%	Conflict
I react emotionally to election outcomes.	4.19	1.63	11.89%	Identity
I have lost relationships because of political differences.	4.40	1.91	12.87%	Conflict

Note. $N = 202$. Percentages for Composite Agree include Strongly and Moderately Agree. Likert-type responses to each item ranged from one (*Strongly Agree*) to five (*Strongly Disagree*), with a lower mean representing a higher level of agreement.

The results indicated that political identity (as measured by PIRI) was not psychologically central for most participants (see Table 2), and the experience of politically-based relational conflict was relatively low. For example, only 15% agreed that their political identity was important to them, and 19% thought their political views represented who they were. Although 33% of the respondents reported experiencing tension while talking about politics, 13% admitted losing relationships because of political differences. The top six items with the lowest mean (reflecting the highest agreement) were a part of the Open-Mindedness Scale. Most participants agreed that they could be respectful to those who differ from them politically (79%), and they could understand why someone would vote differently (74%).

Relationships Among Constructs

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the linear relationship between religiosity, political ideology, conflict, identity, open-mindedness, and self-censorship (with the latter four constructs measured by PIRI subscales). The relationship between political ideology and religiosity was weak but statistically significant ($r(204) = .36$, $p < .01$), indicating that as reported religiosity increases, reported conservatism also increases. There were also weak but statistically significant correlations between political ideology and conflict ($r(204) = .23$, $p < .01$), open-mindedness ($r(204) = .23$, $p < .01$), and self-censorship ($r(204) = .19$, $p < .01$). To clarify, increased conservatism was significantly associated with decreased conflict, decreased open-mindedness, and

decreased censorship. However, weak correlations indicate that, though there was statistical significance among these constructs, practical significance may be limited. Lastly, the associations between political ideology and identity and between religiosity and conflict, identity, open-mindedness, and self-censorship were not statistically significant.

Multiple linear regressions were completed to further examine the association between political ideology, conflict, open-mindedness, and self-censorship. The relationship between political ideology and conflict was statistically significant, indicating political ideology is a significant predictor of conflict $F(1,192) = 10.60$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .05$). Those who identified as liberal were more likely to have higher levels of political conflict, while those who identified as conservative were more likely to have lower levels of conflict ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$). Additionally, the relationship between political ideology and open-mindedness was statistically significant $F(1,195) = 10.58$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .05$), indicating political ideology significantly predicts open-mindedness within the sample. Those who reported being more conservative also reported lower levels of political open-mindedness, while those who reported being more liberal reported higher levels of political open-mindedness ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$). Political ideology was also a significant predictor of self-censorship $F(1,196) = 7.00$, $p <. 01$, $R^2 = .03$). Liberalism predicted increased political self-censorship while conservatism predicted decreased self-censorship ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). It is important to note that the open-mindedness scale in PIRI included items measuring partisanship loyalty and not only one's disposition to respect the viewpoints of others and tolerate differences in politically pluralistic contexts. (There was no statistically significant relationship between ideology and open-mindedness related to the latter construct.)

Table 3

Pearson Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	*n*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. PIRI–Conflict	206	—					
2. PIRI–Identity	206	.23**	—				
3. PIRI–Open-mindedness	205	—.04	—.20**	—			
4. PIRI–Self-censorship	206	.29**	.09	—.02	—		
5. Religiosity	204	13	.05	—.06	—.03	—	

6. Political Ideology [a]	198	.23**	—.12	.28**	.19**	.36**	—

[a] For political ideology measure, lower numbers indicate leanings toward liberalism, and higher numbers indicate leanings toward conservatism.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients for Study Variables.

Variable	β	*SE*	*p*
PIRI–Conflict	.227	.406	.001
PIRI–Open-mindedness	.227	.335	.001
PIRI–Self-censorship	.186	.028	.009

Note. $N = 197$. Political ideology predicts conflict, open-mindedness, and self-censorship in the sample, as measured by the PIRI.

Discussion

This study explored the patterns of political identification, endorsed political values, and experience with political conflict among young people attending an evangelical Christian college. As expected, the sample consisted of highly religious students, confirmed by the CRS scores. The high CRS scores demonstrate the salience of religious belief to one's identity. Based on ideological self-identification, the sample slightly leaned toward conservativism, which was not surprising. After all, the connection between political conservativism and high religiosity has been long established (Malka et al., 2012). However, the results showed that the participants most frequently saw themselves in the middle of the political spectrum. While students affirmed a two-parent traditional family structure as an ideal environment for the flourishing of children, there was less consensus about the impact of same-sex marriage on the institution and sanctity of marriage.

Based on the findings, many students did not neatly fit into the right, traditionally occupied by those who are socially and fiscally conservative, or the left—those who are socially and fiscally progressive. And they looked anything but Libertarians, who are typically socially progressive and fiscally conservative. The pattern from the data represented those identified by the fourth combination—socially conservative (to an extent) and fiscally progressive. Perhaps their fiscally liberal position can

be narrated through the words of a participant in Bryant's (2005) study of evangelical students:

> I think a lot of conservative Christians feel that it's not the government's place to do that, to help the poor and stuff, and that it should be organizations and churches and stuff like that. But I don't think that necessarily actually happens. The church doesn't always help the poor like they should. And so, if they're not doing it, I'd rather someone do it than no one. (p. 11)

Like this study's sample, students in Bryant's research "leaned toward the right, but did not hesitate to embrace liberal positions that better accommodated their commitment - often derived from their Christian faith - to alleviating social problems such as poverty" (pp. 12–13). Overall, when it comes to their views on economic issues, they look very much like the members of their generational cohorts, "progressive and pro-government" (Pew Research Center, 2020, para. 5).

Yet, the students in the current study mostly identified as Republican, suggesting some tension between partisanship loyalty and endorsed beliefs, which is, as noted earlier in the article, fairly common. "American Christians, both liberal and conservative, must deal with conflict between the traditional dictates of their faith and their personal political views and allegiances" (Ross et al., 2012, p. 1). There are several plausible explanations for the students' allegiance to the Republican Party despite their diverse (and sometimes divergent) views, but the in-depth discussion of this fascinating dynamic is beyond the scope of this paper. Notably, the measure we used to draw out the students' political attitudes did not include the question about abortion, which is very important to evangelicals. In the recent Pew Research Center study (2022), White evangelicals were more likely than other religious groups and twice as likely as the general population in the U.S. to say abortion should be illegal.

The study revealed that, within this sample, politics played a modest role in shaping or illuminating one's identity across the ideological spectrum and that political identity was less salient for students identifying as ideologically conservative and highly religious. Not surprisingly, the experience of politically-based relational conflict was also lower for those who did not see that their political views represented who they were at their core. Previous research documented a particularly strong emotional response to the presidential elections among Democrats, liberals, and those who did not identify with Christian faith both in 2016

(Hagan et al., 2018; Hoyt et al., 2018) and 2020 (Ballard et al., 2022), regardless of who ended up in the White House.

According to LeBaron and Pillay (2006), differences of opinion do not inevitably result in a conflict unless these differences are about something that deeply matters. In their book, *One Faith No Longer*, Yancey and Quosigk (2021) offered a thorough, research-based account of what matters most to conservative Christians (described as those who believe that the Bible was divinely inspired and authoritative): "Conservative Christians do not put strong emphasis on political agreement in order to determine if you are one of them—their major concern is whether you agree with them theologically" (p. 4).

The most encouraging finding was related to the reported openness, desire to understand, and (perceived) capacity to maintain respect toward those who hold politically different viewpoints. Again, these results were similar to the dispositions of openness and humility Bryant (2005) encountered in her research projects on evangelical students 15 years ago.

Implications for Research and Practice in Higher Education

Building on the results of this study and other recent research about college students and politics, further inquiry can explore (1) how ideological orientation and political attitudes are formed and, potentially, transformed during the college years; (2) whether students perceive any discrepancies between their faith-animated worldview and party affiliation, and if so, how they rationalize their political commitments; (3) what additional variables interact with their ideology and political attitudes; and (4) how the college environment helps and hinders the political dialogue. Future studies can also tease out whether low political conflict stems from students' understanding of what matters most, biblically, or whether a politically homogeneous environment and cultural or economic privilege contribute to the relative insignificance of politics to their identity. Additionally, a study capturing socioeconomic variables and their impact on student views, as well as the environmental and interpersonal variables, could offer causal explanations for the reported opinions and experiences.

Faculty and student development professionals have an incredible opportunity to model and encourage respectful conversations about differences that matter. As wisely noted by Michele LeBaron (2003), "cultural generalizations are not the whole story, and there is no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences, coming to know others

more deeply over time" (para. 8). This observation is strongly supported by the research that shows "political opponents respect moral beliefs more when they are supported by personal experiences, not facts" (Kubin et al., 2021). It is hard to think of a better place for the stories to be invited, shared, and valued than a faithful learning community within higher education.

Beyond promoting an open dialogue, we need to share with our students a compelling vision for the pursuit of the common good (and personally commit to this work) through gospel witness and community engagement, transcending partisan divisions. For those who work at institutions identifying with the evangelical tradition, it may be helpful to teach about the sizable minority of evangelicals whose passion for sharing the gospel was clothed into a tangible effort to alleviate human suffering (see Magnuson, 2004; Smith, 2004).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, its sample was non-random and was drawn from one college, limiting the generalizability of the results. Second, the 12-item version of PAQ did not include questions about polarizing issues, such as abortion, climate change, and immigration, thus limiting the opportunity to understand student positions on these topics. Capturing their attitudes could have helped better comprehend the reasons for partisanship loyalty. Third, although the ANES measure used to determine participants' view of the Bible has been a long-established tool (Yancey & Quosigk, 2021), the more nuanced survey items would help locate them along the progressive-conservative theological spectrum. Fourth, this study involved Christian students attending an evangelical institution rather than evangelical students. Directly inquiring about their evangelical beliefs would make the connection between evangelical faith and political identity and conflict less tentative. And finally, since this study relied on self-reported data, we need to consider social desirability bias, in which participants present themselves as more religious or open to differences than they are.

Conclusion

With little scholarship on faith and political meaning-making in college students, this study contributes to the student development field by exploring political leanings and experiences with the political difference among those who attend an evangelical liberal arts institution. Drenched with constant reminders from the media and literature of how divided Americans have become, we found that these divides do

not extend to the students who participated in this study (at least not to the same degree). In our sample, political identity was not salient to one's personhood, and openness to understand and respect others' political viewpoints was the disposition most consistently expressed. Yet, one's placement on the ideological spectrum predicted the relational impact of political divisions and self-censorship, with those leaning toward the liberal orientation experiencing greater conflict and engaging in self-censorship strategies to manage it. Overall, the findings showed that the participants were far more complicated politically than the labels (conservative or liberal), party affiliation, or voting decisions would convey.

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Relationship as Pedagogy: Empowering Faculty to Support Student Mental Health

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the impact of college student mental health on faculty pedagogy. Using a grounded theory qualitative research methodology, the researcher interviewed 13 faculty participants about their experience of college student mental health in the classroom. A review of the literature on theological anthropology, trauma, and Christian higher education provided a framework for the findings of this study to be discussed. Findings revealed four main themes influencing faculty pedagogy which included: the value of relationships for promoting student well-being; lowered engagement by students experiencing mental health challenges; the increased need for mental health-related accommodations; and the impact of faculty well-being on classroom practice. In response to these themes, the following recommendations for improving relational pedagogy were provided: restoring a sense of faculty well-being and introducing trauma-informed strategies for faculty pedagogy.

Introduction

The relationship between teacher and learner, or faculty and student, holds significance for the mutual learning that occurs in college classrooms as faculty and students act as co-learners in their academic endeavors (Clark et al., 1991). The role of pedagogy is important for informing and shaping the impact faculty can have on a student's well-being beyond just their academic learning. However, there are challenges that arise which interrupt the learning relationship, such as mental health concerns. For faculty, there is an increasing need to consider the impact of mental health as it relates to a student's ability to engage classroom content and succeed academically (McMurtie, 2022).

Additionally, Christian institutions call their faculty and students to abide by certain theological commitments held by their institution's faith heritage. These theological commitments point to the distinctive pedagogy of Christian higher education. Faith and learning serve as cornerstones to the formation promised to college students enrolled at these Christian institutions. Theological anthropology, or the biblical understanding of what it means to be human (Harrison, 2010), provides a guide for intentional engagement with faith-based pedagogy for faculty and students on Christian campuses, affirming the integration of faith and learning at a deeper theological level. Yet college student mental health concerns bring a disruption to the vision of integrated faith and learning as students are arriving to campus with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and experienced trauma (Bohannon et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2015; Davidson, 2017). In addition to mental health concerns, trauma also interferes with a student's learning. Trauma's neurological impact manifests through the body in ways that directly affect student learning (Badenoch, 2008; Dana, 2018; van der Kolk, 2014). In addition to academics, students' spiritual lives are also disrupted as their mind, body, and soul seek safe connections (Stephens, 2020).

As researchers continue to explore student mental health, the college classroom has become a newer area of interest as it relates to trauma-informed care (Gross, 2020). Placing faculty at the forefront of students' academic experience means faculty are joining their student affairs counterparts on the front lines of student mental health care (Flaherty, 2021; Gallimore et al., 2019). How do faculty understand their role when it comes to caring for students' mental health in the midst of their existing roles as educators? Desiring to meet faculty in the unknown of

this question, this study sought to understand the experiences of faculty, specifically how student mental health concerns have affected their pedagogy.

Review of Relevant Literature

A review of the existing theological, educational, and psychological frameworks related to the impact of college student mental health concerns on faculty pedagogy endorses the need for a greater exploration and consideration of faculty experiences.

Theological Framework

The integration of faith and learning is what makes Christian liberal arts institutions unique in their educational model as faculty are encouraged to incorporate theological frameworks within their respective disciplines. Smith (2013) explained that a Christian university is held at the intersection of "two ecosystems," that of the Church and that of higher education. Imagining the work of Christian higher education as formative practice heightens the responsibility of faculty to engage this call with great intention. The significant integration of psychology with theology provides an opportunity for a holistic understanding of students, resonating with the intentional, whole-person education aims of Christian higher education.

Theological Anthropology

Viewing human development through a theological lens gives valuable insight to what makes Christian higher education pedagogy distinctly Christian. Theological anthropology is the biblical understanding of what it means to be human (Balswick et al., 2016; Harrison, 2010; Shults, 2003; Shults & Sandage, 2006). It affirms that "we are distinct and particular beings" (King, 2016, p. 223), all created in the *imago Dei,* providing a sense of unity, yet each human exudes their divine image through unique human identity. Humans are called to be in relationship with the divine and to reciprocate that relationship with others.

Faculty hold the opportunity to reciprocate the *imago Dei* by providing pedagogy focused on whole-person formation through their learning relationships with students (Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Kuh et al., 2005; Parks, 2000). Recognizing the spiritual lives of students, as integrated with their learning, names a distinctive factor of Christian higher education and the faculty who teach in such institutions. Shults and Sandage (2006) stated, "Theology can help us understand spiritual experience, transformation, questions of God, while psychology helps us to develop

models of spirituality that have empirical validity with respect to experiential and relational dynamics of the lived world" (p. 155). To be able to connect the lived experience with the spiritual through such areas of study requires a culmination of psychology, theology, and relationality within the classroom, specifically between faculty and students. A guiding framework modeling this integration can be found in the concept of the reciprocating self.

Reciprocating Self

The concept of the reciprocating self provides a Christian framework for faculty and student learning relationships (Balswick et al., 2016; Shults & Sandage, 2006). Presented by Shults and Sandage (2006) as a developmental teleology, the reciprocating self models the understanding that "God's intention for human development is for us to become particular beings in relationship with the divine and human other" (p. 55). Christ reflects the perfect image of God (*imago Dei*), and in the reciprocating relationship, self and others can come to understand their blessedness as image bearers, too. For the purposes of this study, the reciprocating self helps to represent the theological value within Christian higher education of developing students holistically. Described in an educational framework, Palmer (1993) refers to the aim of whole-person education as "the goal of knowledge arising from love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds" (p. 8). This notion of restoring or "reconstructing" students to whole beings represents a need for a psychological understanding—knowing how the mind, brain, and body play a role in restoring the whole person.

Psychological Framework

The mental health concerns of college students cover a broad range of experiences from anxiety to trauma. Additionally, students may hold different types of trauma, including examples such as generational trauma (Doucet & Rovers, 2010), collective trauma (Hirschberger, 2018), or secondary trauma (Gilbert-Eliot, 2020). Understanding the interruption caused by mental health concerns and trauma on a student's ability to learn helps frame the need for further research in how institutions can best aid faculty as they guide students' learning experiences in the classroom.

Mental health is the phrase used to describe an individual's well-being as it relates to social, physical, and emotional engagement with their world, including mind-body regulation (Galderisi et al., 2015; The Mayo Clinic, 2022). Also included in mental health is the experience of trauma.

Trauma affects a person's nervous system, altering their brain and body function (Badenoch, 2008; Dana, 2018; Siegel, 1999), adding to the interruption of learning. The brain's response to trauma leads an individual to feel overwhelmed, with a strong sense of loss of control over their body (Yoder, 2005). Traumatic experiences create a sense of continual risk, causing one's body to shut down emotional responses. The body then begins to exhibit the unfelt experience of these emotions through symptoms such as neck pain, digestive problems, sleeping issues, headaches, and more (van der Kolk, 2014).

These factors present hurdles for student learning on college campuses (Bohannon et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020). In a study researching the mental health landscape of university students (N = 43,048), researchers found that 52% of students have indicated receiving treatment for a mental health condition on campus (Eisenberg et al., 2018). Because of their findings, the same study recommended campuses intentionally include mental health care into daily campus life for the student, including "integrating consideration of mental health with academic advising or academic curricula in creative new ways" (p. 85). With the increase in student trauma exposure, discussions about faculty involvement in student mental health training and care have entered the higher education field as faculty seek guidance (Gallimore, et al., 2019; Doughty, 2018; Flaherty, 2021). Therefore, the reciprocal relationship between professor and student may serve as a needed safe connection for students to begin sharing their stories, which may lead to healing (Herman, 1997).

Educational Framework

Exploring the significance of pedagogy for Christian higher education provides an opportunity to further understand the valuable role faculty hold within these institutions. Boyer (1990) wrote of the important practice for good teachers to be always reviewing their pedagogy and intentionally planning their procedures in line with their subject matter. Further affirming this practice, Bartlett (2005) compared the banking model of education to a critical pedagogy model. In the banking model of education, the teacher "deposits" knowledge to students. Contrasting this model, critical pedagogy invites students and teachers to learn together "through dialogical theory of praxis and knowledge as a revised relationship between teacher and student" (Bartlett, 2005, p. 345).

Returning to the value of the reciprocating self for faculty-student interactions in Christian higher education classrooms, the nature of the critical pedagogy model shared by Bartlett (2005) represents the shift

away from pedagogy as simply knowledge-based. There is a formation component integrated. Smith (2013) named the shift in detail by stating how "pedagogies of desire form our habits, affections, and imaginations, thus shaping and priming our very orientation to the world. If Christian education is going to be holistic and formative, it needs to attend to much more than intellect" (p. 13). If pedagogy serves as a home for the praxis of integrated faith and learning, faculty serve as the inhabitants of the home, providing the lived experience of pedagogy. Students' responses to and interactions with faculty are critical to pedagogical effectiveness (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

Relational Pedagogy

Helping to provide pragmatic context for the ways in which pedagogy can positively influence student faculty interactions, Howard (2016) integrated the value of relationships for pedagogy in his transformationist model of pedagogy. This model postulates that at the core of pedagogy, an educator must hold the triad of 1) knowing self, 2) knowing students, and 3) knowing practice. Presented as a triangle, each point of the triangle represents an intersection for which Howard (2016) named a "doorway" for learning. At the intersection of knowing self and knowing students is the "doorway of relationship" (Howard, 2016). In the transformationist pedagogy, an educator seeks to establish a safe connection with their students, including an element of vulnerability in their teaching (Brantmeier, 2013). A student's mental health concern or trauma may prevent them from receiving the faculty's attempt to establish a safe connection through a transformationist model of pedagogy (Copeland et al., 2021), giving rise to an opportunity for pedagogical mismeetings. A mismeeting occurs when the educator seeks to impose their ideas onto the learner rather than offering openness toward the learner as "someone that is in actual being and someone that is in a process of becoming" (Buber, 1988, p. 72). The demands placed on faculty by their evolving roles in college student well-being prompts a curiosity to understand the faculty teaching experience, specifically as it relates to faculty observations of student mental health as presented in the classroom learning environment.

Methodology

A grounded theory approach was applied through a qualitative interview process. The particular method of grounded theory was chosen based on the theory's founding principle where the researcher is

"questioning their place in research texts" (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 7). As there was not a significant amount of existing research on the topic of faculty pedagogy in relation to student mental health, the researcher was seeking to find a place within the research to add a contribution in the absence of information.

Participants included 13 faculty members from four Christian campuses representing a range of teaching experience as summarized in Table 1 (individual and institution names are pseudonyms).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Institution	Department	Year range at current institution
Kate	Sepia College	Religion Studies	20–25 years
Lucy	Sepia College	Education	15–20 years
Dan	Sepia College	Communication	30+ years
John	Sepia College	Humanities	15–20 years
Kim	Indigo University	Nursing	5–10 years
Nicole	Indigo University	Nursing	5–10 years
Molly	Lavender University	Communication	5–10 years
Sam	Lavender University	Education	15–20 years
Anne	Magenta University	History	1–5 years
Dexter	Magenta University	Social Science	5–10 years
Gwen	Magenta University	Sociology	5–10 years
Helen	Magenta University	Social Science	20–25 years
Louise	Magenta University	Nursing	15–20 years

To understand the experiences of faculty members teaching in Christian college classrooms, the researcher followed a constructed interview script to conduct the 60 to 90 minute individual Zoom interviews. Through an inductive analysis process of transcription, coding, and theming, the content of the interviews was analyzed to discover outcomes for the study. An interrater reviewed the initial coding produced by the researcher for "negating any bias that any one individual might bring to outcomes" (Creswell, 2012, p. 161). Additionally, the NVivo (Version 12) software was used for storing transcriptions and tracking

researcher notes in an organized manner, allowing for greater reliability within the coding and theming process. It is evident that college student mental health continues to be a rising concern on many Christian college campuses (Bohannon et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2015; Davidson, 2017). Therefore, it was assumed that participants were more likely than not to have encountered, with at least one student, the effect of a student's mental health on the faculty member's teaching experience.

Discussion of Findings

As a result of this qualitative process, four main themes arose from the participant interviews in connection to the original research question exploring the impact of college student mental health on faculty pedagogy. The themes presented are: the value of relationships for promoting student well-being; lowered engagement by students experiencing mental health challenges; the increased need for mental health-related accommodations; and the impact of faculty well-being on classroom practice. Each theme holds within it a connection to the faculty's experience of pedagogy as impacted by students' mental health.

The Value of Relationship for Promoting Student Well-Being

The value of relationship within faculty pedagogy aligns the whole person education model of engaging students' development beyond academics (Palmer, 1993; Smith, 2009). Recalling the concept of the reciprocating self (Balswick et al., 2016; Harrison, 2010; Shults & Sandage, 2006), the relationship between faculty and students serves as a priority for faculty. As evidenced by participants' examples, faculty at Christian institutions seem to hold a dedicated place within their pedagogy for getting to know their students so that they can best help them learn while getting to know them as people. Louise, a nursing professor, shared, "I would say the biggest thing that's kept me in the role is the relationships that I've been able to build with students that extend beyond their graduation."

A pedagogical value within Christian higher education is the honoring of the other in the learning relationship between faculty and student. Viewing one another through the lens of the *imago Dei* helps to reaffirm this relational value, especially as faculty model this practice (Dockery & Morgan, 2018). This reciprocal lens of naming self and other as made in the image of God emphasizes the mutual valuing of the other and encourages student and faculty to humanize one another, allowing a "pedagogy of vulnerability" to form (Brantmeier, 2013). This concept begins

to diverge from the traditional literature on pedagogy by proposing that teachers, or faculty, share about their life experiences with their students for the purposes of creating a "lived curriculum" within the classroom, making the co-learning relationship more personal.

Lowered Student Engagement with Pedagogy

The theme of lowered student engagement accentuated the valuing of relationships as the lack of engagement in class caused high levels of concern for faculty. Referring back to the idea of a theological anthropology as it relates to pedagogy in Christian higher education, Buber's (1988) explanation of "meeting" and "mismeeting" within human interactions proves a beneficial comparison for this theme. Expressing the tone of this theme, Molly, having just shared about the return of her students to campus after their pandemic remote learning semester, stated, "I think we're still living in a bit of the residue of [the pandemic]." The residue in Molly's comment refers to the dynamics experienced by all participants of still living in a pandemic at the time of this study and the continuing need to adjust pedagogy for quarantine learning situations. Molly's discouragement models the felt experience of a mismeeting in the reciprocated relationship as Molly was offering opportunity but the students were not present to the relationship to receive, causing a break in the reciprocating nature of the relationship in this instance. This theme is significant for faculty as they continue to adjust to the implications of the pandemic on students' educational journeys.

Mental Health Accommodations within Pedagogy

The rise of college student mental health concerns existed prior to the start of the pandemic (Bohannon et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2015; Davidson, 2017), and the pandemic experience seems to have accelerated the trend (McMurtie, 2022). Within this study, faculty indicated that student mental health most influenced their pedagogy through increased requests for accommodations in the classroom and with assignments. Participants demonstrated a connection with Herman's (1997) trauma healing framework, specifically the act of remembrance, as they connected with the sentiment that students seem more likely to share about their personal lives, specifically their mental health, through the sharing of their stories with faculty. Representing this theme in his personal account of students sharing openly about their mental health, Dan shared, "I don't know yet whether there's actually more [mental health needs] than there was in the past, or whether it's become less of a stigma to talk about how they're struggling."

The act of students sharing about their mental health or trauma to a faculty member may be both an affirmation of the trust established between co-learners as well as an attempt to seek healing by telling their stories (Allender & Loerzel, 2021; Herman, 1997). Faculty, in turn, may provide wisdom in guiding the student to make meaning of their trauma as "story makes sense of chaos" (Simmons, 2001). Receiving a student's story and providing support through connection to proper resources is a common model of the reciprocating self at work as the student is heard and the faculty practices boundaries of self while still caring for the student.

Faculty Well-Being

Arising from participants' personal reflections on their teaching experiences, the theme of faculty well-being holding significant impact on pedagogy became evident. Factors also identified within this theme were the importance of boundaries for the faculty role, specifically as it relates to time management and student care; expressions of exhaustion in the role; and a theme of encouragement stemming from the support of colleagues for their well-being. Gwen elaborated about the implications of faculty well-being on the student experience in sharing, "I think students get the short end of the stick ultimately. Because [faculty] are just trying to survive. Going back to mental health, it is the opposite of what [students] need." For the purposes of this study, Gwen's remark draws attention to the potential "mismeetings" (Buber, 1988) taking place with current faculty expectations.

Scope and Limitations

Indicative of a broad statement such as the search within Christian higher education for a sustainable method for caring for student mental health, this study requires a specific scope in order to remain consistent with the research topic and provide a focused research process. In order to keep the study focused, the researcher placed a boundary within the possible avenues of the study. The intent of the study was to pursue faculty experiences specific to college student mental health as it manifests in the Christian college classroom and the impact of that intersection on faculty pedagogy. Therefore, the researcher did not include deeper study specifically on the topic of COVID-19 on faculty pedagogy. As an anticipated theme that did arise in faculty responses, COVID-19 was a focal point of participants' responses, especially as the interviews were conducted during the ongoing pandemic. The researcher offered the data as presented, being true to the qualitative process, but did not spend

extended research efforts on exploring COVID-19 experiences or implications as related to the study.

In addition to naming the areas for which the researcher limited their scope of study in order to provide a deeper, more focused research response, there also needs to be an acknowledgement of the limitations presented in the research design. Conducting qualitative interviews allowed for a thorough understanding of faculty experiences but presented a limitation as it only allowed for the exploration of a small population of narratives compared to the possibilities of a quantitative research study, which could provide more of a breadth of responses from a larger participant pool. However, the narratives of the participants provide depth and insight to the intended research topic.

Implications for Practice

Drawing from the themes identified above, the recommendations provided begin with restoring faculty well-being as well as offering trauma-informed training to equip faculty responding to students' mental health concerns in the classroom. As evidenced in their deep care for students, faculty participants named their students as the primary reason they have remained in their careers as professors. If faculty are feeling "exhausted," "fatigued," or "burnt out," how can they continue to care holistically for their students? Faculty, like students, require encouragement and opportunities to practice self-care for their own well-being (Freytag & Shotsberger, 2022). Two recommendations are offered: equip faculty through trauma-informed practices and find opportunity to create "hearth spaces" (Parks, 2000) on campus.

The first recommendation encourages institutions to equip faculty through trauma-informed care and training. While there is significant research and established practice of trauma-informed classrooms for K–12 educational levels, there are fewer offerings for the college student experience. Making an important distinction, Stephens (2020) highlighted the necessity of a campus-wide effort when it comes to becoming a trauma-informed campus. A campus-wide approach requires faculty to serve as partners with all other offices attempting to support a student in their response to effects of trauma in their life (Doughty, 2018; Hoch et al., 2015; Stephens, 2020). As student affairs professionals already engage in the work of supporting student mental health, how might this profession become co-learners with faculty in the effort to support student mental health across campus? As faculty seek to engage their students, the ability to create safe spaces, or hearth spaces, and connections with

campus partners provides a helpful way forward for faculty pedagogy (Carrere & Kinder, 2021; Olson, 2014; Phillips et al., 2020).

A hearth space, described by Parks (2000), captures the essence of a created space for "humanizing practices." The importance, particularly in pandemic processing, of allowing faculty opportunities within their work to "keep life human" (Parks, 2000, p. 154) serves as an avenue for faculty to engage the reciprocating self, mirroring the *imago Dei* to one another as colleagues for the benefit of sustaining faculty well-being. It is important to provide space and opportunities for faculty to remember they are created in divine likeness and be reminded of their call to teaching. A step toward such an offering can be inspired by the act of re-membering (Palmer, 2007). In order to receive the reality of student mental health implications, faculty are invited to do their own re-membering through "recovering identity and integrity, and reclaiming the wholeness of our lives" (Palmer, 2007, p. 21). As curricular and co-curricular professionals continue to navigate the landscape of college student mental health collaboratively, the need for modeling holistic self-care presents as essential in the enduring work of developing whole persons during the college years.

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The Lived Religious Experience of Black Students at a Southeastern CCCU Institution

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the religious experiences of Black students at a Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) institution. The researcher interviewed 22 participants at a private Christian university and analyzed the data using in vivo coding, constant comparison, and thematic analysis. Findings suggest formal religious activities that are required and presumed by the institution to be nurturing can have the opposite effect for some Black students at the institution. The researcher identified three major themes regarding how Black students perceive and experience religious activity. The themes provide helpful insight regarding participants' thoughts related to dissatisfaction and concerns, acknowledgment of personal growth, and feedback on religious programming. The themes are presented and discussed along with implications for practice.

Introduction

Black students continue to be underrepresented at higher education institutions and persist at lower rates than their White peers. Unfortunately, Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) can be unsupportive and unresponsive to the needs of Black students (Bimper, 2017; Lewis & Shah, 2021). While this is a challenge for PWIs in general, the issue is even more pronounced at Protestant institutions with strong evangelical cultures (Smith, 2010; Young, 2015; Westbrook, 2017). Institutions with evangelical missions promote inclusion and justice yet continue to struggle with racial inequity as it relates to retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Smith, 2010; Young, 2015; Westbrook, 2017). This begs a simple question: Why? Is there something about such institutions that contributes to these less than desired outcomes?

Because graduation is one of the outcomes the higher education community desires for all students, a better understanding of the Black student experience is necessary to create environments that will more likely lead to persistence and degree completion. Understanding the experience of Black students is critical as lower graduation rates for Black students can be attributed at least in part to the environment and support services that do not adequately meet their needs (Goings, 2017). To succeed academically, Black students need to be supported holistically in environments that promote positive experiences (Luedke, 2017). When students are comfortable with the university environment and nurtured emotionally, they are more likely to remain at the institution and graduate (Le et al., 2021). An important component for Black students being comfortable at Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) institutions centers around religion and religious practices. Does that part of campus life contribute to their experience in a positive manner? Do campus religious traditions serve Black students in ways that are nurturing?

Scholarship on issues related to diversity in evangelical Christian higher education is limited (Kratt, 2004; Smith, 2010; Young, 2015). There is an opportunity and need for more research that addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at CCCU institutions. This study will contribute to the body of literature from the perspective of Black students and their individual experiences at a CCCU school. Specifically, it will give voice to 22 Black students at an evangelical Christian institution. There is currently very little in the literature that reports on the personal experiences

of Black students at this type of institution. The findings of this study will provide evangelical Christian institutions of higher education data directly from the perspectives of Black students regarding how they experience religious life at a CCCU member institution.

Can what makes some CCCU institutions distinct also create challenges and barriers for Black students? If the answer is yes, we need to know. We need to better understand so that we can address this important question in a thoughtful and honest way. Culturally sensitive religious programming and innovative approaches to improving the experience for Black students needs to include input directly from them. Religious fit, or lack thereof, may play into the retention and graduation challenges CCCU institutions are confronted with regarding Black students (Longman & Schreiner, 2010; Young, 2015).

Religion on Campus

The literature clearly demonstrates the importance of religion for many Black students and the profound impact it can have on wellness, experience, and academic performance. The literature also sheds light on possible characteristics at some CCCU campuses that can serve as negative or positive influencers regarding the religious experience of Black students. Religion can certainly serve to establish and build positive relationships as it can directly contribute to a sense of community for students on a college campus (Astin, 2004). Unfortunately, students who attend private Christian-affiliated institutions can be more inclined to have difficulty with religion than students who attend private institutions that are non-religious (Bryant & Astin, 2008). This may happen because of the prominent role religious organizations play at CCCU institutions, and when there is not alignment between student religious values and institutional values, discord may occur (Longman & Schreiner, 2010).

Higher education research on Black students at PWIs is extensive and provides insights into several areas. A few worth noting are lack of representation in higher education; gaps in achievement, social experiences, and academic outcomes; and ways they navigate various challenges. There needs to be more research focused on Black student experiences at predominantly White CCCU institutions. Such research is needed to bring better understanding of Black student experience and factors that might improve retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Scholarship focused on evangelical Christian higher education and issues related to DEI is limited and needs to be expanded (Kratt, 2004; Smith, 2010;

Young 2015). This study will contribute to that need by documenting the religious experience of Black students at one CCCU institution using their voices.

Methodology

The research question for this study was: How do Black undergraduate students at a CCCU institution experience religious activities? The primary objective was to better understand how Black students experience religion at a CCCU institution. A qualitative descriptive case study was the overall research approach used to address this question. The most appropriate methodology for this research was a qualitative methodology study for a few reasons. First, qualitative inquiry facilitates exploration and provides a pathway to make sense of lived experiences (Savin-Biden & Major, 2013). It can also allow for the researcher to grow and develop an in-depth understanding of an individual or context (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is also an ideal mechanism to describe how people understand experiences, their surroundings, and the meaning associated with connecting the two (Merriam, 2009). As such, qualitative inquiry was ideally suited for this study.

Site and Participant Selection

The site selected for this study is a university that is a CCCU member institution located in the southeastern United States. The site will be referred to as Private Christian University (PCU) for purposes of this study. As part of its strategic plan, PCU has clearly stated DEI objectives to improve programming for all students. Diversity numbers for both tenured faculty and students are low in the Southeast for CCCU institutions (Reyes & Case, 2011). Related studies on the experience of Black students at CCCU institutions have been conducted in other regions of the United States (Young, 2015). As such, a CCCU institution located in the Southeast was appropriate for this inquiry.

The student body at the selected institution consisted of approximately 3,300 undergraduate students. Black students represented 9% (300) of the overall undergraduate population. The sample included 22 undergraduate Black students who were currently enrolled at the institution and had completed at least one full-time semester. The sample of Black undergraduates included student athletes, non-student athletes, high academic achievers, low academic performers, and a variety of majors. Of the 22 students, there was one freshman, six sophomores,

five juniors, and 10 seniors. There were 14 female participants and eight male participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included semi-structured in-person interviews (Creswell, 2013) with each of the 22 participants. Participants shared personal stories from their unique perspective through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013) with open ended questions. Participants were given options for scheduling the interview at times convenient to them. Interviews occurred in a private and convenient location in an academic building on-campus and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Following each interview, the researcher recorded noteworthy observations, including body language and tone. Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed professionally. Transcripts were then provided to each participant for review and to ensure accuracy.

Follow-up interviews occurred via phone with each participant. During those discussions I thanked each participant, asked them to clarify any comments I needed additional thoughts on, and allowed them to provide any additional information they thought might be helpful. I also observed students on multiple occasions in social settings on campus. I observed students on five occasions in the cafeteria at various mealtimes. I attended chapel services on three occasions, and I also observed students in the social outdoor space on campus between class periods three separate times. During each field observation, I jotted down my thoughts that I later wrote as field notes. I then coded those field notes in the same manner as the interview transcripts.

The data collected were transcribed and initially coded manually with the in vivo coding method. Codes were then organized using constant comparison and thematic analysis (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Findings from in vivo coding, constant comparison, and thematic analysis revealed the study's themes. Applying constant comparison and thematic analysis to the collected data allowed transcripts to be organized and classified systematically into phrases, perceptions, and ultimately themes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This led to the identification of patterns and trends that emerged from the participants. This systematic approach contributed to a better understanding of Black undergraduate student religious experiences in the context of a CCCU member institution.

Results

As the research question was addressed with the interview protocol, and transcripts were reviewed, codes began revealing themselves. After identifying codes and employing the constant comparison method, three broad themes became prominent. As a result of detailed coding and data analysis, the following three noteworthy themes emerged:

1. Dissatisfaction with weekly convocation
2. Personal growth and other positive experiences
3. Desire for more inclusive and varied programming

This section includes the terms "chapel," "worship," and "convocation" or "convo." Participants used these terms interchangeably to describe the formal religious services all undergraduate students are required to participate in. All undergraduates are required to earn a certain number of convocation credits prior to graduation. The primary way most students earn these credits is through attendance at these weekly religious services on campus.

Theme 1: Dissatisfaction with Weekly Convocation

Students used strong language to describe feelings about the more formal religious services on campus. Participants used the word "hate." One student "hated it with a passion." For some it did not really feel like church in that it was in the morning, in the middle of the week, and not practiced in the way they are accustomed to. For example, some students were more accustomed to a pastor or preacher figure dressed in a more formal way with a suit or pastoral robe. That type of figure was not present at many campus services. The person leading often had a more casual appearance. This added to the perception of services not feeling like church for some study participants. Additionally, the perception of "required religion" was problematic for sixty percent of participants.

One prevalent critique was the style of music. Several students preferred either a gospel or more contemporary style as opposed to what they heard at typical campus services. It was clear this was a serious concern. Students talked about music being a favorite part of the worship experience and looking forward to attending church growing up because of that. They indicated not being familiar with some of the songs and not relating to the performance style. Students commented on the repetitive nature of the songs in that the same songs were recycled and used frequently. This can end up being quite discouraging for students and in some cases; they end up completely tuning out what is being presented.

Such a pattern can result in students getting little out of the services. This quote captures the essence of feedback from several students:

> I mean, definitely, I am a Christian and I do go to church off campus. Attending convo, I guess, would be my only experience with spiritual life on campus. I have learned a lot through that but it hasn't particularly been my favorite aspect of PCU.

One of the reasons the student quoted above went to church off campus was to enjoy music familiar to her. Some students had also been a part of churches that engaged the congregation in ways that allowed for unscripted verbal response and audible feedback to the preacher during the sermon. Campus services were not that way. As indicated earlier, they were more formal and certainly not infused with audible expressions of feedback from those in attendance. The absence of that feedback was a difficult hurdle for some students to deal with. They found the traditional approach off-putting, boring, and sleep-inducing. In some cases, students could not articulate exactly why they didn't like the services: they simply didn't. The formal outlets to practice faith on campus did not connect with some participants. In fact, one student indicated not ever going willingly.

Students also talked about the services being segregated and feeling obligated to attend. They experienced students sitting with peers based on race. They also noted simply not seeing much diversity in worship. In fact, one student noted worship felt segregated like "everything else on campus." As such, he indicated getting very little out of the service and simply attending to earn the required credits. This was a very common sentiment—simply attending to earn credits required for graduation. In some cases, students were "churched out" by the weekend and would not attend service even at a church of their own choosing.

While some students enjoyed religion being integrated formally and informally across all aspects of campus life, others found it overwhelming at times, especially if they had attended a public school where religion was not a typical part of classroom discussion or social activities. Students that did not come from an environment where religious practice and faith were a part of daily activity in the way it was at the institution talked about how challenging it was to get accustomed to that particular environment.

Theme 2: Personal Growth and Other Positive Experiences

Study participants indicated the university does a good job of incorporating faith into many areas on campus, not just in the formal

religious gatherings, but also in social activities, the classroom, and informal gatherings. In the classroom for example, students talked about professors praying before class or reading scripture and doing a short devotional. This was noted as being the case in many classes that did not necessarily have anything to do with religion. They liked seeing faith being integrated and practiced in their normal activities. It indicated to them that religion is not relegated to a lecture, sermon, or worship service but can be experienced as you go about your day.

Faith being modeled in authentic ways was valued, appreciated, and respected. It also nurtured trust with some professors, which opened doors for personal conversations and in some cases led to close relationships. Participants reported liking conversations about religion and faith occurring casually in the classroom and on-campus in general. Several students went into detail about the importance of these relationships with faculty members that started in the classroom. Some students developed rapport with faculty members in the classroom and felt safe expressing themselves regarding their faith. In some cases, this expression might be a question, an observation, or a statement that differed with other students in the class.

Professors that responded with patience, grace, and kindness were highly valued by participants. Students mentioned staying after class, meeting with professors during office hours, or even developing relationships outside the classroom. In each case where this was discussed, the relationships contributed to retention, personal growth, and acted as a bridge for positive academic outcomes. For some students, these professors contributed to the overall feeling that religion was not being forced upon them. It was instead viewed as an aspect of the campus culture that was a part of student life in both formal and informal ways.

Students also reported an appreciation for being in a space full of peers openly seeking to grow in their faith. They talked about the value in being on a faith-based campus in terms of the opportunities to grow through those relationships. In some cases, students found themselves in more of a mentor role where they were able to encourage, guide, and share with someone at an earlier stage in their faith journey. Students expressed how important upperclassmen were when they were new students. They found tremendous value in being on a campus with so many people at different points with whom they could have conversations and share experiences. Students talked about how much they enjoyed hanging out with friends and enjoyed conversations naturally going from just

about any topic, to faith, back to another topic, and so on. This was reported as a common occurrence and appears to be a significant factor in the religious experience for students in the study.

Some students developed friend groups through these relationships rooted in exploring faith. In some cases, students reported building deeper relationships with other Black students. They also talked about doors being opened across racial lines and creating friendships across racial lines. In some cases, ideas about religion were affirmed, in other cases challenged, but each contributed to growth. Students would challenge one another to get more involved, dig deeper for themselves, or help other students. Students also talked about reading more scripture than in the past and reading books on theology, faith, and religion. One student had never read the Bible all the way through. In fact, he was very proud of that fact that he finally read the Bible and indicated it was a formative exercise for him.

Students also talked about relationships on campus serving as gateways to attending churches off-campus. Students would develop relationships and through those relationships get invited to churches they would not have otherwise attended. In some cases, the invitations welcomed them to churches that were more in line with their own traditions which was reported as being comforting. In other cases, students were invited to services that were different than those on-campus and also different than their own churches. Either way, students discussed these opportunities in positive terms. Churches were viewed as a way to learn, grow closer to friends, and develop off-campus community relationships. In fact, students attributed attending a religious-affiliated institution with the exposure to friends and classmates inviting them to other churches. Those opportunities came out of the fact that students openly discuss religion and faith on a regular basis.

One other advantage of students exploring off-campus churches was allowing them to find somewhere comfortable—or even somewhere they were excited—to attend church. In some cases, they discovered something new that they liked. In other cases, they found something familiar that represented experiences to which they were more accustomed.

An overall sentiment expressed was an acknowledgment of many opportunities to participate in formal and informal activities that could cultivate personal faith. Students acknowledged not being in the place they wanted to be spiritually when they came to PCU and ultimately growing as a result of the experience. Being in an environment with

frequent reminders was a positive motivating factor for some to engage with religious matters when they might not have otherwise done so.

Participants spoke about the noticeable impact experiencing campus had on them outside of school. They referenced examples like simply discussing their faith more, being more curious about religion, and praying more frequently. One student had never journaled but was encouraged to do so while attending a church service. Being able to reflect on documented thoughts has been very helpful for the student in navigating challenges of various kinds. Again, students attributed spiritual growth to their time at the institution and the opportunities to practice their faith. Some students had never been around a peer group so saturated with people willing and able to discuss their faith and religious beliefs. The students indicated that they appreciated and valued this quality of their community.

Theme 3: Desire for More Inclusive and Varied Programming

The students in the study indicated a desire for more varied worship services. Specifically, the music issue needs to be addressed along with incorporating more relevant topics. The participants indicated they would very much appreciate music more familiar to their tradition and culture. They argue that style can vary without compromising content, core values, or biblical beliefs. Students spoke about alternating styles of service to include traditional, contemporary, and gospel. They indicated feeling like that would convey openness and invitation as opposed to appearing rigid and being off-putting. The participants also talked about programming and a desire to hear issues important to them addressed from the pulpit. That could include issues around diversity, voting rights, social justice, and racism to name a few. They also spoke about wanting to see diversity from the pulpit and from worship leaders:

> And I feel like it could also go both ways. I mean, maybe we haven't stepped out and said something about it and made it clear for them how we feel about it. But I just feel like it's really like White.

While visual diversity doesn't address all the issues mentioned earlier, seeing diversity was clearly important to participants. They would also like to see an emphasis placed on community service. Included in that sentiment is the notion that the institution is respected, has the resources, and should use them to serve others. Students also talked about creating more opportunities that are interactive. They desired opportunities to not only be taught about faith but to engage in conversations. The

participants also mentioned enjoying speakers that were more transparent. Personal testimony was highlighted as something these students appreciated and almost always helped them relate to the speaker and the message.

Creating space for convocation credit to include more student-led worship opportunities was important to the study participants. Students suggested allowing the gospel choir to perform more frequently, not just around diversity events or Black History Month. Students that have had opportunities to lead in formal and informal ways also highlighted the benefits they personally experienced. Those benefits included feeling affirmed, feeling valued, building new relationships, and having more confidence in themselves and their personal faith.

Creating partnerships with local churches to give students "credit" for attending services they are excited about going to was discussed. One student mentioned being a part of a dance ministry that is sponsored by the school. She recommended more opportunities like that with an emphasis on inclusion. Religious mentors were very important to study participants. Those mentors can take the shape of peers, professors, staff, or coaches. Several students talked about how much they value those relationships, how much they learn, and even how those relationships contributed to them staying at the institution.

There was certainly an acknowledgement that finding a single church or style of worship that satisfies everyone is not an easy thing to do. Some students talked about enjoying church at locations off-campus, which helped address the frustration of feeling pressure to conform to a way of worship that was not always comfortable. This quote highlights the impact spiritual life can have on a student:

> I feel like being at PCU puts so much emphasis on spiritual life. Me, personally, it's personally made me not want to participate in the spiritual activities that they have. I feel like I'm being forced to do it. I don't feel like it helped me gain any more spirituality. I think it's just something that's been tacked on to the university and it forces students to align with a certain core value or core curriculum that says it has to line up with Christian values which, I know I'm a strong believer in Christianity but being here at PCU is like, "Wow, this is making me not want to participate in the Christian activities that they do promote on campus."

This section concludes with this quote intentionally. This student's thoughts underscore the importance and urgency of CCCU practitio-

ners taking Black students' perspectives into account.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

Practitioners at CCCU institutions perhaps should freshly be reminded that Black students want to practice their faith in ways that are familiar. Issues related to religion can be more challenging at institutions like PCU as compared to public institutions where students can choose whether or not to participate in campus sponsored religious activities. Embracing diversity and making sure Black students don't feel forced to participate in gatherings they do not enjoy might help create a stronger sense of inclusion. There are several steps Christian colleges can take. If students are required to earn a certain number of credits related to participating in religious activities, institutions could broaden the range of options that can be counted, such as service projects. Attendance and engagement in local churches could also be included in meeting institutional requirements. It is also important for leaders at CCCU institutions to create ways for students to openly discuss how they are experiencing religious activities on campus. This open dialogue would allow Black students to provide suggestions regarding their preferences that could be incorporated to make religious experiences more enjoyable. CCCU colleges and universities need to address faith preferences so that what is intended to nurture students does not instead cause frustration and resentment.

It is also important to note many institutions that require several chapel or convocation credits do provide a variety of options for students to earn those credits ranging from programming on-campus, approved events off-campus, and a variety of service-related activities. One reason Black students at PCU attended the traditional worship services on-campus was for the sake of convenience. Chapel services on-campus were at an hour during the week when there were no class conflicts. Furthermore, students that worked, did not have transportation, or were athletes frequently did not have the time or means to participate in alternate options on a regular basis. Practitioners should take these factors into account when planning programming, as access to those options may be an issue for some.

Conclusion and Reflections

The objective of this study was to better understand how Black students experienced a CCCU member institution. This was accomplished

through a descriptive case study that included in-depth interviews with 22 Black students. Short follow-up interviews with each participant, and field observations of students in various settings on campus. Study findings indicated that Black students at PCU faced several academic and social challenges. They relied on relationships with peers, faculty, and staff to help navigate these challenges. In many cases, participants were able to look back on their challenges in constructive and positive ways.

A better understanding of how Black students experienced this CCCU institution might help practitioners create programs and initiatives that improve student experiences. Educating faculty and staff regarding the importance of relationships with Black students should be a priority. Regardless of race, gender, or age, faculty and staff who are informed and caring can make a significant difference in the experiences of Black students. This study also identified opportunities for practitioners to reconsider how religious services on campus are represented. Mandatory religious services that students must attend on a regular basis should consider students' varied expectations from different faith traditions. Planning services that are more inclusive can be more welcoming to Black students but could also enrich the religious experiences of all students. No doubt many practitioners across Christian higher education have worked hard in recent years to create convocation experiences and options that are inclusive Findings in this study highlight how important those efforts are and continued emphasis on providing students an array of options to meet convocation requirements are important for students from underrepresented populations.

As practitioners, we are all concerned with student development and personal growth. If practitioners continue to develop inclusive religious programming, perhaps more students will reflect on their undergraduate experience in terms such as this:

> I just feel God's presence like at PCU. It's just very rooted in faith and not something that was really important to me coming to college. So, it's a confirmation that I chose the right place or rather that like God led me to the right place. Faith has just been awesome, how available it is to grow in it and how you can kind of like customize your faith experience to like how you want to grow.

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Pursuing Campus Collaboration That Works: Assessing the Impact of Relational Leadership and Work Engagement on Relational Coordination between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs in Christian Higher Education

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Abstract

Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs departments has long been a focus of organizational development but is inconsistent at best. This quantitative study of student affairs professionals (n = 256) within the Christian higher education context examined the role that experience of relational leadership and a worker's level of work engagement have on a student affairs professional's experience of relational coordination with the academic affairs departments within their organization. The study used three validated surveys and subsequent regression analysis to measure relational leadership, work engagement, and relational coordination to identify the predictive relationship between the variables as well as a qualitative question for added nuance. Relational leadership was statistically significant at predicting the relationship between relational leadership and relational coordination, but there was no statistical significance between work engagement and relational coordination. This study provides student affairs professionals with a starting point to increase relational coordination as they collaborate with academic affairs as co-curricular educators in higher education.

Introduction

If asked about the perceived value of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs departments, most educators in higher education would agree on the importance of working together well to support the student experience. However, despite dotted lines on organizational charts, committees, task forces, and work groups, coordinating efforts continues to be elusive for many institutions (Baker, 2020; Syno et al., 2019). Philosophically, student affairs and academic affairs departments approach student growth and learning through differing lenses, often leading to disagreement in appropriate educational methodology (Palmer, 1998). Muir (2013) highlighted that "the tradition of rigor and intellectualism" in the liberal arts context goes beyond mere academic instruction and "aims to educate students with life skills as wise citizens of their society" (p. 13). However, whereas the academic culture primarily disseminates knowledge to students through consistent and structured methods, the student affairs culture tends to be more fluidly responsive to the needs of the student and the unexpected situations that arise (Dahlvig & Beers, 2018; Yao & Mwangi, 2017). Strong partnerships between these campus cultures are important sources of essential support measures for students to succeed (Jensen & Visser, 2019; Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Collaboration relies on a number of factors, including modeled behavior, experience of interpersonal trust (Derblom et al., 2021), personal investment, and a healthy sense of autonomy and responsibility on the part of the employee (Ganotice et al., 2021), which is all the more vital in a future where universities are "unlikely . . . [to] resemble a historical ideal" (Wells & Ingley, 2019, p. 29). Bills and Pond (2021) suggested that the world-wide disruption of COVID-19 may prove to be a blessing in disguise by dislodging the patterns of organizational behavior so severely that higher education institutional cultures, often steeped in tradition and resistant to change, must adapt accordingly. As anyone who worked in higher education during the pandemic can attest, the rhythms of the work did indeed change quickly and unexpectedly.

Work Engagement

In the midst of such tumultuous times, however, declining work engagement is a real threat as employees scramble to adapt with expectations. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind," characterized by the three aspects

of vigor, dedication, and absorption (p. 74). Work engagement includes an employee's experience of work-life balance (made more difficult in an ever-increasingly virtual world), the extent to which an employee shares the philosophical mission of the organization, and their sense of happiness, focus, and investment in their tasks (Kataria et al., 2019; Pasquarella et al., 2021; Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020). Burnout, the antithesis of work engagement, occurs when a previously engaged employee fails to experience vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work and withdraws as a result of ongoing job strain (Junker et al., 2021).

Relational Coordination

In the absence of engagement, relational coordination between departments may suffer. Relational coordination is perhaps most simply summed up as "the capacity for high-quality communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration," specifically, "coordination work through relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect," which serve as the three elements of the relational dimension of relational coordination (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). Gittell (2016) suggested that these three elements lead to an increase in frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication between organizational members (the communication dimension of the relational coordination construct). Relational coordination is particularly helpful where work settings require a high level of task interdependence (Gittell et al., 2008), such as in traditional higher education governance structures that include hierarchical authority and red tape. Given that collaborative student support requires frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication between campus stakeholders, the hierarchical organizational structures of traditional higher education can often serve as a barrier to effective communication, especially in hindering autonomous or spontaneous decision making (Nurlatifah et al., 2021). The emphasis on maintaining hierarchical structures can also lead to low levels of peer respect when elements such as job design, title, tenure, or other demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status) are prioritized over the underlying goals of collaboration for the sake of student support (Tesi et al., 2020).

Relational Leadership

An organizational leader may be explicitly tasked with the mission, vision, and financial health of the organization, but they are also responsible for the culture that their organization fosters, implicitly or otherwise (Raguž & Zekan, 2017), which will influence collaboration between

departments and roles in dramatic ways (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Leaders in these settings must prioritize relationships with and among their teams, demonstrating "the willingness and ability to step away from the expert role to learn from others" (Gittell & Ali, 2021, p. 95). The specific components of relational leadership are that leadership is (1) directional (providing vision for the shared goals), (2) engaged (maintaining the culture of the team as they work together), and (3) involving (being personally engaged in the work alongside their team members; Hornstrup, 2015). In a shared leadership context, leadership is bestowed and borrowed mutually between group members, demonstrating that "lateral influence among peers" emerges when necessary and is "broadly dispersed throughout the team" (Sato & Makabe, 2021, p. 143). In this way, relational leadership emphasizes the authority of each person or role in an organization "based on the knowledge associated with it" (Gittell & Douglass, 2012, p. 719). Within this framework, student affairs members are correctly viewed as co-curricular co-educators who play a vital role in the educational formation of students.

The Student Affairs Context

Despite the reality of being co-educators who equally value student learning, tension has existed between academic and student affairs departments since the formation of student affairs departments in the late 1800s (Komives & Woodard, 2003; McGill et al., 2021). Student affairs departments originally formed to foster the development of the student as good citizens (Glanzer et al., 2020) and the cultivation of good habits imposed through structures, sanctions, and discipline (Hevel, 2016). However, as McGill et al. (2021) identified, insufficiency in professionalism stemmed from difficulties such as "the lack of a theoretical base, consistent and rigorous training standards, the definition of the role of student affairs, and the field's impotence in addressing these matters properly" (p. 124).

Making matters worse, student affairs departments often served as the "dumping ground of all unpleasant things" by faculty members and presidents (Schwartz, 2010, p. 4). Faculty are often viewed as intellectual thinkers while student affairs educators are considered development doers, furthering the divide and perception of value, capability, and missional purpose (LePeau, 2015). While the traditional higher education organizational structures bifurcate academic and student affairs departments, holistic education of students requires coherence of outcomes and alignment of mission that demand interaction between student affairs

and academic affairs departments (Barnett & McCormick, 2016; Palmer, 1998). Even the origin of the word *university* in the Latin (*universitas* meaning "community" and *universus* meaning "totality") implies an interdependence within itself as well as "notions of relationships, environment, expectations, and responsibilities" (Jongbloed et al., 2008, p. 305).

Collaborative work between student affairs departments and academics can "provide students with a richer higher education experience by offering a holistic approach to learning and breathe life into the collective project that faculty, staff, and administrators engage in as we pursue our vocations as co-educators" (Jensen & Visser, 2019, p. 160). Academic and co-curricular departments who commit to this goal can reduce the student perception that their experience in college is disjointed and disconnected (Blimling & Whitt, 1998) as they "work in concert to create the climate most conducive for teaching and learning to occur" (Trudeau & Herrmann, 2014, p. 61). Cultivating such an institutional culture fosters what Ernest Boyer referred to as *general education* that integrates coherence of purpose between "institutional mission, social context, and educational program" (Wells, 2014, p. 43). In this regard, Christian higher education uniquely prepares students to be "the most active, most serious, and most open-minded advocates of general human learning" (Noll, 2011, p. x). Longjohn (2013) suggested that "university personnel, including the faculty and student affairs professionals, are uniquely situated to help students navigate their spiritual quest, particularly in seasons of struggle" (p. 38). By emphasizing holistic student development, universities can "move beyond defining education as a simple acquisition of knowledge" and instead foster an educational environment that promotes "experiential competencies" in areas like interpersonal development, faith formation, respect and discourse, ethical action, and personal responsibility (Beers & Trudeau, 2015, p. 32). Student affairs and academic affairs departments are integral to each other's success in universities commited to this pursuit (Henck, 2011). When challenges arise, ranging from declining enrollment and reduced campus resources (Bessette & Fisher, 2021; Grawe, 2021) to global pandemics (Yang, 2020), it is a dedication to shared mission that will permit Christian education to endure.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges to adapt rapidly as institutions faced unexpected burdens, including financial, labor, modality, and student health challenges with little warning (Raaper & Brown,

2020). The pandemic caused many employees to experience low morale, increased burnout, high compassion fatigue, and significant emotional health stress including depression and anxiety (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). Student affairs departments routinely found themselves on the frontlines of pandemic response efforts (Basko, 2021). Faculty members found that their jobs extended beyond the class periods to connect with increasingly-disconnected students like never before (Willett, 2021). While the pandemic affected academic and students affairs departments uniquely, Bessette and Fisher (2021) encouraged these co-educators to work together in a united front to support students well. In doing so, faith-based institutions would continue to build the credibility of Christian higher education through a continued emphasis on "vibrant, quality academic community" despite the pandemic challenges (Moser & Ream, 2019, p. 5).

Methodology

This quantitative research study was conducted using a non-experimental, multivariate design to determine a causal-comparative relationship between the experience of relational leadership, work engagement, and relational coordination. A research survey, administered to a cross-sectional convenience sample of student affairs professionals in Christian colleges and universities (n = 256), included questions from three validated assessments that measure the variables. Inferential statistical analysis was utilized to determine the influence that relational leadership behaviors demonstrated by an employee's supervisor have on the participant's experience of relational coordination with colleagues as well as the influence that an employee's level of work engagement has on their experience of relational coordination.

The Relational Coordination Survey is a fully validated assessment to measure teamwork between unbounded teams—that is, teams that span organizational boundaries for task completion—and is ideal for understanding organizations that are highly complex and interdependent, such as higher education institutions (Gittell, 2009). The questionnaire utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to assess the seven questions across both the relationship and communication dimensions of relational coordination between organizational roles. The assessment was validated with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .86 (Gittell et al., 2010). Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis found that "the seven dimensions of

relational coordination were best represented as a single factor," with a corresponding eigenvalue of 3.41 (Gilmartin et al., 2015, p. 381).

As relational coordination served as the dependent variable in this study, to contextualize the experience of coordination between academic and student affairs, each of the seven validated survey questions asked participants to reply in light of the six primary types of the most common current collaborative efforts between student affairs and academic affairs identified by O'Halloran (2019): (1) academic support, (2) cocurricular activities, (3) orientation, (4) service, (5) residential groups/colleges, and (6) policy and planning (see Figure 1). To ensure participants were able to answer as accurately as possible, an additional option "Not applicable at my institution" was provided for each of these types of collaboration on each of the seven questions. For the purposes of this study, *academic affairs* was defined to include both academic administration roles and faculty members. Participants were asked to consider collaboration with faculty members in the context of their responsibilities outside of teaching in the classroom but still within their role as a faculty member (e.g., serving on committees, task forces, or assisting with campus programming and initiatives).

The Relational Leadership Scale measures the extent to which a leader builds relationships both with and among the people they lead (Douglass, 2018; Gittell & Ali, 2021). Developed by Hornstrup (2015), the validated scale uses eight questions to identify three dimensions of relational leadership: two questions that relate to directional leadership, three questions that relate to engaged leadership, and three questions that relate to involving leadership (Gittell & Ali, 2021).

To measure work engagement, the research study utilized the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) to measure the subscales of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The 9-item survey contained three subscales and nine questions that use a 7-point Likert scale of options to identify the frequency each participant experienced the respective phenomena, ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Internal consistencies as measured by Cronbach's alpha in previous uses of the UWES-9 survey ranged between .80 and .90 (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Cronbach's alpha was also run on each of the subscale responses using this research sample to ensure internal consistency for the participants. Following the construction of each of the subscale scores, the multiple linear regression analysis identified the Pearson's *r* coefficient to answer the research questions of this study.

The survey also asked participants demographic questions and a single open-ended question to invite the participant to share qualitative reflection about their work experience in the midst of the pandemic. The responses to the open-ended question were then examined to accomplish the three-fold goal of adding nuance to the data, giving the respondents a voice to share the context that shaped their responses to the survey, and indicate response quality (Neuert et al., 2021). Referred to as "web probing," a method used in evaluating respondents' comprehension of the key terms used in the prior questions of the survey "as well as their thought processes while answering," this method is particularly helpful when a "content analysis of the open-ended questions complements the quantitative findings" in how it "paints a more nuanced picture" (p. 5).

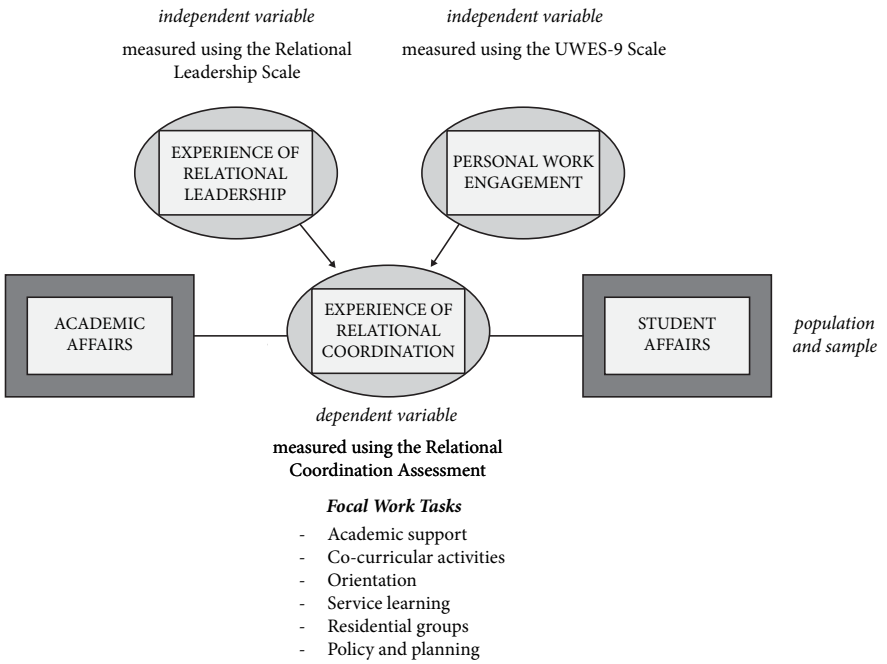
Including the responses from the open-ended question to shape the conclusions of the data also assists in addressing researcher reflexivity and positionality as a member of the population being examined and to avoid over-reliance on the researcher's own perspective (Fenge et al., 2019). Each participant quote included in the discussion was selected from 214 responses to an open-ended question that invited the participant to answer (if they wished) "In your own words, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your job in student affairs in the past two years?" Using a simple but systematic coding method, the researcher was able to "evaluate [the quotes] and choose which to use in the text: the most common, most accurately formulated, or those that provide the most important knowledge" (Ose, 2016, p. 149) to innovatively expand the research conclusions by stepping outside of a purely quantitative approach.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of experienced relational leadership and work engagement on relational coordination among organizational members. Two primary research questions guided this study:

1. Does a significant predictive relationship exist between a team member's experience of relational leadership behaviors and their relational coordination behaviors?
2. Does a significant predictive relationship exist between a team member's level of personal work engagement and their relational coordination behaviors?

Figure 1

Diagram of the Research Study Variables Used in This Study



Descriptive Statistics

Student affairs professionals (n = 256) provided survey responses for this study. Of these participants, the majority were employed full-time (86.7%) and all were employed on a Christian college campus. The participants ranged in job title, including director-level student affairs professionals (35.2%), resident directors (19.5%), dean-level positions (12.1%), and vice presidents (7.4%), and the participants had an average years of experience of 10.73 years (SD = 8.9). The sample was evenly distributed between gender (50.4% men, 49.6% women) and participants with an average participant age of 38 (SD = 11.76). Participants reported their ethnicity as White or Caucasian (85.2%), Black or African American (4.3%), and Hispanic or Latino participants (4.3% each). The participant sample was overwhelmingly homogenous in its ethnic makeup, indicating that the organizations represented in this study may also be largely ethnically homogenous. Participants also reported their highest level of education: 51.2% had obtained master's degrees, 17.2% had obtained doctorates, and 14.8% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree. Institutions involved in the research study represented all nine of the geographic regions of the United States officially recognized by the

United States Census Bureau, with the largest regional response (36.3%) representing the East North Central region, covering Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin (unsurprising given the strong concentration of Christian colleges and universities in this region). Institutional student enrollment ranged broadly: 24.2% of the participants reported fewer than 1,000 students, 26.2% reported 1,000-1,500 students, 41.4% reported 1,500–5,000 students, and only 8.2% of participants claimed a school with more than 5,000 students. Most student affairs departments (66.0%) consisted of fewer than 30 staff members. Because survey anonymity was offered to participants, identifying the unique institutions represented in this study was not possible.

Results

Independence of observation was checked by verifying that the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.88) was between 1 and 3, and collinearity was checked by verifying that the tolerance (.874) was greater than .10 and the VIF (1.14) was less than 10. No outliers were identified by verifying that the residual statistics fell between -3.29 and +3.29 for a minimum (-2.775) and maximum (2.294) score. A normal distribution was observed on a histogram and normality was observed on a P-P plot with all values falling on or close to the line. Data were elliptical when observed on a scatter plot.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if a significant predictive correlation existed between the independent variables of work engagement and experience of relational leadership and the dependent variable of relational coordination. The correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination was statistically significant, R (254) = .225, p = .004. However, the correlation between work engagement and relational coordination was not statistically significant, R (254) = .161, p = .158. The effect size for the model (r^2 = .058) indicated that the level of relational leadership that the student affairs professional experienced and their work engagement accounted for a small portion (5.8%) of the variability in relational coordination with academic affairs. The regression equation for predicting relational coordination from work engagement was $\hat{Y}$ = 1.234 + .010x, and the regression equation for predicting relational coordination from relational leadership was $\hat{Y}$ = 1.234 + .184x.

Because the correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination was weak and no correlation was found

between work engagement and relational coordination, an additional statistical test was conducted to determine if the correlation between either years of service or age and relational coordination was statistically significant. Using a bivariate correlational analysis test to compare the relationship between the years of service in student affairs and relational coordination score (and subsequently between the age of participant and relational coordination score), statistical significance was not present in any of the tests. Expanding the test to examine correlation between the variables and work engagement revealed that only age of participant and work engagement were statistically significantly correlated, R (254) = .144, p = .02, with a small positive effect on the work engagement score as the age of the participant increased.

The most common theme that emerged from the analysis of the open-ended question was the experience of *increased or changed job responsibilities* (80 references). A similar theme of student affairs professionals *adjusting or adapting* their methods, programs, or policies also indicated a high level of change agility and change motivation that was essential in this time (58 references). The third most common theme was direct references to feelings of *burnout* and *exhaustion* (38 references). As one participant said succinctly, "there are higher levels of fatigue that a good night's rest can't cure" because of the pandemic. A table of the most common themes are below in Table 1.

Table 1

Open-ended Comment Themes

Theme	*f*
Increased/Changed Responsibilities	80
Adjusting	58
Burnout	39
Relationships	35
Student Involvement	26
Community	25
Mental Health	25
Organizational Culture	22
Under-Resourced	14
Programming	13
Communication	12

Student Preparedness	10
Goals	9
Technology	9
Policy	8
Collaboration	7
Creativity	5
Resignation	5

Additionally, each of the comments was categorized with an overall theme to assess the overall sentiment of the participant's response (see Table 2).

Table 2

Overall Themes of Responses

Theme	*f*	Rel *f*	c*f*	Percentile
Negative	160	0.75	214	61.22
Neutral	33	0.15	54	25.23
Both Positive and Negative	13	0.06	21	9.81
Positive	8	0.04	8	3.74

Discussion

The basic themes revealed in this overall coding process paint a starkly negative picture of the experience of working in student affairs during COVID-19. The overwhelming theme (75% of all comments) was that the student affairs experience during the pandemic was solely negative, compared to the 25% of comments that acknowledge any positive aspects of how their institution handled this industry disruption well. If higher education trusts what Wells and Ingley (2019) and Bills and Pond (2021) are warning the industry regarding the changing future of higher education, the low level of confidence that participants had in how their institutions handled the pandemic does not bode well for the likelihood that future disruptions will be handled any better. As institutions brace for the demographic changes, the decrease in perceived value of education, and the shifting modalities from face-to-face interaction to increasingly online formats, disruption will become the norm, not the exception.

While statistical significance was not found between the variables of work engagement and relational coordination, the analysis of these comments suggest that student affairs professionals' level of work

engagement likely requires careful attention. One of the participants of the survey commented regarding the pandemic that "I felt well-supported in my job by my leadership even though it was a very draining time." The open-ended question responses further indicated the keen sense of burnout among the employees in the midst of COVID-19. One participant commented that they felt "overwhelmed and demoralized" while another admitted that the pandemic "hardened me in a way that is not positive." If the job expects too much of the employee, vigor, absorption, and dedication (i.e., work engagement) are unlikely to emerge. As one senior leader acknowledged, "I have thought all too often about going somewhere to work where I can just make a widget" because the influx of burdensome tasks "negatively impacted the positive goals that I had for my institution to help us move forward." While a sense of vocational calling or missional alignment may be a moderating effect on the burden of the pandemic, is it enough to overcome it entirely? Junker et al., (2021) suggested that exhaustion, not poor work engagement, as a possible explanation for the dissonance between the failure to find statistical significance on the research question examining work engagement and the student affairs participant's comments indicating a dissatisfaction with their work during this time. In other words, highly engaged workers who have a strong shared vision for the value of their work often engage more in their work when facing a task or problem rather than disengaging, leading to exhaustion (Junker et al., 2021). Indeed, both exhaustion and burnout were both among the most commonly mentioned themes from the open ended question responses and often used interchangeably. In this regard, strong work engagement may yield negative personal outcomes while simultaneously yielding positive organizational outcomes.

Collaboration is another key theme that was identified in the participant comments. One student affairs professional lamented that "as demand has risen in areas such as health services, mental health, residential life, etc., it sometimes feels like we have fought the battle alone and certain responsibilities are just relegated and considered 'not my job' by certain academic administrators." This potential professional disconnect may further entrench preexisting silos and forge new lines of division and discord. A comment by a frustrated student affairs professional highlighted a unique frustration of residential student affairs professionals during the pandemic: "I feel a divide between the other departments on campus that were able to work from home while I was

living with students day in and day out. We had very different experiences than the professors who were only on Zoom and not on campus." If left unaddressed, this divide is unlikely to resolve itself naturally. As O'Halloran (2018) highlighted, the six primary areas of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs include (1) academic support, (2) cocurricular activities, (3) orientation, (4) service, (5) residential groups/colleges, and (6) policy and planning. In each of these areas, there will likely be continued collaboration as institutions continue to emerge from the effects of the pandemic. However, as indicated by the participants in their responses, each of these areas may now hold newly formed opportunities for professional discontent and unresolved tension to emerge, which may threaten to undermine the attempts at successful collaborative student support measures. Student affairs participants who perceived that they carried an unequal share of the burden of the pandemic may struggle to see their academic counterparts as being equally yoked in their shared mission to accomplish the task of educating students as holistic beings as Muir (2013) and Jensen and Visser (2019) prophetically called them to.

Implications for Practice

Given the correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination, higher education leaders should design roles with an expectation of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs professionals and provide relational leadership to increase the likelihood of success for their efforts. When considering the six focal work tasks that O'Halloran (2018) outlined, each of those areas is often relegated entirely to the various stakeholder whose job description includes that task or responsibility, and collaboration only occurs when acute moments in the institution's life require it (e.g., at the start of new student enrollment periods for orientation purposes).

Take, for example, the experience of a student conduct incident that violates one of the institutional policies (one of the areas of common collaboration). Institutional policies are often determined by the university administration, with the foundation and occasional edits voted on by faculty in committees and enforced by the front-lines (faculty and staff alike in their separate contexts). From there, the splintering of the campus begins as the residence life staff is often entrusted to address student conduct in the residence halls, the faculty members focus on the classroom, and the athletic coaches consider the student's actions on the field. However, a holistic development perspective would not see these

areas as bifurcated and distinct from each other but would instead seek to foster an integrated approach to helping the student navigate their development where the aspects of their university life are coherent. An examination of the assumptions that each campus holds about "how things ought to be done" will yield opportunities to discuss how the institution is sharing information about each student in a way that honors a student's ability to navigate their campus with necessary anonymity yet provides them with sufficient support so that struggle in one area does not compound in other areas. Student care committees to discuss student struggles, student information systems with confidential but appropriately broad information sharing channels, consistent meetings between faculty, coaches, and staff to foster collaborative spirits, and an insistence on a student development (not student deficit) mindset (Dampier et al., 2019) are all methods that can assist with this goal. It is essential that the student affairs senior leadership personally embodies the characteristics of relational leadership by providing clear direction for the expectations of how to accomplish student support work differently, remaining engaged in the transitional period where new behaviors are adopted (and new issues emerge as a result), and being personally involved in consistently demonstrating and modeling a student-focused mindset in every way.

As colleges and universities emerge from the acute experience of the pandemic, a renewed focus on relational leadership by senior leaders can help department members who feel, as one participant described: "buried in operational survival," supported and valued after a season of "intense, time-consuming" priorities not related to their pre-pandemic department goals. Restarting the positive forward momentum will require attention to what one participant termed the "newly-constructed silos" caused by COVID-19 to correct the sense of "a divergence in shared understanding, university goals, and strategic plans." This may look like hosting listening sessions for leaders to dissect the underlying issues that linger, creating opportunities for student affairs and academic affairs to interact and foster a healthy sense of community and collegiality, and revisiting often the fundamental aspects of the university's mission that each individual is committed to. If senior leaders do not give particular attention to asking reflective and probing questions of their organization about the employee experience through the COVID-19 pandemic, they will miss a pivotal and necessary growth moment in the lifespan of their organization. There may need to be difficult moments of acknowledging

where the leader, the institution, or the collective community of higher education at large "got it wrong" about how to handle the pandemic in a way that was equitable and considerate. Simultaneously, there ought to be a spirit of humility and grace extended where appropriate for the challenge of leading in what many referred to as "unprecedented times" and the impossibility of getting each decision right, except with the benefit of hindsight.

In doing this, as institutional leaders carefully consider the gulf between student affairs and academic affairs departments that may have widened during the pandemic and respond courageously to the difficult of task of entering into that dynamic between campus departments, the distance between the two may narrow. As these departments begin to remember anew the reality that they are simply two sides of the same coin in the "collective project" (Jensen & Visser, 2019, p. 160) of higher education, the imperative they share to work in coordination together for the sake of the student is reinforced, no matter the obstacle that may stand in the way. The end goal of holistically developing students is worth the challenge of returning to the table to continue collaboratively defining a fresh vision for the future.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by a number of factors, including self-selection and nonresponse bias through the voluntary nature of the study. It is also possible that social desirability bias may be present, as participants from a faith-based organization may answer questions more positively than is accurate due to their desire to uphold Colossians 3:23; "whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (NIV, 2011). Additionally, this study measured an employee's experience of relational leadership behaviors from their leaders, which introduces an inherit level of limited perspective and does not directly measure relational leadership. Furthermore, almost 20% of the participants were resident directors, a valuable role on college campuses that is, by job design, fairly removed from opportunities for academic collaboration, which potentially skews the results further.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a number of opportunities to explore this research problem further in the future. This study could be replicated in non-faith-based institutions to understand if the conclusions are generalizable beyond the Christian higher education context. This expansion would challenge the assumption of homogeneity of values and the influence of a strong

missional approach to work shared between like-minded individuals at faith-based institutions. Another suggestion would be to conduct a single-site, mixed-methods case study of a college or university to do a full campus relational coordination evaluation by collaboratively mapping the mutual efforts of the various departments surrounding the six focal work tasks developed by O'Halloran (2019).

Final Thoughts

Poor collaboration rhythms between the student affairs and academic affairs departments will not be easily resolved, but the pandemic has demonstrated that, for the sake of holistic student development, strong collaboration is essential. Institutional leaders, with an eye to the mirror to monitor their own relational leadership behaviors and an eye to their people to monitor their ongoing experience of vigor, absorption, and dedication to the work, can begin to cultivate an organizational culture that promotes relational coordination. The result is a healthy form of campus collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs that truly works: one that goes beyond merely working well with one another to demonstrating faithful commitment to the monumental but achievable task of holistically developing students together as co-educators.

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Cultivating the Self-Awareness of Global Students: The Role of Communities of Practice

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Abstract

Research on the impact of leadership education programs on undergraduate students has demonstrated that cultivating self-awareness is foundational to developing other leadership capacities. Yet, scant research has been undertaken to understand the impact of leadership education on global students. For the sake of this research, global students include any undergraduate student who had spent a significant portion of their development years outside the country of higher education. As such, global students include international students as well as other globally mobile students such as children of international military personnel, businesspeople, and religious workers. This qualitative research sought to understand how global students cultivated self-awareness. Findings indicated that global students negotiated their sense of self through processing interpersonal messaging provided by others in multiple spheres of influence. The experiences of these global students demonstrate the importance of providing an intercultural community of practice in cultivating the self-awareness of global students.

Background and Literature

Higher education professionals have long been concerned with holistically cultivating young adults who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to engage as ethical leaders in a globalized world. Moreover, Christian higher education faculty and staff have a missional mandate to cultivate global leaders who will be change agents in their future vocations. Thus, intentional leadership education programs need to be embedded in both the curriculum and co-curricular aspects of Christian higher education institutions in order to provide opportunities for emerging adults to garner the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes of a future change agent.

Extensive research in leadership education has indicated that cultivating consciousness of self in undergraduate students is foundational for other areas of leadership development (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Chickering & Reisner, 1993; Komives et al., 2006) Consciousness of self includes awareness of personal beliefs, values, emotions, and attitudes (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Cultivating a strong sense of self is foundational to becoming an ethical leader because it "contributes to one's ability to understand others and work with others toward change, which requires more complex developmental capacity" (Haber & Komives, 2009, p. 133).

Extant research has indicated that interaction with faculty plays a role in increasing students' abilities to engage in leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Quantitative research has also indicated that involvement in student organizations and having formal leadership roles enhances undergraduate students' self-awareness (Haber & Komives, 2009). Both the curriculum and constituency in leadership programs are shown to impact participants' cultivation of self-awareness (Dugan et al., 2011; Komives et al., 2006). High impact curriculum includes experiential learning and critical reflection with diverse others, which provide opportunities for self-differentiation (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Engagement in a diverse community of practice provides participants with a "platform for the development of listening skills, clarification of personal values and perspectives, and social perspective taking" (Dugan & Komives, 2010, p. 539). The concept of communities of practice was derived from a social theory of learning, which emphasizes the impact of meaning, practice, community, and identity working together synergistically (Wenger, 1998). According to social learning theory, the actual embodied practice within specific contexts is crucial

for interpersonal meaning making. Thus, in this view, meaning making cannot be separated from the communities in which an individual is engaged in an agreed upon practice.

Yet, firsthand exposure to diverse others does not always determine openness to the process of garnering self-awareness. In a community of practice with diverse others, certain conditions assist participants in cultivating consciousness of self: a sense of group purpose and a commitment to critical self-reflection (Illeris, 2014, Killick, 2015). Schapiro et al. (2012) also clarified that dialogue undertaken in intercultural groups provides a synergistic space for both self-awareness and others-awareness.

While multiple studies have been undertaken to understand the impact of leadership programs on domestic students, global students have not been delineated in the research. In this study, I define global students to be any undergraduate student who had spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside the country of their higher education institution. As such, global students include international students as well as other globally mobile students such as children of international military personnel, businesspeople, and religious workers. There are many differences between those who would traditionally be labeled an international student and U.S. passport holders who grew up internationally. Yet, in our age of globalization there are many similarities among these students such as the multiple identities they must negotiate having been socialized in pluralistic environments like international secondary schools. Characteristics of an international secondary school may include the following: ethnic and linguistic diversity in constituency, use of an internationally approved curriculum, English as the medium of instruction for the majority of subjects, and a pipeline for attending university outside the country, such as the United States (Hayden et al., 2002) Therefore, prior to coming to the United States for higher education, the majority of the participants in this research engaged with diverse others from multiple cultural backgrounds and value systems (see Table 1). I recognize that such a label of global students could be unwelcome by some, but I seek to have an inclusive stance towards all students who have spent a portion of their developmental years outside the country of their higher education. Also, it should be noted that although I employ the terminology of "global students" for participants of this research, previous empirical research has been conducted mainly on international students.

Extant research has indicated that international students experience greater levels of learning in leadership development programs and courses where professors actively sought to engage students in intergroup dialogue (Glass, 2012). Also, participation in co-curricular activities, such as leadership programs, increased the sense of belonging international students experience on campus (Glass & Westmont, 2014). Intentional leadership development of international students also assisted them in achieving higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence (Calley, 2021; Collier et al., 2017). Additionally, personal mentorship from faculty and staff has been shown to assist international students in their leadership development skills (Shalka, 2017).

While the data on international students' experiences in leadership programs has been increasing in the past decade, U.S. citizens who have grown up internationally have not been taken into account (La Brack, 2011, Van Reken, 2011). Thus, this research sought to not only illuminate the experiences of international students, but also to account for the experiences of other globally mobile students such as children of international military personnel, businesspeople, and religious workers. While it has been documented that leadership programs can provide opportunities for students to cultivate consciousness of self, understanding this phenomenon qualitatively from the perspective of global students can provide nuance to the previous empirical research as well as implications for Christian higher education institutions. Thus, this research focused on understanding how global students described cultivating self-awareness through participating in a leadership development program. The guiding research question was: How do global students describe the impact of participation in an intercultural leadership development program on cultivating their sense of self?

Methodology and Participants

In order to understand and explain how global students described cultivating self-awareness in a leadership program, I utilized a constructivist, qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivist, qualitative inquiry is an inductive process where researchers seek to understand meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach was appropriate for the study as I sought to understand the personal perspectives of participants in their own words regarding this phenomenon. I wanted the voices of the students themselves to be

prominent, demonstrating their agency, especially since the perspectives of global students are often not highlighted in the academy.

This instrumental case study was undertaken at a private, Christian university in Southern California which provided an intercultural leadership development program specifically for global students. This program was designed and implemented by staff at the university with the goal of providing developmental opportunities for global students. Between 40 and 50 global students participated in this program yearly. The program consisted of leadership trainings in an experiential learning cycle within diverse teams. Participants not only learned about leadership through trainings but also by providing cultural awareness activities to the greater student body.

In order to understand the experiences of the participants from their own perspectives, I conducted intensive, semi-structured interviews with 26 undergraduate global students who participated in the year-long leadership development program. The interviews were conducted in their post-baccalaureate life, either in their passport country or in the United States. Of these 26 global students, 16 would be considered international students who attended the university on a student visa, while 10 of them were United States citizens who spent their developmental years in a country outside of the United States before coming to the university to pursue undergraduate studies (see Table 1).

Table 1

Snapshot of participants

Name	Passport Country	Global Mobility	Languages Other than English
Samantha	Indonesia	China	Indonesian Mandarin
Elena	United States	Mexico	Spanish
Joy	Singapore	Vietnam Myanmar	
Cyndi	China		Mandarin
Sage	United States	Slovakia Hungary	Slovakian
James	South Korea	South Korea Fiji Australia Indonesia Singapore	Korean Indonesian Mandarin

MJ	Indonesia	China	Indonesian Mandarin
Ivy	Taiwan	China	Mandarin
Aspen	Cameroon		French Cameroonian
Eno	Indonesia		Indonesian
Jennifer	United States	China	Mandarin
Angie	South Africa		
Alice	United States	France Sweden	French Swedish
Stephen	Singapore	Canada Australia	
Hannah	United States	Korea	Korean
Jamie	Canada	South Korea United Arab Emirates	Korean
Grace	South Korea	Kenya	Korean
Lisa	United States	Singapore	Mandarin
Jeremy	United States	Pakistan	Urdu
Tony	Malaysia	Singapore	Mandarin
Ann	South Korea	Algeria France Saipan	Korean French
Sandra	United States	Jordan	Arabic
Rose	Hong Kong	China	Mandarin
Bruce	United States	Hong Kong	Mandarin
Mary	United States	Indonesia	Indonesian
Sarah	Indonesia		Indonesian Mandarin

Adhering to research standards, I obtained ethical clearance from the university prior to beginning interviews. Also, participants were provided with consent forms making them aware of both the risks of benefits of participation in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After receiving consent, interviews were conducted in two phases due to accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic: 15 interviews were conducted in person, while 11 were conducted via Zoom.

The majority of the participants were multilingual with high proficiencies in English; thus, interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed using an online transcription service. After all the interviews were transcribed, participants were given

an opportunity to do member checks to demonstrate trustworthiness in the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After receiving permission from participants regarding the final copies of their interview transcriptions, I coded the 26 interviews using first and second cycle coding as well as constant comparative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2009; Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). In first cycle coding, I utilized both descriptive and process coding, looking for routines, rituals, roles, and relationships in participants' experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Once all data was accounted for and labeled in first cycle coding, I utilized second cycle coding and constant comparative analysis to develop saturated categories from the first cycle codes. These findings are delineated using thick description to again demonstrate trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

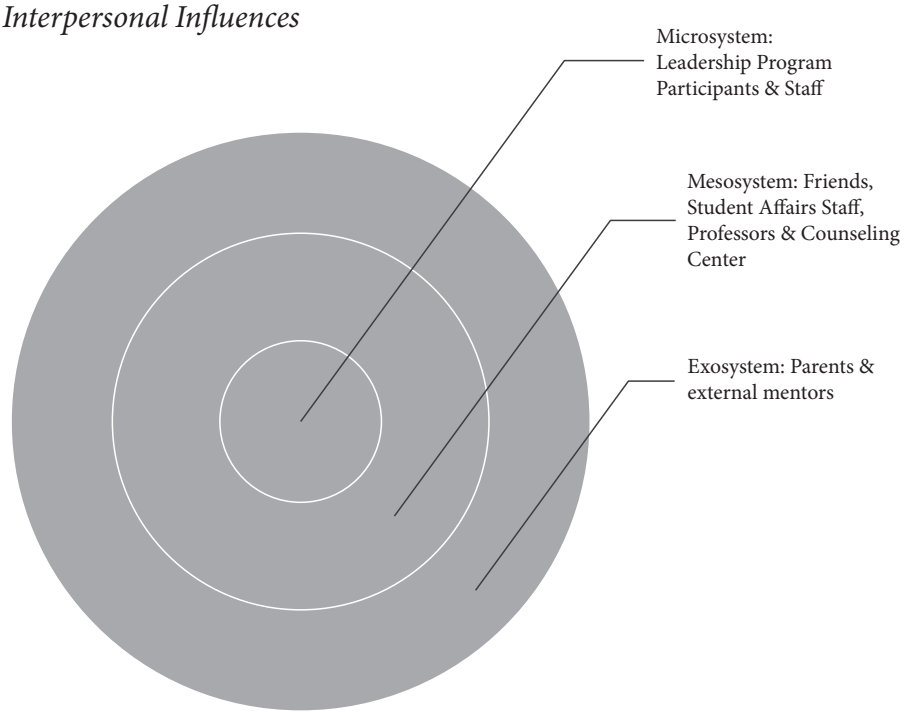
While there are many models that could be utilized to organize the findings of this research for discussion, this research focused on emerging adults who engaged in co-curricular leadership development during their undergraduate years, so an ecological model provided a helpful interpretative framework as it shed light on the interaction between people and environment (Patton et al., 2016). Patton et al. (2016) asserted, "Educators can use ecological models to understand how student development occurs and to consider how to shape campus environments to promote optimal growth and development for diverse student populations" (p. 41). Thus, in order to make sense of the findings, I employed Bronfenbrenner's (1993) developmental ecology as a theoretical framework. According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), there are inherent attributes of a person which may "induce or inhibit dynamic dispositions toward the immediate environment" (p. 11). Thus, a student's reaction to the university environment may either promote or deter self-negotiation. Moreover, there are layers of environments which may influence students in cultivating self-awareness. Within each of these systems, there are influences and structures that students must navigate, informing their sense of self. Bronfenbrenner delineated these environments as microsystems, mesosytems, and exosystems. According to the model, microsystems are those which have the most direct influence on an individual, mesosystems have less of a direct influence, and exosystems have the least influence.

Findings

The goal of this research was to understand how global students described cultivating self-awareness through participation in an intercultural leadership development program. Findings from this research indicated that global students accessed multiple sources of interpersonal input to make sense of themselves, their skills, and their role in leadership. Of the 26 participants in the study, 24 indicated accessing personalized feedback from interpersonal connections. Utilizing the messaging from their interpersonal connections served to assist participants in engaging in an intrapersonal meaning-making process. In this meaning-making process, global student leaders were able to sort through messaging and clarify their sense of self.

As noted previously, microsystems are those which have the most direct influence on an individual, mesosystems have less of a direct influence, and exosystems have the least influence. For the sake of this research, microsystems are the direct influence of the other participants in the leadership program as well as the student development staff connected to the leadership program. The mesosystem is considered the undergraduate institution in which the participants were enrolled, including friend groups, faculty members, counseling center professionals, and other student affairs staff outside the leadership program. The exosystem consisted of any interpersonal input received from those external to the university system, such as parental influence and influence of external mentors. Participants in this study shared that they engaged with these multiple feedback channels during their year in the leadership program, with the most salient being the microsystem (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Interpersonal Influences



Microsystem

Data indicated that participants in the leadership development program experienced the most interpersonal impact from those in their immediate circle of influence within the microsystem. These included both other participants in the leadership development program and the student development staff running the program. First, data were saturated with the experiences of participants who specified that the interpersonal feedback from other global student leaders in the program was significant in developing their consciousness of self. Sixteen out of the 26 participants in this research indicated that the other global students in the program provided salient opportunities for them to develop self-awareness. In the following sections I will share how the participants themselves described the ways in which their interpersonal meaning making experiences impacted their self-awareness.

Engaging with Peers

Jamie, ethnically Korean, who spent her development years in both Canada and Abu Dhabi, shared that another participant in the leadership program impacted her by asking clarifying questions regarding her experience working with culturally diverse others. As a self-declared

verbal processor, she stated that her co-participant, "helped me talk through a lot of my emotions . . . help me to kind of dig into myself . . . and what I was going through and being a leader." Grace also described her experience on the leadership team as one that helped her process her multiple identities. Ethnically and in terms of nationality, Grace is South Korean. Yet she grew up in Kenya, attending an American international school. Grace recalled processing how she associated with Kenyan culture, and how she dealt with disliking Korean culture and values. Yet, through externally processing with another leadership program participant from South Africa, she began to get more clarity on her multiple identities. She shared, "Just talking made me realize I could never be Kenyan. But I can also have a different social role." Through these conversations, she began to appreciate her Korean identity, describing it as, "like being glad I'm Korean or being okay that I'm Korean. And that I do have Korean values, even if I don't want to." Another participant, Lisa, a U.S. citizen who grew up in Singapore, shared that making friends in the leadership program assisted her in making sense of herself and others. She described her experience in the following passage:

> I think having been a part of the [leadership] team, I really made solid friendships through that. I was very thankful for the fact that I could make those friendships and have that sense of belonging. So different people on the team were definitely very helpful, either just listening to my frustrations or letting me know that you're going a little too far with this opinion, you may come back a little bit, or kind of presenting me another view. So that was really helpful.

Thus, the other participants in the leadership program provided salient feedback for her to make sense of herself.

Jennifer, a United States citizen who grew up in China, shared that talking with another leader in the program helped her to clarify her role and needs as a leader. She stated, "It helped me identify how I function in a group, what my role is being a leader, and also needing affirmation and being vulnerable." Finally, Alice, also a United States citizen, who was raised in France and Sweden understood how participating on a team of diverse individuals developed her consciousness of her abilities. She stated,

> I learned that I was more capable than I thought. And initially I was very nervous to work with eight people, because that was a lot of people . . . But I learned that I was able to kind of build

> relationships with them and establish trust, to different degrees. A few of my teammates never completely warmed to me. But most they were still able to work with me. So I thought it gave me insight into my ability to meet people where they are and welcome them and create a safe spaces for them to talk about their experiences.

In this except, Alice demonstrated how she became more cognizant of her intercultural skills through engaging with other members of the leadership development program. These four excerpts are representative of the data which demonstrate that global students were able to cultivate self-awareness through interpersonal engagement with other their peers in the leadership development program.

Engaging with Leadership Program Staff

While the majority of the participants looked to their peers in the program for interpersonal feedback, 13 participants also connected with the leadership program staff to process their sense of self. Elena, a U.S. citizen who grew up in Southern Mexico, shared that a member of the leadership development program staff was able to "pick out things and potential" that she didn't see in herself. She stated, "My mentor was able to guide me in learning specific things that were very socially concentrated . . . and that gave me a lot of confidence." Thus, Elena's engagement with her mentor in the leadership program provided salient messages helping her cultivate self-awareness.

James was a participant in the leadership program who experienced a highly mobile childhood. He is ethnically and nationally South Korean, but spent his developmental years in Australia, Fiji, and Indonesia. Through one-on-one meetings with the leadership program staff, James was able to "take a step back and look at my life." This provided him an opportunity to cultivate self-awareness. Regarding that self-awareness, he shared,

> One thing I can think of is that I learned that even though I'm an introvert I really like people and to hear their stories. They say college is the time where you figure out yourself your identity, I think, that was a major, major experience where I realized that about myself. So, I am more quiet, shy, sometimes. Not extroverted and energetic, but since I really enjoy spending time with people and hearing their stories, showing care and concern, able to empathize, I think I realized that this is really part of my DNA and my values.

Through this excerpt, James demonstrated how engaging with the leadership program staff assisted him in intrapersonal meaning making.

Angie, a South Africa citizen of East Indian ancestry, shared that meeting with her staff mentor one-on-one helped her to understand why she was so insecure with decision making in leadership. She explained, "I was constantly insecure about, am I making the right decision? Am I making the right choice? Is there a better choice that I'm not choosing? Because it's hard, am I not choosing it? Also, what is going on there?" Angie stated that talking with the staff member gave her insight into her insecurities as well as provided her with confidence to continue to grow. Finally, Joy, a Singaporean national who grew up in Myanmar, shared how experiencing mentorship from women was impactful in cultivating her sense of self and her leadership skills. Joy stated, "that was also very inspiring to be around . . . I felt empowered." Noting this empowerment, she shared that she saw herself as a valid leader for the first time.

These examples are just a handful of excerpts from participants delineating the role of staff in cultivating their self-awareness. Together with the data regarding engagement with peers, these excerpts demonstrate the most salient finding of this research: Global student participants indicated that they were able to cultivate their sense of self through feedback from their microsystem—leadership program peers and staff.

Mesosystem

Outside of that immediate circle of influence lies the mesosystem which includes friends, other student affairs staff, faculty, and community resources such as the university counseling center. While not as salient for participants as the microsystem, this layer of input is present in the data in that five out of the 26 participants indicated that friends outside of the leadership program provided feedback to them which helped them develop their self-awareness. One participant, Eno, an Indonesian with Chinese heritage, shared the following about the impact of her friends on her self-awareness:

> I think because of the close friendships I made, I become more compassionate, I become more patient actually because of their relationships I made. I think that that was the first time that I realized there are values. And there are ways to value people other than career or academic achievement. There are certain values that you can ascribe to in their relationship and in the way that you can treat people.

Thus, engaging with her friend group gave her input on her val-

ues, broadened her perspective, and impacted her understanding of compassion.

MJ, also an Indonesian with Chinese heritage, indicated that his friends provided feedback on his great listening skills. He stated, "A lot of people have been telling me that, and I noticed in myself that I'm a pretty good listener." Gaining this self-awareness provided a desire to provide more personal mentorship to others through listening. Aspen, a Cameroonian who grew up among multiple cultural influences, thought more deeply about her multiple identities as she watched her global friends navigate theirs. She explained,

> One of my best friends, Melody [(not a participant)], she's Korean. She grew up in Kenya for pretty much her whole life. So she doesn't identify with Korean culture in a lot of ways. But then she does. She identifies with Kenyan culture in some ways. So it's been a process of engaging in intentional conversations with these people around me, who are going through a similar journey.

Thus, engaging with her friends assisted Aspen in garnering self-awareness.

Similarly, Jeremy also shared that his community of friends helped him to "process his cultural background" providing a "close and very accepting community." These excerpts demonstrate that some participants experienced the influence of their friends as salient in their interpersonal meaning making process.

Not only did friends external to the leadership program provide participants with an opportunity to cultivate self-awareness, but five participants also indicated accessing faculty perspectives for interpersonal input. As a poignant example, Elena shared that one of her professors intentionally took her under her wing and helped her process her value system. According to Elena, her professor stated, "All of us have values that we think that we have that we hold unconsciously. But identifying them helps us not only relate to others better, but also understand ourselves better." Following up on that process, Elena identified her top three values of love, justice, and freedom, which helped give her perspective on the mental conflict she was having. Other participants indicated utilizing faculty members for cultivation of their sense of self, but without many specifics.

Four participants also indicated that student affairs professionals assisted them in helping them garner self-awareness. The participants

discussed having outside sources just a "text away" to provide support and encouragement. They valued the voices outside of the program to be sounding boarding for the interpersonal meaning-making process. Student affairs practitioners included resident assistants and spiritual development staff. Also, within the mesosystem, two participants indicated that accessing feedback from counselors in the university's counseling center was helpful in making sense of themselves. Thus, within the mesosystem participants indicated cultivating their self-awareness through engagement with friends, faculty, student affairs staff, and the counseling center.

Exosystem

Moving beyond the mesosystem is the exosystem, which is external to university and of least influence on participants. Of the 26 participants, only three participants indicated cultivating self-awareness through conversations with parents and external mentors. In this layer, there were only two participants who shared that talking with their parents helped them to negotiate their sense of self, and those two instances were connected to their skills as intercultural leaders. Another participant indicated connecting to his mentor in his home country at times, but also shared that the mentor did not always understand his context or how to guide him. Thus, the data demonstrate that the role of parents and external mentors was not as salient for participants who experienced cultivating self-awareness in a leadership development program. This disparity between the salience of interpersonal input for participants is significant and will be explored in the discussion section.

Discussion

Global students in this research indicated that interpersonal messaging assisted them in developing their self-awareness. The most salient input was provided by the microsystem, or other leadership program participants and staff. Next, participants indicated that input from the mesosytem, individuals outside the leadership program but within the university system, was somewhat salient. Finally, the least prominent input was received from their exosystem, which was anyone outside of the university system. In comparison to previous research on the impact of leadership development programs on undergraduate students, this study substantiates general research on the impact of leadership education. For example, it corroborates Haber and Komives's (2009) study on the impact of formal leadership roles in cultivating self-awareness. This

study also validates Dugan and Komives's (2010) research on how socio-cultural conversations with peers provide opportunities for self-differentiation. It also substantiates Glass's (2012) research on the leadership development of international students which indicated intergroup dialogue was a prominent factor.

Yet, these findings on global students' cultivation of self-awareness provide more nuance to those previous studies as it delineates the importance of the community of practice. This research indicates that global student leaders cultivated self-awareness through receiving feedback mainly from other participants in the leadership program and leadership program staff. While participants did indicate that others outside of the program such as friends and faculty members did help to clarify some participants' consciousness of self, the findings also indicated that parents and external mentors were not as utilized for the cultivation of self-awareness. Looking at this data in light of previous research on international students in leadership programs, it stands in opposition to previous research by Nguyen (2016) as global student leaders did not report accessing feedback from their parents. Also, this research does not fully substantiate Shalka's (2017) research regarding the impact of being mentored by external campus staff and faculty. In contrast, the majority of leadership program participants shared that the interpersonal feedback that assisted them in making sense of themselves was garnered from their immediate circle: the microsystem of the leadership program. With a desire to understand these findings more fully, I will look at them in light of the concept of cultivating self-awareness in a community of practice.

Communities of Practice

As the majority of the participants indicated that they were able to develop consciousness of self through engaging with other members of the leadership program, this section will discuss a possible reason for this phenomenon—experiencing belonging in a community of practice.

The literature points to three distinctives of communities of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Jenkins & Ednersby, 2019, Lave & Wenger, 1991). Seen in this light, the leadership program in which the global students engaged was a community of practice. Even though the global student leaders had different personalities, socio-economic backgrounds, and identities, findings demonstrate that their group process contained some level of mutuality—their identification as global students. In essence, data indicated there

was a sense of belonging to one another through their involvement in the program. Moreover, they had a common purpose and shared repertoire, making the sense of belonging even stronger. Their stories indicate that their multiple, individual identities were not minimized; instead, they were able to negotiate their identities in a place where they experienced belonging.

In this specific context, the participants negotiated their diverse ways of being, mindsets, and values with one another, creating a microcosm of diversity for participants to explore. While communities of practice are not inherently diverse, if they are, they can provide participants robust opportunities for self-reflection and intercultural understanding. Jackson (2019) noted, "Firsthand exposure to new communities of practice can compel individuals to reflect on and even question their behaviors, self-identities, values and beliefs" (p. 193). This observation holds true for participants in this research as they were compelled to reflect in their community of practice resulting in clarifying their sense of self. Thus, as the participants in this research engaged in an intercultural community of practice with mutuality, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise, they experienced identity negotiation through dialogue with trusted others in the program, both other student leaders and staff members. Those outside the program played less of a prominent role in participants' cultivation of self-awareness as the community of practice was demonstrated to be a place of belonging and mutuality.

Limitations

The potential limitation of this study is researcher bias. Due to the fact that I had extensive contact with the research participants prior to conducting the study, I had to take multiple steps at ensuring trustworthiness during data collection and analysis. As such, I employed member checks, as well as the use of thick description and bracketing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Implications and Conclusion

This research has multiple implications. First, while providing opportunities for global students to integrate into the larger university system is essential for their flourishing, providing communities of practice where they belong as global students could also be considered a best practice at Christian higher education institutions. Similar to other programs designed for niche groups of students such as first generation student programs and cultural affinity groups, programs designed specifically for global students may provide the belonging necessary for them to begin

cultivating consciousness of self. Yet, unlike other diversity programming on university campuses where specific cultural and/or identity groups facilitate brave spaces to negotiate their sense of self, this diverse group of students from a variety of nationalities, ethnicities, and language backgrounds was able to develop self-awareness through engaging with one another. This research demonstrates that belonging could be cultivated within very diverse groups if there is a common thread amongst the students.

The common thread for the participants of this research was being included as a global student. Thus, this inclusive posture towards all global students could be a high-impact practice for Christian higher education institutions to consider. Many universities provide transition services for international students and may provide opportunities for cultural celebration. Yet, United States citizens who grew up internationally are often not considered by either international student services offices, or diversity and inclusion efforts. They typically are marginalized, having to assimilate to a more monolithic group, rather being able to engage with their multiple identities, some of which may be hidden. Thus, this study demonstrates that their inclusion will not only help them to experience a sense of belonging, but also an opportunity to negotiate their multi-faceted sense of selves. In essence, providing such leadership development opportunities for all global students honors the *imago Dei* in all of them.

An intentional leadership development program for all global students provides an opportunity for those involved to engage in intercultural learning, breaking down barriers between diverse students. Thus, designing opportunities such as leadership programs geared specifically for global students may not only provide a place of belonging but also communities of practice where students can engage interculturally. Ultimately such intentional programming for all global students would demonstrate that they matter to the larger campus community. Finally, providing intentional leadership development for global students connects to the heart of the mission of Christian higher education institutions. Cultivating global leaders who are change agents in the world does not happen automatically. It must be intentionally connected to curricular and co-curricular programming, where all students—even global students—can have the opportunity to be transformed for their future vocational assignments.

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The Agile College: How Institutions Successfully Navigate Demographic Changes

Nathan D. Grawe (2021)
John Hopkins University Press

Reviewed by Andrew J. Cornelius, M.S.Ed.

Higher education institutions are confronting predictions of population decline, demographic shifts of the college-going population, and a growing skepticism of higher education's purpose. Nathan Grawe (2021), in *The Agile College: How Institutions Successfully Navigate Demographic Changes*, examines large scale national data impacting future enrollment trends and provides practical measures to support student success upon admission. Grawe suggests that projections are not current reality and higher education institutions have the ability to shape their future. This data-driven text suggests that institutions should be aware of geographical, economic, and student success practices that increase and sustain enrollment efforts. Grawe frames the book in two parts, covering "Demographic Pressures" and "The Response of Higher Education." He uses national data sets to argue that there is no "one solution," but institutions are responsible for crafting their future and fate.

Part I, "Demographic Pressures," includes broad statistical data regarding population shifts within the United States that can impact higher education enrollment. This statistical data reveals information leading up to the mid-2030s. Grawe specifically draws on data from the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS) when examining population shifts. Grawe does not only provide broad population data for the entire country but also breaks down the population shifts by geographical regions. This is central to Grawe's encouragement and warning for institutions. Grawe encourages institutional leadership to look at demographic shifts through the lens of adaptation and change, not viewing

them as stagnant or "destined." Instead of conflating all enrollment declines forecasted as applicable to all institutions, Grawe advocates for institutions to contextualize to their geographic and institutional identity in forecasting demographic shifts.

Student populations are becoming more diverse. Grawe attributes shifting demographics to migration, immigration, and increased pathways to success for certain student populations. Examining migration and immigration patterns is seminal to the thesis of this text. Grawe localizes migration and immigration through geographic regions and institutional type. Due to high costs of living on the coasts, migration has increased toward the South and has decreased in the Northeast and West coasts. The migration patterns situate higher education institutions in the South with a higher chance to enroll students whose families have migrated. Yet, "the West appears the most auspicious region for four-year institutions followed by the South" (p. 33). The two analyses presented above point to the complexity of "one size fits all" models of college enrollment predictions. Institutional type, student type, immigration, and migration realities all impact each college and university differently.

Instead of finding the "one solution," Grawe reveals ways for institutions to localize efforts to enroll and retain the current college students. Part II, "The Response of Higher Education," examines the intersections of shifting demographics and institutional response. With demographic shifts in mind, Grawe offers readers topics of focus to support enrollment initiatives, evaluate student engagement efforts, and guidance when discussing long term strategies for institutions. Grawe begins this section of the book by framing admissions and financial aid policies as mechanisms of support and barriers to access. Grawe offers creative solutions being implemented by institutions such as targeted recruitment programs, tuition resets, and new ways of providing loan repayment to help bolster enrollment numbers.

The chapters situated in Part II address tangible ways institutions can better engage students. Grawe does this by providing case studies and examples of institutions who have executed programs or initiatives that have bolstered retention. It is important to note that Grawe examines current institutions who are modeling successful strategies that increase retention; he is not constructing new initiatives or approaches. Grawe does an exceptional job providing examples from all institutional types and regions when identifying student support and retention practices.

The final chapters of Part II reveal larger trends taking place within

the U.S. higher education system as a whole. This includes institutional "downsizing," mergers, and reprioritization of program offerings. Grawe concludes the text by providing examples of policy work at both the institutional and national level related to student loan reform and building great pathways from two-year to four-year institutions. He challenges the reader not to look at demographic shifts as a doomsday prediction but reminds us that institutional leadership will have to address these concerns to remain stable in the next few years.

Student development professionals should read this text to understand regional demographic shifts impacting their specific enrollment populations. Specifically, Christian student development professionals should take this volume seriously as it relates to the implementation of retention strategies surrounding underrepresented groups among all college-going populations. This is specifically important for those institutions who are tuition driven and rely on both enrollment and retention to sustain the university. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ is seen on the outside, in margins of society, caring for the individual. Christian higher education professionals should mirror this practice by examining policies that create systemic barriers and implementing practices that support those who have historically been denied access to higher education. Grawe provides examples of institutions who understand their student populations and their needs. Before implementing broad policy changes, institutions should be aware of their own demographics and students' needs.

The mission of Christian higher education institutions and Christian higher education professionals often aligns with the principles listed in *The Agile College*. Specifically, Grawe argues that remaining student-centered may drive institutional reform and, therefore, create a place where all students can succeed. Higher education professionals should not be scared of the demographic changes but should look at this change as potential space to better serve students that will create a sustainable future for higher education institutions. It is not a matter of "if" higher education institutions will be impacted by the demographic shifts. It is a matter of "when" and "how" the university leadership and Christian higher education professionals will respond and improve because of this demographic impact.

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Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say

Preston Sprinkle (2021)
David C. Cook

Reviewed by Kaleigh Richardson, M.Ed.

Dr. Preston Sprinkle, president of the Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender, has authored a timely and in-depth book on transgender identities and Christianity. With humility and compassion, Sprinkle explores emerging gender identities, the Church's response, and what the Bible says. This book is interwoven with stories from those who question their sexual identity, and it gives readers a glimpse into transgender brothers' and sisters' deep and often agonizing struggles with sexuality. For those working in student development, it is essential to understand the discussion around transgender identity, be knowledgeable about the topic, and be prepared to care for students who identify as transgender. A theme common throughout *Embodied* is the idea of people and concepts: people to be loved and shown hospitality and concepts to be wrestled with and deeply considered. The ability to balance abstract ideas with the hard work of loving God's image bearers can be difficult, but Sprinkle demonstrates a way forward where ideas and love flourish side by side.

Whenever human sexuality is involved, the conversation is guaranteed to be complex. Sprinkle prepares readers to be fully engaged by ensuring terms are defined and the scope of *Embodied* is understood from the very beginning. From the outside looking in, Generation Z seems to know these terms innately, but for professionals unfamiliar with transgender identity, it is crucial to start at the beginning. The definition used to set the stage for the remainder of the book is: "Transgender is 'an um-

brella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present and express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex,'" (Yarhouse, 2015 as cited in Sprinkle 2021, pp. 29-30). Umbrella is an apt term for this book, as the diverse experiences and varied examples differ significantly. This is an important concept to grasp and one Sprinkle emphasizes throughout the text—one transgender person's experience is just that: one person's experience.

Understanding the difference between biological sex and gender stereotypes is an important nuance to Sprinkle's position. Stereotypes persist for a reason, generally because enough people conform to those expectations to allow the stereotype to continue. However, stereotypes do not dictate behaviors. Too often, the Church, and culture more broadly, has made those who do not fit into narrow definitions of acceptable gendered behaviors feel like outsiders. Sprinkle questions and explores what role these narrow understandings of gender play in the transgender experience. While the data do not show a direct link between stereotypes and gender dysphoria, Sprinkle argues there is a correlation. What can be shown is that stereotypes can and do exacerbate the pain felt by transgender people. The Church has reinforced those stereotypes and imposed cultural ideas of gender on individuals instead of offering the freedom found in Christ. God calls his people to grow to be more like him; he does not call his followers to be more masculine or feminine based on their sex.

As God's image bearers are physically present in the world, Sprinkle wrestles with the role bodies play in a felt sense of sexual identity. Historical Christian belief says that God created males and females and declared them good, but the Fall brings the unfortunate reality that all is not as it should be. Does that mean that transgender people are experiencing some effect of the Fall when they do not feel at home in their created bodies? When body and mind do not align, which is given preference? Building an argument from Genesis through the New Testament, an exploration of medical journals, and interviews with transgender individuals and their families, Sprinkle concludes that "sexed bodies play an essential, though not exhaustive, role in determining who we are" (p. 76). Sprinkle concludes that bodies should be given preference when one feels incongruence between biological sex and gender identity. However, he recognizes that it can be a painful experience for those experiencing

gender dysphoria and that the Church has to do more to care for the transgender community.

While Sprinkle's beliefs align with the orthodox views of the Church, he presents them with a posture of humility and love. The Church has regularly gotten the theology of something right without following Jesus' example of freely giving love and belonging. The last half of *Embodied* explores what it means to welcome transgender individuals and emphasizes that what Christians believe is just as important as how they believe it. He dives into current issues such as rapid onset gender dysphoria and hormonal therapy for teens questioning their gender identity, how to care for Christians who are considering transitioning or have already transitioned, navigating pronoun usage, and gender-inclusive bathrooms and sleeping spaces. These are complicated topics to explore, and some may be surprised at how untraditional some of his ideas are compared to historical Christian behavior towards sexual minorities.

What stands out throughout the book is Sprinkle's humility and desire to truly listen to the experiences of members of the transgender community. His care for others clearly shows in his writing about this very complex and emotional topic. Readers will find someone who not only writes about the ideas of sexual ethics and gender identity but also lives in community with and deeply loves transgender people.

So, what does this book mean for those working in student development? If the goal is to care for students, then understanding their experiences is necessary. Whether that is caring for students who are exploring their gender identity or supporting students as they are walking alongside friends and family members who are questioning their gender identity, student development professionals have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the student experience—or at least a responsibility to not be ignorant. The reality is that all campuses have students that are wrestling with their gender identity, and faculty and staff alike should be prepared to walk with them as they explore the complexities of gender identity and their faith.

To think more broadly than caring for individual students, how does this apply to caring for entire communities? How are students encouraged to engage with this topic and care for others? How is deep care and belonging for those with different life experiences being modeled? If minority students do not fit into stereotypical male- or female-targeted programming, where do they find belonging? Is there a place for community building between the sexes and programming not targeted to

specific genders? What systems are in place to ensure that all students, regardless of sexual or gender identity, are welcomed and respected community members? The questions are endless. The answers are also countless but require reimagining how things have always been done.

Regardless if readers are unfamiliar with the various identities that fall under the umbrella of transgender or if they have a deep personal knowledge of the transgender experience, it is likely something new can be learned by reading *Embodied*. Along with Biblical references, Sprinkle has done the hard work compiling the most recent data and research into something easily accessible that will appeal to a broad audience. Human sexuality is a controversial topic, perhaps especially so in Christian communities. However, *Embodied* shows a way forward where Christians can follow Jesus' example of holding deep convictions while loving and welcoming people.

Sprinkle does not shy away from this complicated discussion, nor do the numerous transgender individuals whose stories are shared in the text. Student development professionals must ask themselves how students' stories are being received. Are professionals seeking to understand the student experience or attempting to dictate to students the choices they should be making? Christianity is rooted in the freedom to choose. Dictating acceptable behaviors and feelings is the opposite of the guidance of discipleship. The average person feels loved when they feel heard, so much so that it is difficult for them to distinguish between the two (Augsburger, 1982). Do students feel heard? Or do they feel ostracized due to their theology not aligning with the institution or individual professionals? While readers may disagree with the positions taken in *Embodied*, Sprinkle's love for transgender people is apparent throughout his work. He shows a way forward where abstract concepts and love for people can not only coexist but flourish.

Kaleigh Richardson holds a M.Ed. in Higher Education from Abilene Christian University and a B.A. in Political Science from Taylor University. She is currently serving as the Assistant Director of Student Conduct at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

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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.

Submission Guidelines

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:
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    d. Include, for submitting author, phone number and email address.

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